

The Discipline of Grace

Application Questions

Chapter 1 How Good is Good Enough? ~ Central Idea: Contrary to a common misconception, we do not earn or forfeit God's blessings in our daily lives based on our performance. Regardless of our performance, we are always dependent on God's grace, which is His undeserved favor to those who deserve His wrath.

1. What's your initial reaction to this statement: "The pursuit of holiness must be anchored in the grace of God; otherwise it is doomed to failure?"
2. Bridges makes the point that we have relegated the gospel to the unbeliever and foisted the duties of spiritual disciplines, holiness, and service onto the believer. Is that true in your own experience? Why do you suppose that happens?

Chapter 2 The Pharisee and the Tax Collector ~ Central Idea: We have points in common with both the pharisee and the tax collector, the Prodigal Son and the older brother.

1. If ever there was a person who excelled in the disciplines of the Christian life, in obedience and in sacrificial service, surely it was the Apostle Paul. Yet he viewed himself in a manner similar to William Carey. Paul kept "down-grading" his self-concept in view of the seriousness of sin. Paul grew over the years to what did he compare himself? (How did he "rank" in each case?)

About AD 55, I Corinthians 15:9

About AD 57, Romans 7:18

About AD 60, Ephesians 3:8

About AD 63, I Timothy 1:15-16

2. Bridges contends that Christians should view themselves as both saints and sinners. Why is that?

a. How do you tend to view yourself usually – as a saint, sinner or both?

b. How are you viewing yourself after completing this study session?

Chapter 3 Preach the Gospel to Yourself ~ Central Idea: when you set yourself to seriously pursue holiness, you will begin to realize what an awful sinner you are. And if you are not firmly rooted in the gospel and have not learned to preach it to yourself everyday, you will soon become discouraged and will slack off in your pursuit of holiness.

1. Sometime during 1993, a survey was taken on the floor of a large Christian convention attended by several thousand people. One of the survey questions was, “What is the gospel?” Of the scores of people interviewed, only one gave an adequate answer.

a. If you had been one of those polled, what answer would you have given? Write your answer here and compare notes with others in the group.

b. What similarities do you notice in each other’s gospel presentation? What are the core elements?

Chapter 4 We Died to Sin ~ Central Idea: there is no such thing as salvation from sin’s penalty without an accompanying deliverance from sin’s domain. This obviously does not mean we no longer sin, but that sin no longer reigns in our lives.

1. What do you think of this statement: "The death of Christ secured for us not only freedom from the penalty of sin, but also deliverance from the dominion of sin"?

a. That statement sounds unbelievable, compounding the situation for someone who is struggling with one or more sinful habits.

b. I've begun to experience that freedom from sin's dominion in my own life.

- c. Such a message of free and total forgiveness through Christ will cause Christians to treat sin lightly.
 - d. I wish such a statement were true in my own experience.
 - e. I do not understand *how* God delivers from the power of sin, short of finally throwing Satan into the "lake of fire," which won't happen until the end-time events of Revelation 19-20.
 - f. Hallelujah!—what a Savior we have who can do more than we could ever ask or think.
2. The common objection arises: “If we died to sin’s dominion, why do we still struggle with sins in our daily lives? How do you account for this continuing struggle? How would you explain in your own words what it means to say we have "died to sin"?”

Chapter 5 Disciplined by Grace ~ Central Idea: The grace that brought salvation to you is the same grace that teaches or disciplines you. But you must respond on the basis of grace, not law. That is why you must “preach the gospel to yourself every day.”

1. Many of us have friends and relatives who profess to be Christians but in whose lives there appears to be no evidence of the discipline of grace. Oftentimes we cling to a frail hope that such persons are believers because they made a profession some time ago, but with nothing to show for it. It seems parents are especially prone to this form of denial regarding children who show no evidence of a genuine work of grace. Without making any judgments as to the reality of another person's salvation, what are you looking for as evidence that a friend or family member is indeed a Christian?

Chapter 6 Transformed into His Likeness ~ Central Idea: The Spirit of God transforms us. He calls on us to cooperate and to do the part He assigns us to do – to behold the glory of the Lord – but He is the One who works deep within our character to change us.

1. How does beholding the glory of Christ in the gospel help to transform us? In practical terms, how do we go about beholding Christ’s glory in the gospel?

Chapter 7 Obeying the Great Commandment ~ Central Idea: To love God with all my heart and soul and mind obviously means to love Him with all my being, with everything I have. To the degree that we live with an abiding sense of His love for us in Christ, to that degree will we love God with all our heart and soul and mind.

1. Bridges contrasts “cruise control” obedience with “race car” obedience. What are some of the factors that you think typically keep believers from pursuing “race car” obedience.
2. Does your obedience tend to be more of the “cruise control” or “race car” variety? (Or do you spend a lot of time parked?) Why do you suppose this is the case?

Chapter 8 Dependent Discipline ~ Central Idea: If we are to make any progress in the pursuit of holiness, we must assume our responsibility to discipline or train ourselves. But we must do this in total dependence on the Holy Spirit to work in us and strengthen us with the strength that is in Christ.

1. Think of the two wings of the airplane, discipline and dependence. In what proportion do they exist in your life?
 - a. My pursuit of holiness tilts toward the passive ("faith") approach.
 - b. My pursuit of holiness is more like the self-disciplined ("works") approach.
 - c. My life is unbalanced, as if I am flying on one wing, soon to fall.
 - d. I'm weak in both wings.
 - e. I think I am fairly well balanced between discipline and dependence.
 - f. Other (describe it):
2. You believe in the work of the Holy Spirit and you give lip service to this need for dependence in Sunday worship, but do you truly practice it each day?
 - a. Throughout the day, every day of the week, I acknowledge my dependence on Him.
 - b. I mostly pursue holiness in the strength of my own willpower and a very disciplined life.
 - c. My prayer life is meager or perfunctory, which is to say, in effect, I can handle most of my spiritual life somehow on my own.
 - d. My reliance on the Holy Spirit has increased substantially during the past year.
 - e. I must admit I'm not even committed to the pursuit of holiness.
 - f. Other (describe your situation):

Chapter 9 The Discipline of Commitment ~ Central Idea: If we hope to make any progress in the pursuit of holiness, commitment is essential. One reason we do not see more progress in holiness in our lives is because we have for the most part lost sight of the necessity of commitment.

1. What are some areas in which you need to make some specific commitments to resist sin or show Christlikeness? Ask the Holy Spirit to make His list apparent to you. This list will be for your eyes only so you can review it and pray over it daily.
 - a. Do you need to make a covenant with your eyes about what you look at? If so, explain.
 - b. Do you need to covenant with your mouth about what you say? Explain.
 - c. What about with your mind about what you think? Explain.
 - d. Is there a particular temptation that arises in your work or school?
 - e. Is there a particular area in your marriage or in your relationship with your children, your parents, or even a friend, or with an associate at work, where you are not demonstrating the Spirit's fruit of love, patience, or kindness?
 - f. What else would you add to this list?

Chapter 10 The Discipline of Conviction ~ Central Idea: We cannot effectively pursue holiness without the Word of God stored up in our minds where it can be used by the Holy Spirit to transform us. We need the discipline of forming Bible-based convictions.

1. Someone has observed, “A belief is what you hold, but a conviction is what holds you.” You may live contrary to what you believe, but you cannot live contrary to your convictions. In developing our convictions, we believers are influenced by both society and the Word of God.
 - a. What determines whether we are influenced by one more than the other?

2. The idea of continually meditating on the Word of God may seem unrealistic and unattainable in our busy age when our minds need to be occupied with the various responsibilities we all have. So the question naturally arises: “How can I meditate on Scripture, when I have to think about my work all day long?” What opportunities to meditate on Scripture does your day offer you?

Chapter 11 The Discipline of Choices ~ Central Idea: Holiness of character is developed one choice at a time as we choose to act righteously in every situation we encounter during the day.

1. People vary in their ability to discipline themselves. The more naturally disciplined person wonders why everyone else can't be as successful in mortification as he or she is. But often all that person has done is exchange one sin (impure thoughts, for example) for another (pride). Another person, less self-disciplined, tries to mortify some particular sin by sheer willpower, but fails and becomes frustrated.
 - a. Which of the two errors—pride or frustration—do you most commonly fall into when you try to mortify sin on your own apart from utter dependence on the Spirit?

Chapter 12 The Discipline of Watching ~ Central Idea: With the world, Satan, and the flesh arrayed against us, we must watch against the temptations that constantly beset us. We can effectively do so by knowing our enemy, knowing our weaknesses and strengths, and mounting a good offense, that is, by meditating on God's Word and by prayer.

1. Bridges prays, “Lord, keep me on a short leash.” That is, “Don't let me get away with the little sins. Give me a tender conscience that will recognize the little sins and sound the alarm bell in my heart.”
 - a. Where do you find yourself most prone to “little” sins? In what ways can these “little” sins become increasingly destructive? What rationalizations have you made for them? What discipline, accountability, and repentance might need to take place in one or more of these areas?