

Leadership Discipline White Paper No. Five: Growing in Grace: Developing by Divine Power

Definition: The Christian life starts when we enter into relationship with Jesus Christ. I believe God continues to offer grace upon grace to us on a daily basis throughout our lifetime. We grow in grace as God works in and through us. This is a foundational principle for effective Christian leaders.

This is the final white paper I am writing about the five leadership disciplines which frame my understanding of servant leadership. It is also the paper that describes the foundational discipline unique to Christian leadership. That is, we grow in grace as God's divine power works in our lives.

The Doctrine of Grace

What is grace? John Wesley's order of salvation includes prevenient, justifying, sanctifying and glorifying grace of God. This multifaceted definition of grace is one of the best gifts that the United Methodist Church offers the worldwide Christian movement. It presents a reality that when embraced transforms every leader- for that matter- every Christ follower.

Like you, I have my personal story of how God's grace has changed and shaped my life. This story began earlier than my first memory and continues even today as I grow daily in my walk with Jesus Christ.

I first publicly accepted God's grace in my life as a child during an old fashioned revival service in a rural church pastored by my Dad. However, God's **prevenient grace** had been working in my life for years prior to that moment, preparing my heart and wooing me into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

During the revival service that evening I experienced an aspect of God's grace that I did not know previously. Though quite young, I realized that I regularly committed wrong actions and displayed inappropriate attitudes in my daily life. I felt convicted to ask for God's forgiveness for the sin in my life. When I did, God's powerful **justifying grace** made everything "well with my soul."

Since that "moment in time" God's **sanctifying grace** has been shaping and changing me daily. As a result I continue to grow in grace every day, continually being transformed little by little by the divine power of God working in and through me.

I anticipate that one day on the other side of heaven I will experience God's **glorifying grace**. I do not have a full grasp of what that will be like. But I am certain that it will be wonderful for all of creation, including Christ-followers!

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Receiving Grace

God is the One who offers us this life-shaping, life-changing grace. Yet, you and I also have a role to play in growing in grace. Our part is to open ourselves to *receive* the grace God offers to us. (Philippians 2:12-13).

One of the best ways that I have found to do this is by showing up regularly to spend time with God. It sounds like such an ordinary practice. However, this means of grace has an extraordinary effect upon my daily life. This is not surprising- because one cannot spend time in the presence of the living God without experiencing grace. For that matter one cannot be in God's presence regularly without being changed.

It is mind-boggling to think that we can come into God's presence on a daily basis. But that is what happens as we participate in daily prayer time . . . regular Scripture reading . . . worship . . . giving . . . serving and other spiritual disciplines. Part of the genius of the early Methodist movement was the emphasis on the methodical observance of habits of personal piety. As the first generation of Methodists regularly observed spiritual disciplines they grew in grace.

I have found the same to be true in my life. Over the years as spiritual disciplines have become integrated more and more into my life, I have discovered deeper and deeper dimensions of God's grace.

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Offering Grace

As God's power works in our lives, we grow in the grace we receive. We also grow in the grace that we *offer*.

This does not mean that we fail to hold others accountable or that we lower our standards for Christian living. It does mean that we look for the best in other persons and are grace-filled in how we respond in times of conflict and challenge.

We are able to do this because of the deep reservoir of God's grace from which we draw. The parable of the unforgiving servant comes to mind (Matthew 18:21-35). How can we fail to forgive others when God has forgiven us so graciously? How can we be stingy with grace when Jesus, the One we follow, makes it clear that we are to forgive seventy times seven? How can we not offer grace when we have received it so abundantly? We offer grace out of a deep gratitude for the great and merciful love we know in Jesus Christ.

Grace and Leadership

But what does grace have to do with leadership? After all, leadership is a matter of methods, systems and techniques that can be measured statistically, right? That is an important dimension of leadership within the context of the church. But it is not all of it.

Leadership at its best also requires grace upon grace. Leaders need it from others and the people of God need it from our leaders.

Such leadership starts with justifying grace which transforms the leader's life. Every transformed leader increases the witness and health of the church. Indeed, transformed leaders are essential to a growing, thriving, healthy church.

Then, there is sanctifying grace. Grace-filled leaders relate to one another with sanctifying grace. This is especially true when we are on different sides of questions - whether in issues in a local church, or in our whole denomination. We can view one another graciously, with sanctified vision that is loving enough to understand the other person's point of view, even when it is different- perhaps even polar opposite from ours. The grace with which we relate to each other during stressful times and when in conflict can be a more powerful witness of God living in us than any words we say.

That brings us to the matter of glorifying grace. Wesleyan leadership recognizes that numbers matter. They mattered in the parable of the 99 (Luke 15:1-7) and they matter in the life of the church. Yes, glorifying grace knows that one matters, and that ninety-nine matter, because they are all eternal creatures, en route to glory, God's glory. We do well to remember that we are more than any social, political, or economic organization; we are an eternal body, the people of God.

Basic to all of this justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying grace, as leaders we need to remember that prevenient grace is at work. That is, God has been working in our church, our movement, before the General Conference of 2012, and before the Christmas Conference of long ago; before Aldersgate Street and before the Holy Club at Oxford. God has had a stake in the Wesleyan movement before Samuel and Susanna Wesley even knew each other. Our leadership -- grace leadership! -- must take hold of Wesleyan grace, knowing that it begins with the prevenient grace of God.

Concluding Thoughts

Grace is a profound part of the identity of every Christ-follower. It is also an integral dimension of Christian leadership. We grow in grace as God's divine power works in and through us.