

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF GRACE



CENTRAL BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“GRACE TO YOU”

Every single letter of Paul’s begins
& ends with this blessing:

“Grace to you”

It is a prayer to God.

It is a prompter to Christians.

Grace is our spiritual oxygen.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

“The very center and core of the whole Bible is the doctrine of the grace of God... The theologians of the Church can be placed in an ascending scale according as they have grasped that one great central doctrine... The center of the Bible, and the center of Christianity, is found in the grace of God.”

A CULTURE OF GRACE

Grace is a distinctive of the Christian faith—maybe *the* distinctive of the Christian faith.

When it is missing, a church becomes sweltering & suffocating.

So how do we cultivate a culture of grace?

GRACE-SATURATED DOCTRINE

1 – Jesus' Life was a Ministry of Grace

- He brought “grace and truth” and gives “grace upon grace”
(John 1:14, 16, 17)
- His birth was grace incarnate
(Titus 2:11)
- His life was grace to the miserable
(Acts 10:38)
- His death was grace for the wicked
(Hebrews 2:9)

GRACE-SATURATED DOCTRINE

2 – Our Salvation is All of Grace

- We are saved by grace
(Ephesians 2:1-9)
- We are secured by grace
(Romans 5:2; 1 Peter 5:12)
- We are sanctified by grace
(Titus 2:11-14)
- We are sustained by grace
(2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Commenced

Continued

Completed

D. M. LLOYD-JONES

“When you and I come to lie upon our death beds, the one thing that should comfort and help and strengthen us there is the thing that helped us in the beginning... Not what we have been, not what we have done, but the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Christian life starts with grace, it must continue with grace, it ends with grace.”

GRACE-SATURATED DOCTRINE

3 – Our Growth is All of Grace

- We pray at the throne of grace
(Hebrews 4:16)
- We feed on the Word of God's grace
(Acts 20:32)
- We are commanded to grow in grace
(2 Peter 3:18)
- We are repeatedly bid “grace to you”
(Beginning & Ending of EVERY Pauline letter)

D. L. MOODY

“A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week. We must draw upon God’s boundless store of grace from day to day, as we need it.”

WHAT THEY REMEMBER

Beyond teaching the gospel—tirelessly—you need to show that it is the core value and identity of your church:

- “We’re not the good people.”
- “We approach you, Lord, in spite of us and because of the blood and righteousness of our Savior.”
- “We unite around the Scriptures and the Savior, not around music, educational choice, or other issues.”

DISCUSSION

- We each have an inner legalist that relies on human effort without divine enablement. How can we recognize & resist that tendency?
- In my experience, a church will focus on the gospel or extrabiblical issues—but not both. Do you agree? Why?
- Beyond our teaching, how can we “open the windows” to let God’s grace replace stuffy legalism?

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF GRACE



CENTRAL BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

RAY ORTLUND

“Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. The doctrine of grace creates a culture of grace. Without the doctrine, the culture will be weak. Without the culture, the doctrine will seem pointless.”

A CULTURE OF GRACE

What do we mean by a culture of grace? What is its opposite?

My C.O.G. Definition:

An environment in which everyone is more aware of his own sins than the sins of others, and more focused on Christ than either.

CHARLES SPURGEON

“Pride is “a groundless thing”
and “a brainless thing” and “the
maddest thing that can exist.”

Another way to cultivate a
culture of grace is to exemplify
Gospel-Centered Humility.

GOSPEL-CENTERED HUMILITY

1 – Be humble in your evaluation of ministry.

- You are a “fellow elder”
(1 Peter 5:1)
- You are a shepherd
(1 Peter 5:2)
- You are an example
(1 Peter 5:3)
- You are—only—a deputy
(1 Peter 5:4)

Peter?

People need a better Pastor than you!

GOSPEL-CENTERED HUMILITY

2 – Be humble in your interaction with others.

- “Clothe yourselves with humility”
(1 Peter 5:5)
Humility is not your native dress.
- “toward one another...”
(1 Peter 5:5)
Horizontal humility is hard.
- “God opposes... but gives grace...”
(1 Peter 5:5)

ANDREW MURRAY

“Humility toward men will be the only sufficient proof that our humility before God is real.”

THOMAS BROOKS

“It is sad to consider that saints should have many eyes to behold one another’s infirmities, and not one eye to see each other’s graces.”

J. C. RYLE

“There is no surer mark of backsliding and falling off in grace than an increasing disposition to find fault, pick holes and see weak points in others.”

GOSPEL-CENTERED HUMILITY

3 – Be humble in your estimation of yourself.

- “Humble yourself...”

(1 Peter 5:6)

Humble is a verb here, not an adjective.

- “under the mighty hand of God...”

(1 Peter 5:6)

True humility is measuring ourselves by God.

Vertical humility begets horizontal humility.

- Have a biblical self-identity.

(1 Timothy 1:15)

JERRY BRIDGES

“Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God’s grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God’s grace.”

EMBRACE GRACE.

RANDY ALCORN

“Let’s face each day and each person we see with humility, as an act of grace, while reminding ourselves that we too desperately need God’s grace—every bit as much as those we’re offering it to.”

EXTEND GRACE.

DISCUSSION

- Identify evidences of pride in your own life & ministry.
- Give Bible reasons why pride is “mad” and “groundless” and “brainless.”
- Why would looking for evidences of grace in others both promote your own humility and also help cultivate a culture of grace?

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF GRACE



CENTRAL BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A CULTURE OF GRACE

An environment in which everyone is more aware of his own sins than the sins of others, and more focused on Christ than either.

JARED WILSON

“A message of grace will attract people, but a culture of grace will keep them.”

GRACE-KILLERS

Just as there are ways to foster a culture of grace in the church, there are ways to kill it.

A Performance Mindset

Pastoral Severity vs. Empathy

Professional Distance / “Preacher”

An Air of Pastoral Invincibility

The Fear of Man

RAVI ZACHARIAS

“If we don’t demonstrate grace as we present the truth of Jesus Christ, we make the message we are carrying undesirable and nondistinctive.”

Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey



Map Credit:
ESV Study Bible







OVERVIEW OF ACTS 20

- En route to Jerusalem at the end of the 3rd missionary journey, Paul sails past Ephesus.
- He calls the Ephesian elders to make the 40-mile trip to Miletus.
- There he imparts to them his final words of instruction regarding pastoral ministry.
- This is the main Christian-to-Christian message in Acts. It's an “**inspired philosophy of ministry.**”

TOP-DOWN TRANSPARENCY

1 – Paul’s ministry was intensely personal.

- “You know me”

(Acts 20:18, 34)

Character & testimony are non-negotiables.

- “House to house”

(Acts 20:20)

- “Night and day”

(Acts 20:31)

Paul repudiated the notion of a professional distance.

Question: What do shepherds smell like?

TOP-DOWN TRANSPARENCY

2 – Paul's ministry was intensely affectionate.

- Paul's tears for the church
(Acts 20:19, 31)
 - Tears of empathy
 - Tears of ecstasy
 - Tears of urgency
 - Tears of injury
- The church's tears for Paul
(Acts 20:37-38)
- Paul's expressions of affection
(1 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

TOP-DOWN TRANSPARENCY

3 – Paul's ministry was intensely vulnerable.

- Paul magnified his weaknesses
(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)
Pulpit talk: Be a human, not a hero.
Choose 1: Invincibility or influence.
- Paul requested prayer
(2 Thessalonians 3:1-2)
PFMPFY
- Paul shared his life with the church
(1 Thessalonians 2:8)
Ministry is a transfusion, not a lecture.

MINISTRY: THE MACHINE



“I’ve just sucked one year of your life away... What did this do to you?
How do you feel?”

“LOVE HURTS”

- Most of us were unprepared for the deep hurts which ministry brings.
- The climax of Paul’s sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11 is “the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for [the church].”
- You must resist the urge to shelter yourself from disappointment & hurt. There’s no other way to minister.

TOP-DOWN TRANSPARENCY

4 – Paul's ministry was intensely normal.

- His ministry was sustainable
 - Acts 20:17-38 contains no miracles.
 - Paul lived a godly life.
 - Paul preached the Word.
 - Paul loved the church.
- His ministry was reproducible
 - You can do this.
 - The people you lead can do this.
 - Work hard to make yourself expendable.

AUGUSTUS STRONG

“That minister is most successful who gets the whole body to move, and who renders the church independent of himself. The test of his work is not while he is with them, but after he leaves them. Then it can be seen whether he has taught them to follow him, or to follow Christ; whether he has led them to the formation of habits of independent Christian activity, or whether he has made them passively dependent upon himself.”

DISCUSSION

- How does a leader fit in to James 5:16's commands to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another?
- Why does it undermine a culture of grace when leaders try to seem perfect?
- How does the fear of man hinder authenticity and transparency?
- How can you avoid the temptation to protect yourself by shutting people out?

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF GRACE



CENTRAL BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MY TWO CENTS

- Pursue influence, not an image. You want to be beloved, not revered.
- Fight the notion of members as consumers. “Every-member ministry.”
- Use ministry, build people—not v.v.
- Challenge the status quo with issues like adoption & foster care.
- Make much of the virtue of deference.
- Avoid “red meat” and bashing.

MY TWO CENTS

- Think of ministry as a spider web, not a wagon wheel.
- Strive to be as diverse as your community.
- Be generous with resources—especially people.
- Rally to a cause, not an empire.
- Celebrate your core, not peripherals.
- Model what you most desire.

INDEFATIGABLE JOY

“Joy is as constant as its cause.”

Circumstances

Finances

Health

Family

Ministry

Our joy must be rooted in the
unchanging truths of the gospel.

JESUS-CENTERED JOY

1a – Rejoice in salvation, not success.

- Ministry success is a good thing.
(Luke 10:17-19)
There is joy in heaven over repentance. So why is Jesus a wet blanket here?
- Ministry success can be an idol.
The disciples' "tell": "To us!"
Real spiritual results are beyond your control.
- Ministry success is fickle.
Tying your joy to ministry performance is too self-aware... and is spiritual suicide.

JESUS-CENTERED JOY

1b – Rejoice in salvation, not success.

- Marvel that “Jesus saves!”

(Luke 10:20)

Jesus is the prize, not the ticket.
The gospel is meat as well as milk.

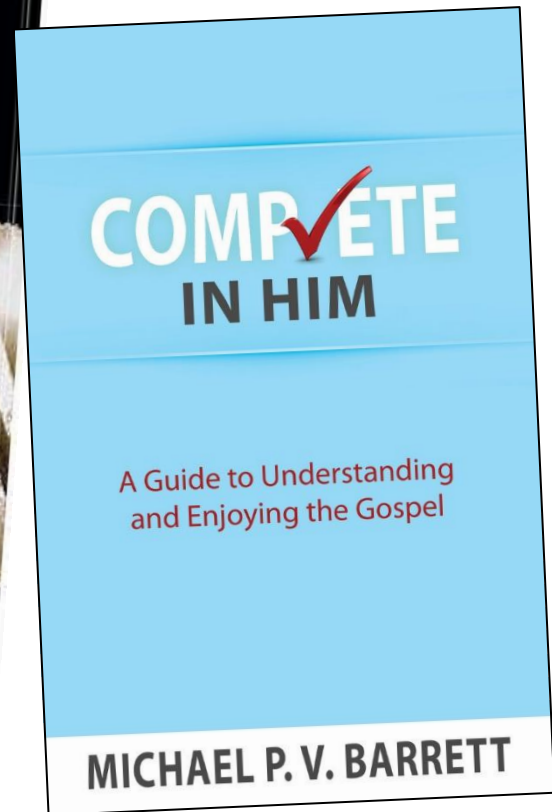
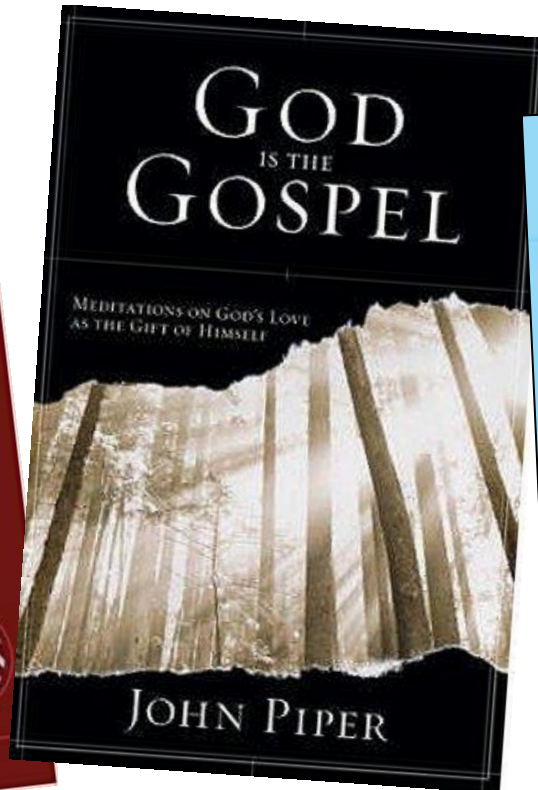
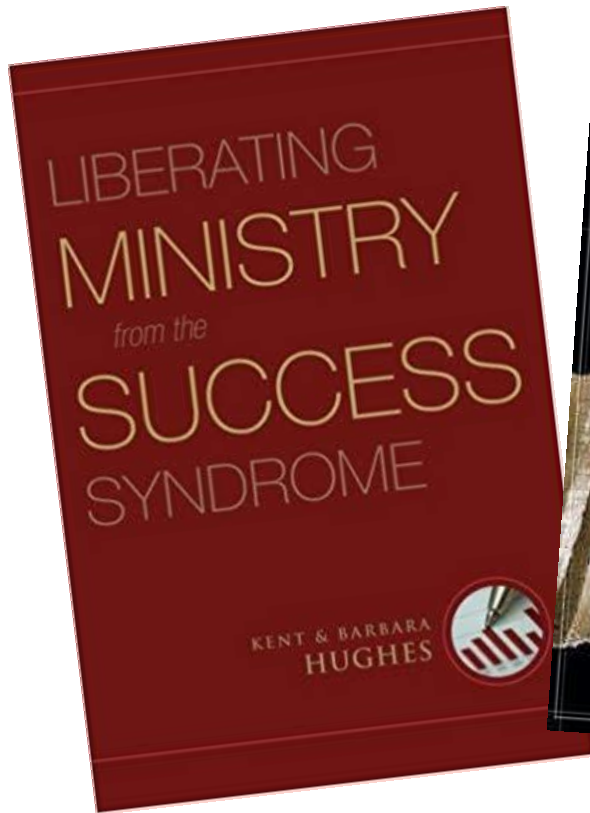
- Marvel that “Jesus saved me!”

Pray the gospel, starting your prayers in
Jesus’ name.

We live in a grimy, sticky world. We need
the refreshment of a gospel “showers.”

Gospel-rooted wonder is contagious.

FOSTER JOY IN JESUS



JESUS-CENTERED JOY

2 – Rejoice in illumination, not insight.

- Illumination is absolutely essential.

(Luke 10:21-22; Matthew 16:17)

No new content, but light to see what's there.

- Illumination is a Trinitarian work.
- Illumination is a gift of grace.
- Illumination is humbling.

Conversions are beyond your paygrade.

- Spurgeon: “Enjoy what you can’t explain.”
- Me: “Sleep like a Calvinist.” ☺

JESUS-CENTERED JOY

3 – Rejoice in the privileges that are ours.

- OT heroes longed to see Jesus' ministry.
(Luke 10:23-24)

Patriarchs (John 8:56)

Prophets (1 Peter 1:10-12)

- NT nobodies partake of Jesus' triumph.
(Luke 7:28)

We enjoy direct access through Christ.

We enjoy a more sure word of prophecy.

We enjoy the indwelling, empowering Spirit.

FATAL FAMILIARITY

Imagine a Krispy Kream employee who hates donuts.



Has the Gospel become
your **JOB** rather than our **JOY**?

Has the Lord Jesus become
a **PRODUCT** rather than a **PRIZE**?

Read the gospel. Listen to it. Write about it. Talk about it. Pray it. Sing it. Treasure it.

DISCUSSION

- Why is it so dangerous to tie your joy to the relative health of your church?
- What does it reveal about you when you crater over ministry setbacks?
- How can you protect yourself from becoming a gospel “professional”?
- How can you renew your own joy in Jesus? How can you help your spouse do the same?