

GRACE FOR PROFIT

Series: Gracenomics
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Grace, Forgiveness, Unity, Well-Being
Ephesians 2:11-20

Is it possible to get to the top by giving it all away? That's a question Adam Grant set out to answer. Grant is a psychologist, researcher, and professor at the Wharton School, one of the world's top business schools. And over the past decade, much of Adam Grant's research has focused on what he calls reciprocity styles - basically, how we interact with others. In 2013, he wrote a book called *Give & Take*, based on his research. In it, he outlines three types of reciprocity styles - the taker, the giver, and the matcher.

Takers, simply stated, like to get more than they give. Grant says, "They tilt reciprocity in their own favor, putting their own interests ahead of others' needs. Takers believe that the world is a competitive, dog-eat-dog place. 'If I don't look out for myself first,' takers think, 'no one will.'"

Givers are on the opposite end of the spectrum. "They tilt reciprocity in the other direction, preferring to give more than they get. Whereas takers tend to be self-focused, evaluating what other people can offer them, givers are other-focused, paying more attention to what other people need from them."

Matchers fall somewhere in the middle - trying to balance give and take - seeking always to balance the scales.

Grant and his colleagues took these three types of people and did extensive study of how each reciprocity style affects the professional career of a person (he is a business professor after all). And what do you think his research showed?

Well, for one thing, there was one group that immediately fell to the bottom - especially in highly competitive fields like engineering, sales, and the medical field. Which group would you guess that was?

Yeah, it was the givers!

One study of engineers, found that the least productive and effective engineers are givers. They didn't complete as much work, they had more mistakes and missed more deadlines. Grant says, "Going out of their way to help others prevented them from getting their own work done."

The same held true with medical students. The givers - the ones who went out of their way to help other students, who took time to share their knowledge with others, even at the expense of spending that time to fill in the gaps in their studies - those students gave the ones they were helping an advantage, and gave themselves a disadvantage.

A study of salespeople showed the same results. In comparison with takers and matchers, givers brought in two and a half times less revenue. These were the salespeople who were more concerned with serving their customers' interests than they were about the bottom line.

Grant concluded that, "Across occupations, it appears that givers are just too caring, too trusting, and too willing to sacrifice their own interests for the benefit of others." Bad news for the givers.

But, if givers are at the bottom of the success ladder, who do you think was at the top? Was it the matchers - always seeking balance - or the takers - the ones committed to success at any cost?

Neither. When Grant looked at his data, he discovered this anomaly: The givers came out on top. Yes, it's true that the least successful people were givers, but so were the most successful people. The takers and matchers fell somewhere in the middle.

Today, as we wrap up our Gracenomics series, I want to talk about Grace for Profit - how offering grace to others can actually benefit us - the givers.

But first, I want to pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

Pray

So, how do we reconcile Adam Grant's findings? If being a giver can land us at the bottom of the heap or the top of the heap (and if we make the assumption that the same is true in life, not just in business), what differentiates one from another? And which one are we supposed to strive for?

You know, it's interesting how a lot of Christians approach this. Some people think "I'm a child of the king! I deserve the best!" Others think, "I'm supposed to lay down my life, be a servant. I don't deserve anything and shouldn't strive for anything." The first attitude, of course, is a taker attitude. The second is a giver attitude, but it might be a flawed one, because it can lead to what I call doormat syndrome.

Some of us think that to be a giver - to be a person full of grace - means we have to just stand idly by and let people walk all over us. Some of us think that following Jesus means having no desire to achieve anything in life. But Jesus didn't talk that way.

In the bible, in the book of Luke, chapter 14, the author records an interaction between Jesus and some people at a banquet. They were at this wedding banquet, and Jesus noticed how they were picking their seats around the table, and he gave them some advice.

"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Luke 14:8-11

Do you see it there? Jesus doesn't say, "Don't hope for a good seat." He says, "Here's how to get a good seat."

Jesus doesn't call us to be doormats. He calls us to be altruists. Do you know what an altruist is? An altruist is someone with an overriding concern for the welfare of others. And, I think, a true altruist is someone who recognizes that improving the lives of others ultimately results in the improvement of my own life as well.

It's an outlook on life that's very similar to the African concept of ubuntu, which says, "I am who I am because of who we all are." So, rather than becoming a doormat who gets walked on, we become an altruistic revolutionary - fighting for the betterment of all people.

That's what Jesus did. He didn't fight for himself, but he did stand up for other people, and worked for the good of all people. And ultimately, he sacrificed himself for the sake of the world - not because he was a doormat, but because he was ready to stand up to, and defeat, the ultimate enemy - death itself.

Doormats get trampled on. Altruists help others and rise to the top. And in Adam Grant's research, he found that the difference between the givers at the bottom of the heap and those at the top is that the ones on the bottom were doormats. They had no real sense of mission or purpose in their giving, and they got walked all over. The ones who came out on top were altruists - they were intentional in their giving - not for personal gain, but for the sake of others, and for the sake of all.

So, what does all this have to do with grace? Well, I would argue that if altruism is an overriding, unselfish concern for the welfare of others, that grace is a fruit of that concern.

You know, some Christians like to talk a lot about sin. Did you know that the word "sin" comes from the ancient world of archery. In archery, to sin simply meant to miss the mark - to be off-target. And, to me, it really means the same today. When we miss the mark, we sin. And you know the cause of nearly all of our sins? Selfishness!

Think about it. Think about the "big sins" - murder, theft, lust, pride. What do they all come back to? Selfishness. I kill because I value something more than your life. I steal because I value my possession of that item over yours. I lust after people or objects, because I want to satisfy my own desires.

You see. Sin is selfishness. And if sin is selfishness, then the opposite of sin isn't perfection, the opposite of sin is grace. The opposite of selfishness is unselfishness - the opposite of judgement and criticism is altruism.

If we are givers and lovers, our lives will be full of grace - grace given to other people. And the result is that we will rise to the top of the heap in this life and in eternity. That's what Jesus said, and that's what the research shows.

So, what exactly are the personal benefits of living a life of grace toward others?

First, I think grace unites us with other people.

We see this in the bible. In the Middle East, during the first century, there was a serious division between the Jews and their Gentile neighbors (some things never change) There was hostility and violence and a general disdain for the other.

But one of the things Jesus came to do was to unite those groups of people - the Jews and the Gentiles. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus - a group of Gentiles - says this. Ephesians 2:11-22:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Ephesians 2:11-14

That’s some big stuff. These are two groups of people that not only didn’t like each other, they didn’t even want to have contact with each other. And what does Paul say? He says in there.

...you who once were far away have been brought near

*For he himself is our peace, who has **made the two groups one** and has **destroyed the barrier***

...he put to death their hostility.

...you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens

*And in him you too are **being built together** to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

You see, grace unites us with others by breaking down walls and divisions. That’s what Jesus came to do. And if you’ve ever tried to bring two disparate groups of people together, you know that it take a *lot* of grace - a lot of altruism - to get people to see eye to eye.

I saw a great talk last week by a guy named David Logan who studies behavioral patterns in people groups. And Logan talks about 5 stages of behavior:

Stage 1 is “Life sucks”. Stage 1 people operate in what Logan calls despairing hostility. They are the people who seek to harm others, to harm themselves. Stage 1 is the culture of thugs and gangs and prisons. They will do whatever it takes to survive, even if it involves undermining or harming other people.

Stage 2 people have a slightly different outlook, which is “My life sucks.” This moves from a macro statement about life in the universe to a personal statement about my circumstances. A Stage 2 person supposes that life *could be* better if only this or that would happen. They have a negative outlook on their own lives, and some angst toward others who seem to have a better existence. And the reality is that Stage 2 people, even if their circumstances change, are likely to remain Stage 2 people - convinced that their life is awful, but it would be better if only XYZ would happen.

Stage 3 people say, “I’m great and you’re not.” This is a place I find a lot of people in. It moves out of self-negativity, but maintains a defensive posture. This is the stage where people are trying to one-up each other. It’s the stage where people like to point fingers of judgement at other people. It’s all about maintaining that wall of separation between you and me, and making sure you and I both know that I’m great and you’re not.

Stage 4 people are people who have had a significant transformation. Stage 4 people say, “We are great!” They are the team people - the cheerleaders. They unite - they gel - around something greater than themselves. If you’ve ever known someone who was all about their team - their organization or their church or their department, then you know a Stage 4 person.

Lastly, Stage 5 people say, “Life is great!” And more to the point, Stage 5 people pursue the great things in life. David Logan talks about the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa, for which Desmond Tutu won a Nobel Prize. He calls this a Stage 5 process - not because it was all glitter and rainbows, but because Desmond Tutu arrange this coming together around two values - two *great* values - truth and reconciliation. These are things everyone can say yes to. Stage 5 people believe in a great life and invite others to pursue it with them.

So,

Stage 1: Life sucks

Stage 2: My life sucks, but...

Stage 3: I’m great, you’re not

Stage 4: We’re great!

Stage 5: Life is great!

Now, I don’t think I’m being braggadocios or naive here when I say I think I’m a Stage 5 person. And not on my own accord, but because of the way I see God moving in the world. No matter the situation, I know that God is up to something great, and I hope to be a part of it, and to invite others to join me in pursuing what it might be. I’m not ignorant to life’s struggles, but I’m in pursuit of something greater. I’m a Stage 5 person.

And one of the discoveries Logan has made is that we have the hardest time relating with, reconciling with, and unifying with people who are more than one stage away from us. In other words, as a Stage 5 person, I don't have a problem with Stage 4 folks. In fact, I kind of like them. They're team players, they have a positive outlook, they are loyal and fierce and willing to do what it takes to get the job done. I like Stage 4 people.

You know who I have a tough time with? Stage 2 and 3. Stage 1 I can deal with, because they're so desperate, I don't even attempt to have the same kind of relationship with them. I have empathy for them and a desire to help. I don't expect much of them.

But Stage 2 and 3 people drive me nuts. The Stage 2 person, for me, is the complainer. They like to tell you how hard they have it. They like to point out how if they got the breaks other people did, or if only they had a different job, a different spouse, or whatever, their life wouldn't be like this. That drives me crazy.

The Stage 3 person is almost as bad. They're the ones who insist on letting you know how great they are. They flaunt their achievements and successes, and rarely celebrate others. That irritates me.

And so, I have to ratchet up the grace when I'm interacting with those folks. It would be easy to talk about what *they* have to do, or how *they* need to mature, or how *they* need to be more like me. But in reality, I don't have any control over them. I can only control me - and I can only kind of do that.

So if there's going to be unity between us, I have to take responsibility for my side of things, and I have to offer grace. I have to be willing to understand that *I may be as irritating to them as they are to me.*

I had an encounter the other day with a Stage 3 person. I don't know this person. He's someone who heard about what we were doing here and was curious, so he signed up for our email newsletters. But the other day, I got an email from this guy, and he was really upset about an event that we had done. I mean, really upset.

And I read his email, and it was a Stage 3 email. It was all about his personal convictions, and wondering why I didn't share them. It was about his conclusions and why I didn't have them. It was, even though he probably would never state it this way - it was, "I'm great, and you're not."

Now, in the past, I might have ignored this guy. Or worse, I might have sent some snarky reply. But, I've learned at least a few things over the years. I've matured at least a little bit. So I replied to his email, but I did so with a huge helping of grace.

I said, in essence, "I'm really sorry that you are offended by our actions. If I were you and held your same convictions, I'm sure I would feel the same way. However, I come from a slightly different perspective, and have good reasons for doing what I did. I hope you can see the good that has come out of it, and even if we don't see eye to eye on the method, that we can both agree that we're pursuing the same goal."

I didn't try to correct him or tell him he was wrong. I didn't belittle his deeply-held convictions. I tried my best to offer grace, while also remaining resolute in my own convictions. I wasn't a

doormat, but I wasn't combative either. I have yet to hear back from him, but I hope that my email helps to break down a wall there - that he can say, "You know what, I may not agree with you on this issue, but I'm all for the work you are doing."

I'm hopeful, because I think grace opens the doors to those possibilities.

And I think grace unites us with others by reconciling relationships. Right in the middle of that passage from Ephesians sits this verse. I want to read it from the New Living Translation. Ephesians 2:14

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. Ephesians 2:14 NLT

He united Jews and Gentiles into one people. When we break down walls, we can begin the process of reconciliation.

You know, there's a movement that's picking up steam right now called the Abraham Path. The Abraham Path was started by one of the world's most renowned experts in peacemaking, negotiation, and mediation - a guy named William Ury. And it came about as Ury tried to figure out a good starting point for peace in the Middle East.

Tapping into his experience as a mediator and negotiator, he knew that the best way to get people to come to an agreement is to go back to some kind of common ground. You start with the things you agree on, and work forward from there.

So, William Ury began thinking about what that could be in the Middle East. And what he landed on was this. Every culture, he says, has an origin-story. And the origin-story in that region is that 4,000 years ago, a man and his family walked across the Middle East, and the world has never been the same since. That man was named Abraham, and he's held in high esteem by Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike.

So that's Ury's starting point. And he began working to develop a path - an actual, literal walking path - that traced (roughly) Abraham and his family's journey. And people thought he was nuts. It was too dangerous - too many borders to cross (it goes across 10 Middle Eastern countries), too many divisions among the people, too many crazy militias and headstrong leaders.

But what he discovered, he says, "is you go into these villages in the Middle East where you expect hostility, and you get the most amazing hospitality, all associated with Abraham. They say, 'In the name of father Abraham, let me offer you some food.' So what we discovered is that Abraham is not just a figure out of a book for those people. He's alive; he's a living presence." And it completely changes the dynamic. It changes the conversation.

You see, grace does that. It crosses borders. It tears down walls. It offers hope of reconciliation. It unites us with other people - even people very different from us. And all of a sudden, in the midst of all this tearing down of walls, all this hard work of reconciliation, we look around and say, "I love this! This makes ME feel good! There's something in this for ME!"

Suddenly, if we're, like a Stage 3 person - I'm great and you're not - we find ourselves moving to Stage 4 - we're great! And the "we" now involves people who used to be "they". Grace unites us with other people.

I think grace also unites us with God. God is a God of grace, and we are made in his image - when we offer grace, we tap into something of God in us.

I read a story the other day that was told by Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie Ten Boom, if you've never heard of her, was a Dutch Christian who helped hide and house Jews during the Nazi invasion of World War II. She and her sister were both arrested and put in prison in Ravensbruck concentration camp, and later Ten Boom became a writer and speaker - sharing her story with others.

At one particular speaking engagement she met up with a former prison guard from that camp. She writes: "It was in a church in Munich that I saw him—a balding, heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. "It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture.

'When we confess our sins,' I said, 'God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever...'
"The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. People stood up in silence, in silence leaving the room. And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. This man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp. Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: 'A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!'

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying, 'I was a guard there. But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein, will you forgive me?'" And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven—and could not forgive. My sister, Betsie, had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

"It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it—I knew that. And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. '... Help!' I prayed silently.

Woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing

tears to my eyes. “I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!” For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely, as I did then.”

You see, when we become givers of grace, we tap into something of God inside of us. And it feels good!

We become united in purpose with him. If God is a God of unlimited grace, then we have the privilege of offering others human-sized appetizers of that grace. A foretaste of what God has to offer.

I also think that maybe the more we understand Grace, the more we understand God. We begin to view God through the lens of grace, and we can begin to understand why, for example, bad people aren’t immediately punished. 2 Peter 3:9 says,

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.
2 Peter 3:9

You see, we begin to see that there is a bigger picture to this whole grace thing.

There are other personal benefits of grace. I don’t even have time to go into the physical and psychological ones, but I can bullet point them for you. Being a person of grace...

- Reduces stress, tension, anxiety, and anger
- Lowers blood pressure
- Helps you sleep better
- Boosts your immune system

A recent study showed that people who forgive other people actually *live longer* than those who don’t.

If I’m the kind of person who struggles with guilt or self-shaming, offering grace to others actually helps me offer grace to myself, to love my life (even if it isn’t what I thought it might be), love my friends, my family, my spouse - embodying grace means disembodying many of the things that tear us down as humans. When we are filled with grace, we begin to empty of judgement, vengeance, jealousy, greed, envy, callousness. Ultimately, grace helps us find life.

And that’s what this church is about. Finding Friends, Finding God, and Finding Life. Grace is the secret sauce in our recipe.

I hope you’ve enjoyed this series on grace. I hope it’s challenged you at times and comforted you at times. I believe with all my heart that God’s grace is even greater than we can imagine or comprehend, and we look forward, as a church, to continuing to explore the width and breadth of that grace, and to extend it to others.

You know, we’ve reached the end of a season for this church. These four monthly gatherings have been a bit of a trial run - a little taste of what this church is about. But two weeks from today, we launch our public, weekly celebrations. And we’re calling them celebrations,

because we think that finding friends, finding God, and finding life is something worth celebrating.

So, I want to ask you for a favor. As we look ahead to February 15th and the launch of this church. Will you pray with us that God will give us favor in this city? I'm not talking about *special privileges*. I'm talking about open doors into the lives of the people of Nakuru. There are thousands of people in this city who need to know that God loves them, no matter what.

On February 15th, we'll start a series called "LOVE**FIRST**", where we'll be looking at the powerful impact that Jesus and his love had on the first century world, and that it has on us today. Please pray with us that God will send us a crowd of people to hear that message, and that when they come, they'll experience the love of God in every possible way.

Let me pray a prayer of blessing over you guys, then you're free to go. If you've never committed your life to Jesus, and you listened to what I had to say today and think, "Hey, I could use that kind of grace," now's your chance. Make your way up here after we're done and let's talk. God loves you and he's waiting for you. What have you got to lose?

Pray