

CHRISTIAN

It's Not What You Think SESSION 5 - When Gracie Met Truthy

We all think we know something about love—and all of us have experienced love to some extent. But Jesus tells us to love one another the way he loved us.

When we look at how Jesus loved, it's a bit terrifying. We discover that it was messy, and sometimes it seemed inconsistent. At times he seems to be forgiving; at other times he seems to hold everyone accountable. Occasionally he's harsh; in many other moments he's kind. Sometimes he points out sin; on other occasions he seems to ignore it.

Whenever we open the Scriptures and take seriously the teachings of Jesus, there's a tension. We dare not walk away from this tension, even though it's messy and sometimes seems confusing. If we try to resolve it, however, we will give up something very important.

DISCUSSION STARTER

As you've read or heard about the way Jesus treated individuals, what has most surprised or puzzled you?

VIDEO OVERVIEW

For Session 5 of the Video

In his gospel, John wrote that Jesus, as the Word, “made his dwelling among us,” and that he “came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Full to the brim with grace and truth—there's the tension.

We think we know what grace is and what truth is. Truth says, “Hey, you're accountable.” Grace says, “Oh, you're forgiven.” Grace says, “You're fine.” Truth says, “No, you're broken.” Grace says, “It's going to be okay.” Truth says, “Oh, you're going to have to work on it.”

But John says that Jesus was absolutely full of both grace and truth. To further emphasize this, John adds, “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17). Grace and truth showed up as a full package in the person of Jesus—not a balance between the two, but the full measure of both and the embodiment of both.

This is what made the love of Jesus so messy, so confusing to us at times, and so unpredictable. Jesus was all of both grace and truth, and he brought all of it to bear on everyone he talked to and into every situation he encountered.

If we want to know what Jesus meant when he said to love one another, we can watch how Jesus loved. He loved us by calling sin “sin”—and then he paid for it. And having paid for it, he declared, I don't condemn you. We can't let go of truth. God is constantly saying, “Here's what is true; here's how you've got to live; here's how you've got to treat people; here's what you have to do with your morality and your ethics; and here's why you have to be accountable. Sin is destructive, and I don't want it to get you.”

We can't let go of grace either, because to some extent sin already has us, and grace is our only way back home. Grace is the only way we'll know that we've connected or reconnected with our heavenly Father.

We need truth, and we need grace.

If Jesus is the embodiment of grace and truth, and if the church is his body—then we are the best expressions of Jesus others will ever know. So we have to be comfortable with the mess and the unfairness and the inconsistency and all the stuff that goes along with managing and hanging on to the tension around grace and truth.

The church is at its best when it embraces grace and truth and refuses to let go of either. The church is to be the dispenser of both.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you read the Bible (or hear it taught) and experience tension in your understanding of Jesus and how he lives and loves, is that tension something you try to resolve or are you comfortable with it?
2. What's your understanding of the word "grace" and what it represents—both as coming from God and as conveyed by us to other people?
3. What's your understanding of the word "truth" and what it represents—both as coming from God and as conveyed by us to other people?
4. What are the ways you recognize or experience tension between grace and truth? In which direction do you tend to lean?
5. In what ways have you experienced both grace and truth?
6. Why is a "balance" between grace and truth the wrong way to think of what's being taught in this session? What is a better way to think of the relationship between grace and truth?

MILEPOSTS

- When examining how Jesus loved, we find unpredictability and apparent inconsistencies. If we try to resolve this tension, we lose.
- In all his encounters with people, Jesus was always the full embodiment of both grace and truth. We, however, tend to see these two in tension.
- We must never let go of either truth or grace; we need both. The church is at its best when it embraces both and dispenses both.

MOVING FORWARD

Think about your own commitment and intention to extend to others both truth and grace in full measure. What does that actually mean to you? What will it require from you? We recommend that you make it your goal to reflect deeply on the full manifestation of both grace and truth in the life of Jesus. As you continue reading about him in the New Testament, try to embrace whatever tension arises as you see the love of Jesus in action and as you seek to put it into practice in your relationships.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

These profound words reflect the reason for the tension we often encounter as we observe the surprising and unpredictable ways in which Jesus loved people.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

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PREPARATION FOR SESSION 6

To help you prepare for Session 6, use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your small group meeting.

Day One

Focus this week on the brief stories (parables) that Jesus told in Luke 15. What is especially important to note in the background for these stories as indicated in 15:1–3?

Day Two

In the story Jesus told in Luke 15:4–7, what stands out to you? What do you relate to the most in this little story? What do you enjoy the most?

Day Three

In the story Jesus told in Luke 15:8–10, what stands out most to you? What do you relate to most in this story? What do you enjoy most?

Day Four

In the final story in Luke 15 (in Luke 15: 11–32), what do you see as Jesus' main points? What would the audience that day be most surprised to hear in this story?

Day Five

What do you see as the strongest ways in which the three stories in Luke 15 link together?

Last Session

Jesus came to this earth as one who was absolutely “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In his encounters with people, this worked itself out in surprising and perplexing ways, as he always brought all his grace and all his truth to bear in every situation. Trying to understand his way of loving can cause tension in us, but it's a healthy tension. We, too, need to hold on fully to both grace and truth in all of our relationships.