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Encountering Grace

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Encountering Grace

March, 2015

George Fox University

Faculty Lecture – Spring 2015

Rodger K. Bufford
George Fox University

Encountering Grace

- Would you or I recognize grace if we saw it?
- Would we embrace it, or like Peter resist (Jn 13:1-10)?

Don't wash my feet

“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me”

“Lord, not my feet only . . .



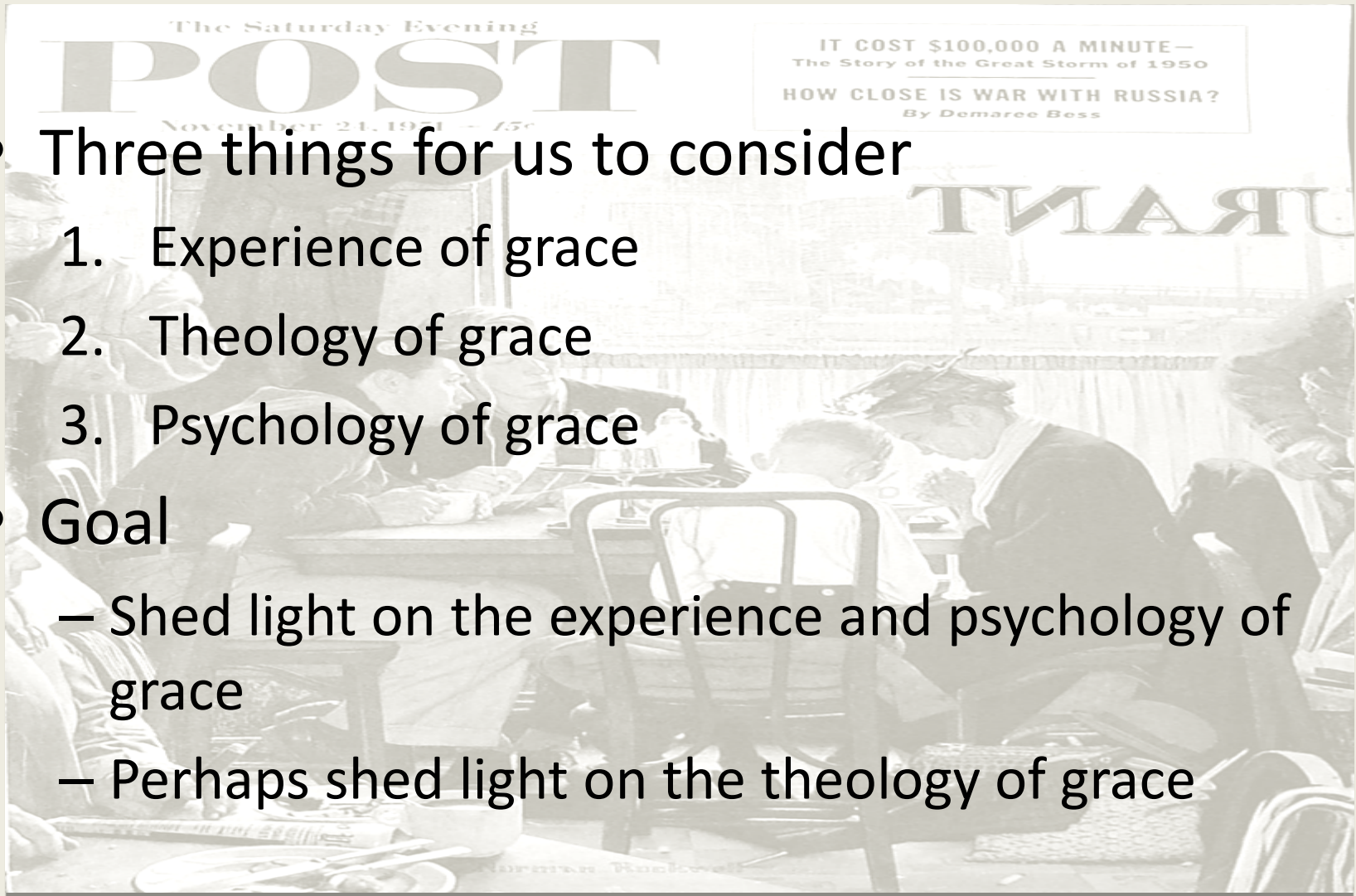
Encountering Grace

- Three things for us to consider

1. Experience of grace
2. Theology of grace
3. Psychology of grace

- Goal

- Shed light on the experience and psychology of grace
- Perhaps shed light on the theology of grace



Encountering Grace



- I. Introduction
- II. Theology of Grace
- III. What Troubles Us About Grace?
- IV. Psychology of Grace

Encountering Grace: Introduction

Experience of grace

Snowy day

Return of the Prodigal

Encountering Grace: Introduction

Experience of grace

Snowy day

Return of the Prodigal

(Luke 15:11-32)



Encountering Grace: Introduction

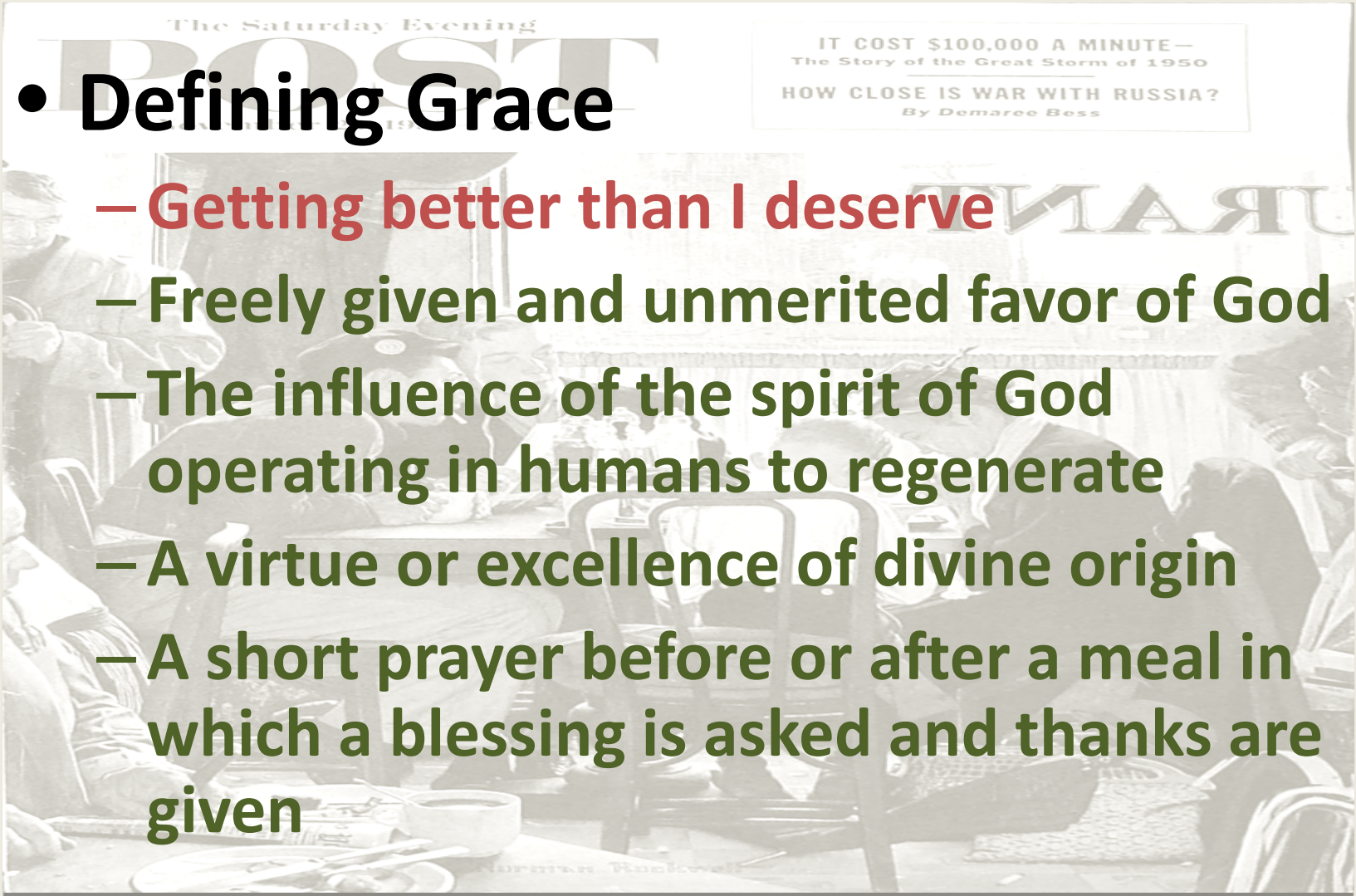
• Defining Grace

- The word "grace" in biblical parlance can, like forgiveness, repentance, regeneration, and salvation, mean something as broad as describing the whole of God's activity toward man or as narrow as describing one segment of that activity.
- An accurate, common definition describes grace as the unmerited favor of God toward man.
- Old Testament, **hen** [[ej](#)] (60 times)
- New Testament, **charis** [[cavri](#)"]. (125)

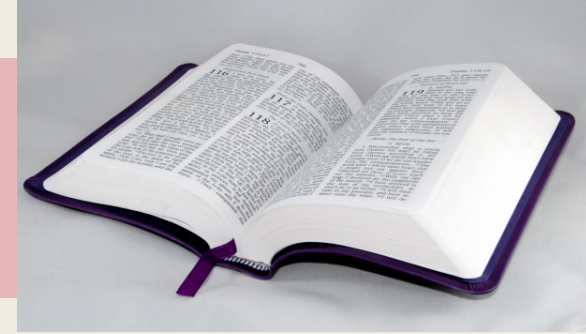
Encountering Grace: Introduction

• Defining Grace

- Getting better than I deserve
- Freely given and unmerited favor of God
- The influence of the spirit of God operating in humans to regenerate
- A virtue or excellence of divine origin
- A short prayer before or after a meal in which a blessing is asked and thanks are given



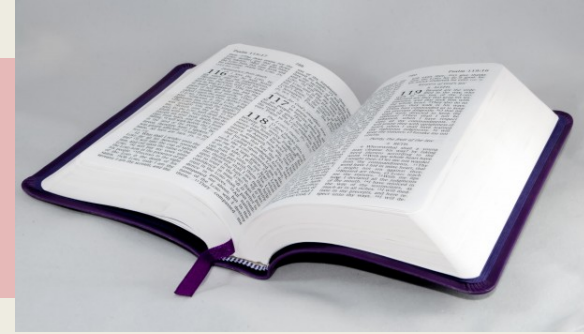
II. Theology of Grace



Two kinds of grace—maybe three

- Special grace—actions of God toward His people
 - Saving grace (prevenient grace, sufficient grace, effective grace)
 - Miracles: parting of the red sea, water in to wine, Lazarus raised, etc.
- Common grace of God of God to humans in general
 - Sunshine and the rain
 - Everyday healings and medicine
 - “Enacted grace” (“pay it forward” is today’s lay expression)—loving service to fellow humans as a response to God’s grace and love
- Human grace—empowered by God

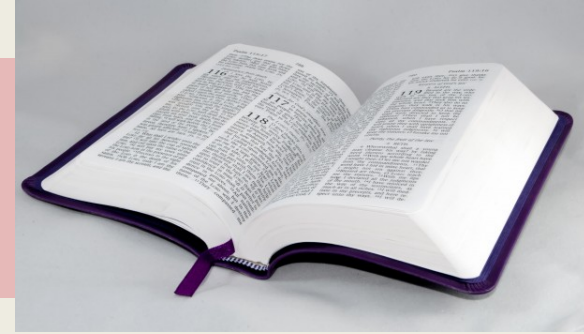
II. Theology of Grace



- *“The very center and core of the whole Bible is the doctrine of the grace of God.”*
–[J. Gresham Machen](#)
- “Grace” is the most important concept in the Bible, [Christianity](#), and the world. It is most clearly expressed in the promises of God revealed in Scripture and embodied in Jesus Christ.
- “Grace is the love of God shown to the unlovely; the peace of God given to the restless; the unmerited favor of God.

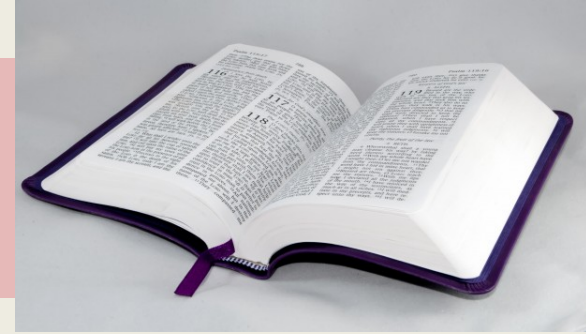
<http://www.christianity.com/theology/what-is-grace.html>

II. Theology of Grace



- “Grace is free sovereign favor to the undeserving.” ([B.B. Warfield](#))
- “Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues.” ([John Stott](#))
- “[Grace] is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him.” ([Jerry Bridges](#))
- “Grace is unconditional love toward a person who does not deserve it.” ([Paul Zahl](#))

II. Theology of Grace



- We live in a world of earning, deserving, and merit, and these result in judgment.
 - That is why everyone wants and needs grace.
 - Judgment kills.
 - Only grace makes alive
- A shorthand for what grace is - “mercy, not merit”
 - Grace is the opposite of karma, which is all about getting what you deserve.
 - Grace is getting what you don’t deserve, and *not* getting what you do deserve
 - Christianity teaches that what we deserve is death with no hope of resurrection

III. What Troubles us About Grace?

What stands in the way of grace????:

- A. Experiences of **disgrace** lead us to distrust grace
- B. Just world notion
- C. Grace can be painful
- D. We simply do not recognize it when we encounter it

III. What Troubles us About Grace?

- A. Sometimes experiences of **disgrace** lead us to distrust
- Parental example (and others)
 - NO NO NO NO NO NO NO—
 - Yes (but you'll pay)
 - Thus when offered grace we believe it's a trap, so we avoid it

III. What Troubles us About Grace?

B. Just World: we believe

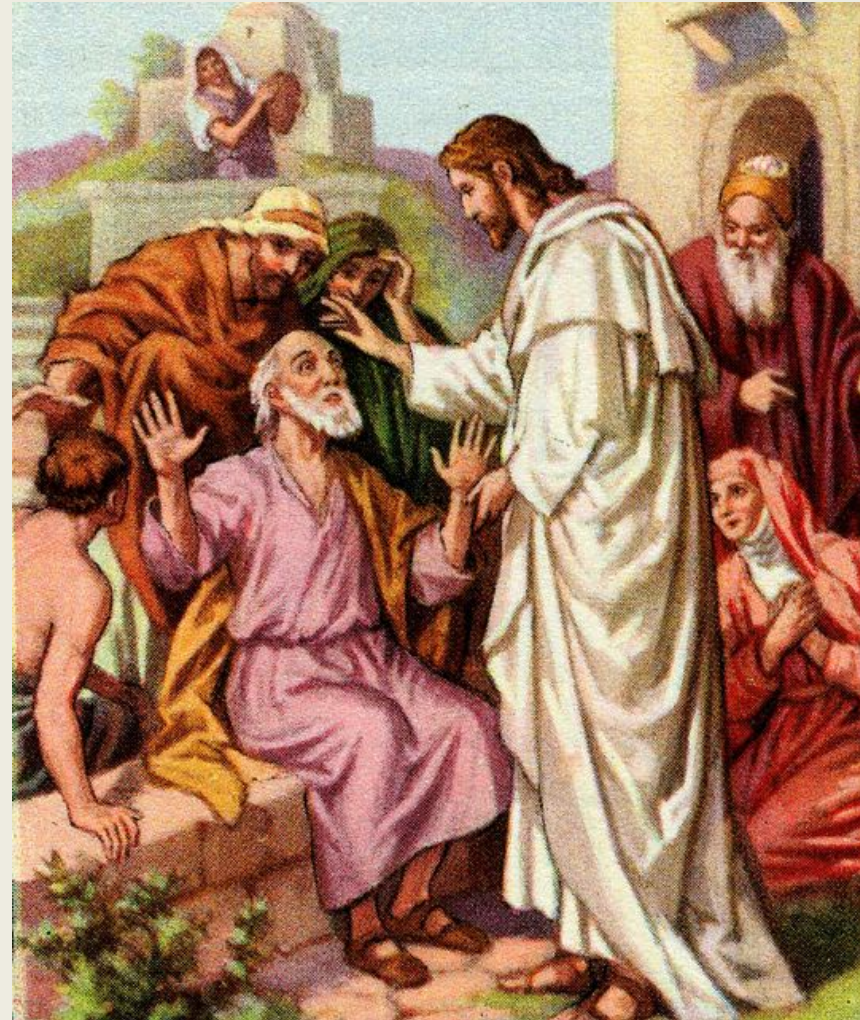
- “What goes around comes around”
- You get what you pay for
- You get what you deserve and deserve what you get
- Crime must be punished
- Sin deserves death



III. What Troubles us about Grace?

- Jesus and the blind man:
 - “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”
 - “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the worked of God should be revealed in him’.”

John 9:1-2



III. What Troubles us About Grace?

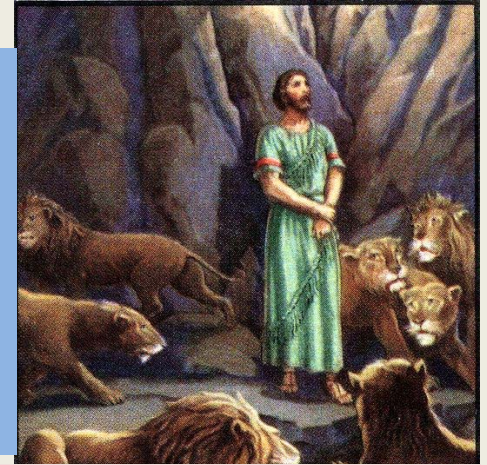
C. Grace can be painful

– Adam & Eve—Genesis 3:22



– “lest he . . . take also from the tree of life . . .

III. What Troubles us About Grace?



- C. Grace can be painful—Daniel and his friends
- Siege: surrender and go into exile, make yourself at home there
 - Jeremiah: left in Jerusalem, thrown into the cistern, rescued and kept in the house of the guard with bread and water (Jeremiah 38:1-13)
 - Zedekiah (Jer 38:14-39:9) surrender and go into captivity and Jerusalem will be saved and you spared/protected—but he resisted and saw his sons slain before him, was blinded, and then carried away captive (anyway).

IV. Psychology of Grace



- Whenever we attempt to investigate something scientifically, we need a way to measure it:
 - tape measures or calipers,
 - beakers or gram scales
- So it is with grace: we need a measure.

IV. Psychology of Grace

We need a measure.

- In psychology we measure lots of things:
 - Intelligence,
 - Personality,
 - Psychopathology, etc.
- Some remain challenging and controversial even after years or decades of research.
- Grace poses similar difficulties



IV. Psychology of Grace

- At present we know of three grace measures—make that four.
 - Grace Scale (Payton, Spradlin, & Bufford, 2000; Spradlin, 2002)
 - Richmond Grace Scale (Sisemore et al, 2010)
 - TAGS-The Amazing Grace Scale (Bassett et al, 2013)
 - GRACE (Sells, Beckenbach, & Patrick, 2009)

IV. Psychology of Grace

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IV. Psychology of Grace

- Do they measure the same thing?
- Can we make a better measure?



Study 1 Results:

Do They Measure the Same Thing?

Gender

- No gender differences were found for any of the grace measures.

Ethnicity

- No differences related to ethnic background were found for any of the grace measures.

Religious Affiliation

- Significant main effects were found for all three grace measures on the single demographic item on religious affiliation

Study 1 Results:

Do They Measure the Same Thing?

Religious Profession

- Significant main effects were found for all three grace measures on the single demographic item of Christian profession
 - GS ($F_{3, 125} = 10.59; p < .001$)
 - RGS ($F_{3, 133} = 18.40; p < .001$)
 - TAGS ($F_{3, 134} = 52.61; p < .001$)
- **Those who professed to be Christian scored higher on all grace measures**

Study 1 Results:

Do They Measure the Same Thing?

Dawkins Atheism Scale

- Significant main effects were found for all three grace measures
- GS ($F_{2, 134} = 14.32; p < .001$)
- RGS ($F_{2, 134} = 12.70; p < .001$)
- TAGS ($F_{2, 134} = 52.61; p < .001$)
- **Those with belief in God scored higher on all grace measures**

Study 1 Results:

Table 1

Descriptive Results and Internal Consistency for Research Measures

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Alpha</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Skew</u>	<u>Kurtosis</u>
Grace Scale (40 items)	.73	182.89	19.64	-.28	-.60
RGS (15 items)	.93	149.04	25.63	-.73	-.16
TAGS(27 items)	.97	82.36	19.56	-1.12	1.03

Study 1 Results:

Table 2

Correlations of Grace Measures with Each Other

<u>Measure</u>	<u>GS</u>	<u>RGS</u>
Richmont Grace Scale	.66**	
<u>The Amazing Grace Scale</u>	<u>.55**</u>	<u>.65**</u>

Note N ranged from 129 to 144.

Here they seem to measure
somewhat the same things.

[In study 2 correlations were .69**, .69**, and .68**]

Table 2

Correlations of Grace Measures with Other Scales

<u>Measure</u>	<u>GS</u>	<u>RGS</u>	<u>TAGS</u>
RWB	.57**	.65**	.79**
EWB	.55**	.48**	.44**
SWB	.65**	.68**	.77**
Gratitude-6	.38**	.42**	.38**
<u>R-COPE Positive</u>	<u>.45**</u>	<u>.60**</u>	<u>.80**</u>
R-COPE Negative	-.37**	-.32**	-.09
Internalized Shame	-.56**	-.32**	-.14
ACE	-.24**	.17	-.04
<u>ACORN</u>	<u>-.37**</u>	<u>-.09</u>	<u>-.10</u>

Note N ranged from 129 to 144.

Here not so much the same . . .

IV. Psychology of Grace: Study 2

A technical challenge: factor analysis

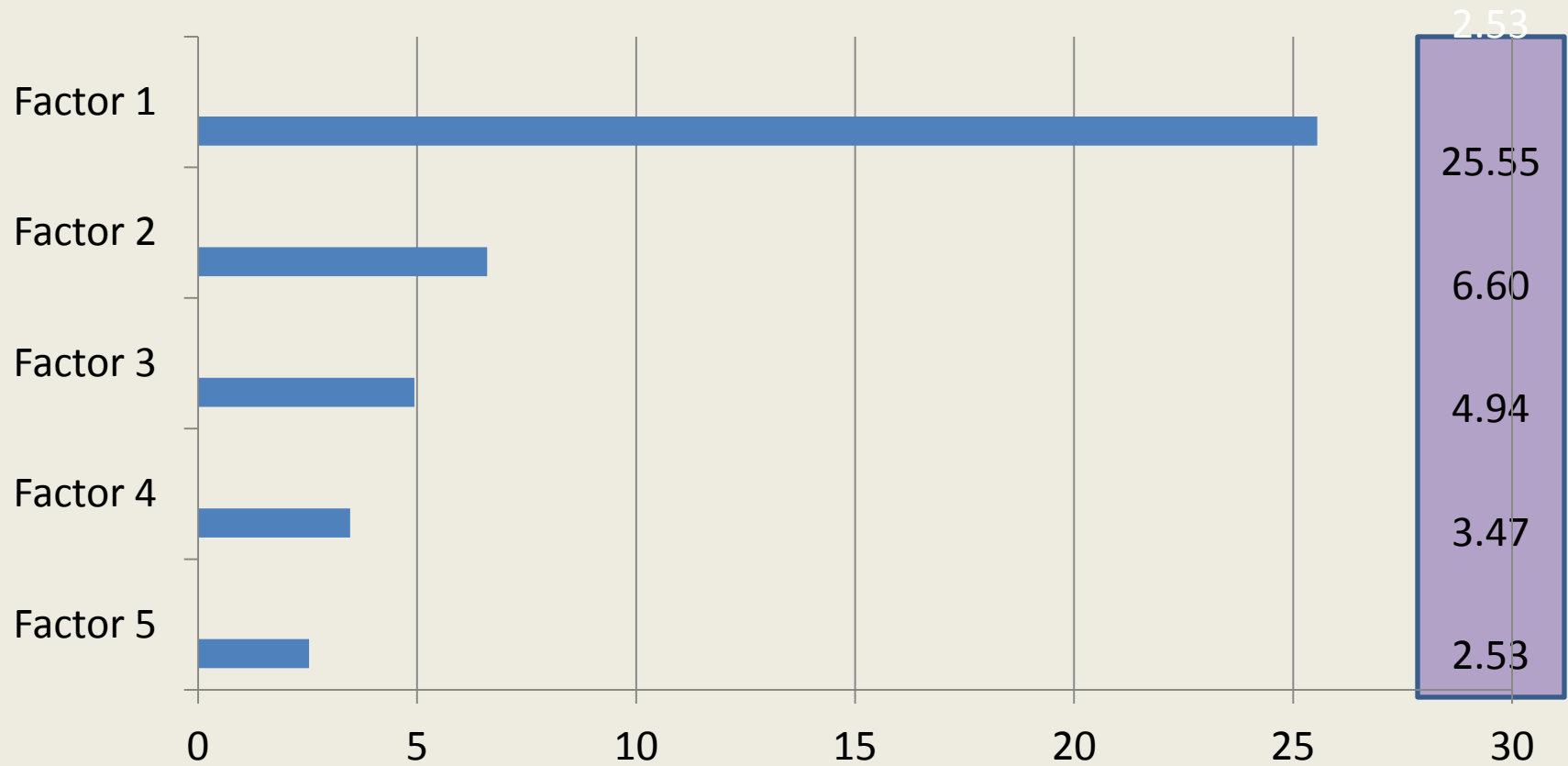
- Correlation considers two measures or variables

- Factor Analysis considers many items at once—here 83 items

- Put simplistically, there are three dimensions:
 - How many clusters of items do we get
 - How many items are included in each cluster
 - How strongly are the items related to each other within a cluster



IV. Psychology of Grace: Study 2



Factor 1

Series1

IV. Psychology of Grace: Study 2

So five factors

1. Experiencing God's grace—27 items
2. Costly grace—12 items
3. Grace to self— 7 items
4. Grace from others—8 items
5. Grace to others—9 items

IV. Psychology of Grace: Study 2

Scale	Alpha	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
F-1 Experiencing God's Grace	.98	5.60	1.12	-1.27	1.65
F-2 Costly Grace	.94	5.87	1.15	-1.28	1.45
F-3 Grace to Self	.76	3.20	0.95	0.11	-0.21
F-4 Grace from Others	.84	5.32	1.29	-0.66	-0.34
F-5 Grace to Others	.71	4.42	1.00	-0.07	-0.43

IV. Psychology of Grace: Study 2

Grace Factor Correlations

<u>Measure</u>	<u>F-1</u>	<u>F-2</u>	<u>F-3</u>	<u>F-4</u>
F-1 Experiencing God's Grace				
F-2 Costly Grace	.47**	.		
F-3 Grace to Self	.09	.07		
F-4 Grace from others	.24**	.27**	.05	
F-5 Grace to Others	.38**	.49**	.08	.23**

IV. Psychology of Grace: Study 2

Grace Factor Correlations with other Measures

Measure	F-1	F-2	F-3	F-4	F-5
Spiritual Well-Being	.63**	.40**	.25**	.24**	.35**
Gratitude 6	.41**	.36**	.05	.25**	.26**
R-COPE Positive	.78**	.39**	-.01	.17**	.30**
R-COPE Negative	-.08	-.32**	-.21**	-.20**	-.32**
Internalized Shame	-.20**	-.21**	-.54**	-.39**	-.27**
ACORN	-.13**	.03	-.43**	-.20**	-.17**
Adverse Childhood Exper	-.05	.14**	-.18**	-.39**	.04

IV. Psychology of Grace: Discussion

Next steps

- Concerns
 - Skew
 - Kurtosis
 - Number of items: 83 is way too many
- Selection of items for proposed new scale
 - Minimize skew
 - Minimize kurtosis
 - Limit number of items

IV. Psychology of Grace: Study 2

Proposed 36-item *Dimensions of Grace Scale*

- Experiencing God's grace—8 items
- Costly grace—7 items
- Grace to self— 7 items
- Grace from others—7 items
- Grace to others—7 items

Items	
+	-
8	0
0	7
3	4
1	6
1	6
5	23

IV. Psychology of Grace: Item Examples

F-1 Experiencing God's Grace

God is in the process of making me more like Jesus

F-2 Costly Grace

*The harder I work, the more I earn God's favor.

F-3 Grace to Self

*I tend to be hard on myself.

IV. Psychology of Grace: Item Examples

F-4 Grace from Others

As a child I was confident that at least one of my parents loved me no matter what.

F-5 Grace to Others

*I need to see remorse before I offer forgiveness.

IV. Psychology of Grace: Discussion

What are our current concerns and limitations of the measure?

- What's missing: have we adequately grasped grace?
- Yay and naysaying
- Re-visit factors: both positive and negative loadings
- Generality 1: similar participants
- Generality 2: different participants—Asians, Bosnians, children, elderly, less educated, poor, etc.

IV. Psychology of Grace: Discussion

What about other considerations?

- What fosters the experience and enactment of human grace?
- What inhibits the experience and enactment of human grace?
- What are the results of experiencing grace?
 - Gratitude? –there is much more psychological research
 - Praise?
 - Enhanced well-being?

IV. Psychology of Grace: Conclusion

We now have a measure so we can study grace

- A 36-item *Dimensions of Grace Scale* that seeks to measure 5 dimensions.
- Adequate to good internal consistency
- Preliminary support for validity
- Five additional studies are under way using this new measure

We also have questions:

How good is the measure?

Can it be further improved?

What can we learn about grace from it?

Questions & Audience Discussion



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