

2012

Grace (Chapter One in Faithful Teaching: Values and Themes for Teaching, Learning, and Leading Purposeful and Principled Education)

Amy Lynn Dee

George Fox University, adee@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/soe_faculty



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dee, Amy Lynn, "Grace (Chapter One in Faithful Teaching: Values and Themes for Teaching, Learning, and Leading Purposeful and Principled Education)" (2012). *Faculty Publications - School of Education*. 195.

https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/soe_faculty/195

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - School of Education by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolf@georgefox.edu.

1

Grace

AMY LYNN DEE

THERE WAS A LARGE coatroom in the back of the class, perfect for storing the boots and coats required in the winter days of my third year in school. It also served as a great place to hide if math was not of particular interest. Mrs. Callahan, realizing she was missing a difficult and resistant math student, kept teaching as she made her way to the door of the coatroom to take the hideaway, Arthur, by surprise. She pushed the door open, and as she entered to sweep aside the hanging coats in order to reveal the missing student, Arthur, who had tricked her, came out from his hiding place behind the door and swiftly closed it, locking a startled Mrs. Callahan on the other side. Craning our necks toward the back of the room, all 29 of us watched in stunned silence as our imprisoned red-faced teacher demanded, through the window of the coatroom door, that Arthur let her out. Frozen by the fear of what he had just done, Arthur stood rooted to the gray linoleum and began to wail at the top of his lungs. At just the right time, the custodian came by with his ring of keys and unlocked the door freeing Mrs. Callahan. What happened next reflected nothing other than pure grace. Mrs. Callahan scooped up the sobbing Arthur and held him close until he stopped crying, and we all listened as she told this very challenging child that she loved him still. No yelling, no threats, no sitting in a chair facing the corner. A prolonged silence followed this simple gift

of grace that remains, to this day, one of my strongest memories of God's unmistakable presence and influence in a public elementary classroom.

Miraculous accounts of deaths rescinded, magnificent stories of truths revealed, and memorable narratives of leaders and followers bind us to an ancient era and captivate both those who study Scripture in a faithful and scholarly manner, as well as those who peruse verses on occasion; but regardless of the purpose for reading Scripture, the concept of grace alone serves to confound those of us who lay no claim to exegetical expertise and perhaps even to those who study the earliest Aramaic manuscripts. Years ago, on the way to see the Grand Canyon, I read a guidebook that said no words existed in the English language to describe the size of this fracture in the earth. Upon looking into the canyon for the first time, I thought of the guidebook and knew that the absence of words to describe this wonder made it incomprehensible even though it was right in front of my eyes. To wrestle with the notion that God loved his creation with an entirely incomprehensible fullness and offered Jesus as an acquittal so that all who believe in Him have a promise of everlasting life regardless of righteousness, brings us face to face with a plan so enormous in its grace that we can not help but wonder if it is real. We do not have to prove our worthiness; we only have to believe. Even when we stand frozen in fear at the realization of our unworthiness, grace alone ties us to the heart of God and allows us an intimate experience with the mystery and wonder of the greatest gift ever given. How do we respond to this gift of grace as educators and scholars? Can we attach words to this gift in order that it become comprehensible so that we might explain it and embody it in ways that honor God and encourage colleagues and students?

Paul tells us in Romans 3:24 that we are "justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Our early Sunday School lessons taught us that the crucifixion of Jesus atones for the sins of all women and men, and our faith in Jesus as our Savior allows for eternal heavenly life. We do not have to sit in a corner in shame because Jesus hung on a cross in pain. While it sounds simple: we all sin and we are all forgiven, God's gift of grace through Jesus, while not demanding good works for the entrance into God's presence, does imply organically that we respond to the gift with gratitude demonstrated through our living as Christians. Redemption comes through Jesus as an act of grace, but we accept that Grand Canyon sized grace as a people following the moral imperatives embedded in hearts that recognize Christ as God, teacher, role model and redeemer.

The biblical definition of grace remains one that provides Christians with great hope, yet some scholars argue that the concept of grace allows some to discard God as the ultimate heavenly judge. William Muehl in *The Living Pulpit* (January–March 1995) asserts that the concept of grace is grossly misused among Christians who lead decadent permissive lifestyles in reliance upon God's forgiveness. Muehl denounces those who use grace as an excuse to forego the commandments given in Scripture, and reminds us that the concept of grace must remain within the larger story of God and creation (see Romans 6:1–11). While Muehl manages to remove the wonder and joy from the gift of grace, he does elevate the gift with the statement, "Grace neither precedes nor follows from good works. It permeates the whole spectrum of divine action in history, giving what might be called texture to each human experience" (p. 17). While not incumbent upon good work, grace does indeed require a type of good work not addressed by Martin Luther that appears in action and gratitude.

Of course, the Arthur of my childhood knew he had done wrong. The realization that he had locked his teacher in a coatroom without seeing a way to redemption prompted a meltdown that Mrs. Callahan immediately saw as a cry of fear, humility, and complete surrender to the hands and heart of one more powerful. Our submission to God coupled with our acceptance of grace implies a tacit agreement to act as agents of grace, ourselves. Grace is not a stand-alone as a biblical concept, but ties to humility, acceptance, responsibility, forgiveness, joy, and gratitude; all themes addressed in other chapters within this book. Christians who recognize and acknowledge the magnitude of the gift of grace have little choice but to live as Christ desires of us and to reflect his work in ours. How can we not respond to the gift of grace as humble servants ready to reciprocate through sincere action as the hands and feet of Christ?

Grace, as commonly defined, denotes a fluidity and elegance in movement, a state of goodwill, and a well-mannered disposition, all of which suit educators very well. One might define physical grace as the Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova's performance in *Giselle*, or even wide receiver Jerry Rice speeding toward the end zone, but almost no one considers as grace the deftness by which a teacher moves in between subjects, standards, objectives, and a multitude of questions while navigating over spilled backpacks and through chair legs and extension cords. A Mother Teresa or Ghandi-like desire for goodwill brings world-wide recognition for a few, but not for those who work to help the underprivileged on a daily basis

in the country's most difficult classrooms, and do so with a sincere desire to make a difference. Finally, a pleasant and charming temperament, perceived by both students and their parents, can make or break the success of a teacher in most communities. Given the complexity of education today, a teacher without the attributes of the common definition of grace will not fare well in the field at all. One with the common attributes of grace might very well find success, but one with both the common attributes of grace and who also embodies the biblical concept of grace in attitude and action will most certainly find success as measured by professional standards, and by lives forever transformed by an educator who brought the presence of God into a classroom.

Even though God's grace comes with no strings attached, teachers who not only discern the Christ that dwells within students, but who also appreciate the human frailty and vulnerability of those same students, may more aptly accept and respond to all students, including the Arthurs of our day, with more grace than those teachers who are blinded by a mindset that students will get only what they deserve within a classroom or institution without bearing any responsibility for their growth as a scholar and human being. We have been blessed by a grace far greater than we deserve, and if we are willing to accept that grace, we must in turn, take these definitions and reflect grace within our practice. The remainder of the chapter focuses upon the manifestation of grace in our classrooms and institutions.

GRACE IN PEDAGOGY

Outside forces and inside realities converge to create the working climate and school culture in which teachers enact the call to teach. The work can feel overwhelming. Grace in practice, or specifically grace in pedagogy, unites the professional requirements and expectations of teachers with the academic targets and required behavior of students resulting in praxis that exemplifies championship teaching. Legislation, changing standards, accreditation organizations, grassroots community groups, policy makers, teacher licensing agencies, parent groups, and students themselves all apply an oft undue measure of pressure to a job that already demands that each teacher hold an arsenal of strategies and methods to teach the gifted along side those who struggle with learning, a relational disposition in order to work with all children and their parents or guardians, a collaborative nature so that professional interactions lead to student achievement and

breadth of knowledge in the content areas. The heroic among educators handle these demands and expectations with finesse and acceptance. The graceful teachers handle such demands with finesse and acceptance, and they also keep the bureaucracy and the stress of the current culture toward education out of the learning environment. These teachers teach as if the only thing that mattered was student achievement and they work outside the tangle of politics to ensure that all students learn.

Student learning, the ultimate goal in any educational system, remains the imperative of all schools, but fulfilling the mandate has become more challenging for even the most gifted teachers. Our classrooms, no longer marked by industrial age homogeneity, contain the richness and blessing of diversity along with the monumental challenge to reach all learners. Differentiation, a practice introduced by Tomlinson (1999) asks teachers to vary methods, student products, and assessments based on student need. Instead of a "one size fits all" lesson plan, teachers plan for each student in the classroom. Honoring the individual learning style of each student through careful planning, and some individualized instruction paired with allowing students different methods by which they demonstrate knowledge, illustrates grace in action. The flexibility that encourages and assists each student in meeting curricular objectives respects the uniqueness of the individual. When faced with a student who challenges a teacher's educational skills in ways that stretch the concept of the professional self, the teacher has a choice. Some teachers give up, or allow the student to "choose to fail," or set up expectations that doom the student to defeat. Teachers of grace seek new methods. Teachers of grace try new ways to connect with the student and to connect the student with the learning. Teachers of grace remediate basic skills to allow for higher-level thinking. Teachers of grace demonstrate love for the Christ inside each student by drawing lines of acceptable behavior, remaining consistent, and setting goals that allow students to experience success.

The measurement of success warrants discussion from a Christian perspective in light of the concept of grace. While the Bible speaks often and unfavorably about judging others, the people following Jesus clearly recognized Christ as a teacher—albeit, not one who corrected with a red pen. The Bible does speak to accountability and integrity, fundamental components of assessment in education. Assessment can cause anxiety for many educators because the stakes are often high. In the lower grades, poor marks mean distressing conversations around the dinner table. In the

secondary grades, poor marks can mean the difference between a first or second tier university. In higher education, grades on a transcript can determine admissions to graduate school—a heavy burden for any educator to carry.

Considering assessment as a means to shape student learning through a focus upon the knowledge and skills mastered allows the student a view of self that remains free from any personal judgment. When students understand expectation of performance and have multiple opportunities to meet performance objectives, assessment becomes a learning process whereby students see improvement. Even though most institutions require some sort of final mark for a transcript, the anxiety many educators face when converting formative evaluations to summative grades is lessened by the careful feedback provided earlier in the course. Some mask the anxiety of grades by the reliance upon an electronic grade book and student work reduced to numerical form. While a number provides little fodder for argument, and students understand how a number reflects progress in a course, a number does not provide clear explanations of the concepts mastered and skills honed in each course. A Christian educator takes seriously the need to assess with integrity, and integrity demands honest formative feedback that leads to student achievement rather than a few opportunities for students to produce evidence of memorization in a mid-term or final summative evaluation.

In short, teachers of grace never relinquish best practice in favor of personal convenience or comfort. Numbers are convenient and electronic grade books remove the subjective assessments of growth, whole group teaching and reliance upon lecture means less planning for individuals, rigid due dates and impossible expectations allow for positional power on the part of the teacher, but none of these practices adhere to either strong teaching practice or the ethical imperatives of the Christian educator. Numbers have a place in education as do the lecture and due dates; however, the Christian educator must find ways to combine rigor with practice that brings all students to high levels of mastery. A traditional view of education allows 10 percent in the mastery category. This inherently discriminatory view leaves 90 percent of the student body below the mark of mastery. Ninety percent of God's children receive less than 100 percent of course content? Think about it. Moving into a vision of education as providing the very best in learning to expand and magnify the potential of all students requires grace at the very core of teaching.

Discussion Questions

How do you demonstrate grace to difficult students?

Describe the characteristics of students who most need our grace.

Describe some educational practices that you could adjust to better exemplify grace.

GRACE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Maximizing the promise within each student involves establishing appropriate relationships with students, parents and guardians, teachers and other school personnel, and with the larger community. An invitational classroom climate where learning takes precedence necessitates a trusting relationship between the students and the teacher, and the teacher and those important to the student. Numerous writers have addressed the issue of relationships in a learning context (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Pianta, 1999), but the idea of grace as a precursor to relationship leaves the Christian educator with much to consider. And grace and love are not always easy. Students may come into classrooms with poor attitudes about teachers and learning coupled with a history of failure. Students may come to us from homes where parents denigrate the educational system or perhaps fear what they perceive as positions of power; and thus, the teacher becomes the antagonist in the story of school. The plot is all so familiar with a predictable conclusion for both teacher and student—unless grace becomes a theme.

Concepts of love and acceptance form the foundation of relationships, and grace requires the presence of both. Christian love—the love-your-neighbor-as-yourself kind of love—brings teachers like Mrs. Callahan into relationship with students like Arthur, who was not always tremendously likeable. The acceptance of a unique individual, one who may not ascribe to our ideals of behavior and philosophy, along with Christian love will serve as a foundation for a grace-filled relationship. We know from developmental frameworks (Erickson, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978) that learning requires the sense of acceptance and belonging, and the embodiment of grace provides the portal into which we can begin developing relationships that lead to learning and also develop the heart and soul of another human being.

Not long into my teaching in higher education, I ran into my first real challenge to grace-filled teaching. A student, one many educators would describe without many words of compassion, became a tremendous challenge to my course planning, attitude about students, and ideals about a career in higher education. Incessantly negative, cynical, and sometimes quite rude, this student managed to push every button possible. When describing his behavior to a colleague, I mentioned that my past fourth graders had better self-regulation. That statement made me realize that even adult students entered my classroom with a need for grace and love, and this became a defining moment that mitigated feelings of frustration and annoyance. Teachers may not like every child, but they must love all children. As with a child, the decision to purposely demonstrate grace in the relationship with my adult student changed my attitude about him and my place in education. While this challenging person never developed into a student who brought joy to the classroom, the grace, rather like forgiveness, enabled me to move ahead and to find joy within my own act of teaching. This grace relies upon the pedagogy mentioned earlier, the acceptance of all students as worthy people created by God for unique purposes, and relationships that allow learning to remain a priority in the classroom.

What happens when our faith and value systems conflict with those of our students? Accepting that all students are created by God; and therefore, worthy of grace presents real challenges for some Christian educators. Our Christian worldview must dictate our actions, including the call to treat every student with justice and equality so that diverse viewpoints are included in the educational setting—even when they do not match our own. Several years ago, while still teaching undergraduates, I taught a class in multicultural education and within it sat a diverse group of students, even though at first glance they all appeared to represent the demographic of the rural community in which the college was situated. Upon closer inspection, I found, aside from the obvious few underrepresented cultures, students who lived with significant others, students who used controlled substances as recreation, students who had grown up in poverty, athletes, intellectuals, liberals, conservatives, one Wiccan, and two who identified as homosexual.

Thankfully, I quickly learned that homogeneity in a small rural private college is nothing more than a myth, and that reality surfaced once I looked deeply enough and past the obvious. My challenge was to shape this group into a community that honored each other for the gifts each brought to the classroom every Tuesday and Thursday. Instead of using my value system

as a lens through which I viewed each individual, the recognition of the unique gifts of each individual served as the way in which I viewed my students. My students. The result was the building of relationships that have lasted until this very day. It also allowed me to understand how Jesus could love young people who do not adhere to customary Christian traditions. These students are His, too. The fundamental educational mandate requiring the creation of an invitational environment where all are honored and respected aligns directly with the Christian concept of grace. Jesus did not discriminate and dole out grace only to those who followed the prevailing cultural norm—quite the opposite, really. Inviting others in instead of pushing them out is grace in action and it allows for the formation of rewarding relationships.

Turnitin.com advertises as “the global leader in addressing plagiarism.” A common practice in my neighborhood school district is to have high school students set up an account and submit all written work to Turnitin.com before submission. Ask any high school student why teachers use Turnitin.com and chances are you will likely get the following answer: “They don’t trust us.” Notice the distinct they-we division between teachers and students. No doubt, cheating and plagiarizing are immoral, but “guilty until proven innocent,” the prevailing philosophy behind the choice to use the service, does little to promote either relationships or teaching about moral decisions, not to mention specific knowledge about the avoidance of plagiarism. Trusting students and then offering support when poor decisions are made is the foundation of discipline—discipleship in action. True discipline enacted out of love promotes a culture of *us*. Allowing students to fail, without letting them fail the course, provides an opportunity for both the teacher and student to learn. Trust, accompanied by the realization that we live in a broken world where people make the wrong choices, and forgiveness and grace prompt us to move forward and experience growth.

Many educators fear relationships, and establishing boundaries often becomes a topic of discussion in teacher preparation programs as well as within teachers’ lounges across the country. The actions of a few troubled and unscrupulous individuals within our profession have left many educators fearful of “getting too close” to students, literally and figuratively, and the resulting perception on the part students are that teachers and professors do not care about them. Birch & Ladd (1997) and Pianta (1999) highlight the importance of learning in relationships and we have established fairly well the agreement that the student-teacher relationship profoundly

affects learning. Healthy and appropriate relationships build confident and resilient learners. (See the Search Institute's website.) Entering into relationships with the purpose of building others—and an attitude of servanthood—is good and right. The call to teach inherently includes the call to serve in relationship.

Fostering healthy relationships with students also requires flexibility briefly discussed earlier in the section on grace in pedagogy. In healthy student-educator relationships, flexibility becomes non-negotiable. When educators see each student as an individual with whom a relationship exists based on trust and support, rigid rules of operation can damage the learning process. Individuals have unique circumstances and no amount of planning when constructing a syllabus can prepare educators or students for what may come during the course.

My daughter, a student at a Christian university, told me that she accidentally submitted an assignment to the wrong place in the electronic class site. She caught it early and informed the professor, requesting with an apology, that he send it back to her so she could re-submit in the proper location. From my vantage point as an educator who began teaching first graders and has moved up through the grades to the graduate level, it appeared as a reasonable request and a common error that has no bearing what so ever upon a student's demonstration of progress toward course goals, so what is the big deal? Apparently, for students in that course, it measures up there with the most egregious of offenses. In the same semester, my daughter neglected to transfer two answers on an exam from the test sheet to the answer sheet. The professor saw her omissions and gave her the points for the questions. Which professor will my daughter look to as a mentor, a fair and reasonable person, and as a worthy educator? The little graces in the form of flexibility and understanding go along way in establishing a climate where students want to do well for themselves and they want to do well for the professor because of the honor established within the relationship with that educator.

When educators honor students and demonstrate that through grace, students honor educators and reciprocate likewise. While grace-filled pedagogy asks for timely and thorough feedback, educators are also human with demands and obligations outside the academy. When a teacher has a solid relationship with the students, and life burdens steal time meant for reading student papers before the next class session, an honest explanation from the educator suffices and understanding abounds. Educators who do not have the relationships in place get poor evaluations, poor ratings on

websites, and have students scheduling around their course times. Often, educators are reluctant to offer any flexibility or leeway to students because they fear adding to what they refer to as "student entitlement." Many educators see in students a "prerogative to demand" that they attempt to battle at any cost. Do some students demand? Absolutely. Are students entitled to a quality education from servant professors and teachers who honor each student as an individual with whom God has found favor? Absolutely. Our hearts hold the balance, not the syllabus or guidebook or policy manual. Responding in grace with the recognition of relationship and individual uniqueness suppresses any sense of entitlement one might find in a student.

Discussion Questions

When have you found yourself in conflict with a student?
How did you resolve the conflict?

When has classroom practice or policy conflicted
with your concept of grace?

Do you fear entering into relationships with students?

When your heart conflicts with practice, what do you do?

GRACE IN COLLEGIALITY

Gary Tiffin discusses at length the concept of community in a later chapter in this book. A strong connection exists between community, collaboration, and grace. In the current educational climate, collaboration with colleagues surrounding student achievement proliferates regardless of the type of school environment. Teaching, no longer a solitary act whereby one enters a classroom and closes the door to the outside world, now requires that we work as a team. Just as students learn in community and relationship, so do educators. While this cannot come as an earth shattering revelation, getting some educators to work collaboratively might just require something along the lines of an apocalyptic threat. After all, teachers have worked in crowded isolation for centuries. When teachers leave their congested classrooms and enter into collegial work, students realize amazing results because of the learning that takes place in community. Working in

community toward an institutional goal, or individual student progress, allows the collective good and knowledge of the group to develop plans and solutions that rise above what one individual could accomplish. School districts around the world now grant time within a school day for teachers to collaborate. University professors are expected to serve on committees and it serves as a measure of worthiness in issues of tenure and promotion. Teamwork, like community described by Tiffin, leads to a stronger environment in which our students learn.

Collegiality, the sharing of responsibility between and among those working together toward a common goal, requires transparency and excellent communication. While we value collegiality and collaboration between educators, working with others brings its own challenges in the form of personality differences, communication styles, competitiveness, and different passions. Working with others who are not like us can either challenge and inform for personal and group growth, or challenge and overwhelm leading to stagnation and a loss of opportunity to move forward. Only when the challenge accompanies grace, can we begin to grow together toward a common goal. Grace in collegial relationships takes on forgiveness and inclusive communication and it focuses on the common good of the organization as opposed to personal agendas.

Gone are the days of phone calls and letters to arrange meetings or to disseminate information. Email, social websites, and text messages have replaced many of the communication methods we have used for years. We are left with new ways to receive and send important material, which means we also have new ways to interpret the written word. Danger lurks not in the technology, but in the immediacy of the communication and in the decoding of any implied message. A grace filled collegial culture must include an agreement to communicate with honesty, transparency and grace. Professors, teachers, and institutions ought to consider how communication styles and content might affect students and families in everything from syllabi and report cards to invitations and general information. Collegial and grace-filled communication also includes the courage to say the difficult with that love-your-neighbor-as-yourself type of love. Withholding information that can lead to growth, ease job performance, or promote belonging and inclusion represents a separation from God's desires for his people. Knowledge is power and withholding knowledge represents a duplicitous undermining of the wellbeing of others—the opposition of grace.

Grace in collegial relationships also requires that we refrain from judgment based upon myopic philosophical perspectives. We learn from Matthew 7:1–5 that we must not judge, and yet Christian educators, accountable to God and to each other, might expect gentle confrontation if actions do not align with mission. The point remains that hypocrisy has no place in our schools, and colleagues who value each other see multiple ways to view each other's practice. For example, I have a colleague who when teaching undergraduates used to require all assignments to be turned in on time in order to avoid a grade penalty. He says he told students, "The trains run on time in England." He makes the point that students are accountable to the schedule and need to learn to manage time. On the other hand, I have always allowed extra time on assignments provided that what gets turned in represents quality work reflective of the extended due date. I understand that trains run on time in England, but I also understand that other trains arrive regularly. I want my students to find solutions. Time management verses problem-solving—both are valuable. I do not judge my colleague's practice as poor, inferior, or ineffective, as I am sure he would not judge mine as substandard or too lenient. We have different perspectives and different desires concerning our students. He has students who to this day (years later) come back with expressions of gratitude, as do I. Conversely, I do expect that this colleague would hold me accountable to upholding institutional mission and Christian living.

Christian living often excludes celebration of personal success lest it become boastful (see Romans 12:3). How do we gracefully celebrate the success of others? While some interpret the announcement of any success as boasting, against which the Bible warns repeatedly, educators have long understood the importance of building self-esteem in students by celebrating successes. Building the confidence of our students comes easily and most would agree that building the confidence of our colleagues also comes effortlessly as a joy and a privilege, but others adamantly disagree and feel the announcement of a professional accomplishment causes others to feel inferior. Recently, a colleague came into my office with a check for a substantial sum of money. When I asked her what it was for, she explained that she had written a grant and just received the funding. Joy was written all over her face, and I asked her if she was going to announce this at the department-wide meeting later that afternoon. Her reply was, "Oh, no, I couldn't possibly." I asked permission to announce the funding of the grant that allowed her to carry our ministry to people on another continent and

that was acceptable, but she was not comfortable sharing this news with her colleagues assembled as a body of Christian educators. While there is a difference between *I am happy because this hard work paid off* and *I am better than you because this I accomplished*, many Christians do not acknowledge the nuanced variation in the two statements. Richard Graves tells us that grace transcends the ego and that it allows us to see ourselves universally (Foehr & Schiller, 1997). I suggest we seek ways to support each other and celebrate these happy moments in our lives as teachers and professors because they sustain us and allow us to continue to interact with each other in grace-filled ways that lead to the advancement of our field.

Promotion and tenure committees judge and assess professors upon their contributions in teaching, scholarship, and service. While elementary and secondary teachers might not have service requirements, I doubt many Christian educators spend long hours outside the classroom in idle wandering. Rather, most might have trouble honoring the Sabbath due to an over-commitment to serve in various roles in and out of the school. We received grace through the ultimate sacrifice, and many Christians, in turn, sacrifice time and resources in order that they might extend grace to others. Serving others and doing for the least of these through the use of our hands and feet as agents of Christ set Christians apart from non-Christian colleagues. While non-Christians might very well serve others in important and meaningful ways clocking in more volunteer hours than what might seem humanly possible, the recognition that we serve out of a commitment to Jesus, and in recognition of His grace, adds a dimension to the service that can complicate. University-wide volunteer days, church stewardship committees, Saturdays with Habitat for Humanity, and teaching Sunday School all look good on resumes but carry no more value in the eyes of the Lord than sitting with a colleague editing a paper, working with a teaching partner to assemble a bulletin board, or acting as a sounding board for a colleague contemplating a career move. Graceful service is quiet and has the interest of another at heart.

Grace in collegiality requires an assessment of aptitude of self and others, and an acknowledgment of gifts and areas for improvement. If our colleagues have communicated with grace, we have an understanding of our gifts and challenges as perceived by others. An unemotional assessment of this knowledge leads us to personal growth and allows us to use gifts to help others through service. Because gifts are God given, the use of gifts to promote and assist others demonstrates graceful living.

Discussion Questions

When has your grace been challenged in a collegial relationship?

In what ways do you extend grace to your colleagues?

How can a grace-filled relationship with a colleague affect student achievement?

GRACE IN SCHOLARSHIP

God's grace gives us unique gifts. Through the act of scholarship, we use the gifts to advance our field and the practice of others. Literature exists that speaks directly to the challenges of Christian scholars (Craig & Gould, 2007; Hughes, 2005; Marsden, 1997) and while scholarship can emerge from Christians serving in secular institutions as well as from those in Christian institutions, the nature of the scholarship reflects God's purpose and grace. Seeking new knowledge honors God, as God provides the source of all truth. Our work as Christian scholars, particularly those within the sciences and social sciences, can lead to disequilibrium, but then Jesus asked his disciples to think in different ways. Scholarship that seeks truth, regardless of what that scholarly inquiry reveals, ultimately leads back to God as the source of all creation and the model of grace. The interaction between a dynamic field and a consistent God encourages spirited discussion within classrooms and among colleagues, and it encourages scholarship that promotes faith for faculty and students alike. Scholarship motivated by fascination and a desire to serve and advance our field while promoting students and colleagues satisfies the godly qualities of wonder and grace.

Educators exemplify grace in scholarship by upholding standards and giving researchers respectful consideration. That almost sounds paradoxical. Producing good work, helping those under our tutelage rise to accepted standards of scholarship, and holding ourselves accountable to our colleagues upholds the ideals of our profession. At the same time, when we encounter scholarship, we should assume the researcher has given his or her best effort to expand the field; and therefore, allow us to appraise the work based upon how it informs our discipline rather than our personal preferences. Disagreement about research or scholarship must remain within the

context of the work rather than moving into the realm of relationship, and at the same time, we must recognize any bias. Many educators struggle with providing feedback that students or colleagues might perceive as negative, but when the feedback provides opportunities for growth, we have a professional and ethical obligation to correct, mentor and guide those who have not met expected criteria.

The complex relationship between epistemology, content knowledge, instructional strategies, and scholarship informs the way Christian educators choose to infuse faith into the learning experience for students. The timeworn integration language used by scholars in the Christian education arena (Badley, 1994; Hasker, 1992) leave some seeking ways to simplify, glorify, and personalize the infusion of faith into teaching and learning experiences. Using faith as a filter from which we view instructional choices and course content in relationship to student need and present culture allows educators to speak of faith infusion in ways that remain relevant and meaningful. Furthermore, grace in scholarship seeks ways to promote meaningful discourse and discovery while at the same time advancing the university, aiding other scholars, and motivating the productivity of the researcher. The attempted infusion of faith into scholarship, learning experiences, or interactions with colleagues that does not include an intentional awareness of God's sustaining grace may superficially satisfy the requirements of a faith-based institution, but an attempt to call upon and impart God's grace reflects and magnifies Him in powerful ways that can influence others in ways we could not do left to our own resources.

Ernest Boyer (1990) regards teaching as scholarship and recognizes the commitment needed to stay current in the field by reading widely in addition to planning that considers solid pedagogical methods. Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) advance Boyer's assertions and say that scholarly teaching brings the ideals of the academy to the student and thus prepares them to enter therein primed and ready to reciprocate through the promotion of the scholarship of others. Regarding teaching as scholarship accentuates the significance of educators' work in the shaping of students. When grace enters teaching, students experience the best educators have to offer; gain skills, knowledge and a deeper faith; then leave with the skills and dispositions to offer grace to others.

Discussion Questions

How have you been challenged by scholarship in your field?

In what ways do you advance your field?

What other ways to you see a connection between grace and scholarship?

CONCLUSION

We have come full circle. Grace in the way we choose to teach, in our relationships with students and colleagues, and in our scholarship reflects the essence of exemplary education. As recipients of the unearned gift of grace, we must accept it with deep gratitude and we then become agents of grace passing it on to our students. Incorporating the concept of grace into the work of educators leads to transformational teaching in which students learn not only content, but the values of the academy, how educators extend God's love, and how they can reciprocate the gift of grace in their own lives.

REFERENCES

- Badley, K. (1994). The faith/learning integration movement in Christian higher education: Slogan or substance? *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 3(1), 13-33.
- Birch, S. H., & Ladd, G. W. (1997). The teacher-child relationship and children's early school adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology*, 35, 61-79.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Craig, W. L., & Gould, P. M. (Eds.). (2007). *The two tasks of the Christian scholar: Redeeming the soul, redeeming the mind*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.
- Erickson, E. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.
- Foehr, R. P., & Schiller, S. A. (Eds.). (1997). *The spiritual side of writing: Releasing the learner's whole potential*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Glassick, C. E., Huber, M. T., & Maeroff, G. I. (1997). *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Hasker, W. (1992). Faith-learning integration: An overview. *Christian Scholar's Review*, 21(3), 234-248.
- Hughes, R. T. (2005). *The vocation of a Christian scholar: How Christian faith can sustain the life of the mind*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Faithful Education

- Marsden, G. M. (1997). *The outrageous idea of Christian scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Muehl, W. (1995). *The Living Pulpit* (January–March).
- Pianta, R. C., (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- <http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets>.
- <https://turnitin.com/static/index.php>.