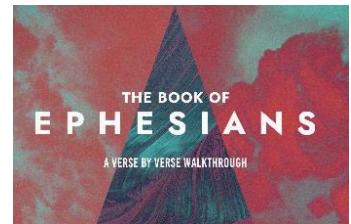


Title: Ephesians, Week 6, A Grace-Filled Life

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Ephesians 3.1-13

Big idea: 6 character qualities evidence a grace-filled life.



One of the beautiful gifts God has given us is the gift of language, the vehicle by which we can express our thoughts, communicate to each other, build relationships and so on. Think if we didn't have language. I'm not sure we'd even be here.

Several words and phrases we use in the English language immediately convey something positive.

- He's such a nice person.
- She's so kind.
- They care about people.
- She's so loving toward others.
- He really listens to me.
- They've got my back and on and on.

One of those phrases is this. [A grace-filled life](#)

Even outside of Christianity, of which grace is such a part, when we hear or even think of a grace filled life, it implies positive qualities about that person.

So, right now, take a few seconds and share with someone nearby one or two qualities that come to your mind when you think of a person you would describe as grace filled.

Hopefully that got you thinking more about a grace filled life because today as we continue our series in Ephesians, we're going to look at what makes up a grace-filled life.

Here's today's [Big idea: 6 character qualities evidence a grace-filled life.](#)

## BIG IDEA

6 character qualities  
evidence a grace-filled life.

We will glean from this passage today these 6 qualities. After we unpack the passage, I'm going to give you six statements that reflect a character quality related to a grace filled life and ask you to evaluate yourself. Hopefully you got the sermon notes. You can go to our web site even now and download them if you want to follow along electronically.

You will evaluate how you would describe that character quality in you using this scale...

### Statement 1

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Not certain | Agree | Strongly agree

Before we jump in, let's review last week.

Last week I contrasted two perspectives from the passage in Ephesians, a **not-like-me** one and a **less-than-me** one. **Not-like-me** is simply recognizing that people around me are different from me in different ways. There is nothing wrong with noting those distinctions: different colored skin, different language, different dress, different personalities, etc.

But, the problem comes when our perspective shifts from an objective not-like-me to a prejudicial and harmful **less-than-me**. Some words that describe this less-than-me attitude would be prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, intolerance, and racism.

Big idea: Practicing the 5-R's can help us Root out and Remove a Less-than-me attitude.

## The 5 R's

1. Remember from where you came
2. Reflect on where you are now
3. Repent of any *less-than-me* biases
4. Rejoice in God's creativity seen in human diversity
5. Reach out to a *not-like-me* person

1. Remember from where you came (we were separated from Christ, far from him, without hope and without God). We must not forget from where we came, not to dwell on it but to dwell on the next R.
2. Reflect on where you are now (in Christ).
  - If you are a true Christian, you have 24/7 access to God.
  - You are a citizen of the Kingdom with all its privileges.
  - You belong in the family of God.
  - You are part of His new spiritual temple, the church.

3. Repent of any known *less-than-me* biases.

4. Rejoice in God's creativity seen in human diversity. This one new spiritual people, Christians, does not mean we don't celebrate God's amazing creativity in how we are all different in different ways.

5. Reach out to a *not-like-me* person.

Today's passage is Ephesians 3.1-13.

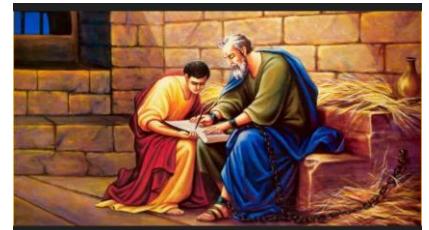
Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. <sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

**Eph. 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—**

Remember Paul was in prison under house arrest in Rome, sometimes chained to a soldier. He was there because he maintained that the blessings of the new covenant didn't require a person to first become a Jew. His imprisonment was like a house arrest that allowed for certain privileges, one of them being visitors. So, his friends and inquirers about the faith would visit him as well as travelers coming from other churches in other parts of the Roman Empire. So, his fellow evangelists could take the letters he wrote and distribute them to these churches.



He does not see himself as a victim of the Jews or the Roman government. Certainly, his detractors mocked his plight and tried to make things more difficult. Paul, however, sees his imprisonment as a mark of his apostleship. He saw himself as a champion for Christ, even in his suffering.

He starts a prayer, but he breaks it by explaining this mystery God has revealed to him.

**<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,**

This term is the equivalent of a stewardship or task. If you were a steward or manager for someone else I that day, you had a lot of responsibility for the one you served or worked for. God had given Paul this task and equipped him as steward with his grace to carry out the task.



They had heard about this mystery of grace for everyone when he had been in Ephesus before his imprisonment.

I mentioned last week that he took two key leaders to the church in the ancient city of Ephesus when he had stayed there for 3 years. And Apollos, a great teacher, was already there. During his stay, the

whole area heard about the Gospel from Paul because he used a new communication technique, teaching and leading discussions in a secular teaching hall called the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus. He powerfully preached the gospel there through discussion and teaching.



It became one of the most successful evangelism strategies in Christian. That's why he could say, you've heard this.

**<sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.**

This mystery is not like a Sherlock Holmes or an Agatha Christie book. Rather this mystery was something that was hidden from human knowledge in the past and now revealed by divine revelation through God's Spirit to Paul. Through the Apostle Paul's writings and teaching, it was now an open secret. Anybody can enter the Kingdom of God through faith and repentance. You don't need to be a Jew first. This idea of this open secret dominates this chapter.

This truth was not just for a select few but for all. And God revealed it to the Apostle Paul who was now God's mouthpiece to reveal it to the world.

**<sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ**

Although the OT tells us that the Jewish people understood this in a limited way, that they would be a blessing to the Gentiles because the Messiah would come through them, it wasn't until Paul came along that this plan of God was fully revealed and that a new covenant would reveal this new spiritual race, this new body of Christ of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

Insight comes from understanding and represents the profound comprehension into spiritual realities that God gives us today through His Spirit.

Paul was eager for them to learn and understand, but it took a desire and intentionality on their part (our part) to understand. The book of Acts mentions a church in a small village off the beaten track called Berea. Acts commands the Christians there for their hunger to learn.

*Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17.11)*

Learning about Jesus and the life he has for us should be an ongoing commitment on our part to continually grow in our understanding of God and how he wants us to live.

There is a word in the next verse here that appears three times. See if you can catch it.

**<sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.**

Did you see it?

It's the word **together**. Following Jesus is a together experience, not meant to be a lone ranger experience. Because our faith is a together experience, it's vital that we come together with other believers for corporate worship. It's vital that we are connected to each other in smaller groups.

Following Jesus was never meant to be solo.

This mystery that God revealed to Paul and that which he has now been tasked to make known includes three key truths:

1. Every Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, is a recipients of God's blessings
2. Every Christian is now part of the body of Christ
3. Every Christian now shares in the promises of being in Christ.

So in Christ, every believer is on equal footing, no matter your ethnicity, skin color, or demographic category.

**<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.**

A servant was a table waiter. Paul did not bring personal qualities that qualified him for this task to be God's mouthpiece to the Gentiles. It was all a gift of grace. This grace here is not used for saving grace, but grace for service.

In other words, when God gives you a responsibility (like Paul who was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles), he also gives you the provision of his power to carry it out (God's grace through the working of His power).

**<sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all God's people,**

He actually made up a word here.

He experienced this sudden outburst of amazement that God would use him, a murderer of Christians, an opposer of Jesus and His church before he was miraculously saved. He didn't feel like he deserved this honor. He considered himself the foremost of sinners, unworthy of the salvation that God freely gave, and unworthy of being God's tool to preach the Gospel even though he had tried to destroy the church.

This made-up word is *leaster*, less than the least.

He considered himself a nobody that God made into a somebody. This was not false modesty, but rather profound gratitude and humility in a Roman world where humility was not considered a virtue. He had persecuted the church, yet God extended his grace to him and he became Christianity's most influential Christian and theologian.

Paul saw himself as double blessed, given the privilege of God revealing this mystery that all could be saved, no matter their ethnicity, and the privilege of being given the responsibility to make this secret known to others.

**this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.**

Paul had three goals in his preaching.

1. Preach Christ to the Gentiles.
2. Inform the world of this miracle of Jew and Gentile becoming a new humanity, a third spiritual race known for its love.
3. Inform the angels. Part of this mystery is that angels are watching redemptive history unfold, observing the teachings and actions of God's people.

The word unsearchable is almost untranslatable into English. Translators have used words like inexplorable riches, untraceable, unfathomable, uninvestigable, inexhaustible, illimitable, inscrutable, incalculable, and infinite.

The riches you have in Christ are so deep that although you can announce them (as Paul does) we can never fully explain them. They are so great and so vast that we can't fully comprehend them.

In other words, we can never exhaust our understanding about Jesus and His work. The unsearchable riches of Christ revealed in his word will keep you on a transformative learning journey the rest of your life, if you want it. You will never exhaust the depths of wisdom and insight and knowledge of the incomparable Christ.

The implications are this: Jesus always enriches our lives. He never subtracts. He only adds.

**<sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,**

This is a puzzling verse. What are these rulers in the heavenly realms? It could be God's angels that also have great interest in God's plan and it could be fallen angels, demons. For demons, it is a defeat for them because satan and his followers are all about dividing people and engendering animosity between different nations and ethnicities.

The very formation of the church is tangible evidence that the power of evil angels has been broken, demonstrating that even the most diverse in God's creation are subject to Christ.

**<sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

God's plan of the church was not some hasty, last-minute plan when Israel rejected the Messiah.

*The open secret is that the Church, the new humanity, a multiracial, multinational third race, will rule in the universe along with Christ and the angels, and that amidst the swirling tides of Marxism, revived militant Islam, and virulent materialism only the Church will survive history.<sup>1</sup>(R. K. Hughes)*

**<sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**

In Athens freedom of speech was a prized possession but could be misused.

Freedom is liberty in speech or frankness between two friends which leads to confidence in such a relationship just as the freedom we have to come before God and share anything, gives us confidence *when* we come to him.

It's like we have an all-access pass to come before God with freedom and confidence. The practical outcome of our being in Christ is that we can enter God's presence without any inhibition or sheepishness that might rise from self-reliance or self-consciousness.

**<sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.**

In the present context, the point is that if Paul had never carried out his ministry to the Ephesians, he would not have been in prison and the Ephesians would never have been introduced to Christ.<sup>2</sup> So, they don't need to be discourage at his imprisonment.

What he writes not a plea for sympathy, but an example of how God is still at work in terrible conditions. He didn't want his persecution to dampen their zeal for Jesus. Rather, his suffering was meant to encourage them to persevere. I think we can see this today with the suffering of Ukrainian Christians who are staying strong for Christ in terrible circumstances. That should drive us to pray for them and to be emboldened to live faithfully.

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: the mystery of the body of Christ* (p. 110). Crossway Books.

<sup>2</sup> Hoehner, H. W. (2002). *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (p. 470). Baker Academic.

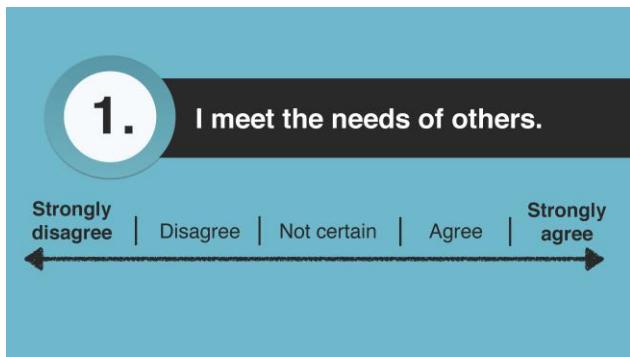
Remember that in our series on Revelation we learned that as we approach the end times, Christians will suffer more. It is inevitable.

So, let's go back to our big idea.

**Big idea: 6 character qualities evidence a grace-filled life.**

I'm going to give you each of these qualities. You will evaluate how you would describe that character quality in you using this scale.

**1. I meet the needs of others.**

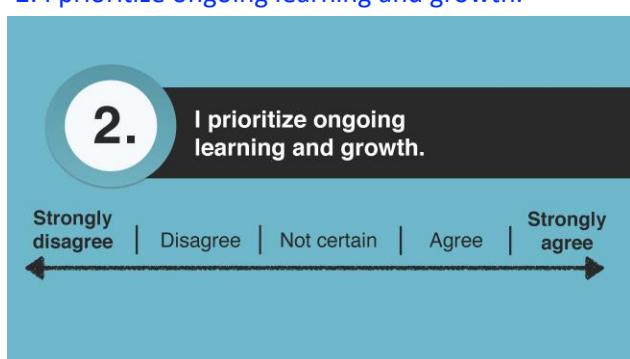


This means that you just don't think about your own needs and wants, it's all about me.

Rather, do think about other's needs and how you might meet those needs when appropriate. God gave us His grace not just for me, but so that we could bless others. Paul's whole ministry was for other people's benefit.

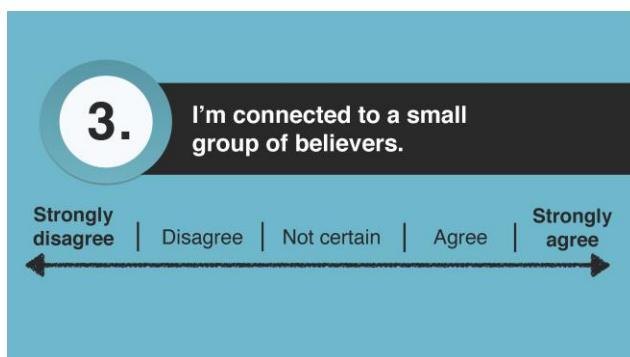
Just as God gave Paul the grace to carry out his God ordained mission and purpose in the world, so has he given you the equipping grace to fulfil your purpose on earth, how you are to serve others. We saw last week that God planned good works for us to do. We are saved to serve.

**2. I prioritize ongoing learning and growth.**



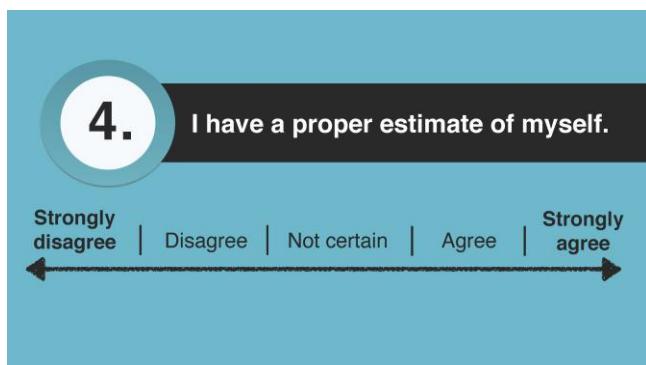
Paul used such words as understanding and insight to communicate to the Ephesians that they were to be learners themselves. A Christian should be a perpetual learner always learning and growing.

**3. I am connected to a small group of believers.**



In verse 6 he used the word together 3 times. Following Jesus is not a lone ranger endeavor. That's why you and I need to be with the church. That's why being in a smaller group with other believers is so important so that others can encourage your walk with God.

#### 4. I have a proper estimate of myself.



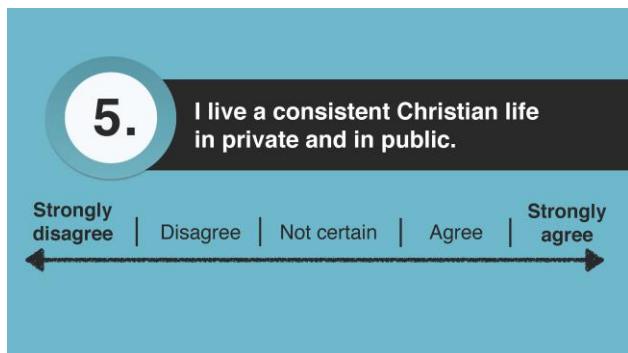
This is modeling humility. Remember Paul made up a word, leaster, (less than the least of these).

This means that you are not proud, arrogant, haughty, or that you show false humility. On the end of the spectrum humility is not self-deprecation, disparaging yourself, groveling, or being a passive doormat.

Biblical humility means believing what God says about you over anyone else's opinion, including sometimes your own. It requires

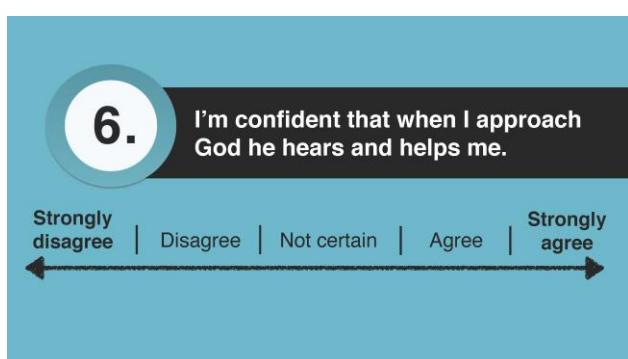
embracing who you are in Christ over who you are in the flesh. To be biblically humble is to be so free of concern for your own ego that you unreservedly elevate those around you. It's a modest view of yourself.

#### 5. I live a consistent Christian life in private and in public.



Paul wrote that the church, us, must display his grace to these spiritual powers. I'm applying that to what our lives say about God to those around us, including the private world of our families.

#### 6. I'm confident that when I approach God he hears and helps me.



Paul wrote in verse 12 *approach God with freedom and confidence*. Because of the work of Christ, we have the freedom to speak freely to God which makes us confident to approach him. That confidence gives us the ability to speak freely, openly, and boldly to our heavenly father. Such confidence certainly excludes any presumptuous or arrogant attitude. Rather we come with humility and awe.

So let's put them all together.

1. I meet the needs of others.
2. I prioritize ongoing learning and growth.
3. I am connected to a small group of believers.
4. I have a proper estimate of myself.
5. I live a consistent Christian life in private and in public.
6. I'm confident that when I approach God he hears and helps me.

So, which one was your strongest? Thank God for that.

Which was your weakest?

Here's an assignment, every day for 5 straight days, spend 10 minutes with God in prayer and with your bible, asking him what your next step would be so that this character quality becomes more consistent in your life.