

Renew Your Life

COVID-19 Version

Session 2: The Energy of Grace

Reading: Chapter 2

Welcome & Opening Questions (10 minutes)

Introduce yourself, again, and share your response to this question:

- What is something you are grateful for today?

Group Hopes & Expectations (5 minutes)

Walk through the "Hopes and Expectations" information found on the website and the additions for your group. Share any comments or input.

Group Prayer Practice (5 minutes)

Spend a few minutes in silence as a group. Sit in a comfortable position and imagine yourself being held by God. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Gently set aside or release any distracting thoughts during this time. The leader will guide you with these prompts.

- As you think about the past day or week, what did you experience that was life-giving?
- As you think about the past day or week, what was energy depleting for you?
- Silently, release the past day or week over to God in prayer.
- Imagine yourself held in the expansive energies of God's love. Take a minute to breathe deeply of God's presence and peace.

Amen

Scripture Text (3 minutes)

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NRSV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Reading Recap (5 minutes)

In *Renew Your Life*, Pastor Kai discovered and shares seven renewable sources of energy that are embedded in the creation story of Genesis 1 & 2: grace, possibility, paradox, natural world, relationships, fruitful work, and rest. Perhaps the greatest energy and gift is grace. What is your image of God and how does it reveal grace?

This guide includes more questions than your group can answer to give you choices and a chance to adapt. Some groups are new and just starting. Other groups are returning for the COVID-19 series. Returning groups may want to focus on the COVID-19 update and questions below.

Questions on Chapter 2 (35 minutes)

Start with these questions, adding in other questions to supplement. Questions are also available in the Renew Your Life book, starting on page 141.

- What concepts in the readings and sermon were life-giving for you?
- What concepts or stories were difficult or challenging for you?

The Energy of Grace

1. What pictures (if any) of God did you have in your mind when you were growing up? What phrases would you use to describe God today?
2. If you imagine a God of grace and love, how does that change how you see yourself, your life—imperfections and failures included?
3. When you imagine God seeing others with grace and love, how does that change things?
4. When are you most likely to fall into “comparison fatigue”? What does that do to your sense of yourself or your life? When are you most susceptible to comparison fatigue?

Update during COVID-19

Grace—When is enough, enough? – For all of us, life looks different now in many ways. What do we do when the scaffolding that has propped up our lives; personal relationships, affirmation for our work, opportunities to move about and experience the world, are no longer available? What defines us? Are we enough as we are, both broken and beautiful in our own way? What does God think about us, whether we are “productive” in the eyes of the world or not? What is still true about us and our relationship with God, when the world all around us has changed.

In recent weeks the scaffolding that has held up racial injustice has also become clearer. We hope and strive for a world where we can see one another through the eyes of God. How can we listen, learn, lean in and love one another in this time? What does it look like to respond with humility, confession and repentance? How can grace be a force for change in the world? Where is grace especially needed now?

Questions during COVID-19

1. Where do you see God’s grace at work in your own life during this pandemic? Where do you see God’s grace at work in the larger community?

2. In Kai's conversation with the consultant he heard: "You need to figure out who you are, not who you think you should be." How has the radical shift in our daily lives, caused you to contemplate who you are?
3. Are there instances during this pandemic in which you have set unrealistic expectations for yourself or you have felt the impact of someone else's expectations for you? How have you dealt with this? If you see yourself "through the lens of love and acceptance, the lens of grace," how does that change your perspective?
4. Pastor Kai says our image of God defines who we are, how we see the world and how we interact with God. As you contemplate your image of God, consider whether it has changed since the onset of this pandemic. If it has changed, how?
5. Sometimes, the perceived behaviors we see in others—for example, a lack of courtesy in maintaining social distance from us or others, or a lack of respect for frontline workers—can aggravate us. How can we instead feel or show grace in instances like these? What is the role of God's grace and love?
6. Pastor Kai tells the story of Frank Laubach with the words "they must see God in me" and "I must see God in them." What do those words tell us about how we live in this time of unrest and change?
7. We find ourselves living in a historic time. What are your thoughts or feelings about being alive in this time?

Closing Question & Faith Practice (5 minutes)

Explore how the chapter theme can make a difference in your life but considering this question and trying this faith practice in the coming week:

- "Mysteriously, beautifully, some part of God's graciousness is embedded in each person through the very act of creation. Can we see that?" Spend time this week reflecting on those words through journaling, in conversations or in prayer.
- Spend time each day reflecting on "grace in, grace out" practice (page 74). Consider these questions:
 - Grace in:* How was God's grace evident in my life today?
 - Grace out:* How did I extend the grace and acceptance of God to others?
- Use this breath prayer in the coming week to remind you of God's grace and creative, renewing energy. (see "breath prayer" instructions).

Inhale: Spirit of God - Exhale: Your Grace is Enough

Alternative:

Inhale: Grace In - Exhale: Grace Out

Closing Prayer *(3 minutes)*

God, this is a time of challenges beyond what we could have imagined. We each face our own, unique circumstances, and together we share in a time of unforeseen changes, loss, uncertainty, pain, brokenness, fear and disruption.

Yet, God, we know that your steadfast love never ends and your presence never leaves us. We continue to see you in ordinary and extraordinary moments. We thank you for creation's renewal and beauty, for actions of kindness and love, for the blessings of daily life and for your renewing gift of hope. We are especially grateful for those who are doing self-sacrificing work on behalf of others, the community and the world. Most of all, we thank you for your peace, love and grace.

Guide us to know how to be your blessing in the world today. Open our hearts and imaginations to see how we can create healthy and abundant life for others. Sustain us, comfort us, guide us and enliven us to be your presence in the world. Amen.