

Hebrews Grace and Gratitude

Session 3: Responding Gracefully to Grace

1. Infancy vs. Maturity

- What are some differences between a young infant and a mature adult?
- What changes take place as a child grows into an adult?
- What is the difference between immature and a mature Christian?

2. Watch the Video

- Do you tend to think of God's grace more as "a one-way transaction" or "a dynamic relationship," and why? How, if at all, has your thinking about God's grace changed over time?
- DeSilva explains a first-century view of gift-giving: Gifts, or "graces," create long-lasting, reciprocal "relationships between people . . . committed to advance one another's interests in the world." How much, if at all, do you think this first-century understanding of giving survives in modern society?
- How accurately or appropriately do you think the image of the Three Graces (Giving, Receiving, Return) applies to the relationship between God and those to whom God gives the gift of salvation?
- DeSilva says the preacher wants his congregation to "look for ways to do God 'a good turn' whenever they can—which, in their case, means showing love and support for their fellow believers facing more significant hardship than they themselves do." What do you think that means?

3. Reading and Discussing Hebrews 4:14–5:10

- "Priests played an important role in both Jewish and Greco-Roman religion," writes deSilva, "standing between human beings and God or the gods to build or repair bridges between the two, assure the favor of the divine toward the people, and secure for the people the assistance that only God or the gods could provide."
- The preacher of Hebrews starts "building a case" that Jesus—who was not, in his life on earth, a priest—is our "great high priest." What "qualifications" for Jesus's priesthood does the preacher point to in this section of his sermon?

- How does the claim that Jesus was “tested” or “tempted” (both translations are accurate) “in every way that we are” (verse 15) but remained faithful shape the way you think about tests and temptations you have faced or are facing?

- “Jesus models how to pray with a view to persevering through suffering and difficulty,” writes deSilva, “not with a view to escaping it.” How much do your own prayers and your faith community’s prayers follow Jesus’s model in this regard? When, if ever, is it appropriate to pray to escape “suffering and difficulty”?

4. Reading and Discussing Hebrews 5:11–6:8

- How do you react to the preacher’s charge of spiritual laziness against the congregation? How would most people respond if your preacher or spiritual leader leveled such a charge against your faith community?

- How does the preacher define spiritual maturity in these verses? How much or how little does it correspond with your own definition?

- “We have many opportunities to take up our responsibility as Christians who are no longer ‘infants’ in the faith,” deSilva writes. What are some opportunities you have taken advantage of as a maturing Christian to exercise responsibility in the faith community?

- DeSilva suspects the preacher’s comments about restoring wayward believers is “the most disputed passage in Hebrews.” How does your tradition deal with such believers? What does your tradition teach about whether or not Christians can “lose salvation”? Do these teachings reflect Hebrews’ understanding of salvation as the gift of a dynamic and continuing relationship with God? How?

5. Personal Reflection

- What is one specific graceful response to God’s grace you plan to make before our next session?

Closing Prayer

Grant us grace, O God, to serve you with grace, that by your Spirit the gifts you lavish on us may transform our relationships with one another, with our neighbors, and with you, so we may embody the freely given love you have shown us through your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.