

1. Phillip Yancy writes about grace and ungrace in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* "Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can love."
2. He also says, "The world runs by ungrace. Everything depends on what I do. I have to make the shot. Jesus' kingdom calls us to another way, one that depends not on our performance but his own. We do not have to achieve but merely follow. He has already earned for us the costly victory of God's acceptance."
3. It might be a challenge for some in the group to accept the idea of grace. We may ask, "What's the catch?" We are not culturally conditioned to think about God as granting unmerited favor. We may not want God to operate on grace. Instead, we might hope God only shows favor on this who deserve it the most.
4. *The Running Father*: In the first century in the Middle East, to see a father running would have been an undignified and humiliating thing. First of all, to run, the father would have to pull up the bottom of his robe exposing his naked legs. That, in itself, was culturally shameful. But what's more, grown, important, respected men didn't run anywhere. People came to them, not the other way around.

Why was the father running? He had gotten a glimpse of his son and he is running for love. It's his boy who was lost and now is found! He's running for love! But he's also running for another reason. Others had gotten a glimpse of his son coming home. Word was out in the community and all the towns people were all gathering near the city gate. They wanted to get to him before he got to his dad and perform the Ke-zah-zah. They would not let him in the village, but outside the gates they would take a clay pot and smash the pot in front of the boy.

They'd tell him: You have broken everything that is good. You have broken trust. You have broken community. Even worse – you have broken the heart of your father. Your damage is beyond repair. So let this be a symbol of your brokenness. Let these be the broken pieces of your broken life. You are not whole. You are not family. You are not welcome. You are cut-off!

That is the reception the son would have expected. Maybe that is the reception the son deserved. And the Father knew it was coming! So the Father takes off running. He humiliates himself in front of his neighbors and runs to his boy to protect him from the 'Ke-zah-zah. Before anyone can say, "You are cut off from us!" The father envelops his son in an embrace and showers him with kisses.

5. Help the group think through what they might need to do to receive grace. Sometimes we believe lies about ourselves that keep us from experiencing the grace of God. We might think that grace is for everyone else but me. Those lies that we've come to believe need to be confronted, so we can see the truth about what God says about us.
6. Also, have the group discuss how they can be a source of grace to the people around them. When we experience God's grace and know it down deep, then we can get better at practicing that same kind of unmerited favor with others.

7. The closing prayer in the guide (Lord Jesus, thank you for your grace; may others see you in me) is an adaptation of the Jesus Prayer, which says, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Where do you see God at work in your life right now?
2. What next steps do you feel called to take in your faith journey?
3. Have you considered getting baptized? Learn more at communitychristian.org/baptism/
4. Who have you been able to BLESS?