

VALUES FOR OUR
LIFE TOGETHER



Part Two: Respect

*A Chat for Faith Teams
Accompanying the Devotional Series
“G.R.A.C.E. Values for our life together”*

By The Rev. Dr. Walt Lichtenberger

NOTE to Faith Team Leaders: This Faith Chat is the second in a series of five that feature Christ-centered values for living with others in community. It contains a variety of options allowing its use either at a monthly or even weekly gathering of a Faith Team. Faith Team leaders are encouraged to use bits and pieces as they see fit. The goal is to have a meaningful conversation that is supportive and allows participants to explore and deepen their faith. By design, there is more material than could possibly be used in a single session.

Gathering (15 minutes: 0:00-0:15)

Coming Together - (12 minutes: 0:00- 0:12)

Introduce yourself around the table. Share your name and something about yourself that others may not know.

Light a candle and invite God's Spirit to be present.

Opening Prayer: *Ask for a volunteer to pray the following...*

Gracious God, help us in our learning to be kind, inquisitive, and responsive to your grace. Make us aware in our listening and speaking that you have gifted each of us with wisdom and experiences to share. Give us the courage that we need to welcome change and transformation. Through Jesus Christ, amen.

Introduction: (3 minutes: 0:12- 0:15)

When I was little, my parents taught me to always respect my elders. "Respect" meant that I should be polite, well-mannered, listen, and do what the adults in my life said, whether I thought it was a good idea or not. The mandate to respect stuck and has become one of the core values that I embrace.

Over the years, however, I have modified and expanded my parent's original teaching. In addition to 'adults,' I've added children, teenagers, squirrels, cats, dogs, and the trees that grow

behind my house. In short, everyone and everything that lives on the planet. I now seek to apply my parent's wisdom to all life. I do this for spiritual reasons.

In this Faith Chat we focus on the second of our G.R.A.C.E. values: Respect. Ever needed, this value is of particular importance in our current times. Differences in perspective, politics, and passions are causing turmoil in families, churches, and communities worldwide. A general lack of respect is having negative results as we face challenges large and small.

Respect looks beyond ourselves and honors the work and presence of the Creator in "the other." This quintessential value recognizes the complexity of relationships and how they intertwine. It also seeks to catch a glimpse of the Spirit that moves among and between all life, gifting breath, wisdom, and connection. Though paradise remains lost forever, Eden's memory and hope linger for the restoration of God's good creation.

Engaging God's Word: (10 minutes: 0:15- 0:25)

Reading God's Word: (5 minutes: 0:15-0:20)

Romans 14:7-13 (NRSV)

“We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” So then, each of us will be accountable to God. Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another.”

For those who are using this Faith Chat for more than one session, you may choose either to repeat the verse above or choose one of the alternate options. Use the same questions below to guide your reflection upon each of these sayings of Jesus.

- “What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Romans 6:1-5 (NRSV)
- “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” Romans 11:33-36 (NRSV)
- "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God... For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." Romans 13:1-2, 5-7 (NRSV)

Responding to God’s Word: (5 minutes: 0:20- 0:25)

What stands out for you in these words from Paul to the Christians in Rome?

What initial questions emerge? What is confusing or hard to grasp?

How does it make you feel?

What does it teach us about our relationship with God? With others?

How does it challenge you?

What do these words teach you about respect?

Exploring Connection (45 minutes: 0:25- 1:10)

Choose one or more of the following options to generate group discussion. For those who are using this Faith Chat over multiple sessions, you might want to do one of the supporting Bible stories in Option A for each session.

Option A: Respect Abounds in Jesus-Stories

Choose one of the following stories from the gospels in which Jesus exhibits the value of grace. If you are using this Faith Chat for more than one week, you might want to select a different story for each session.

I. Family Ties.

The saying “blood runs thicker than water,” points to the importance of family. We might feel a special allegiance to those with whom we share DNA. As important as family ties are in our culture they were even more so at the time of Jesus. Tribal/clan loyalty made demands on individuals to put their “own kind” ahead of everyone else. We see this expectation in the following encounter between Jesus and his mother/brothers. They came demanding more than a simple audience; they wanted Jesus’s undivided attention and expected unrestricted access to his power.

Read the story and use the questions below to discuss.

“Then [Jesus’s] mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

-Mark 3: 31-35 (NRSV)

Questions for discussion:

Where do you see respect displayed in this Jesus-story? Where do you see dis-respect?

What is the role of honor and shame? What behaviors demonstrate respect and what do not?

What is the interaction between God’s grace and respect?

How does this story relate to **Romans 14:7-13** (or the guiding verse chosen for this session)?

II. Hometown Rejection - the time Jesus was “dissed”

When Nazareth doesn't show honor to Jesus, the gospel's label their response as shameful to the intentions (kingdom/realm) of God. They lack the imagination to see God's inbreaking into the ordinary places of human existence and relationships. They would have honored both the message and the messenger had they been able to listen and hear the message Jesus proclaimed; “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news (Mark 1:15). But lest we think we would have done any better, we need to consider the shame that the human lack of understanding about the presence of God's realm brings about in every age, including our own.

Read the story and use the questions below to discuss.

“[Jesus] left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.”

Mark 6:1-6 (NRSV)

Questions for discussion:

Why do you think the Nazarean villagers had difficulty honoring Jesus's teaching and identity? What challenges do familiarity present when it comes to respect?

Jesus “could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hand on a few sick people and cured them.” Why do you think that was the case?

What is the interaction between God's grace and respect in this story?

How does this story relate to **Romans 14:7-13** (or the guiding verse chosen for this session)?

III. A Voice Honors From Above

In all the gospels, the Transfiguration story is spectacular and “other worldly.” Jesus ascends a mountain with his core leadership team and encounters the presence of God Almighty. A voice from heaven honors Jesus and commands the disciples to listen. Some scholars suggest that Moses and Elijah symbolically embody the law and the prophets, pillars of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. Their presence suggests solidarity with Jesus. This is a reciprocal relationship. Jesus’s teaching and ministry honor the law and prophets AND the law and prophets honor Jesus’s teaching and ministry. Shame (which is the opposite of honor) comes upon those who fail to listen to the divine voice that comes from the cloud.

Read the story and use the questions below to discuss.

“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.”

Mark 9:2-8 (NRSV)

Questions for discussion:

How do you think Peter, James, and John felt on the mountain of Transfiguration?

How do we listen to Jesus? How does our listening bring honor and our lack of listening bring shame to our relationship with God?

What is the interaction between God’s grace and respect?

How does this story relate to **Romans 14:7-13** (or the guiding verse chosen for this session)?

IV. Disrespectful Figs

Figs were a beloved staple in the ancient diet. According to The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, “cultivated at least since the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3000 BCE), [fig trees] could take root in rocky soil and within seven year bear fruit for as many as fifty years (vol. 2, p 453).”

Prophets used the fig as an analogy for Israel. Budding or being barren describes the state of either being fruitful or not.

The story of Jesus's cursing (bringing ultimate shame upon) of the fig tree is located in Mark's gospel just prior to the passion. A lack of reception of the kingdom of God is judged a shameful response. Had the tree (or the people, or us) honored Jesus's life, identity, and ministry, it would have produced the sweet fruits for Jesus according to the timing of God's kingdom which arrives in Christ.

Read the story of Jesus's teaching moment with his disciples about prayer. Use the questions below to discuss.

“On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.”

“In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Mark 11:12-14 and Mark 11:20-24 (NRSV)

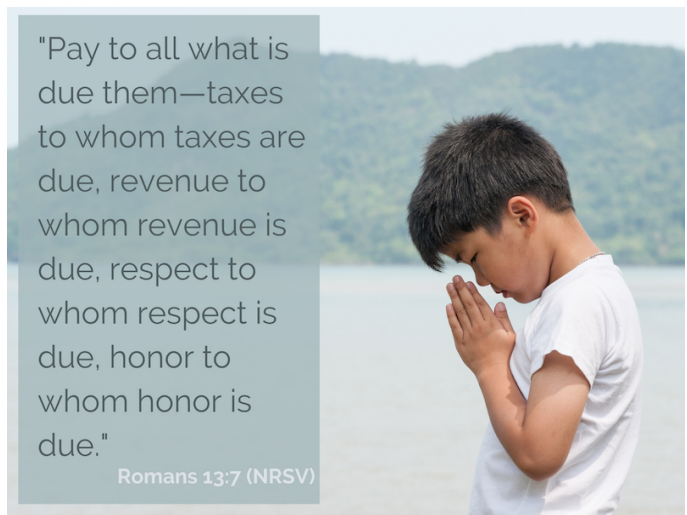
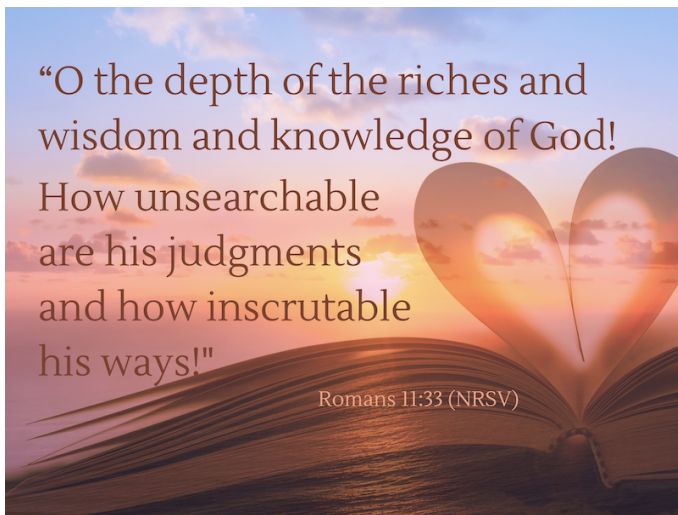
Questions for discussion:

How fruitful is your fig tree? Do your words, thoughts, and actions honor Jesus's presence in your life? What words, thoughts, and actions are fruitless and bring shame?

What is the interaction between God's grace and respect?

How does this story relate to **Romans 14:7-13** (or the guiding verse chosen for this session)?

Option B: Inspirational Images



Discuss the Inspirational Images above.

How do you connect or disconnect with them?

In what ways do the images convey respect?

What other images would you choose to go with these scripture texts?

Option C: Gleaning Wisdom from Experience:

Look at the following questions through the lens of your Faith Team. Allow for recurring foci and conversations of the group to guide your conversation.

Where do you find yourself when it comes to respect? Do you apply this value easily? What situations or persons make being “respect-full” easier or more difficult?

Where do you experience the honor of God’s presence in your life? Where might God’s presence bring shame or dishonor to human experiences?

What does being a disciple of Jesus mean for you? How does this identity shape and influence the ways you relate to others as you show respect?

Option D: “Romans and countrymen, lend me your ears”

Throughout this Faith Chat series on Christian values, Paul’s letter to the Romans will be used as our biblical foundation. This epistle, which is the longest of all the correspondence attributed to Paul, has long been read as a theological treatise on matters of faith that were of critical importance to the reformers (including Luther) of the sixteenth century. Recently, scholars such as Douglas Moo, have suggested other lenses through which we might access the wisdom and import of this letter.

It is helpful once again for us to remind ourselves that the Book of Romans is a letter, written by Paul to a group of Christians in Rome. Although Paul had not been to Rome at the time of writing, he was very experienced in both Jewish and Gentile culture and those cultures found themselves clashing among the Roman Christians. Honor and shame were important values in the Greco-Roman world.

Relationships were built up as communities expressed honor for one another. Likewise, shame came upon individuals when their behavior strained relationships with others. Moral codes helped to establish normative behaviors for communities. Breakage of these expectations, which at times were rigid and well-established social norms, resulted in the expulsion of folks from the community. Shame separated violators.

Throughout Romans, Paul speaks about the negative impact that sin has upon humanity's relationship with God and within Christian communities. Sin brings shame. Grace brings honor and allows for the possibility of restoration.

Questions for discussion:

What behaviors bring honor and shame within Christian community today? What sins are particularly destructive? How might the value of grace help restore honor, especially to those who have experienced shame within Christian community?

Sending (15 minutes: 1:10- 1:25)

Sharing of Appreciation for Learning (5 minutes: 1:10-1:15)

Ask each person to name a single insight or learning that they will take home with them.

What can you do differently going forward based on these insights/learning from this Faith Chat?

Bringing Our Time to a Close (10 minutes: 1:15-1:25)

Salt, Light, and Prayer: Go around the table a second time. Ask folks to share three things: 1) something positive from their week; 2) something with which they are struggling; 3) someone who is in their prayers.

The Lord's Prayer: Close with saying Jesus' prayer together (choose a version as a group)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

-or-

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.