

ZONDERVAN

*Sticky Faith Teen Curriculum*

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# 1

## what's the real gospel?

### The Big Idea:

*The real gospel is centered on grace, not works.*

### You'll Need:

Copies of the **10 Things I Do to Live Like a Christian** handout on page 20

Poster paper

Tape

Pens or pencils

Markers

A Red Bull drink (or another similarly highly caffeinated beverage)

Copies of the **Ephesians 2:1-10** handout on page 21. Ahead of time, follow the guidelines on this handout so you can display your own version of the passage, complete with colorful markings and notes.

Colored pencils and/or highlighters

Copies of the **When I Blow It** handout on page 22

Bibles

More Worship and Prayer: Copies of the **God's Face** handout on page 23

Optional: If you decide to watch the video "What You Need to Know about Grace" on the DVD, be sure to figure out ahead of time how you'll show the video (laptop, projector, etc.) and set up accordingly. Alternatively you could send students a link to the video later to watch as a follow-up to the session.

## NOW

■ Start by saying: **Recent research indicates that up to half of youth group seniors will drift from their faith in the first year after graduation. Does this surprise you?**

■ Explain as you distribute pencils and copies of the **10 Things I Do to Live Like a Christian** handout: **Today we're going to look at how your faith impacts your life currently. On this handout I want you to make a list of up to 10 things that you do to live like a Christian.**

As students are making their lists, tape a sheet of poster paper and write at the top: "Things I Do to Live Like a Christian."

After students have finished, ask each to share two or three items from their lists. Write down what they share on the sheet of poster paper.

■ Ask: **What stands out to you about what we've listed?**

NOTE: In a few minutes, you'll help students understand that making a list like this misses the heart of Christianity, which isn't about us "being good" but much more about God's goodness to us. A few of your more theologically astute seniors might point this out now, before you're ready to share that principle with the whole group. If they do, try to redirect them toward writing down or discussing what we're supposed to "do to live like a Christian" by saying something like, **You're right that grace is important, but right now we're focusing on what we each do to live like a Christian.**

- Ask: Is a list like this helpful to your faith or not?
- Continue: According to one study of 500 high school graduates, students who said “no” to alcohol and sex before high school graduation ended up saying “yes” after getting to college.  
Raise a can of Red Bull (or another favorite energy drink, in which case you can shift the metaphor in the next paragraph) and ask: **What are the highs and lows of energy drinks like this?** Students will likely share that Red Bull makes them feel great at first but soon the caffeine and sugar wear off and they crash. Hard.
- Continue: Too many of us have bought into a Red Bull Gospel. It might help us make good decisions at first, but the Red Bull Gospel doesn't lead to Sticky Faith. It's not deep enough to help us say “no” and “yes” to the right things after we graduate.

## NEW

- Explain: While Red Bull wasn't invented until recently, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians we see he was dealing with his own version of the Red Bull Gospel in the first century.  
We'll read 10 verses of this letter together in a format that might be new to you.  
Distribute copies of the **Ephesians 2:1-10** handout to your students, making sure you read aloud the guidelines at the top of the handout. If you've worked through the passage ahead of time, show students your colorful version of Ephesians 2 as a model of what they might do themselves.  
Give your students plenty of time to read, and reread, the passage, noting themes, opposing phrases, or questions the passage

### *Scripture Sidebar*

The city of Ephesus was at an intersection of major trade routes and was thus an important commercial center in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). For three years, Paul made Ephesus a center for evangelism, and the church thrived.

What makes the letter to the Ephesians different from many of Paul's other epistles is that it doesn't address any particular theological error or heresy. Instead Paul seems concerned with helping the believers in Ephesus understand some basic Christian beliefs.

raises for them. After students are finished, lead them through the manuscript study with questions like:

- What words or phrases does Paul repeat?**
- What words or phrases are opposites?**
- What are Paul's most important ideas?**
- What questions does this passage raise for you?**

Feel free to interject the following into your discussion:

The “death” that Paul describes in Ephesians 2:1 doesn't refer only to physical death—the “death” that folks (apart from Jesus) experience after their lives end. It refers to a real death right now since the most vital part of a person—the spirit—is dead apart from Jesus.

Interestingly, Paul includes himself in the “all of us” who are disobedient and dead apart from Christ in Ephesians 2:3. Paul teaches in Romans 3:23 that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and he backs that up in this Ephesians passage by including himself in the category of people who need Jesus to rescue them from sin.

The “grace” that Paul describes in the passage is God's free gift to us—and applies both to our earthly and eternal lives—which God offers us through Christ.

The “works” in verse 9 refer to deeds or activities we do in a futile attempt to save ourselves (apart from God's grace); the “works” in verse 10 refer to the ways we obey God in our daily actions, as a sign of our gratitude for salvation.

The root word for *created* in verse 10 is “ktizo” (pronounced kuh-TIDZ-oh) and is only used in the Greek language when referring to God. What's special about the way God creates?

The word for *handiwork* in verse 10 is “poiema” (pronounced poe-AY-ma), which means “work of art” in Greek. What do you think it means to be God's work of art?

Sometimes it may seem as though Paul's writings are all about grace and the book of James is all about works. As we see from Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul's theology is grounded in grace, but then he encourages believers to serve out of gratitude for their salvation. If we assume Paul and James are teaching different messages, then we probably aren't reading them carefully enough.

what's the real gospel?

One of the main points, if not *the* main point, that you want students to get from this passage is the relationship between works and salvation. We don't do good works in order to experience salvation; it's because of our salvation that we do good works. And by doing those good works, we become human pieces of art—living masterpieces—of God.

■ Ask: **What does it mean to live as God's handiwork, and how is that different than simply "being a good person"?**

At this point remove the poster paper list of **Things I Do to Live Like a Christian** from the wall and rip it up. Ask your students to do the same with the lists they've made.

■ Ask: **How do you feel now that you've torn up the list?**

Continue: The reality is that there *are* things we *do* as people who follow Jesus, but none of them are at the heart of the gospel that leads to Sticky Faith.

## HOW

■ Research found that Christian kids who fail to do the items on our "10 Things" lists feel guilty and hypocritical. For instance, if they decide to party, they don't feel like they can show up at church or on-campus Christian groups because folks there know they've been partying. As a result, they end up turning away from God and Christian community.

■ Ask: **How should the Ephesians passage make a difference to the Christian student who wakes up after a night of making some mistakes?**

## Have More Time?

At this point, you might want to show the "What You Need to Know about Grace" video found on the resource DVD. You might set it up by saying something like, **Here's what a few other youth leaders have to say about God's grace.** Afterward, invite students to share their responses to the video by asking a question such as, **What emotions or thoughts did that stir in you? What resonates with our discussion about grace so far? How is this different from how you might have understood grace in the past?**

Distribute copies of **When I Blow It** to your students as you explain: **Odds**

### ***Real Reflections from Real Students***

You've got to find a campus ministry or a church that's going to be real about stuff. You don't want to walk into a church or college ministry where everyone is fake. You want to be able to walk in and say, "Yeah, I was at a party this weekend, and I drank too much . . ." You gotta find people you can be real with. Because if you walk into a college ministry, and it's just full of fake people you can't be honest with, then you're sunk.

are good that you'll blow it in some way after you graduate. So I want us to think now about what we'll do when we mess up. Give students a few minutes to complete their handouts.

If you have time, close by singing a familiar song or two about grace. If you're short on time, simply close in prayer, thanking God for freedom and a gospel based not in what we do for God, but in what God has done for us through Jesus.

## **More Worship and Prayer**

### ***The Face of God***

The final discussion paragraphs on "blowing it" might stir a lot of feelings in students who already feel like they've completely blown it

with God. Similarly, some students may be feeling like they "get it" for the first time as you talk about the gospel of grace. The following idea for a closing prayer may be something you want to plan time for, particularly if you're anticipating that your students may need more space for reflection. If it's natural for your setting, you may want to include musical worship in this reflection time. You also may want to allow students to simply spend time in silence.

- Explain: **The good news is that God's grace knows no bounds. While grace is more fully explained in the New Testament, it also threads its way through the Old Testament. One of those powerful Old Testament threads is the idea of *blessing*. In the Old Testament, God's unfailing love and care is closely connected with God's blessing.**

In Numbers 6:24-26, the Lord gives Moses specific instructions for how the priests of Israel were to bless—in New Testament terms, *show God's grace*—to God's people. This blessing is still widely used in churches today:



what's the real gospel?

The Lord bless you  
and keep you;  
the Lord make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;  
the Lord turn his face toward you  
and give you peace.

**It's interesting that God's face is mentioned *twice* in this blessing—that the Lord would “make his face shine on” and “turn his face toward” the people. These expressions imply God showering grace on his creation.**

Distribute the **God's Face** handout and invite students to read the Numbers 6 passage a few times and reflect silently on the handout questions. When they're finished, close by reading aloud Numbers 6:24-26 as a benediction—a sending prayer—that you say on behalf of your students.

## 10 THINGS I DO TO LIVE LIKE A CHRISTIAN

In the space below, write down up to 10 things you do to live like a Christian. Try to be as specific as possible. For example, instead of writing down “pray,” write down “I try to remember to pray as I’m driving to school in the morning.”

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

## EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Read the Scripture text once. Then read it again, this time circling, underlining, or drawing arrows with different colored pencils toward the following:

Themes you notice, either because the same words are used or the same concepts are used

Opposite phrases or concepts

Ideas that seem important to the author

Ideas that are important to you

Questions this passage raises for you

Then try reading the passage a third, and even a fourth, time. New insights might stand out to you each time you read it.

<sup>1</sup>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup>And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

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## WHEN I BLOW IT

When I blow it, either before or after I graduate, I want to remember the gospel that Paul describes in Ephesians 2:1-10.

How do my sins and mistakes resemble death? (Ephesians 2:1)

How can I experience the grace that saves me from my sin? (Ephesians 2:5)

How can I now help my life reflect “God’s handiwork” and the “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”? (Ephesians 2:10)

Who can I talk to about the mistakes that I make?

If I could have a conversation with God, what do I think God would say to me about my mistakes—ones I’ve already made, and ones I’m going to make?

## GOD'S FACE

The Lord bless you  
and keep you;  
the Lord make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;  
the Lord turn his face toward you  
and give you peace.

*Numbers 6:24-26*

### *Questions for Individual Prayer and Reflection*

When you consider God's face turned toward you, what expression do you see? What expression do you imagine might be on God's face right now? If it's hard to imagine God's face shining on you, what do you suppose could be the reason?

Think for a moment about God's face turned toward—not away from—each of us. Whether we do all the stuff on our "Live Like a Christian" list or blow it all, God sees and loves us. How does that make you feel? What questions does it raise?