

# Just Grace: Another Perspective

*Annika Greco Thompson takes the current Faith in Business theme of grace, forgiveness and accountability and relates it to her work at the UK charity Stewardship, giving us insights which apply to all our work. She concludes that generosity is one of the best ways to model these truths in the workplace.*

Even though the words grace, forgiveness and accountability might be thought of as largely ‘Christian’ concepts, it is all too easy to allow more secular, humanistic definitions to inform how we understand these terms. This is why it is so helpful to consider them within the framework of the word ‘just’ – not in the sense of ‘only’ but in the sense of ‘righteous’.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word *just* as acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good, merited, or legally correct. The problem in today’s culture, where one’s own definition of a given term might supersede the traditionally accepted definition, is that there is a fractured understanding of how we ought to relate with one another, both at home and at work.

Thankfully, Christians can always turn to God’s definitions. He is the only one who has the authority to determine what is just and what is unjust. The Bible, in particular Mosaic Law, is full of pointers as to how to live in right, or just, relationship with God and our fellow human beings. While Jesus’s death and resurrection mean that the letter of the Law no longer applies, the principles of the Law still do.

Let’s look at grace, forgiveness and accountability through the lens of justice – as God defines it – and consider how they might apply in our places of work.

## Grace

The very definition of grace implies that it isn’t ‘just’ at all! Grace is unmerited, an unexplainable moment of divine favour that marks the very nature of our relationship with God. Out of His deep love for us, he freely gives his grace to

us, which in turn allows us to live and flow in grace towards other people.

Grace is so much a part of our Christian vernacular that it can be overused, sometimes to the point of glibness. But the truth is, showing grace to others requires a great deal of generosity. And generosity is not something we talk about quite as often. I work at Stewardship, a UK charity whose mission it is to help Christians be the best stewards of the resources God gives them. Our products and services are built to help God’s people faithfully and generously steward their personal, professional or ministry resources for the blessing and flourishing of society. Naturally, the aspect of generosity we focus on the most is financial. However, we know there are numerous ways in which God calls us to be generous: with our time, our skills and abilities, our hospitality, and our emotions.

## Generosity

Photo: Notre Dame Deloitte Center for Leadership



The corporate world isn't necessarily the most obvious context in which to witness generosity in action. Business leaders can easily be caught up in maximising profit, minimising cost, and getting away with as much as possible. How can Christians be counter-cultural in this kind of environment? One of the best ways is to use generosity to counter ego or *mammon*.

As a Christian, my identity is not in how much I make, or how successful my business is, or the degree to which my peers admire me. My identity is in being a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven, where resources are unlimited and grace abounds. When that is my reality, I don't feel the same need to compete. I can call out the heavenly potential in each person I interact with, whether they know God or not. I can be generous and show grace to those who dislike me or may feel threatened by me or may throw me under the bus to close a deal. Showing generosity is one of the most effective tools I have as a Christian to bring God's justice into the marketplace.

## Forgiveness

Grace through generosity links directly to the concepts of forgiveness and relational reconciliation. One of the most vivid parables about forgiveness can be found in Matthew 18:21-35, where we read about the unmerciful servant. Here is a man who owes his master the equivalent of a few million pounds. For no apparent reason other than pity, the master chooses mercy and cancels the debt, thereby sparing his servant, and the servant's family, time in prison (which would have been, essentially, a death sentence). One would think that this man would be so floored by his master's response that he in turn would cancel any debts owed to him, but the opposite happens. Instead, he is demanding and cruel.

What does this story tell us about forgiveness and reconciliation? Where there are outstanding 'debts' or unaddressed grievances, there is no 'right' or 'reconciled' relationship. God's desire is that we live in right relationship with him and with each other (see Mark 12:30-31), but that reconciliation only comes through forgiving the wrong. In forgiving, we build or strengthen that relational bridge to our peers, and it brings us into alignment with the heart of the Father.

In order to live this out in my business relationships, I need to make sure that I practise forgiveness, that I don't hang on to grievances, that I let minor or petty things slide. It means that I make room for people to have a bad day, that I attempt to understand what a negative reaction might be rooted in. It means that I choose not to get worked up about something and instead choose to trust that God will redeem a bad situation. It harkens back to showing grace through emotional generosity.

To be clear, this does not mean that I should enable dysfunctional dynamics or allow bad behaviour to perpetuate. That would not be just.


This brings us to accountability.

## Accountability

In every single interaction Jesus had, he saw the person, met them where they were at, and then he called them to repentance. In no way did he affirm them in their unrighteousness; he affirmed them in their identity as image bearers of the Creator. That is our model to follow. We miss our calling to bring reconciliation to a world that is in a state of separation from God if we don't address sin.

There are infinite examples of poor behaviour in the marketplace, and God calls us to speak up and judge fairly (Proverbs 31:9). We must seek to establish shalom where there is exploitation and disharmony. A vital part of that is holding people and injustices to account. We must call out toxic attitudes and abuses of power. We must resist worldly behaviour and model a better, more selfless way of relating with one another.

We must also be prepared to suffer for the sake of righteousness. Jesus never promised that we would avoid pain if we did the right thing. God never guaranteed us a satisfying result. Sometimes justice is deferred, and the 'baddie' gets away with wrongdoing. Sometimes we lose out on something that we really wanted (like a promotion, an acquisition, or a public platform). But take comfort in the fact that God has the last word. His justice will prevail in the end – it is not up to us to determine who gets what. We are simply tasked with dragging that which is in the dark out into the light. The struggle is real, but we know what to do. "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

Grace, forgiveness and accountability are effective only when operating through the lens of justice, or 'right relationship'. And one of the best ways to model these truths in the workplace is through generosity. Let us ask the Lord for a fresh revelation of his generosity towards us and let us be bold in showing generosity to others. An unbelieving world cannot help but pay attention to a Church that is vital and generous, abounding in grace, and walking in love. Amen. 



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