

but I believe it is nevertheless a significant one for some people.

I commissioned a national poll that showed that members of the Millennial generation are more likely to be spiritually skeptical than Baby Boomers and that they are also more likely to have had a poor relationship with their father as they grew up. While I can't prove a direct correlation, the broad trend is clear. Too many young people today are growing up without fathers who are present and participating in their life, and I think we're seeing some of the effects of this in our culture of increased spiritual skepticism.

Q : How can youth leaders reach out to the "good kid" who may not think they need grace?

You might want them to read my interview with Dr. Craig Hazen in "The Case for Grace." He was a "good" kid, an over-achiever academically, a nice guy – and yet he came to realize over time that he still needed God's forgiveness and grace. Romans 3:23 says all of us – even the so-called "good" kids – have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We all need His grace and forgiveness in order to be reconciled with Him. Help them come to grips with the fact that there are no exceptions mentioned in Romans 3:23. Even just ignoring God is a form of rebellion.

Q : How can adults help teens with their anxiety about performing to earn God's love?

Grace is the antidote for legalism and the anxiety that comes with trying to work our way to God. The story about Jud Wilhite in "The Case for Grace" illustrates this – even after he received God's grace and became a follower of Jesus, he still tried to somehow

prove he was worthy of redemption. This created so much anxiety that he eventually threw up his arms in frustration and said, "I quit!" He admitted he had become a sanctimonious jerk because he was caught in a web of legalism and performance. Unfortunately, there's an epidemic of this in Christendom. We need to help Christians see that true freedom comes when we revel in God's grace and then lavish it on other people.

Q : Why isn't the Church typically known for grace?

Too many Christians seem to have forgotten that they were once far from God but that He nevertheless showed them mercy, grace and forgiveness. We need to stay in touch with our own shortcomings and failures so we don't become sanctimonious jerks in the way we view people. Too often, churches are known more for what they oppose than what we're supposed to promote, which is a message of hope, love and grace. Jesus confronted people in His day who were judgmental toward others and entangled in legalism. If we want to be Christians and churches known for love, then we need to seek God's help in how we can show that love each day of our lives, in small ways and big ways. Changing the church begins with changing each of our hearts.

Q : What steps might youth ministers and students take to become known by grace in their lives and community?

Seek God's guidance daily in the way we interact with others. Colossians 4:5 says, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:13-16 that we be like salt and light – in other words, to live

in a way that causes people to thirst for God and which shines His light of compassion, grace, hope, forgiveness and eternal life into dark areas of despair. We can't do that unless we are intimately connected with God. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Q : How does grace fit in with the exclusivity of Jesus being the only way to eternal life?

Help students understand that Jesus is unique: He not only claimed directly and indirectly to be the unique Son of God, but He proved it by returning from the dead. Therefore, His words have divine authority – and He's the one who says in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He said that not out of arrogance, but out of compassion, because it's true that He offers the only path to salvation. This is why it's so important for youth leaders to teach Christian apologetics to young people.

In the end, Christianity is the only world religion based on grace. Every other major religion says we must do a bunch of rituals or other things to try to earn our way to God – and many people will fall short nevertheless. But Christianity says it's done – Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished," because His death atoned for our sins and He offers forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift of His grace. That's an inclusive message.

Anyone, anywhere is invited into the community of God not on the basis of their strivings and hard work, but because Jesus has lovingly opened the door out of His grace. That is Good News worth sharing.

Q : How can youth leaders address hard biblical truths – especially the ones Millennials in particular find hard to accept like Jesus' exclusivity – with grace?

Create an atmosphere where it's OK to express doubts. Let the students candidly discuss their own hesitations and skepticism. In fact, turn the tables on them – you can role play a skeptic and challenge them to come up with reasonable answers to your objections. Let them authentically wrestle with faith issues – because, ultimately, their faith will be stronger as a result. Don't just teach them what Christians believe, but also help them understand why we believe it.

A recent headline said Christian apologetics is making a comeback in student ministry – and I believe that's true and necessary. In a day when young Christians will probably be

confronted by skeptics on the Internet or at school, it's so vital that we help them develop a strong foundation for their beliefs.

Q : How do you begin to make the case for Christ to Millennials who often value emotion and experience over proof and facts?

Help students recognize that we can't really exist in a world where truth is relative and where emotions determine the decisions we make. Each day, we make small and big decisions based on facts that we either consciously or unconsciously analyze. Psalm 34:8 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." We see the evidence for Him from science and history, and based on those facts, we take a step of faith and put our trust in Him. We're constantly following evidence and facts. The big question is: do the facts really point toward the truth of Christianity?



Lee Strobel was the award-winning legal editor of "The Chicago Tribune" and is the bestselling author of "The Case for Faith," "The Case for Christ" and "The Case for a Creator." With a journalism degree from the University of Missouri and a Master of Studies in Law degree from Yale, Lee wrote four Gold Medallion winners and the 2005 Book of the Year with Garry Poole. He and his wife live in Colorado.

"The Case for Grace: A Journalist Explores the Evidence of Transformed Lives" releases Feb. 24, 2015 from Zondervan. Join him for a live simulcast event March 1, 2015 to hear more stories of lives changed by grace.

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THE CASE FOR GRACE-FILLED STUDENT MINISTRY

A Q&A WITH LEE STROBEL



In his bestselling “The Case for___” series, author Lee Strobel seeks the answers to popular and personal doubts about Christianity. In his new release, “The Case for Grace,” he continues to use his experience as an award-winning journalist to investigate the concept of God’s grace through the stories of those who have encountered it firsthand.

Q : I love what one interviewee in your book said about grace: “Grace is a decision before it’s an emotion.” How can youth ministers help teens make that conscious choice toward grace instead of relying completely on their feelings?

Emotions can be fickle. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things.” But the Word of God is always true and trustworthy. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” We need to help young people understand that relying on our feelings can sometimes lead us astray because we get caught up with our own self-interest and desires. If we keep our eyes fixed on God and His commandments – which, after all, are designed to help and not hurt us – then we can be confident we’re headed in the right direction.

The Bible tells us we should offer grace to others as God has offered grace to us. Colossians 3:13 says, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” That’s best for them – and for us.

Q : You include powerful stories of prodigal types experiencing grace. What would you tell parents of chronic “prodigals?”

I think of the old hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” which includes the lyrics: “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.” All of us have that tendency, but some seem especially apt to stray from God and His teachings. My advice to parents in that situation is, “Don’t panic.”

Pray for your child and trust that the spiritual instruction you’ve provided over the years will have an effect. Be honest with them about your own doubts and shortcomings. Cultivate a warm and close connection with them – studies have shown that even if fathers are devout in their own faith, their children will wander from faith if they have a distant and detached relationship with their kids. I know that in my own life, my bad relationship with my dad fed my spiritual skepticism.

And look for opportunities to have spiritual conversations with your kids. Offer them resources designed to build faith, knowing that they may not read it right away but that eventually they might. Live out your own faith in an authentic way, showing to them the richness and joy of a life steeped in grace.

Q : We all want to receive grace, but often struggle in offering it to others. What advice and encouragement can youth ministers give students who need to extend grace, especially to a hard parent like you had?

Let them know that sometimes it’s difficult to offer grace to someone who has harmed or disappointed us, and that’s OK. Often it’s a process. What God wants is for us to acknowledge this, express the desire to forgive and seek God’s help in doing so. See if they’re willing to pray this way: “Lord, I know You want me to forgive this person, but honestly I don’t feel I can right now. So please help me. My desire is to come to the place where I can authentically extend them grace. I know I can’t get to the place without Your help. Please change my heart to be more gracious like Yours.”

The truth is, sometimes our forgiveness isn’t really sincere if we offer it too quickly. Real forgiveness can be hard, and that can take time.

Q : There seem to be underlying themes of fatherhood/sonship and identity throughout your book. How do these powerful factors influence our perception of grace?

For me – and for many others – experiencing profound disappointment with our earthly father makes us less interested in finding our heavenly Father because we fear He will reject us, too. This isn’t the only factor that discourages people from seeking God,