How do you feel when someone else pays for your bill at a restaurant?

If they do pay, we will often say that we will get the bill the next time. Why do we do this?

How do you feel if someone gives you a Christmas present, but you never got them anything? Why do you feel that way? What do you do the following year?

In what other ways do we tend to keep score and make sure things get evened out?

If someone fails to reciprocate, does that limit the amount of grace we choose to show them in the future? What would that reveal about our “grace”?

In what ways might we be tempted to “even” the score with God or “pay him back” for all he has done?
- Sometimes we try to barter with God. “If you bless me, I’ll bless you”
- Ministry involvement
- Tithing
- Volunteer service
- Being good
- Etc.

*Isaiah 26:12 (NIV)*

> LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

What are some problems with the idea of paying God back?
We can’t pay God back. We have nothing he needs and all that we have came from him in the first place.

Even the things we are able to accomplish, we do so by the grace and empowering of God. When we “try” to pay God back, we are only able to do what we do because he gives us the ability. So even in the process of paying God back we are actually digging ourselves deeper into his debt. Everything about God and life is a gift of his grace – we can’t avoid it.

All we can do with grace is joyfully receive it.

The major problem with “evening the score” is that it is our attempt to be equal with God.
In what ways does our pride become a barrier to receiving grace?

Pride declares that we are self-sufficient and need nothing from anybody. For someone to bless us with a free gift that we have not earned makes us feel like a beggar who must rely on the charity of others. As a result, we often refuse to let people bless us.

Pride demands that we deserve whatever we receive as if we have earned it by our efforts. We have so deeply bought into the performance lie that we find it difficult to even understand the concept of grace.

Romans 10:12 (NIV)
For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.

Why might this passage have been perceived as a great insult to some Jews?
Jews understood that they and they alone, were the people of God, the people of blessing. To now include the Gentiles into God’s blessing with their pagan history, without the Law, without the temple and all the sacrifices was unthinkable. They were keeping a scorecard and according to their estimates they believed God should bless them more than anyone else. This was the very tension the Jews struggled with in Acts 11 after the Holy Spirit descended on Cornelius’ household.

Luke 4:25-30 (NIV)
25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian.”
28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

What was the point of Jesus’ message that infuriated the Jews so much they wanted to kill him?
Jesus was declaring that God’s grace is available to all. The thought of God choosing to bless pagans above the Israelites was too much for them to comprehend. Their sense of self-righteousness and being God’s “favoured” people, so clouded their understanding of grace that they could not conceive God treating others as equal or better than themselves. This struck such a deep chord that it motivated them to try to throw Jesus off a cliff.

In what ways did their response to Jesus limit the amount of grace he may have been able to show them?
Jesus would have enjoyed performing many more wondrous signs in their midst, but their rejection of him forced him to leave and go to another town.
Does this imply that we can control God’s grace?
We cannot control or limit the grace God chooses to make available to us, but we can choose to reject it in pride, when it is available. The same grace that was shown to the widow of Zarephath and the Syrian commander was also available to the Israelites, but they were not in a position where they were willing to turn to God to accept it.

In what ways might we sometimes hinder the grace of God at work in our lives?
- If God invites us into a ministry where he wants to work through us to impact lives, but we hold back in insecurity.
- If God calls us to take a step of faith and trust him, but we refuse to go where he has the blessing prepared for us.
- If we choose not to cultivate godly relationships within his family whereby he can build into our lives.
- If we stay focused on our personal goals and do not embrace the mission he has called us to. In so doing we walk away from where Christ is serving others and we miss out on the adventure.
- Etc.

*Isaiah 55:1 (NIV)*
Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

The one condition of experiencing God’s grace is to receive it. What does the above verse mean when it says “come”? To “come” implies turning toward God and embracing the life he desires to give us. All our deepest needs are gladly met by Christ if we are willing to trust him and receive his free gift of life.

This also implies we willingly leave behind the pursuits of this life that have not given us what we truly need. We have worked so hard to meet our own needs, but all our efforts have been fruitless or unsuccessful. God tells us all the blessings we need are to be found in him.

What do we do if we believe we have turned to God, but our needs or deep desires are still not being met?

Paul addresses these concerns in his letter to the Philippians who were fighting for their personal perspectives or agendas. What key points do the following passages teach regarding finding peace when it seems your needs are not being met?
Philippians 4:4-7 (NIV)

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1) Rejoice
Our greatest need is the presence of God. If we have God is near, then we have nothing to fear; he will meet our every need. It is very difficult to fret or whine when you are praising God and celebrating all he does for you.

2) Leave it with God
Leaving our concerns and needs with God declares that we trust he loves us and will take care of us. When we choose to fret over perceived unmet needs we declare that we do not trust God, that he does not see, or that he does not love us. Each of these is a lie that seeks to separate us from God and the ability to receive his grace.

3) Be thankful
Thankfulness (as discussed in session 1) reminds us that God really does meet our needs. It helps us to maintain a proper perspective that we are here for God’s purposes and not the other way around. Thankfulness takes our focus off what we don’t have and appreciates all that we do have. Thankfulness brings us joyfully to God, whereas fear brings distrust between us.

Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV)

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

4) Be Content
Our perspective of what we need is often radically different than what God perceives our needs are.

How can we determine if something is a need or a desire?
Needs are those things which are necessary to accomplish the goal to which God has called us. Paul was still able to confidently carry out his ministry whether hungry, imprisoned, alone, or in great supply. The things he did not have did not detract from his ability to carry out his mission.

That is not to say that there were times Paul would have appreciated deep relationships, food, freedom, respect, etc. But these were not “needs”, they were simply desires.
What is the secret then to Paul’s contentment at times when he experienced lack?
Paul learned to shift his focus from his circumstances to his mission with Jesus. He knew that Jesus was in control and that Jesus would give him everything he needed to accomplish the purpose set before him.

Paul had plenty of opportunity to gripe about the conditions of his life since following Christ. But Paul was driven by a greater sense of purpose than making his own life comfortable.

How might focusing on our needs prevent us from experiencing all that God has for us?

*Philippians 4:19 (NIV)*

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

5) **Trust**

Move forward with the confidence that ALL your needs are ultimately already met in Christ. You have every resource you need to accomplish your mission. Our purpose in this world is NOT about comfort, but about connecting people to Jesus Christ. I am free to do that because I KNOW that all my needs are already taken care of. I don’t have to focus on what I DON’T have because I know I already have everything I need to bring glory to God.

All perceived needs and lack that I have now are already fulfilled on the new earth. It is a given; it is a promise. Why then fret over anything here on this earth?

*2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV)*

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

God will usually choose to bless us “through” his body, the people of God. Provide some examples of how God has shown grace to you through his body.

What are some ways you have resisted other believers showing you God’s grace?
How has a scorecard mentality possibly prevented you from receiving grace from others?

Instead of feeling like we need to pay somebody back, or pay it forward by showing grace to somebody else, how does God want us to respond to those who show us grace?  

How do you want someone to respond to a gift you give them?  
Do you expect them to pay you back?  
God intends that we simply enjoy the gift with an attitude of thankfulness. Do not diminish the value of the gift by trying to pay it back. At such points it becomes a “trade” not an act of kindness.

Are there some people with whom you have been trying to keep the scorecard even? What should you do in these cases?

Are there some ways you realize you have been trying to pay God back instead of simply enjoying his grace? What should you do differently?

Have you ever offered a gift with strings attached?

How can your approach be freer in the way you give and receive this week?