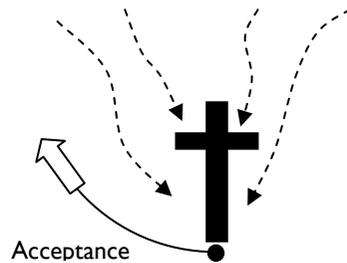




Where is God in relation to all of this?

- The cross turns the effects of these 'works' into grace. It puts Jesus amongst the casualties.
- Jesus gives himself, coming alongside the casualties to be a comfort and healer - accepting a wounded and broken world.
- Here he leads us into new life - he acceptance our failure and saves us. The harmful cycle of living by works is broken as we freely receive Gods gift of mercy, compassion and love.
- This generous love arouses a desire to live by grace. So we are drawn into the love of God and into the flow of grace.



The movement of redeeming grace

This grace is hard to believe - it's too good to be true – and it asks us to reflect on the image of God that causes us to be like this.

Gaining a sense of how God's grace meets our lives affects our sense of life and of how God views us and this affects our choices.

What sort of God am I praying to?"

This question can help us distinguish between unhelpful and helpful images of God.

It is easy for us to be sucked into driving ourselves 'anti-clockwise' by images of a god who demands we achieve before we gain his love.

When we stop and realise this, we begin to be discerning between these driving god's and the God of grace.

'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life' Deuteronomy 30:19-20

God of Grace

God's Grace is too good to be true!

Grace is beyond logic and rational explanation so it is hard to comprehend, accept and enjoy.

A way of understanding this difficulty, as well as to help the process of accepting and allowing the goodness of grace to sink in is to use Frank Lake's 'Dynamic Cycle' (Clinical Theology). It is also helpfully described in David Runcorn's book – Touch Wood.

Dynamic Cycle

This has four stages: acceptance, sustenance, status, achievement

It is helpful to look at these in relation to how it connects with the life of Jesus as well as our own lives

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1. Acceptance

Jesus' life began with acceptance and unconditional love

- at birth (even conception) by Mary and Joseph
- at his Baptism he received unconditional love again 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' This happened *before* Jesus began his ministry. God expresses simple delight in who he is and wants him to know it.

3. Status

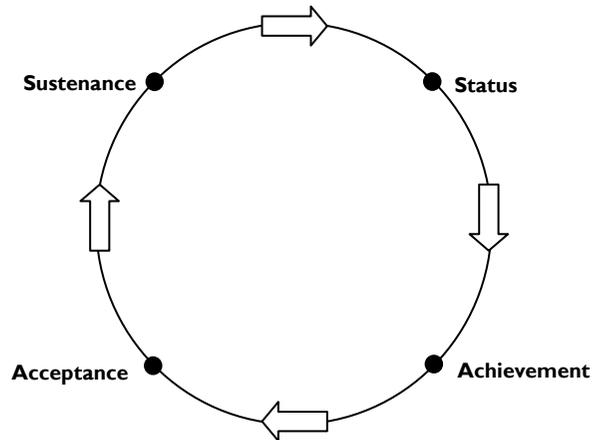
Being sustained in living one's life, gives a sense of purpose, what you were meant to be.

- Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth reads 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me' and comment 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled' because he has found this sense of his significance.
- Washing his disciple's feet Jesus shows he knows his significance

2. Sustenance

Acceptance leads to a sense of well being, of being sustained for who you are (not for what you should be, or have achieved).

- This gives a confidence and freedom to explore life.
- Jesus' sense of well being is sustained through his ongoing relationship with his Father. As he lives, he gives time to prayer that sustains his ministry.
- He lives, exploring what it means to be who he is, and in each step he takes he finds the sustaining love and acceptance of his heavenly Father, which in turn enables Jesus' greater trust and confidence.



'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God' (John 13.3)

4. Achievement

Living out one's status (what one was meant to be) results in achievement

- this underlines the acceptance and worth
- In Jesus his ultimate achievement is to fulfil his purpose in the Father, which ends with the cross, an achievement which to the world appeared to be total failure

The Dynamic Cycle describes the flow of grace in human life.

When life flows in this way it is humble and generous rather than overbearing and self-indulgent.

Jesus' life has these features, showing the way of living by grace and inviting us to follow this way - to seek to live from the acceptance of being loved as we are, rather than for what we do or believe.

Justified by works?

We struggle to accept grace because we have been taught from an early age to go around the cycle the opposite way.

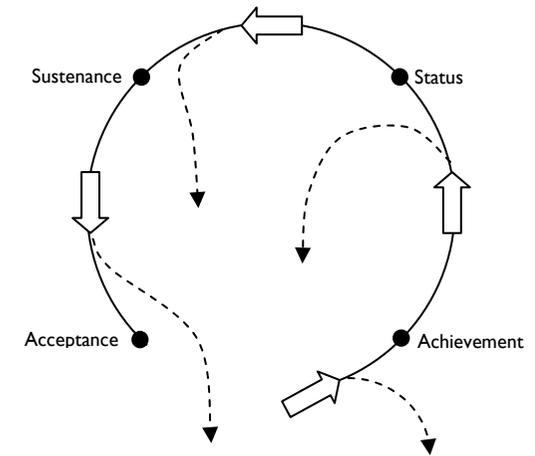
Society constantly compares, is full of evaluations and expectations, driving people to earn status and work for achievements. We are taught to justify ourselves by works (even within our churches!)

Our habits of justifying ourselves can be revealed by our thought patterns:

- *I hope I'll feel better about myself if I do... (status from achievement)*
- *I'll be accepted by X if I do... (acceptance from achievement)*
- *Once I have done this, many will be impressed and like me and I will be happy and at peace (which never happens)*

or messages from others like:

- *If you do this (achievement)...we will give you promotion (status)....*
- *Doing this will make you feel better about yourself (well-being)....*
- *Think of how people will respect you once you have achieved... (which is never quite what it seems)*



The cycle – movement by works showing its casualties

There can be casualties (co-workers, family, friends and self) in all stages as we struggle to justify ourselves by what we do.

- Struggling to achieve some fail,
- Working for status others are hurt,
- Striving for a sense of well being is costly
- Efforts to gain acceptance only produce short term gain

Not gaining the hoped for results brings a sense of failure, low self-esteem, rejection and worthlessness.

These ways of struggling to get around the cycle anti-clockwise are harmful to our selves, our bodies, minds and souls.