



Section One: **SYSTEM FAILURE**

We live in a world that rewards performance. It's ingrained in us from an early age. Answer the test questions right and you pass. Answer them wrong and you fail. Score the most points and you win. Score one point less than the competition and you lose. Do well in school and you'll get a good job. Do well at work and you'll get a promotion. Granted, it doesn't always work that way. But there's no denying that performance matters.

This performance orientation has the potential to shape our assumptions about God. When you ask people to describe what they think they have to do to get on or stay on God's good side, you get a list of behaviors—religious performance. Just about every aspect of life works that way. Why wouldn't it be the same with God? After all, if God created the world, shouldn't we assume he created the way the world operates? If that's the case, then isn't the cause-and-effect relationship between our performance and our value a reflection of some divine design?

While it would be easy to make that assumption, there are exceptions to the performance-valuation rule. A student fails an exam by two points, and the professor finds a way to give him a passing grade. A sales associate makes a less than stellar sales presentation, loses an account, and her manager responds by giving her another opportunity. A motorist is rear-ended and upon discovering the challenging circumstances of the careless driver, decides not to make an issue out of it. Every once in a while, people get exactly what they don't deserve.

But even when we're the ones being let off the hook, we feel like something is wrong. It's great not to suffer consequences for what we've done, but it also feels like we've violated the system. Shouldn't people get what they deserve? Isn't that just?

Section One:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Where do you feel the effects of a performance-based world most?
2. How does this influence your view of God?
3. When was there a time you've been let "off the hook"? How did you feel about it?

Section Two: **UNDESERVED FAVOR**

In chapter 5, we discussed forgiveness. We discover that Jesus' death paid for all our sins—past, present, future. As the apostle Paul stated, through Christ, God.

**...canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us.
- Colossians 2:14**

In other words, through Christ, God removed all the barriers to us being adopted into his family. Here is where the confusion often begins for many Christians. Having initiated a relationship with God by faith rather than by performance, their inclination is to manage their relationship with God according to the old system—the performance system. Before they know it, they're making assumptions about God's attitude toward them based on how well they perform. They attempt to earn what he's already given: favor. They quit thinking like family and begin performing like contracted labor. Old habits die hard.

Do you ever bargain with God? You know, "God if you [blank], I promise I will [blank], I will never [blank]." Think about that. Bargaining is based on two assumptions. First, someone has something the other party wants or needs. Second, the other party isn't about to do anybody any favors.

Do you believe you have earning potential with God? Do you believe you have something God wants or needs? Seems kind of silly when you stop to think about it. Don't feel bad. Most religious systems foster a bargaining mentality, and understandably so. That's how the world works. But remember, those who knew Jesus best made it remarkably clear ... with God, grace is the rule, not the exception.

We're not the first generation of people to wrestle with this tension, the assistive Paul addressed this issue in several of his letters. To the Christians in the ancient city of Colassae, he wrote:

So then just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord... - Colossians 2:6

That phrase alone deserves a comment. Based on our previous discussion, how does one receive Christ Jesus? By faith. What was it that compelled God to make salvation and forgiveness available to you in the first place? Grace. Undeserved favor. Nothing about you compelled him to. He just wanted to.

Paul continues:

...So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him. - Colossians 2:6

His point? Continue the way you started. Your relationship with God was initiated by faith in his gracious, undeserved offer of forgiveness. So, approach God every day for that same vantage point. Your life with Christ began in grace and it should continue in grace. Listen to how he concludes this passage:

...rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. - Colossians 2:7

Did you notice what he said about bargaining? No? It's not there, is it? But look again at what he says about thankfulness. The Christian life is categorized by an overflow of thankfulness. You thank someone for what he's done. You bargain with someone for what you want him to do. God doesn't need anything from you, so you have no leverage with him. But he wants something for you, so you don't need any leverage.

In this letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul wrote:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God—not by works, so that no one can boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9

You have been saved "by grace." God's forgiveness was, or hopefully will be, received as a gift. God does not view through the filter of your performance. He views you through the filter of a father-to-child relationship. You didn't earn your way into God's graces. You don't have to perform to stay there.

Section Two:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Is the idea of a relationship with God absent of performance a new idea to you?
2. How do bargaining-based Christianity and grace-based Christianity look different?
3. How would you explain the grace of God to someone else?

Section Three: **THE REASON FOR OBEDIENCE**

Think back for a moment of time when someone extended grace to you. Try to remember the most extreme case— an event where you received something so undeserved and unexpected you weren't even sure you could accept it. Have you ever been embarrassed by the gravity or significance of a gift or favor? If so, you can probably remember what you felt. If not, you can imagine what you would feel.

Now imagine if the person who bailed you out, forgave a loan, or gifted you unexpectedly said, “ I don’t want anything in return. This is a no strings-attached gift. But if you feel the need to thank me, simply do for someone else whatever degree you can what I’ve done for you.” Chances are, you will look for an opportunity to do just that.

With that in mind, read how Jesus instructed his closest followers to live:

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” - John 13:34

Therein lies the basis and motivation for all the New Testament “thou shalts” and “thou shalt nots.” We are to behave out of the overflow of our gratitude for how God through Christ behaved toward us. We don't obey to gain anything. We obey because of all we have already gained. For Jesus’ followers, obedience is not a bargaining chip. It’s a voluntary response of gratitude for what’s already been given. Paul echoed that same sentiment when he writes:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with any form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:31-32

These imperatives are not presented as means to an end. Paul didn’t instruct his readers to be kind and compassionate so that God would be kind and compassionate back. He commanded them to embrace these virtues because God had already exhibited those very things toward them. What comes next is even more extraordinary:

Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loves us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. - Ephesians 5:1-2

Again no bargaining. No begging. We are to do for others what God in Christ has already done for us. One hundred percent of the “to dos” related to the Christian faith are a response to what God has “to done” for you. As the apostle John put it:

We love because he first loved us. - 1 John 4:19

Section Three:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What has characterized your exposure to or experience with Christians? Why do you think that is?
2. What should a Christian characterized by love and motivated by gratitude look like?
3. How would your life change if you viewed obedience to God’s rules as opportunities to express gratitude?

BOTTOM LINES FROM WEEK FOUR:

- People often relate to God on a performance basis.
- With God, grace is the rule, not the exception.
- One hundred percent of the “to dos” in the Christian faith are responses to what God has “to done” for us.

AFTER YOUR GROUP ENDS:

This group is over, but what's next?

- Don't stop asking questions!
- Read the Appendix for helpful next steps.
- Celebrate both the journey on which you've been and the journey on which your beginning!

APPENDIX:

YOU'VE COME TO THE END OF THE BEGINNING

You've come to the end of the beginning. You've begun a dynamic conversation that I hope will last a lifetime- a conversation that connects you with God and with others. We designed Starting Point to be a safe place to ask questions about God and faith. I grew up attending a church where we couldn't ask big questions, and I knew I wanted to create a place where no question was off limits, because God is big enough for them all! I know that just because your group has ended it doesn't mean all of your questions have been answered. In fact, as you continue to investigate and experience God here at Anthem, more questions will surface. That's great!

I hope you'll not only be comfortable searching for the answers yourself, but that you will continue to seek a deeper relationship with God and healthy relationships with those on the same journey. I hope Anthem becomes a place you continue your journey of discovering the answers to those questions. Through your Starting Point conversations, you've learned more about God, others and yourself. **I want to encourage you to continue conversations about faith through a community setting.**

We've talked about a lot of important things. One of the most important is who Jesus is and what he did for you. You may or may not be ready to put your faith in Jesus Christ, but wherever you are on your faith journey, I pray you will continue it. God loves you. God is FOR you. God desires a growing relationship with you. Even now, he's reaching toward you.

However we can come along side of you in this season, we would love to do that! Anthem is designed for that! The Appendix on the following pages are just possible next steps you can take around here. So... what's your next step in this journey?



Jason Lee
Lead Pastor



startingpoint

THE END:

WHAT'S YOUR NEXT STEP?

No matter where today finds you, we can all take steps forward. Below are some areas you could do that. Maybe your next step is simply beginning one of these things or even taking a bigger step in one. However you do take a step, we'd love to continue to journey with you as you discover and practice authentic faith!

INVITE: anthemchurch.com

We think Sunday should be the best day of your week and your kids week. So our staff and incredible team of volunteers go above and beyond to create experiences that people love to attend, want to come back and invite a friend. We hope you'll make it a priority to attend on the weekends! Oh, and parents- have your kids here! There's nothing like Sundays at Anthem!

SERVE: anthemchurch.com/serve

We believe that when you choose to put your faith into action and serve others- whether it's right here in our church, within our community, or around the world- those acts of service transform lives, including your own. Serving is also the best way for Anthem Church to feel like your church.

CONNECT: anthemchurch.com/groups

We believe in order to continue to grow spiritually, you need to be connected relationally. If you want to take steps in your faith journey, you need intentional relationships with people who have the same goal- and a Community Group is the ideal place for that.

GIVE: anthemchurch.com/give

Your generosity helps Anthem lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus, by allowing us to create the irresistible environments you enjoy and experience every week. It also helps you live in a generous way by investing resources in something bigger than yourself.

BAPTISM: anthemchurch.com/baptism

Baptism is publicly sharing your faith in Jesus. Baptism was modeled first by Jesus, then has been practiced for the last 2,000+ years by people who are deciding to follow Jesus. You can visit the link above or talk to your Starting Point leaders if you have more questions about Baptism.

APPENDIX:

BIBLE READING GUIDE

If you're interested in reading the Bible, you don't have to start at the very beginning and read to the very end. In fact, that's probably not the best way to get started. So we've put together few options (on the next page) that make reading the Bible enjoyable and helpful. Whichever option you choose, it's a good idea to ask yourself the following questions as you read. These questions will help you better understand what you're reading and how it applies to your life:

1. What does the passage say?
2. What does it mean?
3. How does it apply to my life?

If you're more of a digital person, the best way to read the Bible is in the **YouVersion Bible App**. You can just search "Bible App" in your app store or visit this link on your device:

[*https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/*](https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/)

This app allows you to find other reading plans and read the entire Bible in any translation (we'd recommend NIV to begin, but try out the Message!) You can also hit "play" and have the Bible read to you!

EXPLORING JESUS IS 21 DAYS

The Gospels- Matthew, Mark, Luke, John are four different accounts of Jesus' life. This reading plan explores two of them: Luke and John.

Day 1: Luke 1-2	Day 12: John 1-2
Day 2: Luke 3-4	Day 13: John 3-4
Day 3: Luke 5-6	Day 14: John 5-6
Day 4: Luke 7-8	Day 15: John 7-8
Day 5: Luke 9-10	Day 16: John 9-10
Day 6: Luke 11-12	Day 17: John 11-12
Day 7: Luke 13-15	Day 18: John 13-15
Day 8: Luke 16-18	Day 19: John 16-17
Day 9: Luke 19-20	Day 20: John 18-19
Day 10: Luke 21-22	Day 21: John 20-21
Day 11: Luke 23-24	

SAMPLING SCRIPTURE IN 10 WEEKS

This reading plan includes entire books or significant portions of books spanning different time periods and literary genres in the biblical story. As you read this plan, you'll experience historical narrative, songs, prophetic messages, travel accounts, and personal letters. You'll also read the well-known stories of creation, the exodus, and the early Christian movement. You'll meet biblical figures such as King David, the prophet Jonah and Jesus. The purpose of this reading plan is to expose you to the grand redemptive storyline in the Bible.

Week 1: Genesis 1-25	Week 6: Esther, Ezra
Week 2: Exodus 1-20; Ruth	Week 7: Mark
Week 3: 1 Samuel 16-31, 2 Samuel 1-7	Week 8: Acts 1-12, 1 Peter
Week 4: Psalms 1-41	Week 9: Acts 13-28
Week 5: Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah	Week 10: Romans, Ephesians