



Episode 006—The Role of Grace in Adoption and Allyship

Welcome to Adopted into Allyship, a podcast about loving others well and fighting for connection. I'm Jamie K Corbin and this is episode six, The Role of Grace in Adoption and Allyship.

Hey, friendly reminder—this is intended to be a safe place to learn, but I do talk about hard things because when you've been adopted into allyship, you don't shy away from conflict or pain. Healing and growth aren't compatible with avoidance or apathy. You can expect an uncomfortable amount of honesty and vulnerability, as well as an abundance of grace as we work toward becoming better allies together.

In this episode we're going to discuss the dirty little secret about the concept of grace: those of us in the Christian faith are often guilty of abusing it. Either we all want it for ourselves and are much less enthusiastic about offering it to others, we assign it a far weaker definition than it actually deserves, or we exploit it as a get out of jail free card every time we feel convicted of wrongdoing. God, please have mercy on those of us who are guilty of one or more of those misuses.

One thing that needs to be done in preparation for any adoption or allyship journey is to ensure that one has a solid concept of grace—a concept that defines it with the honor it deserves, understands its purpose, and acknowledges its power—because grace is our home base, it's where we start and where we finish every mission we encounter along our adoption and allyship journeys, and it's how we will prove victorious over the evils of this world.

And let's call it the way it is: the fact that we have fallen from the garden of Eden and landed in a world where children are parented by anyone other than their biological family and where our resistance to oppression is something we must choose to engage in is evidence enough that we do indeed face evil in this world.

Listen, I didn't truly understand grace until I was a desperate first time mom of a newborn. I know I mentioned it in [episode four, Expectations](#), but becoming a mom was especially difficult for this transracial Latina adoptee who struggled with healthy attachment. What I didn't mention in that episode was that when it came time for my maternity leave to end, instead of signing off on my HR paperwork so I could return to the classroom and teach, my midwife gave me the diagnosis of postpartum PTSD and sent me off to counseling.

Our eldest's birth was traumatic, but within an hour we knew everything was going to be fine. A lot of the trauma I was dealing with had more to do with the shock of becoming a mom. In just a few months I had gone from a woman confident in her ability to nurture the minds of nearly thirty third grade students five days a week to a woman who had no clue what to do for most of the moments in her day. I went from feeling on top of my game professionally to feeling like I was failing to provide for my own child's needs in the way she deserved. I was so terrified of not attaching to my daughter and passing my own attachment disorder down to her that I made fear-based decisions in every area of parenting, which admittedly worked, we are super attached, but also cost me a tremendous amount of mental and physical health.

This major change in identity was taking its toll on my mental and physical health, and the impact was compounded by a couple of things.

One was the external silence I maintained about it, despite the non-stop internal soundtrack of alarm because what if I couldn't be a good mom? What if there was something wrong with me and that's why my biological mom gave me up for adoption? What if she was right? What if being a bad mom was genetic? Was that why I was given up for adoption? Was my own daughter going to inherit all of the messed-up things that came along with being in a relationship with me? I am such a dangerous person to be in a relationship with because I don't attach right! Were either of us going to be okay? You get the idea.

Also compounding the intensity of the situation was the fact that other members in my family were having physical and mental health crises of their own and Kelvin was traveling four days a week. Whether I was or not, I felt alone with my scary thoughts. Things were dire and I was desperate for sure.

Eventually I realized that Thursdays were magical. If I could just hold it together on Thursdays, Kelvin would fly back home and being together as a family of three would soothe the panic and pain from the week. I don't know for sure when I began writing down the pep talks I was giving myself out loud, but when I did, I shared them on social media with the encouragement to my friends and family to "dig deep for grace for yourself and those around you." #findgracethursdays became a small spiritual practice that continues to get me through the challenging stuff life throws my way.

I think part of the beauty in my find grace Thursday experience was uncovering a grace much deeper than the "undeserved forgiveness" definition commonly referenced from the church stage. That simple definition borders on dangerous when presented by a toxic institution and can end up being used as a free pass on abuse.

Yes, undeserved forgiveness is certainly a part of grace, but I needed the kind of grace that comes from individuals acknowledging their belonging to one another, one that offered and embraced belovedness, and was marked by an unwavering belief that we haven't been abandoned by the Holy Trinity to fend for ourselves in this messed up world.

I needed to experience the embodiment of the gospel, the truest definition of grace, in the grace I offered myself and others, and in theirs shared with me. I needed permission to fully acknowledge the darkness that surrounded me without being made to feel guilty for not having a “too blessed to stress” attitude and also to be reminded of what my husband Kelvin is always saying, “two things can be true at once.” I can be blessed and stressed at the same time, all while fighting to choose hope and belonging over the despair and self-inflicted solitude that seemed a constant threat.

Quick sidenote, if you're feeling especially alone these days, let me just remind you that the Holy Spirit is around-the-clock available and can provide an abundance of compassionate company if you invite her in.

The grace I found was compelling and convicting. It moved my story forward and gave it purpose. Undeserved forgiveness, yes, but with a reminder that every force has an equal and opposite reaction...if making mistakes was like digging myself into a hole on my journey, grace was like finding the bounciest of trampolines at the bottom of the hole with a note that says “You can't stay here, the world needs you and you need them, keep going” every single time. I had the opportunity to try again and be better next time.

Hoarding this kind of grace to ourselves, like we are often tempted to do when we've been wronged, will never work, and neither will using it as a means to avoid being held accountable for the consequences of our actions, especially as they relate to harming the relationships in our lives, because we will just end up with nobody to return to once we bounce back up out of our holes. We will end up alone...which is exactly what we are created to avoid. Loneliness can literally kill us, y'all. Google it.

We will need to find this kind of grace in adoption and allyship because of the harm we are going to unintentionally cause the people we love most. We are going to dig ourselves into some messy holes along the way, you guys. We can journey smart and do our best to minimize those occurrences but expecting to avoid them all together is just unrealistic.

As allies, we have a lot to learn. I explained in the last episode that this allyship journey is a lifelong learning experience. And, as I explained in my newsletter [“Reading, Writing, and Raising Allies”](#) last December, learning allyship is never free, it always costs us something. That's because allyship is a manifestation of self-sacrificial love. Often this looks like sacrificing our time, energy, and sometimes pride to the cause.

But, you know how in books or movies, when the plot takes a dark twist and it becomes obvious that the protagonist's sacrifice is going to be extra painful because it involves causing the pain of someone they love, directly or indirectly? The allyship journey has moments that look a lot like that.

Sometimes it's the people around us that end up paying the price for our learning and when that happens, we need to find grace, we need to ask for their forgiveness, and we

need to dig deep to extend grace to ourselves and others. We need to embrace our belonging to one another, believe in our belovedness, and radiate a rebellious insistence that we are not alone in the fight against evil. We come with a holy battalion at our backs, since the holy trinity is always here, with their holy host of angels.

But we can't just play at invoking this kind of powerful grace. We need to come correct—grace means little without the offender's remorse, a remorse so genuine that it demands an action-oriented response of repair to aid in the reconciliation efforts for the sake of recovering the relational damage done.

Let me say that again: Grace means little without the offender's remorse. And the remorse has got to lead to making things right in the relationship.

Simply put: you can't fake the kind of remorse needed to find this kind of grace. The defiantly crossed arms, rolling eyes, and exasperated tone of the apologizing toddler will not cut it here.

For those of you who take notes, let's do a quick run-down of what grace is and isn't:

Grace is not a permission slip to continue a pattern of harmful behavior.

Grace is not cheap content for cute wall art, coffee mugs, and t-shirts in big box craft stores.

Grace is not something that can be hoarded.

Grace is built on the model of Christ on the cross, beaten and bloody as a reminder of our belovedness and that we have not been abandoned by our creator.

Grace is something that can be found and shared.

Grace is what pulls us forward in this work, even when we make mistakes.

When I think about what grace looks like on an adoption or allyship journey, I really do see it as the home base for our work. We start with grace, we dash into the world, where brokenness abounds, do our best to be a light, and when there is something lost that needs to be recovered, we come right back to the home base of grace. Sometimes we even bring others back with us.

Allyship is love in action, and I think that the action we can take now is to figure out what it would look like to make grace our home base. I promise to stop rhyming now.

Here are four ways to make grace our...well, I did promise. Here are four ideas to center grace in our adoption and allyship journeys, how about that?

Idea number one: honor grace for what it is. Let's stop interacting with grace as if it were a commodity. Scarcity mindset has no business with grace—seeing as it's source

is the infinite love of almighty God, who creates the universe. And let's not impose our capitalist worldview onto such a holy concept—just because there is an overabundance of grace available to us, does not mean it is less costly. The cost of grace was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, may we never forget that.

Grace is an understanding that we are beloved, we belong to one another, and that we do not embark on our adoption and allyship journeys alone, ever. It is both the reason we choose allyship and the secret sauce that will help us persevere in love when the odds of the world are against us. Every time we summon the courage to choose grace, the good guys are winning.

Idea number two: find grace and share it. In case it's not super obvious, let me just state for the record, we need grace in every aspect of our lives, not just our adoption and allyship journeys. I, like many of us, have multiple friends trying to adult their way through their family's experiences with COVID. They have been doing an amazing job—I see you friends, holding the most important pieces of your family life together while tending to the sick among you—and as these families start to recover I hear common sentiments of exhaustion and discouragement. I asked one such friend via text (and it was fitting because it happened to be a find grace Thursday), Do you have a find grace playlist? Do you have a find grace candle? The reply back was no, but I need them in my life and I need to know more about how you use them.

Earlier in the episode I mentioned that the kind of grace I needed was an embodiment of the gospel, and I meant that both figuratively and literally. When I am trying to find grace, sometimes it's easy-ish, but often it's challenging. I have learned to use my five senses to remind myself of my own belovedness, which helps me then remember the belovedness of others and how we belong to one another. A holier person might be able to do this in a different order, but I am who I am. This is how I get to finding grace and I use it in everyday life.

Sensory input like a find grace playlist, which is a list of songs that help you remember whose you are and how much you are loved, or a find grace candle, which offers a visual reminder of our goal to be a light in the world, helps my mind slow down from the spinning of worst case scenarios and the enemy's lies trying to distract me from my mission, and focus on finding and sharing grace with others.

Other helpful things are opening the windows for fresh air, or even better going for a silent walk. A super hot bubble bath or shower is a luxury worth spending the time on and can provide a long enough break from the world to help pull me back to grace.

Taking the extra time to savor a London Fog, my comforting hot beverage of choice, or nibbling on a piece of Dove Dark chocolate and seeing how long I can make it last also helps. The trick is to use your body's ability to send sensory input to your brain, as a means to distract your mind from pursuing anything other than grace. And then, once you've found it, move forward from there with efforts to bring it to others.

Idea number three: ask for grace appropriately. Ugh, you guys. Apologizing and asking for grace is the worst. I hate that it's such an inescapable part of the adoption and allyship journey because it is not fun. And, when the moments making it clear that I need to do it arise, I have the ickiest feeling in my stomach until I actually follow through. Those icky feelings of disgust I experience when I need to ask for grace comes from a holy place and lead me to fix things to the best of my ability as quickly as I can.

Hurting someone you love is an awful experience, and unfortunately to be human is to have the twisted ability to inflict pain on someone intentionally, which is so far beyond the blueprint of Eden, God help us, or unintentionally which seems very unfair and inconvenient. Our humanness can be dangerous, which is why we have to approach this work with an abundance of humility and be prepared to ask for grace when the moment calls for it.

A few tips to help you ask for grace appropriately.

First, ask for grace from your heavenly father before you ask your fellow human. It's good to be reminded of where all of our grace comes from and it's easier to do this next part once you're right with God.

Then, go into your conversation with zero expectations for forgiveness or grace, this conversation is not about you. I know, yikes. But, it's true. A confession to God is how you get your guaranteed grace. Asking for grace from another human is actually a gift you offer them. You give them an opportunity to forgive you, which can be healing for them and gives them the ability to let go of a portion of the hurt you caused them, if they choose to. I repeat, this part is not about you, you are not owed grace by anybody.

And finally, replace "I'm sorry." with "Will you please forgive me?" Yeah, that's a tough one, but it keeps the conversation on the right track and I dare you to try it.

Idea number four: build safeguards against grace abuse. Grace is so much more than undeserved forgiveness, but the forgiveness piece is what most of us associate it with. That can be fine, but only if we do the work of mentally disassociating it from what we've all been taught about forgiveness, which is that it's something we are obligated to do, over and over again.

Miss me with the forgive and forget nonsense, that stuff is so toxic. I'm not saying it's healthy to keep a petty record of minor, every day run of the mill human errors, it's definitely not, but don't forget so quickly that you miss a pattern of toxic abusive behavior. If you start to sense such a pattern, find someone, either a friend with a healthy track record of shared grace, or a professional counselor and talk through it.

If and when you determine there is someone in your life exhibiting some form of abuse, or if you come to realize that, without meaning to, you yourself have become an abuser, definitely do what needs to be done to set up some boundaries to prevent the abuse from continuing. This would be where I share my opinion that we could all benefit from having a counselor available to us.

Father God,

In you we find a wonderful counselor and we find grace.

We know that your original plan, and that which we long to return to, is an existence where grace isn't needed because it will all be well, all the time.

But until then, God, until your kingdom is fully here, replacing this mess we have made for ourselves, until our ability to cause one another pain ceases to exist, we need your help to find grace.

Help us find the real deal kind of grace and deliver us from the temptation to abuse it by hoarding it to ourselves, assigning it too weak a definition, or weaponizing it to enable abuse.

Would you help us make the grace that illuminates your love for us and the beauty of how you intend for us to belong to one another central to our lives in such a way that it cannot help but overflow into our adoption and allyship journeys.

Help us dig deep to find your game-changing grace, especially in the moments when we are tempted to harden our hearts in reaction to anger or fear.

And then help us share it generously with others in a way that draws them closer to its source, in a way that points back to you, and illustrates your goodness.

Let grace be the steady drumbeat as we march toward a better world.

In our brother Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thank you for joining me for another episode of Adopted into Allyship, produced by Day Three Studios. It's an honor to be your ally as you push yourself to listen, learn, and love in a way that helps you become an equipped, reliable, and action-oriented ally.

If you found this episode helpful or encouraging, I would be most grateful if you would take a minute and rate the podcast, leave a review, and share it with those you know who could benefit from joining us as we work toward loving one another well and fighting for connection. I will be back with more next Thursday, but until then, I would love to connect with you on social media. I usually hangout on Instagram, but you can find me on most platforms @jamiectorbin and of course, I share more thoughts on the topic of allyship, including a free guide to listening and a monthly newsletter about helping your kids become allies, on the website, jamiectorbin.com.