

# UPDATE

## New Year Update

- Grace orientation
- Works orientation
- What makes a difference

John Hancock Center for Youth and Family Ministry-La Sierra University and the North American Division Office of Education

Number 3 — Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup> information you can use

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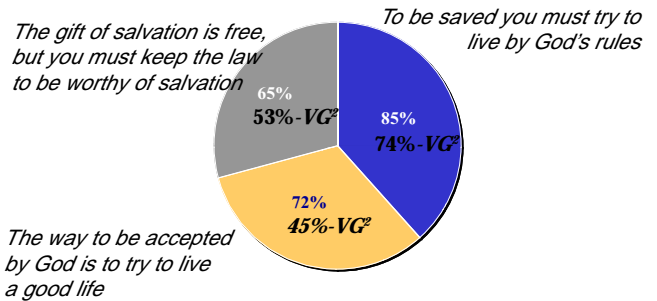
## Why a Grace Orientation is Crucial

There is nothing more important in building a balanced, rich faith than understanding the way God works in saving us. Remember in Valuegenesis<sup>1</sup> we recognized that there was both good and bad news to be found in the research. The good news was that the youth of the church (grades 6-12) recognized that they believed in a God who's love for them was exceptional. And in this unique time of earth's history this was a welcome fact. What we now know is that the early Valuegenesis<sup>1</sup> grace scale was, in actuality, better identified as a LOVE scale! At 95% youth from grades 6-12 knew that God loved them no matter what they did and that even when they sinned, they had a loving God. But we also learned that almost 67% of those same young people were confused about how God worked for their salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Roger Dudley in our first book on that research indicated that Adventist emphasis on behaviors and unique standards may be the message young people are getting rather than learning that it is God that does the saving. In Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup> the news continues to be good! And the new scales that were developed, using our research team of nine statisticians and theologians, helped us get a better, and we believe, more balanced look at an Adventist understanding of the relationship between God's actions on our behalf and our need for obedience and faithfulness and His overpowering love for us.

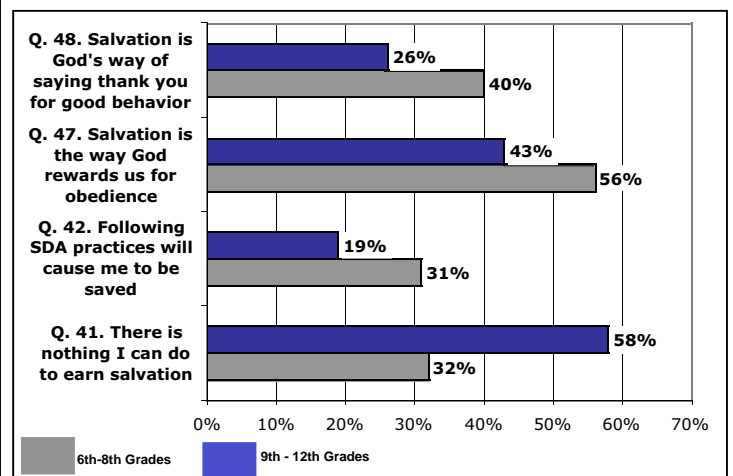
We know that growth in understanding God's grace has been significant over the past ten years. Factor analysis showed us that we have a true grace scale now, and in addition, we have scales that provide us information about Adventist's concern for law-keeping, continued value of the Ten Commandments in Christian life, and understanding of the nature of salvation as well as a clear love scale.

Let me share some statistics at this holiday season. Next is a pie graph showing three of the questions on the Valuegenesis<sup>1</sup> scale regarding the first grace scale. Remember, to do a comparison of 10 years, we must stick with some of the same questions in order to do valid research. And, even if you disagree with the writing or phrasing of these questions, they provided our first look ten years ago at this central Adventist truth.



Note in every one of these early questions, a clearer picture of salvation is evidenced ten years later—with a reduction of an aggregate over 50% in the same cases over that past ten years. We recognize that these early questions were fraught with misunderstanding for some, especially those at earlier age levels. That being the case, in Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup> research, we expanded the questions about God's action in salvation to give us a clearer picture of the issues regarding salvation from our unique Adventist perspective. Adventist young people seem to have done some growing in their understanding after ten years.

(Students responded below: "I definitely agree.")

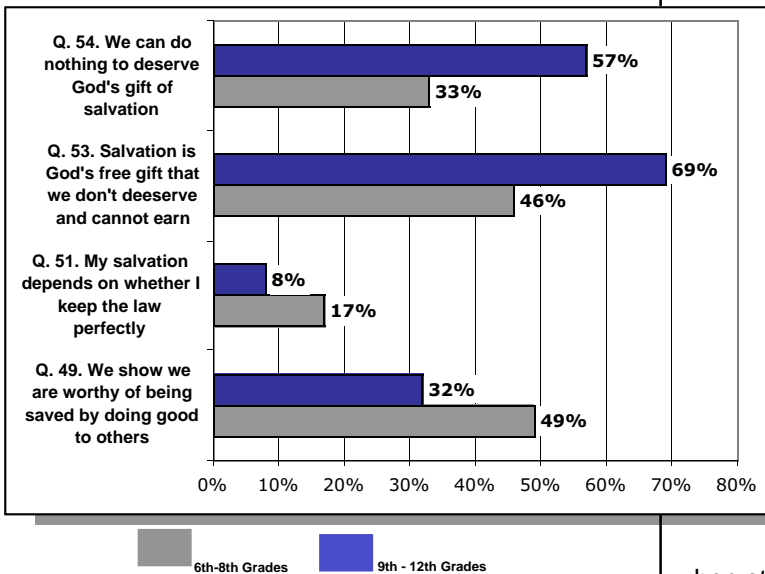


## What the grace scale teaches us

As you look at the progression through the grades you can see that the older students get and the longer they are in Adventist schools, the more they grasp the understanding of salvation through grace through faith.

## More about grace and works

As we look at the rest of the items on the grace scale, we notice an interesting fact. Students have a healthy respect and appreciation for God's law as a

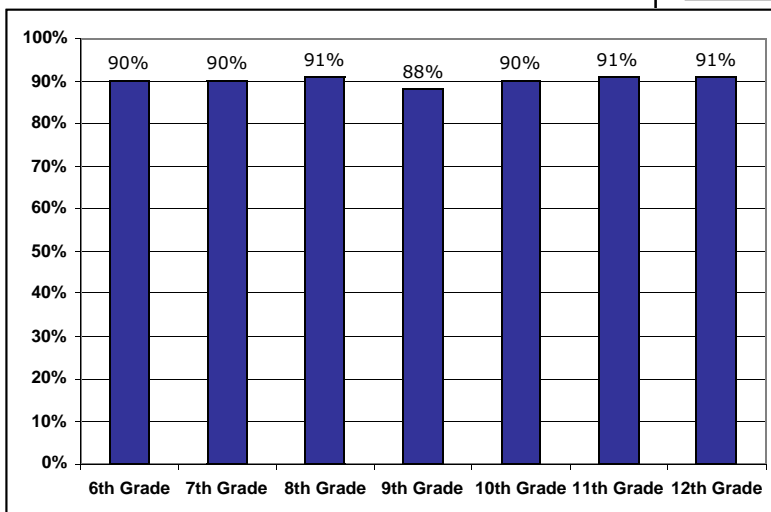


guide for their lives. And at the same time students in Adventist schools have a growing appreciation of the impact of God's gift of salvation that they cannot earn and do not deserve!

Another thing that is clear is that there is no tension between grace and law; in fact, students are beginning to understand the importance of the law in relation to God's activity towards us in salvation.

## Attitudes About God's Law

As a response to God's rich grace, students in Adventist schools understand the role of the Ten Commandments in a clearer way than ten years ago. When asked if they "definitely" believed that the Ten Commandments still apply to us today, look at the consensus below.

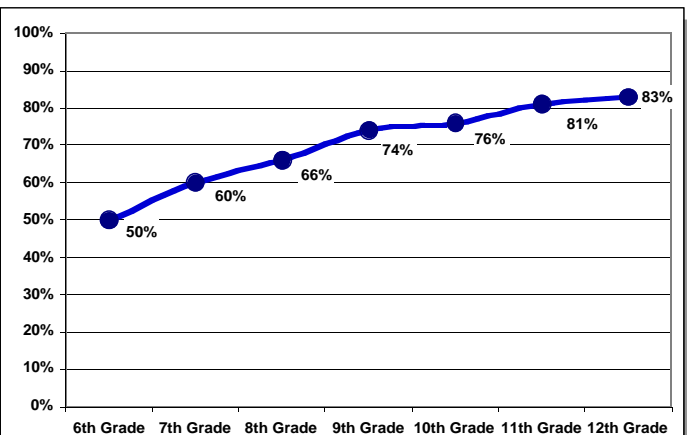


It is almost inconceivable to think that those who understand "how" God saves them —through grace—often believe that this emphasis on God's activity depreciates or even eliminates our response to God through obedience.

When we fall in love with someone and believe that they love us as unconditionally as humanly possible, we never then try to do everything we can to separate ourselves from them or do things that are in the exact opposite of that love we profess. Obedience is crucial as we come to understand God's will. But obedience is our response to God's work in our life, not a means to get God to love us more. After all, he died on the cross to save us from sin, and like the song says, everybody ought to love Jesus! What more can we do?

## Do we still have a works orientation?

The Valuegenesis<sup>2</sup> data sets reveal that when students in SDA schools were asked if they disagreed with the statement "their salvation depended



Q. 51. My salvation depends on whether I keep the law perfectly ("Tend to disagree" and "Definitely disagree")

on whether they kept the law perfectly," the impact of Christian education seems evident. As the student grows older, and his or her understanding of God's message of grace and their personal response to Him in obedience becomes clear, they recognize how God views them in light of Jesus' perfect obedience.

One could argue that they are growing in their understanding and becoming less works oriented (believing that through their obedience, God loves them more).

### References...

<sup>1</sup>Roger Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, (Riverside, CA: La Sierra University Press, 1992), Section on grace and works.