

grace

STUDY GUIDE

Introduction: Grace

Welcome to this five-week series on one of the most foundational and transformative realities in the Christian faith: Grace.

What is grace? We might hear it defined simply as 'God's unmerited favour'. While true, this definition only scratches the surface. Biblical grace isn't just God overlooking our faults; it's His active, powerful, undeserved kindness poured out towards rebellious people, supremely demonstrated in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

It's God giving us not what we deserve (judgement), but what we desperately need (forgiveness, reconciliation, new life) – all made possible through Jesus's incarnation, His substitutionary death on the cross, His victorious resurrection, His ascension, and the sending of His Holy Spirit.

Grace isn't just the starting point of the Christian life; it's the fuel for the entire journey. Over the next five weeks, we'll see how this amazing grace impacts every area of our lives.

We begin where grace must begin: with our salvation (Week 1). But grace doesn't stop at conversion. It meets us in our ongoing struggles and weaknesses (Week 2). God's grace breaks down barriers, uniting vastly different people into one family through faith in Christ (Week 3). Furthermore, grace empowers us to respond faithfully even when we are wronged or offended (Week 4). It's grace that teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness and 'yes' to righteousness as we face daily temptations (Week 5).

Each week there will be a sermon on Grace at both 10am and 4pm services (10am only on week 5) and both readings tie together on each of these themes. I'd encourage you to read both if you have time as they are designed to complement the theology with a real-life situation.

My prayer is that through discussing these passages and praying together, the reality of God's grace in Jesus Christ will increasingly be a dynamic power we experience every day. May it transform our hearts, our relationships, our struggles, and our witness, all for the glory of God.

Week 1: God's Grace To Us

Theme: Understanding the foundational nature of God's grace in salvation.

Opening Question: When you hear the word "grace," what first comes to mind? What are some common ways people misunderstand it?

Bible Passages: Ephesians 2:8-9 (10am) Matthew 20:1-16 (4pm)

Discussion Questions:

- What does Ephesians 2:8 say is the source of our salvation?
- What does verse 9 say grace excludes? Why is this important?
- How does understanding salvation as a gift, not based on works, change how we view ourselves?
- How does it change how we view God? What does it tell us about His character?
- If salvation isn't earned by good works, what is the place of good works in the Christian life (see Ephesians 2:10)?
- In the Parable of the workers (Matthew 20), how does this challenge our human understanding of fairness versus God's concept of grace?
- How does the concept of "boasting" relate to grace? In what subtle ways might we still try to "boast" or take credit for our standing with God?
- How can we remind ourselves daily that our relationship with God is based entirely on His grace, not our performance?
- How does the gospel truth of grace guard us against both pride (thinking we've earned it) and despair (thinking we're not good enough)?

Prayer Suggestions:

- Thank God for the incredible, un-earnable gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Praise Him for His rich mercy and love (Ephesians 2:4).
- Pray for a deeper personal understanding and experience of depending entirely on His grace, confessing any ways you have relied on your own efforts or righteousness.
- Ask God to help the group live lives that reflect the reality of His grace

Week 2: Grace When I'm Struggling

Theme: Knowing God's sufficient grace in times of weakness and hardship.

Opening Question: Think about a time you felt weak or were struggling significantly. What did you rely on to get through?

Bible Passages: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (10am) Exodus 4:10-16 (4pm)

Discussion Questions:

- Context: Paul has been pleading with God to remove a "thorn in his flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). What is God's answer in verse 9?
- What does "My grace is sufficient for you" mean in practical terms when facing ongoing struggle?
- How is God's power "made perfect" or "completed" in weakness?
- Why would Paul shift from pleading for removal of the weakness to boasting about weaknesses? What change in perspective occurred?
- What is the connection Paul makes between his weaknesses and Christ's power resting on him?
- In Exodus 4, Moses felt inadequate because of his speech impediment and hesitated to obey God's call. When have you felt inadequate or focused on your weaknesses when faced with a task you believe God wants you to do? How does God's response to Moses encourage you?
- What does the paradox "when I am weak, then I am strong" mean? How have you experienced this, or seen it in others?
- How do these passages challenge our culture's emphasis on self-reliance, strength, and avoiding suffering?
- Practically, how can we embrace our weaknesses not as failures, but as opportunities for Christ's power to be displayed?

Prayer Suggestions:

- Pray for those in the group currently facing weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, or difficulties, asking for God's sufficient grace and Christ's power to be evident.
- Confess any tendencies to rely on your own strength or to despair in weakness. Ask for help to boast in weakness so Christ's power can rest on you.

Week 3: Grace When Others Are Different

Opening Question: Think about a time you found it challenging to get along with someone very different from you (background, opinions, personality, culture, etc.). What made it difficult?

Bible Passages: Acts 15:6-11 (10am) and 1 Corinthians 8 (4pm)

Discussion Questions:

- Read Acts 15:1-5 for context. What was the core disagreement that led to this meeting in Jerusalem? Why was it such a significant issue for them?
- In verses 7-9, Peter recounts his experience with Cornelius (Acts 10). What is the main point he makes based on how God acted?
- God "made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (v9). What does this say about the basis on which God accepts us?
- What does Peter declare is the only way anyone (Jewish or Gentile believers) is saved (v11)?
- In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul emphasizes that even if we have the "knowledge" that allows us freedom (like eating idol meat), love for a brother or sister should guide our actions. Can you identify modern "grey areas" where Christians might have freedom, but need to consider how exercising that freedom could impact others negatively?
- How does the grace of the Lord Jesus challenge our natural tendency to judge or exclude people who are different from us?
- How can the principle from Acts 15 – salvation by grace alone, making no distinction – help us navigate these differences in a godly way?
- Can you think of a specific situation where you need to show more grace to someone different from you? What would that look like practically?
- How does focusing on the core truth of salvation through Jesus Christ (v11) help maintain unity amidst diversity?

Prayer Points:

- Pray for humility to recognise that we are all saved solely by God's grace through Jesus, regardless of our background or traditions.
- Ask God to help you see people who are different from you through His eyes, valuing them and demonstrating grace.
- Pray for unity within your church community, that differences would not lead to division, but to a richer experience of God's kingdom.

Week 4: Grace When I'm Offended

Opening Question: When someone wrongs or offends you, what's your typical first reaction? What makes it hard to respond graciously?

Bible Passages: Romans 12:16-17 (10am) Matthew 18:21-22 (4pm)

Discussion Questions:

- Read Romans 12:14-21 for the wider context. What is the overall theme Paul is addressing in these verses?
- Verse 16 speaks of living in harmony and associating with the lowly. How might pride prevent us from responding graciously when offended?
- What does it mean practically to "repay no one evil for evil" (v17)? Why is this command so counter-intuitive?
- Verse 17 also says to "give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all." How does our response when offended affect our witness?
- In Matthew 18, Peter thought forgiving seven times was generous, but Jesus multiplied it dramatically ("seventy-seven times"). What does this radical command for limitless forgiveness practically mean for our relationships? What are the biggest challenges we face in living this out?
- How did Jesus model responding to offense and evil during His life and, ultimately, on the cross? (Consider e.g., Luke 23:34, 1 Peter 2:23).
- What's the difference between forgiving someone (an internal heart attitude enabled by grace) and trusting someone again?
- How can Christian community (like this small group) support one another in responding with grace when facing hurt or offence?
- What practical steps can you take this week to "give thought to do what is honorable" when you feel offended or wronged?

Prayer Points:

- Pray for humility, asking God to help you see your own need for grace and forgiveness, making it easier to extend it to others.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit's power to overcome the natural desire for retaliation when offended, and instead to respond in a way that honours Christ.
- Pray for specific situations where forgiveness and grace are needed, asking for wisdom and strength to act in love.

Week 5: Grace When I'm Tempted

Opening Question: Where and when do you find you are most tempted to drift away from following God?

Bible Passage: Titus 2:11-14 (10am)

Discussion Questions:

- According to verse 11, what has appeared, and who is it for? What does this tell us about the source and scope of God's grace?
- Verse 12 says this grace "teaches/trains us". What does it train us to renounce and what does it train us to live like?
- How does God's grace do more than just forgive past sins? How does it actively empower us for godly living now?
- What are we "waiting for" according to verse 13? How does keeping this "blessed hope" in mind help us resist temptation in the present?
- Verse 14 describes who Jesus is and what He did. How does His sacrifice ("gave himself for us") relate to our struggle with temptation and sin?
- What does it mean that Jesus aims to redeem us from "all lawlessness" and purify for Himself a people "zealous for good works"?
- How is resisting temptation not just about willpower, but about actively relying on the grace that comes through Jesus's work?
- Think about a specific temptation you face. How does the truth of God's grace, as described in Titus 2:11-14, offer both the motivation and the power to resist it?
- How can we practically remind ourselves of this grace day-to-day, especially when facing temptation?
- How can we encourage one another in the group to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives, empowered by grace?

Prayer Points:

- Thank God for the grace that appeared in Jesus Christ, bringing salvation and the power to change.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit to train you by this grace, helping you renounce ungodliness and worldly passions day by day.
- Pray for strength to resist specific temptations, relying not on your own willpower but on the power of Christ's redemption and the hope of His return.

Space below for your notes