

GRACE



A FAITHPATH Resource
by Scot Pollok



GRACE

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INTRODUCTION

Grace is the greatest gift you've ever been offered. The short book you hold is an attempt to explain and apply the profound beauty of God's grace toward you. But, the best we can hope for from any work on God's grace is just a good scratch on its surface. In a way, we will aim to do a good job exploring the top of a great iceberg, all the while learning there is much more below the surface. These short chapters before you aim to say a lot in a small space. Please read and reread thoughtfully. To make the most of this study within the community of a small group or family, simple questions and application ideas follow each chapter. I pray this study profoundly changes your view of God and the magnificence of His grace.



SCOT POLLOK | LEAD PASTOR

FAITHPATH

Discipleship is probably a word only Christians and church people use these days. Not so in the time of Jesus. A disciple was then, and still is now, a committed follower of a master or teacher. As such, a disciple's role is to stay close to the master, to follow him, to learn, to mature and to become more like his master. Christian discipleship is the intentional and lifelong pursuit of nearness to Jesus the Master, becoming more like Jesus in your character, values and mission.

Exactly how we engage in Christian discipleship is sometimes hard to understand and apply. You might have some questions yourself. *How do I practically follow Jesus now? What is involved? Is it just about not doing certain things or is it more than that?* Fortunately, God's Word has all of the answers for us. What we see in Jesus' life recorded in the Gospels, what we hear in Jesus' own words, and what we learn from the rest of the writings of the New Testament is a picture of discipleship that is both simple and exquisitely rich. As a way of illustrating this biblical picture of discipleship, we invite you to **FAITHPATH**, a simple layout of twelve circles in the form of a map. See it below.



We believe that all of the investments, engagements, practices and relationships that God’s Word calls disciples to enjoy are represented on this map. With simple language that believers of any age can understand, **FAITHPATH** offers a comprehensive glimpse at what is included in Jesus’ invitation: “Follow Me.”

There are three key things to remember as you take time exploring **FAITHPATH**. First, there is one and only one starting point: faith in Jesus Christ. Trusting in Jesus as the only one able to save you from your sin is the nonnegotiable beginning of Christian discipleship. Without personal faith, you will only be engaging in practices, not deepening an intimate, life-giving relationship. Secondly, after this starting point there is no strict order or sequence to the aspects or circles related on **FAITHPATH**. While some elements, such as baptism, should be enjoyed early in your faith journey, enjoyment of any and all steps is welcome at any time. Lastly, after the starting point of faith, there is no perfect graduation or completion of any of the steps in **FAITHPATH**. Even baptism, which is a one time event, must be more deeply understood over a lifetime in order to help others understand its meaning and significance. Most of the aspects of following Jesus will take a lifetime, which is the grandeur and glory of the invitation.



Like a map, **FAITHPATH** is designed to help you locate your current position and plan your next steps. The big questions to ask and ponder are, “Where am I on the map?” “Have I trusted in Jesus for salvation?” “What other aspects of discipleship have I already engaged?” “What steps do I need to examine and enjoy further?”

This short study is an exploration of parts of at least two of the circles in **FAITHPATH**. It will help clarify in many ways what “Trusting in Jesus for Salvation” really means. It also is written to help you “Understand Grace Better.”



Grace is the first, last, and key ingredient to Christian discipleship. Grace is how God the Father interacts with His children. The Apostle Paul wrote to a friend named Titus about this long ago. *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11-14).* God’s grace truly is the greatest gift you’ve ever been offered.

1

Grace is Free

I couldn't tear my eyes away. Waves of diverse emotions came and went with some invisible tide. Tour guides also came and went. My wife and I remained still, focused, mesmerized. Without seeking it out, or even knowing it existed, we had discovered Michelangelo's only surviving canvas painting during a trip to Italy. It's entitled "The Holy Family." The color and emotion of this simple scene are difficult to describe. Seeing a picture of it today still takes me back to that breath-taking first glimpse.

Like an unexpected masterpiece, God's grace is almost too beautiful to comprehend. At once, it can be both recognizable and surprising. Familiar and staggering. How often have you thought about grace? The Bible speaks of God's grace hundreds of times but we seldom mention it. This booklet is a first step towards understanding God's amazing gift a bit better.

Let's start with a simple truth: Grace is free. This uncomplicated statement may seem shallow or redundant at first glance, but as we will see, it could be one of the most important truths the Scriptures reveal about God and about you.

Grace is a Gift

If you've been around church, Christians, Christian music or literature for any amount of time, chances are you've heard the term "grace." But what is grace exactly? What is it not?

In order to understand what grace is, we first have to manage a long line of imposters masquerading as the real thing. Grace is not being merciful, nice or kind. Grace is not generosity or service. Grace is much more than selflessness or humility. The grace we are talking about is not a pleasing fluidity of movement or the ability to dance. So what is grace?

God's grace is nothing less than a completely free gift, an undeserved act of favor from God. The free gift is eternal salvation from sin. Forgiveness. Acceptance into God's forever family. Heaven. Life.

God's great love for you is what motivates His gift of grace. He chooses to give grace freely, without cost. This means grace pays no attention whatsoever to the worthiness of the person receiving it. Has a greater gift ever been offered to you?

Grace is Un-earned

The un-earned aspect of the gift of grace can be a point of confusion. The free nature of grace means there are no strings attached to the gift of grace. Nothing is expected. Grace is not a retail exchange, something for something. Grace cannot be paid for. It cannot be paid back. One cannot purchase grace or labor to gain it. Grace, therefore, rebels against all language of debt or owing. Grace is only received. That is what you do with a gift. It is given free of charge and received without worthiness or entitlement.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Ephesians 2:8-10

“But if [God’s choosing and protection] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”

Romans 11:6

Grace is not at odds with effort; don’t misunderstand. Grace has no difficulty with good works or being grateful or obedient. Grace is, however, diametrically opposed to the idea of earning, as it directly contradicts the free nature of a gift. You don’t earn a gift.

It was a passing sentence from Stephen Ambrose’s historical *“Band of Brothers”* that led Steven Spielberg and others to make the now classic WWII movie *Saving Private Ryan*. After a dangerous and deadly mission to find “a needle in a stack of needles,” a rabble search party finally locates Private James Francis Ryan after all of his brothers were killed in battles elsewhere. Because of this tragedy, Ryan gets to go home. Refusing to abandon his post and his mates, the search party led by Captain Miller joins them in a final mission to defend an important bridge. (Spoiler alert!) After the successful defense of the bridge, only Ryan and a few others survive. The search party’s mission to find and protect Ryan seems complete but came at great cost. With his dying words, Captain Miller looks at all the death and destruction around him and whispers to the soon to be freed Private Ryan. *“Earn this,”* he says, referring to the price of his rescue. The movie ends many years later with an old and wrinkled Ryan at the grave of his former rescuer, Captain Miller. With kids and grandkids in tow, Ryan has produced all the familial evidence he can muster to show he did his best to earn the rescue he was given.

This is how many view Jesus’ offer of salvation. It’s “free” up front, but we have to earn it after the fact, or at least prove we are worthy of it. To be clear, Jesus never said, “Earn this.” It’s actually impossible for you to do so. What He does say is this: “It cost me everything to purchase you. I have rescued you from sin and death. Believe in Me and live. You are free.”

Grace is Rescue from Sin

God has rescued you and it cost Him His only Son. This is the Gospel, the Good News.

God's chosen path of rescue is grace, and grace is not cheap. This is why the Gospel is all about what God has done through Jesus Christ, not what you need to do.

Intentional rebellion has stained God's perfect creation. The sin of the first man and woman had catastrophic consequences. Adam and Eve were no longer allowed in the presence of God. This is what sin does: it separates us from God. Marvelously, just moments after this first act of mutiny, God unveiled a plan to buy us back. As time went by, God progressively revealed this rescue plan until the perfect time when Jesus, God Himself in human flesh, was born. Then the plan was fully realized. Jesus would suffer and die in the place of His people, paying the just penalty of sin in Himself. This sacrifice would be a substitute payment for all of the sins of anyone who places their believing trust in Jesus. Finally, after dying, He was miraculously raised from the dead to validate and confirm all that He promised, and to triumph over the devil and death itself. Jesus accomplished all that was necessary to offer the free gift of life, forgiveness and redemption. The full price has been paid. This is the Gospel. And this is grace.

"Jesus came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word [Jesus] became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth... For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."

John 1:11-14; 17

Grace is Received by Faith

Our response to the Gospel of grace is to receive it by faith. This is what you do when a beautiful gift is offered, you receive it. You humbly believe, accept what God has done for you, place your trust in Jesus and receive grace. All that is required for your salvation has been fully accomplished by God Himself.

The Bible repeatedly and consistently communicates one, and only one,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

John 5:24

condition for salvation by grace: faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is believing trust in Jesus Christ. It involves believing in Jesus’ identity as God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and acceptance of what Jesus accomplished on the cross for your sin. Faith is trusting Jesus alone for your salvation. These are matters of the heart and mind, but they are not as simple as acknowledgment or agreement.

Faith is an act of trust that appropriates the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Acts, after Paul and Silas were miraculously released from a jail cell, an astonished prison guard asked them, *“What must I do to be saved?”* Now if there was ever a moment to lay out the list of requirements, this was surely it. What would Paul say? Would it include various steps of obedience or certain evidences of faith? Paul and Silas responded, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (**Acts 16:30-31**). Grace in salvation is received by faith alone.

While many Christians agree that salvation by grace is received in this way, many sincere followers of Jesus add other requirements to the Gospel. They demand layers of evidence or products of faith such that they create pseudo-conditions or tests on which salvation is dependent. These misplaced stow-aways steal the full weight of sufficiency and finality from the cross of Christ. They deeply misunderstand grace. Jesus has accomplished all that is necessary for your salvation. There is nothing to prove or earn.

The Father chooses to offer this gift freely, through your faith in Jesus. Do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust Him for your salvation?

Grace is Free

When all the world operates on give and take, payment, earning and owing, God chooses to deal with the problem of your sin differently. Instead of asking you to work your way back to Him, something you could never achieve, the Father gave His only Son as a sacrifice in your place. This was a great cost. Grace is not cheap because it cost the Father everything. It cost Him His only Son. He chooses to give you life and forgiveness as a free gift at great cost. This is the gift of grace. It is given without charge, without strings and in response to your faith in Jesus. He gives. You receive. God's grace is free. If you trust in Jesus, you are free as well.

For Discussion

- » What single sentence or thought surprised you most about this chapter? Why?
- » How would you define “grace” in your own words?
- » Grace is free. How does the “free” aspect of grace challenge your thinking about God, about yourself and about salvation?
- » Grace is not the opposite of effort but of earning. What does this mean to you?
- » Read **Ephesians 2:8-10**. What does this simple passage say about God’s grace? List as many observations as you can.
- » How have you personally experienced God’s grace?
- » Have you accepted God’s gift of grace in salvation and forgiveness in Jesus Christ?
- » If someone asked you, “What must I do to be saved?” How would you respond?
- » Which of the Scripture passages shared in this chapter was most impactful for you? Explain why to your group.

2

Grace and Works

Grace is a free gift from God granting everyone who trusts in Jesus rescue, forgiveness and salvation from sin. This is very good news! But let's be honest, when most people think of any religious system, even Christianity, they think, "Be good and God will like you; and when God likes you, you'll be okay." This popular idea focuses on works and deeds. So where do good works fit with the truth of God's grace?

The truth is, God loves you and gave His Son for you when you were His enemy. Yes, the deep rebellion of sin means you were not just imperfect but God's enemy. Nothing you could do in a thousand lifetimes of sacrifice could earn favor with a holy God. So what good are good works? If grace is free, are Christians supposed to obey God? Where do works fit in?

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:6-8

Salvation is not Earned by Works

God saves you by His grace. God's grace is a gift, and gifts are not earned. They are given and received; so it is with grace. The gift of grace is life and salvation, and these cannot

"For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Ephesians 2:10

be earned. You do not religiously perform in order for God to rescue you. You are not saved by works, but by grace.

But good works do have a critical place in the life of the Christian. The Bible is crystal clear on this. You are saved *for* good works, not *by* good works. In other words, you do not obey God in hopes to earn heaven, but rather in gratitude for the gift of His grace. Think

about it in a linear way. Salvation is in the middle of the line. While many people place good works *before* salvation, making salvation dependent on our obedience, the proper biblical place is after salvation. Good works flow out of salvation given by grace. And as we will see, grace actually covers the whole line. God alone accomplished all that was necessary to give you salvation as a gift.

Two Big Bible Words

The Bible uses two important words that help us clearly understand the order and place of grace and works. They are *justify* and *sanctify*. Rare in our everyday language, it is important to define and illustrate these two words well.

Justify is a legal term meaning to *declare someone righteous*. By your faith in Jesus, God declares you in perfect standing with Him. You

"...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." Galatians 2:16

no longer stand guilty or in danger. Remember, grace pays no attention to worth. That's why justification is a choice by the Judge. It is not earned, it is declared. God chooses to justify sinners based on their faith in Jesus.

Even those justified by faith are still wrapped in sinful flesh this side of heaven. They still struggle, still fail. Yet if a sinner has been justified by faith in Jesus, he or she enjoys a blameless legal standing before God.

Actions and attitudes like generosity, patience, lack of anger, perfect humility, complete submission or some standard of moral perfection are not required to be

"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

2 Timothy 2:21-22

justified by God because justification cannot be earned. They belong to a new subject, which is our second big word, *sanctify* or *sanctification*. This New Testament term describes the progressive process of actually becoming more and more like Jesus in character, values and action. This is believing faith lived out in action and growth, which is what God fully intends for His children. Sanctification is all about works of obedience.

As you can imagine, this kind of change does not happen overnight. Becoming like Jesus occurs in many small victories over a lifetime. As you choose to walk by the Holy Spirit, suppress and deny

the desires of the flesh, resist the devil and His schemes, obey God's calling and fully operate in His gifts, you will slowly realize Christ-likeness here on earth. This is enjoyed by faithfulness, obedience and discipline. It is hard work.

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Romans 3:23-24

A Critical Distinction

Justify and sanctify are not the same actions.

While they both play a role in God's full design for His children, there is a critical distinction between the two. Many Christians are confused on this point. The simple and biblical placement of works of obedience *after* salvation has

been challenged since the very beginning. This fallen world simply does not work that way. In fact, many of us feel much more comfortable with earning salvation than with salvation by grace. That's one reason why many have muddled God's gift of salvation

"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."

Galatians 1:6-7

by confusing these two distinct biblical ideas (justification and sanctification).

This misunderstanding fails to represent what the Scriptures reveal about the place and function of works of obedience. What the Bible never does, not even once, is base the truth of salvation from sin on works of obedience. The reality of your justification is never based on the progress of your sanctification. The Scriptures are very careful to maintain a distinction between the two. Even a

proper understanding of the Old Testament law supports this important truth. The New Testament Book of **Galatians** takes up this argument directly.

"Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Galatians 3:11

quoting **Habakkuk 2:4**

Obedience Increases Joy

When we place obedience and works in their proper place, God's design for our life as His children can be fully enjoyed. Think about it. So many people have struggled with accepting God's grace because of personal failures and sin. But grace has the power to kill doubt in this area, because there is always room for doubt if our salvation depends

on human performance at any level. But God's salvation is given in spite of your sin; indeed, in the full knowledge of all of your sin and failure. Thus, the ability to put works of obedience in their proper place can dramatically increase your joy and freedom as a follower of Jesus.

Obedience Protects

Let us not forget that God is a good Father. He does not let disobedient children enjoy rebellion without discipline. Sin has consequences for everyone. (For some examples see **Psalm 38:1-8**.) Disobedience is never simple, hidden or harmless. It disrupts nearness to God, intimacy with Jesus and it turns down the volume on God's voice in your life. Sin also separates you from other people. Disobedience has a cost. The opposite is true of obedience. It protects you from the consequences of sin.

"...God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

Hebrews 12:7

Obedience Deepens Intimacy with God

Just as disobedience and rebellion put distance between you and God, so obedience keeps you close to Him. While God never kicks out or disowns any of His children for disobedience, sin does interrupt nearness to Him. Thus, no one can claim great intimacy with God and happily live in sin. To experience maximum joy and nearness to God, obedience is absolutely necessary. Obedience keeps God close and allows you to hear His voice clearly.

"If we say that we have fellowship with [God] and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

1 John 1:6

Obedience is Discipleship

Jesus came to the earth and called disciples to follow Him. He still calls disciples. Disciples are devoted students, committed learners and close followers of a master. Thus discipleship is the active pursuit of sanctification. And as we've seen, sanctification happens by obedience, faithfulness and dependence on God. Discipleship is about learning and living in Jesus' character, values and mission. To listen, obey and follow Jesus in submissiveness is to be His disciple. Thus, obedience and discipleship go hand in hand. To obey and follow Jesus is to be His disciple.

"Jesus said to his disciples, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me."

John 14:21

"But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy...so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Titus 3:4-7

Obedience Looks Back

We sing of God's amazing grace because it is the greatest gift we've ever been given. There is not a close second. The truth of grace received should produce great gratitude. There is a big difference between gratefulness and paying a debt, between thanksgiving and owing. Our works of obedience as followers of Jesus are not a way of paying God back for His grace. That is an impossible task. God does not want to be paid back. He desires His children to enjoy a life full of the gifts of His grace because this gives Him great glory. Our obedience as children of God is motivated by great love and gratitude, not fear or doubt. This truth of grace changes everything.

Obedience Looks Forward

You are headed to a face-to-face meeting with God. Do you want your life to matter for His Kingdom? Do you want your time here on earth to glorify Jesus? Obedience is the way. Spending your time on earth in pursuit of purely selfish goals will be a wasted life. Pursuing Jesus by walking according to His desires rather than your own is how you make the most of your life. When you see Jesus, you will want to hear Him say, *“Well done, my faithful servant.”* You will want to glorify Him. This is done by faithful obedience.

Grace is Free

One of the most important aspects of grace to understand is where it places works. Being good or doing good does not make God save you. You are not loved by God because of good works, but because of Jesus' sacrifice and redemption. Good works do not come before salvation, in order to earn it. Works flow from salvation in freedom from fear and doubt. A life of obedience is God's will for all of His children. Obedience protects you and deepens your joy and intimacy with God. Disciples of Jesus walk in obedience, which looks forward to rewards in heaven and overflows from gratitude for such an amazing gift.

For Discussion

- » Why do you think most religious systems work on a “be good and God will like you” model?
- » How is biblical Christianity different than other world religions because of grace?
- » Read **Titus 2:11-12**. What are the two main roles in which grace operates? What does grace offer in each role?
- » What is the difference between justification and sanctification?
- » Of the products of obedience mentioned in this chapter, which is the most encouraging to you? Why? Which is the most challenging? Why?
- » Right now, are you trying to obey God? If so, what motivates you to live in obedience? Are you working to earn God’s favor? To pay back His gift of salvation? To stay in God’s good graces? Share honestly with your group.
- » What is the most important truth about works that you discovered in this chapter?

3

Grace is Secure

God wants His children to enjoy a secure love that can be completely trusted in times of insecurity. When your heart is under attack, your Father wants you to know for sure that you are loved and that you are secure in that love. This is a gift of His grace.

Have you ever wondered whether God really loves and accepts you despite your continued struggles? Have you ever doubted if you are saved from your sin or are really a part of God's family? Once you are saved, can you lose your salvation? Rather than an uncertain and unreliable foundation of wishful thinking or worldly hope, God speaks into your life with a promise. If you have trusted in Jesus to rescue you from sin and death, then you have received God's free gift of grace. And this grace has the power to build incredible confidence and peace. Let's look into God's gracious gift of security more closely.

"[Because God called me as a missionary] I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until [the last] day." 2 Timothy 1:12

Security is Not Based on Performance

God has graciously built for you a home of freedom and joy. You are not a member of God's family because you perform well. You are not saved only as long as you perform well. Your worth to God is not proportionate to your usefulness.

Faith in Jesus Christ is the only thing God requires for your rescue from sin. This gift of salvation is freely given. This is grace. This grace is also secure, kept and guarded by God Himself. By your faith you are saved forever, secure in Christ. And only if you are saved forever can you rest in the assurance of your salvation. This is why the truth of grace is so important.

Security is Based on Grace

The Scriptures use a diverse array of words and pictures to communicate a simple yet profound truth: Once you receive salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, that salvation is kept secure for you through any and all trials, failures, struggles or sin in the future. This is a truth of grace. God's gift of salvation is not based on anything you've done, plan to do, fail to do, or might do. He did not save you because He saw your bright future or great potential. Your worth, or lack of worth, has nothing to do with it. Thus, your actions or worthiness cannot be a factor for losing the gift God gives.

Yes, unfortunately this means God's grace may be abused and taken for granted. It

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

1 Peter 1:3-5

may be unappreciated or received without gratitude. This is the risk in a gift. The greater the gift, the greater the risk. God accepts this risk when He freely gives His grace. The important thing to remember is that this risk is no reason to alter the nature of the gift, how it is given or how it is received. To do this is to steal beauty from grace and glory from God.

Biblical Pictures of Security

God so desires for you to properly enjoy your security in Him that He provided numerous pictures and images of security in His Word. These illustrations and word pictures relate the permanent and unalterable state of your salvation by grace.

- **BIRTH.** In a conversation with a religious leader, Jesus describes salvation from sin as being born again, that is, born of God. Birth is not an act that can be reversed or taken away. See **John 3:3** and **1 Peter 1:3-5**
- **ADOPTION.** Salvation by grace is also likened to adoption in the Scriptures. And while our legal courts may have a process to “disrupt” an adoption, the Bible knows nothing of un-adopting. No biblical language comes close to undoing this gracious act. See **Romans 8:15** and **Ephesians 1:5-6**
- **FAMILY.** Following birth and adoption, the Bible repeatedly refers to believers as a family. Like your given last name reminds you, being part of a family is permanent. Despite the many painful failings in human families, this is a picture of security in the family of God. As a believer, you are a forever daughter, a forever son. See **Romans 8:14-16** and **Hebrews 12:7**
- **THE FATHER’S STRENGTH.** How powerful is your heavenly Father? Is there anyone stronger than God? Jesus and the apostles use the illustration of God’s infinite power to describe the security of your salvation. No one and nothing can snatch you out of His hand. See **John 10:27-29** and **1 Peter 1:5**

- **SEALED.** The Scriptures describe believers as “sealed” in the Holy Spirit. This picture comes from the business world. It is an image of earnest money or a down payment for a great purchase, a pledge. God makes this pledge and always completes what He begins. See ***Ephesians 1:13-14*** and ***1 John 3:24***
- **BAPTIZED.** While this picture may be difficult for those not familiar with the Bible or the Church, it is a powerful truth. Baptism in the time of Jesus was by immersion in water—that is, going all the way under. This immersion is a dual image: first a picture of the washing away of the penalty of sin, and second, a picture of death, burial and resurrection. The image of baptism is one of permanent change and transformation. Even more, all believers are internally and invisibly baptized by the Holy Spirit. See ***Romans 6:3-4*** and ***1 Corinthians 12:13***
- **TRANSFERRED.** At the moment of faith, a person receives eternal life. Jesus says that everyone who believes in Him has “crossed over from death to life.” This crossing over is a permanent transfer from darkness to light, from the kingdom of the devil to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son. See ***John 5:24*** and ***Colossians 1:13-14***
- **BOOK OF LIFE.** Several times the Scriptures reveal an inside look of God’s record keeping. The names of all believers are written in His Book of Life. The only mention of “erasing” a name is mentioned in the negative, “I will not erase their names.” This is another important illustration of the permanence and security of your salvation.

“In [Jesus], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Ephesians 1:13-14

See **Revelation 3:5** and **Revelation 21:27**

Each of these pictures clearly communicates permanence and security. That is their purpose. God wants you to understand the true depth of His grace and how it provides a secure salvation. This freedom and security is where He wants you to live.

Security and Obedience

You may be thinking, “If my salvation is secure, then why wouldn’t I live however I want?” If you have this thought, you’re not the only one. After a magnificent

“The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!”
Romans 5:20-6:2a

explanation of God’s grace in salvation, Paul powerfully states this kind of thinking is completely the opposite of God’s intention for His grace in your life. See **Romans 5:20-6:4**

Being rescued and freed from the very worst that death and the devil can do is not a license to live foolishly. You should not abuse God’s grace. Security can also be abused. But rather than do damage to the truth of grace by threatening to take salvation away or hold it in check until certain hoops are jumped through, God’s Word consistently communicates security.

For a Christian, obedience should never be an effort to earn God’s favor or love. This is contrary to the nature of a gift. Security of salvation by grace is intended as a powerful motivator toward faithfulness, not a free ticket to rebel without consequence. Like a person rescued from a burning building by a firefighter, you should live a new life out of a deep sense of gratitude.

Security and Worship

Since salvation security is designed to overflow into deep gratitude, it should directly

*Psalms of Security
and Hope:*

Psalm 16

Psalm 23

Psalm 27

Psalm 31

Psalm 37

Psalm 46

Psalm 54

Psalm 56

Psalm 57

Psalm 62

Psalm 63

Psalm 91

Psalm 103

Psalm 139

Psalm 143

inform your worship of God. The largest book of the Bible, the book of Psalms, is a collection of worship songs, all of them expressing gratitude to God for His character and goodness. Even in desperation and prayers from great pain, each Psalm worships God in gratitude for who He is and what He has done. A significant theme in the Psalms is security.

What greater gift have you ever been given than eternal life? Forgiveness? Freedom? Redemption? Heaven? Wise people don't receive an amazing and expensive gift and then throw it away, pawn it off, abuse it or forget about it. They enjoy it, use it, profusely thank the Giver and remember the gift every time they see Him.

My friend, if you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you have been saved by grace. You have been rescued. You have been born again and adopted into God's family. You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. You have crossed over from death to life. No greater gift has ever been given to you. Instead of squandering this gift,

forgetting about it, diminishing it or abusing it, let it motivate you to faithfulness and overflow into a lifetime of worship.

Grace is Free

God's grace has much more to say than you might have imagined. The Scriptures clearly reveal salvation by grace and security in that salvation. Once a person is saved, he or she is saved forever. This is true because our security is not based on works of obedience or performance. Security is based on the nature of God's gift of grace. His grace is free and secure. Rather than a life of rebellion without consequence, security of salvation leads His child to a life of obedience born out of gratitude and joy, not out of fear and doubt. This marvelous truth can set you free to experience the fullness of joy God intends for His forever children.

For Discussion

- » Have you ever struggled with fear over losing your salvation? Why? How?
- » How would your life be different if you were completely free from this fear?
- » Read **John 10:27-30**. What does Jesus say about His sheep? About His Father? About life and death?
- » Read **Romans 8:33-35**. What is the opening question in this text? How does Paul answer the question? What does this answer say about your security?
- » Of the biblical pictures of salvation security listed above, which image encouraged you the most? Why? Which image surprised you the most? Why?
- » How would eternal security affect your obedience?
- » How would it affect your worship of God?
- » What is one practical step you can take to follow Jesus in freedom from fear?

4

Grace is Sure

Fear and doubt are plaguing problems in the church today. Like a nasty virus, they refuse to go away. Suspicions and doubt about the reality of one's salvation are especially difficult. Can you know that you are saved? Do you? Is it even possible to know? Confusion about God's grace in salvation is responsible for much of this difficulty. This short chapter will try to shed some light on this problem.

Saved for Sure

God does not want His children to live in fear or doubt. If you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, you are welcomed into a relationship and family that are secure. What is more, you can know for sure you are saved.

But how? How can a Christian enjoy assurance of salvation? Isn't that presumptuous and arrogant? To know you are saved for sure sounds a lot like claiming to know what only God knows. It sounds like you can know the future. Fortunately, God is very interested in sharing this knowledge with us. He is passionate about telling you exactly how you can know you are saved for sure.

The Big Question

When you think about knowing you are saved or discussing it with others, inevitably a point of reference is determined, a stance from which to evaluate and judge. This

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the [satisfactory sacrifice] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” 1 John 2:1-2

is important because we cannot evaluate anything accurately without a point of reference. Typically if a person is doing well in his or her pursuit of Jesus, he or she feels good about the situation and enjoys some measure of safety in salvation. If someone is not doing so well and struggling with sin, doubts and suspicions grow. Questions are posed like, *“Would a saved person act like that?”*

The next step for many is to change the question into a statement. After hearing about the questionable actions of a person who claims to be a Christian, one may say, *“Well, she probably isn’t really a believer.” Or, “He obviously isn’t saved if he acts that way.”*

Now take inventory of your own heart. You are the one committing foolish and sinful acts. You’ve trusted in Jesus but have given into temptation. You’ve gone through a difficult season that has worn down your faith. Your actions are not those of Jesus. What do you think? Are you saved? Were you ever saved? How do you know? What does the reality of your struggle with sin reveal about your salvation? How can you be sure? Does God’s Word offer any help?

God’s Answer

Fortunately God has a steady answer. Since a person is saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus, all works and actions are separated from the transaction. Salvation is a free gift of grace, no strings attached. God rescues you without regard

to your deeds, good or bad. This means your works and attitudes make a terrible point of reference.

The problem in the previous conversations is they bring works into the discussion. And if the actions and works do not line up with our expectations of a follower of Jesus, then doubt and fear enter in. When your actions are good, you rest easier. But that never lasts long. This is not how God wants His children to live. God's grace is the answer.

Assurance is Not Based on Works

Remember, your salvation from sin was not a payment for good works. If you try to gain assurance of your salvation by looking at your works, you will remain in doubt and fear. This is because your obedience and disobedience are like a bad roller coaster, constantly

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

1 John 1:8-10

"But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Titus 3:4-7

up and down, dizzying. Even if you look good from the outside and are not committing any of the "big" sins, you are still racked with pride, greed, sinful passions and selfishness on the inside. Any evaluation of the reality of your salvation that references works of obedience will likely end in doubt.

Thankfully, God never builds assurance of your salvation on works. Why would He? He didn't save you with regard to good works. Why would he un-save you or fail to fully save

you because of your failures and sin? Your Father wants you, His child, to enjoy the freedom and security that accompanies a real knowledge that you are saved for sure.

Assurance of your salvation is not based on your works. This means you can never look at the cleanliness or dirtiness of your hands and determine whether you are saved or not. Nor can you judge another person's salvation solely based on his or her actions. None of the Bible passages on knowing people by their fruits or judging people

"This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life."

1 John 2:25

according to their actions deal with salvation or assurance of salvation. Then, what exactly is assurance based on?

Assurance is Based on God's Promise

God clearly says He will save anyone who trusts in Jesus. This is a promise. Since God promises to save you by grace through faith in Jesus, then it is God's promise that is the basis of your assurance of salvation. You can know because God has promised. The only question left is, will God keep His promise?

In the Old Testament, Abraham's story is filled with ups and downs, fear, insecurities, failures and struggles. But he wrestled through all of this towards increasing faith in God and God's promise. Take a look at Paul's simple statement about Abraham's faith in God. "...Yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (**Romans 4:20-21**). You see, Abraham's stable foundation was not found in his works but in God's promise.

"For as many as are the promises of God, in [Jesus Christ] they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge."

2 Corinthians 1:20-22

To base your assurance solely on works will only lead to doubt and fear. This is why God did not leave it up to you. He made a promise. And when God makes a promise you can be sure He will keep it. From cover to cover, our Bible reveals a promise-making and promise-keeping God. It is part of His nature. He cannot fail to keep a promise just as He cannot lie, or deceive. God is good. What He says, He will do.

Take God at His Word

Have you taken God at His word? Have you trusted Him for salvation? He provided a gracious way through the completed work of Jesus, His Son. He promises to save you fully, completely and eternally, the moment you trust in Jesus for salvation. So the real question does not pertain to your life of obedience, but to whether you have taken God at His promise to save you by your faith in Jesus.

No More Fear

This gorgeous truth of Scripture can set you free from the constant fear and doubt of whether or not you are saved. It is about switching your evaluation from yourself to God. The Gospel message is much more about the goodness, love and grace of God than it is about you. We respond in believing trust, and God provides an overflowing grace.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand..."

Romans 5:1-2

This truth means when doubt and fear return, you have an answer. When the devil throws accusations and threats and causes you to question your salvation, you have a response. When he says, *"You can't really be saved, look at yourself. Look at the dirt on your hands. Look at the black on your heart. You're not good enough."* Then you can truthfully respond by saying, *"You know what, you're right. I'm not good enough. I'll*

never be good enough. I'll never consistently live in perfection. That's why God gave me grace. I believe in Christ Jesus. And God has promised to save me. So I am standing on the promises of God. Now be gone!"

Assurance is a Motivation

So what practical difference does assurance make? A sure salvation should motivate you to a life of obedience, service and gratitude. Assurance should never be a reason to do whatever you want, without concern for consequences.

Once again, inside an extended argument, Paul saw these questions and fears coming because he struggled with them himself. *"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin"* since grace has covered all of our sin? Since grace is always greater than even the worst of our sins? No way! *"May it never be!"* (**Romans 6:1-4**). God has freed us from this fear and doubt so that we might walk in newness of life as Jesus did. God intends the reality of being saved for sure as a powerful motivation to faithfulness and obedience.

Grace is Free

God wants His children to know they are His children. You can know you are saved. This knowledge is grounded in God's promise to save you, not any particular lifestyle you live. It is not arrogant to know you are saved. It is not presumptuous. Walking in good works is a very good thing and can be a sign that you are following Jesus. But good works can be interrupted. Assurance of your salvation should always reference God's promise first. His promise will never fail. Assurance takes God at His Word. The gift of assurance can be a powerful antidote to the virus of doubt and fear. It can set you free to live a life of obedience, gratitude and deep worship.

For Discussion

- » How big of a role does fear play in your relationship with God? In what area is fear most active?
- » Read **1 John 4:15-19**. How is this text relevant to security as discussed in this chapter? What does it say about fear? What does it say about God? About love?
- » Do you know that you are saved? Why? Why not?
- » This chapter suggests that the promise of God is the best biblical basis for your security. Why is this a greater reference point than your actions?
- » Read **2 Corinthians 1:21-22**. What role does the Holy Spirit play in assurance of your salvation?
- » Identify one change you can make in your personal life as a result of this chapter.

5

Grace in Relationships

You live in a world defined by relationships and whether you know it or not, God's grace can powerfully transform the relationships that constantly operate all around you. This is how God designed it. God is relational and interacts with you in grace. He has engineered you to live in grace-based relationships.

God's gift of grace is much more than only a means of rescue from sin. Grace is such a force in the life of a follower of Jesus that it wants to inform all of his or her relationships. Grace unleashes a powerful flow of love, mercy, forgiveness and redemption wherever it is allowed to work. This great ministry of God's grace is, sadly, one of the most overlooked and underdeveloped benefits of God's love. This chapter will help you understand grace in relationships a little better.

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need [of the relationship], so that it will give grace to those who hear." Ephesians 4:29

A Gift to Give

Have you ever seen real grace in a human relationship? Chances are you probably have, but not very often. Most relationships between people are based on earning, fear and power. There are very few free gifts given in relationships, with no strings attached.

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

Colossians 3:12-13

This is why grace can be such a powerful and refreshing tool for relational growth and health.

Most people understand grace simply as something we receive from God. While this is true, reception is far from the end of your grace story. You have the opportunity to treat others the same way. You get to re-gift God’s grace.

God has abundantly poured grace into your life so you can give grace to others. He wants you to do what He does—give the gift of grace to others.

Grace and Humility

The relational adventure of grace begins with a humble look at God’s love. Where were you when God rescued you? Who were you? What had you done? Even if you were the personal secretary to Mother Teresa, God’s grace found you when you were far from Him, having no merit of your own, no claim to perfection, no earning potential.

When you trusted Jesus as your Savior, God chose to pour out an infinite supply of grace into your weakness and emptiness. Thus, your starting position should be one of great humility. What do you have that was not given to you? While everything in life seems to fight this truth, it is

“...He gives a greater grace.

Therefore it says, ‘GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD,

BUT GIVES GRACE TO

THE HUMBLE.’” James 4:6

critical for you to remember all God has done for you. With this posture of humility and gratitude, the gift of grace in relationships can begin.

Grace and Forgiving Others

There is perhaps no greater relational gift grace can provide than forgiveness. Yet so many people misunderstand and misuse forgiveness. It is not simply being sorry or

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
Ephesians 4:32

making amends. Forgiveness is a choice. When someone wounds you in any way, they are in debt to you. They owe you something in a real way. This debt-wound is what leads to anger in all of its ugly faces. Forgiveness is a choice to release someone from this debt. They no longer owe you

because you choose to free them. It is a choice. You can also choose to not discuss the offense again. You can choose to forget. This is forgiveness.

For the follower of Jesus, this is much more than just an act of good will. This is not a choice out of nowhere. You can forgive others only because God has so richly forgiven you in Christ. This choice grows out of the gift of God’s grace.

Who has been wounded more than God? Because of what Jesus perfectly accomplished on the cross, through your faith in Jesus, God has forgiven you every debt you owe Him. And you owe God more than you could pay in a thousand lifetimes. But by grace He forgave you. Since you have been forgiven so much, forgiving others should be a choice you make as often as possible.

Grace and Your Forgiveness

What about when you do the wounding? When you are the offender? For many, accepting God’s forgiveness for their sin can be just as difficult as forgiving

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

James 5:16

Jesus said, "If you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

Matthew 5:23-24

someone else. God's grace covers all of your sins—past, present and even future. As a believer in Jesus, you don't need to fear.

When you sin against someone else, and everyone does, even Christians, you should ask for forgiveness. First, confess to God and ask Him for forgiveness. You do this not because you lost your salvation when you sinned, but because confession of sins keeps your fellowship with God clear, clean and close. Next, you should ask for forgiveness from whomever you hurt. Simply ask, "Will you please forgive me for hurting you?" Just

ask. The response is up to them. Asking for forgiveness will show humility because you are admitting you did wrong. You are confessing. If they understand God's grace as a gift to give, they will forgive you also.

Grace and Love

Grace also allows us to love others as God loves, without regard for worthiness, actions or attitude. This is the product of forgiveness. When relationships are free from debt-wounds and the distance and anger they cause, great room for love is opened. We love because God first loved us. This is grace. God loved us while we were His enemies. This is why Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, because it is what He did. We, therefore, should not only love those who love us, those who are nice and those who don't step out of bounds. We should love even unlovable and difficult people. This is grace reflected and moved forward into love.

Grace and Generosity

Great relationships enjoy a heaping measure of generosity. This kind of generosity

is not looking for a favor, control or a tax break. You can freely give because of the great grace given to you in Christ. Born out of humility and the freedom forgiveness provides, followers of Jesus can be generous givers of their time, love, resources, assistance and simple presence. Relationships are built strong on generosity freely given.

Grace and Service

Your greatest friendships are also strengthened by the help and service you give, no strings attached. Just as grace is free of charge, grace allows you to serve others without expectation of payment or repayment. You can serve a stranger and know that your Father sees your gifts given in secret. You can serve your closest friend, your church family, your neighbor and even your enemy in the power that God's grace provides. Jesus Christ, your Savior, came not to be served but to serve.

Grace and Freedom

All these gifts of grace allow you to live freely with others, enjoying even imperfect

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

and difficult relationships. There is no more give and take, no more score keeping. With the freedom grace provides, your friendships can recover from the wounds of sin. You can move toward others in love fueled by grace. You can trust in your Father's unfailing love and abundant grace for all of the relational difficulties you will encounter. Your

relationships can be set free by the power of grace.

Growing in Grace

But all this is not as simple as just understanding. It takes time and hard-fought practice in real relationships. The Apostle Peter encouraged a struggling group of churches to grow in grace. How did they do that? How do you do that now? Since

God's grace is always more abundant than your need, your sin, your failures or your problems, it makes sense that you can learn to live in grace more and more.

This adventure is rooted in nearness to Jesus and submission to His desires for your life and relationships. This is walking by God's Spirit. It is the opposite of

"... But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

2 Peter 3:18

walking according to your natural human desires. Patient, humble, grateful nearness to Jesus is the only way to grow in grace. It is the product of faithfulness and obedience over time. It is an adventure that will shape your relationships into strong, stable, life-giving reservoirs of love and joy.

Grace is Free

You were created by God to live in relationship. Because of sin, this can be terribly hard and painful. Along with the Spirit of God living in you and God's Word to guide you, God has unleashed His powerful grace to speak into your relationships. You can experience the freedom of God's forgiveness and re-gift that forgiveness to others who have hurt you. You can give, love and serve others from the freedom that grace provides. All of this is possible because God has fully met your needs. His love is the answer. This love is perfectly pictured in the sacrifice of His Son Jesus, which

provides for you an infinite supply of grace.

For Discussion

- » How would you rate the overall health of your relationships? Why?
- » What is the most difficult relationship that you are currently engaged in? Why is it challenging?
- » Read **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**. Usually reserved for wedding ceremonies, what is the most challenging relational truth in this chapter for you? Why?
- » Where do you see grace in the human relationships of Jesus' earthly ministry years? Can you recall a story from the Gospels?
- » Who do you need to forgive? Make a list. Pray through this list often. Choose to forgive. Move toward these people in service.
- » Would people describe you as relationally generous? Why? Why not?
- » How would your church family benefit from more grace given in relationships? Try to identify as many ways as possible.

6

Grace and Shame

Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, grace is the way God interacts with us. Together we have begun to see the beauty and impact of grace in the way we see God, salvation, assurance, security and relationships with others. But grace has much more to say. God's grace offers a radically new way of viewing yourself, your identity, your failures, your successes and the image that you project and protect. If you are interested in living more freely and joyfully, grace is the way. This chapter will help you explore how God's grace can set you free from the tricks and traps of shame.

Shame's Beginning

The very first act of human rebellion is recorded in the first book of our Bible. Genesis relates how God created a perfectly good world, filled it with good things and gave it all to the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, to rule in perfection. But instead of trusting God and enjoying His presence, they were deceived by Satan and revolted against God's design and command. The very fabric of existence was shaken by this simple and catastrophic act. That is why we call it "the Fall."

Immediately after their act of defiance, Adam and Eve dramatically changed. They were suddenly aware of their nakedness and felt great shame. Before this they “were not ashamed” (**Genesis 2:25**). This shame led them to cover themselves with leaves. When God came down to meet and walk with them, Adam and Eve hid themselves in fear. Think about that. They were afraid of God. This is what sin does. It brings fear and shame.

Shame Defined

While there are many definitions and examples of shame in our culture, it may be best to see shame as *the painful, personal effect of misplaced trust*.

Shame is really a trust issue. People feel shame when they put their hope or trust in something false. The Bible often speaks of shame as the reality a person crashes into when their object of trust is found to be untrustworthy or false. This is what happened to Adam and Eve when they discovered that Satan lied to them about God.

*“Let me not be put to shame,
O Lord, for I call upon You; Let
the wicked be put to shame...”*

Psalm 31:17

“Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” **Genesis 3:8-10**

The opposite is true when you place your trust in God. You live life unashamed because God is true, trustworthy, unchanging, stable. In what are you placing your trust? Are you trusting in your appearance? Your performance? Your intelligence? Your personality? Your money? Your

business plan? While none of these things are inherently bad, they will all ultimately prove untrustworthy. When these things fail you, you will likely crash into some kind

of shame. Shame is not exactly the same as guilt, which is negative emotion about something you do. Shame is about who you are. While you may feel guilty that you broke a glass vase, shame makes you feel like *you* are broken. *You are* the mistake.

God's Answer

The Genesis account of Adam and Eve does not end with their punishment. Nope. It

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Ephesians 1:3-6

actually ends with an unexpected twist of grace.

The text says, rather tersely, *"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them"* (**Genesis 3:21**). What they deserved for their rebellion was death. But instead, in a free gift of grace, God gave them expensive clothes to cover over their nakedness and shame. These clothes were expensive because they cost an innocent animal its life. After all, that's where you get garments of skin.

This passing verse in **Genesis 3** directs your attention thousands of years into the future when Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, willingly sacrificed His life to perfectly cover your sin and shame. You didn't deserve this. You didn't earn this. This is a free gift of God's grace.

Grace and Identity

Shame speaks only lies. Shame is born from false hope and protects itself by breeding falsehood in your heart. While shame wants to redefine who you are in negative and painful ways, God longs for you to remember who He says you are by grace. If you have trusted in Jesus as Savior, then God calls you

daughter or son. He calls you friend. Redeemed. Forgiven. He calls you *His*.

You are not who you think you are. You are not who you say you are. You are not who other people believe you to be. And you are not who shame says you are. You are who your Creator says you are. Your heart and words must catch up to His heart. As Creator, and even more so as Savior and Redeemer, only your heavenly Father gets to declare your identity, your worth, your purpose. All of this is a powerfully secure gift of grace.

Grace and Weakness

It is often personal failure, inconsistency, weakness, and the inability to overcome sin that lead to shame in your life. As he did in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, Satan wants nothing more than to deceive you, frustrate you, separate you from God and from the truth. He is a compulsive liar. And here's a surprising truth he desperately wants you to avoid: your areas of weakness are powerful receptacles for God's grace. We can see a small glimpse of this powerful truth in a painful passage from the Apostle Paul.

"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I [Paul] am foremost of all."

1 Timothy 1:15

"Because of the surpassing greatness of [Divine] revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10.)

Did you catch that? God said to Paul that his weaknesses were areas where His

power could be perfected. Paul was so dramatically changed that he actually began to boast in his weaknesses. God's grace works differently than the world's system. Grace turns human weakness into Divine strength. We are not sure what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was precisely, but it was clearly a tool that God used to show Paul that his brokenness and desperation were spaces used to perfect His power and grace. In Paul's weak brokenness God made him strong. God's grace can do the same for you.

Grace and Confession

There is one thing Paul did that Adam and Eve did not do: *confess*. While Paul found that God's sufficient grace met his weakness and pain, Adam and Eve chose to hide in shame. This is why God asked, "*Where are you, Adam?*" It's not because God couldn't find him. Think about that. God knows everything. You will never win a game of hide-and-seek with God. No, God asked Adam that question as an invitation to confession. Confessing means to say the same thing as God does about your actions. This includes your sinful actions. Confessing your failures sets you free from the power of sin and can heal some of the relational consequences of sin. But confession can also be positive.

"...Let us draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for [God] who promised is faithful." Hebrews 10:22-23

You can also say the same thing that God says about your identity, your worth, your place in His family, your righteousness in Christ. This is confession too, and grace will always meet you there.

Grace and Vulnerability

Shame not only wants to keep you imprisoned, it also wants to keep you isolated, fearful and self-

protective. Vulnerability is the way out. Think about it, how often has the painful feeling of shame kept you from a new relationship? Kept you from speaking up? From asking a question? From taking a leap? Shame wants to keep you from things, but the power of shame is taken away when you speak the truth with honesty and vulnerability.

Tell God what you are feeling. Tell a friend what you are scared of. Tell Jesus how you are struggling to remember your identity in Him. Don't pretend to be strong. Put down the mask. God's power will never be perfected in a fake display of strength and confidence. While the fear and power of shame may entice you to hide like Adam and Eve, God's grace offers a very different option. The path to God's perfect power always passes through humility and vulnerability. When your pride and sense of protection desperately wants to hold its ground, vulnerability sees the freedom and grace in admitting your need. Being able to share struggles, sin and temptations is a direct attack on the stronghold of image protection and projection. Shames hides out here.

Grace and Repentance

There is yet another active way to counter shame. Now here's a big church word for you: *repentance*. Far from just sadness or regret, biblical repentance is a change of mind and action based on a deep conviction of the heart. Repentance is active. While shame wants to keep you stuck in a rut, repentance is what gets you moving again. Repentance reignites a desire to trust God more and more.

Just as grace is in no way opposed to effort, obedience or intentional spiritual growth, neither is grace opposed to repentance. It is God's kindness and grace that led you to repentance (**Romans 2:4**). Repentance is a way of life. It is the regular attitude and consistent practice of the follower of Jesus Christ.

Grace is Free

Putting together all that we have seen in this study, like diverse paint colors in an artistic

"I [Paul] thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus."

1 Timothy 1:12-14

masterpiece, we are beginning to see how God's grace truly is the greatest gift ever offered. It cannot be earned and it rebels against the idea of earning. Free gifts are not earned. Grace is not opposed to effort or obedience. Far from it, in truth. God's gift of grace is a powerful motivator to holiness. Yet we are forever secure in God's love and grace despite our struggles and failures. Just as we did nothing to earn it, we can do nothing to lose it. Jesus accomplished all that was necessary to save us and the Father promises to keep us in His grace once we put our trust in His Son. And we can know this for sure, living from a place of assurance. Finally, grace radically changes our relationships with others and the way we see ourselves. It frees us and changes our identity.

Growing in God's grace is the adventure of a lifetime.

All of these things combined can produce new depth, greater wholeness and next-level freedom in your life. It is the road map to truly becoming. It is on this gracious and God-centered road that you will discover who you truly are in Jesus. No matter what you face in this life, God's grace is always there. God's grace is bigger. God's grace is stronger. God's grace is always more abundant.

For Discussion

- » What do you think about the definition of shame shared in this chapter?
- » When have you had feelings of shame in your life? Share a brief story.
- » Share with your group at least 7 things that are true about your identity in Jesus Christ.
- » Why are confession and repentance so hard in real life? Where and how have you struggled with these practices?
- » Read **Philippians 3:18-19**. What does this passage say about shame and how it comes upon a person?
- » What action or attitude in this chapter has you most excited about fighting against shame in your life?
- » Read **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**. How do Paul's words help you understand the deep changes that God's grace makes in your life?
- » For you, what has been the most transformative part of this entire study? Why?

DISCOVER MORE

I sincerely hope this study has been a tremendous blessing to you, and that it is just the beginning of a lifelong adventure in God's amazing grace. For more on the **FAITHPATH** you can visit thefaithpath.org. Here, the map you saw at the beginning of this book will come to life with short videos, biblical texts and more. We also have several other **FAITHPATH** resources like this one available online at faithbibleonline.org.

This resource was written primarily for the family of a local church called Faith Bible Church, in The Woodlands, Texas. We are a family called to build generations of Jesus followers who take grace to our world. We gather every Sunday morning and many other times throughout the week and would love for you to join us in person, engage with us through social media or stream one of our services live through our mobile app or website.



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Notes



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