



# Free

*by the Grace of God*

*Devotionals: Book 1*



# Grace as God's Unmerited Gift

Patty Hardaway

## Read Ephesians 2:8-9

*“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.”*

A company once had difficulty selling an instant cake mix that required only water to prepare. Despite the convenience, consumers were hesitant to purchase it due to its simplicity. To address this, the company revised the instructions to include adding both water and an egg, which significantly boosted sales. This suggests that consumers preferred a product that necessitated slightly more effort. Similarly, individuals may sometimes perceive simple solutions, such as God's plan for spiritual salvation, as being overly straightforward and too simple and easy. They feel that additional actions must be required to truly be saved.

In this passage, Paul clearly explains the concept of salvation, stating that it is obtained through faith in Jesus. He emphasizes that salvation is a gift from God, not earned by individual effort. According to Paul, humans are deserving of punishment due to the events described in Genesis 3, but God offers salvation as a free gift. No effort on our part, such as good works, can make us worthy of this gift. Yet some people still want to add that egg, as if they can somehow save themselves. That is impossible—only faith in Jesus can save us, so we cannot boast about it as if we have done something to earn this gift.



It's important to recognize that justification (being declared righteous before God) happens instantaneously at the moment of belief and is permanently secured. This is distinct from the process of sanctification, which occurs throughout our Christian life as we grow in our relationship with Christ. While justification is secured by faith alone, sanctification involves our response to God's grace through obedience and discipleship.

So, how do we apply this? While good works cannot save us or even definitely prove our salvation, they are valuable opportunities to honor God and grow as disciples. God desires our obedience not as a requirement for salvation but as a response to His grace. As believers, we have the privilege of choosing to follow Christ in discipleship, which brings rewards both in this life and in eternity. We should be the light in this world that makes unbelievers wonder what we have and desire it for themselves—not because our works prove our salvation, but because they reflect the beauty of a life transformed by grace.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Have you believed and received the truth? If not, acknowledge your helpless condition and receive God's grace.
- If you have already been transformed by the gospel truth, are you rejoicing that God has enabled you to know the truth, and the truth has made you free?



# Grace That Overcomes Our Failures

Miles Freeman

## Read Romans 5:20

*“The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”*

This verse presents us with striking contrasts that demand our attention: sin versus grace and death versus life. Paul uses powerful phrases like “the Law came in,” “transgression would increase,” “sin increased,” and “grace abounded all the more.” These aren’t casual words—they carry eternal weight.

To understand verse 20, it helped me to look back at verse 19—one of Scripture’s cornerstone passages on justification. Justification means being declared righteous by God, and at Faith Bible Church we believe that this happens at a specific moment in time when someone believes in Jesus. Here’s what that belief encompasses: Jesus, the perfect Son of God, lived a life of complete obedience to the Father, then died an undeserved death to pay the price we deserved for our sin.

Why was the Law given to Israel? Not to decrease sin, but to provide a standard that would expose humanity’s rebellion. The Law acted like a spotlight, revealing just how far short we fall of God’s perfection. Rather than making people better, it made their need for a Savior undeniably clear. But here’s the beautiful truth: “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” This is Jesus winning decisively. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, He gives us



undeserved favor—grace. His perfect life and sacrificial death give us life.

When we say “I have new life in Christ,” we’re speaking of a profound reality with three dimensions:

- 1) Justification, or being declared righteous at the moment of belief.
- 2) Sanctification is our daily journey with Jesus through the Holy Spirit’s power. We’re being refined day by day to become more like Jesus.
- 3) Glorification is our final state—living forever in Jesus’ continual presence in heaven.

Take time today to purposefully dwell on grace—the undeserved favor Jesus provides. The power of His grace should amaze us continually. Because of this grace and its effects on our lives, we can walk differently today.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- How does understanding the Law’s purpose change your view of God’s standards?
- In what ways have you experienced the “abounding” nature of God’s grace in your own life?
- How does understanding the three dimensions of salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—help you further appreciate God’s grace? If you have questions about these, please reach out to a pastor or elder, as we would love to help.





# Finding Strength in Grace During Weakness

Mark Mayfield

## 2 Corinthians 12:9

*“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.”*

What if the thing you’re praying to be removed is actually the doorway to God’s power in your life? That struggle you hate, the thorn that won’t go away, might be the very place God wants to show up and take over. In a world that teaches us to avoid pain, appear strong, and hide weakness, Paul gives us the opposite: embrace the weakness. Why? Because that’s where Jesus moves. This isn’t some tired slogan about “growing through what you go through.” This is Christ saying, “I will be enough for you, and I will be strong when you can’t be.”

Paul writes 2 Corinthians to defend his apostleship against critics who questioned his authority and mocked his suffering. In chapter 12, he recalls a “thorn in the flesh,” a persistent affliction that brought him to his knees. He pleads three times for God to take it away. Instead, he hears Christ say, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Paul’s response is not one of resentment, but worship. He stops asking for the thorn to be removed and starts boasting in his weakness. Why? Because now he sees the deeper purpose: God’s power isn’t just seen in strength; it shines in weakness. The context reveals Paul’s vulnerability, but also the gospel pattern: weakness leads to dependence, and dependence invites divine power.



The encouragement is blunt and beautiful: God's grace isn't a backup plan, it is the plan. His power doesn't kick in once you've pulled yourself together. It meets you in your weakness and does what you cannot. Christ is not just aware of your struggle; He is present in it, working through it. When you hit the end of your strength, you haven't failed, you've finally opened space for His strength to begin.

This passage invites us to stop hiding or resenting our weakness. Instead, we name it, bring it to Jesus, and let His grace speak louder than our suffering. Living in this means accepting that weakness is not a spiritual failure. It's the ground where Christ builds His strength. It means we stop faking invincibility and start depending deeply. We surrender the need to be impressive so others can see Christ in us.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- What weakness in your life are you asking God to remove, but He's asking you to trust Him with instead?
- How might your vulnerability become a platform for God's strength rather than a source of shame?
- Are you depending more on your own ability or on Christ's sufficiency today? Let His grace be more than a doctrine; let it be your lifeline.



# How Grace Teaches and Transforms

Jeff Persyn

## Read Titus 2:11-12

*“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.”*

“Grace! What is it good for?” — Depending on how you read that line, you might shout “absolutely nothin’!” Or if you know your Bible, you might say, “It’s the offer of salvation.” While that last statement is true, what if grace is good for so much more?

Some people might ask, “If grace is absolutely free, doesn’t that give Christians a license to sin?” Or, “If we’ve already been given salvation and eternal life, what motivates us to live rightly?” Does the power of grace cease after we are saved? In other words, does grace only get us in the door (justification), or does it also empower us to grow (sanctification)?

In his letter to Titus, Paul is mentoring a young leader in how to shepherd a new church in Crete. Much of the letter includes moral instruction and character qualifications for leaders. But in the middle of it all, we find one of the clearest pictures of the power of grace (Titus 2:11–12). Paul speaks of the appearance of God’s grace—not just as an abstract idea, but as a person named Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for “appeared” is *epephane*, the root of our word “epiphany”. This paints a picture of grace breaking





through people's ignorance and spiritually dead state. Humanity could never have formed an adequate concept of God's grace apart from its personal manifestation in Christ and His atonement. And what does the grace of God do besides bring salvation? Verse 12 instructs us to "deny ungodliness and worldly desires" and moves us to "live[ing] sensibly, righteously, and godly". Wow! God's grace is effectual for both salvation AND sanctification. God's grace has us covered. It is sufficient for everything! (See 2 Corinthians 9:8 and Romans 6:14).

So does God's absolute free grace provide license to sin? Does it encourage ungodliness? This may come as a surprise, but I can't say I know one person who has experienced a true epiphany of God's absolutely free grace and used it as an excuse for ungodliness. Maybe they're out there, but I think they're a myth. God's grace is not a loophole — it's a launchpad! It ignites love and thankfulness, and moves us toward "living sensibly, righteously, and godly". I encourage you to reflect deeply on the grace of God and see if it doesn't light a fire inside of you!

Let me ask again: grace, what is good for? Absolutely everything. Say it again.

## Reflection Questions:

- Has reflecting on God's grace ever given you an overwhelming sense of love and thankfulness for Him?
- What do you think your life would look like if you were in a continuous state of gratitude for His grace gift toward you?



# Accessing Grace Through Prayer

Greg Cryer

## Read Hebrews 4:14-16

*“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

The high priest awakens and starts with a bath. After scrubbing intently, he walks past his typical skillfully woven garments towards a new set of holy linens. As he puts on the white linens, he begins to feel the weight, responsibility, fear, and humility of this day. He mentally rehearses the detailed steps required of him, including the blood sacrifices. In a few short hours, he will approach the mercy seat knowing one mistake could mean his death.

This is the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), when he will make atonement for his own sins and the sins of the people. The book of Hebrews is written to a Jewish audience intimately familiar with reliance on a human high priest as their intercessor according to the law in Leviticus 16. In this passage, Jesus is called our great high priest.

Like human priests, He made a sacrifice to atone for our sin, but His sacrifice was dramatically different. He is the Son of God. Unlike other high priests, He was tempted in all things but did not sin. He did not have to atone for Himself.



Instead, He gave Himself up as the perfect sacrifice — once and for all — providing us confident access to the throne of grace.

By accepting the free gift of God's grace, we have permanent access to the Father through Jesus. Because Jesus suffered and was tempted as a human, He understands where we are in our time of need. He invites us to come to Him. He receives us in His mercy, which means we will not get the penalty we deserve (Romans 6:23) and showers us with undeserved favor in His grace.

This is astounding! The God of the universe wants us to come to Him night and day! God lavishes us with His grace. He loves and wants to spend time with us. He wants us to come to Him — no matter what. These truths should change how we pray. He is not waiting to punish or shame us. He understands where we are. He is not asking us to clean up first. He is simply asking us to come in confidence knowing He will meet us with mercy and grace in our time of need.

Is there a sin struggle keeping you from talking to God? Confess it in prayer. Forgiveness is free for the asking. He wants to hear from you.

## Reflection Questions:

- Are you suffering and feel no one truly understands? Talk to Him. He understands like no one else.
- Do you approach God with timidity or penance working to earn the right to be in His presence? Come confidently in prayer. You are His child. You are valuable.
- Do not let anything stop you from starting a conversation with God right now.



# Humility as the Pathway to Grace

Dustin Ellis

## Read James 4:6

*“But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.’”*

I've been thinking a lot lately about how grace works—not just the kind of grace that saves us, but the kind that helps us keep going when we're worn out, burdened, or trying to get it right and still falling short. There's a part of me that thinks, “God must be tired of me by now.” But then James 4:6 reminds me that God gives more grace. Not less. Not just enough. More. And He gives it not to the strong or the perfect or the put-together—but to the humble. To the ones who show up empty-handed and say, “Lord, I need You.”

The letter of James feels like a conversation with someone who knows the messiness of life. In chapter 4, he's talking to believers who are letting their selfishness and pride push them into arguments and spiritual drift. It's as if James is saying, “You're chasing the wrong things—and it's costing you.” But right in the middle of that tough conversation comes this beautiful reminder: “But He gives a greater grace.” The grace that James is talking about here is for living—the help we need in the middle of the struggle. And this is not at all about earning God's favor—it's about depending on Him. This verse becomes a turning point, a doorway from pride and striving into surrender and help.

God is not asking you to have it all together. He's asking you to come to Him. Humbly. Honestly. Willing to admit you



can't do it alone. That's where His grace meets us. I wonder if James had people in mind who felt like failures—who had let pride or self-focus get the best of them. And instead of giving them shame, he gave them hope: "He gives a greater grace." Grace that keeps flowing even when we've messed up. Grace that invites us back. Grace that says, "Let's start with what you have." Grace does not run out when you stumble—it increases because God doesn't run out of grace. It is ready and real for those that need it.

This week, let's choose humility—not as a posture of weakness, but of strength through surrender. You don't have to pretend you're more than you are. Bring your honest, imperfect self to Jesus. Ask Him to work with what you've got. Humility is the invitation for God to move—not because you've earned it, but because He loves to give grace. So when you feel like you're not enough, remember you're not. But He is. And He gives more grace. Open your hands, open your heart, and let Him do what only He can do with your loaves and fish.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Where are you still trying to be "enough" without depending on God's grace?
- What would it look like to humbly bring what you have to Jesus this week?
- Do you believe God's grace is still available—even when you feel like you've failed?



# Grace That Stores and Strengthens

Mike Arnold

## 1 Peter 5:10

*"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."*

As Jesus followers, we don't talk a lot about suffering. Some suffering we experience may come from financial hardship, broken relationships, or illness.

When I think of suffering, I think mostly of my sister, Barb. She was my older sister and always had my back growing up. She grew into an active and passionate woman who loved her husband, daughters, grandsons, and the rest of our large family. In her early 50's, she experienced a stroke which made her violently nauseous every day for seven years. When she couldn't handle the constant sickness any longer, she took her own life in 2019. I miss my sister dearly and can't wait to see her again, fully healed.

In this country, we are blessed to experience little suffering from persecution for following Jesus. However, there are many brothers and sisters suffering persecution for their faith in Christ around the world. There are currently 380 million persecuted Christians, with 4,744 imprisoned and 4,476 murdered for their faith in Christ just last year. These men and women are enduring suffering for their faith that most in the West cannot imagine.

Whether our suffering is a result of persecution for our





faith, a prolonged illness, or even a result of our own bad decisions, God's grace is sufficient.

In John 16:33, Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." If we live long enough, eventually we will all experience suffering. But those who put their trust in Jesus also experience His grace and peace that surpasses all understanding, even in the suffering.

1 Peter 5:10 reminds us of God's Sovereignty. He uses suffering, trials, and tribulation to conform us to the likeness of His Son. And after we have suffered for a little while, Christ Himself will (as Tom Constable clarifies) "perfect" us (make us complete). He will also "confirm" us as His own, "strengthen" us for service, and "establish" us in His will. God uses our suffering to grow our faith.

I love what Paul says about all the suffering he endured for the sake of Christ in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." By God's grace, we too can focus on the future glory that awaits us in eternity as we endure the temporary suffering in this life.

## Reflection Questions:

- Have you ever experienced the grace and peace of God that surpasses all understanding in the midst of suffering?
- Looking back, can you see how God may have used suffering to grow your faith and trust in Him?



# Grace That Builds Our Spiritual Legacy

Jamey Bryant

## Read Acts 20:32

*“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*

For those of us with kids, there comes a defining moment—that sacred milestone when we launch them into the next chapter of life. For many, it’s the day we drop them off at college. If you’ve been there, you know the feeling: pride in who they’ve become mixed with the quiet hope that you’ve prepared them well enough to succeed—or at least survive! You pray that the legacy you’ve passed down—your values, faith, and love—will take root. Thankfully, they’re just a phone call away, and you know they’ll be back soon to visit.

In Acts 20, the Apostle Paul experiences a farewell of a deeper kind, one marked by finality. He’s saying goodbye to the Ephesian church, a community he loves deeply and has faithfully served for three years. He had taught, prayed, and walked with them, declaring the whole purpose of God (v. 20, 27). His love is evident not only in his tears (v. 19, 31), but in theirs (v. 37–38). And it’s all the more heart-wrenching because Paul knows this is the last time they’ll ever see each other (v. 25).

What do you say in a moment like that, when there will be no more visits, no more phone calls? The clock has run out on teaching them what they need to know. What final words would you leave behind to ensure the legacy you’ve built will endure?



Here's what Paul says: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (v. 32).

This is legacy language. Paul doesn't leave them with a checklist or a leadership manual. He points them back to grace! From the day he arrived in Ephesus, grace was his message. And for three years, he continued to instruct them in the grace of God, helping their faith take root and grow deeper. The grace of God is not just what saved them, it's what would sustain them and build them into the kind of people who would carry the message forward to others.

God's grace is the only foundation for a lasting spiritual legacy. Not effort, not performance, not polished programs—just grace. It's the message that builds, strengthens, and ultimately secures an eternal inheritance. Paul knew that if anything lasting was going to remain, if the seeds he planted were going to bear fruit long after he was gone, it would be because of grace.

It began with grace. And it would continue with grace. That's the kind of legacy worth leaving behind.

## Reflection Questions:

- Are you relying on God's grace to build a lasting spiritual legacy, or are you slipping into a mindset of performance and striving?
- If today were your final goodbye, what message would you want to leave with those you've poured into?



# Grace as the Great Equalizer

Donnie Carpenter

## Read Romans 3:23-24

*“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.”*

Have you ever flown Southwest and seen someone famous on the plane? Once, flying from Lubbock to Dallas, I saw this guy with neck tattoos, hat pulled way down. The friend I was with nudged me, and said quietly, “Vanilla Ice”, nodding at the tall lanky man trying to hide in his window seat. Times have changed, but back then, everyone on a Southwest flight was an equal. Maybe you boarded a little earlier or later, but that was based on when you got to the airport, not on how much you spent or on having a special status with the airline.

What does that have to do with Romans? We all, every human who has ever lived or will ever live, start in the same condition with relation to God. We have all sinned. We all deserve eternity separated from our Creator. Yes, that's a common refrain, but what does that mean for me personally?

I am no better, or worse, than anyone who has ever lived. When I come down hard on myself for failing, yet again, to live up to God's perfect standards, I'm in some pretty good company. At the same time, I am not—no matter how much I would like to believe that I am—any better than the unrepentant sinner. I have done nothing to save myself and can do nothing to save myself.



So there's this middle path that we need to find and stay on. I should not listen to the self-doubt that tells me I don't deserve God's grace. Of course I don't deserve His grace; no one does. And that's what makes the gift so much sweeter! At the same time, I cannot look down on anyone who hasn't accepted the gift yet. After all, as the Puritan John Bradford remarked when watching a prisoner headed for the gallows, "There, but by the grace of God, go I." In other words, without God's grace, each of us is marked for death.

By threading this needle, I can better follow through on the second part of the Great Commandment—to love my neighbor. It is neither my role to judge myself, nor to judge my neighbor. Instead, I need to recognize the wonderful gift that I've received and see the freedom that grace gives me. And perhaps, most difficult of all, I need to approach those of the world with the same love God showed me.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Where are you being too hard on yourself?
- How does God's forgiveness and grace impact how you see yourself at your worst?
- Where are you being too hard on others?
- Spend some time in prayer, asking God how you can live out the Great Commandment and show God's love to the lost.



# The Abundant Overflow of God's Grace

Chase Lindsay

## Read John 1:16

*"For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace."*

Have you ever been to Costco when they are restocking the toilet paper? It's incredible to see the amount of goods that are moved and stacked upon each other only to get replaced a few days later. The stacks seem never-ending, and my kids love playing in them like a giant fort. As I'm trying to calculate and comprehend the ridiculous amount of goods moved in and out of this warehouse, it hits me. Costco restocking is but a speck compared to the abundant overflow of God's grace for me, and I get the opportunity to teach my kids to embrace and live in God's grace in the same way they enjoy and play in the Costco fort.

John opens with sharing the good news of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us. Christ was present at the beginning of creation and became flesh to walk in His creation. John then describes the gift of grace given to us through Christ, and in case the reader doesn't understand how much grace that means, or if it ever runs out, he reiterates "grace upon grace". The God of the universe does not run out of grace.

Every day, I need and ask for God's grace. Surely, the stacks of grace should be diminishing, yet the towers of grace never change. The warehouse of God's grace is never-ending, and that is a calculation I will never fully





comprehend. Through acceptance of Jesus as my Savior, I pursue fellowship with Him through prayer, scripture, Christian community, and service, striving to be more like Christ. I don't want to waste the grace He has given me because of its abundance; rather, I want to share the hope we have so that others may experience God's grace and the freedom that comes from following Him.

Now we get to the payment of grace. I'm not able to leave Costco until I swipe my credit card and pay. Often, I feel as if I'm using God's grace like a credit card with no limit. I know there's nothing I can do to repay the debt owed for the grace received, but I know I should heed the words of Paul when he answers the question of whether we should keep on sinning so that grace may abound. Paul says absolutely not. Fortunately, when we do sin, we know that Christ has stepped in on our behalf to pay this debt, and that warehouse of grace and hope is open and free for all.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Do you fully believe in the fullness of Christ, that He became flesh to pay for your debt of sin, so that you may receive grace if you believe in Him?
- In what areas of your life are you relying on grace upon grace?
- How can we share the hope we have in Christ with those around us who also need grace?



# Grace as the Foundation of Our Calling

John Dillon

## Read 2 Timothy 1:9

*“Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”*

Have you ever experienced a setback? You set out with ambition to accomplish something, but things just didn't go to plan. How did that make you feel? On more than one occasion I've set my alarm, hopped out of bed with aspirations of getting to the office early, only to end up standing at the door realizing I left my access badge at home. While the dejection of that moment is real, it mostly fades after a few minutes.

However, not all setbacks are as easily forgotten. Maybe you felt called by God to a job only to find yourself out of work. Perhaps you were called to be a stay-at-home parent, but circumstances now threaten that possibility. Potentially more perplexing, you felt called to a ministry or witnessing opportunity that doesn't seem to be producing any fruit, or worse, has actually resulted in some personal loss.

That's where Paul and Timothy find themselves in this letter. Called as leaders in the early church, they have dedicated their lives to sharing the Gospel. Where has that gotten them? Paul is alone in chains, awaiting execution. It would be easy for Timothy to see this setback as a valid reason to give up and hide.



Paul's message to Timothy: It is not about what YOU are doing; it's about what God is doing through you for His purpose. The God who saved us has a higher holy calling for us beyond our circumstances. The fact that we are invited to participate in His work is an amazing grace! What's more, because of His grace, we can have confidence that His work through us will not be thwarted. If Paul's execution did not stop what God was doing through him to the gentiles, then why do we think of our misfortunes as setbacks?

Church family, God has graciously invited us to the most prestigious calling anyone can have: to partner with Him to impact eternity. So if the job I feel God has called me to is not progressing how I thought, I can continue moving forward, having confidence that God's purpose through me will not be thwarted. If my home circumstances are not what I envisioned, I can have confidence that God's purpose will not be thwarted. Most importantly, if my proclaiming the Gospel, somehow negatively impacts me, I can have the utmost confidence that not only will God's purpose not be thwarted, but that I will be rewarded one day when I see Jesus face to face, hearing the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

## Reflection Questions:

- Have you ever seen a perceived setback lead to an eternally impactful moment?
- How might God be working through your current circumstances to impact eternity?



# Graces That Liberates From Sin's Power

Heather Bryant

## Read Romans 6:11

*"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."*

You have no memory of life before the dungeon. All you've known is an existence shackled to a filthy cell wall in a chilly, squalid dungeon... painful, miserable, trapped. You've heard fantastic tales of the outside world — of clean, fresh air; skin warmed by the radiant glow of the spring sun; vivid colors unlike anything you've ever seen; the unbelievable idea that your legs had the capacity to walk and even run! These legends seem too good to be genuine. They must be lies. And then one day, this man appears in your prison cell, and your chains and the cell door dissolve into thin air! He points to where the cell door once stood, speaks one word, "Freedom", then vanishes.

Days go by, months, years, and you haven't left your cell. Why? You just don't feel like you're really free. You still feel like a prisoner.

Sounds ludicrous that anyone would choose to stay in a dungeon when freedom was a step away, right? But this is often what we do as Christians. We rely on our feelings instead of the truth of God's immovable Word.

In Romans 6, we see some significant repetition — our past history with Christ, our current reality, and the purpose behind His actions. We were buried with Him, so that we



could WALK in newness of life (v. 4). We were crucified with Him, so that we would no longer BE slaves to sin (v. 6). Because of His victory over sin, we are to consider (count/reckon) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Audacious? No! It's our reality. It's a command, from our Creator, who tells us we are not only to classify ourselves dead to sin, but ALIVE to God! He tells us exactly what we are to believe about our relationship with sin.

Then we are explicitly told how to act. "Do not let [allow] sin reign in your mortal body... and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin... but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead,... as instruments of righteousness to God" (v.12-13).

Why would God tell us to do things that we aren't equipped to do? He wouldn't. He didn't. He tells us what to do with sin because of what He declares true — we are not under law but under grace. Through grace we have freedom — to NOT sin. Freedom to walk out of the prison cell. Sin has no mastery over us, no actual power other than what we give it.

Life. Grace. Freedom. Ours because God says they belong to us now.

## Reflection Questions:

- What sin in your life do you believe deep down you can never actually have victory over? Think again! God says otherwise.
- What truth from God's Word can you apply to your life to experience His freedom?



# Extending God's Grace Through Our Words

Terri Johnson

## Read Colossians 4:5-6

*“Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”*

Have you ever found yourself to be the outsider in a situation? I have. My family sometimes plays a pickup basketball game at the park. It doesn't take long for someone to notice that I am the weak link. Even so, my family shows grace with their encouraging words and by going easy on me with their defense. You might say, “Of course they show you grace — you are their mom/wife!” Yes, that is true. Though I'm an outsider when it comes to my skill on the court, they love me because we are family. It is easy to practice showing grace to someone that you know and love.

In contrast, Paul is calling us to step toward those outside the church. As we encounter people who do not know Jesus or are opposed to Jesus, we are called to do so with grace in our speech, along with knowledge and wisdom in our responses. Notice the strong words that call us to this high task — making the most of every opportunity, speech always be with and grace, know how you should respond. What clear instruction and high bar! This is not a casual suggestion but a calling to a way of life, a consistent conduct.





God does not call us to this conduct without giving us the means and providing an example. Wisdom and knowledge go hand-in-hand with gracious speech. This is how we are able to know how we should respond to each unique person that we encounter. We are equipped to show grace to outsiders by hiding God's Word in our heart, listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and loving the lost as Jesus did. Jesus is our perfect example. We see in the gospel stories that He expected the lost to sin, and He approached them with compassion rather than condemnation. Consider how Jesus approached the Samaritan woman at the well, Zacchaeus the tax collector, and the woman caught in adultery. Jesus had a heart sensitive to showing grace and speaking truth that gives hope and salvation.

Let's practice this together. Let's push past the laziness or fear or busyness and make the most of every opportunity. Let's grow in our calling. Let's allow outsiders to experience the same love and grace from us that we have received from Christ.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Is there an "outsider" in your life right now that God is calling you to approach with gracious words and actions?
- If so, what small step could you take this week to extend grace to them?
- If not, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to an opportunity.



# Grace That Shapes Our Identity

Lance Terry

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:10

*“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”*

What do we mean when we talk about our “identity”? It’s usually a combination of things. It’s how other people in our life see us. It’s what we do for a living. It’s our successes and our failures. All of those come together to answer the question — “Who am I?” Unfortunately, our failures and mistakes tend to make up too much of our identity.

I often wonder if the Apostle Paul ever struggled with his identity. Think about it. In his early days he persecuted Christians! He was their enemy. He was someone to be feared. Then, Jesus appears and turns his life upside down. Now he’s a member of this group he had just been persecuting. Jesus gave him a new identity, but those old ways of persecuting Christians never left his memory. It’s who he was. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is declaring the reality of Jesus’ resurrection, and all the people Jesus appeared to. In verse 9, he identifies himself as the last one Jesus appeared to: “the least of the apostles and not fit to be called an apostle”. Paul’s identity could have been defined by what he used to be... an enemy of Christians.

But there’s good news. In verse 10 Paul reveals the means by which he received a new identity, “By God’s grace I am what I am.” That’s a strong identity statement. When we believe in Jesus, we get a new identity. No longer are we



defined by what we do or who others say we are. Because of God's grace, Paul didn't have to be known as the "least of the apostles." Not only that... with God's grace fueling his new identity, Paul was able to accomplish more in his ministry than any of the other apostles. Paul was clear that these accomplishments were not his own. The grace of God that gave him a new identity accomplished this work.

Did you know that if you have put your faith in Jesus you have a new identity? You're not defined by the mistakes you've made. You're a child of God. You're a new creation. Through God's grace you are who He says you are. As you seek to follow Jesus and serve Him well today, know that His grace will provide all you need to live out this new identity in everything you do.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- In what areas of your life have you looked for identity?
- What are the potential issues with searching for an identity outside of what God says about you?
- How has God's grace toward you shaped who you are today?



# Grace as God's Favor in Daily Life

Claire Carpenter

## Read Psalm 84:11

*"For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
the LORD gives grace and glory;  
No good thing does He withhold from those who walk  
uprightly."*

For ten years, my family and I lived in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. If you've never been, trust me when I say it was like living in the lushest of gardens—with rivers running through it, with more fruit than you could ever eat, and with snowy mountains or the Pacific Ocean just an hour away. But do you know why the area is so green and fertile? Rain. So... much... rain. Nine months out of the year, the skies are mostly grey and cloudy. On any given day, it's either raining or about to rain. Many people don't do well in those conditions because their bodies simply need to feel the sun.

In today's passage, the writer delights in two metaphorical images of God—God as a "sun and shield". This psalm is likely one of the songs of ascent sung by the Israelites as they traveled up to Jerusalem and the temple. The writer is bursting with anticipation as he moves closer and closer to God's dwelling place. Why does this context matter? Verse 11 begins with a connecting word "For", which tells us to look back at the previous verse to answer the question: "Why is God a sun and shield?" In verse 10, the writer declares that he would rather stand at the entrance to God's house (i.e., the temple) than live amidst the wicked. Why? Because the LORD God is "a sun and shield." Just being right at the threshold of God's dwelling place is enough to feel the benefits of intimacy with God.



Nowadays, of course, we don't have to travel anywhere to enter God's dwelling place. If we have placed our faith in Jesus and accepted God's gift of grace, then we have received the Holy Spirit, which means we are God's dwelling place. We can experience intimacy with God wherever we are!

When I imagine what it would be like to experience God as a "sun and shield", I immediately feel the comfort and warmth of His presence. As the "sun", He provides light and clarity and wisdom. He is reliable and constant and everlasting. Under His care, I can grow and rest and bask in His presence. As the "shield," He protects me. I imagine a tall Viking shield of solid oak, braced with iron and rivets, tall enough to fully hide behind when facing an onslaught of arrows. No matter what you picture, the image likely creates a feeling of safety. When we dwell with God, we get to live inside His protection. In our day-to-day life, we may not always feel safe and cared for. But with God, we are warm and secure.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Do you feel secure in God? Why or why not?
- In what way(s) have you experienced the warmth of God's grace recently?



