

God's Story Of Grace

You are reading these words because someone who cares about you has invited you to go through this material with them. At this point it all feels odd and foreign, but this person wants to encourage, pray for you and answer some of the questions you have had for a very long time.

The one word you are going to hear over and over is the word grace. Grace is the key to everything we want to teach you and grace is the lifeline to your relationship with God.

This is what we will focus on during these four meetings:

- Lesson 1 is where we learn that our story and God's story have come together. From the beginning of time, God has been moving towards us. His passionate and loving desire is for us to experience every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.
- In Lesson 2 we learn Christ's death and resurrection can make us alive spiritually through faith. This salvation is a gift of God, not of ourselves, not of works, lest anyone should boast.
- In Lesson 3 we learn Christ needed to rescue us from sin and death, but we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Our grasp of the love and grace of God will be revealed in our lives as we put off our old lives and identity and put on who we are in Jesus Christ.

- Lesson 4 is where we learn that Christ died to eliminate the power that hurt, guilt and shame has over our lives. Jesus' amazing love now ushers us into fullness in Him.

Take time before you meet to watch the videos and think through the questions and material of the lesson you will be discussing. It's ok if you are confused and need to ask more questions. That is why we do this together with a trusted friend. Our goal in gathering together is that you would be rooted and grounded in God's love.

Our prayer is that you may be able to comprehend the width, length, depth and height of God's love for you. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

We are praying for you!

Dr. Matt Ketterling and David Anderson

We have asked RhiAna Arredondo to share her experience and encourage you before you start lesson 1. View it as your own personal pep talk.

(Watch RhiAna's Arredondo Video)

Lesson 1 - God's Loving Movement of Grace Towards Us (Ephesians 1:1-14)

(Watch Andrea Baiseri video)

Your story:

(Please process through these questions before your meeting.)

- Where were you born/where have you lived?
- What was your family like?
- Where did you go to school?
- What are you passionate about?
- What parts of life have been dark and discouraging?
- What were your experiences with God? Experiences with church?
- How has your past formed your present?

Pick two questions to share with the group.

God's story:

We find a powerful description of God's loving movement towards you in a book of the Bible called Ephesians (let's read it together):

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has

blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

1) The Apostle Paul is so thankful in this section of Scripture. Without getting side-tracked by each theological term, can you list the verbs that describe God's pursuit of us?

2) Was there ever a time you have felt alone and unloved? How would things have changed if you knew of God's love and His desire to adopt you into His family?

Before time began God chose to adopt us into a personal and intimate relationship with Himself. Before Christ we were sons and daughters of disobedience. After Christ, we call Him Father! He freely and joyfully loved and chose us to be His adopted sons and daughters.

You might wonder, “How can I be a part of a family that is characterized by holiness and without blame when I am not holy and I am not without blame?” Paul says that we were redeemed by the riches of God’s grace. God is the only one who had the “riches” to pay our ransom. He is the only One who could have redeemed us from our captivity to sin. We have free access to God because we have been redeemed and forgiven.

Matt Ketterling is going to take a few minutes to help us understand this idea of adoption in the grand scheme of things.

(Watch Matt Ketterling video)

3) Having thought about your story and God’s loving movement towards you, can you look back and identify God’s hand in your life?

Ask God to bring to your mind how He has been working in your life.

This is where your story and God’s story collide. From the beginning of time, God has been moving towards you. The fact that we are talking today about God’s grace reveals His powerful saving acts towards you. His passionate and loving desire is for you to experience every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just like Paul and the saints in Ephesus.

Lesson 2 - Why Is Grace Necessary? How Do I Receive Grace? (Ephesians 2:1-9)

(Watch Mandy Mendoza video)

Read Ephesians 2:1-9

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

1) Can you identify the change that occurs between verses 3 and 4? How does it lead to Paul's conclusion that no one can boast?

Scripture says humanity is spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. Before Christ we walked according to Satan and this world, the pleasures and focus of self and the lusts of our flesh. We were willfully rebellious and deliberately disobedient and driven by the uncontrollable, insatiable demands of our sinful appetites.

But in verse 4, Scripture says that despite the sinfulness of humanity, we can become spiritually alive through Christ. This is the Gospel! The Gospel is that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again (1 Cor. 15:3-4). God made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ's death and resurrection can make us alive spiritually through faith. This is not of ourselves - it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Salvation by grace through faith means that we have no human ability to pull off our own salvation. We can't measure up to God's perfect standards. Our hope is not in our ability to somehow outwit the scales of God. Do we think that somehow our good works will outweigh our sins? Our good acts are not going to outweigh our sins. If that were true, Jesus would have never invaded history. At the core of our hearts, we desperately needed Christ to come and rescue us, and He did.

2) What are some typical ways people attempt to minimize their sin and maximize their goodness in order to be saved?

In Luke 18 Jesus tells an amazing story about two worshippers, 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Ed Underwood will further explain the contrast between the religious person and the tax collector.

(Watch Ed Underwood video)

3) What do you think distinguishes you as acceptable to God? Are you like or not like the tax-collector that proclaims, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”?

4) Have you received the gift of salvation by grace through faith? Why or why not? What questions do you have about God’s love for you?

Lesson 3 - The Purpose Of Our Salvation (Ephesians. 2:8-10, 4:22-32)

(Watch Shawn Winters video)

You are Jesus' masterpiece, created for good works!

Read Ephesians 2:8-10

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Christ needed to rescue us from sin and death, but we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. God planned this from the beginning that we should walk in them. We aren't saved by good works, we are saved for good works. The depth of our understanding of the love and grace of God will be revealed in the actions of our lives.

The tripping point for many in the Christian life is understanding how God's grace and our own human effort connect to each other.

- A. Some may believe their good works are a bargaining tool with God to assure a pain-free life.
- B. Others may view their effort as a way to bolster people's perception of them.
- C. Still others may pursue good works in the hopes of diminishing their shame and feel unworthy of God's mercy and grace.
- D. Others may utilize "God's grace" to excuse responsibility to live righteously.

1) All of us will have unhealthy motives in responding to God's grace and our calling to good works; which of the motives above are you prone to?

In Ephesians 4, Paul introduces us to this idea of the “old man” vs. the “new man.” When Paul says “old man,” he is talking about Adam and our former way of life, which is characterized by self-centeredness. When he talks of the “new man,” Paul is referring to Jesus and a new life characterized by self-sacrifice because of trust.

2) In Ephesians 4:22-24, can you identify what Paul is commanding you to do and what He promises the Spirit is doing?

Read Ephesians 4:22-24

22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

David Anderson shares an illustration to help us understand the difference between the old nature and the new nature in Christ.

(Watch David Anderson video)

Read Ephesians 4:25-32

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his

own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

3) Can you identify areas from this list (vs. 25-32) in which you function with the same mindset as Adam (insecure self-centeredness)?

What would it look like if you operated with the mindset of Christ (trusting self-sacrifice)?

In your family?

At school or at work?

In the church?

In this world?

Lesson 4 - God's Immense Love (Ephesians. 3:14-21)

(Watch David Speck video)

Here are 3 things we experience every day: 1) Hurt, 2) Guilt, & 3) Shame:

Hurt—wrong was done to me. It would take just a few seconds for you to rattle off a dozen names of people who have hurt you. These folks vary from close relatives to co-workers and employers to teachers and neighbors.

Guilt—I have done wrong. We have hurt others and hurt ourselves and these things generate guilt in us. Some of us carry the weight of deep sins that we have committed and they have become our identity.

Shame—something is wrong with me. Shame is when hurt and guilt become internalized deep in our being and create a twisted formula that says if I do enough good things and don't do too many bad things I'll be worthy of acceptance, attention and affirmation.

1) What role do you think guilt, hurt and shame have played in your choices, life and attitude?

We live out our lives with a whole lot of hurt, guilt and shame. In our self-hatred, we think that the God of the universe feels the same way about us. Ephesians 3 describes the great mystery of Christ whereby mankind is rescued from the alienation of hurt, guilt and shame. Specifically, it shows that the Gentiles, not just the Jews, had a seat at the table by faith. God's mystery is that He sent His Son to die on the cross and rise from the dead to rescue

every single one of us who has been hurt, and is guilty and full of shame. His amazing love now ushers us to our seat at God's table.

Paul is writing this letter to Gentiles who did not experience God's presence in the Temple, did not have the Jewish prophets of God, and had never read the Jewish Scriptures. In short, they were without God and without hope in the world. Paul identifies the One whom he is praying to as "the One whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." God is the Father of both Jew and Gentile.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

2) In verses 17-19 Paul explains the goals of his prayers. List out the purposes of Paul's prayer.

3) How might hurt, guilt and shame keep us from the fullness of God?

4) How can this discipleship group pray more specifically for your greater experience of the width, length, depth and height of the love of God?

Our prayer is that you would experience every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus by trusting that salvation is a gift of God - not of ourselves and not of works - and that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works.

We pray that you would gain a deep understanding of God's immeasurable love for us, because this is how we overcome the hurt, guilt and shame that keep us from experiencing God's fullness. May God bless you immensely as you trust His amazing grace!