

Lavish Grace Week 1 The What, When, and Why of Grace

By Kathy Howard

God's grace simply doesn't make sense to me. His grace is radical. Extreme. It even contradicts human logic. For instance, if we work hard, we earn a paycheck. If we drive faster than the speed limit, we often get an expensive ticket. In the world, we usually get what we deserve.

But God's grace is different. Grace doesn't play by the world's rules. We don't deserve grace. Yet, God freely pours out His grace on those who don't deserve it. He lavishes it on those not even looking for it. What do we do with that?

For the next 6 weeks, here at The Mom Initiative, we are going to explore God's grace. This study, which is based on my new Bible study *Lavish Grace*, will help you recognize, rest in, and share the glorious grace of God. And Paul – often referred to as “the Apostle of Grace” – will be our tour guide. We have built in **four levels** of involvement, so you can participate as much or as little as you are able. (See previous post for an explanation.)

Where do we begin this journey into grace? Today, let's start with some basics – the *What, When, and Why* of God's Lavish Grace.

What is grace?

The best, condensed definition of grace I can give you is this: “Grace” is *God's divine favor and merciful, loving-kindness*.

The Greek word usually translated as “grace” in the New Testament is *charis*. The definition of *charis* in *The Complete Word Study New Testament* includes these facets:

- Closely related to the Greek word we translate as “joy”
- Divine favor, kindness, acceptance
- Favor bestowed on the undeserving without expectation of return
- Absolute freeness of God's loving-kindness to men
- Motivated by the bounty and heart of the Giver
- Unearned and unmerited favor
- Forgives sin and affects a person's sinful nature, shaping her to be used for God's good purposes
- Results in joy and gratitude in the one who receives it

Slowly read back through the definition of God's grace above. Underline any aspect of grace that is new to you. Write a summary definition of grace in the space below:

The best thing about grace is its source. True grace flows from *God's* heart. It's based on *His* bounty, *His* character. We do not merit His grace. We cannot earn it. Yet in His loving-kindness He freely pours it out.

Grace begins and ends with our gracious God. It's all about Him, yet you and I benefit. Isn't that amazing?

When does God extend His grace?

When does God begin to pour His grace into our lives? Is it when we recognize we are sinners? Is it when we first begin to think about God? Let's talk about this.

When did you first recognize the presence of God's grace in your life?

When was that moment for you? If you grew up in church, maybe that moment happened in a children's Sunday School class during a Bible story. If you met Jesus as an adult, maybe your first awareness of grace occurred when you realized you were a sinner who needed a Savior. Let's see what the Bible says.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14. List every word or phrase you find in the passage that describes God's actions toward us.

When did God decide to act in these ways towards us? (See verse 4).

Read Romans 5:8. What were we doing when God demonstrated His love and grace toward us on the Cross?

So here's the truth of it:

“God chose us for Himself long before we were even aware of Him. He chose to love us when we were indifferent to His love. He offered His grace even while we were still rebellious. He wooed us with whispers of His grace so we would choose Him too.”

Lavish Grace, Week 1

God’s grace was working in your life long before you were aware of it. Long before you knew what grace was, God had already poured it out. Then He drew you to Himself so you would embrace His grace with joy.

Why does God pour His grace in our lives?

Throughout this study, we will discover that God’s grace is constantly active in every aspect of our lives – spiritually, relationally, and physically. God’s grace is:

- **Poured Out for our *spiritual* good** – Our eternal salvation is completely and thoroughly a work of God’s grace. From the first drawings of the Holy Spirit and our conversion, to our spiritual growth and service, God pours out His grace to make us His own.
- **Poured Through for our *relational* good** (Weeks 2-4 of this study)– God calls us to be channels of His great grace, not stagnant pools. He pours His grace through us and into the lives of those around us.
- **Overflowing for our *physical* good** (Weeks 5-7 of this study)– Through times of trial and suffering, God’s grace overflows our lives to provide comfort, encouragement, and strength. God extends His lavish grace to us every moment of every day.

Today, let’s dig a bit deeper into Paul’s story to see how God’s grace pours out for our spiritual good. The Apostle Paul understood God’s grace in a way most of us never will. He experienced it at a depth that, thankfully, few of us will sink.

Read Galatians 1:11-17. Answer the following questions:

- ***When did God set Paul apart?***
- ***What was Paul doing when God called him by His grace?***

Saul (Paul) was the archenemy of Jesus’ followers. He sought to kill them and destroy the young church. Yet, our gracious God chose Saul and wooed him with His lavish grace. Have you ever wondered how God worked in Saul’s heart and mind before his dramatic conversion on a dusty road to Damascus?

Saul the Pharisee knew what was going on in Jerusalem. He knew about the miracles performed in the name of Jesus. He probably heard the apostles preach. He witnessed first-hand the effect of the Gospel message. And he wanted to stop it.

Read Acts 6:8-15, 7:54-60, and 8:1.

Stephen was the first believer killed because of their faith in Jesus. His martyrdom was the beginning of great persecution. But God also used Stephen's life for the spiritual good of one person in particular.

Reread Acts 8:1. Who does this verse make a point of telling us was present at Stephen's stoning? What was he doing?

In what ways do you think God could have used Stephen's testimony (See Acts 7:1-53) and death to impact Saul?

Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen. He not only "approved" it, he may have even instigated it. But that doesn't mean God didn't use Stephen's witness to woo Saul with His grace. Isn't that just totally crazy, illogical and amazing?

Now, let's hear about Paul's moment of conversion in his own words. The following passage recounts the testimony Paul gave to King Agrippa while in prison in Caesarea.

Read Acts 26:9-23. Look again at verses 12-18 and answer the following questions:

- ***Why did Jesus say He appeared to Paul?***

- ***What did Jesus say He would do for Paul?***

- ***What would Paul do under the authority and power of Jesus?***

Now read 1 Timothy 1:12-17. Check any of the following statements that are true:

- Paul considered himself unworthy of forgiveness and salvation.*
- God's abundant grace wrought a radical transformation in Paul's life.*
- Paul's salvation stands as an example of the unbounded nature of God's grace.*

The one who hunted, imprisoned, and killed the followers of Christ became a believer. By His grace, God not only saved Paul, He also called Paul to a specific purpose. Paul was wooed, saved, and called by the lavish grace of God.

No think about your own life before salvation. In what ways did God draw you to Himself? How did He work around and in your life to reveal Himself to you?

If you are a Christian, God's grace ultimately drew you to the Cross of Christ for eternal salvation. It is there – and only there that God's saving grace can be applied.

Read Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, and Ephesians 2:1.

- ***What is the effect of sin in a person's life?***
- ***Have you ever sinned?***

Now read Ephesians 2:1-22 without stopping so you can feel the impact of God's grace at work. Then go back through the chapter using the table on the next page to record words, phrases, and facts that describe the two spiritual conditions – dead and alive.

DEAD		ALIVE
	G R A C E	

Now reread Ephesians 2:8-9. Have you crossed from death to life through faith by God's grace? Yes No

If you circled "no," then why not today? You can't do anything to earn God's great salvation. You just need to realize your need and receive His gift of grace.

- Acknowledge you are a sinner and in need of a Savior.
- Believe that Jesus Christ died to pay the debt for your sins and rose from the grave victorious.
- Confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord!

If you made this decision for the first time, welcome to the family of God! If you have been a believer for some time, consider in what other ways you may need God's lavish grace today:

- *Is there someone in your life you think God won't – or "can't" save. Maybe she is totally resistant to the things of God. Maybe she lives a depraved life. God's grace is more than sufficient – just look at Paul's life!*

- *Perhaps there is something in your past you feel is beyond the scope of God's grace. In light of what we've studied, will you accept that God's grace is more than sufficient?*
- *Maybe you are in a season of rebellion, complacency, or doubt. Will you allow God to draw you close to Himself?*

However God may be speaking or leading, write your response to Him below:

As we witnessed in Paul's life, God doesn't merely save us *from* something. He also saves us *into* something. Yes, God saves us *from* eternal death, bondage to sin, and separation from Him. But God also saves us *into* a new life marked by spiritual freedom and a unique purpose.

We learned that God's grace did not stop in Paul's life at his conversion. His calling to ministry, his preparation, and his equipping by the Holy Spirit were all gracious gifts from God.

Read Ephesians 3:2-9. List any words and phrases that describe these workings of grace in Paul's life after salvation.

God called, equipped, and gifted Paul for a unique purpose, but the same is true for every believer. Have you found the unique place of service or ministry God has called you to and prepared you for?

Read and compare Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, and Ephesians 4:7, 11-16. Thoughtfully and prayerfully answer the following:

- *Why does every believer – including you – need to be a vital part of a local church?*
- *Why has God given you a unique set of spiritual gifts or "gifts of grace?"*

- *Have you discovered your unique place of service and ministry within a local church and the larger Kingdom of God?*
- *Are you fulfilling the role God designed for you? If not, why not? What changes can you make to step into His calling of grace?*

Before we end this week's lesson, let me add a word of caution. Any works of service and ministry should flow out of a healthy, purposeful relationship with Jesus. As we surrender our will to His and follow His leading, He will guide us into areas of service.

As we close this week's lesson, contemplate the quality of your relationship with Jesus. Do you actively and regularly foster that relationship. In what specific ways can you do that this week?