

Lavish Grace

An 7-Week Study of God's Lavish Grace

Experience a fresh awareness of the overflowing, ever-present lavish grace of God

Week: Five

Author: Amy Schaffner

Title of Lesson: The Work of Grace

When we speak of grace in our lives, we're generally speaking of beautiful things that make our lives peaceful, and ignore the "work" side of grace that can often give us bumps in the road. We forget that we can't really have one without the other. God uses trials to work out grace in our lives.

Eight years ago my body began to betray me. I would be doing the normal stuff of life when suddenly my heart would start beating too hard, I would get dizzy and have chest pains, and eventually I ended up on the floor. I was, of course, afraid something was wrong with my heart, and with two small children to care for this out of control feeling terrified me.

Through many doctors and tests we concluded that I have a panic disorder. I was relieved it wasn't my heart that was the problem, but that didn't stop the episodes from happening or my brain to always go to the darkest places when they did.

I would lay in bed and plead with God to take it away from me. I didn't understand why He wouldn't intervene and help me. All I wanted was to be better and able to care for my family!

I now know that this was God working his grace in my life. Through the mess of the early years of my panic disorder, I learned to depend on God like I never have before. He has consistently used these issues in my life to shape me and mold me into who He created me to be.

Paul and the Work of Grace

We see this work of grace through trials in the life of Paul throughout the New Testament. If there was ever anyone who could win the trophy for "most trials brought about by serving Jesus", it would probably be Paul.

Paul was stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, put in jail, and the list goes on and on. All of those things were necessary for the shaping of his character and for the furthering of the gospel. As Kathy Howard says in her Bible Study *Lavish Grace*

"Paul, a strong well-educated leader with enviable pedigree, was probably prone to pride and self-sufficiency. In fact, all of us have a sinful tendency to rely on ourselves, to accomplish things with our own strength and power. And while many of us are indeed strong and

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God was using trials to work out His will for Paul's character and ultimately the furthering of the Church and the Kingdom.

She also says *"Like Paul, most of us have circumstances, troubles, or difficulties God has not eliminated from our lives. Though we repeatedly plead with him to remove it, the pain remains. On some days, 'My grace is sufficient' just doesn't feel sufficient. If we aren't careful we can begin to doubt God's power or His love for us."*

Kathy compares grace working in our life with the physical analogy of strengthening our muscles. To become stronger we have to add "stress". Lifting heavier loads is what builds and shapes our muscles into what they need to be. Without stress our muscles atrophy and die.

Our spiritual strength is similar to this. We need stress in our lives in order for our faith to grow. As humans, we naturally want life to be easy and pain free, but we also know that for our Spiritual life nothing could be more deteriorating.

Grace Working In Your Life

What about you? Can you think of things in your life that you can identify as God's loving work of grace for you? Or maybe you're in the middle of one right now and needed a fresh reminder of God's love for you.

Paul boasted in the trials that God had placed in his life because he knew they had a kingdom purpose. Your trials do, too. Remember that God is gracious to allow those trials into our lives and that He will never waste them. He is using them to mold you into the person He created you to be.

Can you think of a specific trial in your life that you now see was God working out His Grace?:

Read Philippians 3:7-11. How can suffering affect our intimacy with Christ?

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WHAT THIS MOMMA LEARNED this week about GRACE: _____

WHAT THIS MOMMA WANTS TO WORK ON (OR THROUGH) NOW: _____

TIME TO PRAY ABOUT IT:

Father, thank you that even the things in life that we view as the hardest can be used for your glory and for making us more like you. Thank you that grace comes in many forms, and that one of them is trials that shape us and mold us so that our character becomes more like you day by day.

Amen

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Amy Schaffner is a happy West Texas homemaker whose idea of a nice day is to take care of her home and her people with a cup of steaming coffee in hand. On the days when her homeschooling life lets her have a few minutes to write, you can find her at www.amyschaffner.com. You can also connect with her on her Facebook page, www.facebook.com/PiecesOfAmy/ or Twitter at www.twitter.com/AmyLynSchaffner. Honestly, Instagram is her favorite, [amy_schaffner](https://www.instagram.com/amy_schaffner).