

Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

Prayer and Praises

Introduction

She was an orphan in search of a home. Having bitten a government worker who entered her home uninvited, the family was given two choices- lose custody of the children or get rid of the dog. Because she had bitten once, Sacramento Animal Control could not legally place her; neither could the family place her with anyone without knowledge of the biting incident. She was on the way out of this life, without a chance to love and live. How could I allow this creature to be killed when I had the power to prevent it? Her name upon arrival at our home was Kimber, to that we added the middle name of Grace; for she truly was being saved from death by unmerited favor.

With her presence in our home we have learned about how to give and receive grace. This animal does not ask us to be perfect, only to be allowed to love us. This animal is not perfect herself, but we love her even at her most unlovable. This animal does not judge us, only sees us as worthy. We are so like this animal! Made worthy not by our own abilities, but by the generosity of God. We are unable to save ourselves in our natural state, just as Kimber Grace was unable to save herself, and yet we seek the benevolence and mercy of a power greater than ourselves, in our case, God.

Grace has been described as God's Riches At Christ's Expense. My Bible's dictionary defines grace as: "God's free and unmerited favor for sinful humanity."

- *What does this definition of grace mean to you?*
- *If you have one, share another definition that suits you better?*

Grace for Salvation

Romans 3:23-24

“All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, and are justified freely by (God’s) grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:4, 8-9

“But because of (God’s) great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions... For it is by grace you were saved, through faith- and this is not of yourselves, it is a gift of God- not by works, so no one can boast.”

Titus 3:7

“So having been justified by grace, we may become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

By definition, the word salvation as it appears in the Bible usually means being rescued from the power and penalty of sin. When we accepted Jesus as our Savior, became saved, and came into a personal relationship, along with becoming a child of God **1)** we also became co-heirs with Jesus in His glory (Romans 8:17). **2)** We received all the things that accompany salvation, (Hebrews 6:9) and **3)** we were marked with a seal of the Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14). The grace that came with salvation is probably the first encounter most of us have with God’s benevolence and mercy. That is why so many Christian songs speak about this first encounter.

We are probably all familiar with the words to Amazing Grace, that well known hymn by John Newton,

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I’m found;
Was blind, but now I see.*

This hymn expresses the wonder so many feel upon their salvation; astonishment that with no effort of our own, we became God’s own, and gratitude that through the efforts of Christ we became children of God. Truly we have experience the most unbelievable miracle through God’s grace; that we no longer have to depend on ourselves and now have an Advocate, Friend, Savior, Lord, Brother, and all that we need.

- What things has this aspect of grace brought into your life?
- Is our need for grace difficult for you to accept, why or why not?

Grace for Leadership

Ephesians 1:7-10

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us with all the wisdom and understanding. He made known to us the mystery of (God’s) will according to (God’s) good pleasure, which (God) purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head- even Christ.”

Imagine a world where there are no rules. How would we manage traffic, run our country, or our lives? What would happen if instead of relying on our own flawed motives, we trusted God to manage it all? That is what God yearns to do now, and in the future. God ultimate goal is to bring all of creation under the control and management of One.

It is God’s grace within us that shows forth as the attributes we so often seek in our leaders- determination to benefit others, diligence to work for equality for all, and willingness to put out the effort needed to work within the system to make a better world. It is God’s grace within us that encourages each of us to look beyond our own self-interests and reach for another’s hand to guide them when they are having a hard time finding the right path.

We lead with grace, and we allow grace to lead us. It is only in allowing God’s grace full reign in our lives that we truly have the qualities that will allow us to become “...the light of the world. A city on a hill (that) cannot be hidden.” Matthew 5:14

- *How can we lead with grace?*
- *How can we be led by others because of their grace?*

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Grace for Freedom

Romans 6:14

"For sin will no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace."

In his version of Amazing Grace, Chris Tomlin adds this refrain to the familiar words:

My chains are gone, I've been set free!
 My God, my Savior, has ransomed me!
 And like a flood His mercy rains,
 Unending love, amazing grace.

When we were saved, we became free, as we said last time, from the power and penalty of sin. This freedom does not allow us to run willfully and errantly any way we choose; when we were under the law, sin was our master- the law cannot and does not justify us or help us overcome sin. But when we became bound to Christ, He became our Master and we received the power to do good rather than evil.

We received the freedom to choose. We received the power and right to deny anything into our lives that is not of God. We also received the privilege and duty to bring into our lives only that which I call God's P.E.R.T. P.L.A.N., those things that are: "pure, excellent, righteous, true, praiseworthy, loving, admirable, and noble." (Philippians 4:8 words rearranged by Eileen)

- *What does freedom bought by grace allow into your life?*
- *What does this freedom bought by grace forbid in your life?*

Grace for Help

Hebrews 4:16

"Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Grace is always available to us. Some Christians approach God meekly with their heads hung low, afraid to ask God to meet their needs. Others pray flippantly, giving little thought to what they say. We are to come with reverence because God is our Sovereign, but also with bold assurance because God is our Friend and Counselor.

We, because we are clothed in Christ's sacrifice, can confidently seek all that God has to offer. We are free to assertively ask for mercy, even though we do not deserve it. We can boldly march into God's presence, and know that God will answer our prayers, although not always the way we expect. We can assuredly place all our troubles in God's care, for we know that there is no one more precious to God than we are. All these blessings and more are ours through grace.

According to Matthew Henry, *"There is a throne of grace set up. God might have set up a tribunal of strict justice, but (God) has chosen to set up a throne of grace. There grace reigns, and acts with sovereign freedom, power, and bounty. It is our duty to be often found before this throne of grace."*

If you are anything like me, it may be hard to admit when you are wrong, even to the One who already knows. It seems so much easier to pretend that it never happened, you didn't hurt your loved one's feelings, you didn't allow a bad mood to alter your common courtesy, or you didn't avoid any of a myriad of things that are your weakness.

- *When you are in need, where is the first place you seek help- on the phone or at the throne?*
- *Is the throne of grace easy or hard to believe in? Why or why not?*

Grace for Blessing

Acts 11:23

“When (Barnabas) arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”

Acts 6:8

“Now Stephen, a man full of grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.”

This facet of grace is like a cup that overflows, the person becomes so full of grace that it literally pours forth from them in all that they do, and all that they are. Our lives can become so full of God’s love, power, and grace that God’s blessings flow from us as easily as water from a tap; touching all who near us.

Now part of this overflowing life is to remember that while it is great to feel about our life “too blessed to be stressed”, sometimes it can be a hindrance to others who struggle with poverty of body, mind, or spirit. I once wrote a journal entry that asked if those who appear less blessed are any less loved by God. I don’t believe this to be so. We all have the same amount of access to God. We all have the same Christ-bought inheritance. We all have the same Spirit residing in us.

The most important prerequisite for any kind of Christian service is to be filled with faith, power, and grace, the externals are not a measure of God’s love, but we must ensure that those around us know that they, even if not externally showing God’s abundance, are also greatly blessed. We must encourage others, and sometimes ourselves, to look for the ways we are blessed. It is by acknowledging our blessings that we often become more a blessing to others.

- *What are your greatest blessings?*
- *Do they really have anything to do with the balance in your bank account?*

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Grace for Everything

John 1:16

"From (Christ's) fullness of grace we receive grace after grace."

Another characteristic of grace is its ongoing nature. We receive grace to bring us to salvation, and then over and over again to, among others things: 1) allow us to work on conquering our failings, 2) help us endure trials, and 3) teach us how to be compassionate to others.

There is no place further than God's grace can reach. There is no situation that is impossible for God's grace to rectify. There is no person too lost that God's grace cannot save them. God's grace should be an ongoing request every day and all through the day. No matter what we are doing, where we are going, or whom we are around, we need God's grace in order to live life abundantly.

It has been said that God will never take us where God's grace cannot keep us. It is this constant flow of support that allows us to become greater than we ever thought we could. It empowers us to move out from our comfort zone and into the unique ministry God has prepared for each of us. Wherever we are, whatever we are called to do, we are God's messengers of hope to a dying world.

- *What ways has God's grace touched your life?*
- *What ways have you shown God's grace to others?*

Grace for Righteousness

Isaiah 26: 10

"Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and do not regard the majesty of the LORD."

So, here we see that grace is poured out on us all, but that God's grace has the purpose of teaching us righteousness. The picture in my mind is of a drenching rain, falling on two plots of land. One plot is so full of clay that instead of soaking up this freely given, and life-sustaining water, just lets it roll away, never fulfilling the purpose for which it was created. The second plot has been tilled and the clay broken up, so it can soak up the rain and use it to grow crops, as it was intended to do.

As we receive grace, we are able to use it to grow closer to the perfection of God; that is righteousness; this is how we were intended to live, that is God's ultimate goal for us. As the words from the song *Day by Day* says, "To see Thee more clearly, follow Thee more nearly, love Thee more dearly, day by day"; that is God's wish for us, to live in God's embrace and grow more and more in that image of love, power and generosity.

While we will never become righteous on our own, we ARE the righteousness of God through Jesus. "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

- *Are there any areas where God's grace is teaching you righteousness?*

Grace for the Walk

Matthew Henry says in his commentary on Acts 20, "Paul commends them not only to God and to (God's) providence, but to Christ and His grace... He commits them to the word of God's grace, not only as the foundation of their hope and the fountain of their joy, but as the rule of their walking."

I was once challenged to pick a scripture as my life verse, and I picked:

Acts 20:24 (Message Bible)

"What matters to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity (grace) of God." Is there a way that you can incorporate grace into your walk? How?

- *As we conclude this study of grace, what insights about grace have you learned?*