

The
GRACE
of
GOD

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Introduction: The Story of Grace

Key Quotes

1. **A Personal Struggle:** “When we are on the receiving end, grace is refreshing. When it is required of us, it is often disturbing.”
2. **Requiring Humility:** “Grace cannot be recognized or received until we are aware of precisely how undeserving we really are.”
3. **In Relationships:** “It is only within the mystery and complexity of relationships that grace is experienced.”

Questions for Reflection

1. The “struggle for grace” (p. xiii) refers to our desire for undeserved favor, but our reluctance to give it to others. Do you ever find yourself struggling with grace? Describe a time when you were either unable to accept it or reluctant to give it.
2. “Grace is often an early casualty in the world of organized religion” (p. xiv). Why do you think churches tend to drift toward legalism and away from grace? How does this affect their ability to minister to people?
3. What do you think makes grace so difficult to handle—for individuals (question #1) and for institutions (question #2)?
4. “The only thing Jesus stood against consistently was graceless religion.” People often think it’s more important to do good than to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. How does Christ’s own ministry contradict this perception?

For Further Study: John 1:1–17

1. What do we learn about Jesus Christ (“the Word”) in this passage?
2. Can we give or accept grace apart from Jesus?

Chapter 1: In the Beginning, Grace

Key Quotes

1. **In the Old Testament:** “The Old Testament reveals grace to be God’s preeminent characteristic from the very beginning” (p. 3).
2. **God Reveals His Nature:** “They wanted to know who had delivered them and who they were being asked to follow” (p. 4).
3. **Benevolent:** “God declared each phase of creation good because it was good for us” (p. 7).
4. **Generous:** “Whereas God’s expressions of grace were innumerable, his requirements were minimal” (p. 10).
5. **Merciful and Instructive:** “God responded to Adam and Eve’s sin like good parents respond to their children: he disciplined them. And his discipline was an expression of grace” (p. 16).

Questions for Reflection

1. List the attributes of God that come to mind when you think about the:
 - Old Testament
 - New Testament
2. Christians often view Genesis 1–3 as a demonstration of God’s punishment (the curse). How do these chapters actually demonstrate God’s grace toward humankind?
3. “God declared each phase of creation good because it was good for us” (p. 7). Does this surprise you? Describe a time in your daily life when God’s creation blesses you.
4. As you think about God, do you usually assume he expects a lot of you and gives a little OR gives a lot to you and expects a little? How does this affect the way you pray to him?
5. “Sin was the gateway to shame. In the beginning, shame served a purpose” (p. 12). Do you believe shame serves a purpose today? If so, what is that purpose? When do you think shame is inappropriate?

For Further Study: Romans 5:15–21

1. How do these verses describe the relationship between sin and grace, between Adam and Jesus?

Chapter 2: Chosen by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Undeserved:** “The Lord initiated this covenant as an expression of his grace, not in response to any merit of theirs” (p. 21).
2. **Unearned:** “The Lord didn’t issue Abram a set of behaviors to adhere to . . . He simply asked Abram to receive *promises*” (p. 23).
3. **By Faith:** “A righteous standing with God comes through faith” (p. 25).
4. **We Can Be Reconciled:** “The offer of friendship God made to Abraham would eventually be extended to the entire world on the same terms: *trust me*” (p. 30).

Questions for Reflection

1. God was not surprised that the flood did not eradicate sin, so why did he cause such a “natural disaster”? How were the flood and the ark demonstrations of God’s grace?
2. Name several of the bad choices Abraham made that demonstrated he was not fully trusting God. Why did Abraham’s unfaithfulness not wipe out God’s covenant with him?
3. Why do you think God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son? What would Abraham have learned from the experience? What would Isaac have learned from the experience?
4. So far, we have seen God at work in the lives of Adam, Noah, and Abraham. How did God treat them the same? How did their reactions to God differ?

For Further Study: 1 Corinthians 1:26–31

1. God could have chosen to start the clean-up process with anyone. Why do you think he chose “a man with no influence, no children, and no homeland” (p. 22)?
2. Can you think of a time when God has used you in unexpected ways to impact others?

Chapter 3: Surprised by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Pardoned:** “Just as sin sometimes results in bad things happening to good people, so grace creates the possibility of good things happening to undeserving people” (p. 34).
2. **For Murder:** “Hatred is nothing less than murder waiting to happen” (p. 36).
3. **For Greed:** “Judah veiled his greed beneath a thin veneer of mercy” (p. 37).
4. **For Hypocrisy:** “He burned with righteous indignation against the sin of another while conveniently forgetting his own wrongdoing” (p. 41).
5. **Even Blessed:** “And beginning with King David, the kings of Israel and Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, were born from the lineage of Judah” (p. 49).
6. **By Grace:** “It cannot be said that he found grace . . . grace found him” (p. 49).

Questions for Reflection

1. Does the phrase “What goes around comes around” scare you or excite you? What does this say about your self-image? How will this influence your view of grace?
2. “Hatred is nothing less than murder waiting to happen” (p. 36). Do you agree? What does Christ say about this concept in Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28?
3. For twenty years, Joseph’s brothers seemed to “get away with” their sin against him. However, what does their reaction to Joseph in Egypt tell us about what they must have experienced during those years?
4. What surprised you most about Judah’s story? Can you imagine how he might have rationalized his decisions? What does the end of his story teach us about God?

For Further Study: James 2:8–13

1. The story of Israel and his twelve sons provides examples of many different kinds of sin and their consequences. List some of their sins in order of significance.
2. How does this story illustrate that even sins we might consider less “significant” (telling half-truths, showing favoritism) can have disastrous effects?
3. How does this story also show that God can redeem even the worst offense (see Genesis 50:19–20)?

Chapter 4: Redeemed by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Your God:** “Having established the relationship, having sealed the relationship, and having proven the security of the relationship, God *then* gave the people rules to live by” (p. 58).
2. **Active:** “God didn’t want his people to become enslaved to inanimate objects when they had a living God ready and willing to set them free” (p. 59).
3. **Protective:** “Do not leverage the name of God in order to accomplish your own agenda” (p. 60).
4. **Providing:** “God will provide seven days of sustenance on six days of your effort” (p. 63).

Questions for Reflection

1. For centuries, the Israelites had to live in slavery to a tyrant whose word was law. How does this context affect the way you view the purpose of the laws they were given?
2. “We protect what we value most” (p. 56). What do the rules in your home reveal about your values? What do the first four commandments reveal about God’s values?
3. “He said, ‘I want to be your one and only because—guess what?—I am the One and only.’” This may sound obvious, but it is incredibly easy to forget. How do we demonstrate in daily life our distrust of God?
4. This chapter emphasizes the fact that the law was not created as a stepping-stone to heaven. Why do you think so many world religions assume following religious laws is the way to earn heaven?

For Further Study: Psalm 19: 7–14

1. In this psalm, David thanks God for his law. What benefits does David describe coming from God’s law?
2. We know David loved God’s law, broke many of God’s laws, and was called *a man after God’s own heart* (1 Samuel 13:13). What does David’s example teach us about God and the relationship between law and grace?

Chapter 5: Ruled by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Freedom:** “The purpose of God’s law has been the same from the beginning: to protect the freedom of those he loves” (p. 68).
2. **If We Trust:** “Will I trust that God has my best interests in mind?” (p. 68)
3. **And for When We Don’t:** “The Law didn’t simply condemn sin; it included instructions for making amends” (p. 74).

Questions for Reflection

1. Ancient civilizations did not necessarily believe in absolute values. The laws were all relative, changing with the king. How does this compare with the post-modern view that truth is relative?
2. How do people benefit from absolute truth?
3. *Honor your parents; honor other people’s bodies; honor one another’s marriages; honor other people’s ownership; honor other people’s reputations . . .* How does this paraphrase of those commandments give a different impression than the usual *Thou shalt not . . .*?
4. “Only as governments discover and embrace God’s law can they keep their nations safe while not trampling freedom.” How does this statement compare to many Americans’ understanding of freedom and the role of government? Do you agree with it?
5. Would “your greatest regrets have been avoided if you had opted to obey rather than disobey God’s law”? (p. 75)

For Further Study: Romans 6:12–23

1. The Bible teaches that sin leads to slavery (and death) while obedience leads to freedom (and life). Sin claims the opposite. In your daily life, how do you see sin trying to convince you that you’ll be missing something good if you obey God?

Chapter 6: Rescued by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **God is Just and Gracious:** “God is both terrifying *and* merciful. God hates evil *and* he loves people. God punishes sin *and* he extends grace to sinners” (p. 78).
2. **Patient:** “Could it be that the Lord gave the people of Jericho six nights to sleep on their decision to oppose his people?” (p. 86).
3. **Redeeming:** “By surrendering her illegitimate claim to the land and by receiving God’s gracious offer of mercy and forgiveness, Rahab became an adopted daughter in the family of God” (p. 87).
4. **Empowering:** “Grace doesn’t require people with embarrassing labels to shed those labels as a prerequisite. Grace is what empowers us to do so” (p. 89).

Questions for Reflection

1. Genesis 15:16 reveals that God had a plan in place for the Canaanites and Joshua 2:8 reveals that the Canaanites knew it. In what ways do we see God was merciful to the Canaanites, offering time and opportunity for repentance?
2. In what ways can you relate to Rahab? Are there any labels, habits, or “guilty pleasures” that keep you from wholeheartedly following Jesus? What does her example show us about God’s ability to change people, freeing them from their slavery to sin?

For Further Study: Genesis 18:16-19:29

1. What does this encounter between God and Abraham—and God’s ensuing actions—tell us about God’s justice and mercy?
2. List some of the reasons you think God might have had for ordering total destruction of these cities.

Chapter 7: Sustained by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Given Responsibility:** “Fortunately for those of us who have been given much and are thus responsible for much, there is much grace” (p. 92).
2. **Promised:** “God made David a promise. An extraordinary promise. An unconditional promise with generational implications” (p. 94).
3. **Disciplined:** “Grace and discipline are not mutually exclusive . . . Discipline is often an expression of grace” (p. 100).
4. **And Still Given Grace:** “Solomon led the nation into what is considered to be the golden age of Israel” (p. 103). “The birth of Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of the promise made to King David” (p. 96).

Questions for Reflection

1. Who do you relate to more, Rahab or David? Why?
2. List the sins that David committed in his interactions with Bathsheba and Uriah. If God could forgive these sins, do you think there’s anything you could do beyond the reach of his grace?
3. Now list the terrible consequences that resulted from David’s sins. How can you see God’s grace at work even in the middle of a “mess”?
4. Finally, list some of the results of the promises God made to David.
5. Think back to a time when you knowingly sinned. What consequences did you (or others) experience? Can you see how God may have used those circumstances for your good?

For Further Study: Romans 8:28–39

1. Take a few moments to dwell on these verses. Pray that God would give you a heart that is willing to trust him and receive his love and grace.

Chapter 8: Puzzled by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Prejudiced:** “Jonah found himself unwilling to extend grace to . . . people who he thought didn’t deserve it. But nobody deserves it” (p. 108).
2. **Running:** “Jonah would rather die than go to Nineveh” (p. 110).
3. **The Wrong Way:** “That’s what people do when they run from God. They run to the strangest, most dangerous places and they make nonsensical decisions” (p. 109).
4. **But Not Outrunning God:** “God hadn’t given up on Jonah just because Jonah had given up on God . . . Even though Jonah had given up on the people of Nineveh, God had not” (p. 110).

Questions for Reflection

1. Jonah knew that “those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs” (Jonah 2:8), yet he clung to his own idols. What were those idols? Why do you think he could not let them go? What would Jonah need to do in order to experience “the full measure of God’s grace” (p. 113)?
2. Who are the people to whom you have a hard time extending grace? (p. 117)
3. Now that we’ve studied Noah’s contemporaries (p. 20), Sodom and Gomorrah (chapter 6: *For Further Study*), the Canaanites of Jericho (pp. 80, 81), and Nineveh (p. 114), what patterns do you notice in how God dealt with each group? How does that change the way you see the God of the Old Testament?

For Further Study: Matthew 12:39–41

1. In this passage, Jesus compares himself to Jonah and the people of Nineveh to the Israelites who heard Christ’s preaching. Why do you think the listeners would have found this comparison offensive? Why do you think Jesus used it?

Chapter 9: Accepted by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **God:** “Jesus said what only God can say and then he did what only God could do” (p. 131).
2. **Full of Grace:** “People who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus . . . Jesus liked people who were nothing like him” (p. 126).
3. **From the Beginning:** “Instead of glossing over the embarrassing moments in Jesus’ genealogy, Matthew draws attention to them” (p. 135).
4. **Inviting:** “What would the personification of holiness say to a man who had sold his soul to Rome for the right to steal from his countrymen? ‘Follow me’” (p. 132).
5. **And Challenging:** “Jesus came to shine a penetrating light of reality on the self-righteous and to offer those who were full of shame a way back” (p. 139).

Questions for Reflection

1. Matthew eases the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament by starting his gospel with a genealogy. What aspects of this particular genealogy make it an ideal demonstration of the unity of the Bible as a gospel of grace?
2. Jesus was very clear with the Pharisees that he had come to save those who knew they were sinners. How do so many people today convince themselves that they’re not sinful? Why is it so important for us to see our sinfulness?
3. It is also possible to feel so sinful that we won’t accept God’s grace. How is this actually a form of pride? Why is it wrong?

For Further Study: Luke 2:21–38

1. After four *centuries* of silence, God appears as a baby. A star shines. Angels sing. Magi visit. History pivots. After walking through some key passages of the Old Testament, do you see this event with new eyes?
2. How do you think Simeon and Anna felt?

Chapter 10: Reborn by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **A “Good” Man:** “The Pharisees were the men considered most deserving of God’s blessing in this life and the life to come” (p. 147).
2. **Looking for a General:** “Nicodemus had grown up with stories of a warrior king who would someday inspire and lead the nation to overthrow Roman rule and restore the autonomy and security of God’s promised land” (p. 150).
3. **Found a Savior:** “Jesus was implying that being a descendant of Abraham was not enough . . . Jesus equated *belief* or *trust* with eternal life” (pp. 152, 155).
4. **Who Defeated Death:** “Nicodemus’s faith in Jesus led to the creation of the strongest evidence for his resurrection” (p. 162).

Questions for Reflection

1. Whether it was the paralytic man (Matthew 9:2) or Nicodemus, people often came to Jesus asking for what they wanted but getting what they needed – forgiveness. What do you usually pray for? How do you think that compares with what God knows you need?
2. Nicodemus knew firsthand that legalism doesn’t lead to righteousness; it breeds hypocrisy. The Pharisees’ system didn’t work. Jesus offered an alternative explanation of the Scriptures, one that works. How do you think this made him feel?
3. Do you relate to Nicodemus, living under a burden of guilt, working to be “good enough”? Have you ever received God’s gift of eternal life by placing your faith in Christ’s death as the full and final payment for your sin? If not, why not?

For Further Study: Isaiah 53

1. List (or if you can print this passage, circle) the facts in Isaiah 53 that match the life and death of Jesus.
2. Christ fulfilled the prophecies found in more than 300 Old Testament passages—some of which he explained to his disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:27, 44). How does this confirm what Christ said in Matthew 5:17?

Chapter 11: Filled by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Thirsty:** “Her life bore the combined scars of tragic circumstances and foolish choices . . . public humiliation only added to her misery” (p. 168).
2. **Coping:** “Jacob’s well didn’t quench her thirst for long, but it was familiar and it would be there tomorrow” (p. 170).
3. **Confronted:** “Jesus knew he had to dredge up all the old so that it could be replaced once and for all” (p. 171).
4. **Sustained:** “The grace of God is the life of the Savior coursing through the souls of believers to sustain us through those things that will not or cannot change” (p. 176).

Questions for Reflection

1. You have probably not tried to quench your thirst with sand. But are there other things, habits, or relationships you have hoped would soothe your soul? What has been the result?
2. In chapter 2, God chose a man who had “no influence, no children, and no homeland.” In chapter 6, God saved a pagan prostitute. Here, God revealed himself to a husbandless Samaritan woman. Why does he continually choose the unexpected? What does this reveal about our own prejudices and judgments? What tends to make you feel inadequate to do his work?
3. We don’t know this woman’s whole story, but perhaps it is enough to know she “preferred the afternoon heat to the company of the other women in town” (p. 169). God has great compassion for the outcast, having been the ultimate outcast rejected by men and by God (on the cross). Describe a time when you have felt isolated or outcast. How did you cope with it? In what ways is Christ always there for us when we feel abandoned by people?

For Further Study: Hebrews 4:14–16, Philippians 4:4–7

1. According to these two passages, how are we to approach God?
2. What does God promise to provide?

Chapter 12: Saved by Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Unfair:** “The kingdom of heaven is unfair. At least the way most of us measure fairness” (p. 181).
2. **Generous:** “The other criminal had nothing to offer. Restitution for his crimes was impossible” (p. 187).
3. **Forgiving:** “Jesus offered himself as the answer to the question no one could answer, ‘Now that I’ve messed up, what do I do?’” (p. 190).
4. **Universal:** “Everybody is invited. Everybody gets in the same way. Everybody can meet the requirement” (p. 191).

Questions for Reflection

1. Does it upset you to think that Stephen, Paul, and “the other criminal” will all be in heaven? Does it bother you to think that many modern-day murderers or rapists will be in heaven with those who have devoted their lives to Christ?
2. In chapter 5, we looked at Romans 6:15: “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” Some have suggested that grace takes away a person’s motivation to be obedient to God on earth. Why is this not true?
3. Knowing some will abuse the seeming “license” grace offers, why do you think it’s so important to Jesus that he make this point (through the parable of the workers) about the last being first (Matthew 20:16)?

For Further Study: Matthew 5:38–47

1. How do these verses confirm that the kingdom of heaven is “unfair”?
2. Have you ever seen the generous, almost shocking love described in these passages? How did people react?
3. While Christ doesn’t promote “fairness,” he does remind us of an important concept in Matthew 6:14–15. How do these verses tap into our love for fairness?

Chapter 13: Commissioned for Grace

Key Quotes

1. **Sharing Grace:** “The church is God’s medium for exporting, illustrating, and modeling the grace of God in the world” (p. 208).
2. **With Additions:** “From the very beginning, the church was trending toward making it difficult for people to turn to God. It was hard to leave grace alone” (p. 202).
3. **Tempers Its Power:** “The local church may have lost its appeal, but grace certainly hasn’t” (p. 197).
4. **Unnecessarily:** “The church is most appealing when the message of grace is most apparent” (p. 205).

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you currently active in a church? Why or why not?
2. Are you comfortable attending church? Taking an unchurched friend to church? Why or why not?
3. How could you influence your local church to make it more grace-centered and accessible for the unchurched?
4. Many first-century Jews wanted Christian Gentiles to follow Jewish traditions regarding food, clothing, prayer, etc. What customs do we expect churchgoers to conform to? Is this biblical?

For Further Study: Galatians 5:1–6

1. Paul wrote the book of Galatians in response to the same concerns described in Acts 15—Jews requiring Christian Gentiles to convert to Jewish customs. According to Galatians 2:21 and 5:1–2, why was it so critical that this not be required?
2. As we finish this study, how do you see it affecting your view of:
 - The Old Testament
 - Jesus
 - Yourself
 - Grace