**Genesis 3:21-24 (NET)**

***The Lord God made garments from skinfor Adam and his wife, and clothed them. And the Lord God said, “Nowthat the man has become like one of us, knowinggood and evil, he must not be allowedto stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the Lord God expelled himfrom the orchard in Eden to cultivate the ground from which he had been taken. When he drovethe man out, he placed on the eastern sideof the orchard in Eden angelic sentrieswho used the flame of a whirling swordto guard the way to the tree of life.***

Look closely at the above text. The cherubim and a flaming sword blocked the way to the Tree of Life. Why? Because, if they could get to that tree, and eat of its fruit, they would live forever! Now fast forward approximately four thousand years to another tree. A tree that was cut down to make a cross. And what kind of “fruit” hung upon that tree (Deut. 21:23)? On a hill called Golgotha, suspended between heaven and earth, was the naked, mutilated and blood-soaked body of God’s One and Only Son.

**Galatians 3:13 (NET)**

***Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (because it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”)***

The curse of sin was absorbed by the “fruit” that hung on a cut-down tree when Christ, who knew no sin, became sin for us (1 Peter 2:24). Now looking back to the Garden, what would happen if Adam and Eve could eat from the Tree of Life? They would live forever! By allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, the mystery becomes quite clear, and this is it: The Tree of Life symbolizes the cross, and the fruit that hung upon that tree is the Lord Jesus Christ! Keeping all of this in mind, listen closely to the controversial words of Jesus in the following passages.

**John 6:47-58 (NET)**

***I tell you the solemn truth, the one who believeshas eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestorsate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. Thisis the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a personmay eat from it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The breadthat I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesusbegan to argue with one another, “How can this mangive us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the solemn truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no lifein yourselves. The one who eatsmy flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is truefood, and my blood is truedrink. The one who eatsmy flesh and drinks my blood resides in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who consumesme will live because of me. Thisis the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread your ancestorsate, but then later died. The one who eatsthis bread will live forever.”***

The Lord Jesus is the Living Bread (symbolized by the fruit). And everyone who eats of Him will live forever. Henceforth, the cross of Christ became the ***Tree of Life***! By the way, this tree brings us from the garden all the way to the end of the story of the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7).

* Read each of the following passages and make a note of the provision or foreshadowing of God’s ultimate plan to deal with what took place in the Garden of Eden. What do these passages have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Genesis 3:14-15; Exodus 16:13-20; Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:20-22,28, 10:19-22; Revelation 1:5, 5:9, 7:10, 22:1-5; 1 John 3:8; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 1: 13-14, 19-20  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I would like to use the story I shared in the last chapter to make some applications here. When I lied about my crimes and subsequently allowed my little brother to be punished, He did not suffer in silence. He screamed, “I did not do it! I did not do it!” And furthermore, to state the obvious, it was not *his choice* to take my beating.

But, let’s look at the Lord Jesus. When He was falsely accused and arrested, He could have screamed the truth like my little brother did: “I did not do it!” Instead, He was lead like a lamb to the slaughter, He did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:2-12). Then, He said, “Father forgive them.” In sinless perfection, the Lamb of God willingly submitted to His Father and took our punishment, thereby, absorbing the wrath of God. And as He was dying, Jesus cried out, “Father, why have you forsaken me.” Now, why would the Father in heaven abandon His Precious Son at such a time of need? Habakkuk 1:13 says that “God’s eyes are too holy to look upon sin.” When our sins were laid upon Jesus, the Father turned His back on His Beloved. At that moment, for the very first time, the Lord Jesus experienced our alienation from the Father. Yet, His separation purchased our reconciliation.

Why did it have to happen this way? You see, although God is love, He is also holy. He is so holy that He must keep His Word and punish sin. His holiness demands it. Furthermore, because we are made in God’s image, it’s intrinsic in our nature to want justice and fairness. How many times have you heard this statement, “It’s not fair”? Or, when we are wronged, we say, “Someone is going to pay for this!” Well, the wages of sin is death, and someone will pay--either you or Jesus.

Has anyone ever taken your punishment? Or, have you ever willingly suffered for someone else? If so, it is highly improbable that such a selfless act would be performed on behalf of an enemy. Yet, that is how God’s Word describes us--we are God’s enemies (Romans 5:6-12).

Some two-thousand years ago, in the Holy Land, on a hill called Golgotha, a tree was cut down and made into a cross. That day split history in two. God’s justice and wrath collided with His loving kindness and mercy. There is no greater love than that (John 15:13)!

**1 Peter 3:18 (NET)**

***Because Christ also sufferedonce for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God,***

***by being put to death in the flesh butby being made alive in the spirit.***

Nonetheless, most people will readily embrace a God of love, but they willfully ignore the fact of His holiness. Those who fall into this category refuse to believe in the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. And consequently, they never see their sins or the need for repentance. Yet, even though many will reject Him, this cannot diminish the magnitude of the love of God on display as Christ Jesus lay down His life.

* Look up Isaiah 53:1-12 and Psalm 22:1-19 and find the specific prophecies that describe the death of the Lamb of God. Make a list. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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* There is a scarlet thread that runs throughout the Bible. Read Genesis 38:28, Exodus 25:4 and Joshua 2:18-21. What is it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* John 1:34-37, 10:1-18; Hebrews 9:8-15, 22; Colossians 1:19-22; Ephesians 2:11-22; 2 Corinthians 2:20; 1 Peter 1:16-21, 2:24-25, 3:8-18; Galatians 1:4, 2:20, 3:13; Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; Romans 3:9-23, 4:25, 5:6-8; Leviticus 4:1-35; Isaiah 52:10-15, 53:1-12; Psalm 22:1-19

God’s divine ingenuity is as magnificent as it is mysterious. For instance, a careful study of Romans chapters 1:18-3:20 reveals the terminal diagnosis of our sin problem. Then, when you read Romans 3:21-5:21, God prescribes the remedy.

Another example comes to light when you consider the paradox found in the Latin word for cross: the word is c*rux*! Inquisitive by nature, I chased the origins and derivatives of this word all over the internet, and this is what I found. It’s quite fascinating. The crux, or cross, represents many parallel truths that point us to Christ. For starters, just picture a crossroad with a guidepost pointing you in the right direction. (Jesus said, “I am the way.”) Here is another connection to Christ. Crux is also associated with red like the cardinal bird or like blood. The author of the book of Hebrews said, “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

In fact, even the word excruciating means ex (out of) crux (the cross). The Greek word cardio (which means heart) also comes from the word. So, when we get to the heart of a matter, we have reached the crux.

The word crux could also mean a hinge of a door, an axis or a turning point. (Jesus said, “I am the Door.”) But, we are not done yet. From the word crux comes the general meaning of the word crucial. As you can see, the symbolisms found in the word crux or cross are numerous, but one stands out above all the others. Here it is, and it’s ingenious: At the very heart or *crux* of all our problems is sin. The cross or ***crux of Christ*** was the pivotal hinge that opens the door to the kingdom of God. Now do you see how God provided the cure for our problem by the blood that Jesus shed for us on the cross?

This beautifully brings into focus the central turning point to humanity’s problems. The axis on which all else depends is the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus, His burial and then His subsequent resurrection on the third day. His resurrection from the dead was a picture of our resurrection from spiritual death to life! Notice the irony. The darkest day in history, the very epitome of all evil is called “Good Friday.” Three days later, He rose again, defeating sin and death forever!

* After reading the following passages, state why Jesus died. 1 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 1:7; Romans5:9; Matthew26:26-\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Read 1 Corinthians 1:17. Why do you think the fact of Jesus resurrection is so important? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Genesis 3:7-21, 22:1-14; Exodus 12:21-28; John 1:1-10, 29-34, 19:17-31; Galatians 4:3-5, 6:14; 1 John 3:8; Hebrew 1:1-13; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:13-20, 2:14; Romans 10:13-17; Acts 28:4-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21

**Romans 3:21-26 (NET)**

***But nowapart from the law the righteousness of God***

***(which is attested by the law and the prophets)has been disclosed – namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But they are justifiedfreely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God publicly displayedhimat his deathas the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstratehis righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This wasalso to demonstratehis righteousness in the present time, so that he would be justand the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus’ faithfulness.***

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. Who preached the first gospel message, and to whom was it preached? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. ­­­­­­Read John 8:34-36. Are there any sins that you continually struggle to overcome?
3. Are you comfortable with confessing your sins to God and other trusted believers?
4. If you are in Christ and He is holy, how should this change how you look at sin? 1 Peter 1:15-20) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. In your family, do you see unhealthy patterns in relationships such as passing blame, manipulation, co-dependency, control, or enabling? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
6. Take Isaiah 53: 5-6 and personalize it. “He was pierced for \_\_\_\_\_\_... “The punishment that brought \_\_\_\_\_ peace was upon Him.” … “By His stripes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_am healed.”
7. Read Revelation 1:5; Romans 1:18; 1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How do we know that God hates sin? Hint: there could be more than one answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read Paul’s departing words to the Ephesians in Acts 20:25-28 and answer this question: What was the purchase price of the church–the bride of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Genesis 22:13-14; Mark 10:45; 1 John 2:2, 4:10; Romans 3:23-26, 5:8-11. From these passages, what is the connection between the required Old Testament blood sacrifices and the cross of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Are there any songs that come to mind that reference the cross or the blood of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. In your own words, describe how the killing of the first animal and the sacrifice of Isaac, points to the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read Revelation 17:14 and 19:14. Describe the Lamb. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think On These Things

## Did you learn something new? Did you find a new promise to claim as your own? Did you find a command to obey, a sin to confess or avoid? Is there a passage you could turn into a prayer? How did the Lord speak personally to you through this lesson? What action will you take in obedience to God’s voice? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Memory Verses

**Revelation 21:22-27 (Net)**

***NowI saw no temple in the city, because the Lord God – the All-Powerful – and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God lights it up, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their grandeurinto it.  Its gates will never be closed during the day(andthere will be no night there).***

***They will bring the grandeur and the wealthof the nationsinto it, butnothing ritually uncleanwill ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestableor practices falsehood,but only those whose namesare written in the Lamb’s book of life.***

**Week #5**

# “But God” …Makes All the Difference



**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 2:4-5 (NET)**

***But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved!***

**Introduction**

 Thus far in our study, we have discovered that we are born into this world with a seemingly insurmountable problem.  The problem is this:  because of sin, we are separated from a Holy God. But what is insurmountable for us, is not for Him. Even before time began, God had an overarching plan of redemption and hope.  As we saw in our last lesson, the plan was written in blood. In fact, if you were to take a red pen and mark the references or the allusions to the blood atonement in your Bible, you’ll discover it spans the length of the God-breathed text. Like a large red arrow or a neon sign, the red line points us to the antidote for our problem. It’s the blood of a spotless Sacrificial Lamb—the Lord Jesus Christ.

So now, we are going to probe even deeper into the depths of God’s love, and consider how He has bridged the chasm between us and Himself through grace and mercy. For here, the helpless sinner may pass over from despair and death to salvation and life.

**When God Intervenes**

When we look at our key passage from Ephesians 2, we might be tempted to skip over the two little words at the beginning of the sentence.  The words “But God” seem less important than the huge concepts embodied in the words “saved by grace” and “through faith.”  I promise we will drink deeply from both these life-giving fountains shortly. Yet, before we do, let’s think for a moment on what happens when you take the simple word *but* and combine it with the word *God*. Here are a few examples: We were dead... “But God” made us alive. Or, when we were still powerless, ungodly sinners, God’s enemies… “But God” demonstrated His love by this--Christ died for us. When we were separated from God, without hope in this world… “But God” has reconciled us to Himself through the blood of Christ. Do you see how powerful and weighty these two words are? They can alter a life, a family, a nation and even the whole wide world. When we find this word combination in the Bible, we should stop and take a closer look because they speak volumes. The words “But God” mark a special place—a transition point from one state to another. It is the place where God intervenes in history. In our key passage, it marks the point that we pass from spiritual death to eternal life.

There are other short word combinations like this that we should pay close attention to when we are reading scripture. The word combination “for God,” is an example. Grammarians tell us that using the word “for” as a conjunction (especially at the beginning of a sentence) is an old pattern of writing that is rarely used anymore. When it is used, it adds formality and weight to what is being said. So, although it is rare in other modern documents, we still see this construction in many (but not all) of the most modern translation of the Bible. For instance, you will find this usage in one of the most quoted passages in the Bible--John 3:16… “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (KJV) And then, here’s one more… “For God made His light shine in our hearts.” Why would modern translations of the Bible still use this old way of writing? Why don’t they say “Because God” or “Since God,” or just say nothing at all? Like a highlighter, using “For God” retains the weightiness and formality of the statement. Therefore, even translators don’t normally touch them.

This is all just to say that small words can mean a lot when we are referring to the Scriptures. Because, as Jesus asserted in Matthew 5:18, every jot and tittle are significant. Now let us return to our original subject. Those “But God” moments do make all the difference in the world. From the hour they brought us from spiritual death to life, to the thousand other faith-building moments when God has mercifully intervened in the situations of our life, these moments change the trajectory of our lives forever.

And so, as you read the following stories, consider how the Lord, in His unfathomable love, interrupts our hopeless, helpless, godless lives with these glorious words, “But God.” For when He does, we can never be the same.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Genesis 8:1, 31:42, 50:20, 1 Samuel 23:14; Psalm 49:15, 73:26; Matthew 18:26; John 3:14-18; Romans 5:6-12, 6:23; 1 Corinthians 1:27; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, 7:5-6; Acts 2:24, 3:15
* From these above list of passages, pick out three and state how situations were altered by the words *but* or *for* God. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Once Blind but Now I See**

In 1725 a son of a sailor was born. His name was John Newton, and his is an interesting story. His father owned a slave ship. Like father, like son, John Newton joined in the deplorable trade and earned his wages through the blood, sweat, and tears of the humans he trafficked. God only knows the unspeakable sins committed on that ship. By virtue of his first birth, John was no different than you or I. He was lost, sinful, spiritually blind and separated from God. But then, one fateful night at sea, by grace, God provided a ferocious storm to teach this hardened sinner what it means to fear Him. That’s when John Newton had a divine encounter with the living God. He cried out, “Lord--have mercy on my soul!” And God, who is rich in mercy, saved him, and the change was obvious. He was no longer a sinner–he was a forgiven saint. His personal testimony is depicted in the beloved hymn “Amazing Grace*.*”

The first line of his song offers a window into the soul of a man who had been twice born. Newton’s song begins with these words, “Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I am found, was blind but now I see.” What was he talking about? Was he physically blind or lost at sea? No. He was blind to the glory of God in Christ, and he was blinded by sin to his wretched condition.

The apostle Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote an explanation of spiritual blindness to the church at Corinth. After all, Paul too was once blind until he was blinded by the Light of the world, and then he received his spiritual sight.

**2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (NET)**

***But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaimourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slavesfor Jesus’ sake. For God, who said “Let light shine out of darkness,”is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ.***

Towards the end of Newton’s life, his physical eyesight was failing, but with the eyes of his heart, he had perfect vision (Ephesians 1:17-18). The following words sum up his statement of faith: “Although my memory’s fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior” (Newton 2016). Today Newton’s faith has become sight, and no doubt, as he gazes upon the beauty of the Lord, he is singing that eternal song of praise to his Savior--the Lord Jesus Christ.

* What are your thoughts about God offering grace and mercy to murders and rapists? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Along those lines, what was so amazing about God having grace upon John Newton?

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* Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 and then fill in the blanks: “But for the grace of God\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

There is this oft repeated saying that goes something like this, “There but for the grace of God, go I.” The person who has taken a long, hard look at their own soul’s propensity towards depravity, cannot forget the restraints that God’s grace has put on their actions.  They understand that it took just as much amazing grace to forgive their own sins as it did to forgive the vilest murder who ever lived.

**A Road That Makes All the Difference**

If you have a story in you, or, like Newton, a song of praise, you have got to get it out. It simply can’t be contained. We may not all have a song in us, but every saint has a story of God’s grace. Because our testimonies are so intertwined, I will share a portion of my husband’s story of grace before I tell my own.

Although Art and I both grew up in families that were actively involved in church, neither of us were saved until we were adults. Art was forty years old. This fact alone explains the root cause of our problems. But, I don’t think our story is that different from most. It is my opinion that churches of all denominations are full of broken people living lives in sin and deception. Seasons come and seasons go, yet nothing changes because even though they attend Church, they are not saved. By the way, *people are the Church*, not buildings!

**Matthew 7:13-27 (NET)**

***Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. But the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to life, and there are few who find it.***

***“Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gatheredfrom thorns or figs from thistles, are they? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize them by their fruit. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven – only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons and do many powerful deeds? Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’Everyonewho hears these words of mine and does them is likea wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!***

Sure, we knew Bible stories, but not the One whom all these stories pointed to. We were both lost, religious church members on the wide road to destruction, but we were completely blind to the fact! We were *perishing in the pew* (a title of one of the lessons you will find on Catalyst website). As Jesus, so fittingly described the Church of Laodicea, we were naked, miserable, poor and blind (Revelation 3:17). You see, t*he devil does not care if he takes us to hell from a brothel, a bar stool or a church pew!* I will expound on my testimony in just a bit. But first, I want to give an example of spiritual blindness. I had been saved for a few years when I wrote my first Bible study. It was based on Matthew 7:13-27 (printed above). I borrowed the title from a poem by Robert Frost titled, “The Road Not Taken.” The poem ends this way: “*Two Roads diverged in a wood, and I--I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the Difference* (Wikisource 2016). This poem was the one I selected for the senior quote in my high school yearbook. Although, at the time of my graduation the poem had an entirely different meaning. The reality was, I was traveling my own path of destruction and going *my own way* on the wide road, however, it certainly was not the road less traveled!

**Isaiah 53:6 (NET)**

***All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the Lord caused the sin of all of us to attack him.***

**A Picture Worth a Thousand Words**

My husband, Art, is not only intelligent but also quite artistic. His most famous work, in my opinion, was done in his senior year of high school. He won an award for his portrait of the king--Elvis that is. Art had not come to know the real *KING* yet. Nevertheless, I thought the painting was so good that I took it to Graceland and entered it in the annual Elvis art contest. I was sure we would win thousands of dollars. I had hoped Elvis would pay for my daughter Allie’s wedding. Well, that did not happen. However, Art’s painting did make our local nightly news. When the contest was over, we picked up the painting and drove Elvis home. On the way home, we sang part of this old hymn: “Coming home, coming home, never more to roam, open wide thine arms of love, Lord I'm coming home." When we got home, Elvis returned to the closet!

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As the adage goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. So now I want to tell you about a more important work of “Art.” When I began to write the study of the wide and narrow roads, I asked Art if he would do a painting for me to give us a visual for our study. And so, he did (you can see it above). As our three young children watched the painting unfold, they appropriately named the wide road the “Death Road.” It is a fitting title.

Art painted a beautiful gold mirrored gate at the entrance to hell. The gate was to reflect the people on the wide road. Have you ever been to Las Vegas, Nevada? If so, you have an idea of the facade of the gate to hell which stands at the end of death road in Art’s painting. All that the world offers us may look good on the outside, but just like the shiny facades on the casinos, it is all a grand illusion.

There was one thing I never liked about the painting. Jesus’ face, looked nothing like the one I saw when His light shone in my heart. But you see, Art was blind to the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. And consequently, he was blind to the true condition of his own heart.

Art’s painting was never completed. He stopped short of painting the people on the wide road, although we talked in detail about what they would look like. Have you ever read the short tale by Hans Christian Andersen titled “The Emporer’s New Clothes?” If you have, then you will remember the Emperor’s *new clothes* were *no clothes at all* . If Art ever completes his painting, the people on “Death Road” will be dressed like the Emperor! They are naked, but they don’t know it because the reflection in the gates of hell shows them wearing their Sunday best. But they are as naked as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They are not dressed in the blood of Christ and His righteousness.

Suppose, if you will, an artist is at his easel painting a portrait of a man who survived the atrocities of the concentration camps in Poland. Have you seen the images of the emaciated, naked, half-dead human beings? Now picture the artist standing next to a mirrored wall in his studio. As he paints, he glances at himself in the mirror and he sees a well-fed, well-dressed man. Here’s the irony: the artist is painting a self-portrait. That was my husband! Perhaps Art was beginning to see himself on the wide road and that is why he stopped painting. Like the man who looks into the mirror of the Word of God and walks away, he quickly forgets what he looked like (James 1:21-25). Aren’t we all guilty of this? This is precisely what happens when we attend church, week after week, hearing the Word of God in vain. It doesn’t penetrate our heart, in fact, it hardens it! This is the exact condition of the Church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter three.

The longer I live, the more I realize the Bible is true--every single word of it! We reap what we sow, we reap later than we sow and we reap much more than we sow! The devil never gives you a true picture of what is at the end of his road. Unless the Lord intervenes with a “but God” kind of roadblock, we’ll stay on the wide road, separated from God, in the domain of the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy. This road abruptly ends, and then we will live our worst nightmares for all eternity.

Now, let’s go back to Art’s story. Recounting the day of his salvation, he said, “When the Lord saved me, He introduced me to two people. First, I was introduced to Jesus in all His holiness. And second, God showed me who I was, a sinner, lost and separated from the God who loved me. This is when I understood for the first time that sin was not what I did, it was who I was. The devil worked on me for a few days telling me that God was too holy to save someone who was so sinful. Then, in desperation, I pleaded with Jesus to save me, and by His amazing grace, He did!”

Shortly thereafter, he asked me, “How could I have been so blind? How could I have missed salvation, all these years in the church?” Well, now the answers are clear--he was blind, *but God* opened his eyes. Until God leads us, by the heart, to the cross, and we see the Lord Jesus dying in our place, we are blind to the fact that we are lost. Furthermore, this revelation is a work of God and a *gift* of amazing grace (Ezekiel 36:22-29).

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Isaiah 42:7, 59:1-5, 61:1-3; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 4:18-19, 6:43-47, 8:21; Acts 4:10-12; 5:31; 20:20-21; John 3:1-18, 14:1-6; Titus 2:11-14, 3:3-7; Ephesians 2:11-14; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; James 2:19; Romans 1:21; Revelation 2:1-22
* Read the following passages: Job 42:5-6; Isaiah 6:5; Luke 5:5-8. In each of these stories, someone had an encounter with God. What do all these stories have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Do you have a “But for the Grace of God….” interruption in your life story? If so, would you be willing to write it here and share it with someone? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**My Line in the Song of Grace**

When I contemplate my life before Christ and how undeserving I truly am, I’m astonished by God’s long-suffering, tenacious love. And just to think that before the foundation of the world He knew me and yet still loved me!? There are some things too great to understand, and this is one of them. Admittedly, I am ashamed of the woman I was without Him, but I’m not ashamed of the Lord Jesus–the Author and finisher of my faith (Hebrews 2:5-18, 5:9). So now, I would like to add my line to the eternal song of praise for God’s amazing grace.

**Isaiah 61:10-11 (NET)**

***Iwill greatly rejoicein the Lord; I will be overjoyed because of my God. For he clothes me in garments of deliverance; he puts on me a robe symbolizing vindication. I look like a bridegroom when he wears a turban as a priest would; I look like a bride when she puts on her jewelry. For just as the ground produces its crops and a garden yields its produce, so the sovereign Lord will cause deliveranceto grow, and give his people reason to praise him in the sight of all the nations.***

Outside of the Bible, grace is sometimes defined in terms such as: *to adorn; to decorate; to embellish or to dignify* (Revelation 21:1-2). This definition so fittingly reminds me of my story of grace. Let me clarify, I am not saying that the word dignify is a word that would aptly apply.

https://ssl.gstatic.com/ui/v1/icons/mail/images/cleardot.gif Quite the contrary! However, I can relate to the words adorn, decorate and embellish.

Looking back, there seems to be a wedding theme woven throughout my life. For example, from the very first year of our marriage, my career was preparing brides for their weddings. The name of my business was Memphis Bridal Gallery. As the owner of the bridal gallery, one of my jobs was to write a detailed description of the wedding dress for the mother of the bride. Most descriptions included seed pearls because pearls are the most often used adornment for wedding gowns along with crystals, sequins, rhinestones, silver and gold thread, and lace.

My Pastor, David Lawrence, has a message titled: “Turning Problems into Pearls.” In that message, he says, “God never wastes your past” (2012). You can read a variant on this theme from Pastor Rick Warren at <http://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/the-purpose-of-redemptive-suffering>. Indeed, the Lord has taken an abundance of problems and used them as instruments to write my story of grace.

**Jeremiah 8:20-22 (NET)**

***They cry, ‘Harvest time has come and gone, and the summer is over,***

***and still we have not been delivered.’ My heart is crushed because my dear people are being crushed.I go about crying and grieving. I am overwhelmed with dismay.There is still medicinal ointmentavailable in Gilead! There is still a physician there! Why then have my dear people not been restored to health?***

As I have previously mentioned, something was missing in my life. I was broken, and so was Art. That’s how our marriage began in 1986. It’s strange to me now, thinking about dressing all those brides in their ornate white wedding gowns, and yet my wedding dress was not white, nor embellished with a single bead or pearl. Figuratively speaking, this dress mirrored the condition of my spiritually dead heart and what it means to try to cover my sins in my own self-righteousness and religious rituals. No wonder I felt like anything but a beautiful bride on my wedding day. Have you heard of these old wedding traditions: “Something old, something new, something borrowed something blue”? The item I chose as “something borrowed” was a very common wedding accessory, a single strand of pearls.

I was 26 years old when the Heavenly Father led me to the foot of the cross of Christ. After an entire lifetime of church attendance, I saw for the very first time the horror of my sins hanging on the love of my life. When I saw how pure and holy He is, I saw what a dirty mess I truly was.  In His boundless grace and loving kindness, God led me to see specific sins. But, the most heinous of all my sins was my religious self-righteousness. What amazed me the most was that He knew all I had ever done, and yet He loved me. That day, for the first time, I understood that He knew me; He knew me. He was not blind to what I was. But He also showed me His enormous heart of love and compassion toward me. I thought, “How could it be that He still wanted me for His Bride?” The only explanation is grace.

God did not waste the years I spent in the bridal business. It was in those years that I became His Bride! He is still working to remove the spots and wrinkles from my wedding gown. He is not done with me yet. Preparation for this wedding is a lifelong task. Part of this process has been refining me through fiery trials.

God is a God of redemption, and when we give him our testimonies, no matter how shameful or painful they may be, He can turn the ashes into something beautiful and useful for our good and His glory. These years were preparation for the eternal work God has chosen for me--to introduce others to King Jesus and dress the King’s daughters for the wedding by making disciples. From beginning to the end, this is a story of grace upon grace (John 1:14-16).

Someone once said, “Grace is--God satisfying our souls with His Son so that we are forever ruined for everyone else!” To put it another way: the best advertisement for a product is a satisfied customer. There is no one else who ever filled my empty soul like Jesus. Is He that good? Is His grace so completely satisfying that everyone and everything else pales in comparison? Yes, He is, and yes, He does. He absolutely satisfies; I am ruined forever! And that’s a very, very good thing!

**Psalms 40:2-3 (NET)**

***He lifted me out of the watery pit, out of the slimy mud. He placed my feet on a rock***

***and gave me secure footing. He gave me reason to sing a new song, praising our God.***

***May many see what God has done, so that they might swear allegiance to him and trust in the Lord!***

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* 1 Peter 1:18-22, 2:9-10, 2:24-25, 3:18; Romans 3:20-31; 4:2; 5:6-12; 6:1-10; 9:30; Galatians 2:20; Titus 3:4-5; 2 Timothy 1:9; John 3:14-18; 1 John 4:7-12; Psalm 103:1-22; Revelation 21:1-4

**God's Love Is Not Blind**

**John 2:24-25 (Net)**

***But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. He did not need anyone to testify about man, for he knew what was in man.***

Perhaps you have tried to look good, or be good, or do good to gain love. If so, then you know that is not only exhausting, but it is pointless. And furthermore, where did all this effort get us? Nowhere! Any “so called” relationship that is absent of transparency and acceptance is no relationship at all. If we must wear a mask to gain acceptance, then we will never be at ease when we are around that person. I have just described much of my life. But God’s grace changed all that when I met the real Jesus. It was like finally coming home to a place I have never been. At long last… it was rest for my weary soul. Can you relate?

* Is there anyone in your life with whom you feel completely at ease being yourself? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Do you think those closest to you feel comfortable being themselves around you? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* What do you think it would take to foster this kind of relationships? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

There is nothing quite like being completely known and understood. Only Jesus knows us this way because He has walked the recesses of our hearts and minds. Therefore, He understands our idiosyncrasies, silly ways, propensities to fear, or sin or whatever. He knows what we do, and He knows why we do these things. *He gets us!* Not only is He is intimately acquainted with all our ways, He knows what’s in us. But as He was dying upon the cross, He became *intimately* *acquainted* with our sins. Think about that. Every vile thought and deed conceived in the darkness of our unredeemed hearts was placed upon Him. It’s hard for the mind to fathom how repugnant sin truly is to One so holy. That was the true horror of the crucifixion, and these very sins were in the cup He pleaded with the Father to take from Him. No wonder He agonized to the point of sweating drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-42).

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Matthew 11:28-30; Jeremiah 1:4-8; Psalm 10:4, 11:4, 56:8, 139:1-16; Ephesians 1:1-6; 2:10; John 2:25

**The Hound of Heaven**

**Luke 19:10 (NET)**

***For the Son of Man cameto seek and to save the lost.***

In his poem The Hound of Heaven, the English poet Francis Thompson wrote of a God who woos and pursues His bride. Like an unfaithful wife, we run after other lovers. Even so, He searches us out. He paid the highest price for our ransom and He has too much at stake to let us go (Romans 5: 6-12; John 3:14-19; Ephesians 2:1-15). It comes as no surprise that the word *rescue* is found in the definition of the Greek words: ***forgive, grace and save***.

In a previous lesson, we read Acts 17:24-28. It says that God has determined the exact time and place that we will live. Kiki Carson, a beautiful addition to our disciple group, tells us of how the Lord sought her when she was an exchange student in Morocco, of all places! Kiki said, “He was pursuing me like a Bridegroom pursues His bride.” Don’t you just love that? If you are in Christ, although you may have been unaware of it, He did the same for you. Yet, sometimes, the instruments God uses to draw us, may seem like a contradiction to His love--especially when it involves suffering. For John Newton, God sought him amid a tumultuous sea. For my husband and me, it was a turbulent marriage. For Saul, who became the apostle Paul, it was God’s grace that stopped him in his tracks in the middle of a murderous rampage against Christians. For others, it could be one of a thousand other forms of grace.

It matters not the place, nor the circumstances we are in, God knows *who* *we are*, *what we are* and *where we are*. Oh, we may run, but we cannot hide from the ***Hound of Heaven*** (Jeremiah 23:24; Psalms 139:1-16).

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.**

1. What do you think it means to be spiritually blind? (2 Corinthians 4:3-6) How does one get spiritual sight? (Psalm 119:130) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Romans 5:6-10 and describe what kinds of people Christ died to save. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Ephesians 2:1-9 clearly states how God feels about those who are dead spiritually. What does the text say? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. When a person is the recipient of God’s amazing grace, what are some of the effects that this will have upon their life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Read the following passages: Psalm 103:1-14; Isaiah 38:17, 43:25; Zechariah 3:9; Hebrews 9:26. Make a list of what God’s grace has done for every sinner who repents: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. See if you can find any passages that have the transitional phrases “But God” or “For God” and list them here.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. What kind of circumstances did the Lord bring into your life as He wooed you to Himself? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Read Ephesians 1:4-5; Acts 2:38-39; John 6:44-45,65. What do these passages tell us about the Hound of Heaven? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think On These Things

## Did you learn something new? Did you find a new promise to claim as your own? Did you find a command to obey, a sin to confess or avoid? Is there a passage you could turn into a prayer? How did the Lord speak personally to you through this lesson? What action will you take in obedience to God’s voice? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Memory Verses**

**Hosea 2:14-17 (NET)**

***However, in the future I will allure her;I will lead******her back into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. From there I will give back her vineyards to her, and turn the “Valley of Trouble”into an “Opportunity for Hope.” There she will sing as she did when she was young,when she came up from the land of Egypt. “At that time,”declares the****Lord****,***

***“you will call,‘My husband’;you will never again call me,‘My master.’***

***For I will remove the names of the Baal idols******from your lips,***

***so that you will never again utter their names!”***

**Week #6**

**The Riches of God’s Mercy and Grace**



**Key Passages**

**Ephesians 2:4-9 (NET)**

***But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved!***

***and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, to demonstrate in the coming agesthe surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not fromworks, so that no one can boast.***

**Introduction**

For much of my life, even as a believer, I have misunderstood the concepts of God’s grace and mercy. Although, having spent a considerable amount of my life attending a protestant church, I was certainly acquainted with theses doctrines. The fallacy of this mindset is not inconsequential. As I have previously mentioned, my lack of understanding of grace and mercy resulted in an unhealthy pattern of trying to earn love, even God’s love. Until recently, I didn’t even realize just how detrimental this faulty thinking was to my relationship with the Lord. It has caused me to live as a beggar--even though in Christ, I am rich. Furthermore, without having a firm grip on the doctrine of grace, it left a crack in the foundation of my faith. Left unattended, the crack became a crater that drained the joy right out of my salvation. And if I am being honest, I still struggle with a mindset that somehow God loves me when I am good, but when I am bad-- not so much.

It all goes back to the fact that fairness and justice are ingrained in our DNA. These deep-seated beliefs are not wrong. It is just that apart from God, they are non-existent. Whether I am behaving good or bad, I don’t deserve God’s love. I never have, and I never will. Rather, by the very nature of my first birth, I have merited death. That’s why it is so important that we move past a surface, sterile view of God’s grace and mercy. Until we do, we are living as paupers, even though we are daughters of the King. Writing this study, especially this lesson, is helping me to retrieve my joy. I sincerely hope it will do the same for you.

And so, we are going to revisit the same passage that we did in the previous lesson. Only this time, as promised, we are going to hone in on the two bedrocks of the Christian faith: grace and mercy. We are going to mull them over, look at them from different perspectives, and, with the Lord’s help, try to define them.

**A Reformed Pharisee**

It is difficult to speak with any authority on a subject that you are unfamiliar with. Whereas, experience can afford you the credentials of an expert. As one who had experienced God’s mercy and grace firsthand, the apostle Paul was well qualified to speak on the matter.

Reading Paul’s testimony, it’s apparent that he had experienced a radical paradigm shift. When he encountered the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, not only was his theology reformed, but his life was transformed. In his “B.C.” days as Saul, he was a law abiding, rule keeping, legalistic Pharisee (Acts 25:5-18). But all that changed when God captivated his heart with grace. At last, he was set free from the futility of striving to earn salvation by keeping the Law. And what a relief it is to be unfettered from the vain attempts to earn God’s love, or appease Him with empty burdensome rituals. Paul knew for a fact that God “justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:5). And He never got over it. With a heart full of gratitude and awe, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the pastor of the church at Ephesus at the time, and he said:

**1 Timothy 1:13-16 (NET)**

***“even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I was treated with mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and our Lord’s grace was abundant, bringing faith and love in Christ Jesus. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” – and I am the worst of them!  But here is why I was treated with mercy: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life.”***

* Make a list of some of the burdensome rituals that religions put upon people? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

It is traditionally believed that the book of Galatians, a tutorial on grace, was written while Paul was at Ephesus. Ephesians 2:4-9 is a condensed version of the entire book of Galatians. The crucial theme of salvation by grace through faith became the hallmark of the reformation (we have just celebrated the 500 year anniversary of this historical event). In fact, Galatians has been called “Luther’s book,” because Luther took his stand on the words of Paul’s apologetic letter on this subject. That’s how vital the doctrine of grace is.

Paul spoke more about God’s grace than any other writer in the Bible, and assuming he penned the book of Hebrews, that is over 100 times! When Paul finally embraced grace, it became the anthem and theme of his life: his emancipation declaration. If we are in Christ, it is ours too.

**Galatians 2:16-21 (NET)**

***Yet we knowthat no one is justified by the works of the lawbut by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christand not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no onewill be justified. But if while seeking to be justified in Christ we ourselves have also been found to be sinners, is Christ then one who encourages sin? Absolutely not! But if I build up again those things I once destroyed, I demonstrate that I am one who breaks God’s law. For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God. I have been crucified with Christ,*** ***and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. Sothe life I now live in the body,I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God,who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside God’s grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing!***

**The Lord Abounds in Mercy**

**Psalm 145:8-9 (NET)**

***The Lord is merciful and compassionate; he is patientand demonstrates great loyal love.***

***The Lord is good to all, and has compassion on all he has made.***

Outside of the Bible, I can’t even think of a context that the word mercy is used in today. With one exception, and it just so happens to be a great platform for illustration. Let’s think in terms of a court of law, where a judge has “mercy” upon the accused sparing their lives from the death penalty. Or here is another, less noble, example. For instance, you say flippantly, “Lord, have mercy." I'm ashamed to admit, but I’m guilty. However, the Lord has been readjusting my thinking lately on this subject.

To bring this lesson closer to home, I would like to tell you a story. Well, a few stories to be exact. Not too long ago, our family had a frightening experience when my sister-in-law was in a terrible car wreck. (Not only did the Lord spare her life, he also protected her newly donated kidney–double miracles!) Being the visual learner that I am, the Holy Spirit (my teacher) seized the moment as an opportunity to give me an object lesson on mercy.

We spent two full days in our local Regional Medical Center. As we took turns sitting by her side in the bowels of the trauma center, we got a firsthand look at many gut-wrenching crisis situations. We were totally out of our element!

With only a curtain separating us and other critically injured people, we could not help but hear the conversations and wailing cries of the wounded. An injured young man who had been involved in a shoot-out was placed beside my sister-in-law. It just so happened, that this young man had apparently shot some of the other victims in the trauma center. Along with several police officers who came to pay the criminal a visit, was his aunt. I overheard her plead with her nephew. She said: “You need to get down on your knees and thank the good Lord for having mercy on you and sparing your life!” Although he appeared oblivious to the fact that God had spared his life, his aunt knew better. Her words, it seemed, fell on deaf ears and a hardened heart. His calloused response to her pleas exposed his lack of fear of the Lord and disregard for the mercy that had been shown him.

There’s little doubt that she left there praying God would have mercy on her nephew’s soul and grant him repentance. I silently interceded for her, her nephew and the others in the trauma center. My heart was tendered to the woman’s plight, because, I just recently lost my nephew, Billy. His short life was replete with trials and sorrows. Granted, there were many times he tried to reform his life, but to no avail. So, when he couldn’t walk the “straight and narrow,” he would give up and run from the Lord (I understand, I’ve been there, too). Many a pleading prayer had been offered up on Billy’s behalf. The last couple of years of his life, the Lord answered our prayers by placing Billy into the care of a local ministry for men named *Warriors Center* ([www.warriorscenter.org](http://www.warriorscenter.org)). Once he entered their program, they loved Billy to Christ and then discipled him. Then, when he was finally ready, the Lord took Billy home. As I write this, next week would have been his thirty–fourth birthday.

**Romans 11:32-36 (NET)**

***For God has consigned all people to disobedience so that he may show mercy to them all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how fathomless his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that Godneeds to repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all*** ***things. To him be glory forever! Amen.***

Now, only a fool would claim to fully understand the plans and ways of God. They are far above our pay scale. But of this I am sure, Billy’s life ultimately brought glory to God. How is that so, you may ask? His life displayed the enormous heart of God–His patience, His mercy, how longsuffering He is and the greatest of all of God’s attributes…unfailing love.

Is there someone in your life that desperately needs the Lord? After years of praying, are you wondering if they are a lost cause? To persist in this kind of intercessory prayer takes faith--the kind that moves mountains! But where are you going to find that? Jesus said in Matthew 17:20-21, that even if our faith is as tiny as a mustard seed, we can move mountains. He’s speaking hypothetically here, not so much about physical, but spiritual obstacles, such as blinded eyes being opened, or those held captive to sin being set free, or the spiritually dead being raised to life. So, here is a list of passages that you can use as “seeds” to grow your faith. As you prayerfully mull them over, ask yourself these questions: Is there anything God can’t do? Is there anyone who is beyond the reach of God’s amazing grace (2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Matthew 18:18-20, 21:21-22; Mark 10:21-27; Luke 11:5-13,13:6-9, 18:1-8; John 6:44, 65; Isaiah 65:8; Job 22:21-30; Daniel 9:4-19; Revelation 7:10)?

* After prayerfully reading over this list, share your insights from these passages. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Compassion--Mercy’s Companion**

**Isaiah 54:10 (NET)**

***Even if the mountains are removed and the hills displaced, my devotion will not be removed from you, nor will my covenant of friendshipbe displaced,” says the Lord, the one who has compassion on you.***

Now, let’s turn our attention to a couple of Biblical examples of God’s compassion and mercy. And there are so many to choose from! So, for time sake, we will just have to settle for one Old Testament and one New Testament story.

To begin with, there is King David. Now, here is a man who knew about God’s mercy and compassion. Even though he was a man after God’s own heart, he committed adultery with Bathsheba, lied about it, and subsequently, murdered her husband. He broke at least four out of the ten commandments--and some big ones at that! The point here is this: *none of us* are beyond returning to the pig pen of sin. However, in David’s case, he didn’t stay there for too long (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12). Finally, after the prophet Nathan confronted Him, David owned up to his sins. After this humbling fall, in brokenness and repentance, he was forgiven and restored to fellowship with the Lord. You can read about his repentance in Psalms chapters 32:1-5, 38:1-8, 51:1-19 and 145:3. David never stopped counting the many ways God had been merciful to him. With a humble and grateful heart, David wrote the following Psalm.

**Psalm 103:8-17 (NET)**

***The Lord is compassionate and merciful; he is patient and demonstrates great loyal love. He does not always accuse, and does not stay angry. He does not deal with us as our sins deserve;he does not repay us as our misdeeds deserve. For as the skies are high above the earth, so his loyal love towers over his faithful followers. As far as the eastern horizonis from the west,so he removes the guilt of our rebellious actionsfrom us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on his faithful followers. For he knows what we are made of;he realizeswe are made of clay. A person’s life is like grass.Like a flower in the field it flourishes, but when the hot windblows by, it disappears, and one can no longer even spot the place where it once grew. But the Lord continually shows loyal love to his faithful followers,and is faithful to their descendants.***

Now let’s see what we can learn from a New Testament illustration. You might want to take a moment to read the story yourself; it is found in John 8:1-11. Here, saint John tells of one occasion where Jesus was teaching in the temple court. (We might compare that to the foyer of a church.) His teaching session was interrupted by a bunch of self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees. With murder in their eyes and stones in their hands, they had the audacity to bring a half-naked woman and threw her down right in the center of everyone! And how convenient, to have just “caught” her in the very act of adultery! Sounds to me, like this was all premeditated, and she was set up as the “bait” they used to trap Jesus. Curiously enough, someone was missing from this humiliating seen. Where was the man she was caught in bed with?

Amid the accusations of the self-righteous throng, Jesus reads them like a book, exposing the motives of their (pardon the pun) *stony* hearts. Jesus is no respecter of men. He treats everyone equally--the ones who know they are sinners and those who *think* they are not. In this instance, Jesus addresses the latter first. Setting the bar as high as the Ten Commandments   
(which they loved to quote, but none of them had kept), He stoops down to write in the dirt. We can only speculate what He wrote, but, perhaps it was the specific commands they had broken that day. Or maybe, it flashed through their minds, all the times they coveted their neighbor’s wife or even worse--committed adultery with their eyes! Pointing out their sins, He said, “Whoever among you is guiltlessmay be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). If they were tallying up how many commandments were broken here, the judicial scale would not fall in their favor. Sometimes, wisdom *does* come with age. The first to drop their stones and walk away were the older ones.

There are several good takeaways in these two narratives. But, what stands out the most is the stark contrast between the self-righteous Lawbreakers and the compassion and mercy of the Lord Jesus. We might be tempted to look down on them the way they looked down on the woman until it hits you, “Am I really any better than them?” So, who am I to cast my judgmental stones?

God the Father could have sent Jesus to condemn us all, and justifiably so (John 3:14-18). Yet, rather than giving us what we deserve, He delights in giving us mercy--He is rich in it. And, although God is Holy, Holy, Holy, He is also compassionate towards us, remembering that He made us from the dust, therefore, we still get dirty with sin. That is why we need a Savior, a defender, someone who is perfect to stand in the gap. There is only One who fits the bill (Acts 4:12; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).

I don’t know about you, but, having already lived beyond the half-way point of a century, I am certain that if God had treated me, even for one millisecond, as my sins deserve, I would have died a long time ago! More often than I care to admit, I sin grievously, and I know that the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective (James 5:13-16). Since I am always in need of prayer, this is a real predicament. What can I do when I know I don’t have a righteous leg to stand on or to bow on before God? But, then I remember that my Judge sits upon a mercy-seat and at His right hand is Christ Jesus. He is my Righteousness.

Incidentally, the Greek word that is translated as *mercy-seat* is halasterion. It is defined as the means or the place where sins are forgiven. By no means is God obligated to exonerate us. Yet, when we confess our sins, because of the blood of Jesus, He is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:5-10). Here again–because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, we can receive mercy. Isn’t He wonderful?

* What are the wages of sin? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Honestly, where would you be if you had to pay the penalties for your sins? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

This seems like a fitting place to stop for a moment and think about all of this. When we opened our eyes this morning, God’s mercies were new. He has granted us one more day of life, and at this very moment, we are living in the brief dash between the day of our birth and the day of our death. In fact, David wrote, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6 King James Version). Did you catch that? God’s goodness and mercy follow us, covering our past (what is behind us), and God’s mercy is sufficient for all the days that lay before us. Then one glorious day, because of His mercy, we get to dwell in His house forever! Therefore, to say that mercy is simply “*not* being treated as our sins deserve,” would be a colossal understatement; it is so much more than that!

If you are a recipient of God’s mercy, then He put a song in your heart. But it was not meant to stay there. Don’t you think the Lord loves it when we sing praises to Him? Isn’t He worthy of it? Besides that, if we don’t sing, the rocks will cry out (Luke 19:40). And we don’t want that to happen, do we? Are you grateful for God’s mercy? If so, when was the last time others have heard you sing about it?

**Psalm 89:1-2 (KJV)**

***“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth, will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shall thou establish in the very heavens.”***

Before we turn our attention to focus on God’s grace, we will have a brief lesson in Hebrew. The words grace, mercy, love and compassion abound throughout the Bible. Although, it is difficult for us to appreciate and appropriate these words unless Hebrew and Greek are our native tongue. But one Hebrew word stands out above them all and epitomizes the very heart of God’s mercy and love. In Hebrew, the word is *cheched*. It’s most often translated as loving kindness or mercy. What’s so special about this word?

Well first, it appears that when trying to translate how massive God’s loving kindness and mercy are, the writers of the Old Testament couldn’t articulate them in one or two words. And so, the Hebrew word *cheched* seems to explode into many other words, such as: to love, have compassion, be gracious, kind, to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior, to have piety or to grant mercy or beauty or favor. I could go on and on and not capture them all. This explains why there are so many renderings of the word in different translations of the Bible. God’s love is just that massive! In short, this Hebrew word finds it’s equivalent in the Greek word translated in the New Testament as grace or forgiveness. The central message of the Bible is that God is a God of love and mercy. It is who He is, therefore, it is what He does. It would be well worth your time, to search out these words found in the long list of passages below.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Exodus 25:17-22, 26:34, 33:19, 34:5-7; Leviticus 16:2; Isaiah 54:5-10, 55:3; Nehemiah 11:5; Zech. 10:6; Hosea 2:16-20; Psalms 33:3; Lamentations 3:19-25; Matthew 12:7, 15:32; Acts 20:20-24; Romans 3:25, 8:1-2, 26-34, 9:14-18, 11:6; Hebrew 4:16, 9:5-12; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 1:5-10; John 8:1-11; Ephesians 1:2-10, 2:5-8, 3:2-8, 4:7, 32, 6:24; Colossians 1:14; 2:13

You may be saying: “I thought you said that this would be a *brief lesson* on Greek and Hebrew!” If you are not used to Bible study, your mind may hurt or you may have fallen asleep from exhaustion! Perhaps you do not love to dissect words the way I do. So, I apologize. Remember, though, every jot and title are important. And so, I hope that at least you have gained a fresh appreciation for the riches of God’s love, mercy and grace.

**God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense**

**Romans 6:23 (NET)**

***For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

Every man-made religion in the world has one thing in common. In one twisted way or another, they say: “If you do your best, you can work your way back to God.” Christianity is just the opposite. The Bible says that we cannot get to back to God on our own. We can’t fix our sin problem–Our sins have *earned* us a death sentence. We owe an astronomical debt. That is why we need a Savior! We need God to come down to us because we can’t get back to Him. And grace is the bridge between sinners and God. To say otherwise is to make a mockery of grace!

However, just for the sake of the argument, what if we could work our way to God? How much work would we have to do? How would we ever know if we had done enough? I have a loaded question for you. When you work a fifty, sixty or eighty-hour work week, and your employer hands you your payroll check, do you consider that a gift? I think not! That would be ludicrous. You labored to *earn* a paycheck. People don’t work to receive a gift--do they? So why in the world do we think we can earn the gift of salvation through works?

* What are some ways that you have tried to earn grace? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**2 Corinthians 9:15 (NET)**

***Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!***

At every turn of the page in Scripture, there is a story or an analogy of Grace. Moreover, numerous examples could be used in an endeavor to define it. Maybe you have heard it said, “Grace is God giving sinners what they need the most, but deserve the least.” Truth is, any attempt to explain grace and mercy will fall woefully short. Nevertheless, as inadequate as it may be, I would like to try by using the story of the criminal I mentioned earlier as an allegory.

**Micah 7:18 (NET)**

***There is no other God like you! You forgive sin and pardon the rebellion of those who remain among your people. You do not remain angry forever, but delight in showing loyal love.***

As we have just discovered, mercy could be defined as not getting what we deserve. A case in point is the man whose crimes landed him in the hospital and ultimately in jail. He had been shot while shooting someone else. By our estimation, justice would have been served if his actions landed him in the morgue instead of the hospital. Yet God spared his life. Now *that* is mercy.

But, to get a better understanding of grace, let’s suppose, hypothetically speaking, that one of the shooting victims in the story was the only son of a Judge. We’ll call him the Honorable Judge Grace. Imagine, if you will, it just so happened that Judge Grace was the one who presided over the trial of his son’s killer. While the evidence proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the accused had killed his son, Judge Grace chose to have mercy on the man. He spared his life from the penalty of a death sentence. That would be an incredible act of mercy, would it not? But grace is even more extravagant than that!

Let’s imagine that the man has served his time in jail, and now he stands before the parole board. Who would speak on his behalf? Judge Grace was the only one who showed up as his advocate. The board granted his release, but he was homeless because his family had long since abandoned him. (This is where grace comes into focus, and it’s truly hard to fathom.) Then, to the amazement of everyone, especially the criminal, the judge did a preposterous thing. The judge who had been bereaved of his only son and had suffered so much because of this sinner’s folly welcomed his son’s killer into his own home. But that’s not all! He gave this hopeless, helpless, sinful man everything that had belonged to his own dearly loved son. And then he bestowed on him the great honor of making him the heir to his estate. Judge Grace loved the unlovable man with the same boundless, limitless love that he had for his very own son. Can you even imagine? Can you see who the characters are in this analogy? God the Father is Judge Grace; His only Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. The unworthy criminal represents you and me. That is why its’ called appropriately--amazing grace!

**Colossians 1:12-14 (NET)**

***… giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to sharein the saints’inheritance in the light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption,the forgiveness of sins.***

When God, the ultimate judge, liberates you from the due penalty of your sins: *that is mercy*. But, when He takes you into His home and heart and loves you as His very own Son, now that’s another thing altogether*: that is grace*!

**Romans 8:15-17 (NET)**

***For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself bears witness toour spirit that we are God’s children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ) – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.***

As we wrap up this lesson, let’s glance back to the beginning of the Bible where Moses had an encounter with God. Speaking to Moses, “As a friend…face-to-face,” God described Himself. What would you suppose He would say? “I am a consuming fire.” After all, He had spoken to him from a burning bush! Or, He could have said, “I am the LORD God the Almighty” (Genesis 17:1). Or, “I am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:1-5). He could have described Himself in many other ways that would have left Moses trembling in his sandals. But no. The Lord God made all His goodness pass in front of Moses and then He said:

**Exodus 34:5-6 (NET)**

***The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the Lord by name. The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed:“The Lord, the Lord,the compassionate and graciousGod, slow to anger,and abounding in loyal love and faithfulness.***

So, what exactly is grace? Well, for starters, it’s a gift. Therefore, it can’t be earned, and it can’t be bought. Its value is beyond measure. We certainly don’t deserve it, and we cannot be saved without it. Grace is a person--a Savior. He’s the God who put on flesh and dwelt among us personifying forgiveness, mercy, loving kindness and compassion. This is how the apostle John described Him: “full of grace.” What is grace? Grace, my friend, is Jesus!

To our finite minds, the concepts of grace and mercy are foreign. They simply defy the limits of our understanding. It all sounds too good to be true, like a fairy tale or fable. But it’s not.

This is the gift of salvation that God offers. Incredible, isn’t it? Would you like to know how to receive it? Then please keep reading.

**DIGGING DEEPER: Read the following passages and make notes of any insights and personal applications.**

* Revelation 14:6-7, 19:11-16, 20:11-15; Acts 10:42, 17:31; Romans 4:25; James 4:12; Matthew 10:28; John 5:21-27; Hebrews 4:12

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Let’s talk about it.

1. In the following passages, what two words are added to mercy and grace that are used as a common greeting for the saints? (Ephesians 1:2; 1 Timothy1:1; Titus 1:4; Galatians 1:3) Why do you think these words are connected? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you love someone who has become the constant subject of your intercessory prayers? Or, did you have someone who loved you and labored in prayer on your behalf? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Can you think of ways religion can distort or corrupt grace? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. The doctrine of Grace was solidified out of what movement? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you ever been affiliated with a religion that insisted that works would earn you an entrance to heaven or favor with God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Outside of receiving the gifts of grace and mercy from God, have you ever received these precious gifts from someone else? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. If so, do you think this person had, themselves, been the recipient of God’s grace? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Luke 6:35-36 and state how God treats His enemies. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. If we have been placed in Christ and He is Grace, then is it possible to “fall from Grace”?

­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­ Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Think On These Things

## Did you learn something new? Did you find a new promise to claim as your own? Did you find a command to obey, a sin to confess or avoid? Is there a passage you could turn into a prayer? How did the Lord speak personally to you through this lesson? What action will you take in obedience to God’s voice? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Memory Verses**

**John 1:14; 16-18 (NET)**

***Nowthe Word became fleshand took up residenceamong us. Wesaw his glory – the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father. For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another. For the law was given through Moses, butgrace and truth came about through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only one,himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made Godknown.***