



# **GOD'S GRACE: WEEK 1**

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Today we set out on a four-week journey that has the potential to change our lives. Together, we will examine the Scriptures and listen to the Holy Spirit as we consider the topic of God's grace.

Have you ever taken the time to think deeply about grace? Have you ever taken the time to study God's Word about grace? This is a journey for all of us to take together: seasoned saints, new believers, and those who are exploring whether the good news of Jesus is really true. The topic of God's grace is so vast, certainly much more than we can cover in four weeks. But I hope that we can begin the journey together and that each of us will spend the rest of our lives on the wonderful journey of learning and entering into God's grace in greater and greater measure.

Today, we will discover that God's grace is more than forgiveness; he sends his grace to teach us a new way to live.

Let me start out this morning by telling you a story you might not expect to hear in church. It may be difficult to hear. It's a story about an abusive husband and his wife. The husband was a rage-aholic, given to fits of anger and, horribly, those moments sometimes overflowed into violence. Like the time he slammed his wife up against the kitchen cabinets. Or the time he slapped her across the face and then, in horror and shame, ran off to find a quiet place to tremble and cry.

The wife, a Christian, forgave her husband each time he came home. He said (quite accurately), "I don't know what comes over me." The wife loved her husband deeply, and saw the many good sides of this flawed man, but she lived in fear that the next rage-riot might bring a harm that would not heal. She stayed with her husband because, each time, he sincerely begged for forgiveness. She knew her duty as a Christian was to forgive and extend grace.

The only thing she knew of God's grace was forgiveness. She had been told all her life that she was powerless over sin and that God's grace came to forgive and restore her relationship with God. She was enough of a Christian to understand that, if God had forgiven *her*, she should extend the same grace to others, especially her husband.

She knew a small piece of God's grace, but only enough to put her in danger.

It's God's grace that forgives and restores. Sweet forgiveness. Sweet, yes, but in the story you heard, forgiveness alone was filled with torment, unless there was something more. If we look at the wife in this story, we want to scream, "Get out! It's not safe!" Any sane Christian understands the woman has no duty to remain at home and risk injury or death because of some notion of grace, expressed as constant forgiveness.

If we look at the husband in this story, we see a man trapped in thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that will harm everyone he loves and ruin his own life, as well. A sympathetic view of the husband understands that he, too, is a tormented soul in desperate need of help—help beyond merely wiping clean his sinful slate. The most gracious thing his wife could do would be to move out and demand that he get the help he needs to overcome his deep anger and pain.

And what of Jesus, the third member of the marriage? We could no more imagine Jesus leaving this husband alone in his condition (a captive to anger and fits of rage) than we could imagine Jesus telling a homeless man, “Go your way, be warm and filled,” without giving him food and clothing.

Beyond the characters in this simple story lies a larger question: what about us? Would a grace-filled God leave us in the condition he finds us? Would he spend his days reminding us of our shortcomings, demanding, again and again, prayers of repentance and sorrow? Would the loving Creator wave his hand and say, “You are forgiven, now—go and sin no more,” without lifting even one finger to empower us over our sin?

The story I’ve told you is extreme and disturbing, but it is a true story, one that’s been repeated over and over in many Christian families. Sometimes an extreme example is necessary to grab our hearts and free our minds. Does God’s grace mean only forgiveness, or is there something more to his antidote for our sin? Would God leave us alone in our rage, our addictions, or our isolation? A cold and comfortless God he would be, if that were so.

The problem is not with God the Father or with his grace; the problem is our *understanding* of grace, of God’s ongoing work in our lives. Jesus will not leave us to ourselves any more than he would leave a beggar in the street. Anyone who suggests so misrepresents the true grace of God.

Grace forgives, but it also guides. Set aside the question of heaven or hell after we die. What about heaven or hell while we live? His grace is available to lead and guide us right now! The fabric of everyday life is alive with the grace of God. If we wait until we’ve sinned to call upon the grace of God, we’ve squandered the greater part of grace.

Grace restores, but it also guards. It also instructs us to deny ungodly ways and teaches us the how-to of life: how to live sensible, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

The Scripture teaches we are saved by grace. The good news is we can experience salvation here and now, as well as there and then. The kingdom of God glides on wings of grace. The kingdom brings righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17), and best of all, the gracious Holy Spirit wants to lead us into righteousness, peace, and joy in everyday life. The kingdom is never attained; it is received. How will we receive the grace of the kingdom today?

The more I read the New Testament, the more all-encompassing grace becomes. The Bible presents a grace that continues to reach into our lives day after day in more ways than we expect.

Our text today is Titus 2:11–14. It introduces us to grace in ways that are both familiar, and also unfamiliar. The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was writing to a young pastor, Titus. Titus had traveled with Paul, and Titus had been trained by Paul. What’s more, Paul had great affection for this young disciple, calling him “my true child in the faith” (Titus 1:4). Here’s what Paul taught Titus about the scope of God’s grace:

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait

for the blessed hope— the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

In this passage, the word “grace” appears right next to phrases like “self-controlled” and “upright and godly lives.” What kind of grace is this? If grace means only “forgiveness,” why does the Scripture also talk about learning a new way to live?

Most believers are very familiar with “the grace that brings salvation,” but not many have ever heard of a grace that “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” Most believers are familiar with a saving grace capable of securing heaven after we die, but have never considered the possibility that God’s grace can nurture us in this present age.

Let’s look at the four key points of this passage:

**1. Grace brings salvation.** This is the part of God’s grace most Christians know. And it’s wonderful. It’s foundational to our faith; “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). This is the starting point of our life in Christ, but it’s just the start. The good news gets even better!

**2. Grace teaches us to say no.** God doesn’t want us forever trapped in a cycle of sin and forgiveness. So grace keeps on working for us, teaching us how to resist temptation and ungodliness. That’s right, we can call on the grace of God before we fall into sin!

**3. Grace teaches us how to live.** There’s more to the Christian life than saying no to sin. God’s grace is available to replace our sinful habit patterns with self-control, so we can live upright and godly lives. This is not the result of trusting in our works, but rather allowing grace to teach us.

**4. Grace fills us with hope.** Do you see the connection in these verses? Life in Christ is not meant to be a desperate fight against sin, nor even a narrow focus on godly living. In verse 13 we see that it’s God grace that fills us with hope—hope for this life, and the next.

Would grace allow sin to rule over us all the days of our lives? Why would grace leave us naked and bleeding on the side of the road? God’s grace is after more than wiping the slate clean week after week. The grace of God wants to teach us a new way to live.

If grace is the teacher, we are the students, and all of life is the classroom. If we possess the humility to become learners, God’s grace not only transports us to heaven when we die, it brings heaven close to us while we live. This is part of the good news; grace not only forgives our sin, grace teaches us how to live a life that is no longer captive to sin!

Too many believers are stuck in an unhealthy pattern. We choose sin, which is bad enough. Worse still, afterward, a voice in our head tries to drag us down deeper still. It’s the voice of the Adversary. He whispers

enticement before our sin and shouts condemnation after. His is a voice skilled in subtle influence, followed by paralyzing guilt. It's a voice filled with accusation. He is a liar and the Father of Lies; lies are his native tongue.

Sin brings death, it's true, but God's grace wipes away the penalty of death and the stain of sin. Even better, grace does more. It raises us to life *and* teaches us a new way to live.

This is the glory of God. He speaks to us even in our sin. The Great Alchemist turns our sin into the stuff of restoration. His message is restoration, and what's more, he takes our defeat and turns it into the very fabric of instruction. God wants us to learn from our past sins, and "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Have you ever learned from your sin? This is grace. God is not only ready to forgive; he is eager to teach. If we are open to God's voice, even our sin become grace in his hands. He will show us the path and correct our steps, not by insisting on obedience, but by revealing our hearts. Not by counting our sins against us, but by teaching us a new way to live.

For example, if I fall into anger, Jesus wants to reveal its source, and heal the weakness that led to sin. If I choose greed, Jesus wants to reveal my insecurity, and heal the weakness that led to sin. If I choose lust, Jesus wants to reveal my desire, and heal the weakness that led to sin. If I choose judgment, Jesus wants to reveal my pride, and heal the weakness that led to sin. (Do you get the idea that God wants to heal the weaknesses that lead to sin?)

**What he asks, he empowers.** Jesus says, "Go, and sin no more." He *also* makes this command possible. He takes us to the source and gives us hope. This is a kind of resurrection, a resurrection from a life of sin. Resurrection isn't just for Jesus; it's for us. It's not just for the end of days; it's so we can walk in newness of life. Sin puts us in the tomb; Jesus rolls away the stone, as often as we need.

Our application of these verses can be very personal: we can pray, listen, and learn. Let me explain:

In our daily prayers, we should include prayers like this: "Spirit of God, please open my eyes and heart to recognize your grace-works in my life."

It's also a part of God's grace to answer prayers like this. Jesus assured us that if we ask him for bread, he will not give us a stone (Matt. 7:7-11).

We can be confident that God will answer prayers like this one. After our time of prayer, it is our opportunity to learn. Make a few notes of what came to your mind. What did you discover about God as you prayed and listened? What did you discover about yourself? You can be sure that God will lead you toward a larger understanding of grace.

In the coming week, what might happen if you tried this exercise once a day, each day? This exercise is not about merely gaining biblical knowledge (as important as that may be). It's about opening our eyes, ears, and lives to the deeper grace God has in store. God's grace wants to teach us a new way to live! True, we will still stumble and fall along the way, but there is always grace for forgiveness. Better still, there's even more grace available to us for each new day and every new situation.