

Blue Ridge Vineyard
Small Group Study Series
Fall 2018

The Diamond of Grace:
Christ is Bigger, Better
and more Beautiful
than you've Ever Imagined!

- **Gather in your small group, or with a friend at a coffee shop.**
- **Access our intro videos on our youtube channel or on our website, and watch them on your computer or smart phone.**
- **Then take some time to discuss the weekly study on grace.**
- **Discuss the questions in each section.**
- **Share prayer requests and pray for one another.**
- **Take time to go deeper in your understanding and practice of grace.**
- **Do a personal, in-depth study of grace in the Word.**

WEEK 1: Sept 16 A Living Picture of Grace

Living Picture of Grace: (Read aloud Luke 15:11-32)

The Parable of the Lost Son

²⁰“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. ²³And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.”

Luke 15:20-24

This parable is the most vivid and beautiful picture of grace Jesus ever told us. In the story, the younger son dishonored his father, his family and himself. He sinned against God and became consumed with personal pleasure. When sin brought him to his knees, he decided to return home and see if he could fit back in as a servant or slave of his father’s household. He did not expect the reception he received. He was embraced, celebrated, showered with gifts and restored to a place of favor and intimacy with his loving father. That is a living picture of grace. Incredibly simple yet profound.

This is the power and joy of grace. Our sin does not cause God to reject us and make us grovel. When we return to God in repentance and humility, He showers us with grace we clearly don’t deserve. He rejoices in us without once recounting our sin or making us grovel to come home.

The sad part of Jesus’ story is the older brother. He did not shame his father or waste any resources; but he missed grace just as much as his younger brother. He lived to earn his father’s favor and blessing, a life of performance. His hard, judgmental heart and attitude reveal he knew nothing of grace.

WEEK 2: Sept. 23 You Can Rest Now

Grace Given, Not Earned (Read aloud Ephesians 2:8-9/2 Cor. 5:)

⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Eph 2:4-9

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor. 5:17-21

We are no longer dead and separated from a holy God because of our sin. Because of Jesus' obedient sacrifice on the cross, we have been reconciled to God—past tense. It is as if the table of grace has been provided and set for us. We no longer have to earn a place at God's family table, we have been made right, or righteous, through Jesus' sacrifice. We now have a place with our name on it at God's table of intimacy.

Salvation is secured by God's grace through faith; but grace goes so much further than that. Freedom comes by grace, forgiveness comes by grace, healing comes by grace, joy comes by grace, victory comes by grace. All of God's riches are available to us by grace. Are we enjoying the meal of grace seated next to our Father and Jesus or are we outside wishing we could come in?

WEEK 3: Sept 30 Law vs. Grace

Grace Came Through Christ: (Read aloud John 1:16-17; Col 2:11-23)

*¹⁶ And of His fullness we have all received,
and grace for grace.*

*¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses,
but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
John 1:16-17*

Jesus arrived on the scene in Jerusalem at a time when the powers in control were the Pharisees, scholarly religious leaders who valued strict obedience to the law, not love, joy, peace etc? Worship of God had been reduced by the Pharisees into a set of rules to follow. Intimacy and relationship with God were not on the mind of the religious rulers of that day.

Jesus comes and speaks of grace and mercy, eating with tax collectors and prostitutes, and breaking rule after rule. The Pharisees hated him for it and prepared to kill him. But the people, those struggling under the heavy weight of the Mosaic law, loved him and dared to hope that they could be right with God by faith.

Grace was not a concept for Jesus, it was a mindset and a way of life. He forgave the woman caught in adultery. He ate with the selfish and sinful Zacheus and encouraged him to make new choices based on justice and generosity. He didn't write off Peter when he denied Him three times. Grace won out in each of these stories.

Grace isn't found in concepts, but in and through a Person, Jesus Christ.

WEEK 4: Oct 7 The Ridiculous Math of Grace

(Read aloud Matt. 18:21-35 and Matthew 20:1-16 aloud)

²¹Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

²²Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Matt 18:21-22

¹³"But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

Matt 20:13-15

Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a shepherd who leaves 99 obedient, safe sheep, to go seek after one lost sheep who has gone astray. This seems irresponsible. Why would the shepherd risk harm and danger coming on the 99 to go find one? Because of grace. God's nature is to stoop down and restore the one who is lost or has fallen.

Then he told Peter that when someone sins against you, forgive them as many as 490 times. What???! Does't make sense. When do you run out of forgiveness? When is enough enough? For the sake of emphasis, Jesus is saying there is no limit. Forgive a person as many times as is needed. Why would we do this? Because of Grace. Grace isn't counting how many times forgiveness is needed.

Lastly, Jesus tells this parable about workers who all get paid the same wage, but each has worked a different set of hours of the day. The workers grumble and complain. The math is wrong, they argue. Jesus is saying, "Don't I, the King, have the right to be generous with my resources in any way I desire? What is behind this behavior. It's simple. It's because of Grace.

Grace breaks our pattern of measuring everything and everyone. We let go of our lists and records of how many times we have been wronged or done wrong. We don't look at our relationships like a balance sheet, making sure it all ends up equal. Grace math does not add up. We sinned, and Christ pays the penalty. We are wronged and we release the debt, just as God did for us. It's crazy!!

Week 5: Oct. 14 The Living Power of Grace

The Living Power of Grace: (Read aloud 2 Cor. 12: 7-10)

My Grace is Sufficient

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Grace is so much more than a mercy that we couldn’t earn and don’t deserve. Paul knew grace as a power that God granted him to do the things God had called him to do. He discovered a very basic and powerful truth about grace: God’s power comes in the form of grace when we are at our weakest and lowest.

Paul suffered a lot in the struggle he called his “thorn in the flesh.” Whatever it was, he endured a relentless battle that repeatedly broke him down. But in those lowest moments, when he felt the weakest, he discovered grace: a power from God that sustained him and worked through him supernaturally. This is the living power of grace.

Paul, in his writings, would refer to God’s grace which was working powerfully in him and through him. This mighty apostle learned that he didn’t need to be strong, powerful or in control. Grace met him at his weakest moments, when he felt completely empty and felt out of control. Grace will meet us there too. We can rest confidently in grace because it is God’s power and strength that He offers to us every day and in every moment.

The key is to rejoice in our weakness and inability. This is hard for us because it goes against our nature to want to be strong and in control. Learn from the lessons of the great apostle: you don’t have to be strong; God’s grace will be strong in and through you as you lean on Him and welcome His power to work.

WEEK 6: Oct. 21 Grace Brings True Freedom

(Read aloud Gal. 3:1-3; 5:1; 13)

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed ^{as} among you as crucified? ²This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”

Gal 3:1-3

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Gal. 5:1

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Gal 5:13

The Galatian church was struggling with an age-old church problem: striving to please God by religious performance. Teachings that required new believers to be circumcised was troubling Paul and putting a yoke of legalism over the whole church. Paul is warning the Galatian believers to embrace and preserve the freedom that Christ had purchased for them through the cross.

This is a huge issue still today. Forms of rules and religious observance take the place of a living relationship of love and intimacy in the hearts of God's people. The result is a joyless, law-based religion; a far cry from the joy and freedom Jesus wanted to give us.

The danger for us is to allow a numbing to our hearts regarding the law. It happens like the frog being slowly boiled in a pot. Slowly, imperceptibly the religious legalism takes over and we've let go of grace and the gospel. We need to ask ourselves, are we trusting in our religious performance or grace to be in right standing with God? One source brings death and the other brings life.

Paul cautions the Galatians that freedom is not an opportunity to indulge in fleshly desires. Freedom is a gift of grace so that we can joyfully offer ourselves to God's purposes and plans without the weight of guilt or shame. Enjoy the freedom of Grace. Dive in headfirst and explore it's depths.

Week 7: Oct 28 Coming Boldly to Get Grace

Grace by Faith: The Path to God's Riches: (Read aloud Heb. 4:14-16)

¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb. 4:14-16

The writer of Hebrews shows us that Jesus, our High Priest, is compassionate for our weakness and shortcomings. He understands and has compassion because He came in human form and experienced the limitations of our human condition. But the exciting promise is this: Since Jesus knows our weakness, He is ready and eager to help us with his strength and power.

He sits waiting, at His throne of grace to pour out the grace we need in every situation. Grace is not limited our for only a few favored ones; grace is for all of us at any time we need it. We can access grace freely and often, there's no limit on how much we can draw from His heavenly grace account.

Paul said in Eph. 2 that we are saved by grace THROUGH faith. Grace is what saves us, and faith is how we access that grace. Faith is simply trusting and believing that God's grace is ours. Any study on faith is remarkable in how much God loves, responds and is pleased by faith. Even the smallest faith can do great things.

Grace is like a heavenly storehouse waiting to be plundered for our benefit. You don't need money to get it and you can't earn it by being good enough. Only by faith, simply trusting God, can you access these endless riches. Don't hold back in fear or from feelings of unworthiness. Grace is available to you.

Jesus won't berate you for coming again and again. You and I have a compassionate priest who gets us and knows our every struggle. When you struggle don't pull back in fear or shame, come closer and come boldly to get the grace you need.

WEEK 8: Nov. 4 Extending Grace

Stewards of the Grace of God. (Read aloud I Peter 4:7-11)

Serving for God's Glory

*⁷But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. ⁸And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." ⁹Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, **as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** ¹¹If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. I Peter. 4:7-11*

Grace must go beyond good news for us into a way of life. In fact, Peter says that we are stewards of this wonderful gift of grace. What is a steward? It is someone who takes care of another's resources. Grace is God's gift to mankind. Favor and right standing that we didn't earn or deserve. How do we steward grace well?

The first way we steward grace is to be generous with it. Jesus told a parable of an unjust steward who was given great grace and had his debt forgiven, but wouldn't extend grace to another who owed him just a little. We must be generous with grace, extending it to ourselves and others continuously.

Extending grace is not excusing sin or harmful behaviors we experience. It means we do not live by judgment and accusation of others or ourselves. It means we drink deeply and often of God's grace for our sin and shortcomings and we graciously and often extend grace to the broken and weak people around us.

Extending grace takes grace from God. With some things we don't have the willpower to give grace. The pain is too much and the damage is too great. But God can supernaturally give us grace if we ask Him for it. There is an ocean of grace we can access by faith. Since you've been given an ocean of grace, don't be stingy with it. Share it freely and generously.

