

# PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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# GRACE



MORE THAN WE DESERVE

GREATER THAN WE IMAGINE

# THE GRACE-SHAPED LIFE

## Study Grace

Read chapter 1 from *Grace* before beginning your study this week.

*Grace* isn't just a noun. Yes, God gives us grace, but then he uses that very grace to change us. We become more like him, able to gracefully bestow grace on others. No one illustrates the life-changing power of grace better than the apostle Paul, the Christian hater-turned-Christ lover.

Prior to Paul's Christian ministry, which Max references in the session 1 video, the apostle learned a great deal about grace. Before his name was changed to "Paul," Saul was a highly educated Jew intent on stamping out the growing community of Jews who recognized Jesus as the Christ, their Savior. After presiding over Stephen's capital punishment in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), Saul traveled to Damascus to deliver the high priest's arrest warrants for Jesus followers living there.

As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9:3–9)

This experience may not have seemed much like grace at first. But that quick encounter with the Lord, though it left him disabled, made Saul long for more of Jesus in his life. By the time Ananias arrived to deliver God’s grace to Saul and restore his eyesight, Saul was literally hungry for grace, thirsty for grace. In fact, Saul was so full of grace that it bubbled up in his heart and spilled out of his mouth: “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).

- Think back to a time when you realized you were wrong. How did you respond? Did you try to justify your behavior, or did you speak the truth?

- Are you always ready to proclaim God's grace, no matter where you are or who your audience is? Why or why not?

Thankfully God doesn't always allow such suffering before he exercises his grace. Long before Saul met Jesus, God had blessed Saul with the intelligence and desire to absorb God's laws into his very being. But as a well-educated Pharisee (Acts 23:6), Saul had developed his own interpretations of the Scriptures, and his stubborn, know-it-all tendencies were allowing incorrect doctrine to separate him from God's grace. Knowledge of God kept him from knowing God. That's why Jesus arrived with grace to reveal Saul's errors and to humble him. After Saul "thought about what he'd done" for three days, he was ready to receive the graceful gift of Jesus' heart into his body.

- God knew Saul needed to hit rock bottom before he would be willing to let go of his own interpretations of the law and recognize and absorb God's grace. When has stubbornness kept you from enjoying all the benefits of grace?

- > God gives you grace every day. Think of something that happened today that was evidence of God's grace in your life. Did you thank him for it? Did you realize it was him at the time?
- > How can you raise your awareness of God's daily grace in your life?

➤ Have you ever been aware of God using you as a vessel for his grace as he did Ananias (Acts 9:10–17)? Did you cheerfully embark on his mission, or did you allow your own fear or stubbornness to delay his plans?

➤ What are some ways you can be a vessel of grace to

- your coworkers,
- your family members,

- or your neighbors?

After accepting God's grace and letting it change him, Saul changed his name to Paul and started preaching and writing about God's grace. God's grace informed the rest of Paul's life on earth, and we are blessed to have access to some of his sermons and writings in the New Testament. Let's take a look at a few of Paul's messages that Max references in *Grace* and the session 1 video.

In a letter to his young apostle, Titus, Paul mentioned the centrality of grace in the organization and development of the church and its members:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11–14)

➤ What did Paul tell Titus that grace brings to us?



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> What does grace teach us to change in our lives?

> What does grace look forward to?

> How does grace change our actions once it gives us new hearts?

As Max points out, we are clearly missing the magnitude of God's grace in our lives if we only see it as something we receive. Remember that grace is an action, and we must enact grace in order to experience it properly. Imagine if Paul had just accepted God's grace and never put it into action. If so, the gospel of grace might not have reached beyond the Jews to the Gentiles such as those living in Crete and Colossae and Galatia.

Paul described to the Gentiles his understanding of the “mystery” of Christ working in us:

. . . the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. (Colossians 1:25–28)

- What is the great “mystery” that has now been revealed to the church?

- > How is “Christ in you” a description of grace?
- > What is required for us to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”?

When writing to the Jesus followers in Galatia, Paul told the story of an encounter he had with Peter. Soon after the Holy Spirit came upon him, Peter had a vision explaining that no foods were unclean—the law was obsolete in light of Jesus’ death on the cross (Acts 10:9–16). But a few years later, when confronted with Jews who still ate only kosher meals, Peter returned to his own kosher roots. Paul chastised him for this weakness of faith, as he quoted here for the Galatians to read:

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Galatians 2:19–21)

As he explained to Peter and the Galatians, Paul understood that once we accept grace, once “Christ lives in” us, there is no longer a need for the law. It cannot save us, and we don’t need it to guide our actions once we only act in grace.

- How was Paul “crucified with Christ”? How can we claim that too?

➤ We do not follow the Mosaic law as Peter and Paul once did. Instead, what things bind us and direct our actions? What must we “die to” in order to “live to God”?

➤ How do “faith in the Son of God” and “Christ [living] in [you and] me” work together?

# Discuss Grace

At the beginning of the session with your small group, watch Max's video that accompanies this Bible study. Take some time to discuss what you and your group members learned from chapter 1 in *Grace*, your personal studies of this week's lesson, and Max's message. Then consider these questions as a small group:

- > Has God performed a heart transplant in you?
- > What motivations are in your heart that shouldn't be there?

- > What will it take for you to be like Paul, to have a heart that beats only for Jesus?
- > With your small group, decide on an activity you can complete together in the next month that will reveal grace to someone in your community. Here are a few ideas to start your conversation:
- Commit to giving time on a Saturday helping to build a Habitat for Humanity house in your community.
  - Go to the Red Cross and give blood or platelets.
  - Adopt a poor family in your community during the Christmas season.
  - Volunteer regularly at a food bank.

- Host a “Parents’ Night Out” at your church, and babysit young couples’ children for free.
- Do some repair work at the home of an elderly citizen or single parent.

## Conclusion / Prayer

Close your group time by taking prayer requests and praying for one another.



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