



SMALL GROUP OUTLINES



TRANSFORMING GRACE

These Small Group Outlines are produced by the Youth and Children's Ministry Unit in collaboration with Kay Moorby (soulwithaview). They are available every month from our website.

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SESSION ONE:

WHAT IS GRACE?

In Session One we will consider the question 'What is grace?' It's a word that we hear frequently, but if we don't take a moment to think about what it means for us, then we may miss out on the most amazing aspect of God's love for us. Through Scripture, quotes and music, we'll explore just what is so amazing about God's grace.

SESSION TWO:

SAVED BY GRACE

In today's session, we will consider what it means to be saved by grace. We'll dive into the story of the prodigal son and see how the actions of the two sons and their loving father relate to our faith journey today.

SESSION THREE:

PRACTICALLY PERFECT IN EVERY WAY

If we're not careful, we can fall into the trap of trying to earn God's grace. In today's session we'll hear the story of a young woman striving to maintain her perfect image. We'll consider how her faulty beliefs led her to a life of striving, and we will contrast this with the word of God. We don't need to be perfect as we are all 'gracefully broken'.

SESSION FOUR:

TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

It's human nature to find fault in others, while we overlook our own shortcomings. Although it's lovely that we have people in our lives who love us just as we are, there is always a concern that that opinion will change. What if we do something that others disapprove of? What if we make a mistake and let people down? In today's session we'll discover that God really does love us just as we are and calls us to love others in the same way.

Any text in italics represents notes for the leader. It gives more context around the Scripture/activity. You may choose to share verbatim, summarise or not share at all.

WHAT IS GRACE?

In Session One we will consider the question 'What is grace?' It's a word that we hear frequently, but if we don't take a moment to think about what it means for us, then we may miss out on the most amazing aspect of God's love for us. Through Scripture, quotes and music, we'll explore just what is so amazing about God's grace.

WELCOME

SIX-WORD STORY

A six-word story is an extreme example of flash fiction and there are any number of websites and competitions dedicated to this fun writing style.

Here are some examples from the Six Word Memoirs project:

- * Rapunzel! I am slipping! A wig?!
- * Misleadingly deep puddle. Curious child missing.
- * Pencil poised. Blank paper. Writer's block.
- * Early bird. Nervous worm. Ecstatic cat.

Share the above six-word story examples with your group and then challenge them to write their own version. You could set a theme, eg rewrite a Bible story, fairy tale, or your life story in just six words. Share the stories together.

WORD

In these sessions, we are exploring the transforming grace of God. But first we need an understanding of what grace is. While we have all heard the word 'grace' before, we may all have different ideas of what it means.


 How would you define the word 'grace'?

Discuss the responses from the group. Try and create a group definition of grace.

We're going to watch a clip that gives a very simple definition of grace.

 How similar is it to the definition we created together?

 **Watch: What is Grace? – What's in the Bible (1:12)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ue550lQhZBA>

 What two words did the clip offer as a definition of grace? Unmerited favour

The phrase 'unmerited favour' provides a simple explanation of grace. But we're going to do a little more digging and expand on this definition. Using the information on the 'Grace' handout as a starting point, try to create a six-word story that sums up the meaning of grace.

The group will need the 'Grace' handout for this activity which includes the following Bible verses and quotes. Encourage the group to discuss the different aspects of grace represented on the handout and then they can either work individually or in small groups to create their six-word story of grace. When they have completed the task, share the stories together.

“ ‘When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day’s pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award, yet receives such a gift anyway – that is a good picture of God’s unmerited favour. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.’

— GW KNIGHT

“ ‘Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin. Grace is power, not just pardon.’

— JOHN PIPER

“ ‘Grace means undeserved kindness. It is the gift of God to man the moment he sees he is unworthy of God’s favour.’

— DWIGHT L MOODY

“ ‘Those who believe they have pleased God by the quality of their devotion and moral goodness naturally feel that they and their group deserve deference and power over others. The God of Jesus and the prophets, however, saves completely by grace. He cannot be manipulated by religious and moral performance – he can only be reached through repentance, through the giving up of power. If we are saved by sheer grace we can only become grateful, willing servants of God and of everyone around us.’

— TIM KELLER

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

— (EPHESIANS 2:8-9)

²⁰⁻²¹ All that passing laws against sin did was produce more lawbreakers. But sin didn’t, and doesn’t, have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. When it’s sin versus grace, grace wins hands down. All sin can do is threaten us with death, and that’s the end of it. Grace, because God is putting everything together again through the Messiah, invites us into life – a life that goes on and on and on, world without end.

— (ROMANS 5:20-21 MSG)

⁹ Each time he said, ‘My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.’ So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

¹⁰ That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

— (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 NLT)

¹⁵ For Jesus is not some high priest who has no sympathy for our weaknesses and flaws. He has already been tested in every way that we are tested; but he emerged victorious, without failing God. ¹⁶ So let us step boldly to the throne of grace, where we can find mercy and grace to help when we need it most.

— (HEBREWS 4:15-16 VOICE)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Some people use the following acronym to memorise a definition of grace:

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense

 In what way does this acronym help your understanding of God's grace?

WITNESS

The aim of this activity is for the young people to create a visual reminder of the message of God's grace. They can do this in several ways using either their six-word story or the Scriptures and quotes from their handout. The resources you need to provide will depend on the interests of your group.

- * Create a smartphone wallpaper
- * Create a piece of artwork to display at home
- * Write a short blog about grace
- * Create a short video to use on a social media platform
- * Turn your six-word story into a poem
- * Create an equation that represents God's grace

Give the group time to get creative and then share your ideas together. Ask the group how these ideas could help share the message of God's grace with others.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY


It is said that during a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world were discussing whether any one belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities.

Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of God appearing in human form.

Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time, until CS Lewis wandered into the room. 'What's the rumpus about?' he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions.

In his forthright manner, Lewis responded, 'Oh, that's easy. It's grace ... the notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional.'

 In what way do you agree/disagree with CS Lewis's description of Christianity?

WORSHIP

We're going to take time to reflect on all we have discovered in today's session. As you watch the clip, focus on the lyrics and consider what they teach you about God's grace. Jot down any words or phrases that stand out to you or feel particularly relevant to discuss when the song has finished.

 **Watch: Matthew West – 'Grace Wins' (Lyric Video) (4:23)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JXL1czvh7g>

Share together thoughts about the song lyrics and then discuss the following questions:

- 🗨️ What is your greatest experience of grace? How did that feel?
- 🗨️ Have you ever felt unconditional love? How does it feel?

Take time to pray as a group, thanking God for his amazing grace.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Share the following lyrics from the song 'Grace Wins' to bring the session to a close.

**'There's a war between guilt and grace
And they're fighting for a sacred space
But I'm living proof
Grace wins every time, yeah.
No more lying down in death's defeat
Now I'm rising up in victory
Singing hallelujah
Grace wins every time.'**
— MATTHEW WEST

'When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award, yet receives such a gift anyway – that is a good picture of God's unmerited favour. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.'

GW KNIGHT



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(ROMANS 5:20-21 MSG)



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TIM KELLER



SAVED BY GRACE

In today's session we will consider what it means to be saved by grace. We'll dive into the story of the prodigal son and see how the actions of the two sons and their loving father relate to our faith journey today.

WELCOME

For today's welcome activity you will need a bag of treats or sweets and a die. With minimal instruction, ask the group to take turns to throw the die and say what number they have rolled. Each time someone throws the number six, give them a treat or sweet. As the game goes on observe how the group's behaviour changes as they work out how to get the treat. When you feel the time is right, stop the game and discuss your observations. The discussion will depend on how your group reacted, but lead them to consider how they needed to constantly strive for a six to receive the reward.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Continue playing the game, but this time randomly award members of the group who have not thrown a number six. Again, your discussions will be based on the reaction of the group and whether they think your new approach is fair!

WORD

In last week's session, we explored the theme of grace. Now that you have had time to reflect, how would you answer the following question:

 What is grace?

Today, we're going to continue to explore God's amazing grace and discover what it means to be saved by grace. To do this we will turn to a familiar story found in Luke 15:11-32.

 **Watch: The Prodigal Son: Luke 9-19 (4:47)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUCCUHrV0I>





Give each member of the group a copy of the Voice translation of Luke 15:11-32.

 **Read:**

¹¹ 'Once there was this man who had two sons. ¹² One day the younger son came to his father and said, "Father, eventually I'm going to inherit my share of your estate. Rather than waiting until you die, I want you to give me my share now." And so the father liquidated assets and divided them.'

— (LUKE 15:11-32 VOICE)

DISCUSS:

-  Why do you think the younger son was so keen to claim his inheritance and leave home?
-  Do you think the younger son saw anything wrong with asking for his inheritance? Explain your thoughts.
-  In the father's position, would you have given the younger son his money? If so, why/why not?
-  At this point we haven't met the older brother, but what do you think was going through his mind as he watched this play out?

Read:


¹³ 'A few days passed and this younger son gathered all his wealth and set off on a journey to a distant land. Once there he wasted everything he owned on wild living. ¹⁴ He was broke, a terrible famine struck that land, and he felt desperately hungry and in need. ¹⁵ He got a job with one of the locals, who sent him into the fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ The young man felt so miserably hungry that he wished he could eat the slop the pigs were eating. Nobody gave him anything.

¹⁷ 'So he had this moment of self-reflection: "What am I doing here? Back home, my father's hired servants have plenty of food. Why am I here starving to death? ¹⁸ I'll get up and return to my father, and I'll say, 'Father, I have done wrong – wrong against God and against you. ¹⁹ I have forfeited any right to be treated like your son, but I'm wondering if you'd treat me as one of your hired servants?'" ²⁰ So he got up and returned to his father. The father looked off in the distance and saw the young man returning. He felt compassion for his son and ran out to him, enfolded him in an embrace, and kissed him.

²¹ 'The son said, "Father, I have done a terrible wrong in God's sight and in your sight too. I have forfeited any right to be treated as your son."

— (LUKE 15:13-21 VOICE)

DISCUSS:

 What do you think caused the younger brother to realise his mistake?

 What do you think was going through his mind as he travelled home?

The younger son understood his grave error, was full of remorse, and was ready to take the consequences. His Dad had different ideas.

Read:

²² 'But the father turned to his servants and said, "Quick! Bring the best robe we have and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³ Go get the fattest calf and butcher it. Let's have a feast and celebrate ²⁴ because my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and has been found." So they had this huge party.

²⁵ 'Now the man's older son was still out in the fields working. He came home at the end of the day and heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. ²⁷ The servant said, "Your brother has returned, and your father has butchered the fattest calf to celebrate his safe return."

²⁸ 'The older brother got really angry and refused to come inside, so his father came out and pleaded with him to join the celebration. ²⁹ But he argued back, "Listen, all these years I've worked hard for you. I've never disobeyed one of your orders. But how many times have you even given me a little goat to roast for a party with my friends? Not once! This is not fair! ³⁰ So this son of yours comes, this wasteful delinquent who has spent your hard-earned wealth on loose women, and what do you do? You butcher the fattest calf from our herd!"

³¹ 'The father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and all I have is yours. ³² Isn't it right to join in the celebration and be happy? This is your brother we're talking about. He was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found again!"

— (LUKE 15:22-32 VOICE)

DISCUSS:

 In what way do you understand the older brother's response to his younger brother's return?

 How do you think you would have reacted in that situation?

The older brother had played by the rules, and done the right thing, and yet his wayward younger brother came home to fanfares and a celebration.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

 If you had made a huge mistake and needed support, which brother would you turn to? Explain your answer.

One of these brothers had fully experienced the forgiveness and grace of their father. The other had striven for his father's approval. They were both deeply and equally loved by their father regardless of what they said or did. That's the power of God's grace.

WITNESS

The activity for the Witness section is shorter today as the Worship section contains a longer clip.

In the clip earlier we heard these words:

“ Jesus’ Kingdom community was wide open to everyone. The only entry requirement was for people to humble themselves and recognise the need for God’s mercy.”

— BIBLE PROJECT

The prodigal son recognised where he had fallen short, but his older brother felt justified in his anger and resentment.

 Which brother do you most relate to? Explain your answer.

If we're not careful, we can fall into the trap of thinking that God's grace is more available to us if we are 'good' people or have done the right thing. In Titus 3:3-7 we discover that God's grace has nothing to do with our actions.

 **Read:**

³ Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. ⁴ But – When God our Saviour revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. ⁷ Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

— (TITUS 3:3-7 NLT)

- * How are we saved by grace?
- * As you imagine yourself standing in the place of the older brother, how do the verses from Titus impact how you see the younger brother's return?
- * How does this message translate into your everyday Christian life?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY


- * How does the *Amplified Version* of Titus 3:3-7 add to your understanding of these verses?

³ For we too once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various sinful desires and pleasures, spending and wasting our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour and his love for mankind appeared [in human form as the Man, Jesus Christ], ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we have done, but because of his own compassion and mercy, by the cleansing of the

new birth (spiritual transformation, regeneration) and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out richly upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour, ⁷ so that we would be justified [made free of the guilt of sin] by his [compassionate, undeserved] grace, and that we would be [acknowledged as acceptable to him and] made heirs of eternal life [actually experiencing it] according to our hope (his guarantee).

— (TITUS 3:3-7 AMP)

WORSHIP

 What is the most well-known song that speaks of God's grace?

Today we're going to discover the story behind the song 'Amazing Grace'.

The clip contains artistic impressions of images of slavery. It is advised that you watch the clip before the session to check if it is appropriate for your group.

After you have watched the clip, ask the group to share their thoughts about John Newton's story.

 **Watch: 'Amazing Grace': The Story Behind the Song (14:29)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m8AHHduTM0>

If the clip is not appropriate, then you can share the information below and move on to the Additional Activity for this section.

In his early life John Newton spent many years involved in the slave trade, and even became the captain of a slave ship. He was known for his rebellious behaviour, bad attitude, foul language and drunkenness. One day the ship John Newton was on ran into a violent storm. The crew faced certain death. In this moment of deep despair John cried out to God. He later became a church pastor and it is said that he wrote a new hymn for his church every week! He also became a prominent supporter of the campaign to abolish the slave trade.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Use the song 'Amazing Grace' to bring an end to the session with a time of worship and prayer. When the song has finished, you could ask the group to share one line that stood out for them, or you could bring the session to a close in prayer.

 **Watch: 'Amazing Grace' – BYU Vocal Point & Friends (A Capella) (3:51)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27Gcmx7FSc>

LUKE 15:11-32

THE VOICE TRANSLATION

¹¹ Once there was this man who had two sons. ¹² One day the younger son came to his father and said, “Father, eventually I’m going to inherit my share of your estate. Rather than waiting until you die, I want you to give me my share now.” And so the father liquidated assets and divided them. ¹³ A few days passed and this younger son gathered all his wealth and set off on a journey to a distant land. Once there he wasted everything he owned on wild living. ¹⁴ He was broke, a terrible famine struck that land, and he felt desperately hungry and in need. ¹⁵ He got a job with one of the locals, who sent him into the fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ The young man felt so miserably hungry that he wished he could eat the slop the pigs were eating. Nobody gave him anything.

¹⁷ So he had this moment of self-reflection: “What am I doing here? Back home, my father’s hired servants have plenty of food. Why am I here starving to death?”

¹⁸ I’ll get up and return to my father, and I’ll say, ‘Father, I have done wrong – wrong against God and against you. ¹⁹ I have forfeited any right to be treated like your son, but I’m wondering if you’d treat me as one of your hired servants?’” ²⁰ So he got up and returned to his father. The father looked off in the distance and saw the young man returning. He felt compassion for his son and ran out to him, enfolded him in an embrace, and kissed him.

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PRACTICALLY PERFECT IN EVERY WAY

If we're not careful then we can fall into the trap of trying to earn God's grace. In today's session we'll hear the story of a young woman striving to maintain her perfect image. We'll consider how her faulty beliefs led her to a life of striving, and we will contrast this with the word of God. We don't need to be perfect as we are all 'gracefully broken'.

WELCOME

Which fictional character is described as 'practically perfect in every way'?

The following clip would suggest everything is not as perfect as it seems.

 **Watch: Mary Poppins Returns (2018) – Practically Perfect Bloopers (1:57)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLUiFnMwPA8>

Do you think anyone can be truly described as 'practically perfect'? If so, why?

None of the bloopers in the clip we watched reached the final cut of the film of course. All imperfections were deleted and edited to create the 'perfect' version that ended up on our screens.

Do you ever wish the bloopers of our lives could be edited or deleted? If so, why/why not?

In what ways do we edit out the parts of our lives that are far from perfect?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

What is your response to this quote?

“One reason we struggle with insecurity: we're comparing our behind the scenes to everyone else's highlight reel.”

— STEVEN FURTICK

WITNESS

In today's session, the Witness and Word sections are reversed. This will enable the young people to consider their feelings about striving for perfection and then look to Scripture in the Word section.

Read the extract from *If Only I Could be Perfect* by Carla Barnhill.

It happened when I was 12, but I remember the moment like it happened this morning. My older brother had gotten into trouble – again. My Mum and I were folding laundry, talking about the situation and how worried she was about my brother's actions. Then she said to me, 'I know we'll never have to worry about you.'

Now, my Mum meant it as a compliment. Her intention was to tell me she knew I was well-behaved and smart enough to avoid some of the stuff that had got my brother into hot water. But in my mind, her words set a huge weight on my shoulders. When she said, 'We'll never have to worry about you', I heard: 'Make sure we never have to worry about you.'

That simple conversation set me on a mission – to be a perfect daughter. My goal was to make sure my parents never had a doubt where I was, what I was doing, or who I was with. So I never missed a curfew, never drank beer, never hung out with anyone who might lead me into trouble.

Those few times I did get into trouble with my parents, I felt horrible. And even though I got

off with a few stern words, I still felt like I'd let them down.

My desire to be perfect carried over into my relationship with God. I honestly thought God would love me more if I went to youth group, if I said my prayers, if I went to Bible camp. I believed I could impress God if I did all the right Christian things. I didn't always do those things because I wanted to. I did them because I wanted God to think I was perfect.

Striving for excellence isn't always a bad thing. Doing our best is part of the Christian life. Way back in the Old Testament, God's people were told 'to present as the Lord's portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you' (Numbers 18:29 NIV). Even though God was talking about tithes and offerings, we know our whole lives are offerings to God, and we need to give God our best.

But perfectionism is 'doing our best' for all the wrong reasons. Perfectionism is about us, not about God.

I was being good because I thought it would earn love and acceptance. If my behaviour pleased my parents, they'd love me even more. If my behaviour pleased God, I'd earn his favour. I came to believe that my worth was based on how good I was – and on how good other people thought I was. Inside, I was stressed out. The pressure to be perfect was almost too much to handle. But I didn't think I could tell anyone how I felt because that would mean admitting I wasn't perfect. And that was the last thing I wanted to do.

I know I'm not the only one who has felt like being a good person – being a perfect Christian – is the key to God's heart. One of my friends once told me she didn't think she was good enough to be a Christian. She didn't think she could live up to the expectations everyone had of Christians – always being nice, never getting into trouble. She saw Christianity as a secret club that only 'good' kids could belong to. My efforts to be the perfect person sure didn't help her to think otherwise. But if I'd been more honest about my own failures and shown her how God forgives, she might have felt differently.

Perfectionism is a losing game. Fortunately, it's one we really don't have to play. After all, God reached out to us when we were as far away from him as we could possibly be. Being a Christian isn't about being perfect; it's about being forgiven. So we can only relax and be confident that God knows we're not perfect and loves us just the same.

— IN WILD GRACE, MAX LUCADO AND JAMES LUND.

This is an important topic and one that is worth spending time discussing with your group. In our culture, young people are constantly measured on their performance and rated accordingly, but this is not how it is with God.

Use any of the following questions to unpack the themes of this extract with your group.

DISCUSS:

- 🗨️ How closely do you feel you relate to the girl in the story, with regards to trying to be the perfect Christian?
- 🗨️ On a scale of 1-10, how much do you feel God's love and acceptance of you is based on what you do/achieve?
- 🗨️ What things do you do that make you a 'better' Christian? What is your motivation for doing them?
- 🗨️ In what ways do you feel you try to earn God's approval?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

In his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* Philip Yancey says:

“There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less.”

— PHILIP YANCEY

WORD

Copy the 'Grace Scriptures' handout on to A3 paper and cut out the Scripture references. Stick them up around the room. The full Scriptures are shown below for your reference. Ask the group to explore the Scriptures and collect words and phrases that clarify their understanding of God's grace. Share their thoughts together and discuss how Scripture contradicts the striving for perfection that we saw in Carla's story. The group looked at some of these verses in Session One, but the focus today is to see how Scripture stands up against our desire to earn God's grace through trying to be perfect.

There will need to be a handout that is a simple table with the references in each box.

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

— (EPHESIANS 2:8-9 NLT)

²⁰ God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. ²¹ So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

— (ROMANS 5:20-21 NLT)

⁹ Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

— (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 NLT)

¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

— (HEBREWS 4:15-16 NLT)

¹⁶ From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses, but God's unending love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.

— (JOHN 1:16-17 NLT)

¹⁰ 'So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? ¹¹ We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.'

— (ACTS 15:10-11 NLT)

¹⁴ Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

— (ROMANS 6:14 NLT)

¹⁰ But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favour on me – and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace.

— (1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 NLT)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Choose a verse to memorise. Share with the group why you have chosen it.

 What truth does it tell you about God's grace?

WORSHIP

We're going to listen to a song that reminds us that we don't have to be perfect, we are all 'gracefully broken'. As you listen to the lyrics of this song, recommit your heart to our God of grace. Pray that God will take away the striving for perfection that sometimes clouds your judgement and that you will rest in God's amazing grace.

When the song has finished, encourage the group to share in prayer.

 **Watch: 'Gracefully Broken' (Lyric Video) ft. Tasha Cobbs Leonard (5:48)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJNR0LxbIP4>

GRACE SCRIPTURES

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

ROMANS 5:20-21

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

HEBREWS 4:15-16

JOHN 1:16-17

ACTS 15:10-11

ROMANS 6:14

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10


TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

It's human nature to find fault in others, while we overlook our own shortcomings. Although it's lovely that we have people in our lives who love us just as we are, there is always a concern that that opinion will change. What if we do something that others disapprove of? What if we make a mistake and let people down? In today's session we'll discover that God really does love us just as we are and calls us to love others in the same way.








WELCOME

In the classic Brit-flick *Bridget Jones's Diary* there is a moment where Bridget hears a message we'd all like to hear.

Watch the clip and discuss the questions together.

 **Watch: *Bridget Jones Diary* (7/12) Movie Clip – Just As You Are (2001) (2:34)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZu2JfM2Aq8>

DISCUSS:


-  In what ways do you relate to the way Bridget describes herself?
-  What does it feel like to hear someone listing everything that is wrong with you, as Mark Darcy does with Bridget?
-  How could Mark Darcy share his thoughts in a more gracious way?
-  In what ways do we find it so difficult to see past the faults of others?
-  What do you think Mark Darcy means when he says, 'I like you just as you are'?
-  Who do you like 'just as they are'?
-  Who likes you 'just as you are'?

It's human nature to find fault in others, while we overlook our own shortcomings. Although it's lovely that we have people in our lives who love us just as we are, there is always a concern that that opinion will change. In today's session we'll discover that God really does love us just as we are and calls us to love others in the same way.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

The same actor, Colin Firth, played Mr Darcy in the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* that inspired *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Watch the clip and discuss whether you would like to hear a proposal like this.

 **Watch: Darcy Confesses his Love – *Pride and Prejudice* – BBC Studios (4:07)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JF3ueHjUc3k>

-  What kind of conditions do we place on our love for others?

WORD




Today's Scripture passage tells the story of a woman caught in adultery. The religious leaders used her to trick Jesus, but instead of condemnation, she was transformed by the grace of God. Her story is found in the Gospel of John, but scholars do not believe this was its original home. In some translations John 8:1-11 is printed in italics or carries a special footnote as, although it is believed to be a legitimate story from the life of Jesus, it was not in most original Greek manuscripts of John's Gospel. Either way, it shares a story of the amazing grace shown by Jesus to a desperate woman.

 **Read:**

¹ ...but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.





— (JOHN 8:1-6)

-  On what grounds did the teachers of the law and the Pharisees bring the woman to Jesus?
-  What law did they highlight in their accusations to the woman?
-  What law is stated in Leviticus 20:10?

 **Read:**

¹⁰ If a man commits adultery with another man's wife – with the wife of his neighbour – both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.

— (LEVITICUS 20:10)

-  The woman was supposedly caught in the act of adultery. If this was the case, then who was missing from the story?
-  How had the religious leaders twisted the law from Leviticus? Why do you think they did this?
-  How do we distort God's biblical guidelines in today's world?
-  Who does this distortion tend to benefit or leave at a disadvantage?

The Roman leaders had taken away the power of the Jews to carry out capital punishment. The religious leaders tried to place Jesus in an impossible position. If he told them to follow the law of Moses and stone the woman, then they could run to the Roman authorities to report him. If Jesus let the woman be free, then he could be seen to be disobeying the law of Moses.

 **Read:**

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

— (JOHN 8:6-8)

-  No one knows what Jesus wrote in the sand, but what do you think it might have been?

 **Read:**


⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'

¹¹ 'No one, sir,' she said.

'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'

— (JOHN 8:9-12)

Notice that Jesus never says that the woman's actions are OK, but he fiercely defends her against the religious condemnation of the Pharisees.

-  What can we learn from Jesus about how we should treat those who have made mistakes in life or those who are seen as outcasts?

💬 After showering the woman with grace, Jesus tells her to leave her life of sin. Why do you think he does that?

This story is often boiled down to the simple message 'Don't judge others if you're not perfect yourself' – but it is way more nuanced than that.

💬 What have you discovered in this story about the transforming grace of Jesus Christ?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Watch the clip to discover more about how God feels about our sin.

📺 **Watch: Why God Hates Sin – John 8:1-11/ Our Daily Bread Video Devotional (2:59)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcez4Q5HggY>

💬 How does this clip give you a deeper understanding of the power of God's grace?

💬 If you feel comfortable, then share what sin you need to leave.

WITNESS

Read together the following summary of a story from the USA that gives an example of grace in action.

A girl named Shannon drove to high school on the third day of her junior year. Her biggest worries were memorising her class schedule, locker combination, and pep-squad routines. Oh, and one more thing: lipstick. She'd forgotten to put it on that morning.

Shannon was driving on a country road, the kind that features endless views of cornfields and clustered cows, but rarely people. Almost never, in fact. So, Shannon adjusted her rearview mirror for a quick swipe on the lips. It took only a moment. When her eyes returned to the road, she glimpsed something moving directly in front of her. The car jolted. Shannon braked. She'd hit something.

The sinking feeling in Shannon's gut turned to horror when she got out and saw the body of a woman lying face down in the grass next to a mangled bicycle. Paramedics soon arrived and confirmed the worst. The woman, Marjorie Jarstfer, was dead.

Shannon wanted to join her. One thought kept running through her disbelieving brain: I should have been the one killed, not her.

Later Shannon learned that the dead woman's husband, Gary, wanted her to meet at his home the night before the funeral. That was the last thing Shannon wanted. She was terrified. Yet she knew she couldn't say no.

When Shannon stepped into the house that day, her heart raced. From the end of the entry corridor, a burly, middle-aged man approached. He opened his arms wide. Shannon couldn't believe it. He wasn't angry. He wanted a hug. This grieving husband embraced Shannon, and the tears she'd been holding back flowed freely on his flannel shirt. 'I'm so sorry,' she said. 'I'm so sorry.'

Gary sat Shannon down and began to tell her all about his wife. Marjorie loved and was close to the Lord. She'd told Gary she sensed she'd be going home soon. 'You can't let this ruin your life, Shannon,' Gary said. 'God wants to strengthen you through this. He wants to use you. As a matter of fact, I am passing Marjorie's legacy of being a godly woman on to you. I want you to love Jesus without limits, just like Marjorie did.'

Gary refused to press charges against Shannon or sue her family for damages beyond insurance. Shannon kept waiting for Gary to come to his senses and dish out the appropriate punishment. It never happened. Grace had chased Shannon from the moment she got in the car that fateful schoolday morning. She finally let it catch her and, like Gary Jarstfer, wrap her in a bear hug that wouldn't let go. Shannon went from feeling guilty to feeling chosen. Her future was assured. She would live out Marjorie's legacy, as a godly woman who loved Jesus

beyond measure. Today, Shannon Ethridge is a bestselling Christian author, speaker and counsellor.

Shannon was around the age of 16 when the accident happened. One moment of distraction changed everything.

(Full story at www2.cbn.com/article/not-selected/shannon-ethridge-completely-forgiven)

DISCUSS:

- How do you think Shannon felt at the moment she realised what had happened?
- Imagine the moment that Shannon found out Marjorie's husband wanted to see her. How would you have felt receiving that message?
- What reaction do you think Shannon was expecting from Gary Jarstfer?
- How did Gary react when he saw Shannon?
- Could you ever see yourself responding in a similar way if you were in Gary's place? Explain your response.
- How do you think Gary's expression of grace transformed Shannon's life?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

What is your response to the following quote from CS Lewis, and how does it relate to Shannon's story?

“Everyone thinks that forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.”
— CS LEWIS

WORSHIP

Use the following song to bring this set of sessions to a close. Ask the group to listen carefully to the lyrics and reflect on the message of the song. At the end of the song, bring this series of sessions on grace to a close in prayer.

- Watch: For King + Country – 'Love Me Like I Am' with Jordin Sparks (Official Performance Video) (4:11)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhpOA7YvmSI>

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Share this prayer, based on the lyrics of 'Love Me Like I Am' to bring the session to a close.

Jesus,
We are amazed by your love for us and that grace is available to us just as we are. Even when we don't feel like we measure up, you are there loving us no matter what we do.
Thank you for your amazing grace.
Amen.