

BASIC BIBLE THEMES

SESSION 3: GRACE

TEACHER

Background Scripture: Mark 10:17-20; Ephesians 2:1-10; Philippians 3:4-6

Main Ideas:

- Prevenient grace is the grace that comes to all people before they meet God in conversion. It's the love God extends to people to show He wants to save everyone.
- Salvation depends entirely on God's desire to build a relationship with us, which is the definition of grace.
- By God's grace, we can live in the confidence of His unconditional love for us.

Learning Goals:

- Explore how people act when they feel that they must earn their salvation.
- Learn what it means for us to accept God's free offer of grace in our lives.

1. Engage Interest

- Briefly share with your group the story of adoption preparation that begins the Session Content (the first four paragraphs). Then, ask them to respond to this question: What are some ways God's showed grace to you before you became a believing Christian?
- Ask your adults to continue approaching the subject of grace by answering the following question: What are some typical ways people try to "get into God's good graces," (i.e. try to earn their salvation)? (Possible responses: donate money to good, charitable causes; attend church a minimum number of times per year [Christmas, Easter]; be a good person, etc.)

Presentation Option

Display the Philippian jailer's question for the group: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Then, ask:

- What are some ways people try to answer this question?
- Which of these methods—if any—do you think are effective?
- Why are these methods ineffective?
- Why do people continue to use ineffective methods to try to find salvation?

2. Explore the Word

A. Ask the group to think of people in the Bible who tried to earn salvation by doing good works. Two prominent examples are the so-called rich young ruler and Saul of Tarsus. Direct half of the group to read Mark 10:17-20 and the other half to read Philippians 3:4-6. Then, ask:

- Why do you think the young ruler felt he had to do something more, even though he was faithfully keeping all the commandments? (We don't know what the man felt, but from his question in verse 17, it seems clear that keeping the Law did not give him peace of mind.)

- What does Paul's experience before his conversion suggest about salvation? (Perhaps that we can't be saved by head-knowledge about Scripture and by keeping religious rules. As God worked on Paul's heart, Paul became convinced that fine training and obeying the Law were not enough to save him.)

B. Invite the group to read Ephesians 2:1-10 and answers these questions:

- What is like to be “dead in your transgressions”?
- By contrast, what is it like to be “alive with Christ”?
- What makes us “alive with Christ”? (God's grace)
- What kind of “good works” cannot save us?
- What kind of “good works” does God intend for Christians to do?
- Are any of the answers to the above two questions the same works? If yes, how are they different?

Presentation Option

Have the group read Roman 3:21-24; 5:20--6:2, 15 and then discuss the following questions:

- Do you think that most people believe that “all have sinned”? Why?
- Why do you think that more people don't accept the gift of being “justified freely by his grace”?
- Do you think these verses give a Christian the right to live a “sinning religion”? Why or why not?
- What motivates Christians to live a good life, i.e., to intentionally avoid sinning?

3. Examine Life

A. Share the following information with your adults:

In some theology books, you'll find the term “total depravity.” That term is often used by people who teach that humans are so totally and completely sinful and corrupt that there is nothing we can do to help ourselves. The best we can do is hope we are one of the lucky ones God has chosen for salvation. Some Christians believe this—that God has pre-selected all who will be saved. John Calvin, the theological forefather of many Baptist, Presbyterian, and independent churches, for example, taught this.

The concept of total depravity is like a shipwreck in the middle of the ocean, with no life preservers and no lifeboats. A rescue helicopter appears, but it can hold only a few passengers. So, the paramedic in the chopper picks several passengers at random, and plucks them out of the sea. Their rescue has nothing to do with them or anything they do. It is totally at the whim of the rescuer.

The biblical view of salvation John Wesley preferred sees sinners as being both alienated from God and dead in sins--but God gives us the grace to respond to His invitation to salvation. To return to the shipwreck scenario, it's as if a rescue chopper appears with enough life preservers for every passenger. However, all the rescuer can do is drop the life preservers. He can't force the passengers to reach out and grab them.

To reinforce this point, ask a participant to read aloud Ephesians 2:8-9.

B. Invite your adults to discuss the following question, while keeping in mind the grace is a completely free gift from God.

- What is the best gift you have ever received?
- Did you deserve it?
- What made it the “best”?
- What is the best gift you have ever given someone?

- Did he or she do something to earn the gift?
- What made it the “best” in your opinion?

Presentation Option

Write the word GRACE down the left side of the chalkboard or a sheet of newsprint. Then, ask the adults to help you form an acrostic by suggesting words or phrases beginning with those letters that describe grace.

(One example:

Good news

Really ours

Available

Certain

Expensive price)

The purpose of this activity is to help the adults explore what all is involved in God's grace.

4. Exercise Your Faith

- A. Ask someone to 1 John 4:9-10 aloud to the group. Then, ask volunteers to complete the following sentence: If God did not love me . . .
- B. Close the session by explaining that even if we fail God, His grace and love do not diminish. You can drive this point home by telling the story of Sam Harris and his daughter, Rebekah, which appears at the close of the Session Content.

Presentation Option

Invite two or three persons from your congregation, who are not normally part of this group, to briefly share their personal testimony. Ask each of them to respond to this question: How has God's grace impacted your life?