



WITNESS THE POWER
OF FORGIVENESS

THE GRACE CARD

SCRIPTURE-BASED STUDY GUIDE

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"For it is by grace you have been saved ..." Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

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THE POWER OF GRACE

Study written by Pastor Lynn Holmes
Senior Pastor, Calvary Church

Let's Watch ...

Grandpa George's Library (Clip 1)



After a discouraging Sunday service in his role as a pastor and a difficult week on the job in his role as a police officer, Sam seeks the counsel and comfort of his grandfather, George, a retired minister who was active during the days of the Civil Rights movement. After a long walk, Grandpa George invites his grandson to his study and offers him a modern-day parable, hoping it will create the hunger in Sam to dig deeper to discover the true pearl of wisdom that has just been shared—the awesome power of God's grace.

Let's Read ...

"The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love." (Psalm 145:8)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23, NLT

"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you." Isaiah 30:18

"The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John 1:17, NCV

"[Don't] treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die." Galatians 2:21, NLT

Let's Consider ...

To understand the Christian life, you must understand *grace*. It is the heart of our faith and the heart of our relationship with God. Grace is the means by which God brings himself to us and restores us. Grace is best defined as: God giving me what I need, not what I deserve. I deserve to be punished for my sins, but in grace, God offers me forgiveness. Through forgiveness, I am able to experience blessing upon blessing. Grace is a gift that we accept in faith, and that is totally undeserved. We tend to offer people conditional love: I love you, *if*. But Jesus Christ offers each of us unconditional love: I love you, period! And when we are the recipients of such an awesome gift, our hearts are transformed and the desire of our hearts becomes helping others understand this amazing grace.

We hear Grandpa George tell the story about Mr. Eskue asking for forgiveness and offering grace to people that had been enslaved to him and to others. He wanted to treat these children of God with honor, respect, and love. It was this grace that prompted Sam's great-great grandfather to offer to Mr. Eskue his handwritten *Grace Card* in return. Think of the lives changed by those "simple" acts of uncommon grace.

Gratitude should be one of the defining characteristics of those of us who are the recipients of such lavish grace. In our gratitude for what Christ has done for us, we are instructed in God's Word to treat others with the same respect and honor we would want to be treated ourselves. Remember the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The lesson that Grandpa George is trying to teach Sam? Forgiveness and grace are to be offered even to those who seem undeserving of it. Grace is a powerful offense against the evil attacks of this world: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" 1 Peter 4:10.

Grace has the power to transform lives!

Let's Discuss ...

Can you describe the transformation in your life, when you first believed and accepted the gift of God's grace?

How would it change the way you look at other people if you saw them with the same value that God does? Are certain people easier (and certain ones harder!) for you to look at this way? Why do you think that is?

The free gift of grace comes only through Christ. It is a *free* gift, but not a *cheap* gift. Jesus Christ was and is our only door into heaven. Do you think you "deserve" to be saved? (see Romans 3:23) Do you think you have earned this gift of grace? Do you think others who have done more evil in their lives then deserve the same grace?

What does the gift of grace offered by George's grandfather and Mr. Eskue say about the value they placed on others? What does Christ's willingness to offer you the free gift of grace say about your value in his eyes?

Grandpa George's own grandfather wrote these words as a boy: "I promise to pray for you every day, ask your forgiveness, grant you the same, and be your friend always." To whom in your life do you need to offer The Grace Card?

Let's Not Forget ...

I have messed up many times in my life, and in repentance I have seen that God's grace is always willing to receive me back in love and mercy. We all need God. "The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me—to tell people the good news about God's grace," says Paul in Acts 20:24 (NCV). Sharing the transforming grace of God with others is a sacred responsibility. When we experience the transforming grace of God and his miraculous intervention, we should be filled with the desire to share that same wonderful reality with others!

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“For it is by grace you have been saved ...” Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

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IT’S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Study written by Pastor Lynn Holmes
Senior Pastor, Calvary Church

Let’s Watch ...

Blake and Mac argue at dinner before Blake leaves angrily (Clip 2)



In what has become a rare instance at the McDonald house, Blake joins his parents for dinner in an attempt to connect with his dad. Unfortunately, Blake also needs to break the news to his father that he will not be graduating from high school; in fact, Blake’s elite private school has asked him to leave. Mac explodes in rage, screaming at both his son and his wife. “Just once, I want to have a normal conversation with you and not another fight,” Blake says before walking out of the house. Mac then storms out of the room, leaving Sara once again to pick up the figurative and literal pieces.

Let’s Read ...

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” Matthew 5:13-14

Other Key Scripture: 1 John 1:7; Mark 9:50; 1 Kings 11:4

Let’s Consider ...

In 1 John 1:7, we read: “...if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another ...” There are a couple of key words to highlight: *if* and *fellowship*. On a positive note, *if* we are walking with Christ, then we have strong relationships with others, centered on our love for Christ.

On the other hand, *if* our relationship with Christ is non-existent or deteriorating, then that will have a negative affect on every other relationship we have. Mac is a good illustration of this principle. In the aftermath of tragedy, he chose not to turn to God. Instead, he has allowed anger and bitterness not only to impact his life adversely, it has also torn apart the lives of his son and his wife. He is not a person anyone wants to be near.

Our relationship with Christ—or lack thereof—affects every other relationship we have. If we have a strong relationship with Jesus, our relationships reflect that. If we don't, our relationships suffer as a result.

In Matthew 5:13-14, Jesus tells his believers that: “You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world ...” In Mark 9:50, Jesus says: “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and *be at peace with each other*” (emphasis added).

Have you ever thought about how pervasive salt can be? A little salt can totally alter the taste of food that is bland. How about light? In the deepest, darkest caverns of earth, one small flame can pierce the darkness.

News stories are filled with tales of corruption and lack of integrity. Evil is a powerful force. But evil can only operate in the absence of the Holy. Where the Holy One reigns supreme, evil can no longer exist. In the presence of light, darkness flees. With the addition of salt, taste is totally transformed.

Let's Discuss ...

How does God want us to treat one another? How are you doing when it comes to God's standard in this area?

If you were to take an inventory of your relationships, do you think they would reflect that you are “walking in the light”? Why or why not? Would people close to you agree with your assessment?

Think of a relationship (current or past) that has been adversely affected by you or the other person not walking with Christ. What went wrong? How do you think a relationship with Christ would have helped avert that relational crisis?

Mac's bitterness in the film comes in the aftermath of a terrible tragedy. Do you find it easier or harder to draw near to God when things go horribly wrong? Why do you think that is?

How much is salt and light a natural part of your life and your relationships? Is your heart wholly committed to the Lord? Is your heart at peace? Is there evidence in your relationships with others?

Let's Not Forget ...

In the Old Testament books of Chronicles and Kings, we find an expression in the original Hebrew that is not used anywhere else in the Old Testament. It is translated to mean: *wholly committed* or *fully dedicated* to God. It's used as a technical phrase, similar to our word conversion. In the literal Hebrew, however, perhaps a better translation would be: *a heart at peace*.

A heart at peace helps transform all of our relationships, so instead of blaming and accusing, we take responsibility and seek reconciliation. Is your heart truly at peace?

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LEAVING A LEGACY

Study written by Pastor Lynn Holmes
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Let's Watch ...

Blake in the Counselor's Office (Clip 3)



For obvious reasons, Blake blames his father for all the bad that is happening in their home. Through the efforts of Dr. Vines, a Christian counselor, Blake is gradually realizing that he is being eaten up by the same bitterness that possesses Mac. That bitterness is ruling the household. Dr. Vines explains that *someone* must break that cycle of bitterness by throwing out a line of hope to the others, allowing grace to begin to transform this vicious situation within their home and their lives.

Let's Read ...

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Deuteronomy 5:8-10

Other Key Scripture: John 20:31; Exodus 20:5-6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 78:4; 2 Timothy 1:5

Let's Consider ...

My father died on December 19, 2008 but in many ways, he lives on. My dad left a legacy of faith to his family. The verse he lived by was John 20:31: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." My dad's hobby was fishing, but his calling was fishing for men. His life reflected both.

The legacy my father left me is extremely different from the one Mac appears to be leaving his son. Mac has grown bitter at God ... and just about everyone else. He throws blame in every direction and that bitterness is being passed along to Blake. We read in Exodus 20:5-6, Deuteronomy 5:8-10, and Numbers 14:18 that for

the unrepentant, God allows the sins of the father to be visited upon succeeding generations. We see that being played out in Blake's life.

Self-pity is a debilitating dilemma. It causes one to fight and destroy the good relationships of love that are around us. Dr. Vines correctly points out to Blake that "it does not take a man to fight, it takes a man to reach out his hand." She explains that there is greater power in surrendering to God than in struggling with bitterness in our own strength. We were all created in the image of God and to be all that God created us to be, we must invite God into our lives. If we do not, we are subjected to the influences of self-pity, bitterness, rage, and rebellion. These influences destroy the relationships God seeks to bless us with.

We will all leave a legacy. I am grateful that my father left me one filled with blessings.

Let's Discuss ...

When you see a child act rebellious or respond with bitterness, what do you tend to think of their parents? Is that a fair way to assess parents?

Can you name a circumstance in your life where you fought to keep bitterness from ruling you? Were you able to succeed? Why or why not? How important is it to allow the grace of God to help you from becoming bitter?

In Psalm 78:4, we read: "We will not hide these truths from our children. But we will teach the next generation." In what ways have your parents or grandparents specifically shaped you? What are you teaching your children?

Paul gives a good example of leaving a multiple-generation legacy in 2 Timothy 1:5. ("I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.") What kind of legacy are you leaving those who are looking to you? What person who has had a substantial impact on your spiritual life will you take the time to thank personally this week?

Grace can take on many forms. In what area of your life can you show more gratitude to God and complain less? In what specific way do you need God's strength and grace so as to take a stand for him? Are there key areas in your life you need to fully surrender to God?

Let's Not Forget ...

Many of us know from personal experience the feeling of overwhelming pressure that piles up when the circumstances of life come crashing in upon us. In those times we have a choice: we can choose to be *bitter* or we can allow those situations to force us to be *better*. If we choose the latter, we realize that we need a source of strength and help beyond ourselves. When we surrender to the awesome power of God, we discover there is actually greater power and greater peace in the "surrendering" than there ever was in the struggling. Through spiritual new birth, the Spirit of God enters our lives and enables us to become what God originally intended for us to become: children of God who reflect the image of our Heavenly father. Talk about a legacy ...

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GET INTO THE GAME

Study written by Pastor Lynn Holmes
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Let's Watch ...

River Walk with Sam and Grandpa George (Clip 4)



Sam is frustrated that he is now partnered with Mac, a man who appears to dislike everyone that is different than he is. Mac's angry and bitter attitude toward life is opposite Sam's joyful demeanor. On top of that, Sam is now starting to question his true calling as a pastor. The prior Sunday, Sam delivered a message to his church in which he confessed his frustration with Mac and his inability to love others as Jesus does. He also let his congregation know they weren't much better at loving others than he is. As you can imagine, *that* went over like a lead balloon! As Sam walks along the banks of the Mississippi River in Memphis with his grandfather

George, he's about to learn a life lesson from his mentor ... although it may take a while to sink in.

Let's Read ...

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" Matthew 28:16-20

Other Key Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 1:15; Matthew 4:19

Let's Consider ...

This passage in Matthew takes us into the Disciples' world in the aftermath of Jesus Christ's sacrificial atonement (in which He paid for the sins of the entire world with his life's blood) and Resurrection (in which he provided undeniable authenticity that he indeed is the Lamb of God, our Lord and Savior). Now, about to ascend back to the side of his Father in Heaven, Jesus delivers to his followers The Great Commission.

How important is this? Of all the things Jesus could tell his followers before leaving, *this* is the final call he gives. With the establishment of the New Testament Church forthcoming, Jesus tells his followers to "... *go and make disciples.*" In essence, he is saying: Get into the game! Don't wait for the tired and weary to come

to you, *go to them* and make disciples! For many of us in today's churches, we would rather worship with fellow believers than go into the streets to interact with non-believers. But without those interactions, who will point them to Jesus?

Grandpa George tells Sam that as a Civil Rights leader in Memphis, he learned from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. the importance of getting into the game instead of sitting in the locker room. The locker room is where the game plan is delivered—on Sundays in the sanctuary of the church. While that's important, the actual game is played Monday through Saturday on the streets! After hearing the game plan in the locker room, we have to get into the game.

The goal of the New Testament believer is to make disciples. The more disciples you mentor and help to mature in the faith, the more the Kingdom of God (and the church) will grow. We need a steady diet of corporate worship; one of the mistakes believers often make is not exercising the discipline to get their own batteries recharged by receiving a fresh anointing from God. That is done in and through corporate worship. But we can't be in the game if we stay in the locker room!

When those in the world who are floundering see joy and the passion in a committed follower of Christ, it ignites a hunger within them. But how many in the world will walk into our churches—our locker rooms—to catch a glimpse of that? Our passion and joy have to be seen when we get into the game Monday through Saturday and live our lives intentionally with the goal of reaching our communities with the love of God and making disciples through his grace!

Let's Discuss ...

What does it mean to *get into the game* when it comes to Christ's command?

In what ways do you see the church today keeping it in the locker room instead of getting in the game? Does the locker room or the playing field best describe the focus of your church?

Would you describe yourself as someone who gets into the game? Give a recent example. Do you find yourself enjoying the locker room or the game more?

Re-read the passage from Matthew 28. According to the Great Commission, **When** are we to make disciples? **Where** are we to make disciples? **How** are we to make disciples?

In what ways are you demonstrating or sharing the grace of God with others? How could you increase your impact in this area?

Let's Not Forget ...

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus began his public ministry by calling his disciples to become fishers of men. How is this related to his final challenge that we are responsible to make disciples of all nations? The term *apostle* actually means sent one; one is who sent away. Are we doing enough to send people into the game, or is our focus solely on the locker room? We need to be in the game.

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