

The Grace of God

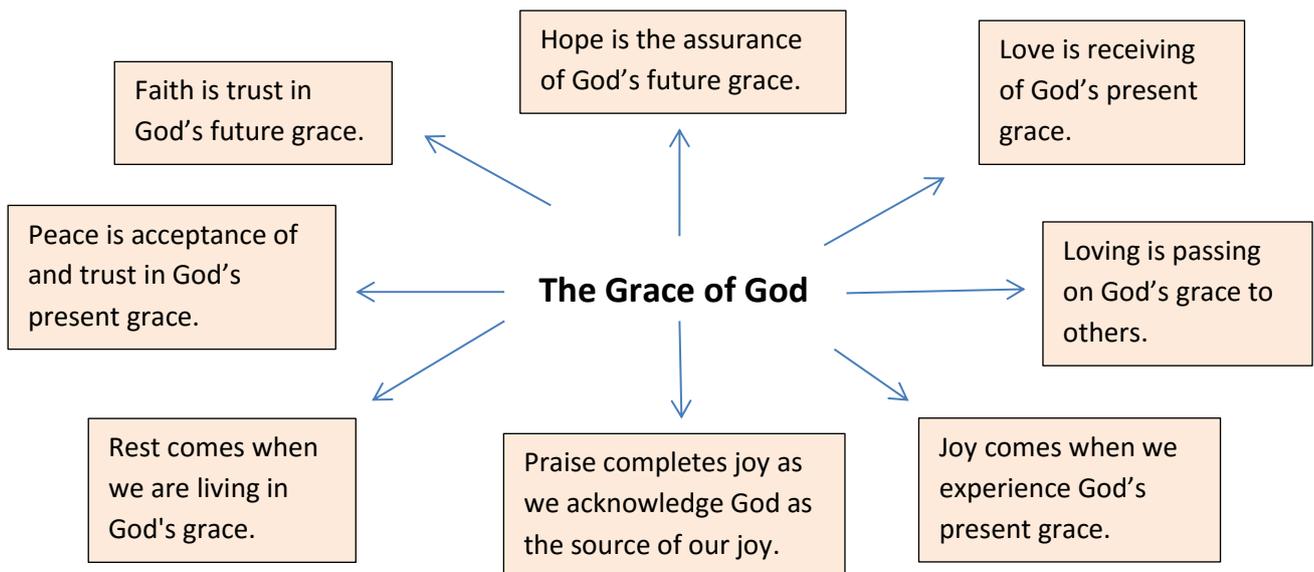
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What is grace?

The word translated "grace" in the Bible comes from the Greek word *charis* (New Testament), or from the Hebrew word *chen* (Old Testament). It means "favour, blessing or kindness."

- Grace is God choosing to bless us because He loves us, rather than punish us as our sin deserves. That's why grace is often described as **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**.
- Grace is God giving His greatest treasures to those who deserve it the least.
- Grace is closely related to mercy, but they are not the same. Mercy withholds a punishment we do deserve; grace gives a blessing we don't deserve.
- Grace is an essential part of who God is. Because grace is part of God's nature He always acts with grace towards His people.
- Grace undergirds all of the ways by which we interact with God (faith, hope, love, joy, peace, praise, rest etc.).



The New Testament speaks a lot about grace, and especially highlights the difference between living under law (as in the Old Testament), and living under grace (in Christ). This leads to some questions about God's and His grace:

- If grace is an essential part of God's nature, was God just as much a God of grace in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament? Has God changed?
- What are some examples of God's grace in action in the Old Testament?
- Why did God do so many "ungracious" acts in the Old Testament, and so few in the New Testament?

We need to learn more about grace in the Old Testament!

Grace in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word for grace is *chen* (חֵן). This word is used 69 times in the Old Testament, and is translated as “favour, blessing or kindness”. Sometimes this word relates to God, and sometimes to people. Here are some of the main places where grace occurs in the Old Testament:

God demonstrating grace in the Old Testament

- Genesis 6:8. Noah found grace in God’s eyes.
- Exodus 33:13,17, 34:9,33:16. Moses received God’s grace.
- Psalm 84:11. Proverbs 3:34. Jeremiah 31:2. God gave grace.
- Ezra 9:8. There was a moment of grace.

Exodus 34 describes a very important moment in our understanding of God’s nature. It was when God explained to Moses who He was. As part of this explanation God declared that He was a God of grace: *And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.* Exodus 34:6,7.

Here God says He is *compassionate and gracious* and that this overflows in His actions towards people. Because He is compassionate and gracious God is *slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness*. This sounds a lot like the God of the New Testament, doesn’t it?

God’s grace towards Israel was primarily demonstrated through His commitment to the covenants He made with His people. Even when the Israelites forsook these covenants, God did not forsake them, maintaining His love towards His chosen people. But even though God is gracious, loving and forgiving He is also just. He *will not leave the guilty unpunished*. Justice (and its consequence punishment) is just as much a part of God’s gracious nature as love, compassion and forgiveness! Perhaps the Old Testament contains so much punishment because God’s beloved people Israel were so stiff-necked and rebellious?

People asking God for grace in the Old Testament

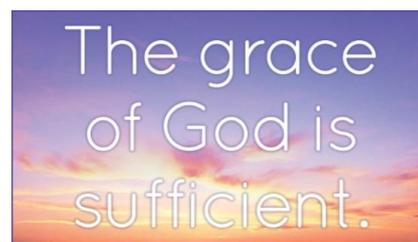
Because God is gracious His undeserving people can come to Him and ask for help:

- Moses did this immediately after God explained that He was a God of who was *compassionate and gracious*. “O Lord, if I have found favour (grace) in your eyes” Exodus 34:9.
- *God be gracious to us and bless us that Your way may be known in the earth.* Psalm 67:1,2.
- *Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.* Psalm 25:16.
- *Lord be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against You.* Psalm 41:4.
- *Turn to me and be gracious to me; give Your strength to your servant.* Psalm 86:16.

God is gracious towards us so we are to be gracious towards others.

People demonstrating grace in the Old Testament

- Psalm 45:2, Proverbs 22:11 - people demonstrating grace in their speech
- Proverbs 3:22 – demonstrating grace through sound judgment
- Proverbs 1:9, 4:9 – demonstrating grace through wisdom
- Zechariah 12:10 – demonstrating grace at the national level
- Isaiah 26:10 – demonstrating grace towards the wicked.



Examples of gracious people in the Old Testament:

- Ruth Ruth 2:2,10,
- Esther Esther 2:17,
- Hannah 1 Samuel 1:18.

From this we can conclude that God is the same in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament. He is just as much a God of grace now as He has always been. The big difference between the Old and New Testaments is that the “justice” side of God’s gracious nature was much more to the fore in the Old Testament, while the “love” side was more to the fore in the New Testament. That’s because God was dealing with His people Israel in the Old Testament so He could use them to bring blessing to the whole world through the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace in the Old Testament thus anticipates and prepares for the full expression of grace that is revealed in the New Testament. There God relates to His people “in Christ Jesus” in a wonderful journey of salvation, forgiveness and love.

Grace in the New Testament

Grace is central in the New Testament and is embodied in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus demonstrated God’s grace through His actions (especially at the Cross) and fulfilled all the promises of grace that underscored the Old Testament covenants. He brought in a new covenant of grace which can be seen as a journey in which we are gradually being transformed into His likeness. *We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Our journey begins with God choosing for us to be saved before the creation of the world, then takes us to the Cross, and then to the point here we accept Jesus as our Saviour and become a child of God. Once we are saved the Holy Spirit leads us through our life, changing us gradually so that we become more and more like Jesus. The journey finds a new beginning when we die (or when Jesus returns) as we are ushered into an eternal relationship with the Lord in Heaven in which we give Him glory and praise for ever and ever, Amen! This whole journey is underpinned by God’s grace. We don’t deserve for God to do these wonderful things on our behalf but He does them anyway. *Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.*

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. John 1:16,17.

We make the journey being loved by the Lord and in love with the Lord

God loves us and continually acts on our behalf in loving ways. That’s grace! *God is love.* 1 John 4:8 so when we receive love we are receiving God’s present grace, and when we love others we are passing on God’s present grace to others. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* John 3:16. *We love Him because He first loved us.* 1 John 4:19.



We make the journey in faith – trusting in the future grace of God.

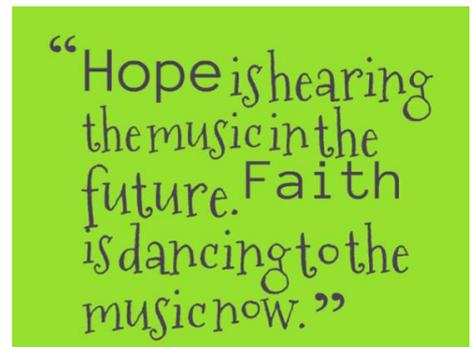
Faith is the act of the soul that connects with God’s grace, receives it, channels it through obedience, and guards it from being nullified. Faith is all about opening up to God; believing in Him; recognising His grace in the past; trusting His grace for the future, hearing Him speak, and then obeying what He says.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go: I will guide you with my eye. Psalm 32:8. *We walk by faith and not by sight.* 2 Corinthians 5:7.



We make the journey with hope – knowing God has everything under control.

For Christians hope is the strong assurance that something which has not yet happened will happen in God’s time, and by God’s grace. To many people hope is just wishful thinking. *I want xxxxx and I hope that I get it.* If they don’t get what they want they get discouraged and lose motivation. From there it is very easy to become hopeless - and hopelessness is possibly the greatest tragedy of this modern age.



But the good news is that there is hope! And this hope is found in Jesus Christ! We may not know what is going to happen to us in the future but we know the One who holds the future. In Christ we can face the future with confidence. Jesus has proved trustworthy in the past; we know that He will be trustworthy in the future.

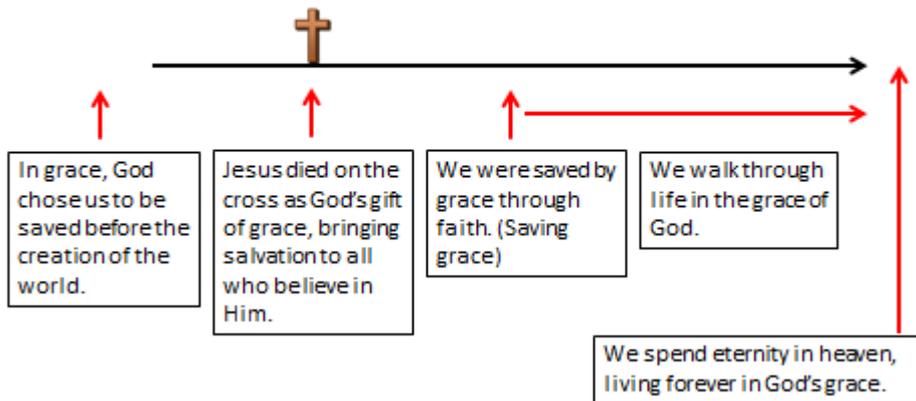
He says *My grace is sufficient for you.* 2 Corinthians 12:9 and this gives us a deep and genuine hope. *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.* Romans 5:1,2,5.

Hope is based on the fact that God never changes. He is the great I am. He always has been and always will be. He has always been faithful, always loving, always good. His grace has been consistently poured out upon us. *I the Lord do not change.* Malachi 3:6. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.* Hebrews 13:8. *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* Matthew 28:20.

Because God does not change we can have confidence that He will continue to love us, care for us, watch over us and be with us in the future; regardless of what we will go through. Hope lives in the present but is confident that God will be just as gracious toward us in future as He has been in the past. *Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him.” The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him.* Lamentations 3:22-25.



Our journey of grace



Let's now explore each of the stages in this "journey of grace"

In grace, God chose us to be saved before the creation of the world.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will - to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us. Ephesians 1:3-7.

God decided "before the creation of the world" that we should be saved. See Romans 8:28-39. If you ever ask "Why did God choose me?" the only answer can be: "because He wanted to!" God loved you and by His grace chose you to be His child. And the only response to this is to say "Thank you Lord!"

Paul's explanation of grace in Ephesians

In the first 3 chapters of Ephesians Paul gives a detailed explanation of how grace works in the Christian life. It forms a wonderful description of our privileged position "in Christ Jesus".

("In Christ Jesus" and its variations like "in Him", "in the Beloved" are sometimes called "Paul's magnificent obsession". He uses the term 29 times in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians and 164 times in all of his Epistles). We can only be "in Christ Jesus" because of God's amazing grace!

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ:

- By grace and in love He chose us to be saved before the foundation of the world.
- By grace He predestined us to be His sons and daughters in Christ.
- By grace He redeemed us and forgave our sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.
- By grace He included us in Christ and sealed this by giving us the Holy Spirit when we believed.
- When we were dead in our sin God called us to Himself.
- By grace we were saved by faith, when we believed in Jesus. God then gave us works that He had prepared in advance for us to do.
- By grace Gentiles were able to included in Christ along with the Jews. Now there is just one body and both have access to God by the Holy Spirit.
- All believers (Jew or Gentile) are now members of God's household and in Christ are a people in which God Himself dwells by the Holy Spirit.
- Paul was given special grace by God to bring this message of grace to the Gentiles.

Jesus' died on the Cross as God's gift of grace, bringing salvation to all who believe in Him.

The Cross was God's greatest demonstration of grace! It was *the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people*. Titus 2:11-13. God chose to sacrifice His perfect Son to take the punishment for sin that we deserved. (Titus 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Even though we were His enemies God extended His grace toward us (Romans 5:10) offering **forgiveness** (Hebrews 8:12; Ephesians 1:7), **reconciliation** (Colossians 1:19-20), **abundant life** (John 10:10), **the gift of His Holy Spirit** (Luke 11:13), and, ultimately, **eternal life with Him in heaven**. (John 3:16-18). All we have to do is accept God's gracious offer and put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.



Saving grace. We were saved by grace through faith.

At some time in our lives we were confronted with the claims of Jesus Christ and were drawn to Him by the Holy Spirit. We then had to make a free-will decision: *Will I accept Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord?* If we decided to accept Christ we were saved and became a child of God (thus completing the choice God made before the creation of the world that we should be saved). When put our faith in Jesus we were saved; our sins were forgiven; we became children of God; we received eternal life and we were included "in Christ Jesus". All of this was based on the wonderful work of Jesus Christ on the Cross! *O happy day – when Jesus washed my sins away!*

God's grace was lavished upon us! *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace which He has lavished upon us*. Ephesians 1:7. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*. Ephesians 2:8-10.

We walk through life in the grace of God.

Once we are saved and become a Christians we can walk daily in the grace of God. This opens up so many wonderful blessings in our lives. We will truly be able to say *For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace*. John 1:16.



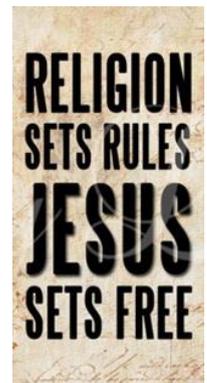
Here are some of the fantastic New Testament descriptions of God's "abundant provision" of grace towards us as we live out our lives "in Christ Jesus".

- We can **live godly lives** as we await the second coming of Jesus. *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ*. Titus 2:11-14.
- We **receive gifts of grace** so we can bless others. 1 Corinthians 12:1-19.
- We can **ask God and He will help in time of need**. *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*. Hebrews 4:16.

- We can **reign in life**. *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!* Romans 5:17.
- **God will watch over us, strengthen us and care for us throughout our lives**. *I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.* 2 Timothy 1:12. *To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.* Jude 24. *Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* 2 Timothy 2:1.
- **God will give us eternal life**. *Just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Romans 5:21.

Sadly, it is also possible for us to set aside, reject or nullify the grace of God.

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! Galatians 2:21. This happens when we try to live out our lives in our own strength - by trying hard, making resolutions, doing what is expected, following the crowd, doing our best, following What Would Jesus Do, obeying the commandments, doing our religious duty etc. Such actions are at the heart of **religion**: doing things because they have to be done (rather than out of love for the Lord). Religion is the greatest enemy of grace! If we live by religion rather than by grace we are effectively rendering Jesus' death on the Cross for us to be nothing.



That's why the New Testament spends so much time explaining how we are to live in the grace of God, and consistently rejects living under the law (as in the Old Testament).

Here are some ways you can reject the legalism of religion and live under God's grace:

- Reject the "shoulds" and "musts" that people and religious systems continually lay on you. They will only take away your freedom in Christ and bring you into bondage to them. *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* Galatians 5:1.
- Accept and rejoice in the grace that God freely lavishes upon you.
- Be obedient to the "still small voice" of the Holy Spirit. He is continually "gracious" and will always be drawing you to become more like Jesus. *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* 2 Corinthians 3:17,18.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16.



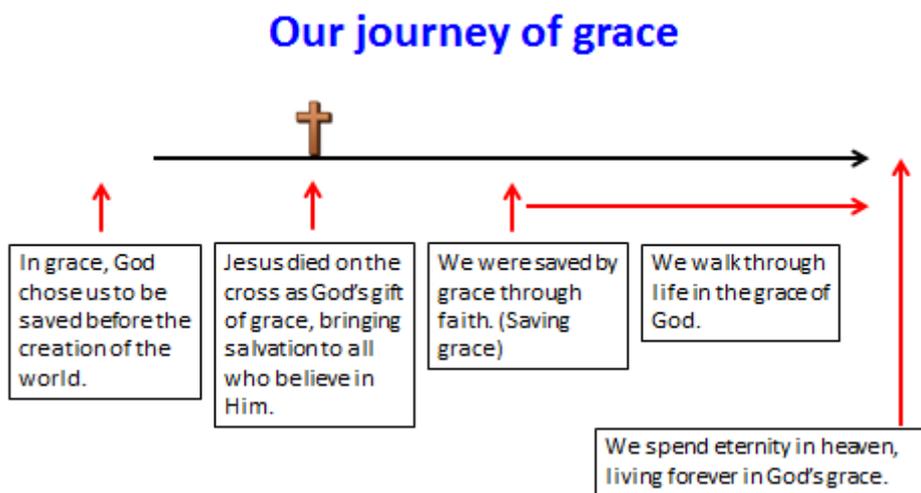
We will spend eternity in heaven, living forever in God's grace.

The final stage in our journey of grace is to spend eternity with the Lord in Heaven. This will happen when we die, or when Jesus returns. It will usher us into a new state of grace as part of our eternal life. We don't fully know what this will be like, but we know that it will be wonderful, because we will forever be with Jesus! See Revelation 21:22-22:5.

Our life on earth will have (hopefully) prepared us for this new state of grace:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 1 John 3:2.

We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18.



In our journey of grace Jesus is the embodiment and the dispenser of grace from beginning to end. That's why the early Christians referred to grace as "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ". It is also why most of the New Testament epistles begin or end with the blessing: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.* 2 Corinthians 3:18. This blessing is a fitting way to finish our study of the grace of God!

And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:10.

Discussion questions

What is grace? What is the effect on relationships when grace is expressed?

How did God express His grace towards His chosen people Israel? How did God express His grace through the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? How does God express His grace today through the Holy Spirit?

Describe your own personal "journey of grace". How does your experience of God's grace throughout this journey affect the way you live your life today, and the way you view your future?

Describe how Jesus is the fulfilment, embodiment and dispenser of God's grace.

What have you learnt from your study of God's grace. How will this affect the way you live in the future?