



## Grace Upon Grace

Leader's Notes and Bible Passages

“Tuesday’s child is full of grace,” is a line from an antiquated nursery rhyme that describes characteristics of children born on different days. Share with a partner or your small group what you think the words “full of grace” mean. **Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group. The leader should give an example of her own to begin discussion.**

The apostle John states in John 1:16: *For from his [Jesus’] fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* What beautiful words of encouragement, comfort, and hope! Grace is God’s undeserved favor and love (a gift!) toward sinful humans who have no right or reason to expect or receive it. In our study, we delve into God’s grace to His children in the past, present, and future.

**Opening Prayer:** Gracious God, You are our loving Lord! However, our sin builds a wall of unrighteousness that separates us from You and Your love. But You saw our need and sent Jesus – the Word become flesh – to live a perfect life, suffer, die for our sins, and rise from the dead. We are showered with the blessings of Your grace given to us through the merits of our Savior Jesus. Thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to give us faith in Jesus and all the gifts He offers. We ask for wisdom and discernment as we study Your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

### God’s Grace: The Past

In **Exodus 33:19**, what does the Lord tell Moses about His grace and mercy?

<sup>19</sup> And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. **It is His to give – His undeserved love to humanity.**

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the Lord sends warnings through prophecy to the sinful children of Israel. Vices and idolatry were rampant in their land and the Lord warns that they will be delivered into the hands of their enemies and are destined for exile from their homeland. As prophecies are fulfilled and Judah is conquered, despair and discouragement, as well as weeping and wailing, occur throughout the nation. God’s people had broken their covenant with Him. In light of this, read what God still promises His people in **Jeremiah 31:2–4** and **31–34**.

**Jeremiah 31:2-4, 31-34:** <sup>2</sup>Thus says the Lord: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when I Israel sought for rest, <sup>3</sup> the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an **everlasting love**; therefore I have continued **my faithfulness** to you. <sup>4</sup> Again **I will build you**, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!

<sup>31</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.** <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. **For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**”

Who or what is the new covenant God promises in verses 31-34? See **Hebrews 8:6–12**.

**Hebrews 8:6-12:** <sup>6</sup> But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. <sup>7</sup> For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. <sup>8</sup> For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>9</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. <sup>10</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will

put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>11</sup> And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. <sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

**Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the new covenant – in Him alone is salvation.**

In the midst of the chaos in their lives, how do you think Israel felt after hearing these prophetic words in Jeremiah? **Answers will vary, but could include: refreshed, revived, encouraged, hopeful, energized, joyful.**

What are we reminded of in **Romans 3:23**? What feelings does this verse generate in us?

<sup>23</sup> ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...

**Answers will vary, but could include despair, remorse, guilt, hopelessness.**

What is the Good News given to us in **Nehemiah 9:17b** and **Titus 3:3–7**?

**Nehemiah 9:17b: But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. God is gracious and merciful; His is a steadfast love; He will not forsake His people**

**Titus 3:3-7: <sup>3</sup>For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Jesus Christ saved us by His perfect life, suffering, death and resurrection; salvation is ours by faith in Jesus through the power of the Spirit working in Holy Baptism**

What does it mean that we are *justified by his grace* (Titus 3:7)? See **Romans 3:21–24**.

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. **Christ's righteousness becomes ours as a gift; Jesus removed our sins and made us just in God's sight.**

**Faith Talk:** Share specific feelings with a partner or your small group that result from knowing that our Savior God saved you by grace – upon grace – from a life of sin and despair and that through Baptism you are His own dear child. **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

## God's Grace: The Present

John Newton penned the following words: *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!* (Public Domain). Of what does **Romans 11:5** assure us?

**Romans 11: <sup>5</sup>So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. God continues to work in our lives, giving us the eyes of faith through the Spirit; we are God's chosen.**

The Holy Spirit uses the Means of Grace to work faith in our hearts and keep us in the faith. What are these? See **1 Peter 1:23**, **Titus 3:5**, and **Matthew 26:26–28**.

**1 Peter 1:23: <sup>23</sup> ... since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God ... God's Word**

**Titus 3:5: <sup>5</sup> ... he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit ... Holy Baptism**

**Matthew 26:26-28: <sup>26</sup>Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." <sup>27</sup>And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup>for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's Supper**

Why are they called the Means of Grace? **These are the ways – the tools – of the Holy Spirit to engender and sustain our faith which is purely a result of God's underserved love.**

Read **Ephesians 2:1–10**. Write the phrase in verse 7 that describes God's grace.

<sup>1</sup>And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show **the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

What *immeasurable riches* does the believer receive by grace through the Holy Spirit? **Answers will vary, but could include: salvation, faith, forgiveness of sins, spiritual gifts and talents, eternal life**

**Faith Talk:** Why can we not fully comprehend this treasure of grace that we have? Discuss with a partner or your small group. **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

Identify and discuss specific ways that we can, with the help of the Spirit, live gracefully in our daily lives:

#### **Colossians 4:6**

<sup>6</sup>Let your **speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.**

#### **Titus 3:1–2**

<sup>1</sup>Remind them to be **submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup>to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.**

#### **1 Peter 4:8–11**

<sup>8</sup> Above all, **keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup>As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **1 Peter 5:6–11**

<sup>6</sup> **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, <sup>7</sup>casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup>Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup>Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. <sup>10</sup>And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup>To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **2 Peter 3:18a**

**But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

**Faith Talk:** Discuss with a partner or your small group ways you can by word and action share the grace of God with those you live and work with this week. **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

## **God's Grace: The Future**

God always keeps His promises. What does He promise us in the following Bible passages, particularly in regard to the future?

#### **Acts 20:32**

<sup>32</sup> **And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. **Eternal inheritance – eternal life****

#### **Romans 5:20–21**

<sup>20</sup> **Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Eternal life****

#### **Romans 8:31–32**

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? **All things**

## **2 Thessalonians 2:16–17**

<sup>16</sup> Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, <sup>17</sup> comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. **Eternal comfort and hope**

## **Hebrews 4:16**

<sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. **Help in time of need**

God's grace is overflowing. Read **John 1:14, 16**.

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Martin Luther wrote in a sermon on John 1:16: "For this is the sum and substance of it all: Whoever wishes to be safeguarded from the devil's might and to escape sin and death must draw from this well, Christ; from Him flows all salvation and eternal bliss. This fountain is inexhaustible; it is full of grace and truth before God; it never fails no matter how much we draw from it. Even if we all dip from it without stopping, it cannot be emptied, but it remains a perennial fount of all grace and truth, an unfathomable well, an eternal fountain. The more we draw from it, the more it gives. Such water, as St. John remarks later, wells up to eternal life (John 4:14)." (*Luther's Works*, Volume 22, page 134; 55-Volume American Edition on CD-ROM; General Editors J. Pelikan/H.T. Lehmann; Fortress Press/Concordia Publishing House.)

**Faith Talk:** Discuss what phrases from Luther's quote are most meaningful to you and why. **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

**Faith Talk:** Will this grace of God ever end on this earth? **No, not for believers** What significance does it have for you that this *grace upon grace* is a "perennial fount," "an unfathomable well," "an eternal fountain"? What could your future look like living in the grace of God? **Answers may vary, but encourage everyone to share.**

### **Faith Walk:**

1. Thank the Lord that you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit for strength to share the message of salvation in Jesus Christ alone with at least one person this week.
2. Look for ways that God's grace is at work in your life.
3. Draw from God's fountain of grace through trials and tribulations.
4. Practice living gracefully and reflecting God's grace to those around you.

**Closing Prayer:** Read responsively these words from Psalm 86 and Numbers 6.

L: Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

R: **Preserve my life, for I am godly; save Your servant, who trusts in You—You are my God.**

L: Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to You do I cry all the day.

R: **Gladden the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.**

L: For You, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon You.

R: **Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace.**

L: In the day of my trouble I call upon You, for You answer me.

R: **I give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify Your name forever.**

L: You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

R: **Turn to me and be gracious to me;**

L: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

**R: The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.**

*Closing: (sing or speak together): "Amazing Grace" (LSB #744; LW #509; or verse 1 above)*