

## Lavish Blessings!

Leader's Notes and Bible Passages Available Online

All Bible references are ESV unless otherwise noted.

*[Please do NOT use the “if time permits” sections when your study session time is limited. These sections could possibly be done by the participant in private.]*

Share with your group the most lavish dessert that you have ever had. What made it lavish? **Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group throughout the study stays within the group.**

Consider the dictionary definition of the word “lavish.” As an adjective it means “sumptuously rich and elaborate; marked by profusion or excess.” As a verb it means to “bestow something in generous or extravagant quantities upon; to expend or bestow profusely.” Synonyms of the word are “extravagant, abundant, prodigal, great, generous and overflowing.” Antonyms of the word are “reasonable, temperate, and moderate.”

This Bible study today focuses on the lavish grace and love of our God in Christ Jesus our Lord and the lavish opportunities that we – His redeemed and precious children – have to share that grace and love with others.

**Opening Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, You are an awesome God! You lavishly give us grace and love because of the merits of Your Son, our Savior Jesus. Help us to share that grace and love with those around us. Empower us through the Holy Spirit to share the message of salvation in Jesus with people we encounter every day. Bless our study of Your Word. In Jesus' great name we pray, Amen.

### The Lavish Grace and Love of God

Read **Romans 1:18-32** and **Galatians 5:19-21**. Find at least ten specific phrases in these passages (**see highlighted in red below**) that describe the state of all people because of original and actual sin. What is the end result of life lived in this sinful condition? (See **Romans 1:32** and **Galatians 5:21**.) **Death; will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

#### Romans 1:18-32

<sup>18</sup> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup> They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. <sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. <sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. <sup>28</sup> Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God,

so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.<sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;<sup>31</sup> they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, and no mercy.<sup>32</sup> Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

#### **Galatians 5:19-21**

<sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;<sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions<sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Read **Ephesians 1:3-10**. What are some of *the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us* (verses 7–8)? **Salvation, forgiveness of sins, faith, hope of eternal life.**

Why is this lavish grace of God good news for sinful people? **Because we could not accomplish our salvation on our own; we are dead in our sins; we are natural enemies of God.**

#### **Ephesians 1:3-10**

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace<sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,<sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,<sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

In light of the depraved state of sinful people, what makes God's grace in Christ Jesus so extravagant – so lavish? Read **John 1:1-5, Luke 2:4-7, Romans 5:6-8** and **Colossians 1:18-20, 2:13-15**. **(Suggested answers in red below.)**

#### **John 1:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.<sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. **Jesus had to penetrate our natural darkness of sin by becoming one of us.**

#### **Luke 2:4-7**

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.<sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.<sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,<sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. **Jesus left His throne in heaven and became one of us; He was born to die.**

#### **Romans 5:6-8**

<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.<sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **Jesus died for us!**

#### **Colossians 1:18-20, 2:13-15**

<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

<sup>13</sup> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. **Jesus redeemed us and rose from the dead and because He lives, we will live!**

According to **1 John 3:1-3**, how has the Father lavished his love on us? **We are children of God in Christ Jesus.**

Look up **1 Peter 3:21**. How does He make us His children? **Holy Baptism**

### **1 John 3:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

### **1 Peter 3:21**

<sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

*If time permits:* Look up the following Bible verses and find in them words and phrases that could be synonyms for the word “lavish.” (See highlighted in red below.)

### **Psalms 23:5**

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup **overflows**.

### **Psalms 31:19**

How **abundant** are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you.

### **Psalms 145:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. <sup>2</sup> Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. <sup>3</sup> **Great** is the LORD and most worthy of praise; **his greatness no one can fathom**. <sup>4</sup> One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. <sup>5</sup> They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—and I will meditate on your **wonderful works**. <sup>6</sup> They tell of the **power of your awesome works**—and I will proclaim your **great deeds**. <sup>7</sup> They celebrate your **abundant goodness** and joyfully sing of your righteousness. <sup>8</sup> The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and **rich** in love.

### **John 1:14**

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, **full of grace and truth**.

### **Romans 5:17**

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 15:13**

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may **overflow with hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **2 Corinthians 9:8**

And God is able to **bless you abundantly**, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

### **1 Timothy 1:13-15**

<sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> **The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.** <sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

## Ephesians 2:3-5

<sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

**Faith Talk:** Discuss with a partner or your small group a time when you have shared the lavish grace and love you have received in Christ Jesus with someone else. What was the result? **Answers will vary; encourage sharing within the group.**

**Faith Talk:** Read **John 1:16-17** printed below from two different Bible translations (New International Version and English Standard Version) and a paraphrase (The Message). Discuss with a partner or in your small group the feelings you experience as you read phrases such as *grace in place of grace*, *grace upon grace*, *gift after gift after gift*, or *exuberant giving*. **Answers will vary; encourage sharing within the group.**

<sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received **grace in place of grace** already given. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (NIV)

<sup>16</sup>And from his fullness we have all received, **grace upon grace**. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (ESV)

<sup>16-17</sup>We all live off his generous bounty, **gift after gift after gift**. We got the basics from Moses, and then this **exuberant giving** and receiving, This endless knowing and understanding—all this came through Jesus, the Messiah. (The Message)

## Lavish Opportunities

When we are baptized, God makes each one of us His child and we receive the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit. Read **Galatians 5:16-17, 22-25**. Describe in detail our new life in Christ as we are led by the Spirit.

### Galatians 5:16-17, 22-25

<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

What are the “means of grace” the Holy Spirit uses to lead us? **Word and Sacraments**

### Acts 2:41

<sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. **Holy Baptism**

### 1 Corinthians 10:16

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? **Lord's Supper**

### Colossians 3:16

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. **Word of God**

What does Paul exhort God's people to do in **Galatians 6:9-10** and **Ephesians 5:15-16**? (Suggested answers in red below.)

#### **Galatians 6:9-11**

<sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

#### **Ephesians 5:15-16**

<sup>15</sup> Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

See the following Bible passages to discover ways to lavishly *make the most of every opportunity* (watch for phrases, as well as the “lavish” synonyms). (Suggested answers in red below.)

#### **John 15:12-14**

<sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command.

#### **2 Corinthians 4:14-16**

<sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. <sup>15</sup> All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. <sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

#### **Colossians 2:6-7**

<sup>6</sup> So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

#### **Colossians 3:16**

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

#### **Colossians 4:2-6**

<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. <sup>5</sup> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

#### **1 Thessalonians 3:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

Read **Matthew 28:18-20** and **Acts 1:8**. What is the lavish opportunity our Lord gives to each Christian in these passages?

#### **Matthew 28:18-20**

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Go, make disciples, baptize, and teach.

#### **Acts 1:8**

<sup>8</sup> [Jesus said], “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Be Jesus' witnesses by the power of the Spirit.

***Faith Talk:*** Share with a partner or your small group specific opportunities that the Lord has given to you to share the Gospel message of salvation. How did you take advantage of those opportunities? **Answers will vary; encourage sharing within the group.**

***Faith Walk:***

1. Reflect on the lavish love and grace that God has given you because of the saving work of Jesus Christ.
2. Rejoice that you are a baptized child of God and that He has made you His own!
3. Thank the Holy Spirit daily for giving you faith in Jesus and the ability to share that faith.
4. Pray for lavish opportunities that open the door (or even a window!) to share the Gospel message. Be prepared when those opportunities arise!

***Closing:***

Divide into two groups and share the following litany based on John 1:16-17 and 1Timothy 1:17.

**Group 1:**     **We praise You, Father, that we have received grace in place of grace through Jesus Christ.**

Group 2:       O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!

**Group 1:**     **We praise You, Christ Jesus, that we have received grace upon grace because of Your birth, perfect life, death and resurrection.**

Group 2:       Thank You for Your love, grace, salvation and hope for eternal life in heaven with You!

**Group 1:**     **We praise You, Holy Spirit, that You have given us faith in Jesus and keep us in that faith.**

Group 2:       Thank You for exuberantly giving us gift after gift after gift!

**All:**           ***Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

---

Shari Miller, wife of Rev. Larry and mother of Joshua and Johanna, is LWML Planner on the Executive Committee and District President of the Montana District LWML. She lives in Helena, Montana, and has written various articles and studies for the LWML.