

DISCUSSION GUIDE

TRANSFORMING
GRACE

LIVING CONFIDENTLY IN GOD'S
UNFAILING LOVE

JERRY BRIDGES

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ISBN-13: 978-1-60006-304-6

ISBN-10: 1-60006-304-7

Cover design by Gearbox

Cover photo by Paul Edmondson/Digital Vision

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Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

Grace. It truly is amazing. But why do so few Christians *experience* the joy of knowing God and His infinite grace? Since it is by God's grace that we are saved, and by His grace that we grow, what is our part in this process? In this study you will explore these and other questions about grace. In the end, we hope you will come away with a deeper understanding and a fuller experience of the amazing grace of our Lord.

This discussion guide is for use with the book *Transforming Grace* (NavPress, 1991, 2008), but it can also be used by itself. Each lesson contains a short excerpt from that book. Please notice that the lessons in this discussion guide don't correspond directly to the chapters in the book. Some of the book chapters are combined in the lessons. We created the discussion guide this way so as to compress the lessons into a shorter amount of time (eight weeks, if you do one per week) than the book would allow (thirteen chapters). Also, while this guide is written to stimulate group discussions, you can use it for individual study. The section at the back of the book called "Help for Leaders" gives practical suggestions about how to lead a group through this study.

Each lesson contains the following sections:

Central Idea. This states the main point of the lesson. It will be helpful to keep this in mind while you prepare the lesson and during group discussions.

Warm-up. This ice-breaker question will introduce the topic of discussion and help the group warm up at the beginning of the sessions.

Text. This material is taken from the book *Transforming Grace*. Group members should read this portion before getting together.

Exploring Grace. These questions help you grapple with the ideas in the text as you look at relevant Scripture passages. They will challenge you to think about how these truths relate to your particular circumstances.

Closing Prayer. These suggestions are designed to help your closing prayer time relate to the lesson. Also, at this time the group should intercede for personal needs people shared during the discussion.

Going Deeper. These are extra questions for additional study and discussion if time allows. The leader can draw from these questions if more material is needed.

Pondering Grace. These quotes are for personal reflection and for stimulating further thought. They may also help broaden the discussions.

God's grace is not something abstract and theoretical in the life of faith. It is the essential and pervasive means by which God impacts our lives. To know God's grace is to see His hand at work transforming our lives. May His grace draw you deeper into fellowship with Him.

The Performance Treadmill

(Chapters 1 and 2)

CENTRAL IDEA

God's grace alone saves us, helps us grow, meets our daily needs, and guarantees our future in heaven. These blessings are never given to us based on our performance.

Warm-up

Tell about a time when someone (a parent, teacher, or friend) treated you with grace instead of treating you as your behavior deserved.

The Performance Treadmill

One of the best kept secrets among Christians today is this: *Jesus paid it all. I mean all. He not only purchased your forgiveness of sins and your ticket to heaven, He purchased every blessing and every answer to prayer you will ever receive.* Every one of them — no exceptions.

Why is this such a well-kept secret? For one thing, we are afraid of this truth. We are afraid to tell even ourselves that we don't have to work anymore, that the work is all done. We are afraid that if we really believe this, we will slack off in our Christian duties. Having come into God's kingdom by grace alone solely on the merit of Another, we're now trying to pay

our own way by our performance. We try to live by good works rather than by grace.

The Christian's debt has been paid by the death of Christ. The law of God and the justice of God have been fully satisfied. The debt of our sins has been marked "Paid in Full!" God is satisfied and so are we. We have peace with God, and we are delivered from a guilty conscience (see Romans 5:1, Hebrews 10:22).

We are brought into God's kingdom by grace; we are sanctified (the process of growing in our faith to become more like Christ) by grace; we receive both temporal and spiritual blessings by grace; we are motivated to obedience by grace; we are called to serve and enabled to serve by grace; we receive strength to endure trials by grace; and finally, we are glorified by grace. The entire Christian life is lived under the reign of God's grace.

What, then, is the grace by which we are saved and under which we live? *Grace* is God's free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely. It is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him.

And although this is a study about *living* by grace, we need to be sure we first understand *saving* grace. Everything that I say about the grace of God in subsequent lessons assumes that you have experienced the saving grace of God — that you have trusted in Jesus Christ alone for eternal salvation. I would do you a fatal injustice if I allowed you to believe that all the wonderful provisions of God's grace we will see in the following lessons are yours apart from salvation through Jesus Christ.

I once heard a definition of grace as God's making up the

difference between the requirements of His righteous law and what we lack in meeting those requirements. No one is good enough to earn salvation by himself, this definition said, but God's grace simply makes up what we lack.

To say the grace of God makes up the difference of what God requires of us is like comparing two people's attempts to leap across the Grand Canyon. The canyon averages about nine miles in width from rim to rim. Suppose one person could leap out about thirty feet while another can leap only six feet. What difference does it make? Sure, one person can leap five times as far as the other, but relative to nine miles (47,520 feet!), it makes no difference. When God built a bridge across the "Grand Canyon" of our sin, He didn't stop thirty feet or even six feet from our side. He built the bridge all the way.

The Bible never speaks of God's grace as simply making up our deficiencies — as if salvation consists in so much good works (even a variable amount of good works) plus so much of God's grace.

All of us, the saint as well as the sinner, need God's grace. The most conscientious, dutiful, hardworking Christian needs God's grace as well as the most dissolute, hard-living sinner. All of us need the same grace. The sinner does not need more grace than the saint, nor does the immature believer need more than the missionary. We all need the same amount of grace because the "currency" of our good works is debased and worthless before God.

Here is a spiritual principle regarding the grace of God: *To the extent you are clinging to any vestiges of self-righteousness or are putting any confidence in your own spiritual attainments, to that degree you are not living by the grace of God in your life.* This principle applies both in salvation and in living the Christian life. Grace and good

works (that is, works done to earn favor with God) are mutually exclusive. We cannot stand, as it were, with one foot on grace and the other on our own works of merit.

If you are trusting to *any* degree in your own morality or religious attainments, or if you believe that God will somehow recognize any of your good works as merit toward your salvation, you need to seriously consider if you are truly a Christian. I realize I risk offending some with that statement, but we must be absolutely clear about the truth of the gospel of salvation. (Taken from chapters 1 and 2 of *Transforming Grace*.)

Exploring Grace

- I. a. What do the following verses say about your spiritual condition apart from Christ?
 - Isaiah 53:6

 - Romans 3:10-20

 - b. Relate an experience that made you keenly aware of your spiritual “bankruptcy” apart from Christ.
2. Why is it important to focus on your spiritual condition apart from Christ in order to understand God’s grace?

3. In Philippians 3:1-14 Paul contrasts the attitude of legalism with a true understanding of the transforming grace of God. In the following chart, contrast a legalist trying to earn God’s favor and a person trusting in God’s grace.

	L egalist	O ne Trusting in Grace
B asis of a relationship with God		
F eelings toward God		
M otivation for good behavior		
R easons for feeling bad about failures		
T reatment of others who have fallen short		
B asis of strength during trials		
B asis of strength to serve the Lord		

4. Many Christians believe that their justification is based on grace, the blessings in their Christian life are based on works, and their future glorification will be based on grace. Where is the error in this thinking? (See Galatians

3:3 and Philippians 1:6.)

5. Look at the following verses. What do they teach about trying to mix grace and works as the basis for a relationship with God?
 - Romans 11:6

 - Galatians 5:2-6

6. What do you think makes it so hard for a person to rely on God's grace rather than his own efforts?

7. Give an example of a recent time when you were tempted to think that God's blessings in your life depended on your performance. For example:
 - You missed your quiet time. When things went wrong during the day, you attributed it to God's disappointment with you for missing your time with Him.

- You had an especially worshipful time with the Lord, reading His Word, praising Him, and interceding for your friends. When you needed the Lord's help with a particular problem, you felt He owed you this favor.
8. Do you ever experience feelings of self-righteousness and spiritual pride creeping into your life? In what circumstances do you find yourself most vulnerable to these kinds of thoughts?
9. How can you guard against these attitudes of self-righteousness and spiritual pride? Decide on one specific thing you plan to do this week to guard against depending on your performance to earn God's favor. For example:
- For one day, keep a running tally on a three-by-five-inch card of the times you think sinful thoughts. Each time you make a mark on the card, stop and thank God that your forgiveness was procured at Calvary, and that by His grace you are growing in Him.
 - Make a list of God's blessings in your life in the last year. Put a check beside anything on your list that you earned through your behavior.

- Make a list of some of your accomplishments in life. Put a check beside any that you achieved on your own efforts, without any help from God.

Closing Prayer

At this time, pray for any personal needs mentioned during the discussion. Praying for one another's needs will bind your group closer together. Spend some of your prayer time thanking God for His boundless grace in your lives.

Going Deeper (Extra questions for further study)

- I. What insights do the following verses give us about God's view of our sin?
 - Leviticus 16:1-34
 - 2 Samuel 12:9-10
 - 1 Kings 13:21-22
2. Sometimes the word *sin* doesn't mean anything to a nonbeliever. How would you explain the concept of sin

without using the word? (You might want to look up the word *sin* in a Bible dictionary or a thesaurus.)

3. What is the relationship between the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ?
 - Romans 3:22-24

 - Galatians 5:2-4

 - Ephesians 2:4-7

4. Which person needs God's grace more: the conscientious, dutiful, hardworking Christian, or the most decadent, hard-living sinner? Explain your answer.

Pondering Grace (For personal reflection)

The first and possibly most fundamental characteristic of divine grace is that it presupposes sin and guilt. Grace has meaning only when men are seen as fallen, unworthy of salvation, and liable to eternal wrath. . . . Grace does not

contemplate sinners merely as undeserving but as ill-deserving. . . . It is not simply that we do not deserve grace; we do deserve hell.

C. Samuel Storms, *The Grandeur of God*

Let grace be the beginning, grace the consummation, grace the crown.

Bede

Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues.

John R. W. Stott

Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to bestow it in the presence of human merit. Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to withdraw it in the presence of human demerit. Grace is treating a person without the slightest reference to desert whatsoever, but solely according to the infinite goodness and sovereign purpose of God.

C. Samuel Storms, *The Grandeur of God*

Divine grace disdains to be assisted in the performance of that work which peculiarly belongs to itself, by the poor, imperfect performances of men. Attempts to complete what grace begins, betray our pride and offend the Lord; but cannot promote our spiritual interest. Let the reader therefore, carefully remember, that grace is either absolutely free, or it is not at all: and, that he who professes to look for salvation by grace, either believes in his heart to be saved entirely by it, or he acts inconsistently in affairs of the greatest importance.

Abraham Booth, *The Reign of Grace*