

# GOD, THE GRACIOUS KING

## + SESSION OUTLINE

1. God's grace is needed to save the dead sinner (Eph. 2:1-3).
2. God's grace is poured out in abundance through Christ (Eph. 2:4-7).
3. God's grace is realized through faith and prompts praise (Eph. 2:8-10; Ps. 51:12-17).

Background Passages: Ephesians 2; Psalm 51

## + WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

God is gracious to save sinners who come to Him through faith in Jesus.

## + HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

All are unable to do anything to make right what sin has made wrong. But God has extended grace to sinners so that anyone who comes to Him by faith in Jesus Christ will be saved.

## + HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because God is so gracious to us, we seek to live with grace before others, giving joyfully and abundantly of our time and resources.

# GROUP TIME

NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

**SETTING:** After centuries of no king, the Israelites were given Saul, who started his kingship with promise but turned his back on the Lord. They then received David, whose blessing and favor from the Lord were evident. David's reputation and rule, however, were tarnished by the second half of his reign. Neither man had a chance to fulfill all of Israel's hopes and dreams because they were flawed, selfish, and sinful. Every kingly failure points us to the one and only true King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ. As we focus on the grace of God, we see that the Lord Himself is the source of all our hopes and strength for this life and the next.

**DISCUSS: What does electricity do? How does it affect our everyday life? What are the benefits of it? What are the negative aspects of it? How would your life be different without electricity?** (it ignites and gives light and makes things function; we rely on it daily; it sustains us and our lives; it can be harmful if used wrongly; without it, life as we know it could not function—the world would be dark)

**DISCUSS: How does the power of electricity compare with the power of God?** (we generally think of electricity as being everywhere, but it must be generated and channeled—God's power, like Himself, is omnipotent and omnipresent; we can't see God or electricity, but we see the result of a light switch, and we can see the fruit of God's creation and work in the world; electricity is a helpful power when respected and used properly—the Lord will not be used by us, but He graciously helps those who fear Him)

**TRANSITION:** When we contemplate the power of God, we think of many attributes that display His power, but the grace of God is not one we typically go to. Yet God's grace has more power than we consider. Without His grace, we couldn't come to Him, we wouldn't have a relationship with Him, and we honestly wouldn't be changed at all. Only by the power of God's grace are we saved and forgiven of our sin.

# POINT 1

## GOD'S GRACE IS NEEDED TO SAVE THE DEAD SINNER (EPH. 2:1-3).

NOTES

**1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** 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— **3** 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.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 2:1-3** from his or her Bible.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 1-2** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Before we had saving faith in Jesus, we all walked in sin, following the paths of this **world** and of **Satan**. We were spiritually **dead**.

**DISCUSS:** What are some sinful paths people choose to follow in this world? (greed; gluttony; drunkenness; gossip; sexual perversion; marital unfaithfulness; violence; self-idolatry)

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSE 3** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

A nature enslaved to sin defines every believer's **past** and every unbeliever's **present**. The end of that path is God's just **judgment** apart from the grace of God found in **Jesus**.

**DISCUSS:** How might a shared history of sin, in general, help believers as they share the gospel with unbelievers? (we know what it is like to be enslaved to sin; we have experienced the superficial highs and guilt-ridden lows of sin, knowing sin never satisfies; we recognize our helpless state in sin that requires a Savior to free us from its grasp; we know the only hope for the hopeless, which we were, and that hope is in Jesus Christ)

**TRANSITION:** Our own sinful flesh draws us away from God, the worldly way of life draws us away from God, and Satan is doing his best to draw us away from God. If everyone is living and walking in sin, how in the world would we ever get out? That's the exact question Paul will answer in the next few verses.

### THE SINFUL NATURE

The sinful nature describes the entirety of a person's existence before Christ. Such a person is spiritually dead in his sins and inclined toward sin in every aspect of his life. He is separated from God and therefore unable to please Him. At the moment of salvation, however, the believer receives a new nature, born of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, through which he or she is able to live a life of righteousness pleasing to God, all the while struggling against the ongoing temptations of the sinful nature in the flesh.

## COMMENTARY

**VERSES 1-2 /** Since Ephesians 2 begins with **“And,”** we must consider the words that precede it. In Ephesians 1, Paul opened his letter to the believers in Ephesus by first making a thorough description of our identity in Christ: blessed, chosen, holy, blameless, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, and more. The phrase **“in Him”** appears five times between verses 4 and 14, pointing over and over to the fact that every single blessing comes from God through Jesus Christ and not from us. Paul then assured the Ephesian church that he was praying for the opening of their spiritual eyes to know God’s calling, which immediately turns his words toward God’s power revealed in raising Christ from the dead and seating Him in the center of authority in the heavenly realms.

In contrast to the glory, honor, and power of Christ, in Ephesians 2:1, we discover our past state in our **“trespasses”** and **“sins,”** two Greek terms Paul used to name our offenses before the holy God. These terms are synonyms, encompassing the ideas of unintentional errors and willful transgressions. Paul was conveying the idea of **“the fulness and variety of the readers’ past sins.”** <sup>1</sup> Because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23) and we were so full of sin, we deserved death. But in another sense, we were already **“dead,”** not yet physically but spiritually, separated from God and bound for judgment in hell.

Not only did we sin, but we **“walked”** in the ways of the **“world”** and **“the prince of the power of the air.”** This, of course, refers to Satan. Even Jesus called him **“the ruler of this world”** (John 12:31), and later in Ephesians, Paul reminds his readers that we don’t struggle **“against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness”** (Eph. 6:12). For a time, Satan has been granted limited authority on the earth while the Lord is patient for sinners to repent (2 Pet. 3:9). The world we live in is filled with temptations, and unbelievers live in sin, enslaved to Satan.

Walking in the ways of the world, we weren’t simply off the path of God; we didn’t know where the path was and we didn’t care. The biblical concept of walking points to an outward expression of an inward life. It’s how we conduct ourselves or regularly act. When we walked like the world, disobeying the Lord, we walked as spiritually dead people, alienated from God, because we were.

**VERSE 3 /** In verse 3, Paul took the opportunity to lump himself in with the rest of his readers. He said that we all used to live **“in the passions of our flesh,”** pointing to the fact that each professing believer has this element in his or her testimony. This recalls John’s first letter, in which he wrote that we must walk in the light, admit and confess our sins, and be willing to clearly state that our past was sinful (1 John 1:5-10).

The Greek word translated **“flesh”** and **“body”** has a variety of meanings, including literal flesh (the part of our body that covers our bones and carries our blood), a physical body, or, as is the case in this verse, the human nature without divine influence. Our fleshly, sinful impulses in both the mind and body point to physical and moral aspects of our lives that deny, ignore, or flatly defy God’s authority. Paul elsewhere said nothing good lives **“in my flesh”** (Rom. 7:18) and that thinking in the ways of **“the flesh is death”** (Rom. 8:6).

The fact that we have all shared in these sinful desires is not a matter of mere choice. Rather, all people everywhere who live apart from a faith relationship with Jesus Christ are defined by a sinful **“nature,”** which we inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve. And because of this nature, we are **“children of wrath.”** This again refers to our state of being **“dead”** in our sins and under God’s just judgment.

Ephesians 2:1-3 describes every believer’s past and every unbeliever’s present. Apart from God’s grace in Christ, we have no hope but the expectation of God’s righteous wrath.

# POINT 2

## GOD'S GRACE IS POURED OUT IN ABUNDANCE THROUGH CHRIST (EPH. 2:4-7).

NOTES

**4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Ephesians 2:4-7** from his or her Bible.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 4-5** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Dead in our sins, we neither **had** nor **have** anything to offer to God for our salvation, but God, in His mercy and love, has saved us by His **grace** alone in **Christ** alone.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **VERSES 6-7** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Because of all Jesus accomplished for us and has given to us, we can walk with **confidence** in our salvation and point **others** to God's grace in Christ.

**DISCUSS:** What are some ways we can show our honor and love for Jesus because of the salvation He has given to us by His grace? (obey His commands; confess our sins and repent, trusting in His grace and forgiveness; sing His praises; gather with His people to worship Him; proclaim the gospel of Christ to believers and unbelievers alike)

**TRANSITION:** From "dead in sin" to "but God," this paragraph in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church sounds like a real-life fairy tale come true. But God's grace isn't poured on us in abundance just so we can skip hell by the skin of our teeth. On the contrary, we are raised to new life to display God's glory as we point others to Jesus. The next few verses from Ephesians 2 and Psalm 51 will show us how to do just that.

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Never change God's facts into hopes or prayers but simply accept them as realities, and you will find them to be powerful as you believe them."<sup>2</sup>

—H. W. Webb Peplow  
(1837-1923)

## COMMENTARY

**VERSES 4-5** / Two of the most exciting words in the Bible are **“But God.”** “But God” said Sarah would bear a son to Abraham in his old age (Gen. 17:19). Not his brothers, “but God” was the One who sent Joseph to Egypt (Gen. 45:8). “But God” watched over the Jewish elders in the face of their troubles (Ezra 5:5). Asaph wrote, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:26). All humanity is exposed to temptation, “but God” is faithful and He will not allow believers to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). So despite our flesh, despite the sinfulness of the world, and despite the fact that we were dead in our sins, we too have this statement in our lives: “But God” is rich in mercy, has great love for us, and has made us alive with Christ in spite of the death we deserved because of our sins.

In verse 4, God’s **“mercy”** refers to His active compassion toward the pitiful, which is humanity. Verse 4 also uses two forms of the Greek term *agape* for **“love.”** Paul was stressing the reality of God’s love for us with the noun form as well as the verb form. So, because of God’s love and His mercy, He took us—dead in our trespasses—and **“made us alive together with Christ.”** This passage reflects Paul’s words and understanding that as Christ was raised from the dead in new life, we too “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). We aren’t just going to be alive with Christ in heaven; we walk now in that new life, revealing through our words and actions that the eternal Christ is giving us eternal life in this very temporal world.

The next few words are some of the most poignant—and some would say most important—in all the New Testament, if not the whole Bible: **“By grace you have been saved.”** The “you” here is a second person plural referring to the ones who were dead in sins and who walked according to the world but have now believed in Jesus: You all are saved—saved from yourselves, saved from your flesh, saved from this world, saved for eternity, and saved to walk in

Christ. And God didn’t give us a mountain to climb or a checklist to complete—He did all the work Himself, sending His Son to die in our place and triumph over death in His resurrection, giving us the victory as a gift. Grace complements mercy perfectly. Through the merciful kindness of God, we receive His favor, or grace, and the outpouring of every blessing that comes through it. God’s grace is the source of our salvation (see Acts 15:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:10).

**VERSES 6-7** / While Jesus walked on earth, He taught His disciples and declared to others truth about the future and pointed to His position in heaven. To some enemies, He said they would see Him “seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

In Ephesians 2:6, Paul declared another benefit of our salvation that comes through the unmerited grace of God in Christ: we are **“raised . . . with him and seated . . . with him.”** The image of being seated carries with it the idea of being finished with work and reigning on a throne. When Christ completed His work of defeating sin and death through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sat down at God’s right hand (Luke 22:69; Col. 3:1). For us as well, the work of salvation has been accomplished through grace, so we can sit in confidence and rest from the toil of trying to earn God’s favor. And one day, we also will reign with Christ, but for now, we partner with God in His work of proclaiming the grace and glory of His Son, not to attain salvation but in response to the salvation that has been freely given to us.

And as we walk—saved by grace, seated with Christ—we see in verse 7 that God is accomplishing something through our lives, namely, displaying **“the immeasurable riches of his grace”** that he has poured out upon us in Jesus. Both now and for all eternity, we are a living testimony to the riches of God’s grace.

# POINT 3

## GOD'S GRACE IS REALIZED THROUGH FAITH AND PROMPTS PRAISE (EPH. 2:8-10; PS. 51:12-17).

NOTES

**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

.....

**Psalm 51:12** Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. **13** Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. **14** Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. **15** O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. **16** For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. **17** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

**READ:** Ask two volunteers to read aloud **Ephesians 2:8-10** and **Psalm 51:12-17** from their Bibles.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **EPHESIANS 2:8-10** commentary to describe what it means to be God's masterpiece. Use the following essential doctrine to summarize the grace of God (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

**ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #14:** *God Is Gracious:* God's nature is to **delight** in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through **Christ**. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve **death** (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and **forgiveness** for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

**DISCUSS:** **What are some ways you have seen the workmanship of God in the lives of believers?** (through the perseverance, prayerfulness, and faithfulness of a believer; when Christians serve with passion, help, and love without expectations; when our creativity is used for His glory; through a healthy marriage, a loving family, and a willingness to go tell the world about Jesus)

**EXPLAIN:** Use the **PSALM 51:12-17** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Our salvation—the entire story, including our great sin overcome by God's **greater** grace—compels us to do good **works** and to **praise** our Savior.

## COMMENTARY

**EPHESIANS 2:8-10** / For the second time in this chapter, we see a truth that should shock us as it shocked Paul: We are saved **“by grace.”** But this time Paul added another little phrase: **“through faith.”** Faith, as defined by Hebrews 11:1, is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Faith confirms in us that God exists, that He is the Creator and Ruler of all things, that He is the Provider and Giver of Jesus for our salvation, and that He will carry us to eternity.

God provides the salvation in Christ, God gives the grace to save, and God also gives us the faith to receive His salvation. And all of this is a **“gift”** from God. This truth should lead us to walk in a new way, not as we once walked in the lusts of the flesh but according to the calling, standards, and teachings of Jesus our Lord. It’s not for salvation that we walk obediently, but it’s because of our salvation that we walk as called by Jesus.

Paul continues and says we are God’s **“workmanship,”** His masterpiece, His crowning achievement, His handiwork, His beautiful accomplishment, His work of art. The beauty of who we are **“in Christ Jesus”** isn’t for our benefit only; it’s also so the world can see God’s grace. As we do **“good works”**—again, not for salvation but because of salvation—we have the opportunity to point others to Jesus. God prepared us—our minds, our passions, our hearts, our personalities, our situations, and our gifting—for the work He has called us to in making disciples and growing His kingdom and being more like Him. And when we walk in that calling, others can’t help but notice the fingerprint of God on our lives.

**PSALM 51:12-17** / When you saw the passage from Psalm 51 in this point, you may have recalled that David wrote this psalm after the prophet Nathan came to him concerning his adultery with Bathsheba. “Weird,” you may have thought, “I wouldn’t have considered David’s adultery when talking about Ephesians 2.” But you should.

If we’ve gotten to know anyone over the past four weeks, it has been King David. We saw him grow; we saw his victories; we saw him with a pure heart and devotion for God; and we saw him as he chose the lusts of the flesh over the call of God in his life. David is a perfect example and illustration of the truths in Ephesians 2. He had walked according to his fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of his flesh. “But God, being rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4), forgave David’s sin and used him as a comfort to his wife. God restored His relationship with David and carried out His promise of having a son of David on the throne through Solomon, Bathsheba’s son.

After having poured out his confession and asking for cleansing, we see these precious words from David in Psalm 51: **“Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me”** (Ps. 51:12). David knew there was nothing he could do to earn salvation. He saw clearly his own depravity, sinfulness, and failure. Only God could save him from the guilt of bloodshed, from the murder of Uriah that he orchestrated (Ps. 51:14). But knowing that God would save him and restore him, David committed to obeying and teaching others God’s ways and declaring God’s praise (Ps. 51:13,15). David did so understanding that **“sinners”** would be watching his life and would hopefully return to God for their own salvation.

So, not only does our salvation result in works, it also compels us to praise. As believers who have experienced God’s grace in Christ, we can’t help but consider who God is, what He’s done, and how He has changed us. And though our praise wells up from deep inside, we can’t keep it there. We must make our praise known and public. The phrase **“my mouth will declare your praise”** means to make known, declare, announce, inform, publish, report, or confess. When God saves us, we want to shout it out and let the world know of His perfect, saving grace for all those who trust in Him!

# MY RESPONSE

**PACK ITEM 10: SALVATION HYMN:** Pass out copies of this hymn and sing it together in recognition that our salvation rests solely on the gracious work of God in Christ on our behalf.

Because God is so gracious to us, we seek to live with grace before others, giving joyfully and abundantly of our time and resources.

## HEAD:

Sometimes our biggest enemy is our own doubt: “You’re not any different.” “You can’t even do the Jesus thing right.” “You’re not fooling anyone.” These whispers—which are lies from the enemy, by the way—deny the truth of the Bible: Though you walked in sin, you have been saved because of the mercy and grace of God. God’s truth is not undone because we doubt ourselves or our ability to walk in confidence. On the contrary, it’s given to us for this very reason! As followers of Jesus, we speak truth to ourselves and our doubts, trusting our Savior to help us have the faith to truly believe it.

**At what points do you struggle to believe in salvation by grace alone?  
How does the gospel of Jesus Christ answer those struggles?**

## HEART:

If anything should make us feel grateful, it’s God’s love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. When we let the truth of those four outward expressions of God’s character seep into our souls, gratefulness overflows through our thoughts, our mouths, and our lives. But in order to cultivate that grateful spirit, we must take the time to focus on the Lord and what He has done to change us from who we were to who we are in Christ. As you see His overwhelming gifts in your life, don’t rush past them. Stand still, take them in, and tell God how He makes you feel. You’ll find the gratefulness flowing freely.

**How has God revealed His love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness to you this week?**

## HANDS:

We are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27), and we who bear His name by faith are created for His glory (Isa. 43:7). So, though each human reflects God’s image in some form, His children should be a reflection of His image and character to the world. God has poured out His grace on us, resulting in salvation, faith, eternal life, and more. As we live, then, we should pour out grace to others: showing favor, helping without being asked, encouraging, acknowledging, and reaching out to those who simply need a friend. God’s grace carries His greatest blessing to our lives—Jesus Christ—our grace should carry blessings to others. And in so doing, we reflect God’s grace, mercy, and love to a world who desperately needs Him.

**What are some opportunities in which will you show God’s grace in the name of Christ today?**

NOTES



## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“He will retrace His own image on you, line by line, erasing by His grace and gracious discipline the marks and spots of sin which have defaced it.”<sup>3</sup>

—Edward B. Pusey (1800-1882)

## POINT 1: GOD'S GRACE IS NEEDED TO SAVE THE DEAD SINNER (EPH. 2:1-3).

### + COMMENTARY

"This chapter Ephesians 2 is closely connected in sense with the preceding, and should not have been separated from it. The great object is to illustrate the subject which was commenced in the previous chapter, Ephesians 2:19—the greatness of the power of God, evinced in the salvation of his people. The "great" manifestation of his power had been in raising up the Lord Jesus from the dead. That had been connected with and followed by their resurrection from the death of sin; and the one had involved the exercise of a power similar to the other."<sup>4</sup>

### + ILLUSTRATED DISCUSSION GUIDE

Ask: "Has anyone in here ever had walking lessons?" (You may have a few volunteers who have had rehabilitation to learn how to walk properly after surgery or an injury.) Point out that most of us walk many times throughout the day, but not all of us walk well or walk in a beneficial way. Use the following article to share the reasons for walking with the right technique as well as some of the tips for walking in the healthiest, body-helping way: <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-walk#tips-for-walking-properly>. If you have a learner with a great sense of humor, have him or her demonstrate each of the tips as you read them aloud. Then point learners back to Ephesians 2:1-2: We were dead in our sins, in which we previously walked according to the ways of this world. Be the first to volunteer what your pre-Jesus walk looked like. Enlist a few others to share what it looked like to walk according to the world, according to Satan, or according to their own flesh. Then ask: "What, then, does a daily walk with Jesus look like?"

#### References

1. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 157.
2. L. B. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 296.
3. Edward B. Pusey, in *Joy and Strength for The Pilgrim's Day* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1901), 148.
4. Albert Barnes, "Ephesians 2," in *Notes on the Bible*, 1934, [biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/ephesians/2.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/ephesians/2.htm).