

GOD, THE GRACIOUS KING

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

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

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Ephesians 2; Psalm 51

+ **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.

DAY 1

READ:

Ephesians 2:1-3,11-12

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 2:11-12

NOTES

Most Bibles divide Ephesians 2 into two sections, verses 1-10 and 11-22. Yet if you read both in one sitting, you'll see that Paul doubles back in the second section, reiterating his points from the first and expounding upon them. It's almost like he finished this portion of his letter to the church at Ephesus and thought, "Whoops! I also meant to say this . . . and this . . . and this!"

In Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul pointed his friends and fellow believers to who they were: dead in sin because they followed Satan, their flesh, and the world. Skipping down to verse 11, he went on to tell them to remember when they were Gentiles "in the flesh," uncircumcised, separated from God.

"Remember that, Paul? Really? Remember how terrible I was and how people treated me?" Yes. Because when we remember where we started, we'll also remember God. Paul expounded: Before Jesus, we were excluded from citizenship with Him, not under God's covenant, and hopeless. There was no past with God, no future with God, and no present with God until we came to saving faith in Jesus through the grace of God.

Let's find inspiration to remember our sordid past from the movie *The Princess Bride*, when the self-proclaimed criminal genius (Vizzini) realizes his assistants (Fezzik and Inigo) are tempted to leave him. In response to their consideration, he says to Fezzik, "And you: friendless, brainless, helpless, hopeless! Do you want me to send you back to where you were? Unemployed in Greenland!"

We need not dwell in the past, but a walk down memory lane can help us shake off the temptations to sin and revert back to our old self. We might remember fun times, but do we remember the soul-draining, heartbroken shell we were? We were dead!

What do you remember about your former way of life before Christ?

DAY 2

READ:

Ephesians 2:4-7,13-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 2:14

NOTES

It wasn't simply that God reconciled the Ephesian Gentiles to Himself; He also reconciled them to the Jews. And that was simply mind-boggling. For the entire history of God's people (the Hebrews, Israelites, or Abraham's descendants), they had the identity of belonging to God and being separate from everyone else. They had a different God, a different system of worship, and a different lifestyle. If someone wanted to join, that was fine, but the Israelites weren't to mix with others for fear of conforming with non-Jews. (And honestly, the worst sins by God's people in the Old Testament occurred when they decided to start acting like the nations around them.)

We were just like the Gentiles in Ephesus, and the Jews who abandoned their covenant. When we acted like the world, we wanted nothing to do with God. Even today, when we stop and think about it, the things of this world—riches, fame, money, self-centered focus—leave us miserable and hollow. For both the Jews and the Gentiles (non-Jews, which the Ephesians were), their past was one of sin.

But God saved them, brought them out of death, and brought them together in Jesus. No longer was there a dividing line between Jew and Gentile; now the doors were open to everyone! The blood of Jesus took down the dividing wall of hostility (Eph. 2:14) and reconciled Jews and Gentiles together.

If we are in Christ, we're still called to unity today. Still challenged to leave the world's ways behind, we're called to grab hands with all who call Jesus Lord. Are we still different? Certainly. Is this difficult? Almost always. But as we consider that God saved us through His grace just as He saved them through His grace (whoever that "them" might be), we see that His peace covers all of us and wraps us up together in Christ.

What are some ways you will promote unity with another believer in Christ this week?

DAY 3

READ:

Ephesians 2:8-10,19-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 2:19-21

NOTES

If you're ever unsure of your identity, turn to Paul. Not only was he confident in his own position in Christ (he called himself "servant" or "apostle" in almost every letter he wrote), he gave us dozens of descriptions of who we are as followers of Christ.

Today's verses in Ephesians 2 do the same. In verses 8-10, he tells us we are God's workmanship, created for the good works He prepared for us to do. And in verses 19-20, we are identified as part of God's household, built on the foundation of the New Testament apostles and Old Testament prophets and with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

Our masterpiece identity is not isolated from others who are also His masterpiece. We're all there, side by side, being melded together as one glorious, amazing, God-glorifying house. With Jesus as our cornerstone, grounding the gift of the whole counsel of the Word of God as our foundation, we make up the structure that God is building.

So as we point to God with our words and our gifts, we join with others who are doing the same thing. Together, we make not a collection of individual pieces of art but a tapestry being woven together, one piece touching the next, and all of us together making the whole even more glorious.

I have a friend who loves to say, "All of us is better than one of us," and she's right. As God shapes us for His glory, He joins us with others and we work together to reveal Him more clearly. We each used to be dead in sin, but now we are "citizens with the saints" (Eph. 2:19), joined by faith with David, Daniel, Abraham, Paul, John, and ultimately Jesus Christ.

As a believer, you are an integral part of what God is building. Your work—because of your salvation, not for your salvation—is building up God's beautiful house.

What are some ways for you to grow in your faith, both personally and with others?

DAY 4

READ:

Ephesians 2:1-5;
Psalm 51:10-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:12

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is not that a Christian never sins; it's that when he does sin, he confesses it and fights against sinning again. He takes God's side against his sin instead of sin's side against God."¹

-Jonathan Leeman

In Ephesians 2:5, Paul uses his pen to shout that we are saved by grace. The Greek word for "saved" has a deep well of meaning: to keep or rescue from danger or destruction, to deliver or protect, to heal, preserve, save, or make whole.

David had known this kind of salvation. He had been face-to-face (or in all reality, face-to-belly button) with Goliath, confident not only in his own fighting skills but in the Lord on whose behalf he had entered the battlefield. He had waited years for the fulfillment of God's calling to be king, attempting to save his own neck from a king who wanted him dead. He faced battle after battle, each time finding God faithful. God's salvation brought him great joy.

But after being convicted of adultery with Bathsheba (the setting for which Psalm 51 was written), David revealed that his sin had changed his relationship with God. He thus prayed for restoration, for a renewal of the joy he now lacked that God had previously brought him when saving him over and over (Ps. 51:12).

If David knew such joy from earthly salvation, how much more joy is ours when we truly experience the salvation God has given to us in Jesus Christ through His grace? David's salvation was miraculous, but he needed saving again in the next battle. Our salvation, on the other hand, is permanent, eternal, and glorious.

Isaiah reflected the same sentiment. In the span of a few lines in Isaiah 12:2-3, three times he spoke of God's ability to save, saying God is my salvation, He has become my salvation, and we will joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation. As we draw such water from the wells of salvation in Jesus Christ—considering its impact on our lives, thanking Him for eternal salvation, and walking in light of His saving grace—we find great joy, which David knew he needed to pray for.

What keeps you from finding joy in your salvation? How do you need to pray in response?

DAY 5

READ:

Ephesians 2:1-10;
Psalm 51:14-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:16-17

NOTES



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).

In God's law, sin was atoned for by the blood of a sacrifice. In His all-knowing plan, that would eventually include the sacrifice of His Lamb—He wanted to make sure we understood the penalty for sin was death. Even the law was merciful. God's people didn't die for their sins; an animal did. But we can only imagine that the taking of an animal life was still disturbing and soul-searching—that animal didn't do anything to deserve this death. How horrible sin must look to God.

David had committed sin upon sin, and yet, he knew God ultimately didn't want an animal sacrifice (Ps. 51:16). It's not that David didn't understand the value of offering sacrifices; he had offered them himself and knew their value and importance (see 2 Sam. 6:12-13; 1 Chron. 21:28). But in this moment of being fully aware of his own depravity, David fully understood that God's desire was not for an outward symbol but an inward change.

God didn't need another slain lamb. He wanted David's heart to be broken and humbled (Ps. 51:16-17). He desires the same from us. When we see who we are without Him—dead in our sin, walking apart from Him (Eph. 2:1-3)—we find it miraculous that the grace of God was powerful enough to save us in Jesus by faith (Eph. 2:4-7).

And like David, when we see God's salvation plainly, we realize what it was He wanted all along—our heart. God would provide the Lamb and the salvation. We needed to offer up a heart that was broken over our sin and humbled at our own depravity. And we can't do that alone. Through God's gracious work in us, our hearts become more conformed to His (Eph. 2:8-10). So as you prepare to consider who you were and who you are in relation to Ephesians 2, look closely at your own heart. God doesn't just want your outward sacrifices; He desires your inward change.

What's the current status of your own heart? What direction and steps do you need to take in faith?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: God's grace is needed to save the dead sinner (Eph. 2:1-3).

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

? What are some sinful paths people choose to follow in this world?

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

? How might a shared history of sin, in general, help believers as they share the gospel with unbelievers?

POINT 2: God's grace is poured out in abundance through Christ (Eph. 2:4-7).

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

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

? 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?

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."²

-H. W. Webb Peplow
(1837-1923)

POINT 3: God's grace is realized through faith and prompts praise (Eph. 2:8-10; Ps. 51:12-17).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #14: GOD IS GRACIOUS

NOTES

God's nature is to _____ 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 _____ .

Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve _____ (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and _____ for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).



What are some ways you have seen the workmanship of God in the lives of believers?

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

MY RESPONSE

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:** At what points do you struggle to believe in salvation by grace alone? How does the gospel of Jesus Christ answer those struggles?
- **HEART:** How has God revealed His love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness to you this week?
- **HANDS:** What are some opportunities in which will you show God's grace in the name of Christ today?

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."³

-Edward B. Pusey (1800-1882)