

**Way Truth Life:**  
**A Journey of Grace**  
*Amazing Grace*  
*Ephesians 2:1-8*

1. What is grace?

2. Grace is personal.

3. Grace is costly.

4. Grace is amazing.

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## Way Truth Life: A Journey of Grace<sup>1</sup> Amazing Grace

I want to do a word association game with you, okay? I say a phrase, and you say the first thing that comes to mind. Ready? “Amazing grace...” How many of you said, “How sweet the sound...”?

Most of us think about that hymn, don't we? It is one of the best known and most loved songs of our time. The song itself is over 200 years old, but it's still sung today in hundreds of languages and dialects.<sup>2</sup> It's been estimated that the song is *performed* (not just sung by ordinary folks like you and me, but actually *performed*) over 10 million times *every year*.

The authors were two men by the names of John Newton and William Cowper. John Newton was a sailor who eventually became the captain of a slave ship, packing hundreds of enslaved Africans into ships and bringing them to Europe and North America. John wasn't just a vulgar slave trader; he was well known for how much of a sinful person he was. He was notoriously famous for his foul language. In fact, sailors were known for having foul language, and John's language was too foul *even for sailors!* Before John was a captain, he was punished by one captain for having such bad language that he was using words that even the captain hadn't heard before! John was even known for making words up so that they would be *even more* vulgar...and his language wasn't the worst of his sins; that gives you an idea of the kind of person he was. John's mother was a devout Christian and had raised him to have faith in Christ, and wanted him to become a pastor, but she died of tuberculosis when John was 7. John was then raised by his abusive father and stepmother. John didn't just live a godless life; he *willfully* rejected Christ. But then something happened: one time when he was at sea, they hit a storm that was so severe that John made the statement, “We'll either survive or Lord have mercy on us.” They survived, but he couldn't stop thinking about his plea for the Lord's mercy and realized that it was the Lord's mercy that he lived through that – despite how sinful he was. Eventually, John became a Christian, renounced his slave ship, and became a pastor. Not only that, John became a mentor to William Wilberforce, who was a member of Parliament in England, and it was through John's influence and Wilberforce's work over his lifetime in Parliament that the slave trade was finally abolished in the British Empire on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1807. John Newton died 234 days later, on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1807.

When John was an Anglican pastor, he partnered with a friend of his by the name of William Cowper and together they wrote a poem to be used in a New Year's Day worship service in 1773. It was recited in that service but probably didn't have a tune. Sixty-two years later it was set to music by an American composer, and *that* was the tune that we

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<sup>1</sup> This series borrows heavily from, and is indebted to:

- David A. Busic, *Way, Truth, Life: Discipleship as a Journey of Grace* (The Foundry Publishing, KC, MO 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Information from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing\\_Grace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing_Grace)

know today.

John never stopped being captivated by the grace of God. In fact, at the age of 82 and on his deathbed, he said, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior.”

John Newton had received, embraced, lived in, and was transformed by God’s Amazing Grace.

For this first Sunday of Lent until Easter, we are going to take a journey of grace. We’ll be using this book by David Busic called, “Way, Truth, Life: Discipleship as a Journey of Grace” as our resource and guide. We have copies available for you to purchase. It’s a great book and each chapter will be our theme for each of these weeks before Easter.

Jesus invites us to a journey when he says, “Come, follow me.” The Christian life is more than just having the right belief or making some kind of intellectual decision to adhere to some philosophy. The Christian life is an invitation to a lifetime journey with Jesus. That journey is what we call *discipleship*. At times it is a nice leisurely walk, and other times it is a challenging climb or a descent into dark valleys that would tempt us to give up. For every person on the discipleship journey, it is a lifetime of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ in all things. But don’t be mistaken – this is not a journey you can make on your own. It is impossible for you to follow Jesus by your own determination and strength. When Jesus calls us to follow him, he also gives us what we need to do so. We can’t do it without Jesus’ help, so *it is a journey of grace*. Jesus tells us:

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:6, niv)

He’s saying that this discipleship journey of becoming transformed into Christlikeness can only take place by and through him – and it is all grace.

The New Testament talks a lot about grace, and I want to read one passage that kind of helps us understand how all-encompassing grace is. Would you honor God’s Word by standing with me please as I read it?

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 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. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:1-8, niv)

Thank you – you can be seated. That passage sounds like John Newton’s life – and the life of every disciple of Christ. What we just read was written in a letter to the church in Ephesus by the Apostle Paul – a guy who knew very well the transforming power of grace.

Before he had his encounter with Jesus, he was as rigidly religious as anyone could be. If it was possible to be good enough by obeying all the rules, Paul was the guy who could do it. But then the resurrected Jesus knocked Paul off his self-righteous high-horse (literally!). He was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, and justified it by the very law he so self-righteously followed (Acts 9:1-19). But through God's grace, Paul realized that for all his religion, he was a horrible sinner. In fact, Paul calls himself "the worst of sinners." He said in another letter:

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came to save sinners, of whom I am the worst." (1 Timothy 1:15, niv)

That sounds a lot like what John Newton said, doesn't it? It's our story, too. Paul knew that it was all by God's grace, and that passage we read made it clear that all of us are sinners. But thanks be to God, because of His grace, we can take this journey. So the question becomes...

### - What is *grace*?

How does it come into our lives, change us, and empower us to live Christlike lives? Grace has been called God's unmerited or undeserved favor and love, or God's unconditional, no strings attached love. There's no question that grace is God's unchanging, limitless love for us, willingness to work in us and for our best, even though we don't deserve it and can never earn it. That must be why we call it "amazing grace" – because it is irrational, unconditional, and relentless.

The Bible talks a lot about themes like God's justice, God's mercy, and God's grace. All of them are different aspects and expressions of God's love. But someone has said it this way: justice is getting what we deserve, mercy is *not* getting what we deserve, and Grace is getting what we *don't* deserve. Justice demands that we pay the penalty of death for our sins. Mercy wanted to spare us from paying that penalty. So God in his mercy sent his Son to die in our place and to take the judgement of the world's sins on himself – meeting the demands of justice in our place. Having paid that price, it set up the possibility of relationship with us that was filled with grace. Instead of us having to meet the requirements of the law in order to be right with God, Christ's sacrifice allows us to experience God's love toward us, and power to obey. Grace is undeserved, transforming love.

The Apostle Paul used a common Greek word to try and explain God's grace – the Greek word is "charis." It's what we get our word "charity" from. For us, the word "charity" has come to mean a handout to someone who should be able to better themselves but for whatever reason, can't for the time being. But the original meaning was "gift" – something that we don't deserve and can't earn but is given freely anyway. There's something else – the original Greek word "charis" comes from the root word "char," and means "that which brings joy." Grace is a wonderful, joy-inducing gift of God's love and favor toward us!

Let's say that I decide I want to give you a one-hundred-dollar bill. It's a gift from me to you! But I want you to know that by giving this to you, I expect you to be available to help me whenever I need it – if I call, I expect you to answer the phone and come over. Is that

really a gift? Would it bring Joy? No. It only brings obligation.

What if I gave you, a hundred dollars as a gift, and I said, “Aren’t I a great guy for giving that to you? I must be rich, right? What else do you think about how great I am because I gave this to you? You’d better write me a really nice thank you note!” Is that really a free gift, or are there some emotional strings attached?

Neither of those is grace. Grace would be if I walked up, gave it to you, told you I love you, and that’s that. Grace.

Jesus tried to explain grace to people multiple times and in multiple ways. In Luke 15 he told three back-to-back, rapid-fire stories to demonstrate God’s grace: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons. The focus isn’t on the 99 sheep that obeyed the rules, but the one lost sheep that is found. Then the lady who turns her house upside down to find one lost coin and throws a party when she finds it. Then the father whose son rejected him and squandered his inheritance and his life, came groveling back, and the father ran to him, embraced him, and threw a party for him and his obedient older brother. In each case, the only characteristic of that which was lost was its *foundness* – that which was lost was found by the one looking for it. They didn’t deserve to be found. They couldn’t do anything to be found. Everything was all dependent on the one looking for it, the one who found it, the one who celebrated over it. You and I are lost, and grace means that God who has been looking for us has found us and celebrates that we’ve been found.

Jesus told another parable in Matthew 20 about a farmer who hired a group of workers at the beginning of the day, the middle of the day, and right before the closing whistle of the shift at the end of the day. When he gathered them together to pay them, he paid the one-hour guys a full day’s wage. And then he paid the three-hour guys and the eight-hour guys, and they all got a full day’s wage too. They all got paid the same. The full day guys were furious. But the farmer said, “Are you angry with me because I’m generous? Can’t I do what I want with my money?” If that sounds crazy, or irrational, or unfair to you, then you are beginning to understand what God’s grace is. And here’s the great thing...

### - Grace is *personal*.

We think about Jesus dying for the whole world’s sins and we think it’s just this big blanket of grace that covers all these nameless, faceless trillions and trillions of members of the human race, but you’ve got to know that grace is personal: all the grace that it takes to forgive and love the entire history of the human race is the same amount of grace that God gives YOU. That is exactly why I say, every Sunday, “God loves you as if you were the only one in all the world to love, and Jesus would’ve died for you even if you were the only one in the entire world to die for.” Grace can be personally experienced because it is profoundly personal and relational. Grace is personal because it comes to us through a person: Jesus Christ who is the Way, Truth, and Life. That’s what was and still is so revolutionary about Christianity; it’s not a system or an ethical philosophy; it is a relationship. Every other world religion throughout history and even today can be described as humankind’s attempt to *reach up to God* – by rigid observance to the rules, by performing enough works, by paying enough money, by chanting enough or meditating

enough. And if you don't do those things enough, you are made to feel guilty and inferior. Christianity – alone in all the history of religions – is *God reaching down to humankind* in grace through the *person* of Jesus Christ. The early believers did not preach a system or even a religion; they proclaimed a *person*. Our author writes this: “For Islam the Word (of God) became a *book* (Qu’ran), for Christianity the Word (of God) became *flesh*. A human being. The eternal, one God, became a Person. (This is what we call) Incarnation.”<sup>3</sup> That’s why Christianity without a relationship to the Person, Jesus Christ, becomes just another religious attempt that falls far short of what we need. Religious Christianity is like saying, “I’ll follow the principles, but thanks, but no thanks Jesus – I can do it without you.” That is Christianity without discipleship, Christianity without relationship, Christianity without Christ. And it is in NO WAY Christianity.

Again, our author says, “The journey of grace is not about following a system, a book, a *Manual*, a denomination, or a tradition. We follow, worship, and serve Jesus Christ. Grace is all the benefits of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of the personal Jesus, who is now Christ and Lord.”<sup>4</sup> The goal of the Christian life is for you and I to be shaped into the image and nature of Jesus Christ. Grace is not *something*; grace is *Someone*. Grace is personalized to you, in a person. It is personal, and while it is free, it is not cheap...

### - Grace is ***costly***.

Don't ever be mistaken: while it is freely given to you, that doesn't mean it is worthless. It cost God the life of his One and Only Son. The Bible is very, very clear about this: the death of Jesus is the absolute highest price that God could pay for you. It cost God everything. So do not think grace is cheap.

Cheap grace would mean that there is no response of true discipleship from us. Cheap grace would mean I can just keep on sinning because God will just keep on forgiving.

Cheap grace is dismissive, abusive, disregarding, and disrespectful. Cheap grace means my response to God treats his costly gift as if Christ's sacrifice and God's intense pain were insignificant. Cheap grace is Christianity without discipleship.

Costly grace means that, to accept God's gift of grace, I respond by allowing his grace to transform me. I give him my life. While I can't earn the gift of grace, and it is extended to me without expectation, I have not truly received it unless I allow it to change me in a lifelong, submissive journey of discipleship, of becoming like Christ. A journey of grace. The more I receive of grace, the more I am changed. The less I receive of grace, the more of an unchanged sinner I am.

Grace cost Christ his life for me. My response to grace is to give my life to Christ. The more I accept grace, the more grace is experienced. The more grace I embrace, the more grace-filled I become. The more I grow in this relationship, the more I become like Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

If you think about it, truly, truly, truly...

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<sup>3</sup> Busic, pgs 30-31

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 31

- Grace is *amazing*.

Grace given and received transforms and grows. The limitless and bottomless grace of God grows even greater in my life. I have all of God's grace and yet I can still grow more in God's grace. It changes me to Christ-likeness and gives me abundant life worth truly living. Grace is amazing.

One of my favorite authors is Philip Yancey. He's written many great books like, "Where is God When it Hurts?", "The Jesus I Never Knew," and "What's So Amazing About Grace," among many, many others. But in his book on grace he writes about a movie that came out several years ago called *The Last Emperor*, about a young boy who was anointed to be the Last Emperor of China. "Even as a child he lives a life of luxury with many servants at his command. (In one scene his brother asks him,) 'What happens when you do wrong?' ... 'When I do wrong, someone else is punished.' ... To demonstrate, the boy emperor breaks a precious artifact, and one of the servants is beaten for (it).<sup>5</sup> (Yancey goes on,) This was the ancient customs of kings and emperors. (It wasn't just, and it wasn't merciful.) Then someone arrived from another world. He was a King who brought new meaning to the concept of authority. He reversed the old order and inaugurated a new kingdom. When his servants fall into sin, the King takes their just due. 'Grace is free only because the Giver has borne the cost.'<sup>6</sup>

Folks, this isn't justice or mercy – this is grace. Costly grace. (Maybe) that's why we love to sing Newton's song. Grace is amazing."<sup>7</sup>

*Pray: grace is being poured out over you, given to you, right now. Won't you receive it?*

*Never have received it. Confess, repent, receive.*

*Once received it, but you've turned it into religion, Christianity without Christ. YOU are what's wrong with Christianity. Confess! Repent! Receive.*

*Thank you, God...we determine to live in this grace, to live being shaped by grace, into the image of Christ.*

In the weeks ahead we'll talk about our response to grace and how it changes us on this journey.

Pastor Jason come dismiss us:

*You are surrounded by, and immersed in, God's grace. May you respond to his grace, allowing Christ to change you personally by his grace, knowing it cost Christ everything to give you his grace and will cost you everything to respond to his grace. May you live each moment of your life, and in every exchange with every person, in the abundance of God's amazing grace.*

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<sup>5</sup> Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* 67

<sup>6</sup> Yancey, *ibid*, 67

<sup>7</sup> Busic, 33-34