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small group material



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Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

RICHLY EXPERIENCING GRACE • Grace Everyday

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 2:1-10

As we've already mentioned, Ephesians divides neatly into two sections: chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. In the first half of this letter Paul describes what God has done for us in Christ. In the second he describes what it looks like for us to live out our new identity. We'll get to that second section in a few weeks, but for now we get to just continue to reflect on the enormity of His gift to us and all it means.

By way of review, 1:3-14 describes the spiritual blessings all believers possess. The next passage, 1:15-23, records Paul's prayer that our hearts would be enlightened to know the hope, riches, and power that God has given in Christ. In our passage for this week he describes how we moved from being objects of God's wrath to objects of His delight.

The key concept you want to explain, demonstrate, and bleed for is that just as we were initially saved by grace (because we were sunk without it) so we live everyday of our lives by grace (because we're still sunk without it.) As Tim Keller says:

The gospel is not just the 'A-B-C' but the 'A-Z' of the Christian life. The gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom, but it is the way to address every problem and the way to grow at every step. It tells us that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved than we ever dared hope- at the same time.

Ephesians 2:1-3

In order to help us understand more fully the grace we have received, Paul gives a fuller description of the life from which we were saved. As my pastor taught me when I was a student, "The good news is so, so good, because the bad news is so, so bad." So let's look at the bad news.

According to Paul we were a mess. Our three great enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil left us dead, disobedient and deceived.

Before knowing Christ, we ignorantly followed the "ways and principles of this world." When the Bible talks about the world it's generally referring to the behaviors, values and outlook of the unbelieving masses. It's the standard operating procedure of people and cultures who don't know Christ. Think about the prevailing wisdom on your campus. To most it's "obvious" that the key to a happy life is having money, relationships are for sex, and if it feels right, it is right. That's the world's way of thinking and our default mode is to go right along with it. Satan or, "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" is ultimately behind this system and promotes these beliefs to our destruction. Our nature is to follow him.

Our third great enemy is our own sinful selves. Paul says we were driven by a core desire to gratify our sinful and selfish thoughts and desires. Paul uses the phrase "sinful nature" to explain that the sin was not simply external behavior, but flowed from a heart that was hopelessly corrupted. The Christian doctrine of "total depravity" states that in all facets of our very being, we are corrupted by sin.

What's the Big Idea?

This passage takes a closer look at the grace God extended to us by raising us to new life in Christ, thereby showcasing His mercy for all eternity. You want your students (not to mention yourself!) to understand that the gospel of grace isn't merely for unbelievers, but is vital for Christians as well. God wants us to live our lives out of a rich experience of His grace on a daily basis.

What's the Problem?

We forget that as believers we still need, and have access to God's mercy and grace just as much as we did before we knew Christ. When we forget the grace of God we can fall into two opposite errors. We may either become filled with spiritual pride or else we may live with a complete sense of failure as we see what our hearts are really like.





This does not mean that everyone is as corrupt as they can be, are as equally corrupt in all areas, or cannot do benevolent actions. It does mean that in our very nature, we are infected with sin and inclined away from God.

As a result of all this we were “objects of wrath.” What this means is that God’s holiness would be compelled to destroy us, for God cannot be in the presence of evil. God’s wrath can be described with a crass, but helpful metaphor – “vomiting.” Just as our bodies reflexively vomit out what is injurious to our health (such as poison), God’s wrath is His reflexive response to evil, of which we were the greatest perpetrators.

Ephesians 2:4-9

Now the good news. This section begins with a very important “but.” The passage emphasizes that in contrast to what we deserved, we who know Christ have received mercy and grace. Grace is an unmerited, even unreasonable, gift that can never be earned. The only role we played in our salvation was to receive by faith this free gift that God mercifully gave us.

Paul specifically highlights two aspects of this gift that is ours in Christ. First, we were made alive. Paul emphasizes that this mercy was shown us while we were still “dead” in our transgression. This means that we were completely helpless to help ourselves. In fact, when this mercy was extended to us, we were still actively in a state of rebellion. But now we are alive in Christ.

Second, He “seated us with Him in the heavenly realms.” In 1:20-21 Paul had described Christ’s resurrection. Now he explains that we too will be raised to live a new life in the world to come. In fact, it’s as good as done. All of this is a gift, motivated by God’s great love for us. It doesn’t get any sweeter than that.

Ephesians 2:10

If the passage ended with v. 9 we could be left thinking that grace paid the entrance fee to heaven, but we’re on our own from here on out. Verse 10 however, dispels that thought. What Paul is saying here, is that this principle of grace is not only how we came to know Christ, but also how we live our entire lives and grow as Christians.

How did we come to Christ? We acknowledged our helplessness and our need to be saved, and we received the free gift of God’s rescuing us. In the same way, now that we are Christians, we don’t launch off on our own trying to live out the Christian life by our own efforts.

Take a look. First, We are “His workmanship,” that is, God is the one who is continuing to form us and mature us. Having saved us He hasn’t moved on to other things. And His dealings with us are always by grace.

Second, He has “good works prepared in advance for us to do.” We aren’t making this up as we go along, but He has a plan for our lives. There are doorways all over campus and everywhere we go for the rest of our lives that He wants us to walk through. These are gifts themselves (grace). And as we walk through them with varying degrees of success He’s there to redeem what we mess up (grace) and love us all the way (grace).

The very act of participating with Him in His eternal purposes causes us to live out our Christian life in close communication and reliance upon God and not in self-effort. As we need strength and wisdom to live out a godly life, we must ask God to graciously provide us with the empowerment to do so. Colossians 2:6 states this principle well: “In the same way you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him.” We were saved by God’s incomparable grace, and we continue to live out our Christian life by this same principle.

End 

What’s Our Response?

Most Christians understand the grace they received when they first trusted Christ.

Many however, having come to Christ by faith, mistakenly think they now need to live their lives by their own effort. Living our lives by faith and under God’s grace is a radically different orientation to life and exactly what the Scriptures call us to.

Believing the gospel of grace and letting it permeate every area of our lives is in large measure the essence of Christian maturity.

Your task in this study is to help your students see that everyday they need to experience the mercy and grace Jesus purchased at the cross.

What Are the Questions?

Ephesians 2:1-10

LAUNCH

Describe a time in your life when you screwed up huge, but were shown mercy. What had you done? How did the kindness impact you?

EXPLORE

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

1. What are the terms Paul uses to describe our life prior to Christ?
2. What does it mean to be spiritually dead? Do you think it's possible for spiritually dead people to do good things?
3. What are the "ways of the world"? What are the ways of this campus?
4. How did you follow these "ways of the world" before you came to Christ? Because of habits you established, what areas of the world still call to you to follow?
5. What does it mean that we were "objects of wrath?"
6. Why do you think Paul paints such a vivid picture of life before Christ?

Read Ephesians 2:4-10.

7. How would you describe in your own words what God has done on our behalf to overcome the problem described in 2:1-3?

8. From the way "grace" is used in verses 5,7, and 8 what would you say it means?
9. According to 2:4-7, what motivated God to rescue us from the consequences of our sin? Why did God raise us to new life? What does this reveal about God's character?
10. What did we do to earn all this?
11. Having been taught that it is clearly not our good works that have saved us, we might conclude that now that we are saved, it is up to us to engineer a life that pleases God. If we can't be saved by good works what role do works play in the life of a Christian?
12. Why does Paul believe it is important that Christians understand there is nothing they can do to earn God's mercy?
13. Colossians 2:6 states this point well: "In the same way you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him." Describe how the process that brought us to salvation is the same process by which we live out our faith.

APPLY

14. Describe a time when the lavish mercy and grace of God became real to you.
15. Why do you suppose Paul felt compelled to preach the gospel to Christians? In what sense do Christians need the gospel?
16. What happens in our lives when we forget how bad off we are apart from Christ?
17. What does our life look like when we live as if the gospel is merely for someone else?

What Are the Answers?

1. We were dead in our sins, following the world and the devil, gratifying our sinful cravings, objects of wrath.
2. It means that in our very nature we are infected with sin and inclined away from God.
3. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage.” Discuss the expected behaviors at your school.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. This means that God’s holiness would compel Him to destroy us, for He cannot be in the presence of evil.
6. To paint the ugly backdrop against which the beauty of grace is best seen.
7. Allow the group to discuss. Answers may include that He made us alive, raised us with Christ, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places.
8. Undeserved favor or mercy.
9. This is a really important question because it gets at the heart of God’s character. Be sure they see God’s lavish grace.
10. Nothing. It’s a lavish, undeserved gift because of his love, not our worthiness.
11. Our good works are not done independently from God, and are themselves gifts from God for us to use to serve and worship Him. They are a consequence, not a condition of salvation.
12. It’s crucial to our spiritual growth. He wants these believers to live out of a rich experience of the grace of God in order that they might grow up in Christ.
13. We were saved by God’s incomparable grace and we live by the same grace.
14. Allow the group to discuss.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. Arrogance on one hand, and despair on the other.
17. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8,9