



CRAZY FOR CRAZY TIMES **GRACE**

DERWIN L. GRAY

Bible Study by PHILIP NATION

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INTRODUCTION

Life is crazy. With the dizzying pace of our lives and the ever-changing values of our world, it can feel like a miracle just to hang on and get through the day. At times, everything seems to be spiraling out of control on a crash course for disaster. In the middle of this chaos, little room or time is given for entertaining thoughts about what happened 2,000 years ago or what exists beyond this life. In fact, a Christian perspective is consistently pushed to the margins of society and seen as strange, irrelevant, or outdated. Anyone claiming to actually know the truth about God and how we are to live our lives is seen as ... well ... crazy.

But what if you can know the truth? What if there are answers? What if there is rest, order, and meaning in the midst of this crazy life? And what if all of those things are wrapped up in something that seems absolutely crazy? What if the truth doesn't compel us to try harder or point more fingers, but to love and to rest from our pursuit of perfection?

Ironically, when faced with current challenges, believers often long for the good old days of the New Testament church. In reality, the culture and the church were just as crazy then as they are today—rampant sexual immorality, racial prejudice, social and economic segregation, arguments and divisions over favorite spiritual leaders, and religious activities covering the spectrum from liberal to legalistic.

So while the 1st century may not be the glory days we imagine when it comes to the Christian life, looking back certainly sheds light on our lives today in the 21st century. Ministering to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul addressed many of these issues. His first letter to them contained this life-changing truth: the heartbeat and lifeblood of the Christian life is grace.

Ultimately, it's not about what we need to do; it's about what Jesus has already done. Peace is found in this unexpected reality: God has crazy grace for crazy times. We all need it, whether we know it yet or not. The craziest thing about grace is that Jesus made it all possible before we ever knew we needed it.

So let's get started with *Crazy Grace for Crazy Times*.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study book is organized into six weeks and includes content for group and personal study. Some groups don't meet every week, so what matters most is finding a rhythm in which individuals and groups are working through all the content in a meaningful way.

What matters most individually and as a group is the degree to which you're open to the life-changing truth of God's Word. Be honest with yourself; your group; and most importantly, with God.

The goal of this study is more than gaining new information or even behavior modification. The goal is gospel transformation.

GROUP SESSIONS

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the teaching of Pastor Derwin Gray.

START

This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video segment.

WATCH

This page includes key points from Pastor Derwin's teaching, along with blanks for taking notes as participants watch the video.

RESPOND

This page includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to Pastor Derwin's video teaching and to engage with relevant Bible passages.

PERSONAL STUDY

Each week provides three days or sections of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions. The personal study revisits Scriptures and themes introduced in the videos so that participants can understand and apply them on a personal level.

TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

PRAYERFULLY PREPARE

Prepare for each meeting by—

REVIEWING the weekly material and group questions ahead of time,
PRAYING for each person in the group;

ASKING the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion
as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

Create a comfortable environment. If group members are uncomfortable, they'll be distracted and therefore not engaged in the group experience. Plan ahead by taking into consideration—

- seating;
- temperature;
- lighting;
- food or drink;
- surrounding noise;
- general cleanliness (put away pets if meeting in a home).

At best, thoughtfulness and hospitality show guests and group members they're welcome and valued in whatever environment you choose to gather. At worst, people may never notice your effort, but they're also not distracted. Do everything in your ability to help people focus on what's most important—connecting with God, with the Bible, and with one another.

INCLUDE OTHERS

Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to—

- **INVITE** new people to join your group;
- **INCLUDE** any people who visit the group.

An inexpensive way to make first-time guests feel welcome or to invite someone to get involved is to give them their own copies of this Bible study book.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small-group experience has the following characteristics.

- **EVERYONE PARTICIPATES.** Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.
- **NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER.** Be sure your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.
- **NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS.** Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.
- **INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP.** Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer.
- **GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL.** Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust Scripture to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to God's Word and to active steps of faith.

KEEP CONNECTING

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Participation during the group session is always improved when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

Encourage group members with thoughts, commitments, or questions from the session by connecting through—

- emails;
- texts;
- social media.

When possible, build deeper friendships by planning or spontaneously inviting group members to join you outside your regularly scheduled group time for—

- meals;
- fun activities;
- projects around your home, church, or community.



WEEK 1
JUST GRACE—
THAT'S ALL

START

Welcome everyone to session 1 of Crazy Grace for Crazy Times. Take a few minutes to make sure everyone in the group knows one another. Then use the following questions and statements to help people start thinking and talking about this week's topic.

What's the craziest thing you've ever seen? Ever done?

What word would you use to describe our culture?

Pastor Derwin Gray is going to clearly show that though our world is crazy, this is nothing new. As crazy as life may feel—and as crazy as our culture may truly be—we'll see not much has actually changed in the two thousand years since the New Testament was written during the Roman Empire.

Before we begin *Crazy Grace for Crazy Times*, let's ask for God's grace in understanding and applying the truth of His Word in 1 Corinthians.

Pray for your time together in God's Word and then use the following page for notes as you watch the video for session 1.

WATCH

Complete this viewer guide as you watch the video for session 1.

For the apostle Paul, grace was not a theory. Grace was a living _____ with the living _____ of the universe.

Following Jesus is about a people who have been so wrecked by God's grace that all of life becomes this _____ so that other people would know this grace.

God gives us a new identity, not based on what we achieve but on what we _____ from Jesus.

To be a saint means that you are _____ for God's purposes.

The very holiness of Jesus is yours as a _____.

For many Christians, it's not about knowing new information. It's about _____ and embracing the old information that makes us new.

Whatever Jesus requires, He _____.

Grace is not dependent on your _____.

Grace removes our _____.

Fellowship means *to participate in*. We are _____ in communion and union in the redemptive purposes of God.

We don't need to do more; we don't need to try harder; we don't need to get smarter. We need to receive more and more _____.

RESPOND

Discuss the video with your group, using the questions below.

Pastor Derwin said studying 1 Corinthians is important for three reasons:

1. It will help us understand where America is going as a nation.
2. It will help us as missionaries to understand and connect with our culture.
3. It will give people who are not followers of Jesus hope.

Which of those reasons resonates most with you currently? Why?

How does 21st-century American “progress” actually look like “regressing” to 1st-century Corinthian culture?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. These verses contain three key words defined in the video: *saint*, *grace*, and *fellowship*.

How was each defined? What was most helpful or challenging for each?

Knowing Paul’s background, why do you think “grace and peace” (v. 3) is a favorite phrase for greeting people in his letters?

How have Scripture and this session provided you with new information about God’s grace or a needed reminder about your new identity in Christ?

Pastor Derwin asked a question that would be great for us to discuss here: “Do you remember when you met Jesus?” Briefly share your story of meeting Jesus and how He changed you.

“Grace is a roaring lion of transformation,” Pastor Derwin said in the video. How is God’s grace continuing to pursue and transform you? Specifically, how can we pray for God to work in and through your life?

Close in prayer. Encourage everyone to complete the following pages of personal study and application, digging deeper into the biblical truths introduced today, before your next group session.



WEEK 1

JUST GRACE— THAT'S ALL

Grace.

Just the sound of the word has a certain ring to it.

But whenever the topic of grace comes up, people may also wonder, *What's the catch?* Grace sounds too good to be true. And, as we've all learned from our favorite TV shows, movies, and real life, if it's too good to be true, then it probably isn't.

However, God's grace runs counter to what we've been conditioned to expect. The world constantly overpromises and underdelivers. So do our jobs, hobbies, every temptation, and many of the people we know. But not grace.

Why? Because God is at the center of grace. Grace isn't just an award He has in heaven that He gives away like a trinket won from an impossible game. With grace God gives you something from His character. Grace delivers something unexpected and amazing. In the end God's grace is all we need.

DAY 1

DEFINING GRACE

What exactly is grace? The concept seems difficult to wrap our minds around.

Based on your current understanding, how would you explain or define *grace*?

The idea of grace runs counter to almost everything we believe. After all, we teach kids to earn what they get. At work we earn a living. In the world we earn a reputation. *Earn* is a popular and comfortable concept for us.

As a professional football player, you earn a chance to try out at camp. Then you earn a spot on the roster. Then you earn the right to put on a jersey for game day. Then you earn a place on the starting squad of 11 defensive players. Finally, if you work the hardest, you might earn the position of team captain.

Professional football doesn't sound much different from the rest of the world. We're constantly working hard to earn what we get. In fact, when we work really hard and aren't rewarded, then we feel cheated.

What are three activities in life where you have to earn something ... or everything?

Because we're so accustomed to earning and working for things, we have a hard time accepting that grace, by its very nature, is free. When Paul wrote to the early church in Corinth, he told them:

I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not justified by this. The One who evaluates me is the Lord.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:4

Think about that word *evaluates*. If you had to make a list to spiritually evaluate a person, what would be on that list?

Paul knew his whole life was dependent on grace. Tomorrow, we'll take a look at the time when Paul—who was formerly known as Saul—met Jesus in a personal way. But think about this one sentence from 1 Corinthians 4.

As Paul was writing about being a faithful manager of everything God had given to him, he took it up to another level. Instead of just saying, "Be faithful in what you have," Paul wrote to remind the church to be faithful to the One who had them.

Let me describe one of the most beautiful things about grace. You no longer have to worry about a judge. You can live life completely unafraid about the "last day." Paul said he wasn't worried, scared, or caught up in self-doubt. He knew without any hesitation that the One who would judge him was the One who had justified him.

That's grace. When we face the great day of judgment at the end of life as we know it, Christians will stand before our God who is the ultimate Judge. He has perfect knowledge about what is right and wrong. Plus, He has perfect character to back up what it means to judge the whole created universe.

Draw a picture or some symbols of what you think the last judgment will look or feel like.

Grace for a Christian means God has justified you. The term *justified* needs its own fleshing out. Many preachers have used the line "Being justified means that it is 'just as if I'd never sinned.'" That's a fairly accurate description.

Justification is a legal term that packs a punch. If you've ever been in a courtroom, you know there's a specific feel to the room. Quiet like a library. Serious like a lecture hall. Justice hangs in the balance. At times it's cold and sterile. At other times the emotions of everyone involved make you want to break out into a cold sweat. It's heavy.

But that's the whole point of justice. There's a weight to it like nothing else. Now take all of that emotion and put it in the context of God's serving as the eternal Judge of the universe. Because of grace Paul was able to stand up under that weight. Why? Because he wasn't standing alone. The power of Jesus Christ supported Paul when the gavel of the Judge was about to strike, when the declaration was about to be stated as "Guilty!" Through Jesus' blood, the ultimate example of God's grace, Paul was able to say that he was justified. Grace stepped in and says, "This one is innocent. He is justified."

Compare that last statement to the ideas you drew on the preceding page. Maybe you thought about a huge courtroom desk or a massive set of stairs leading up to an enormous throne. The images of God's judgment seat are more than we can comprehend. They're apocalyptic and cataclysmic. But then Jesus steps into that scene and says, "Don't sweat it. You're covered. I've got you." The sigh of relief is immense.

So how exactly do we define the idea of *grace*? It seems to cover a lot of territory. One theological definition is:

Undeserved blessing freely bestowed on humans by God—
a concept that is at the heart not only of Christian theology
but also of all genuinely Christian experience.¹

Earlier you created your own definition of *grace*. How does it match up with this one? What are the differences, if any?

Grace means you're given something you didn't earn. It's the opposite of what we do every day at work. It's the opposite of what happens with a student in college. It's definitely the opposite of playing professional football. Grace is receiving a gift you can't earn, no matter how hard you work.

Read the following passages. After each reference give your personal summary of how the ideas in the passage affect your view of God's grace.

Romans 3:21-26

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Ephesians 2:8-9

Titus 3:4-7

Grace is a foundational idea to what Jesus was all about. For God to break into history and come to earth, that's grace. After all, He's God. Part of me wants to say, "You don't deserve to be on the earth with the rest of us. We haven't done what's right or necessary to earn a visit from God."

But then I remember that this is all about the crazy grace of God. As the Corinthian church was struggling to discover how to live in the middle of members who were sinning, a political structure that was persecuting, and false teachers who were deceiving, Paul, led by the Spirit of God, wrote to them about the central ideas they needed to hear again. Grace jumped out front in messages ... as it normally did.

Take a moment to read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9:

¹ Paul, called as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Sosthenes our brother: ² To God's church at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours. ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I always thank my God for you because of God's grace given to you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that by Him you were enriched in everything—in all speech and all knowledge. ⁶ In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, ⁷ so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; you were called by Him into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

The passage describes grace as something big. Through grace God has given us everything we need for speech and knowledge about our testimony of Jesus. In grace we don't lack anything we need to do spiritual work. With grace we get to see the work of Jesus in our lives so that we can be strengthened and our salvation secured.

To end this part of your personal study, take some time to write down the spiritual work in which you feel God is calling you to engage. It could be simple things like serving on a hospitality group for the Sunday worship services or something more complex like a calling to serve in global missions. Whatever it is, write it down and then offer up a prayer of thanksgiving to God that His grace is all you need.

DAY 2

SAVING PAUL

In Acts 9 we read about how Paul became a believer in Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that prior to his salvation, his name was Saul. You'll see that he wasn't a very nice dude.

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest ² and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. ⁴ Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵ "Who are You, Lord?" he said. "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting," He replied. ⁶ "But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. ⁸ Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. ⁹ He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

ACTS 9:1-9

The story of Paul's salvation gives us a lot of insight into God's grace. Go back and read the first five verses one more time and circle each word that helps illustrate the grace God showed to Paul.

WHO PAUL WAS

The first thing that stands out to me is who Paul used to be. He was a guy who was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (v. 1). He was a Jewish man who was a citizen of Rome and had studied as a Pharisee. In his mind he believed the followers of Christ were working against the Jewish religion and were a threat to his way of life. So he asked for the authority to go out and hunt them down.

Don't miss what happened. Saul asked for the authority to become a religious bounty hunter. He didn't ask for permission to spy on people. He had no interest in holding an interfaith dialogue to show respect and tolerance.

He wanted the power to track down followers of Jesus; arrest them; imprison them; and, in some cases, have them executed. And Saul got what he wanted.

A few chapters earlier in Acts, we read the story of Stephen, the first recorded martyr for faith in Jesus. In Acts 7:58 Stephen was stoned to death for preaching the gospel, and Saul was there overseeing the whole violent act. This guy was brutal and murderous.

When you consider who Saul was before he was saved, it makes us pause to think about who we've been and who we are when grace isn't involved. Do you know a person who has a dramatic testimony from a life of extreme sin and later became a Christian? Maybe that's your own story.

Consider your own salvation. Make a list of the sins you were forgiven for at that time.

To understand grace, you have to understand how Jesus takes the place of our sin. By thinking about the disastrous effects that sin has in our lives, we can get a clearer understanding of how Jesus changes us.

WHOM PAUL HUNTED

The people Saul hunted weren't yet known as Christians. In fact, it won't be until Acts 11 that followers of Jesus would be called Christians. At the time of Paul's bounty-hunting days, Christians were referred to as those who belonged to "the Way" (Acts 9:2). It seems to be an odd name for a group: people of the Way. How do you think the early believers earned that name?

Read John 14:1-6. Summarize why the followers of Jesus would be called people of the Way.

How does being a person of the Way relate to receiving grace?

In Saul's mind he was tracking down people who were a cult-like offshoot of the Jewish faith. They were a threat to his way of life. Those who followed the Way were, to him, heretics. People of the Way were those who'd chosen to follow a new leader.

What are some reasons a Jewish leader like Saul would see people of the Way as dangerous to his society?

How are Christians sometimes seen as a danger to culture today? What are some ways living by the grace of the gospel upsets our world?

Saul seemed to take pride in searching for the followers of the rebellious Rabbi from Nazareth. But Jesus didn't just teach His followers how to be nice people. He was much more than just a teacher. Jesus Himself is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Saul thought he was hunting down people who'd proclaimed a new Lord. Politically, it was treason because only the Caesar of the Roman Empire could be referred to as Lord. Religiously, it was heretical, especially for the Jewish believers. For a Hebrew to abandon the law of Moses and say they were going to follow the ways

of a Rabbi from Nazareth named Jesus was to abandon all the religion Saul followed. Plus, they were upsetting the very flimsy peace the Israelites had with the Romans. Saul was ready to crush anybody and any group that threatened to upset his life.

But then something spectacular happened. Saul met up with the crazy grace of God.

WHOM PAUL MET

The grace of God didn't just sprinkle down on Saul like fairy dust from the sky. Jesus Himself came down from His place in heaven to meet up with Saul. In this case grace wasn't a gentle tap on the shoulder. It was a powerful, blinding light that knocked Saul down.

Saul's meeting with Jesus was unexpected. The grace arrived out of nowhere. In fact, for Saul, grace came as a confrontation. It was a humbling meeting for Saul. He was quite literally knocked off his high horse.

When you encountered God's grace, what were the circumstances in your life? Record the story of how God interacted with you—whether it was gentle or sudden.

When the Lord met Saul, He confronted him with an unexpected question: "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul had never met Jesus. However, he'd met—and arrested—a lot of believers. But Jesus wasn't going to let Saul off the hook. Saul needed to know that his sins weren't just against the human beings he'd persecuted. He'd also offended the very Jesus they followed.

To fully understand grace, we need to comprehend the depth of how offensive our sin is to God. Grace isn't about saving you from a mindless, numbing sensation in eternity. It does save you from the eternal peril of hell and deliver you into the eternal pleasures of heaven. But that's not what it's ultimately about either. Grace is more than changing your eternal destination. It's about changing your eternal relationship—namely, your relationship with the God who's deeply offended by your sinfulness.

Many have described grace in the past by using the word as an acronym to describe what it is:

God's Riches At Christ's Expense

That's a simple, accurate way to understand grace. When it comes to sin, someone has to pay for it. No sin is simply swept away as if it never existed. Rather, God's righteous perfection demands that all sin is judged and condemned. God's Son was sent to do the work that atones (or makes a covering) for our sinfulness.

Many New Testament titles reveal something about the ways Jesus deals with our sin. Read the titles below and write descriptions of how Jesus confronts our sin.

Lion of the tribe of Judah

The Truth

The Lamb of God

Immanuel, God with us

The Word of life

The Good Shepherd

The Light of the world

The Bread of life

Mediator

THE HUMBLING EFFECT

Acts 9 tells us Saul was unable to see for three days. If you continue to read in that chapter, you discover that God miraculously caused another believer named Ananias to visit Saul and lay hands on him in prayer. In other words, one of the people of the Way whom Saul previously hunted was praying now for him to be healed. Grace has a way of bringing together people who were enemies before. The encounter with Jesus humbled Saul. It made him a man of faith. When the crazy grace of God intersected his life, he found what all Israel had hoped to find for centuries. He found salvation.

After all this Saul later had his name changed to Paul. That change signaled that his life was different. He was different. He was no longer the bounty hunter of Christians. Now he would serve the very Lord he'd once persecuted.

Paul described himself in other letters to the churches as a slave, a servant, a persuader of men, and the least of all believers. It seems as if he constantly carried around with him an understanding of the price it took to win him over. Paul had done everything right by legalistic standards. If anyone was going to earn salvation, it was going to be him. But now, after Jesus knocked him to the ground, Paul knew just how wrong he'd been.

Now he knew it was all about the lavish, loving, crazy grace of God. Paul suffered from some "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). We don't know what it was, perhaps an actual physical ailment or pride. Whatever it was, God gave Paul a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. Still, he prayed three times for deliverance from it. Instead, God gave him a better answer:

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

The humbling effect of grace is awesome. It kills our pride. It makes sin worthless. It puts Jesus on the throne, where He deserves to sit. Crazy grace is always worth the journey.

DAY 3

BEING MADE NEW

Perhaps you've encountered the crazy grace of God. If so, just like with Paul, it has changed your life. But who are you now? The idea of identity is an important one. When you forget who you are and who you belong to, it's hard to live out the grace you've been given.

Let's go back to 1 Corinthians 1. Like most of the letters in the New Testament, it begins with a greeting. Circle or underline the words and descriptors in these three verses about who you are as a Christian.

¹ Paul, called as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Sosthenes our brother: ² To God's church at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours. ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3

YOU'RE A SAINT

Yes, you. You're a saint. Anyone who has become a Christian and been given grace is now a saint.

We often think of saints in one of two ways. First, in a formal way, we think of dead Christians to whom the church has given a special title. Second, we use the word to describe a spiritual person who is super nice to everyone, never loses patience with his or her kids, and always has something wise to say. "Wow, she's a saint!" But, according to the New Testament, every believer is a saint.

The Greek word used by Paul here and in other places in the New Testament to call members of the church saints is derived from the same word we translate as *holy*. We're saints because God has made us holy. Through the work of Jesus, He's given us a status of holiness. This is another encounter with the crazy grace of God.

Some might ask a reasonable question: "Why? Has God met us? Does He know what we're capable of doing to one another? Just look at that guy

named Saul who went around killing Christians.” And then suddenly it all makes sense. God isn’t just interested in changing something about us. His grace is going to change our very identity.

How does knowing God refers to you as a saint change the way you view yourself

How does it change the way you face temptation to sin?

How does it affect your personal devotional time of prayer and Bible study?

Your new identity is both something that happens instantaneously and something you grow into continually. When it comes to your eternal standing with God, Jesus’ grace has given you the status of saint. You’re holy when it comes to God’s judgment of your life and your relational status with Him. When it comes to everyday living, you’re being sanctified. God has you in the constant process of growing into the status that His grace has conferred on you. On top of all of this, another blessing about your new identity is that you don’t have to try to make it completely on your own.

BETTER TOGETHER

The life of a saint isn’t a solitary one. Paul’s letter was written to the saints in a plural fashion. He told the Corinthian believers they were saints alongside everyone else who calls on Jesus and names Him their Lord.

Encountering the crazy grace of God could happen in solitary confinement. If you were trapped on a deserted island, you could still enjoy God’s grace and its many blessings. But you’re not on an island. You’re a part of a big family called the church.

Lots of churches I've encountered profess that life is better together. It's true. After all, God didn't intend for us to live out our faith alone. The whole point of salvation is to set right our relationship with God. In addition to that, we get to connect properly with everyone else who's a believer.

Being a part of the local church allows us many benefits. List some of the ways you've benefited from being an active member of the local church.

"Better together" needs to be more than a slogan for the saints of God. It should be a lifestyle in which we experience God's grace together and give grace to one another.

EXPLORING OUR NEW IDENTITY

In 2 Corinthians there's a lengthy section that gives numerous descriptions of Christians. Often when believers struggle with the idea of grace, it's because they've lost the sense of their new identity.

Let's take a slow walk through several descriptions in 2 Corinthians 3-7 that will help us understand the impact of God's crazy grace on our lives. Soak in the truth of each description God has made about you.

Living Letters

² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, recognized and read by everyone. ³ It is clear that you are Christ's letter, produced by us, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God—not on stone tablets but on tablets that are hearts of flesh.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:2-3

God has graced you to be the actual correspondence in this world about who Jesus is and what He does. A letter in the ancient world was used much the way we'd use a résumé or a reference letter from someone to vouch for our character. Because of God's grace, the letter that vouches for God's character is you! As a believer, you're the evidence that God's grace works.

Write down a recent event that exemplifies the way God's grace is at work in you.

Competent Minister

*He has made us competent to be ministers of
a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For
the letter kills, but the Spirit produces life.*

2 CORINTHIANS 3:6

If you're like me on a lot of days, you get by on a "fake it until you make it" mentality. Mere survival seems to be the lead story of life. But God has more for us. Right now you're competent to do ministry in the new covenant Christ has established. Sure, we need to learn, study, and grow as much as possible. However, God hasn't left you to just flail around and try harder while you drown in the work of grace-filled ministry.

What ministry has God currently placed on your heart to engage in? How can you grab the opportunity to express God's grace to others through this ministry?

Mirrors of Glory

We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

Every morning I look in the mirror. In fact, it's hard to escape mirrors in our world. We use them to fix our hair, check for blemishes on our faces, and get ready to go out into the world. Mirrors serve more purposes than that, though. In a telescope mirrors help us see far away. In a car they help us avoid crashing into someone else. Mirrors are used in floodlights and flashlights to aim and magnify light. With God's grace we're mirrors of His glory. If we ever doubt our own physical beauty, we can stop worrying about all that, because God allows us to show off something to which no supermodel on the planet can compare—God's glory.

What situation in your life has convinced you that you aren't worthy of people's attention or affection? How can seeing yourself as a reflector of God's glory change your perspective?

Clay Treasure Box

We have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7

Clay jars were like the generic Tupperware® of the ancient world. They were used to hold anything and everything. In other words, clay pots were common and normal things, just like you and me.

What would give a clay pot some value is what it held inside. You and I are like clay jars filled with diamonds. We have a treasure inside that makes us more valuable than we can imagine. The treasure is the very essence of grace—God's power, presence, and work in our lives that we can tell everyone about.

What circumstances are you facing in which you need God's power to get through?

Ambassadors of the King

We are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

In 5:16-6:2 Paul described that we have an identity that puts us on the offense in ministry. We don't have to constantly play defense against the world. The passage teaches us that the ministry of reconciliation given to all believers changes the way we look at ourselves and others.

Our new identity brings us a new perspective about people. It enables us to see everyone in view of eternity rather than how we can use them right now. Our new identities represent the character and sovereignty of God to people who are far from Him, rebelling against His kingdom. It truly takes a lot of pressure off our lives. Our new identity in grace represents the King and His work instead of using the citizens of the world for our work.

List the people you know who need to hear the message that they can also be reconciled to God. Take your final moments of today's study to pray for God to open up conversations for you to discuss His crazy grace with these friends.