



# GRACE unplugged

## The Bible Study

based on the feature film

discovering grace  
changes everything



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## The Bible Study

written by Spence Shelton

based on the film by  
Brad J. Silverman and Russ Rice

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# about the authors

**BRAD J. SILVERMAN** is the writer/director of *Grace Unplugged*. Silverman was on Hollywood's fast track in the mid '90s with a successful stand-up comedy career and a budding motion-picture resume as an actor, director, writer, and producer when the Lord saved him. He walked away from the industry a couple of years later to focus on his faith, returning in 2007 as vice president of Coram Deo Studios. After writing and directing a series of successful programs for children, in 2009 Silverman wrote and directed the company's first feature film, the Christian romantic drama *No Greater Love*, as well as co-authoring the movie's companion devotional book. Silverman and his wife, Hayley, live in Los Angeles with their four young children.

**RUSS RICE** is a producer of *Grace Unplugged* and founder/president of the film's production company, Coram Deo Studios. The studio grew out of Rice's successful Signature Fundraising, which he started while a student at The Master's Seminary. He caught Hollywood's attention in 2001 while working with major film and television studios, making promotional videos. After winning a string of awards and industry notice with those projects, Rice started an in-house media division and began employing filmmakers full-time in 2004. That division grew into Coram Deo Studios in 2007, which produced its first feature, the Christian romantic drama *No Greater Love* in 2009. Rice also co-authored the *No Greater Love* 90-day devotional book. He and his wife, Carina, live in Los Angeles and have five children, four of whom now work for Dad.

**SPENCE SHELTON** is the small groups pastor of the Summit Church in Durham, NC. He holds an M.Div. in Christian Ethics from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and teaches around the country on the gospel and discipleship in the local church. He's written several articles and small group curriculum. His first book, *The People of God*, co-authored with Trevor Joy, will be published in spring 2014. Spence and his wife, Courtney, live in Durham, NC, with their three children.

# about the movie

*Grace Unplugged* is about eighteen-year-old Christian singer Grace Trey. Beautiful, talented, and restless, Grace performs each Sunday with her gifted father, Johnny. A former rock star, Johnny Trey charted a Billboard number-one single twenty years ago. His life spiraled out of control and he crashed hard before finding Christ and starting a new life for his family, far from Hollywood.

One day Johnny's former manager, Frank "Mossy" Mostin, drops by with an offer to reignite his fame. Johnny says no, but after Mossy leaves, Grace calls him and says yes. She leaves for Los Angeles, landing a record deal with Mossy, who sees in Grace a potential pop superstar. Cutting off contact with her parents, Grace seems prepared to abandon her family and walk away from her professed Christian faith to achieve her fantasy of fame.

Ultimately Grace's journey leads her to discover the beauty of God's pursuit. Dissatisfied with fame, she recognizes the longing of her soul and moves toward reconciliation. Leaving behind her pretend faith (passed down by her parents) and her pursuit of fame, Grace finally finds her own passion for God and His ongoing grace for her.



Courtesy of Lionsgate

# about the study

Welcome to *Grace Unplugged: The Bible Study*. This four-week study invites parents to strengthen our relationship with God as we examine our own pursuits, passions, and priorities. Based on the movie *Grace Unplugged*, this study contains a film clip (between three and five minutes) for each session along with sections divided into the following:

**SHARE**—the icebreaker portion that covers the challenge from the previous week and gets participants engaged and talking.

**WATCH**—the film-viewing section with a summary of the scene and questions that promote further discussion and exploration of movie themes.

**STUDY**—the Scripture-soaked section, weaving the Word with the movie motifs, illuminating the struggles in our lives as we see God at work in ourselves and our kids.

**LIVE**—the action step in which we apply what we've learned and challenge ourselves to give our new insight a go in real life.

As you dive into this small-group study, give yourselves a few boundaries to promote health and enjoyment in sharing.

- 1. CONFIDENTIALITY:** The questions in this study are intended to prompt sharing of thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences. All input is to be kept in the strictest confidence; at the same time, no one is to be forced to share.
- 2. RESPECT:** As trust develops and participants offer their experiences—including their mistakes—refrain from jumping in with advice. Commit to being quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). If advice is not requested, do not offer it. Also, be aware of time spent speaking, noting if your input is lengthier than others', as the goal is to allow time for all to share.
- 3. PREPARATION:** Get the most out of this study by coming to group prepared, so you're ready to discuss and learn further from the material.
- 4. ACCOUNTABILITY:** Please attempt to commit to all four weeks, helping yourself and fellow group members grow together.

I, \_\_\_\_\_

*(sign here)*

commit to these principles for a productive,  
congenial small-group study.





# EMPTY PURSUIT

*This section is intended to spark conversation. There are no right answers in this section, so rest easy. Responses should be fairly short.*

Everyone chases something. Whether a dream career, dream car, or dream date, everyone is motivated by something. Depending on the resources available to us, we will go to great lengths—sacrificing relationships and resources—to get what we are after.

Have you ever had anything you just “had to have”? What was it?

Looking back on your childhood, what were the top three things you argued with your parents or guardians about?

Parents have the very trying task of shaping the character of children. During their early years, children push against the authority of their parents on a daily and even moment-by-moment basis in very obvious, sometimes humorous, ways. When my daughter could only crawl, she would swipe something forbidden and then make her best effort at a getaway. While you can't help but be amused, you are also aware that you're viewing your child's pervasive sin nature at work. Shepherding a child's character is incredibly important and rewarding, but perhaps the most exhausting task God will give you.

If you have kids, what are the things that bring out, or brought out, their sin nature—especially selfishness?

VIEW CLIP 1 *from the DVD and use the guide below to discuss it.*



Courtesy of Lionsgate

## Setting the Scene

In this scene from *Grace Unplugged*, Grace is a big hit with the remake of her dad's old song. She basks in the glory of her newfound fame as her first performance ends in the cheers of an adoring crowd.

This scene is followed by two very different interactions with the two father figures in her life. Her manager is proud of her, telling her that she is on her way. The allure of tours, albums, and the glamorous life are now starting to seem possible, and Grace is mesmerized by them. Her dad, on the other hand, is concerned for the road she seems to be heading down. Having been there before, he fears his daughter is getting in over her head.

## Reaction

*This section is intended to bring some of the ideas from the scene to light, setting the stage for your discussion in Luke 15.*

This scene with Grace, her manager, Mossy, and her dad, Johnny, gives a clear picture of each person's agenda. Grace is tired of her dad's overbearing lectures and doesn't care what her dad thinks anymore. Mossy carries the appearance of a friend, while clearly maintaining the

calculating mind of a talent manager. Johnny is convinced his daughter's immaturity is blinding her to seeing things his way and wants to control her actions so they'll be "safe" and "right."

Which character do you relate most to in this scene? Why?

Mossy personifies the enticing promises of Grace's future. Throughout the movie, he tickles Grace's ear with just enough promise of fame to keep her willing to do whatever she needs to do next to "make it." At each point when Grace senses her values being compromised, Mossy offers another hit of fame coming her way. Like a drug, the promise of fame numbs her conscience to what is happening around her.

What causes us to get so wrapped up in an obsession that we can't see the flaws in our pursuit?

Johnny is confronted with his parenting issues of control and fear in this scene, watching his child make a possibly poor decision.

What was good and not so good about the way Johnny handled this conversation?

What makes a parent attempt to control children's behavior even when the child is old enough to make his or her own decisions?

*This section weaves reflections and questions on the scriptural link to the film. The goal is not to get the “right answer” but to interact with the Bible.*

## Context Is Key

Reading the context, or surrounding verses, helps to place the Scripture you are reading inside the broader storyline, shedding light on the intent of the author. Below is a set of three parables Jesus told a crowd of Pharisees and scribes (teachers of the Hebrew law) who were antagonizing Him. This is the passage you will chew on for all four sessions of this study. Let's get acquainted with it.

*Read Luke 15:1-24.*

All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to Him. And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!”

So He told them this parable: “What man among you, who has 100 sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open field and go after the lost one until he finds it? When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’ I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who don't need repentance.

“Or what woman who has 10 silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she finds it, she calls her women friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the silver coin I lost!’ I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents.”

He also said: “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.’ So he distributed the assets to them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a

distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.' So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father told his slaves, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.

#### **LUKE 15:1-24**

The story Jesus tells in Luke 15 is a rich, surprising picture of the message at the core of Christianity.

In this session we will look at the rebellion of a son against his father, highlighted in Luke 15:11-14. The audacity of the son in demanding his inheritance in verse 12 was unheard of in the first-century family. Demanding an inheritance was the equivalent of saying, "Dad, you are dead to me." The son wanted control of his life without his father's authority overshadowing him. Jesus uses this story to teach us about how we act toward God.

In what ways do we do act toward God like the younger son acted toward his father?

As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become useless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.

#### **ROMANS 3:10-12**

This passage in Romans explains a biblical truth illustrated by the younger son in Luke 15. The apostle Paul (the author of Romans) wants us to see that we are all rebels against God—every person. This rebellion is not something only really bad people do. Every single person (with one exception, Jesus Christ) has turned away from God at some point in his or her life. We are by nature and by choice rebels.

What does our “turning away” do to us?

If God is a perfect and loving Father, why do we turn away from Him? What keeps us from living out rationales for turning toward Him?

The most surprising moment in the prodigal’s story is not the son’s audacious request but the father’s response to his request. Leviticus 20:9 basically says you can have a rebellious son like that executed. In *The Cross and the Prodigal* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), author Kenneth

Bailey says, "First century Jewish custom dictated that if a Jewish boy lost the family inheritance among the Gentiles and dared to return home, the community would break a large pot in front of him and cry out, 'So-and-so is cut off from his people.' This ceremony was called the *Kezahah* (literally 'the cutting off'). After it was performed, the community would have nothing to do with the wayward person."

So the father's response is very unexpected.

If your child said these same words to you, what would your initial response be?

What does the father's unexpected response tell you about him?

"But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.  
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow their own counsels."

**PSALM 81:11-12, ESV**

How is it an act of love for God to give them over to their own ways?



## THE GOSPEL TRUTH

The “gospel” is the message that every single human has chosen his or her way over God’s way at some point. This is sin, replacing God’s authority with your own in how you choose to live. We run from the Father and His love until we realize life without Him is empty. The Bible says in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It says the price of that sin is death. Our standing with God is as a rebel declared guilty of treason and sentenced to death apart from God. Any message claiming to be the gospel that does not include the sinfulness of man is incomplete. Sinners are the only ones in need of saving. And we are all of us sinners.

The younger son gathered up everything he had and went out to a foreign land only to flush his inheritance away (interestingly, the son felt he had to go far away to break free from the supervision of the father). When a famine struck, the younger son had nothing; he spent his inheritance on things that could not survive the famine. Jesus calls the son’s lifestyle “foolish” living (v. 13), depicting what a life spent running from God toward our own desires looks like and results in.

How does the empty result of the prodigal’s lifestyle illustrate our own sinfulness?

Have you chased something that seemed like it would fulfill you but left you empty? What happened?

*This section helps you apply the principles discussed to life. Reflect on these questions and write down goals for the challenge at the end of the section.*

Two lenses show us two different perspectives on this story: the lens of the father and the lens of the younger son.

## The Father's Lens

As the parent of young children, I cannot imagine a day in which one of my sons would look at me and tell me he wants nothing to do with me anymore. While we'll never be perfect parents (and God, who is a perfect parent, still deals with rebellious children), we need to beware taking a patronizing approach to shepherding children during their adolescent years. Such an approach can definitely lead to exasperating them instead of inspiring them. While we have the child's best interests at heart, what we often communicate is "Trust me and do what I say." We think we're making headway in relating to our child by saying, "I remember when I was your age ...," but if you will recall, if your parent said that to you, you never knelt and said, "Oh, Mother, please give me more of this wisdom." Nope.

As a teen, I wanted to be my own person and didn't want my parents offering their experiences to dictate my life. Their "helpful" wisdom was just white-noise intrusion to me.

Now that I'm a parent, I'm realizing the following:

- Our children are not ours, but the Lord's. "Salvation is from the LORD" (Jonah 2:9).
- To love as Christ loved is to give them grace in response to their rebellion. At a certain point, we move from controllers to influencers in their choices and actions.

- Talking about the futility of sin is important in parenting, but do it with grace.
- No child is too far gone for God.

## The Younger Son's Lens

Whether we are eighteen or forty-eight, we still wrestle with the desire to pursue our own selfish ambitions. The desire to find our identity in ourselves and not in what God says about us drives us to unwise, detrimental decisions. The only way we ever lay aside our empty pursuits is if we see Christ as more desirable than whatever we are chasing after. Theologian Thomas Chalmers called this “the expulsive power of a new affection.” His thought was that when Christ becomes more attractive than the false promise of an empty pursuit, we realize the futility of chasing after that false promise. Basically, the only way to change our behavior is to change our heart, because the heart always wants what it wants. So when Christ becomes more desirable to us at the heart level, sin loses its attractiveness. Remind yourself of the following truths:

- ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. At some point in some way, we were the younger son.
- There is no place apart from Christ that will satisfy our cravings permanently.
- We are made to worship, so we will worship something. Will it be Christ?

*I am sure, if you are a child of God, you cannot be happy in the world, you cannot be content while leaving Christ, but you are in a miserable way. Grace has spoiled you for the world, and it is of no use your attempting to get comfort out of it. Your only hope of happiness lies Godward.* —Charles Spurgeon

## CHALLENGE

*Apply what you've learned in the session.*

If you have a teenager, consider sharing a time from your past in which you rebelled or chased something that left you empty. Here's the catch: do it proactively. Do not issue a sermon in reaction to something he or she has done. Offer your story during a low stress time, like around the dinner table or on the ride to school or practice. Here's a malleable script to get you started: "I want you to know I'm not perfect. Can I tell you about a time I really messed up? I'm not proud of it, but it's a part of my story. Here's what happened."

This story should be short—say, three minutes long. How detailed and transparent you get should be determined by the age and maturity of your teenager. Conclude with the simple explanation of how you learned that what you were chasing was actually an empty pursuit. Wrap up with "Sometimes I still want to chase things I know are empty. It's an ongoing battle. But I'm glad God is teaching me that He is better than those things. It's tough to keep focused on that wisdom, but I know the good results it brings."