



# GRACE unplugged

## Student Bible Study

based on the feature film

discovering grace  
changes everything





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changes everything

## Student Bible Study

written by Jason Gaston

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

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HOLLYWOOD

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## about the contributors

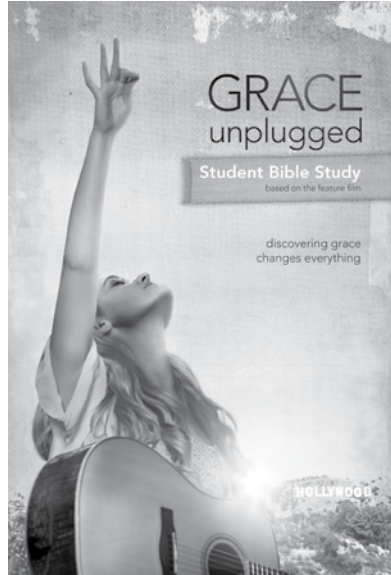
**BRAD J. SILVERMAN** is the writer/director of *Grace Unplugged*. Silverman was on Hollywood's fast track in the mid '90s, with a successful stand-up comedy career and a budding motion-picture resume as an actor, director, writer, and producer, when the Lord saved him. He walked away from the industry 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, *No Greater Love*, as well as co-authored the 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 school fundraising company, Signature Fundraising, which he started while a student at The Master's Seminary. The business took off as Rice felt the call away from full-time ministry, and he caught Hollywood's attention in 2001 by working with major film and television studios making promotional videos for the company. After winning a string of awards and industry notice with those projects, in 2004 Rice started an in-house media division and began employing filmmakers full time. That division grew into Coram Deo Studios in 2007, which produced its first feature, *No Greater Love*, in 2009. Rice also co-authored the companion devotional book. He and his wife, Carina, live in Los Angeles and have five children, four of whom now work for Dad.

**JASON GASTON** is the student pastor at The Summit Church, located in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, and recognized as one of the fastest growing churches in North America. Jason received a Master's degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and has been in full-time student ministry for nine years. Jason's desire is to see a generation of students transformed by the gospel and living out that mission both locally and globally. Jason and his wife, Katie, are the parents of two children: Holt and Annie.

# about the movie

*Grace Unplugged* is an inspirational movie about 18-year-old Christian singer Grace Trey. Beautiful, talented, and restless, Grace is undiscovered outside church, where she performs each Sunday with her gifted father, Johnny. A former rock star, Johnny Trey charted a Billboard number-one single 20 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 the glamour of Hollywood.



One day Johnny's former manager and producer, Frank "Mossy" Mostin, drops by with an offer to reignite Johnny's fame. Johnny says no, but after Mossy leaves, Grace sees an opportunity to step into the spotlight in her father's place. Without warning, 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 and its accompanying disappointments, she recognizes the longing of her soul and moves toward reconciliation. Leaving behind a superficial faith and relentless pursuit of fame, Grace finally embraces the overwhelming love of God. And discovering His grace changes everything.

# about the study

Welcome to The *Grace Unplugged* Student Bible Study. This four-session study is intended to strengthen your relationship with God as you examine your 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 session and gets everyone engaged and talking.
- **WATCH**—the film-viewing section with a summary of the scene and questions that promote further discussion and exploration of 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 in our circumstances.
- **LIVE**—the action step in which we apply what we've learned and challenge ourselves to live it out in real life.

As we dive into this small-group study, we need to consider a few boundaries to promote a healthy environment for 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 sessions, helping yourself and fellow group members grow together.



session one  
**EMPTY  
PURSUITS**





# share

**Have you ever experienced a longing for something you felt you just “had to have”?**

**What was it about that particular object/opportunity/reward that made you want it?**

**Did anyone ever give you a hard time because of your passionate pursuit of it? If so, did their concern/criticism motivate or discourage you in your pursuit? Explain.**





# watch

## Setting the Scene...

The main character in this movie is an 18-year-old girl by the name of Grace Trey. Grace's father, Johnny, was once an aspiring musician with a song at the top of the charts. Now a strong Christian, Johnny seldom thinks of his days as a one-hit wonder. He and his wife have raised Grace in the church, where she has had the opportunity to develop her skill as a talented musician. When we meet her, she is following in her father's footsteps on the worship music team at church, but it's clear that her heart isn't in it. After an unexpected twist, Grace lands a record deal with the help of her father's former manager, Frank Mostin ("Mossy"). For the chance to chase her dreams, Grace seems willing to turn her back on her parents, friends, and even on her faith.

In the scene we are about to watch, Grace has finally hit it big with a remake of the song that made her father famous. Grace seems to have found everything she hoped for in her new life as the crowd goes crazy after Grace's performance. The cheering of the crowd is followed by two very different interactions with the father figures in her life. Her manager is proud of her, telling her she is on her way to stardom. The allure of tours, albums, and the big life is now starting to seem possible and Grace is mesmerized by all of it. Her dad, on the other hand, is concerned about the road she is heading down. Having been there before, he fears his daughter is not ready for all that comes with fame.



## Reaction...

The main characters in this scene are Grace, "Mossy" (her manager), and Johnny (her dad). As the scene plays out, we get a pretty 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 a "whatever it takes" attitude that a talent manager needs to make it in the business. Johnny is convinced his daughter's age and immaturity are blinding her to the potential dangers ahead.

Mossy entices Grace with the promise of a future she has only dreamed about. Throughout the movie he manages to tickle her ear with just enough talk of fame to keep her willing to do whatever it takes to "make it." At each point when Grace starts to sense her values being compromised, Mossy tosses in another dash of the good life coming her way. Like a drug, the promise of fame numbs her conscience to what is happening around her.

**Was Grace wrong to want to live out her dreams?**

**How can an innocent dream become an obsession?**

**What causes people to get so wrapped up in an obsession that they can't see the dangers in their pursuit?**

As children, often our parents or guardians can come across as controlling and overpowering when they attempt to put up boundaries in our lives. One of the hardest things to do as a parent is watch your child make a bad decision that may bring them harm. At the same time, one of the hardest things as a child is to submit to your parents while you feel like they are just trying to control your life.

**What was good and what was not so good about the way Grace reacted to the conversation with her father?**

**Do you think Johnny overreacted by going after Grace? Explain.**

## study



**Parable = a simple \_\_\_\_\_ used to teach a \_\_\_\_\_.**

Jesus told a set of three parables to a crowd of Pharisees and Scribes (teachers of the Hebrew law) who were antagonizing him. This is the passage you will be in for all four sessions of this study. Get familiar with it. Read the entire passage as a group before moving into the focal verses for this session.

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

All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to Him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!"

### **THE LOST SHEEP**

<sup>3</sup> So He told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "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? <sup>5</sup> When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, <sup>6</sup> and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!' <sup>7</sup> 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.

## THE LOST COIN

<sup>8</sup> “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? <sup>9</sup> 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!’ <sup>10</sup> I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels over one sinner who repents.”

## THE LOST SON

<sup>11</sup> He also said: “A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. <sup>15</sup> Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to eat his fill from the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any. <sup>17</sup> 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! <sup>18</sup> I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. <sup>19</sup> I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.’ <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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.’ <sup>22</sup> “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. <sup>23</sup> Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, <sup>24</sup> because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.



## All of us have turned \_\_\_\_\_.

For session one, we will focus our discussion on the parable of the Lost Son found in Luke 15:11-24.

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

**2. Do we all have an attitude of rebellion toward God?**

Read Romans 3:10-12.

<sup>10</sup> As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. <sup>11</sup> There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away; all alike have become useless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.

**3. What does this passage say our “turning away” does to us?**

**4. What might have motivated the younger son to turn away from his father in this story?**

“First-century Jewish custom dictated that if a Jewish boy (rejected the family) 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 kezazah—literally the ‘cutting off’—and after it was performed the community would have nothing to do with this wayward person.”

—Kenneth Bailey, New Testament Scholar <sup>1</sup>

1. Kenneth Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 52–53.

**5. What does the father's response tell you about his character?**

**6. If you were to speak similar words to your parents/guardian, what do you think their reaction would be?**

Read Psalm 81:11-12.

<sup>11</sup> "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. <sup>12</sup> So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels" (ESV).

**7. How was it an act of love for God to "give them over" to follow their own ways in this passage?**

**8. How does this passage relate to the story of the Lost Son in Luke 15?**

The younger son gathered up everything he had and went out to a foreign land only to flush his inheritance down the drain. Jesus calls his lifestyle "foolish" living. The son had to go far away, almost in an act of breaking free from the supervision or influence of the father. He was on his own with his father's money. When a famine struck the land, the younger son realized he had squandered all he had. He was left alone and empty handed. It is important to remember why Jesus was telling this story. He told parables to illustrate a spiritual lesson. He showed us what a life spent running from God looks like and where it ultimately leads us. Our reality today is much like the younger son spiritually. We've traded the riches of God's kingdom for our empty pursuits.

**9. How does the empty result of the younger son's lifestyle illustrate our own sinfulness?**

Read Ecclesiastes 1:14.

I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. (NIV)

**10. How have you personally experienced the emptiness of "chasing after the wind" in your own life?**

**11. How does the plot of *Grace Unplugged* relate to the story of the Lost Son?**

## THE GOSPEL TRUTH

"The Gospel," as it is commonly referred to, is the message that every single human (with one exception, Jesus Christ) has chosen his or her way over God's way. This is sin, replacing God's authority with our own. We run from the Father, who loves us, 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. Romans goes on to say the price of that sin is death. We stand before God as a rebel, declared guilty of treason, and sentenced to death apart from Him. Any message claiming to be the gospel that does not include the sinfulness of man is incomplete. We must recognize our sinfulness in order to see how desperately we need a Savior.





# live

The attraction of self-centered living constantly knocks on our door. The desire to chase after empty pursuits can drive us to make horrific decisions. Regardless of whether we are 16 or 65 years old, the reality is we will always wrestle with our own selfish ambitions. The only way we will ever lay aside our empty pursuits is if we come to the realization that Christ is more desirable than anything we might chase in this world.

A man by the name of Thomas Chalmers called this the “expulsive power of a new affection,” meaning that when Christ becomes more attractive than the false promise of an empty pursuit, one realizes the meaninglessness of chasing after that false promise. Until we see Christ as the ultimate prize and fulfillment of our every longing, the empty promises of lesser pursuits will drive us. When Christ becomes more desirable to us at the core of who we are, sin loses its luster.

## Challenge for the Week...

1. Summarize what you’ve learned during this session in a few sentences. Write those down and put them in a place you will see each day this week.
2. Social Media Challenge:
  - a. Twitter: Tweet one thing you learned during this session and use the hashtag #GRACEUNPLUGGED
  - b. Instagram: Take a picture of the cover of the Bible study. Write out what you learned in the description using the hashtag #GRACEUNPLUGGED
3. Ask someone close to you (a parent, friend, sibling) to point out where you may be blinded to an empty pursuit—it may even be the pursuit of something good that you have turned into an idol in your life.