

**SAVING GRACE**  
**Good News About Grace - Part 1 of 10**  
**Psalm 145:8 (NIV)**  
**Rick Warren**

*"The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love."*  
Ps. 145:8 (NIV)

**WHAT IS GRACE?**

**G** \_\_\_\_\_

*"All of us need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift ... through Jesus Christ." Romans 3:24 (NCV)*

**R** \_\_\_\_\_

*"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 (NIV)*

*"People receive God's promise by having faith. This happens so the promise can be a free gift." Romans 4:16a (NCV)*

**A** \_\_\_\_\_

*"The promise is not only for those people that live under the law of Moses. It is for anyone who lives with faith like Abraham." Romans 4:16b (ICB)*

*"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (NIV)*

**C** \_\_\_\_\_

*"The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John 1:17 (NCV)*

*"... many people have received God's gift of life by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ." Romans 5:15b (NCV)*

*"[Don't] treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die." Gal. 2:21 (NLT)*

## E

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*"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23 (NLT)*

*"The Lord longs to be gracious to you." Isa. 30:18*

How will I Respond to God's Saving Grace?

The rest of the series:

Restoring Grace - How God wipes out guilt and helps you start over.

Sustaining Grace - How God gives you the power to keep on going.

Healing Grace - How God does miracles in your life.

Liberating Grace - How to break free from perfectionism.

Assuring Grace - How to defeat your doubts.

Offering Grace - How to extend God's grace to others.

Growing in Grace - How to become what you are meant to be.

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Complete these common American phrases for me:

If it sounds too good to be true... it is.  
We make money the old fashion way, we ... earn it.  
There's no such thing as a free ... lunch.  
There is no gain without ... pain.  
God helps those who ... help themselves.

Everything about the American way of life teaches us that you get what you earn in life, that there is no free lunch, that you make your bed and then you lay in it. In America we are very aware of the values of competition and winning and we know what it means to work hard and use elbow grease. We value effort and sweat. We tell people, "You get what you deserve in life" and "If you want to make something of your life it's up to you" and "If it is to be, it's up to me".

This is called the American work ethic. The only problem with the American work ethic is God doesn't operate on the American work ethic. It makes it difficult many times for us to relate to God because we're in this driven work mentality.

The problem is Psalm 145:8. It tells us that God, rather than being in a work ethic mode, it says, "*God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.*" Circle "gracious".

The Bible says God is a gracious God. That means He loves to be gracious to you. God loves to bless people who don't deserve it. That's His nature. Aren't you glad for that? I'm glad that God blesses people who don't deserve it.

You can't understand the Christian life at all unless you understand grace. It is the heart of our faith. It is the heart of our relationship to God. When you understand grace you're going to feel closer to God. The more you understand grace the more you're going to be drawn to God, the more you're going to love God, the more you're going to be grateful to God. It is by that system of grace that God brings us to Himself.

Today, we're beginning a new series. I'm calling it "Good News About Grace". What is grace? Grace is a multi-faceted diamond. There are many aspects to it. There is no single definition to describe what grace is all about.

One definition of grace is "God's love in action." Another definition: "God giving me what I need, not what I deserve." One of my favorite definitions is, "Grace is the face God wears when He looks at my failures." And He responds in a gracious way.

You need to understand the difference between grace and mercy. Mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve -- punishment. Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve -- blessing.

## SAVING GRACE

### Good News About Grace - Part 1 of 10

I know many of you probably think you understand grace. You are saved by grace. You've known that for many years. But I've discovered that even many Christians, although they know they're saved by grace sure don't act like it. In fact, they spend most of their life thinking and acting like we're saved by works. For many of you, even though you know you're saved by grace and you don't get into heaven by doing good, your entire life is built on pleasing God by trying to be perfect. And you think God is some unpleasable parent up there in the sky with a clipboard and pen watching your every move -- "That was good... that was bad" -- and you think you have to earn God's approval. You think if you do a certain number of good works God's going to say, "Good girl... good guy! You got it." And if you don't do those things, God says, "Forget it! You're worthless." You're saved by grace but you're actually living by works.

When you really understand grace it's going to bring so much joy to your life. It is the most liberating thing in the world. You can be a Christian for twenty, thirty years and never really learn to live by grace. So we're going to do a series on it. My goal is that through this series, you will not just understand grace but you will experience it, you will feel it, you will enjoy the grace of God in your life. Because it does bring so much joy.

There are many expressions of Grace. Next week we're going to look at Restoring Grace -- How God wipes out your guilt and helps you start over. Then we're going to look at Sustaining Grace -- How God gives you the power to keep on going when you want to give up. We're going to look at Healing Grace -- How does God do miracles in your life. Then we're going to look at Liberating Grace -- How to break free from perfectionism. We're going to look at Assuring Grace -- How to defeat your doubts. Then we're going to look at Offering Grace -- How to extend God's grace to others. Then Growing in Grace -- How to become what you're meant to be.

Today I want us to start with the foundation, which is Saving Grace. We're going to dramatize it with some skits with the help of Ted and Nancy. For many of you this will be a review. You understand Saving Grace. But you cannot build a structure without the foundation. And this is foundational. I think it's good periodically that we sit back and remind ourselves what a good deal we got when we received the grace of God.

Today I want us to look at five aspects of Saving Grace. How is it you know for sure you're going to heaven when you die. I built this around an acrostic -- G.R.A.C.E.

This reminds me of a story of a professor who went to Yale University and decided he would speak on "What is a Yale student?" He said, "I'm going to use an acrostic Y.A.L.E." and he spoke on four attributes of a Yale student. They're Young, they're Adventurous, they're Loyal, they're Enthusiastic. But he went an hour and a half on this little four letter acrostic. It wore out the crowd. By the time it was over, he looked down at the student on the front row and said, "What did you think of my speech?" The kid said, "I was just thanking God I didn't go to Massachusetts Institute of Technology!"

I promise you that my GRACE acrostic isn't going to take that long.

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#### G - GOD'S GIFT TO ME.

Romans 3:24 *"All of us need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift through Jesus Christ."* It's a free gift. Because of this American work ethic I was just talking about, many people think that they're saved by works, by earning their way to heaven, by being good enough that God says, "OK, come on in."

If you were to ask fifty to a hundred people along the sidewalk "How do you get to heaven?" you'd get a lot of different answers. But basically they would all be summarized in, "You've got to earn your way to heaven. You'd hear things like, "The way you get to heaven is you try to be good and do your best" or "Work real hard at being good and just try to be a good, moral person" or "Do more good things in life than you do bad things in life and if your good pile is higher than your bad pile, God's going to say, `You're a good guy. Come on in.'" It's all based on works, not grace.

You need to understand that God says here that salvation is absolutely free. Circle "free gift". You don't work for a gift. It's a free gift. God says salvation is absolutely free. You can't earn it, you can't earn it, you can't buy it, you can't work for it.

This is the fundamental difference between Christianity and every other religion. Every other faith, every other belief system, I don't care if it's Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. You can summarize every religion in one word. Of all the other religions, Christianity is the only religion that's built on grace. That says God just gives you salvation. You don't do anything to earn it. Every other religion is based on works and you can summarize them in one word -- "do". There are certain things you do in order to gain God's approval. It varies. Each system is different. One religion says do "these" things, another "these" things. You do certain things in order to gain bliss, gain heaven, gain God's approval. It's always something you have to do. Rules, regulations, rituals, etc.

On the other hand, if you were to summarize Christianity in one word, it's the word "done". It's already been done for you. It was done on the cross by Jesus Christ. He paid for your salvation. He paid for your sins. It's already been done.

I had a guy ask me one time, "Pastor Rick, What can I do to be saved?" I was just playing with him and I said, "You're too late!" That kind of shocked him. "You're about 2000 years too late! What needed to be done for your salvation has already been done and you can't do anything about it."

Jesus Christ already did it. He paid for your salvation on the cross and now it's a free gift to you. That's why Jesus Christ, when He was hanging on the cross stretched out His arms and one of the things He said was *"It is finished."* He didn't say, "I am finished" because He wasn't. He's still alive today. He resurrected Himself. He said, *"It is finished."* What's the "it"? Your salvation. The plan to provide grace for every person who needs it. It's finished. God says, "Here it is. It's a free gift."

There isn't anything you can do to save yourself. You just accept God's free gift of grace.

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I'm not getting to heaven based on what I do. I'm getting to heaven based on what has already been done for me by Jesus Christ.

That's the greatest gift you're ever going to be offered. You're never going to get a better deal than that. If you really understand grace, you will accept it because it is a priceless gift in your life. It's God's gift to me.

### **R - RECEIVE BY FAITH**

God's gift is received by faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says *"For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith [circle this] and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works so that no one can boast."* Faith is the key that unlocks the door to heaven.

It's just a gift but you have to receive it by faith. If I have a gift for you and say, "Here's this gift for you. It's \$100. Come and get it." It will just sit there unless you come and receive it by faith. You have to have faith that I'm going to give it to you.

He says because salvation is a gift, you can't brag about it. If you could work your way to heaven, do you realize how miserable it would be in heaven? Everybody would be bragging by how they got there. We'd all be trying to "one up" each other with great stories of what great people we were on earth. God says, "It's a grace gift, your salvation. I just give you forgiveness free. I give you heaven free." So what do you do with a gift. You can't brag about it. You can only accept it and be grateful for it.

Romans 4:16 *"People receive God's promise [circle "promise"] by having faith.* [This is the promise of salvation.] *This happens so that the promise can be a free gift."* Salvation isn't based on my performance. It's based on God's promise. It's not based on my goodness. It's based on God's grace. I'm getting to heaven not based on my merit but God's mercy. That's why He gets all the credit, all the glory. There's nothing I can do. It's a free gift that's received by faith.

The Bible is full of stories illustrating the principle of grace. There are many of them. One of my favorites is in the Old Testament. 2 Samuel 9 is a story of a young disabled boy named Mephibosheth. How would you like to have that name? They probably called him Fibby for short! Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the grandson of King Saul in the Old Testament.

Remember the story of David and Saul. David was going to be the king. Saul was the current king and Saul was jealous of David. So most of David's life, Saul was trying to kill him. He chased him all over the countryside. David spent most of his time hiding from Saul, avoiding being killed out of jealousy. But David never retaliated. In fact, he became best friends with King Saul's son, named Jonathan. They made a secret covenant that if either of them ever died they would take care of each other's family. Later on both Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle. And David became the king. All of Saul's relatives immediately were in fear thinking, "David, who King Saul has been trying to kill all of his life, is now in control and he's going to kill all of us." They all tried to escape and hide.

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One of them was the son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth. As the nurse was carrying the young boy out in the escape, she dropped him. His legs were broken and he became a paraplegic. So here was this young disabled boy living in fear, frightened for his life that the man who was now king would retaliate against him.

One day David says, "Is there anybody still alive in Saul's household that I can show kindness to?" (Grace) They said, "Yes, there is. There's one little kid. He's a disabled little boy named Mephibosheth. He cannot walk." David said, "Bring him to me." You can imagine the fear in Mephibosheth's heart. Here's the king, inviting him to the court and he's thinking, "I'm going to be killed, executed. It's over. It's done." But to his surprise when he arrived, David said, "I'm going to take you in, Mephibosheth, and make you a part of my family. I want you to live here in the palace for the rest of my life. I'm going to pay all your bills. I'm going to meet all your needs. You are to sit at my table each night and dine with me and I'm going to treat you just like you're one of my own sons." That's grace.

The Bible says that God comes to us and we're broken, we're disabled in areas of our lives, crippled in some areas. Our emotions are crippled or other things are happening in our lives and God comes and says, "I'm going to bring you into My family. I want you to sit at My table. I'm going to treat you like royalty, one of My own, simply out of My grace."

Remember the story that Jesus told of the prodigal son? There was a man who had two sons. One of them got a little anxious and was independent spirited. He came and said, "Dad, I want you to give me my half of the inheritance." And the dad said ok. He split the future inheritance and gave half to the one son right then and the kid took off. He skipped town, went over to Sunset Strip in Jerusalem, started partying. He's having a great time -- wine, women and song, living it up, blowing all the money. One day he runs out of money and there's no ATM's in Jerusalem. He hits bottom morally, spiritually, financially -- every way possible. In fact, he ended up having to work feeding pigs in a pig sty and he was so hungry that he would eat the food that the pigs were eating.

You know that the Jewish people don't eat pork so that was about as low as you could go -- living with a pig and eating a pig's food. Culturally, he couldn't get more degraded. One day, while he's in this mess, the younger son says, "What am I doing!?! My father's servants are treated better than this. I think I'm going to go home. I'm going to go back to Dad and say, 'Dad, I've blown it. I've made a mistake. I'm sorry. I don't deserve to be called your son any more. Just make me one of your hired servants and I will work for you as a servant, not as a son, the rest of my life because your servants are treated better than I was out in the world.'" The story goes that as the prodigal son was coming home the father saw him from a long way off. It says he ran out to greet the boy. He grabs him in a big bear hug and hugs him and embraces him. He didn't wait for him to get cleaned up, to get that smell of the pigs off him. He hugs him and says, "Bring out the royal robes. Bring out some jewelry. Let's give him the official family ring. Let's party! My son has come home." That's grace. The kid deserved condemnation. The kid deserved to be judged, rejected, a lecture from the dad saying, "I told you so!" But instead, he's received with love, unconditional love. That is the grace of God and it's received by faith.

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#### **A - AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE**

God doesn't play favorites. Regardless of your background, regardless of your status, regardless of your sin. It doesn't matter whether you've been a religious person or a non religious person or you have any religious background at all. Romans 14:16 *"The promise is not only for those people that live under the law of Moses. It is for anyone who lives with faith like Abraham."* Who are these people who live under the law of Moses? the Jews. The Jewish people were given the law of Moses. Moses was their leader. They were given the ways of God to do the right thing before the rest of us were given them.

Have you ever thought about why the Jews were called God's chosen people? Does God love them more than He loves the rest of us? No. They were chosen for a purpose. They were chosen to spread the message to everybody else, to tell the world that there is one true God. That's what they were chosen for. They were kind of like the missionaries to the rest of us.

Now God has taken that task and given it to the church which includes Jews, Gentiles and everybody else who put their faith in Christ. God says it's available to anybody who opens up their heart in faith. *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Circle "everyone". There are no quotas in heaven. It doesn't say only really good people will be saved if they call on the name of the Lord, really religious people, really smart people. No. It says anybody. Anybody who calls on the name of the Lord, who has faith in the grace of God will be saved.

The sad thing is that even though many people know that God offers His grace, His unconditional gift to us, they still try to work their way to heaven. They think that something in their lives is making them good enough that they don't need to receive God's gift of grace through Christ.

You may have done some really nifty things in life, but if you think they're going to get you into heaven, forget it. Heaven is perfect and you're not. The only way you're going to get in is by receiving God's gift to you, receiving it by faith which is available to every person.

#### **C - GRACE COMES THROUGH CHRIST.**

John 1:17 *"The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* Why through Jesus Christ? Why is Jesus Christ the only way to heaven? Why not Buddha? Why not somebody else? Why Jesus Christ?

Because He paid the price of admission. He's already paid for your salvation. Nobody else has done that one. On the cross, He paid for your sins.

Grace is free, no doubt about that. But it is not cheap. It cost Jesus Christ His life. He paid for your ticket.

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The law tells me when I do wrong. It says, "You blew it!" But Grace says, "Here's how to get back on track. You're forgiven. Let's get going in the right direction."

Romans 5:15 *"Many people have received God's gift of life by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ."* In the Bible, the favorite description for someone who has grace, who's accepted God's grace, the favorite description for a believer, is the term "in Christ." That phrase, "in Christ", is used over 120 times in the New Testament. It refers to somebody who has found salvation through the grace of God, being in Christ.

Let me explain it to you like this. This card represents my life and let's let the Bible represent Jesus Christ. In my life there are a lot of things I've done wrong, that disqualify me to live in a perfect place like heaven. There are things in my life that have ripped up my life, the things that I have done wrong, the things that I'm ashamed of that I don't want you or anybody else to know about in my past and I wish I could do them over. There are things that have really hurt me deeply where I've hurt others and they've hurt me. Sins that I've committed, thoughts I've thought, actions that have been hurtful to other people. In many ways I've ripped up my life and allowed others to rip it up too. Then there are things in my life that I've done that I'm really ashamed of and I just made a total mess of my life. I look at that messed up, broken, damaged, scared life and I think, "There's no chance of this getting into heaven. It's certainly not perfect."

But the Bible says that Jesus Christ takes my life with all the scars, with all the tatters, with all the mistakes, with all the guilty things in my life and the Bible says that when I come to Jesus Christ and I say, "Jesus Christ, I open my life up to You and I want to accept Your free gift of salvation" then God puts me in Christ.

When I'm in Christ, can you see my imperfections? Can you see the things that I'm ashamed of? Can you see the things that have ripped up my life and other people? All you can see when I'm in Christ, is Christ. When God takes my life and all the pieces of it that are kind of messed up -- really messed up -- and He puts me in the life of Christ. I get into heaven on Christ's ticket. When He looks at me with eyes of grace He only see the perfection of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:21 *"Don't treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, [by doing good] then there was no need for Christ to die."* If you could be saved and could get to heaven on your own merits, the cross was a waste. If you could have gotten to heaven without any help from God, Jesus wouldn't have come and died on the cross for you. He wouldn't waste Himself like that. But there was no other way. You're either going to get into heaven in Christ, or you're not going.

It's a free gift. You just accept it in faith. Grace is all that God does for me because of what Jesus Christ did for me on the cross. Another acrostic of GRACE is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. It comes through Christ and only through Christ.

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#### E - IT IS EXTENDED THROUGHOUT ETERNITY

Romans 6:23 *"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."* Circle "eternal life". The results of God's grace are going to go on and on forever. Eternal life is one of the benefits of grace. Eternal life. You could say that grace is the gift that keeps on giving. God saves the best for last and the best is yet to come. With Jesus Christ it just keeps getting better and better. The Bible says the free gift of God is eternal life in heaven.

Have you ever thought of what is heaven really going to be like? The Bible tells us that heaven is going to be like four things.

1. A place of reunion where we are reunited with other loved ones who have accepted the grace of God.
2. It's going to be a place of reward. We are rewarded for the character that we developed and the way we served other people here on earth.
3. It's going to be a place where we are reassigned to do new work that we like to do based on our SHAPE. Based on how God has gifted us, we will be given new assignments that we love to do.
4. It's going to be a place of release where we're free from all pain, all suffering, all sadness, all sorrow, all grief, all depression, all loneliness, etc.

It's going to be a wonderful place. And it is the gift of God.

There's one catch: You have to accept it. If you get a gift and you don't unwrap it, it's a worthless gift. You need to realize that Jesus Christ makes this grace gift available to everybody but it is also customized specifically for your life, because God knows exactly what you need.

One of the most brilliant people I've ever met is Peter Drucker, 90 years old, father of American management. Everything he writes is printed in the Wall Street Journal. He's written dozens and dozens of books that are textbooks. A brilliant man. He's been a mentor to me for a number of years. I asked Peter one day, "How did you become a Christian?" He said, "When somebody first explained grace to me, I realized I was never going to get a better deal."

You're never going to get a better deal that we've talked about today. Open your life to the grace of God through Jesus Christ. It's your only hope and it's free.

I know you may be thinking, "If I come to God with all the ways I've messed up my life, God's going to give me some big lecture. I'm going to feel condemned. I'm going to feel judged. In fact, I'm not going to feel good at all. If I come to Christ, I'll just get all this rebuke and reproof and feel bad because I know how many times I've blown it and God's going to say, 'I told you so!'"

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If you think that, you're sadly mistaken. That's what grace is all about. Jesus says, "Come to Me!"

In the Bible there's the story of a woman who had numerous moral failures. Numerous. She'd slept around with anybody and everybody. She had what you'd call a reputation. A real reputation! In fact, one day some religious leaders actually caught her in the act, in bed with somebody, and brought her to Jesus and threw her on the ground in front of Christ expecting Him to condemn her. "What are you going to do about this woman who's violated all kinds of principles of God?" Jesus defended her dignity. He protected her. In front of the whole crowd He said, "All right. Anybody who's here without sin, you can cast the first stone." Of course since there was no one in the crowd who was perfect they all began to slowly walk away. Then in the privacy of that one on one encounter, Jesus looked at this woman who was filled with guilt and said, "Where are your condemners." She said, "They've all gone, Lord." Jesus said to her two very profound things, "*Neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more.*" That's all He said. No long lecture. No big lesson. He just said, "*Neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more.*" Jesus said, "*I didn't come to condemn the world. I came to save it.*" If you are expecting to come to Christ and be filled with a whole bunch of condemnation, you missed the boat. You haven't heard the story. You don't understand grace. Come to Christ.

In fact, the Bible says this. Isaiah 30:18 "*The Lord longs to be gracious to you.*" God wants to be gracious to you. It is His nature to bless undeserving people. He's waiting for you to accept His grace. He enjoys being gracious. He's not mad at you. His heart's broken for you but He wants you to come home.

Does grace just mean that I can accept God's gift and keep on living any way that I want to? thumbing my nose to God? Of course not.

There are two very profound statements. He said, "I don't condemn you." And then He says, "Now just stop doing it. Go and sin no more. Let Me help you change." He's not saying, "Just keep on doing whatever's destroying your life, whatever's opposing the laws of God." He just said, "*Go and sin no more.*"

God's amazing grace is available right here and right now. Today. That's why He brought you here. You're not here by accident. He brought you here. If you have never received that saving grace gift, what are you waiting on?

Prayer:

In the coming weeks we're going to look at God's Restoring Grace, His Sustaining Grace, His Healing Grace, but first you've got to settle the foundation of Saving Grace. Why don't you pray this prayer in your heart? "Dear God, I realize that I can never be perfect enough to earn a place in Your perfect heaven. I realize that the only way I'll get in is by Your grace. Forgive me for thinking that I could be good enough. Forgive me for my pride that thinks I can earn my way into heaven. Thank You that You give me what I need, not what I deserve. Thank You for Your forgiveness and I ask for it today. Jesus Christ, thank You for paying for my salvation on the cross. By faith, I accept Your grace today. I want You to guide my life from this day forward. In Your name I pray. Amen."