

CITY ON A HILL

GRACE
IS GREATER





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This Leader's Guide is designed to help you and your small group understand and experience the grace of God. What is it? How does it come to us? In what sense does it overcome our past? Why does it challenge us? How does it transform and renew us? What makes it brighten our future with God?

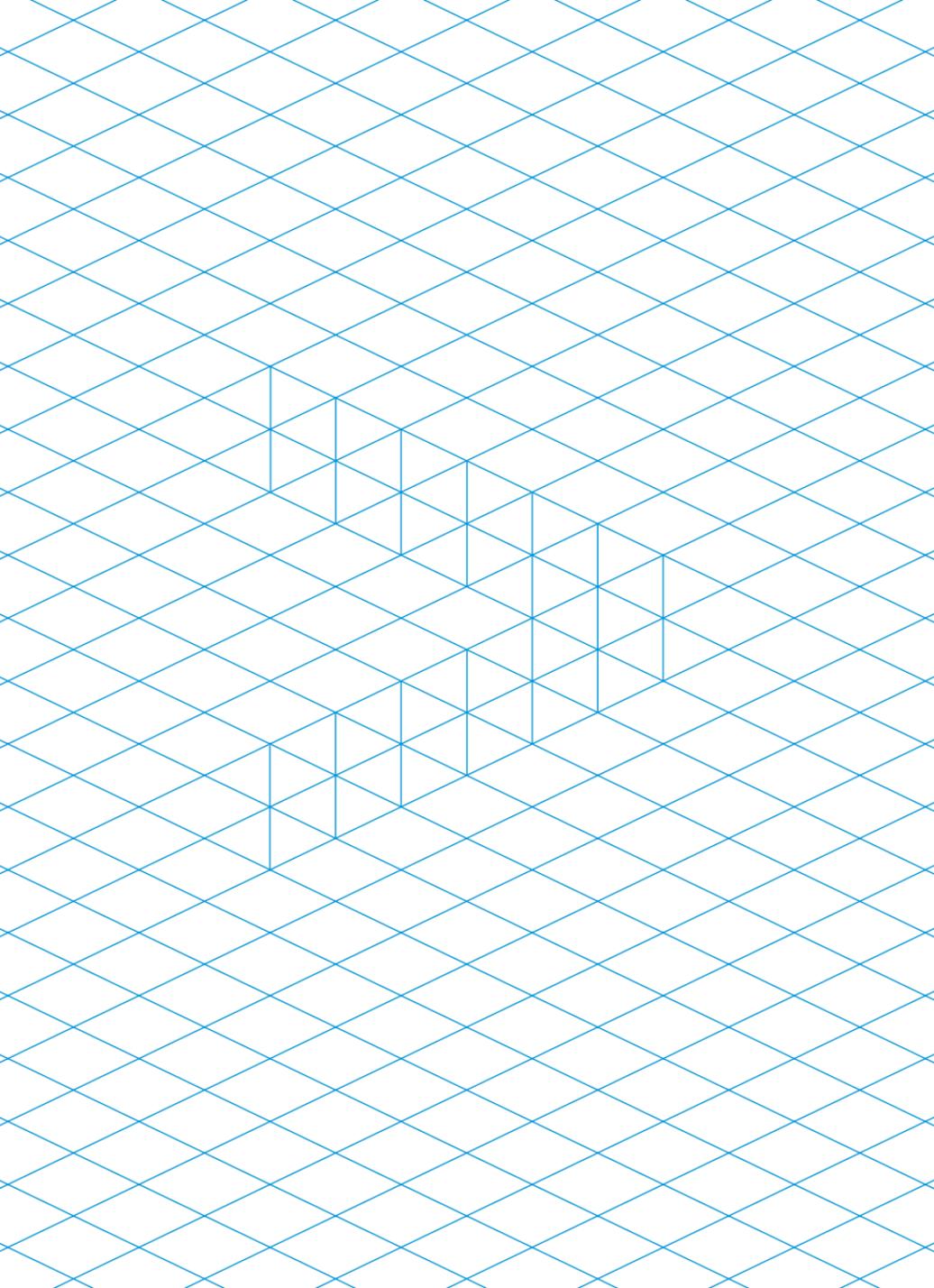


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GRACE.

It's a familiar word. Whether you've been a Christian for several decades or only a few weeks, you've likely come across the word "grace" in the Scriptures, in your local church and among other believers. But you've probably also heard of grace in many other contexts as well — showing grace to others is a familiar concept even outside the church.

But do you really understand grace?

More importantly, have you fully experienced the grace of God?

Simple definitions of grace may include phrases like "undeserved favor" or "complete forgiveness." But grace is a rich and significant theme throughout the Scriptures, and with study and reflection, we can develop a thorough vocabulary of grace — as well as a personal familiarity with God's grace.



This Leader's Guide is designed to help you and your small group understand and experience the grace of God. What is it? How does it come to us? In what sense does it overcome our past? Why does it challenge us? How does it transform and renew us? What makes it brighten our future with God?

In his opening remarks, Pastor Kyle Idleman quotes Hebrews 12:15:

**“SEE TO IT THAT
NO ONE MISSES
THE GRACE OF
GOD.”**

It's easy to miss the grace of God, and the results are tragic. Apart from grace, we remain spiritually dead. Apart from grace, we experience guilt (the consequences of our sin) and shame (feeling unlovable as a result of our sin). Apart from grace, we are overwhelmed with brokenness (the results of living in a fallen world) and woundedness (the effects of others' sins against you). Apart from grace, we are weak — we lack God's power for everyday life.

See, grace changes all this. God's grace is his lavish acceptance as us, just as we are, through the person and work of his son. Grace is God saying, "You are fully accepted; you are my son, my daughter." Grace means there's nothing to hide, nothing to prove and nothing to lose. Grace means the pressure's off.

In other words:

Grace is greater than your sin.

Grace is greater than your guilt and shame.

Grace is greater than your brokenness and woundedness.

Grace is greater than your weakness.

GRACE IN EPHESIANS

To help you and your group understand and experience the grace of God, we'll be focusing on a short passage of Scripture. Along with the videos and Study Journal, this text from the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church will give us a depth of insight and open us up to a life-changing encounter with God's outrageous, astonishing grace.

Paul writes:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

- EPHESIANS 2:1-10

GRACE: A SYLLABUS

To get the most of this “Grace is Greater” experience, we recommend committing to a journey of five weeks (with an optional sixth week to watch the documentary, see p.65). Over five weeks, you and your small group will have time to watch five videos, study Scripture together, complete the Study Journal, and even read the entire book. To help you, you’ll find in this Leader’s Guide a few short instructions to you, the leader, written out in italics during each week.

The Study Journal will enable your group to get the most out of the video series. Designed as a 28-day devotional journey, the journal connects the message of “Grace is Greater” to a deep study of Ephesians 2:1-10. Each day provides grace-centered devotional content and thoughtful discussion questions and exercises. Your group members will bring more to share and deeper reflections when using the Study Journal with this Leader’s Guide.

If you are *reading* “Grace is Greater” along with this study, consider reading the corresponding chapters each week.

If you are *watching* the Grace is Greater Series, complete Week 1 after watching Episode 1, Week 2 after Episode 2, etc.

BOOK	JOURNAL	SERIES
		Episode 1
Intro, Chapter 1	Week 1	Episode 2
Chapters 2-3	Week 2	Episode 3
Chapters 4-7	Week 3	Episode 4
Chapters 8-10	Week 4	Episode 5



LEADING YOUR GROUP

As you prepare to lead your group through this series on the astonishing grace of God, it's normal to feel nervous or underqualified. But remember: The primary qualification for leading this group discussion is simply a desire to more deeply experience God's grace yourself.

Along the way, you may find that the grace of God works twofold: It convicts us of sin and reminds us of our complete salvation. It reveals hidden guilt and wounds and provides the cure.

The life-changing grace of God must disrupt a few things within our souls to truly take root. Don't be surprised if your group members open up about new struggles through tears and describe raw pains below the surface. This is grace at work!

When someone in your group shares a deep hurt, struggles to receive grace or resists sharing in depth, consider a few quick principles.

1. EXPECT DIFFICULT PEOPLE.

We know that everyone is sinful, but it still surprises us, doesn't it? There will always be difficult people. Remember: Difficult people aren't problems to fix, they're people to love. (Chuck DeGroat, *Toughest People to Love: How to Understand, Lead, and Love the Difficult People in Your Life — Including Yourself*.)

2. RECOGNIZE STAGES OF MATURITY.

You may have significant diversity in your group — old and young, married and unmarried, all different personality types and interests. Within a single group, you may have five different seasons of life and varying stages of maturity. Whether you're dealing with the new believer or the struggling Christian or the quick learner, remember to give grace to each where he or she is at.

3. EMBRACE THE COMPLEXITY.

People are anything but straightforward. The same person in your group can be outgoing and silent, generous and critical, fruitful and foolish — all depending on the circumstances. This is not unusual; it's human nature. Don't rush to conclusions if someone is struggling; situations are often more complex than they seem.

4. REMEMBER YOUR ROLE.

If you're the leader of a small group, there's a good chance you — like me — have a genuine desire to solve others' problems or hold their lives together. But you and I can't change anyone. Our role is to create an environment of grace where God can change people.



5. START WITH GRACE.

Several Christian authors describe the process of how people change (Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know.*):

GRACE + TRUTH + TIME (IN RELATIONSHIP) = CHANGE

We create an environment of grace and expect sinners like us to be present. But even when someone is missing the truth, the first word out of our mouths should likely be one of grace. It's a miracle of God every time someone admits sin or lets others into their suffering. We don't exist to judge one another; we exist to point one another to the grace of God. When we have given grace, we can speak God's truth to one another in love (Ephesians 4:15). But this takes time and patience. All these are necessary for true spiritual change.

ASKING GREAT QUESTIONS

When you gather with your group, a familiar and structured pattern of discussion should prove fruitful. After a period of fellowship and settling in, each week will follow a rhythm of conversation and instruction that enables self-discovery, personal application and deep meditation on God's Word.

The basic flow of these questions mirrors the work of grace in our hearts. The approach is gentle, meeting us where we really are. Therefore, we will begin with a soft opening question and prayer. Then we must learn the biblical truths — we'll seek to learn the Scriptures through a Scripture reading, the teaching video, and basic questions covering content and meaning.

Understanding truth is essential, but God's Word is meant to then be experienced and practiced. In the section Meditation and Application, the goal is transformation through deep reflection and personal application. This provides the space for the Holy Spirit to root the truth of Scripture deep in our hearts. To end the group meeting, we'll recognize that focusing on application requires us to put a new reality into practice right away. We'll finish in prayer, committing the discussion and all its discoveries to God.

OPENING QUESTION

You may choose to alter the opening question to fit your group's dynamics. But keep it simple and lighthearted. Starting with "What's your darkest sin?" or "Who can describe the basic themes of the book of Ephesians?" can be off-putting. Start instead with a question that's easy to answer. For a new or shy person in the group, speaking the first time is the hardest. But speaking up early on a simple question enables them to share more deeply later. If you create your own opening question, choose a simple, open-ended question that connects to the week's theme without getting too far ahead.



SCRIPTURE READING

Prior to starting the video, take a few minutes to read the assigned passage — a portion from Ephesians 2. Don't worry about explaining too much at this point. The goal is to have the biblical themes of grace in the background as you watch the video; you'll dive in later.

OPENING PRAYER

Prior to starting the video, say a short prayer to commit the time to the Lord. Consider having this prayer — or any other portion — led by another group member to help share the leadership load.

VIDEO

Before each group gathering, test the appropriate video and familiarize yourself with it. The videos are short and practical and should foster immediate reflection and discussion.

CONTENT AND MEANING

After reading the Scripture and watching the video, you will begin to help one another understand their content and meaning. Here, we are simply asking questions like, “What does it say?” and “What does it mean?” The questions under the heading Content and Meaning will help you reflect on the passage along these lines.

MEDITATION AND APPLICATION

Once your group understands the content and meaning of the passage and video, you'll have a conversation that reaches a deeper level. The goal here is not information but transformation.

We read and reflect not merely to learn. We read and reflect to experience. The God of the universe — the God of grace — invites you to get to know him personally through his Word. In Meditation and Application, you're going to be asking questions like, "What does it mean for me to obey this passage today?" and "How can I love and enjoy God more as a result of these truths?"

You may want to adapt these questions to the specific needs of your group. You are encouraged to do this! If you do so, be sure to ask open-ended questions like, "How is God inviting you to respond?" as opposed to yes/no questions like, "Do you believe that God's grace is enough?" Seek to open up deep reflection on God's Word, and you'll have honest, practical application as a result.

STUDY JOURNAL

Prior to wrapping up the gathering, encourage group members to read ahead for next week in the Study Journal. As you journey through the Study Journal together as a group, you will better understand and apply God's grace, and your



relationships will grow deeper.

PRAYER

Take a few minutes to allow several members to pray aloud. Members can pray words of gratitude for deep truths, pray for pressing situations and pray for one another.

EXPERIENCING GRACE YOURSELF

One last reminder: As you lead your group through this study, don't forget to experience grace yourself! Often we really only learn something when we have the responsibility of organizing and teaching it. Think of this not as a burden but an opportunity: Go as deeply into God's grace as you can, and surely others will benefit as well.

Remember that the message of this study speaks directly to you as a leader. God's grace means that you don't have to be a perfect leader. You don't have to pull it together and get it right. You won't be a failure in God's eyes. Simply bring an expectant heart before the Lord and your group, and watch grace do the heavy lifting.

When you feel yourself discouraged by silence, overwhelmed with others' struggles, or disappointed by an "off night" in your group, remember: Grace always has the final word. Trust the Lord and enjoy the process. ■



THE MORE I RECOGNIZE
THE UGLINESS OF MY
SIN, THE MORE I CAN
APPRECIATE THE BEAUTY
OF GOD'S GRACE.

KYLE IDLEMAN



WEEK 1 | INTRODUCTION



WEEK 1

This week, we are starting a new study called Grace is Greater. Each week, we'll watch and discuss a short video, read through a passage of Scripture from the book of Ephesians, and discuss how grace overcomes the many challenges in our lives.

Before we begin with the Scripture and video, let's start with an easy question.

OPENING QUESTION

> **HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE "GRACE"?** WHAT'S THE FIRST THING THAT COMES INTO YOUR MIND?

READING

Each week, we'll focus on a portion of Ephesians 2 along

with the video lesson. Ephesians is one of the letters the apostle Paul wrote to the church shortly after Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension back into heaven. In this letter, he is reminding the Ephesian church of the most important aspects of Christianity and what that means for their everyday lives.

We'll read this passage twice tonight. As you read or hear it aloud, try to understand what Paul was writing, and you may want to jot down a few notes in your Study Journal or own notebook.

> WOULD SOMEONE VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10?

SCRIPTURE READING

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

— EPHESIANS 2:1-10

OPENING PRAYER

Let's take a moment to pray together that this time of study and discussion will be helpful.

Sample Prayer:

Father, thank you for this opportunity to gather in the midst of a busy week. Thank you for everyone here and for how you're working in each of our lives in many unseen ways. Please give us insight into your Word as we gather. Teach us so that we not only understand your grace but truly experience and practice it in our lives.

Amen.

VIDEO

This week's video is about 12 minutes long. We'll watch it together silently, and then we'll discuss it.



PLAY EPISODE 1: INTRODUCTION



CONTENT AND MEANING

Let's start with a few questions about Kyle's teaching and Ephesians 2.

> WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR SOMEONE TO “MISS THE GRACE OF GOD” (HEBREWS 12:15)? IN WHAT WAY COULD A BELIEVER KNOW ABOUT GOD’S GRACE BUT STILL MISS IT EXPERIENTIALLY?

“WHEN WE MISS GRACE, LIFE BECOMES TOXIC.”

- KYLE IDLEMAN

> WHAT’S THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MISSING GRACE AND EXPERIENCING THE POISONOUS EFFECTS OF ANGER AND BITTERNESS, GUILT AND SHAME?

> ACCORDING TO EPHESIANS 2:1-3, WHAT MIGHT BE SOME OF THE SYMPTOMS OF BEING DEAD IN SIN? WHAT DOES SPIRITUAL LIFELESSNESS LOOK LIKE?

> READ EPHESIANS 2:4-5 AGAIN. HOW DOES PAUL DESCRIBE CHRIST’S WORK IN OUR LIVES?

> HOW CAN IT BE THAT GOD'S GRACE DOESN'T JUST CANCEL OUT OUR SIN OR OUR HURTS BUT IS ACTUALLY MUCH GREATER THAN THEM?

MEDITATION AND APPLICATION

Now that we have a good understanding of the teaching and this passage, let's go one step further. Let's focus on what these truths say for our hearts here and now, and for how they can help us live.

> HOW HAVE YOU SEEN GRACE IN YOUR OWN STORY OF FAITH? DESCRIBE HOW THE GRACE OF GOD CAME TO YOU AND CHANGED YOUR LIFE.

“GRACE MEETS YOU JUST WHERE YOU ARE.”

- KYLE IDLEMAN

> WHERE ARE YOU RIGHT NOW SPIRITUALLY? ARE YOU THRIVING? STRUGGLING? WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GET OUT OF THIS SERIES ON GRACE?



We often don't need more information about grace — we need to experience grace through stories. Think of the stories Kyle shared — of Jesus healing the leper and forgiving the adulterous woman.

> HOW DO YOU FEEL A NEED FOR JESUS' TOUCH OF GRACE?

We all struggle to receive grace. As Kyle says, we often say that God wouldn't show us grace because of one of three things:

“NOT AFTER WHAT I'VE DONE.”

**“NOT AFTER WHAT'S
BEEN DONE TO ME.”**

**“NOT AFTER WHAT
MY LIFE HAS BECOME.”**

> DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH ONE OF THESE STATEMENTS? TAKE A MOMENT TO SHARE THE WAYS YOU DOUBT THAT GOD'S GRACE IS GREATER THAN YOUR NEEDS, CIRCUMSTANCES AND WOUNDS.

In Ephesians 2:4-5, Paul states that all who believe in Christ have been “made alive” — we've been raised to new life by his grace.

> HOW ARE YOU EXPERIENCING THIS NEW LIFE?

> NOW CONSIDER YOUR RELATIONSHIPS: WHO IN YOUR LIFE NEEDS SOME FORM OF GRACE FROM GOD AND FROM YOU?

STUDY JOURNAL

You each have received a Study Journal to accompany this series. Before we meet next week, I encourage you to do the seven days of devotional readings and questions. The seventh day is a “grace day” so you can get caught up or review if needed. Over the next week, let’s each do Week One of the Study Journal (Days 1-7) and come ready to discuss next time.





PRAYER

Sample Prayer:

Father, thank you for this message of grace tonight. We pray now that your Holy Spirit reminds us of these great truths throughout the week. We pray that we truly experience grace as greater — greater than our sins, our brokenness, our hurts. We pray for those who are struggling in this season; would you demonstrate your grace to them through this group? We love you and trust you.

Amen.