

INTRO | A SERIES ABOUT GRACE

We are taking a break from our study of Matthew for a **five-part series called Grace**. Many of you know that we are members of a regional network of churches called 3Strand. We covenant together for the purpose of accountability, community, and cooperation. Once a year, the pastors of 3Strand agree to preach a common sermon series.

This year, when the 3Strand pastors sat down to discuss the series we quickly landed on the topic of GRACE. Grace, the **UNMERITED UNDESERVED, and UNFAIR**, favor of God is the centerpiece of the Christian faith; it is what distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. **Sadly, most deep discussions about God's grace over the years have led to more division in the church than unity.** Historically, men have either abused the doctrines of grace or abandoned them all together for some cheap alternative. The doctrines of grace of uncomfortable...but Christianity is uncomfortable: *"I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."* CS LEWIS. Due to discomfort and laziness (a five part series on 14 VERSES doesn't sound exciting), rarely, have efforts been made to feast on some of the most difficult, yet beautiful, Bible texts on grace. Our hopes for this series are simple:

1. **We hope to elevate a God-centered theology | GOD IS BIG** the whole universe revolves around God. His grace is the force that keeps it all in order and moving. Because people are visible and circumstances are tangible, we tend to use them to develop our own man-centered belief systems. Our perceptions define our truth. Our experiences govern our understanding. Who God is and what He is doing becomes predicated on what feels good to me or what makes sense to me. A man-centered theology invariably makes God SMALL.
2. **We hope to provide a framework to understand God's Story | GOD MAKES ALL of LIFE MEANINGFUL.** Too often the chaos of life just seems like a series of unconnected events. God assures us that he is at work. He gives us glimpses into how He intends to redeem all of creation and restore it to its intended beauty. Without good theology, our view of life is depressing at worst, and confusing at best because we wrongly **believe we are the main character in a story that is basically God's autobiography.**
3. **We hope to draw some distinctions for our network | GOD REVEALS HIMSELF** and our network is confident in declaring God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. Though we could have chosen several things, we have chosen to make it clear that what both distinguishes and unites our churches is: THE GRACE OF GOD. This sermon series is our line in the sand, making it clear that God's self-revelation is our mission, and His grace is the means by which we unify.

V. 1-2 THE TEXT FOR THE SERIES {EPHESUS}

So, over the next five weeks we are going to dive head first into the deep end of the theological pool in Ephesians 1. We'll talk about the "P" word (Predestination), the 'E' word (Election) and even the "F" word (Free Will). And do not for a milli-second believe that theology is NOT FOR YOU. The letter to the Ephesians is not written to highly educated or well-read super-Christians. Some of the people Paul wrote too were slaves without a primary education. **This letter is written for people like us struggling with life like us.** The letter is written largely to Gentile-Christians who were struggling in their new Christian identity.

- First, because of Christianity's strong roots in Jewish history and religion, it was natural for early Christians to wonder if Christ's gospel was limited to Jews, or if Jewish Christians held a special status because of their ethnic heritage. **They were not sure they were good enough.**
- Second, having been converts from an environment full of mystery religions, magic, and astrology, they lived in fear. They feared evil spirits and weren't sure about Christ's relationship to these forces. **They were sure they were strong enough.**
- Third, they were still tempted by the promises of the sinful world they came from. They needed encouragement to adopt a lifestyle worthy of Christianity, free from drunkenness, sexual immorality, theft, and hatred. **They were not sure they were satisfied enough.**

V. 3 THE FOCUS OF THE SERIES {BLESSING OF GOD} ³ **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,** But instead of admonishing them to think, feel, or do something different, Paul attempts to reveal the riches of God's grace in all that He has already done for them. Paul reveals a BIG God more sovereign, loving, and glorious than they could ever imagine. He reveals a God who is good enough, strong enough, and captivating enough. **And in doing so, Paul proves that the key to imitating God's glory, is beholding it.**

Paul begins his letter by BLESSING (praising) God the Father who has BLESSED us, IN CHRIST, with every possible spiritual BLESSING. These are not material temporal blessings, these are spiritual eternal blessings: **redemption, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.** These are ways that ONLY God can bless and which can NEVER be shaken or taken!

When we don't feel **GOOD ENOUGH or STRONG ENOUGH or SATISFIED** enough, the problem is that we have taken our eyes off of God and placed them on men, off of heaven, and placed them squarely on earth, off of **the riches of God's grace and on the poverty of our disgrace.**

V. 4 THE TIMING OF GOD'S PLAN {WHEN}

WHEN did God plan to bless us? Was God proactive or reactive? Was God surprised at what happen with his creation or did he know that Adam and Eve would fall? In verse 4, Paul writes: **as he chose us in him BEFORE the foundation of the world.** We will do some work on the word CHOOSE, but let's first spend some time on the word BEFORE.

1. **BEFORE ANYTHING GOD EXISTED.** Before there was light or darkness, sun moon or stars, trees water sky animals; before mankind or even time itself—there was God. God existed as triune. God is self-existent. **God is self-existent and free.**
2. **BEFORE ANYTHING GOD A CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE.** Scripture teaches us that our ONE God exists in three persons. They are coequal, coeternal, and cooperative in their work. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had a conversation with himself. There was nothing external forcing this conversation. There was an internal inspiration—God began to act out of his character like an artist who may decide to paint a picture. When we ask the question, “Why did God create?” we could just as easily respond, “Why not?” **God is personal.**
3. **BEFORE ANYTHING A PERFECT PLAN WAS MADE.** God making plans is very different than man making plans. Our plans never work out the way we intend (e.g. vacations, projects, etc.). God's plans are not what he HOPES will occur, it is what WILL occur. God's plans do not fail. **God is powerful enough to do what is most difficult. God is wise enough to know what is most helpful. God is**

good enough to do what is most loving. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations (Ps. 33.11); I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. (Job 42.2). God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all sovereign. God is perfect.

V. 4 THE NATURE OF GOD'S PLAN {WHAT} ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. Paul says that God planned to choose a people to be holy and blameless.

- a) God planned to create a people for Himself to love. **“in love”...he predestined us (v.5)**
- b) God planned to for that people to fall. **Only unholy men need to be made holy.**
- c) God planned for the redemption of a people. **God plans to make us holy.**

Before the foundation of the world, God planned for grace. And we see that grace work out in first three chapters of Scripture. God plants a garden and creates men to tend to the garden. Men rebel, and he immediately promises salvation—a seed of the woman. Then, he pushes them into the darkness. Though this appears punitive, mean, it is in fact gracious. ²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. **He plants them in a garden, sends them out of the garden, SO THAT he might bring them back in again.**

V. 4 THE INSTRUMENT OF GOD'S PLAN {HOW} The instrument of God's plan is something called ELECTION. Simple stated, the Bible says that God CHOOSES to save. ⁴ even as he chose us in him... We may disagree about how that works out theologically, but if God does not act first, all men are doomed.

GOD CHOOSES A PEOPLE TO BE THE OBJECT OF HIS GRACE. God chooses to show undeserved favor and love. the foundation of the world, God plans to transform a sinful people into the image of His son WHOM HE LOVES. They will be rescued, they will be holy, they will be blameless, they will be changed, they will be perfected, and they will be with him for eternity. **Romans 8.28-30** ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

GOD DOES NOT CHOOSE EVERYONE. This is one of those uncomfortable truths. **What about those God does not choose? Isn't it cruel to create men then choose some and not others? The alternative is to adopt a man-centered theology that says men make the DECISIVE choice. You have the same problem if you believe God knew they would NOT choose God and still decided to create them.*

GOD CHOOSE IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE. God's choice is gracious in that it is never earned. This is no more evident than the story of God through the Old Testament. **Deuteronomy 7.6-8** ⁶ “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of

slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt God chooses Noah. God chooses Abraham. God chooses Issac, Jacob, and Joseph. God chooses Moses, David, and Mary, Peter, and Paul—all JV. .

V. 6 THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S PLAN {WHY}

The question remains, WHY DOES GOD CREATE AT ALL? WHY DOES GOD PLAN AT ALL? And if you can answer that question, then you can inject total meaning into every aspect of our life. ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

God does everything for His Glory. All of creation, all of redemption, and everything that happens in this world is designed to the praise of his glorious grace. From GEN to REV God is about His own name:

1. For the sake of his name, God did not destroy the desert (Ezek. 20.5-9).
2. Pharaoh's heart was hardened for the glory of God (Ex. 14.4, 18).
3. The beginning of the Israelite monarchy was about the glory of God (1Sam 12.19-23).
4. Solomon dedicated the temple for the glory of God (1Kings 8).
5. Israel became great and powerful among the nations because God was "making himself a name" (2Samuel 7.23)..
6. God did not destroy Israel when it deserved to be destroyed, because he did not his name blasphemed among the nations (Isaiah 48.9-11)
7. God's vision is for the earth to be filled with the knowledge of his glory (Hab. 2.14).
8. God decided to destroy the Israelites because they would not lay it in their heart to give glory to his name (Mal. 2.2).
9. The second coming is about the consummation of the glory of God (2Thess. 1.9-10).
10. We are commanded to do all things for the glory of God (1Corinthians 10.31)

And how does God intend to maximize his glory—He plans to kill His Son. Acts 2.22-24 | ²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. The redemption of mankind was the not the ultimate purpose of the plan...it was a means to an end.

The question is not what God's gracious plan does for us, but what does it say about God?

Matt Chandler says it this way, "This is the story of the Bible, no you or me. It is God and God alone, God's name and namesake alone. The point of everything is God's glory alone so that God alone will be the glory. It is God who is deep in riches, God who is deep in wisdom, God who is deep in loving-kindness, and God who is deep in glory. Not us. This is the message of the Bible."

And when we behold eternal God's glory...we are changed.

1. Before the foundation of the world, God **planned to for you** | knows you, designed you, made you
2. Before the foundation of the world, God **planned to forgive you** | die for all your sin
3. Before the foundation of the world, God **planned to adopt you** | give you an identity
4. Before the foundation of the world, God **planned to change you** | every part of your story for the purpose of helping you look more like His Son Jesus. And every part of your God **planned to use help others praise** the glories of His grace | he choose you to use you
5. Before the foundation of the world, God **planned to restore** you with you.