

Grace Upon Grace: Leader's Guide

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From the *Missional Bible Studies* series
of the Center for U.S. Missions

Abstract: This Bible study focuses upon God's grace in the life of the participant. Through the study of God's word, the participant realizes that salvation in Jesus Christ flows fully out of God's grace. Additionally, participants are invited to reflect upon and share times of grace experienced in their lives. The foundational scripture passage is John 1:16, *From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace*. It is important that you as leader spend time preparing the Bible study prior to leading it.

Timing: The study can be done as a stand alone or as part of a series utilizing related Bible studies from the Center for U.S. Missions website. Together the studies may be used as a half-day seminar.

Participant Guide: Reproduce a Participant Guide (available through www.centerforusmissions.org) for each participant. Participants will need Bibles and pens or pencils.

Optional PowerPoint: An optional PowerPoint is available (through www.centerforusmissions.org) which you may customize to fit your context. It is important to review the PowerPoint before using it. A Greek font is used on some slides. You may need to adjust the font or delete the Greek references.

Grace Moments: In this Bible study, 'Grace Moments' involve personal sharing of God's grace from the leader's and/or participants' life story. They are intended to help participants apply the lessons to their lives and be able to share the story of God's grace in their lives. They also help the leader and participants connect. Through them the leader models both vulnerability and grace. The leader needs to prepare these brief moments of sharing from his or her life in advance.

Introduction: Grace Moments - "Really?"

In this Grace Moment you as the leader are invited to share a time in your life when you were caught in an inconsistency between what you as a Christian profess and your speech or behavior, as well as how God used that moment to convict you of sin and brought to you the grace of forgiveness and the hope of living a life consistent with being a disciple of Jesus. This sharing can be especially powerful if another brother or sister in Christ lovingly pointed out the inconsistency because you can also point out how God puts "Grace People" in our lives. This sharing sets up the next section of the study.

Optional: If you are using the PowerPoint you may want to include a picture of yourself as a child and a current photo. Include your date of birth since this becomes useful later in the study.

From His Fullness We Have All Received: John 1:16a

- Read John 1:16 (NJKV).
- Note that the passage refers to Jesus when it says "*from his*." We know this from the verses before and John's direct words in verse 17 when he says, "*grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*."
- Define fullness: In the Greek text it is πληρωματός (pleromatos) meaning:
 1. that which is (has been) filled
 2. that which fills or with which a thing is filled
 3. fullness, abundance
 4. a fulfilling, keeping
- Ask, "To what do you think the fullness of Christ refers?"
- Continue by exploring these passages:

1. *Fulfillment of the Law*: Matthew 5:17, Also point back to John 1:17
 2. *Righteousness*: Romans 10:4 – By keeping the law perfectly, Christ fulfills all righteousness (see Matthew 3:15). Christ's righteousness is our righteousness.
 3. *Death*: Romans 6:3 – Christ's death is our death.
 4. *Holiness & Life*: Colossians 3:11-12 – 1. Circumcision made the Jews acceptable before God. It set them apart for God, i.e. made them holy. 2. We live resurrection lives here and now because of Christ's fullness, and 3. We have the assurance of eternal life because Christ's death was our death and Christ's resurrection is our assurance of eternal life.
 5. *Salvation*: John 3:16-17 – God's purpose in Christ is to bring salvation to the world. We are saved because Jesus fulfilled this purpose.
 6. *Compassion & Mission*: Matthew 9:36-38 – 1. The fullness of Christ includes his great compassion for those he came to seek and save as demonstrated in this passage. 2. This compassion moves Jesus to the harvest, i.e. mission. Highlight that it is immediately after Jesus tells his disciples to pray the Lord of harvest to send workers into the harvest that he does just that in Matt. 10:1*f*.
- Summary: The fullness of Christ involves his Fulfillment of the Law, Righteousness, Death, Holiness & Life, Salvation and Compassion & Mission. It is a fullness in which we participate by grace through faith. Out of this fullness we receive *grace upon grace*.

Grace Upon Grace: John 1:16b

- Read John 1:16
- Explore *grace upon grace*
 - Define Grace: In Greek grace is *χαρις* (charis).
 - The phrase *grace upon grace* in Greek is *χαριν αντι χαριτος*.
 - Ask, "How do you picture this phrase?" or "How do you understand this phrase?"
 - Expand upon: *Grace is about God's generosity*.
 - ◊ Generous Love
 - ◊ Generous Mercy
 - ◊ Generous Sacrifice
 - ◊ Generous Blessings
 - The cross is God's ultimate expression of this generosity. Through it God addressed our greatest need.
 - Read and briefly discuss Romans 3:19-24 – Paul clearly points out our desperate need for a savior that only God could provide; which he did by grace through faith in Jesus.
 - *Illustration*: Jonathan Edwards wrote and preached the sermon, *Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God*. It is said that as Edwards talked about God's wrath and hell, including an illustration of God's hand holding people above the flames of hell, people moaned and cried out, even crawling on the floor. While Edwards was certainly applying the law, the reality is that Edwards was so doing so that he could point out the vastness of God's grace. Note again that the sermon is titled, *Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God*. Note where the sinners are. The sinners are in God's hand! Where else would you want to be? The ultimate expression of God's generous grace is that while he has wrath for sin because of Jesus, he holds our salvation dear.
- We stand in God's grace!
 - Read Romans 5:1-2
 - ◊ We have been justified through faith.
 - ◊ We have peace with God.

- ◇ Through Christ we have access by faith to God's grace.
- ◇ We stand in grace. This is a key point. Many people falsely believe that Christians enter in and out of God's grace through sin and repentance. They believe that if they sin, they are placed outside of God's grace and only repentance puts them back into that grace. This belief is synergism and false. As long as a Christian has faith in Christ he or she is in God's grace. We repent as an expression of sorrow for our sin and an understanding of God's generous grace afforded us in Jesus.
- ◇ We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Secure in our relationship with God and the salvation he has won for us, we rejoice, remembering that Jesus said in John 10:10, *"The thief comes to kill and destroy but I have come that they may have life, life fuller."* Our joy is not just about hope delayed but hope here and now.

Grace Moments - "Rejoice!"

In this Grace Moment share an experience of God's grace realized in a special blessing in your life. Examples: birth of a child/grandchild, wedding, success through perseverance, etc. Note that God's grace isn't seen only in forgiveness or hardship but also in the blessings of our lives. The idea is to point to the joy realized in one's life by the grace of God.

Optional: If you are using the accompanying PowerPoint insert slides with pictures that highlight the Grace Moment you share here.

Participant Sharing: Invite participants to share personal Grace Moments from their lives. They may be either a time when they were challenged to bring their behavior/speech into line with their profession of faith or a celebrative one when God's grace was realized in a time of joy. Note that this time of sharing helps participants to connect God's grace to their life stories which in turn affords them an opportunity to share the faith with others in a personal, genuine and realistic way.

- Depending on the size of the group this can be done in groups of 2, 3 or 4.
- Allow 5-7 minutes per person in the group.

Closing: Grace Upon Grace

- God through Jesus generously pours out his grace in our lives. He accomplished for us what we could not do for ourselves when he saved us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We now live and have our being in this grace. In fact, through faith in Jesus we stand in grace. It is because of this grace that we have hope and joy. From Jesus' fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.
- God invites us to live in this generous grace!
- Send participants forth with a grace-filled blessing.

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Accompanying Participant's Guide is also available from the Center for U.S. Missions.