

Amazing
GRACE
Group Discussion Guide

sunrise***discipleship***series

By Luke Miller

HOW TO USE THIS AMAZING GRACE DISCUSSION GUIDE

A reference for hosts of the six-week discipleship journey. Plan for 60–90 minutes together. Your role is to help people engage with Scripture, share honestly, and respond to God's grace.

BEFORE YOU GATHER

Complete the devotions. Work through the three days in the Devotional Companion before your group meets. Write your responses; putting pen to paper helps you reflect more deeply.

Pray. Pray for each person by name and for what they are facing. Take time to praise God, receive His grace, and prepare your own heart. Ask the Spirit to guide the gathering and give you wisdom as you lead.

Choose your questions. A day or two ahead, read the week's Scripture slowly more than once, then review the Discussion Guide. Choose one or two questions per section, prioritizing those in bold. You will not need to ask every question.

Prepare the space. Arrange enough seating, a comfortable temperature, and any refreshments. Test the video so everyone can see it and hear it clearly. Contact your coach if you need help preparing or handling a difficult situation.

THE FLOW OF YOUR GATHERING

	60 minute meeting	90 minute meeting
Welcome and connect	10 minutes	15 minutes
Watch the video	10 minutes	10 minutes
Read Scripture and discuss	30 minutes	50 minutes
Pray together	10 minutes	15 minutes

Welcome and connect. Make introductions as needed and use a brief icebreaker. Let everyone know the meeting's flow and ending time. Start and finish promptly.

Watch the video. Allow 8–10 minutes. Encourage everyone to stay seated and focused; taking notes is optional.

Read Scripture and discuss. Read the Big Idea aloud, then invite someone to read the passage. Use the guide to lead the conversation, watching the clock so you leave time for application and prayer.

Pray together. Make room for personal requests, either at the beginning or end. Also reserve time after the discussion to pray about the week's teaching. Offer a quiet moment for individual prayer, then invite someone to close aloud.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

Use the guide with discernment and follow the Spirit's leading. You are facilitating a conversation, so you do not need to cover every paragraph or question. Let people share in reading sections aloud, and allow time for quiet thought before expecting answers.

It may help to understand the structure and flow of each week's guide. Each week has six sections: **Connection, Scripture & Observation, Interpretation & Reflection, Application & Practice, Prayer, and Closing Thought**. The first four include a "**Did You Know...?**" box with commentary by Luke, followed by four or five discussion questions.

You do not need to ask every question. Before your gathering, select one or two from each section that seem most relevant to your group, giving priority to those in bold. As the conversation unfolds, decide which questions to ask, skip, or spend more time on. Learning to make these choices is an important part of facilitating a meaningful discussion.

Read the "**Did You Know...?**" commentary as part of your preparation. It can help you understand the passage, guide the discussion, and offer insight when questions arise. You do not need to read it aloud during the meeting. Share a helpful point, invite someone to read a box, or simply use it to inform your facilitation—whatever best serves your group.

Big Idea and Read. Begin with the week's main theme and Scripture passage so everyone shares the same starting point.

Connection. Use this section to move from the video into conversation. Choose a question that helps people connect the week's theme with their own experience.

Scripture and Observation. Help people notice the passage before moving to application. For a narrative, invite them to imagine the scene from different people's perspectives: What might they see, hear, or feel? Pause to let them reflect. Keep imagined details grounded in Scripture rather than treating them as facts.

Interpretation and Reflection. Explore what the passage reveals about God and about us. Invite honest responses about where the teaching challenges people's assumptions or touches their lives.

Application and Practice. Protect time for this section. Connect the teaching with a real situation, relationship, or struggle. Read the suggested practices and invite each person to choose one or two for the coming week. Keep the response specific and manageable.

Closing Thought and Prayer. Read the Closing Thought to bring the discussion together, then pray about what you have learned. Personal requests are welcome, but also invite people to ask God for help receiving His grace and putting the week's teaching into practice.

KEEP THE MAIN THING IN VIEW

A thoughtful conversation and an honest response matter more than finishing every question. Prioritize the bold questions, leave room to listen, and help each person carry one response into the week.

Amazing Grace, Week 1 Small Group Guide

Stage 1, Grace for the Dependent

Text, Mark 10:13-16

Big Idea

We experience God's grace not when we bring something to Him, but when we come with nothing.

Leader Note

This first week sets the tone for the entire journey. Jesus begins by challenging the assumption that people enter the kingdom through strength, maturity, achievement, or importance. Instead, He points to children, those with little status, power, or contribution, and says the kingdom belongs to people like them. Many adults struggle with dependence because our culture celebrates independence, self sufficiency, and control. This week is about helping people recognize that grace begins where striving ends. Do not rush the discussion. Let people sit with the tension of what it means to receive rather than earn.

Connection

Did You Know...?

Most of us spend our lives trying to become more independent. As children we depend on others for everything, but maturity is often defined by learning to rely on ourselves. We celebrate responsibility, competence, strength, and the ability to figure things out on our own. In many areas of life, that kind of maturity is good and necessary. But when that same mindset shapes the way we approach God, it can quietly distort our understanding of grace.

Instead of coming to God with need, trust, and honesty, we may come with a spiritual resume. We may try to prove that we are faithful enough, mature enough, knowledgeable enough, or useful enough. We may even begin to think that God's love is connected to how well we are doing spiritually. Jesus challenges that way of thinking by placing children at the center of the conversation. Children come with need. They come with dependence. They come without power or status. Tonight we begin by exploring why dependence feels so difficult and why grace often feels uncomfortable to receive.

Discussion

Why do you think dependence feels uncomfortable or even weak for many adults?

In what ways do people try to prove their value or worth today?

What are some subtle ways people may try to earn acceptance from God?

Why do you think receiving something freely can sometimes feel harder than earning it?

Scripture & Observation

Did You Know...?

This short moment in the Gospel may seem simple at first, but it reveals something foundational about the kingdom of God. People are bringing children to Jesus so He can touch them and bless them. The parents seem to believe that Jesus will welcome their children, but the disciples respond very differently. They see the children as interruptions, distractions, or perhaps as people who are not important enough to receive Jesus' attention. Their reaction reveals an assumption about who matters and who should have access to Jesus.

In the culture of Jesus' day, children were loved by their families, but they did not carry the kind of status or influence that adults did. They were not powerful, wealthy, impressive, or socially significant. They had no accomplishments to offer and no position to leverage. That is what makes Jesus' response so important. He does not merely tolerate the children, He welcomes them and uses them as a picture of how the kingdom is received. As we read, pay attention to the emotional tension in the story, the assumptions being challenged, and what Jesus seems most concerned about.

Observation is about slowing down enough to notice what is happening beneath the surface. Sometimes we move quickly to meaning and miss the emotional dynamics of the story. This passage contains tension between the parents, the disciples, and Jesus. The parents are bringing children forward, the disciples are pushing them away, and Jesus steps in with a strong response. Each group reveals something different about how people viewed access, worth, and importance.

It is worth paying attention to the emotional weight of the moment. Imagine being one of the parents, hoping your child might receive a blessing from Jesus, only to be rebuked by His disciples. Imagine being one of the children, sensing that you are unwanted or in the way. Imagine being one of the disciples, assuming you are protecting Jesus' time, only to discover that you have misunderstood His heart. Observation invites us to enter the scene before we try to apply it. Pay attention to what captures your attention emotionally and what questions the story raises in you.

Read Mark 10:13-16 Twice out loud as a group, if possible in two different Bible translations.

Discussion

What part of this story stands out to you most, and why?

What assumptions do you think the disciples were making in this moment?

Why do you think Jesus responded so strongly to them?

What emotions do you imagine the parents may have felt during this interaction?

If you placed yourself somewhere in this scene, where do you think you would be and why?

Interpretation and Reflection

Did You Know...?

Jesus is not simply complimenting children in this passage, He is redefining how people enter the kingdom of God. When He says that the kingdom belongs to “such as these,” He is pointing to something children represent. Children come with dependence, trust, humility, and need. They are not in control. They cannot negotiate their worth. They do not bring achievements, credentials, or influence. They simply receive.

This would have deeply challenged the disciples. They often thought in terms of greatness, rank, significance, and position. Like many of us, they were still learning that the kingdom of God does not operate according to the usual systems of status and achievement. Grace is not a reward for the impressive. It is not reserved for those who have proven themselves. It is not given because we have earned a place. Grace is received by those who come with open hands. Jesus uses children to show that the posture required to receive the kingdom is not strength, but dependence. That does not mean spiritual maturity is childish, but it does mean true maturity begins with childlike trust.

This is where the passage moves from observation into self reflection. Most people want to feel capable, strong, and in control. Dependence can feel vulnerable because it forces us to admit need. It reminds us that we are not as self sufficient as we want to believe. For some, dependence feels uncomfortable because it brings up weakness. For others, it feels risky because they have learned not to trust others. Those experiences can shape how we come to God.

Spiritually, many of us carry quiet pressure to perform. We may feel that we need to pray better, know more, serve more, give more, or appear more put together before we can come confidently to God. Even when we believe in grace, we may still live as though God’s acceptance rises and falls with our spiritual performance. Jesus invites us into a different posture. He welcomes those who come honestly, humbly, and dependently. This section is about recognizing where we resist that invitation and why. The goal is not to force vulnerability, but to create space for people to name the ways they still try to prove themselves.

Discussion

What do you think Jesus wanted the disciples to understand through this moment?

What do you think it actually means to receive the kingdom like a child?

How does this passage challenge common ideas about spiritual maturity or importance?

What part of this passage feels most challenging or uncomfortable to you personally?

Do you tend to approach God more like someone trying to impress Him or trust Him?

Why?

Application and Practice

Did You Know...?

Grace always invites a response, not striving, but surrender. Jesus is inviting people to stop approaching God with resumes and accomplishments and instead come with open hands. That can be difficult because many of us are used to measuring ourselves by what we accomplish. We may assume that if we are doing well, God is pleased with us, and if we are struggling, God is disappointed in us. But grace begins in a different place. It begins with receiving what we could never earn.

This does not mean effort disappears from the Christian life. It does not mean obedience is unimportant or that growth does not matter. It means our relationship with God does not begin with proving ourselves. It begins with trust. Real spiritual growth happens when we stop pretending to be self sufficient and learn to depend on God honestly. Application this week is not about adding more religious activity, but about noticing where striving has replaced trust and where God may be inviting us to come more simply, more honestly, and more dependently.

Spiritual formation happens when truth moves from discussion into daily life. This week is about intentionally practicing dependence instead of self reliance. These practices are not tasks to earn God's approval. They are reminders that grace is received, not achieved. They are small ways of training our hearts to come to God with openness and trust.

It is important to approach these practices with the right posture. If we turn them into spiritual performance, we miss the point. The goal is not to complete an assignment perfectly. The goal is to become more aware of how often we rely on ourselves and how freely God invites us to receive from Him. Choose one or two practices and engage with them honestly throughout the week. Pay attention not just to what you do, but to what it reveals in you.

Discussion

Where do you sense striving has replaced trust in your life?

What would it look like for you to practice greater dependence on God this week?

What is one area where you need to come to God with open hands instead of trying to prove yourself?

How can dependence on God become a strength instead of something you avoid?

Which practice below feels like the most honest next step for you, and why?

Choose One or Two

In an area where you normally rely only on yourself, intentionally ask someone for help this week. Pay attention to why asking feels easy or difficult.

Spend time speaking to God honestly and simply, without trying to sound spiritual or polished. Talk to Him the way a child would speak openly to a loving parent.

At the end of each day, reflect on moments where you trusted God and moments where you relied only on yourself. What patterns do you notice?

Prayer

Did You Know...?

Prayer is one of the clearest expressions of dependence on God. It reminds us that we are not self sufficient and that we need His grace daily. In prayer, we stop performing and come honestly before the Father. We do not need to impress Him with polished words or spiritual language. We simply come as people who need grace.

For some, prayer may feel natural. For others, it may feel awkward or vulnerable. That is okay. This time is not about saying the perfect thing, but about practicing the posture Jesus teaches in this passage. Encourage simple and honest prayers tonight. Jesus welcomes those who come with humility and trust. As the group prays, invite people to bring their striving, self reliance, and need for control before God.

Prayer Focus

Humility to come to God like a child
Freedom from striving and performance
Trust in God's grace and goodness
A deeper spirit of dependence on God

Closing Thought

The kingdom of God is not entered through achievement.
It is received through dependence.
Grace begins when we stop trying to prove ourselves
and simply come to Jesus.

Amazing Grace, Week 2 Small Group Guide

Week 2: I Cannot Earn It

John 3:1-18

Big Idea

You can know about God, live a moral life, and still need to be made new by grace.

Leader Note

This week moves from dependence into transformation. In Week 1, we saw that grace is received with empty hands. This week, Jesus shows Nicodemus that even the most religious person still needs new birth. Some people in your group may have grown up around church, Scripture, religious language, or moral expectations. Others may carry assumptions about what makes someone right with God. The goal is not to make people doubt genuine faith, but to help them honestly examine the difference between religious familiarity and spiritual rebirth. Let the questions create space for reflection, not pressure. This week should help people ask, “Am I trusting in what I know, what I do, or in what only God can do in me?”

Connection

Did You Know...?

Nicodemus comes to Jesus as someone who seems to have everything spiritually in order. He is educated, respected, moral, and religiously committed. If anyone in his world seemed close to God, it would have been someone like him. He knew Scripture, practiced obedience, and carried public influence. Yet when he comes to Jesus, Jesus does not congratulate him on his spiritual achievements. Instead, He tells him that he must be born again.

That makes this passage especially important for church people. Many of us know how to speak the language of faith. We know how to attend, serve, lead, study, and behave in ways that look spiritual. Those things can be good, but they are not the same as new life. Nicodemus reminds us that a person can be near religious activity and still need the transforming work of God. This conversation asks us to consider where we may be relying on familiarity, knowledge, morality, or effort instead of receiving grace.

Discussion

- What do people often assume makes someone spiritually mature or close to God?
- Why do you think religious activity can sometimes hide a person’s deeper need for grace?
- Where do you see the difference between knowing about God and truly knowing God?
- Why might someone who has been around faith for a long time struggle to admit they still need transformation?
- What part of Nicodemus’ story feels relatable to you?

Scripture & Observation

Did You Know...?

John tells us that Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. The Pharisees were not careless or casual about faith. They were deeply committed to Scripture, holiness, prayer, purity, and obedience. They were respected by many because they took the law seriously. Nicodemus was also part of the Jewish ruling council, which means he held influence and authority. He was not spiritually lazy. He was not an outsider. He was not someone people would have looked at and said, “That man needs to get his life together.”

That is what makes Jesus’ words so striking. Jesus speaks to one of the most religious people in the story and says, “You must be born again.” The phrase can also carry the idea of being born from above. Jesus is not calling Nicodemus to become a little more sincere or a little more disciplined. He is telling him that he needs a new life that only God can give. As we read, pay attention to the tension between what Nicodemus thinks he understands and what Jesus reveals.

The setting of this conversation matters. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. John often uses darkness and light with theological meaning, and that may be happening here. Nicodemus is physically coming in the dark, but he is also spiritually trying to understand what he does not yet see clearly. He approaches Jesus with respect, calling Him “Rabbi” and acknowledging that God must be with Him. Yet Jesus quickly moves past Nicodemus’ polite opening and goes straight to the deeper issue.

This is not just a conversation between a teacher and a curious listener. It is a meeting between human religion and divine grace. Nicodemus brings recognition, questions, and religious background. Jesus brings revelation. Nicodemus is trying to understand how Jesus fits into his existing categories, but Jesus tells him that his categories are not enough. The conversation begins with admiration, but quickly moves into disruption. Jesus is lovingly unsettling a man who thought he already understood how spiritual life worked.

Read John 3:1-18 out loud twice, in two separate versions if possible

Discussion

- What part of this conversation stands out to you most, and why?
- Why do you think Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night?
- What do you notice about the way Jesus moves the conversation deeper so quickly?
- What do you think Nicodemus may have expected from Jesus, and how does Jesus surprise him?
- Where do you see confusion, curiosity, or resistance in Nicodemus?

Interpretation and Reflection

Did You Know...?

When Jesus says, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” He is teaching that entrance into God’s kingdom requires more than human effort, religious knowledge, or moral improvement. Birth is something we receive, not something we accomplish. No one causes their own physical birth, and in the same way, spiritual birth is the work of God. This is why the image is so powerful. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that grace is not an upgrade to the old life, it is the beginning of a new one.

Jesus also speaks about being born of water and the Spirit. Nicodemus, as a teacher of Israel, should have heard echoes of the Old Testament, especially passages like Ezekiel 36, where God promises to cleanse His people with water and give them a new heart and a new spirit. Jesus is not inventing a disconnected idea. He is showing Nicodemus that the promises of Scripture are being fulfilled in Him. What Nicodemus needs is not merely more information, but inward renewal. He does not need to climb higher on the ladder of religion. He needs God to do what only God can do.

This passage becomes personal when we realize that Nicodemus is not a villain in the story. He is searching. He is curious. He recognizes something true about Jesus, but he still does not fully understand. That makes him a helpful mirror for many of us. We may have genuine interest in God, respect for Jesus, knowledge of Scripture, and a desire to live rightly, while still needing to surrender to the deeper work of grace.

There is also something humbling about being told that your best is not enough. Nicodemus had spent his life pursuing faithfulness, and Jesus tells him that he still needs new birth. That does not mean his devotion was meaningless, but it does mean devotion cannot replace transformation. Grace confronts our pride because it tells us we cannot save ourselves. It also comforts us because it tells us we do not have to. This section invites us to consider where we may be relying on effort, reputation, knowledge, or religious familiarity instead of trusting in Christ.

Discussion

- Why do you think Jesus uses the image of birth to describe what we need spiritually?
- What is the difference between becoming a better version of yourself and being made new by God?
- Why would Jesus’ words have been challenging for someone as religious and respected as Nicodemus?
- Where are you most tempted to rely on what you know or what you do spiritually?
- What would it look like to stop managing your spiritual image and let God do a deeper work in you?

Application and Practice

Did You Know...?

Jesus does not leave Nicodemus with vague spiritual advice. He points him toward new birth, the work of the Spirit, and ultimately the love of God revealed in the Son. John 3:16 is often quoted by itself, but in context it is part of Jesus' answer to Nicodemus. God's love is not sentimental or abstract. It is revealed in the sending of the Son so that those who believe in Him may have eternal life. Grace is not earned through religious achievement. It is received through trust in Jesus.

This means the response to this passage is not simply, "try harder." The response is belief, surrender, and openness to the Spirit's transforming work. For some, this may mean honestly asking whether they have trusted in Christ or merely in religious activity. For others, it may mean letting go of the pressure to prove themselves spiritually. For others, it may mean asking God to bring new life into areas that have become dry, controlled, or self protected. The invitation is to stop relying on what we can produce and receive what God alone can give.

This week is about paying attention to the places where we may be relying on ourselves instead of receiving grace. Nicodemus had knowledge, morality, and status, but Jesus invited him into something deeper. These practices are not meant to create guilt or pressure. They are meant to help us become more honest about where we need God's renewing work.

The goal is not to perform spirituality better. The goal is to become more aware of the difference between activity and surrender. As you choose a practice, pay attention to what rises up in you. Do you feel resistance, relief, fear, humility, or hope? Those reactions may reveal where God is working. Let this week be a chance to ask not only, "What am I doing for God?" but "Where do I need God to make me new?"

Discussion

- What would it look like for you to trust Jesus more deeply instead of relying on spiritual effort?
- Where might God be inviting you to experience renewal rather than just improvement?
- What is one area of your life where you need the Spirit to bring new life?
- How can this group help one another move beyond religious appearance into honest transformation?
- Which practice below feels like the most honest next step for you, and why?

Practice, Choose One or Two

Set aside time this week to ask, "Am I relying more on Jesus or on my religious habits, knowledge, or effort?" Write down what comes to mind.

Pray each day, "Spirit of God, make new what I cannot change on my own."

Identify one area where you try to prove yourself spiritually. Name it before God and ask Him to help you receive grace instead of earning approval.

Prayer

Prayer is a fitting response to this passage because new birth is not something we can manufacture. We can come honestly before God, but we cannot transform ourselves by willpower alone. Nicodemus needed more than answers, he needed the work of the Spirit. The same is true for us. Prayer reminds us that grace is not a theory to understand, but a gift to receive.

As the group prays, encourage honesty. Some may need to confess self reliance. Some may need to ask God for renewal. Some may need to receive again the simple truth that God so loved the world that He gave His Son. This is not a time to impress each other with polished prayers. It is a time to come before God as people who need new life.

Prayer Focus

Honesty about where we rely on ourselves
Humility to receive what only God can give
Renewal through the work of the Spirit
Trust in Jesus rather than religious performance

Closing Thought

Nicodemus had knowledge, morality, and status.
Jesus told him he still needed new birth.
Grace does not improve the old life.
Grace gives us life from above.

Amazing Grace, Week 3 Small Group Guide

Week 3: I Don't Deserve It

Matthew 20:1-16

Big Idea

Grace feels unfair because it gives people what they do not deserve, including us.

Leader Note

This week presses deeper into the heart. In Week 1, we saw that we bring nothing. In Week 2, we saw that we cannot earn new life. Now in Week 3, Jesus confronts what happens when grace is given generously to someone else. This passage may stir up comparison, entitlement, resentment, or frustration with God's generosity. Do not rush to resolve the tension. Let people honestly wrestle with why grace can feel offensive when it does not follow our sense of fairness. The goal is not simply to understand the parable, but to see where we still want God to operate according to merit instead of mercy.

Connection

Did You Know...?

Most of us have a strong sense of fairness. From the time we are young, we notice who got more, who worked less, who was rewarded, and who seemed overlooked. Fairness feels right to us because we assume that effort should lead to reward and that those who sacrifice more should receive more. In many areas of life, that makes sense. Work, school, sports, and business often operate on the idea that greater effort deserves greater compensation. Because of that, we can easily assume God must operate the same way.

But grace does not fit neatly into a merit based system. Grace disrupts the assumption that people should receive according to what they have earned. This is why grace can feel beautiful when we receive it, but offensive when someone else receives it in a way we think is too generous. This parable is meant to expose that tension. Jesus tells a story that presses on our instinctive sense of fairness so we can discover what is happening underneath it. Before we study the passage, we need to consider how deeply comparison and fairness shape the way we see ourselves, others, and God.

Discussion

- Why do you think fairness matters so deeply to us?
- When have you seen comparison affect a relationship, workplace, family, or church?
- Why is it sometimes easier to celebrate grace for ourselves than grace for someone else?
- What kinds of situations make people feel like they deserve more than others?
- Where do you see the difference between fairness and generosity?

Scripture & Observation

Did You Know...?

In the first century, day laborers often gathered in public places early in the morning hoping to be hired for work. These workers lived with daily uncertainty. If they were not hired, they likely would not earn enough to provide for their families that day. A denarius was considered a normal wage for a full day's work, and in this parable the first workers agree to that amount. Later workers are hired throughout the day, some in the morning, some at noon, some in the afternoon, and some near the end of the workday. The later the day became, the more desperate those workers likely felt.

This historical background helps us feel the tension of the story. The landowner is not only concerned about the vineyard, he is also concerned about people who have not been hired. His repeated trips to the marketplace reveal a surprising kind of generosity. The scandal comes at the end of the day when the workers are paid. Jesus intentionally structures the story so the first workers see what the last workers receive. The order of payment creates the emotional crisis of the parable. As we read, pay attention to what feels generous, what feels unfair, and what the story reveals about the human heart.

This parable is carefully arranged. The landowner goes out early and makes an agreement with the first group of workers. Then he returns again and again, bringing more people into the vineyard. The later workers do not negotiate a wage in the same way. They simply trust the landowner to do what is right. That detail matters because the story contrasts those who work under an agreement with those who depend on the goodness of the owner.

The tension does not appear immediately. Everyone works. The surprise comes when the last workers are paid first and receive a full day's wage. That moment creates expectation in the first workers. If those who worked one hour received a denarius, surely those who worked all day would receive more. But they receive exactly what was promised. Their complaint reveals that the issue is not that they were treated unjustly, but that others were treated generously. Observation helps us see that the parable is not just about wages, it is about comparison, expectation, and the offense of grace.

Read Matthew 20:1-16 out loud in two separate versions if possible

Discussion

- What part of this parable stands out to you most, and why?
- Where do you feel the tension begin to build in the story?
- What do you think the first workers expected when they saw the last workers paid first?
- Why do you think the first workers felt wronged, even though they received what they agreed to receive?
- What does the reaction of the workers reveal about the human heart?

Interpretation and Reflection

Did You Know...?

Jesus begins the parable by saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” That means this story is not mainly about employment practices, economics, or how businesses should set wages. Jesus is revealing something about God’s kingdom and the way grace works. The landowner represents the surprising generosity of God. The workers represent people who struggle to understand generosity when it is not distributed according to their sense of merit.

The first workers are not angry because they were underpaid. They are angry because others were made equal to them. That is the scandal of grace. Grace does not allow us to stand above others as more deserving. It levels the ground. It reminds us that God gives gifts, not wages. If we want wages from God, Scripture tells us the wages of sin is death. But if we receive grace, we receive what we could never earn. This parable confronts the belief that time served, effort given, sacrifice made, or moral superiority should place us ahead of others in the kingdom. Grace is not God giving us what we have earned. Grace is God giving what He delights to give.

This is where the parable becomes personal. Many of us can understand the frustration of the first workers. We know what it feels like to work hard, sacrifice, stay faithful, and then watch someone else receive what seems equal or even greater. We may not say it out loud, but we can begin to believe that God owes us something because of what we have done. That is a subtle form of entitlement, and it often hides beneath faithfulness, service, or obedience.

Comparison has a way of poisoning gratitude. The first workers were content with their wage until they compared it with what others received. Nothing about their actual situation changed, but their perception changed. The generosity shown to someone else made them resent what had once seemed good. That happens in us too. We can become dissatisfied with God’s goodness to us because we are focused on His goodness to someone else. Grace exposes the part of us that still wants to keep score. It also invites us into freedom, because if grace is not based on merit, then we do not have to compete, compare, or prove that we deserve more.

Discussion

- What do you think Jesus is revealing about God through the landowner?
- Why does grace feel unfair when we think in terms of earning or deserving?
- Why do you think people often want grace to be generous for them but measured for others?
- Where do you most often find comparison showing up in your life?
- What does this parable reveal about your own expectations of God?

Application and Practice

Did You Know...?

Grace invites us to stop keeping score. That does not mean we ignore pain, injustice, or real disappointment. It means we stop relating to God as though He is obligated to reward us according to our personal calculations. The landowner asks, “Are you envious because I am generous?” That question reaches beyond the workers and speaks directly to us. It asks whether we truly trust God’s goodness when His generosity does not follow our expectations.

Responding to this parable means examining where we are holding onto entitlement, comparison, or resentment. It may mean confessing that we have wanted God to treat us as more deserving than others. It may mean learning to celebrate grace when it is given to someone we would not have chosen. It may also mean receiving grace again for ourselves without turning it into a measurement system. The invitation is to move from comparison to gratitude, from entitlement to trust, and from resentment to celebration.

This week is about becoming aware of comparison and learning to replace it with gratitude. The workers in the parable reveal how quickly the heart can shift from contentment to resentment. Nothing changed about what they received, but comparison changed how they saw it. Spiritual formation requires noticing those shifts in ourselves. We cannot surrender what we are unwilling to name.

These practices are meant to help you see where comparison appears in ordinary life. It may show up in relationships, ministry, finances, family, career, recognition, or spiritual growth. When it appears, do not simply shame yourself for it. Instead, treat it as an invitation to return to grace. Ask God to help you receive His goodness without measuring it against someone else’s life. Choose one or two practices and pay attention to what they reveal in you.

Discussion

- Where might God be inviting you to move from comparison to gratitude?
- Is there someone whose blessing or restoration is hard for you to celebrate? Why?
- What would change if you truly believed God’s generosity to others does not diminish His goodness to you?
- What is one area where you need to stop keeping score?
- Which practice below feels like the most honest next step for you, and why?

Practice, Choose One or Two

When you notice yourself comparing, pause and name one way God has been generous to you.

Intentionally encourage or celebrate someone you might normally compare yourself to. Pay attention to what that feels like.

Ask God to show you where you have quietly believed, “I deserve more.” Write down what comes to mind and surrender it in prayer.

Each day pray, “God, Your grace is a gift, not a wage. Help me receive it with gratitude and extend it with joy.”

Prayer

Prayer is where we bring our comparison, envy, and entitlement honestly before God. We do not need to pretend these things are not present in us. The workers in the parable grumbled because they could not rejoice in the generosity of the landowner. Prayer gives us a place to confess the same tendency in ourselves. It is where we ask God to free us from the need to measure, compete, and keep score.

As the group prays, invite people to be specific but not pressured. Some may need to confess resentment. Others may need to ask for gratitude. Others may need to pray for the ability to celebrate God’s grace in someone else’s life. The goal is not to leave feeling guilty, but to leave more aware of how generous God truly is. Grace is not fair. It is better than fair. It is generous.

Prayer Focus

Freedom from comparison and envy

Humility to receive grace as a gift

Gratitude for God’s generosity

Joy in seeing others receive grace

Closing Thought

Grace does not give us what we deserve.

That is what makes it grace.

God’s generosity to someone else

does not diminish His goodness to you.

Amazing Grace, Week 4 Small Group Guide

Week 4: You are Invited

Luke 15:11-32

Big Idea

Grace welcomes those who have run from God and those who have stayed but grown distant from His heart.

Leader Note

This week is the emotional center of the series. In Week 1, we saw that we bring nothing. In Week 2, we saw that we cannot earn grace. In Week 3, we saw that we do not deserve more than others. Now in Week 4, Jesus shows us the wide scope of grace, grace for the rebellious son who left and grace for the self righteous son who stayed. This passage may stir up memories of failure, shame, resentment, pride, or distance from God. Let the group feel the weight of the story without rushing to easy answers. The goal is to help people see the heart of the Father, who runs toward the repentant and goes out to plead with the resentful.

Connection

Did You Know...?

The word home carries deep emotional meaning. For some people, home represents safety, belonging, warmth, and acceptance. For others, home may bring up feelings of distance, disappointment, tension, or pain. Because of that, when Jesus tells a story about a son leaving home and returning, He is not just talking about geography. He is talking about relationship, identity, belonging, and the longing to be received.

This parable invites us to think about more than whether we are physically close to God or far away from Him. The younger son is far from home, but eventually comes back. The older son never leaves the property, but his heart is far from the father. That is one of the most searching parts of the story. It is possible to be near the things of God and still miss the heart of God. It is possible to serve, obey, and stay outwardly close while inwardly becoming resentful, proud, or distant. This week asks us to consider not just where we are, but what our hearts are like toward the Father.

Discussion

When you hear the word home, what emotions or memories come to mind?

Why do you think the image of coming home is such a powerful picture of grace?

What are some ways people can drift from God without realizing it?

How can someone be outwardly close to God but inwardly distant from Him?

Which kind of distance feels easier to recognize, open rebellion or hidden resentment? Why?

Scripture & Observation

Did You Know...?

Luke 15 begins with a conflict. Tax collectors and sinners are gathering around Jesus, while the Pharisees and teachers of the law are grumbling because Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. That setting matters because Jesus is not telling this parable in a neutral environment. He is responding to religious people who are offended by grace. Before Jesus tells the story of the two sons, He tells two shorter stories, one about a lost sheep and one about a lost coin. In both stories, something lost is found, and the result is celebration.

The parable of the two sons continues that theme, but it also complicates it. The younger son is obviously lost. He dishonors his father, leaves home, wastes his inheritance, and ends up in humiliation. But the older son is also lost, though in a quieter and more respectable way. He is near the father's house but far from the father's heart. He resents grace when it is extended to his brother. Jesus is speaking both to the sinners gathered around Him and to the religious leaders who are angry that grace is being offered. As we read, pay close attention to both sons and to how the father moves toward each one.

This story moves in two major scenes. The first follows the younger son as he demands his inheritance, leaves home, wastes everything, experiences famine, and eventually comes to his senses. The second follows the older son as he hears the celebration, becomes angry, refuses to go in, and confronts his father. Between those two scenes stands the father, whose actions reveal the heart of the story. He allows the younger son to leave, watches for his return, runs to meet him, restores him publicly, and then goes outside to plead with the older brother.

The details are full of emotional weight. The younger son asking for his inheritance early would have been deeply dishonoring, almost as if he were saying he wanted his father's possessions more than his father. His descent into feeding pigs would have been especially shameful for a Jewish audience. Yet when he returns, the father does not wait coldly for an apology. He runs. He embraces. He kisses. He restores. Then, when the older son refuses to enter the celebration, the father again goes out. The father's movement toward both sons is central. Observation helps us see that grace is not passive. Grace moves toward the lost.

Read Luke 15:11-32 twice in two different versions if possible

Discussion

What part of this story stands out to you most, and why?

What do you notice about the younger son's journey away from home and back again?

What do you notice about the older son's reaction to the celebration?

What stands out to you about the way the father treats each son?

Where do you feel the emotional tension of the story most strongly?

Interpretation and Reflection

Did You Know...?

The younger son's request would have been shocking in the ancient world. In a culture built around family honor, inheritance was normally received after the father's death. For the younger son to demand his share early was not just impatient, it was relationally destructive. He wanted the father's gifts without the father's presence. That is one way sin works. It desires what God gives while resisting relationship with God Himself. When the son travels to a distant country, the distance is more than physical. It represents separation, rebellion, and the illusion of freedom apart from the father.

The father's response is equally shocking. In that culture, a dignified patriarch would not run in public. Running would require lifting his robe and exposing his legs, which was considered shameful. Yet the father takes that shame upon himself in order to reach his son before the village can reject or humiliate him. The robe, ring, sandals, and feast are signs of restoration, identity, freedom, and belonging. The son planned to return as a hired servant, but the father restores him as a son.

The older brother reveals a different kind of lostness. He has stayed home, but he sees his relationship with the father in terms of service, fairness, and reward. He says, "All these years I have been slaving for you," which shows that he may have lived in the house without enjoying the father's heart. He cannot celebrate his brother's return because he believes grace has violated fairness. The father goes out to him too, pleading with him to come in. Jesus leaves the story unresolved because He is inviting the listeners to decide whether they will join the celebration or remain outside in resentment.

This is where the passage becomes personal. Sometimes we are like the younger son, wanting life on our own terms, drifting from God, and eventually discovering that what looked like freedom led to emptiness. Other times we are like the older brother, doing the right things outwardly while becoming resentful inwardly. The younger son's brokenness is obvious, but the older brother's brokenness is easier to hide because it can appear responsible, obedient, or even spiritual. Grace confronts both. It tells the younger son, "You are not beyond return." It tells the older son, "You are not above grace."

Discussion

What part of the father's response to the younger son most challenges or encourages you, and why? How does the older brother help us see that someone can be close to religious activity but far from the father's heart?

Which son do you relate to more in this season of your life, and why?

What false belief about God do you see in either son, and where might that same belief show up in you?

Where do you sense God inviting you to receive grace more honestly, as someone returning from distance or as someone being called out of resentment?

Application and Practice

Did You Know...?

The father's grace invites a response from both sons. For the younger son, the response is to return home, confess honestly, and receive restoration he does not deserve. For the older son, the response is to leave resentment behind and enter the celebration. Both responses require humility. The younger son must admit his need. The older son must admit his pride. Both must receive the father's heart rather than relate to him through shame or entitlement.

This is why the parable is so powerful at this point in the series. Grace is no longer just something we define. It is something we must respond to. Some people need to stop running. Others need to stop standing outside with crossed arms. Some need to believe they can be welcomed back. Others need to release resentment that someone else has been welcomed too freely. The question is not whether the father has grace. The question is whether we will receive it.

This week's practice is about responding to the Father's invitation. The younger son and the older son need different steps, but both are being invited toward the father. One needs to return. The other needs to come inside. One needs to receive forgiveness. The other needs to release resentment. As you choose a practice, try to identify honestly where you are in the story right now. Pay attention to what feels difficult, because that may reveal where God is inviting you to trust Him more deeply.

Discussion

Where do you sense God inviting you to move toward Him this week, returning from distance, receiving forgiveness, releasing resentment, or entering the celebration?

What feels like the most honest next step for you right now, and what makes that step difficult?

Practice, Choose One or Two

Set aside time this week to pray honestly, "Father, I am coming back to You." Name where you have drifted, and receive His welcome.

Think of someone whose restoration, blessing, or forgiveness is hard for you to celebrate. Pray for them each day and ask God to soften your heart.

Spend a few minutes imagining the father running toward the returning son. Ask God to help you receive that same grace personally.

At the end of each day, ask, "Where did resentment, comparison, or entitlement show up in me today?" Bring that honestly to God.

Prayer

Prayer is where we bring both rebellion and resentment into the presence of God. Some may need to pray as the younger son, confessing distance, sin, or wandering. Others may need to pray as the older brother, confessing pride, anger, or a lack of joy over grace given to others. Both prayers belong in the room because both sons are loved by the father. The father goes out to both, and that means there is grace for both kinds of lostness.

As the group prays, encourage people not to hide behind polished language. This is a story about coming honestly before the Father. Some may need to ask for forgiveness. Some may need to ask for a softer heart. Some may need to receive love they have resisted. The prayer time should not feel like a closing formality. It should feel like an invitation to come home and come inside.

Prayer Focus

- Honesty about where we have drifted from God
- Humility to recognize pride or resentment
- Courage to receive the Father's grace
- Joy in celebrating grace given to others

Closing Thought

The Father runs toward those who return.
The Father goes out to those who refuse.
Grace welcomes the rebellious and the resentful.
The invitation is simple.
Come home.

Amazing Grace, Week 5 Small Group Guide

Week 5: I Am Not Condemned

John 8:2-11

Big Idea

Grace confronts our sin, removes our shame, and calls us into a new way of living.

Leader Note

This week may be deeply personal for many people. In Week 4, we saw the Father welcome both the rebellious and the resentful. Now in Week 5, we see Jesus meet a woman who has been publicly exposed, accused, and shamed. This passage holds together two truths that are often separated. Jesus does not ignore sin, and Jesus does not condemn the sinner who stands before Him. Some in your group may carry shame, guilt, hidden sin, or fear of being exposed. Others may recognize themselves in the accusers, more comfortable pointing out the failures of others than confronting their own. The goal this week is to help people encounter the sensitivity of grace, grace that tells the truth, removes condemnation, and invites us to walk in freedom.

Connection

Did You Know...?

Most people know what it feels like to be embarrassed, exposed, or ashamed. Sometimes the moment is public, and sometimes it is hidden deep inside. Shame has a way of attaching itself not only to what we have done, but to who we believe we are. It whispers that we are defined by our worst moment, our deepest regret, or the thing we hope no one ever discovers. Because of that, many people learn to hide, defend themselves, manage their image, or become critical of others as a way of avoiding their own pain.

This story begins with a woman being placed in the center of public shame. She is not treated as a person with a story, a soul, or a future. She is treated as evidence in a religious argument. That makes this passage especially searching. It asks us to consider how we respond when sin is exposed, whether in ourselves or in someone else. Do we move toward condemnation, comparison, hiding, or grace? Before we look closely at the passage, we need to think honestly about how shame works in us and how easily judgment can become a way of protecting ourselves.

Discussion

- Why do you think shame has such power over people?
- What are some ways people try to hide, manage, or cover shame?
- Why is it sometimes easier to focus on someone else's failure than to face our own?
- How do you think grace speaks differently than shame?
- What makes it difficult to believe that Jesus can know the truth about us and still move toward us with grace?

Scripture & Observation

Did You Know...?

This passage takes place in the temple courts, where Jesus is teaching. That setting matters because the temple was a public and religious space. The woman is not brought privately for care, restoration, or pastoral concern. She is brought publicly and made to stand before the group. The religious leaders say she was caught in adultery, but the law addressed both the man and the woman. The absence of the man raises questions about the motives of the accusers and suggests that this woman is being used as a trap rather than treated with justice.

The leaders are trying to put Jesus in a difficult position. If He dismisses the charge, He appears to disregard the Law of Moses. If He agrees to stone her, He risks conflict with Roman authority, which limited Jewish execution rights. But Jesus refuses to be trapped by their categories. He does not minimize the woman's sin, and He does not join their hypocrisy. As we read, pay attention to the contrast between how the accusers treat the woman and how Jesus treats her.

The scene is full of tension. The woman is standing in the middle, the religious leaders are pressing Jesus for an answer, and the crowd is watching. Jesus does something unexpected. He bends down and writes on the ground. We are not told exactly what He wrote, which has led to many possibilities. Some have wondered whether He wrote the sins of the accusers, the Ten Commandments, or a reference to Jeremiah 17, where those who turn from the Lord are written in the dust. Whatever He wrote, His action slows the moment down and shifts attention away from the woman.

When the leaders keep questioning Him, Jesus says, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone." This does not deny that sin matters. It exposes the hypocrisy of those who want judgment without humility. One by one, the accusers leave, beginning with the older ones. Eventually only Jesus and the woman remain. The only person qualified to condemn her is the one who chooses to speak grace and truth to her. Observation helps us see that Jesus changes the whole atmosphere of the moment.

Read John 8:2-11 twice, in two versions if possible

Discussion

- What part of this scene stands out to you most, and why?
- What do you notice about the way the religious leaders treat the woman?
- What do you notice about the way Jesus slows down the moment?
- Why do you think the accusers begin to leave one by one?
- What emotions do you imagine the woman may have felt as the scene unfolded?

Interpretation and Reflection

Did You Know...?

This passage reveals the difference between conviction and condemnation. Condemnation crushes a person under guilt and shame. Conviction tells the truth in a way that leads toward repentance, freedom, and life. The accusers bring the woman forward to condemn her and trap Jesus. Jesus brings everyone in the scene face to face with truth. The woman must face the reality of her sin, but the accusers must face the reality of their own hearts. Grace is sensitive, but it is not sentimental. It refuses to excuse sin, and it refuses to dehumanize the sinner.

Jesus also treats the woman with dignity. The leaders speak about her, but Jesus speaks to her. They use her as an object lesson, but Jesus sees her as a person. His words, “Neither do I condemn you,” are not cheap grace. Jesus can say those words because He has come to bear condemnation on the cross. He is not sweeping sin away as though it does not matter. He is moving toward the place where sin will be paid for fully. That is why grace is both free and costly. It is free to the one who receives it, but it costs Jesus everything.

At the same time, Jesus says, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” Grace does not leave her in bondage. It gives her a future. Jesus does not define her by what she has done, but He also loves her too much to leave her unchanged. This is the sensitivity of grace. It holds together mercy and holiness, forgiveness and transformation, comfort and calling. Many of us struggle to hold those together. We either minimize sin in the name of compassion or magnify sin in a way that buries people in shame. Jesus does neither.

This is where the passage becomes personal. Some of us may identify with the woman, feeling exposed, ashamed, or afraid that our failures define us. Some of us may identify with the accusers, quicker to point out what is wrong in others than to let Jesus examine our own hearts. Some of us may be both. Grace invites us to stand before Jesus honestly. It tells us the truth about sin without letting shame have the final word. It says, “You are not condemned,” and then calls us to walk in freedom.

Discussion

- What does this passage show us about the difference between conviction and condemnation?
- How does Jesus treat the woman differently than the religious leaders do?
- Why is it important that Jesus says both, “Neither do I condemn you,” and “Go now and leave your life of sin”?
- Where do you tend to struggle more, receiving grace for your own sin or extending grace to others in their sin?
- What would it mean for you to stand honestly before Jesus without hiding or defending yourself?

Application and Practice

Did You Know...?

Grace always invites a response. The woman in the story does not simply receive a kind word. She receives a new future. Jesus removes condemnation, but He also calls her into a different way of life. That is important for us. Receiving grace does not mean pretending sin does not matter. It means bringing sin into the light where Jesus can forgive, heal, and lead us into freedom. Grace is not permission to stay trapped. Grace is power to begin again.

This section is not about forcing people to confess details they are not ready to share publicly. It is about helping each person ask what they need to bring before Jesus. Some may need to release shame. Some may need to confess sin honestly. Some may need to drop the stone they have been holding against someone else. Some may need to take one concrete step away from a pattern that is damaging their life. The goal is not public exposure, but honest response to Jesus.

These practices are designed to help people experience the movement of the passage. The woman stands before Jesus. The accusers drop their stones and walk away. Jesus speaks grace and calls her forward. This week, we want to bring our real selves before Jesus and listen for His words of truth and mercy. Choose one or two practices that honestly reflect where God is working in you right now.

Discussion

Where do you sense Jesus inviting you to receive grace more honestly this week?

What is one area where you need to move from shame, hiding, or judgment into freedom?

Practice, Choose One or Two

Set aside time to imagine yourself in the story, standing before Jesus. Bring your sin, shame, and past honestly before Him. Sit quietly and receive His words, “Neither do I condemn you.”

Write down something you carry guilt or shame about. Pray over it, confess it to God, and then tear it up as a reminder that it has been forgiven.

Identify someone you have judged or held something against. Pray for them and release that judgment to God.

Identify one pattern of sin and take a concrete step away from it this week. Replace it with a new, life giving habit.

Prayer

Prayer is where we bring our whole selves into the presence of Jesus. In this passage, the woman remains standing before Him after everyone else has left. That image is powerful. When the accusations quiet down, when the crowd is gone, and when the noise fades, she is left with Jesus. That is where grace speaks most clearly. Prayer gives us space to stop hiding and hear His voice.

As the group prays, encourage people to come honestly but wisely. Some may need to pray silently. Some may need to confess generally rather than share details. Some may need to ask God for freedom from shame. Others may need to confess a judgmental spirit. The prayer time should feel safe and grace filled, not pressured. Remind the group that Jesus tells the truth, removes condemnation, and calls us into freedom.

Prayer Focus

- Freedom from shame and condemnation
- Honesty about sin and hidden struggles
- Humility to drop the stones we hold against others
- Strength to walk in freedom

Closing Thought

Jesus does not ignore your sin.
He does not define you by it either.
He meets you with grace
and calls you into freedom.

Amazing Grace, Week 6 Small Group Guide

Week 6: I Can Give It Away

Matthew 18:21 to 35, Romans 10:9 to 11, Matthew 18:1 to 4

Big Idea

Grace that is received but not extended has not yet been fully understood.

Leader Note

This final week brings the whole Amazing Grace journey to a relational conclusion. In Week 1, we saw that we bring nothing. In Week 2, we saw that we cannot earn grace. In Week 3, we saw that we do not deserve more than others. In Week 4, we were invited home. In Week 5, we heard Jesus say that we are not condemned. Now in Week 6, Jesus calls us to give grace away. This lesson may touch painful relationships, unresolved tension, bitterness, regret, or guilt. Be gentle, but do not soften the call of Jesus. Forgiveness is costly, but it is also one of the clearest ways grace becomes visible in our lives.

Connection

Did You Know...?

Most people like the idea of forgiveness until they are asked to practice it in a real relationship. Forgiveness sounds beautiful in theory, but it becomes much harder when the wound is personal, the offense is repeated, or the other person does not seem sorry. We naturally want justice, vindication, or at least some assurance that the person who hurt us understands what they did. That is why forgiveness can feel unnatural and unfair. It asks us to release a debt that we may feel someone still owes us.

This is why Jesus places forgiveness at the center of life in His kingdom. Relationships are not sustained by perfection. They are sustained by grace, confession, repentance, and forgiveness. Every relationship eventually requires both the courage to ask for forgiveness and the humility to extend it. As this series comes to a close, we are moving from receiving grace to embodying grace. The question is not only whether we believe grace is real, but whether grace is reshaping how we treat people who have hurt us or people we have hurt.

Discussion

- Why do you think forgiveness is easier to admire than to practice?
- What makes forgiveness feel difficult, costly, or unfair?
- Is it usually harder for you to ask for forgiveness or to extend forgiveness? Why?
- How have you seen unforgiveness affect a person, family, church, or friendship?
- Why do you think grace must eventually affect the way we handle relationships?

Scripture & Observation

Did You Know...?

Matthew 18 is a chapter deeply concerned with humility, community, restoration, and forgiveness. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus places a child in front of the disciples and teaches that greatness in the kingdom begins with humility. That connects back to the beginning of this series, where Jesus showed that the kingdom is received like a child. Later in the same chapter, Jesus teaches about going to a brother or sister when sin has damaged a relationship. By the time Peter asks how many times he must forgive, Jesus has already been shaping a whole vision for life together in the kingdom.

Peter's question sounds generous at first. Some rabbis taught that forgiving someone three times was sufficient. Peter suggests seven times, which likely seemed extravagant. But Jesus answers with "seventy times seven," not as a new number to track, but as a way of destroying the idea of keeping score. Jesus then tells a parable about a servant who is forgiven an impossible debt but refuses to forgive a much smaller one. The contrast is intentionally shocking. As we read, pay attention to the size of the debts, the mercy of the king, and the hardness of the servant who had just received mercy.

This parable is built around contrast. The first servant owes a debt so large that repayment is impossible. Jesus uses the amount of ten thousand talents, which would have sounded absurdly massive to the original audience. It is not just a large personal debt, it is an unpayable debt. The servant asks for patience, promising to repay what he cannot possibly repay. The king responds with compassion that goes far beyond the request. He does not merely extend the deadline. He cancels the debt entirely. Then the forgiven servant finds another servant who owes him a much smaller amount. Instead of showing the mercy he has just received, he grabs, threatens, and imprisons him. The emotional force of the story comes from the gap between what he received and what he refused to give. The other servants are distressed because the man's lack of mercy makes no sense in light of the mercy shown to him. Observation helps us see the movement of the story clearly. The issue is not whether the second servant owed something. He did. The issue is whether someone who has been forgiven an unpayable debt can refuse mercy over a much smaller one.

Read Matthew 18:21-35 twice, in two different versions if possible

Discussion

- What part of the parable stands out to you most, and why?
- What do you notice about the difference between what the first servant asks for and what the king gives him?
- Why is the servant's response to the second debt so shocking?
- What emotions do you imagine the other servants felt when they saw what happened?
- Where do you feel the tension of this story most strongly?

Interpretation and Reflection

Did You Know...?

The unpayable debt represents the seriousness of our sin before God. Jesus is not minimizing the wrongs people commit against one another, but He is placing them in the larger context of the mercy we have received from God. The king's forgiveness is a picture of grace. The servant cannot earn it, repay it, or negotiate it into existence. It is given at great cost to the king. To forgive a debt means the debt does not disappear into nothing. Someone absorbs the cost. That is why forgiveness is never cheap. It is always costly to the one who releases the debt.

This parable also helps us understand why unforgiveness is spiritually dangerous. The forgiven servant wants mercy for himself but justice for someone else. He receives grace vertically but refuses to extend it horizontally. Jesus exposes the contradiction in that kind of heart. If we truly understand the grace we have received, it should begin to reshape the way we respond to those who owe us. Forgiveness does not mean pretending the hurt did not happen. It does not mean calling evil good. It does not always mean immediate trust or restored closeness. But it does mean releasing the debt, surrendering revenge, and refusing to hold the person in emotional prison.

This is where the passage becomes personal. Most of us can think of someone who has hurt us, disappointed us, betrayed us, or failed us. Some wounds are small but irritating. Others are deep and painful. Forgiveness can feel impossible when the hurt is still fresh or when the person has not acknowledged the damage. At the same time, most of us can also think of ways we have needed forgiveness from God and from others. Grace asks us to hold both truths together. We are people who have been forgiven much, and we are people called to forgive. That does not make forgiveness easy, but it does make it central to life with Jesus.

Discussion

- What does the unpayable debt help us understand about our need for God's grace?
- Why is it important to remember that forgiveness is costly and not cheap?
- How would you describe the difference between forgiveness and pretending nothing happened?
- Where do you see yourself in this parable, the one needing mercy, the one struggling to give mercy, or both?
- How does remembering what God has forgiven in you change the way you think about forgiving others?

Application and Practice

Did You Know...?

Grace calls for a response in our relationships. Sometimes the response is to ask for forgiveness because we have wronged someone else. That means facing the person, owning the wrong without excuses, and asking for release. It is not enough to say, “I am sorry you were hurt,” if we are unwilling to take responsibility. True confession is honest, specific, and humble. It does not demand forgiveness, but it does seek reconciliation where possible.

Other times the response is to extend forgiveness to someone who has wronged us. This may involve naming the hurt honestly before God, releasing the desire for revenge, and choosing not to make the person keep paying emotionally. Forgiveness may be a process, especially when wounds are deep. It may also require wisdom, boundaries, or help from trusted leaders or counselors. Forgiveness does not mean placing yourself back into unsafe or harmful situations. But it does mean refusing to let bitterness become the organizing force of your life.

This week’s practice is about taking one honest step. It may be a step toward asking forgiveness. It may be a step toward forgiving someone else. It may be a step toward receiving God’s forgiveness more deeply. The point is not to fix every relationship immediately. The point is to let the grace we have received begin to flow through us. As you choose a practice, ask God for courage, humility, and wisdom.

Discussion

Where do you sense God inviting you to take one honest step toward forgiveness this week?
What feels difficult about that step, and what kind of courage or wisdom do you need?

Practice, Choose One or Two

Think of someone you have wronged or hurt. Pray about whether you need to go to them, own the wrong clearly, and ask, “Will you forgive me?”

Name one person you are struggling to forgive. In prayer, tell God what they owe you and begin releasing that debt to Him.

Write down three categories: people I need to forgive, people I need to ask for forgiveness, and places where I need to receive God’s forgiveness. Sit with the list prayerfully.

Each day pray, “God, because You have forgiven me, help me become a person who gives grace away.”

Prayer

Prayer is where we bring our relationships under the grace of God. Some people may need to pray for courage to ask forgiveness. Others may need strength to forgive someone who hurt them. Others may need to receive again the truth that God has forgiven them in Christ. This is a tender moment, because forgiveness often touches real pain. Encourage honesty, but do not pressure people to share more than they are ready to share.

As the group prays, remember that grace does not deny the seriousness of sin. It takes sin seriously enough to bring it to Jesus. The king in the parable cancels a debt that could never be repaid, and that points us to the gospel. In Christ, God has dealt with our debt through mercy. Now we ask Him to make us people who reflect that mercy. We forgive not because it is easy, but because we have been forgiven.

Prayer Focus

Courage to ask for forgiveness

Strength to forgive others

Freedom from bitterness and resentment

Gratitude for the grace we have received

Closing Thought

Grace is not complete when it is only received. Grace is meant to flow through us. Because we have been forgiven, we now give grace away.