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Ephesians 1:1-2

We Need Grace: Introducing Grace

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Today maybe you've come to Cornerstone because it's the beginning of the fall season or a friend invited you. I want you to know that I have the most **encouraging message** prepared for you. In fact, I want to start off with a word of encouragement I received at the last church conference attended.¹ My encouragement to you is this... "You are good for nothing."

You are good for nothing... You, are good, for nothing. Would everyone say this phrase with me:

"I am good for nothing."

Ready? "I am good for nothing..." This is the **definition** of grace. You are good... for nothing. There's nothing you've done or can do or won't do that can make you good. You've been made good for **free**. Today we're launching a new sermon series, *We Need Grace*. That's what grace is—being made good for nothing you've **done** or **accomplished**. **Christians** tend to **define** grace this way:

Grace: the free and unmerited favor of God.

Maybe you're **sitting here** and you're thinking, "No Jonathan. **I'm not good**. I haven't received God's favor. He isn't pleased with me." By the end of this sermon you will know how to receive grace. You will know how to be good for nothing.

One of the **first Christian converts** to receive grace was a man named **Paul**. But he didn't start pro-Christian. In fact, he was responsible for **persecuting** and **killing Christians**. But one day **Jesus appeared** to him on the **road to Damascus** and Paul was completely **transformed**. Jesus **forgave him** for his sins and he traveled the ancient world **telling others** about **God's grace**. Here's some of the things he said.

Romans 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (NIV®)

Paul is saying that we're just like him. We're all sinful and broken. We're all not good. This is why we often **tell ourselves how great** we are, because at our **core** we know **we're not**. We're fallen. But God can make us good—he can justify us—by his grace through Jesus.

To **justify** something is to say, "That thing is **right**" or "that thing is **good**." As humans, we spend **much** of our time justifying ourselves, don't we? "I am right" and "I am good." But no matter how many times I say it I'm **not very convincing**. Isn't it great when a **friend** or your **husband** or **wife** says, "I **know you** and you're a **good person**"? But what if God who **knows me** inside and out told me I was good? What if God said, "Jonathan, you are good, at no cost to you."? That would be amazing. That would **change my life**.

Paul really wants us to believe that although we're not good in ourselves we can be made good by God. He says it **over and over** again throughout the New Testament. Paul even believes that God's grace, God's **favor** and **power**, are **enough** for him when he's not **strong enough**.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-9a ...I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (NIV®)

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

God's grace saves Paul and gives him the **strength** he needs to live life in a broken world. Do you have that? Do you have God's grace? Is God's grace **as** real as the **air** you **breathe**? I want grace to be real **not theoretical**. That's why we're doing this sermon series, because I need grace, you need grace, we need grace. In Ephesians, which Paul wrote in **A.D. 62** as he sat **imprisoned** in Rome he explains grace further.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. (NIV®)

Somehow through Jesus you and I can be **saved** by God's grace. God uses our faith in Christ like a **tool** to extend grace to us. **This morning** at the **trash pick-up teams** used **grabbers** to pick up trash. Our volunteers **were the ones** picking up the trash, but they used the grabbers as tools. God saves us by his grace, but uses **our faith in Christ** as the tool that does it. Grace is a gift. It's **not earned but received**. We have to believe, but that's **different** than receiving grace as a **payment** for the good deeds we've done.

In the book of Ephesians Paul is writing to a church in Asia at the city of **Ephesus**. Ephesus is the capital of **Asia** (modern-day **Turkey**), so it's big. Probably **200,000 to 250,000 people** lived in and around the city.² When Paul writes he's probably writing to **multiple small churches** in Ephesus but as well as the **surrounding region, Laodicea, Sardis, Smyrna**. It's like Paul is sending a **group text** or **cc-ing** a whole bunch of people through **email**. How does he start his message to these churches? ("**look at your Bibles**")

Ephesians 1:1-2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV®)

He starts by **blessing** them with the grace of God from the Father through Jesus. Before he does that he establishes his **credentials**. He is an **Apostle**. What's that?

Apostle: a man appointed directly by the risen Christ to teach about him with his authority. -
Ephesians For You by Richard Coekin³

Through his encounter and relationship with the risen Christ Jesus Paul had authority only other apostles, like **Peter** had. As your pastor I don't have this authority. But Paul has this authority because it was **God's will**, and he uses this authority to write to and encourage the Christians at Ephesus. These are the believers, the **faithful**. So this is primarily not a **letter** to non-Christians but **to Christians** who are members of a **local church**. This is like a **coupon book** you receive for being a member of a store like **Costco**. Others can read it but it **only benefits** those who are members.

Paul writes to those who are "**in Christ**." We're going to learn through this whole series what it means to be "in Christ." It means being covered by God's grace. It means being a **child** of God. It means being **accepted** and **loved** by the **Father**. It means to be in **relationship** with Jesus himself. It means to be a **true Christian**.

Have you ever gotten **lost** because you forgot to look at a **map** or your **gps**? It's easy to get lost in a book like Ephesians so I want to **zoom out** to look at the **big picture**. Ephesians is primarily divided into two parts:

Chapters 1-3 Grace Received

The first three chapters of Ephesians is full of indicatives.⁴ Indicatives are in **Greek grammar** what is called a **mood** that describes **what "is"** instead of what "**may or might be**."⁵ An example of this is, "You are listening to my sermon." **Listening** describes what is happening right now. Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians describe what God has done for us or is doing for us right now.

Ephesians 1:4a For he chose us in him before the creation of the world... (NIV®)

Ephesians 1:7a In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins... (NIV®)

Ephesians 2:5b —it is by grace you have been saved. (NIV®)

Grace is anytime God does something for us that we don't deserve. And Paul writes that God is **constantly doing** for us what we don't deserve, especially in the first three chapters of Ephesians.

Now **thank** you for listening to my sermon. But what if I were to say, "**Listen** to my sermon!" That's no longer an indicative, but an **imperative**. Imperatives are **commands**. If you say "**do this**" or "**do that**" you are in the imperative mood. There are **41** imperatives in Ephesians, but **only 1** imperative in the **chapters 1-3** (Ephesians 2:11). 40 imperatives appear in **chapters 4-6** of Ephesians because they are all about how we **live-out the Christian life**. *Chapters 1-3 Grace Received...*

Chapters 4-6 Grace-Lived Out

The verse that **bridges** and **connects** chapters 3 and 4 begins with a "**therefore**."

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (ESV)

Because of grace, **we therefore live** a different life. We've experienced grace, now it changes us... In these next chapters we find **commands** for how to live out the Christian life.

Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, (NIV®)

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (NIV®)

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (NIV®)

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (NIV®)

If we look at a **big-picture outline** of the book of Ephesians we find the first three chapters are all about discovering God's love and grace for us and the second half is about living that out **everyday**.

Chapters 1-3 Grace Received

1:1-2 Introducing grace

1:3-14 God's gracious plan

1:15-23 A grace-filled prayer

2:1-10 Grace raises the spiritually dead

2:11-22 Grace breaks down and builds up

3:1-13 Making known the mystery of grace

3:14-21 Comprehending the depth of grace

Now this is an **outline I made**. If you find one in a book it might look different. But look at what the second half of the book looks like through the **lens of grace**.

Chapters 4-6 Grace-Lived Out

4:1-16 Be united by grace

4:17-32 Be spiritually transformed by grace

5:1-21 Be a grace-changed church

5:22-33 Respect and love each other in a grace-filled marriage

6:1-9 Be gracious to your family and to those over you

6:10-20 Put on grace to withstand the evil one

6:21-23 Closing in grace

Grace in. Grace out. That's my **big idea** for today. **First** grace comes in **second** grace goes out. **Grace in. Grace out.** Are you familiar with the whole **breathe-in breathe out?** Well it's a lot easier to breathe out when you've breathed in. We breathe grace in so that we can breathe grace out. In other words, we have to receive grace for from God **before** we can live grace out in this world in obedience to him.

I recently spotted Bernie doing **fitness** on Facebook, so I thought maybe he could help me **illustrate** our big idea.⁶ Would you come on up here **Bernie?** Let's give him some **encouragement** (applause). Bernie, I want you to **symbolically live the Christian life.** I think there is no better way to demonstrate you are living like Christ Jesus than to **take the shape of a cross.** So would you stand with your feet together and with your arms outstretched in the shape of a cross. It looks good. You look like a **great Christian!**

I just realized that although you look like a great Christian outwardly, you're actually holding onto a great deal of **sin inwardly.** You haven't given your life to God. You **haven't experienced grace.** You want to look good in your own strength. You want to be a great Christian, and then you'll let Jesus just **touch you up.** So to symbolize that I think it's only fair that you **hold some sin** in each of your **hands,** which we're going to symbolize with two of my **heaviest theology books** with "**Sin**" printed on each.

Now **please don't drop** the books. They're **nice** books and I wouldn't want to **damage** them. And I think you'll be okay. You want to live the Christian life but you'll deal with your sin later. You'll experience forgiveness and grace after you've excelled at living like Christ. Please hold the books up. Take the shape of Jesus on the cross. Keep holding them. **Breathe in breathe out.** You're a very good Christian **I'm sure you'll be fine** for a very long time...

As you can see, Bernie **can't live** as a Christian **before** dealing with his sin. He needs God's grace so that he can live a Christian life. So I need **one more volunteer** (or technically our first volunteer since Bernie didn't volunteer). Please wear this "**Grace**" poster along with me. Now we're going to **take** the sin from Bernie and Bernie I want you to strike that cross pose once more, seeking to live as a Christian. Grace is not only going to **remove your sins** but **hold your arms up.** See, grace makes you "**cross-fit...**" **Grace makes you able to live like Jesus.** Grace makes you **good for nothing.** Bernie, you are good for nothing!

How long do you think you could do this for? A long time! You'd grow tired and weary right, but **as long as grace holds you up you'd be okay.** Thank you, you can both go sit down. Let's thank Bernie for God's grace in his life (applause).

It's only **after** we've received God's grace that we can **share it** with others. **Grace in. Grace out.**

- **Because God loves** me I can love my **wife** even though she didn't do the **dishes** and said she would. **Grace in. Grace out.**
- Because God **values** me I can **turn the other cheek** when a **coworker disrespects** me. **Grace in. Grace out.**
- Because God is **kind** to me I can be kind to my **sibling** even when they've been **annoying** me all day. **Grace in. Grace out.**

- Because God is **compassionate** to me I won't yell at that **car** when they **cut me off**. *Grace in. Grace out.*
- Because God **forgave** me I can forgive “that person” even though this isn't the first time they've wronged me. *Grace in. Grace out.*

One of the **Chinese words** for sin is **crime**. If God forgives you even though you're a **criminal** who can't you forgive? Do you **need** God's grace? Do you want it? Chances are that if you're **not** a very gracious person, you need to receive God's grace **afresh** or for the very **first time**. Maybe you are **kind to others**, but it **wears you out**. You need an **unending source of grace**. You need to God's grace. *Grace in. Grace out.*

There's no better place to **find grace** than **at the cross with Jesus**. Jesus is the God who became man so that he could lift your sins up. He lifted our sins up in the palms of his hands and he **did not falter**. He did **not waver**. He **struggled**. The cross was a **burden**. But he did **not fail**. He bore our sins up so that you and I can **experience grace**. Because of Jesus' **sacrifice** on the cross you and I can have our **sins removed** and grace can **lift us up**. Yes. Jesus wants us to live **transformed lives**, but **first** we just need grace.

Maybe today is the day you **breathe grace in for the very first time**. Maybe today is the day when you realize, “**I want to be good for nothing**” and “I can only be good for nothing **through someone**, Christ Jesus, who **paid it all** for my sins.” If that's you I want to invite you to pray with me to invite grace into your life for the very first time. If you're a Christian who is **struggling** to experience and give grace you can pray this prayer with me too.

*Dear Jesus, I need grace. I need to experience what you have done and accomplished for me in my life before I try to go out and live a godly life. As I confess that I often, maybe even my whole life till now, try to be kind and good apart from you. But I fail because I'm sinful and broken and need your forgiveness and grace. I need your love to fill me up so that I can love you and love those around me more. Thank you for forgiving me of my sins and extending your refreshing grace to me once more. Help me **grace in—grace out**. Amen.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.

¹ Conservative Congregational Christian Conference: Annual Gathering 2018 at Gordon College. Tom Johnston, author of *The Organic Reformation*, said this line, “You are good for nothing” as part of one of his plenary talks.

² Clinton E. Arnold. *Ephesians* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament series Book 10) (Kindle Locations 508-511). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

³ Coekin, Richard. *Ephesians For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading* (God's Word For You) (Kindle Locations 3032-3034). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Thank you to Pastor Alistair Begg in his sermon “Introducing Ephesians” for introducing this to me. Published Jan 20, 2016. Truth for Life. <https://youtu.be/1Em5DgeU1Kw?t=18m20s> (listen 18:20 in) Accessed 9/6/2018.

⁵ Mounce, William D. *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*. Third Edition. Zondervan. 2009. Page 125.

⁶ The idea for this illustration came from a children’s curriculum posted online. *We Give Grace Because We’ve Received It From God*. Group’s Hands-On Bible Max. Copyright Group Publishing, Inc. Loveland, CO http://storage.cloversites.com/thechurchatrutledge/documents/HOBMQ11TG_Ls13.pdf Accessed 9/6/2018.