

# BRIGHT SHINING AS THE SUN!



A Six-Session  
Exploration  
of God's  
*Amazing  
Grace*

COMPLETE  
LEADER'S GUIDE  
for 6-Week Bible Study  
or 6-Session Retreat



A 6-SESSION **BIBLE STUDY**

GRSDD

# BRIGHT SHINING AS THE SUN!

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# Introduction

The hymns we sing often tell the story of our salvation. Their words and music celebrate the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Some hymns tell of our life in Christ and may reflect the experiences of those who wrote them. Written in 1772, first sung in public on January 1, 1773, and then published in 1779, the hymn “Amazing Grace” reflects the astonishment of its author, John Newton, as he considered the grace in his life: “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!” The grace of God is amazing. Grace is God’s undeserved favor for sinners. We are not saved because of our own good works or our efforts to please God. God chose us in Christ to be his own “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). He chose us before we were born, before he even created the world. That is amazing!

# How to Use

## **AS A BIBLE STUDY**

One way to use this resource is as a six-session Bible study at church on Sundays or a weekday or at home in a small group. Make copies of each week's session for each participant to use and fill in answers on their own. Call on various participants to read aloud the Scripture texts printed herein. Encourage participants, as they feel comfortable, to share their personal stories related to the questions, discussion topics or "Amazing Grace" in general, and invite them to take part in the action prompts at the ends of every session. This study can be done any time of the year.

## **AS A RETREAT**

Another way to offer this resource is as the framework for a weekend or midweek summer retreat on grace. Invite participants to gather for an all-day or multiday event at a retreat center, convention hall or church camp for relaxation and refreshment in God's amazing grace. The six sessions could be spread out and used throughout the day or days of the retreat, along with other community-building activities (hikes, swimming, canoeing, sing-alongs, campfires, cookouts, ice breakers, board games, etc.). Perfect for men's or women's group events.

## **AS A PERSONAL DEVOTION**

This resource can also be used as a guide for personal devotion for a week or several weeks over the summer or any time of year. The format of this study allows space for personal journaling and the recording of faith moments related to "Amazing Grace" or other instances in which a person has grown closer to God. This is a helpful tool to instill a routine for regular spiritual reflection on God's Word.

# A Wretch Like Me

*Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*

**Romans 7:24**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, guide and bless our study of your Word. Help us by the power of your Spirit to see our need for a Savior, and lead us to true repentance. Open our hearts and minds to see the wonders of your amazing grace in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Strengthen us in faith for lives of love and service to others. Hear our prayer, and accept our praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **DISCUSSION**

Have you ever received an unexpected gift “for no reason,” when it was not your birthday or Christmas or another special occasion? What did you receive? What explanation was given for the gift?

## **HYMN VERSE**

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

## I ONCE WAS LOST

1. How would you define a “wretch”? It is not a very pleasant description to be used about anyone. How would you feel if someone described you as a wretch? Have you ever thought of yourself as “wretched” in some way? Why or why not?

### 2. Read Psalm 32:1-5:

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit. While I kept silent, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

How does David the psalmist describe his wretchedness and its cause?

3. We describe sin and its impact on our lives in many ways, but along with wretchedness, this hymn verse from “Amazing Grace” describes us as being “lost” and “blind.” How does sin cause someone to be lost? If we are lost, what is impossible for us to find? In our sinful, fallen nature, to what kinds of things are we blind?

4. Scripture says that Jesus “needed no one to testify about anyone, for he himself knew what was in everyone” (John 2:25). Jesus knows us very well. **Read Matthew 15:18-19:**

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.  
For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft,  
false witness, slander.

We may be tempted at times to blame others for the wrong that we have done. What does Jesus say about the source of our sinful wretchedness? Why is it difficult for us to admit this source of sinfulness?

## 5. Read Romans 7:15-25:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me. For I know that the good does not dwell within me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do the good lies close at hand, but not the ability. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that, when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am enslaved to the law of God, but with my flesh I am enslaved to the law of sin.

The apostle Paul knows that he cannot blame anyone else for his own sinful behavior and decisions. Aware of his guilt, he describes himself as a “wretched person.” Paul certainly trusts in Jesus as his Savior, yet the apostle is still troubled by sin. What details does he give about his predicament? When have you been aware of a similar struggle against sin in your life? If you wish, share your experiences. Who has delivered us—and Paul—from our wretchedness?

## NOW I SEE

1. A blind man healed by Jesus is cast out of the synagogue because he believes that Jesus was sent by God. Jesus hears of this and goes to find the once blind but now clear-sighted man. **Read John 9:35-41:**

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

What does the healed man say that reveals his clear, spiritual sight? What examples of spiritual blindness do you see in our world today?

2. The Pharisees often chose to remain blind to God's amazing grace. They complained that Jesus welcomed "sinners" and even ate with them. Jesus told them three parables to teach a lesson about the grace of God. The first parable is about a shepherd and his sheep. **Read Luke 15:1-7:**

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

What aspects of this parable best illustrate for you the amazing grace of God?

### 3. Read Psalm 51:1-11:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

What does the psalmist say to acknowledge his wretchedness before God? What does he ask of the Lord? What does the psalmist say in verse 1 to show his confidence in God's mercy? Why is it important to acknowledge our wretched spiritual condition as we come before God and ask him to be merciful to us?

#### 4. Read Psalm 103:8-14:

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

God created us and he knows all about our fallen, sinful nature. What does God really think of us, as wretched people? Which of these verses are especially hopeful and encouraging to you in your relationship to the Lord?

## AMAZING GRACE

1. “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!” Grace is God’s undeserved favor toward sinners. In repentant humility, we acknowledge our wretched sinfulness and in awe and wonder, we praise God for his amazing grace. Think of accounts that you have heard of people—perhaps members of the armed forces or first responders—who have given their lives to save others. Why do these heroes make such a sacrificial choice? **Read Romans 5:6-8:**

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

How does the apostle Paul use the example of self-sacrifice to illustrate God’s amazing grace in Christ?

2. The apostle Paul was amazed by God's grace because he had experienced that grace for himself.  
**Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17:**

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience as an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

How does Paul describe his wretched past? What does he say about God's grace? What special reason does Paul suggest for the fact that mercy was shown to him? Even though there is nothing we can do to deserve God's grace, how might people try to earn that grace for themselves? When might you be tempted to think that you deserve God's overflowing grace in Christ?

### 3. Read Ephesians 2:1-10:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, doing the will of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else, but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

As you read these verses, think about what the dead can do for themselves. Can they do anything? Why is it important to realize that, apart from Christ Jesus, we were once dead in our sins? We have been created anew by faith in Jesus. Baptized, we were buried with Jesus into death and raised to new life; we are alive in him. What works do you think God has prepared for you as you follow Jesus?

## SUMMING UP

The first verse of the hymn “Amazing Grace” rightly describes the grace of God! Merely hearing the sound of that blessed word is sweet. The words used to describe our sinful condition are not so sweet. We are wretched, lost and blind. God’s grace is his favor toward sinners, favor that we do not deserve, favor we could never earn. Sometimes the letters of the word *grace* are used to spell out its meaning: **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**. As the apostle Paul explains, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9, ESV). With his blood shed on the cross, Jesus our Savior paid the debt of sin that we owed and, by God’s amazing grace through faith in Jesus, the riches of forgiveness and eternal life are ours.

Responsive Reading..... Psalm 103:8-14

- L** The LORD is merciful and gracious,
- C** **Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**
- L** He will not always accuse,
- C** **Nor will he keep his anger forever.**
- L** He does not deal with us according to our sins,
- C** **Nor repay us according to our iniquities.**
- L** For as the heavens are high above the earth,
- C** **So great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;**
- L** As far as the east is from the west,
- C** **So far he removes our transgressions from us.**
- L** As a father shows compassion for his children,
- C** **So the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.**
- L** For he knows how we were made;
- C** **He remembers that we are dust.**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, the amazing grace of God is revealed in your sacrifice on the cross and in your resurrection from the dead. Although we do not deserve your love and mercy, through your redeeming death, our sins are forgiven. We are created anew by God's grace through faith in your name. Help us now by your Spirit to walk in the works that are prepared for us, works of love and service that will reflect your grace. Amen.

## **A SURPRISE GIFT**

Give an unexpected small gift to a family member, friend or neighbor (for example, a plant, a gift card or coffee mug). Include a note about God's unexpected, amazing grace in Jesus Christ.

# BRIGHT SHINING AS THE SUN!



A 6-Session  
Exploration  
of God's  
*Amazing  
Grace*

This 6-part Bible study—for summer months or any time of year—is structured around the beloved verses of John Newton's hymn "Amazing Grace." Adaptable for use in a weekly setting or as a one-weekend retreat, the engaging questions and reflections of this small group study focus on the scriptural inspiration for Newton's lyrics and encourage participants to live each bright day with eyes, hearts and mouths open to sing of God's amazing gift of grace today and for the next ten thousand years!



For more resources related to "Amazing Grace" visit  
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