

# God's Saving and Enabling Grace



## Topic

God's grace

## Theme

God's grace is sufficient for saving the lost and enabling the believer.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will depend on God's enabling grace to witness confidently and serve God boldly.

## Materials

- Resources 1 and 5

## Scripture Focus

Acts 3; 4

## Summary

This lesson shows that God's grace is sufficient for all. It provides salvation for the sinner and enabling for the believer. Peter and John presented God's saving grace to the lost and then experienced God's enabling grace for ministry. God emboldened them to serve Him in the face of dangerous threats.

## Outline

### I. God's Sufficient Grace for Salvation (3)

- Peter illustrates God's grace (3:1–11)
- Peter explains God's grace (3:12–16)
- Peter offers God's grace (3:17–26)
- People react to God's grace (4:1–4)

### II. God's Enabling Grace for Service (4)

- Apostles witness by God's grace (4:5–12)
- Apostles answer by God's grace (4:13–22)
- Believers pray for God's grace (4:23–30)
- God gives His grace (4:31–37)

## Memory Verse

*"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33).*

## GETTING STARTED

### Courage Boosters

**ASK:** Name a challenging or even scary task you have faced. (Q1)

**ASK:** What have you done to bolster your courage in that situation? (Q2)

Christ commanded the early church to make disciples by taking the gospel to the uttermost parts of the world. The lives of those early Christians were at stake when they witnessed. But instead of using fear as an excuse, they prayed and asked for God's enabling grace. And God answered their prayers by giving them His great grace.

### Excuse My Phobia

**ASK:** What phobias do you have?

**ASK:** When, if ever, have you excused yourself from doing something because of your phobia?

**ASK:** Is fear ever a good excuse for not serving God? Explain.

Fear is a part of who we are. Yet fear is not to control our lives, especially when it comes to obeying God. The early Christians had reasons to fear for their lives. But instead they turned to God for grace. He wants us to do the same. He wants us to meet our fears with prayer for His enabling grace.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. God's Sufficient Grace for Salvation (3)

Luke recorded that believers were meeting in the temple and enjoying *favour with all the people* (Acts 2:47). But the religious leaders were not willing to coexist with the apostles and their doctrine. After the healing of a lame man in Acts 3, their opposition of the apostles grew. This increased opposition drove the early Jewish believers away from the temple context. It also gave believers an opportunity both to share God's saving grace and to rely on His enabling grace.

#### A. Peter illustrates God's grace (3:1–11)

Peter and John were going to the temple for prayer at the ninth hour, or about three in the afternoon (3:1). The temple courtyard was surrounded by several gates where women, Gentiles, and unclean Jews could gather. It was at one of these gates that the apostles met a lame beggar (3:2). The beggar made his living from the gifts of passersby. Some would give him a coin or two, but most people ignored his plight, walking right by him. Every time someone treated him as if he didn't exist, he felt both embarrassed and discouraged. No one can be ignored as many times as the lame man was without feeling dejected. His sense of self-worth must

have been almost non-existent.

The lame man spotted Peter and John as they walked by him. He asked the two men for alms (3:3). Apparently the lame man did not look directly at Peter and John. Perhaps this was a coping mechanism for him. He would feel less hurt from people rejecting him if he didn't look directly at them when he asked for money.

**ASK:** When you pass by a homeless person who is begging for money or food, do you look the person in the eyes? Why or why not? (Q3)

**ASK:** What do you notice about the homeless person's tendency to look you in the eyes? (Q4)

When a homeless man was recently asked what was hardest part about being homeless, he replied, *No one sees me*. No doubt the lame man outside the temple felt like no one saw him. So he stopped looking at them too.

But Peter didn't put his head down and hurry by the lame man. Instead, he stopped and told the man to look at him (3:4). The man looked into Peter's eyes, hopeful for a gift (3:5). Peter gave him far more. He told the man to rise and walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (3:6). Peter reached out and took the man's hand, a personal touch the lame man probably rarely felt. The lame man's legs sprung to life. For the first time ever, he entered the temple on his own, praising God as he went (3:11). His praises evidenced his spiritual healing too. He became Peter's illustration of God's saving grace.

The crowd responded to the healing miracle with amazement. They gathered around Peter, John, and the healed man to see if they could get an explanation for the miracle (3:10, 11).

**ASK:** Which was actually more amazing, the fact that the man was standing or the fact that God saved him from his sin? (Q5)

**ASK:** Why was the healing of the lame man a good illustration of God's saving grace? (Q6) *In the minds of most people, the lame man was the type of person God would be the least interested in. His physical healing was a picture of what happened to his heart. His location at the temple gate made him highly visible.*

## **B. Peter explains God's grace (3:12–16)**

Peter promptly addressed the crowd, taking advantage of their rapt attention. He began by dismissing the idea that he and John used their own power to heal the lame man (3:12). Peter directed them to marvel and gaze upon God's Servant, Jesus, Whom God glorified and raised from the dead (3:13–15).

Peter boldly made it clear that the crowd was responsible for the death of the Messiah. He connected *Jesus Christ of Nazareth* (3:6) with the Old Testament names for the Messiah. Peter said Jesus is the *Holy One* (Ps. 16:10; Isa. 31:1), the *Just* or *righteous* (Isa. 53:11; Zech. 9:9), and the *Prince of life*, a name meaning *Giver of Life* (Ps. 16). What a shock for the crowd to learn they killed the Messiah they were still expecting to come!

Peter gave the crowd hope. Jesus was no longer dead. God raised Him to life.

And the man standing before them was proof of what faith in the name of Jesus can do to a person. By faith, the lame man was made whole both physically and spiritually (Acts 3:16).

**ASK:** What did the lame man's salvation teach the crowd about meriting salvation? (Q7) *The Jewish crowd no doubt believed the lame man could not merit salvation. His salvation illustrated that salvation was by grace through faith.*

### C. Peter offers God's grace (3:17–26)

Peter left few options for the people in terms of an appropriate response. God's action had created the climate for repentance. Peter told the people to repent and return to the Lord. Since they had denied Him and delivered Him to death, and since Jesus was their Messiah, Who was now alive, they had no option but to repent.

**READ:** Acts 3:17–19. **ASK:** The Jews killed God's Son, yet God offers them grace and forgiveness. What does God's offer tell you about His grace? (Q8) *God's grace is simply amazing. It makes no sense from a human point of view.*

The word *repentance* indicates a change of mind. In respect to salvation, repentance means *to think differently about the Savior, about sin, and about oneself*. This change involves both an intellectual understanding and a volitional act. The result is the *blotting out of their sins* (3:19; see Col. 2:14).

Evangelical scholars intensely debate the phrases *times of refreshing* (Acts 3:19) and *restitution of all things* (3:21). Both phrases seem to refer to the future earthly kingdom, when Jesus will reign on earth in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Note how *refreshing* (3:19) is connected to the second coming of Christ (3:20, 21). Apparently Peter was saying that if the Jewish people repented, they could have immediate forgiveness of sin. In addition, those Jewish believers would still experience the Kingdom blessings in the future earthly Kingdom of Israel when Christ returns. Peter was not addressing, however, when this Kingdom will take place. Rather, he was addressing that a future does exist for national Israel. Personal salvation in Christ would in no way invalidate the future Kingdom for Israel.

Verses 22–26 affirm that even though the Jewish people had rejected Jesus, they would remain God's covenant people.

Peter spoke the truth with boldness even though it was risky. He didn't compromise his message. He was true to the ministry Christ called him to.

### D. People react to God's grace (4:1–4)

As Peter and John exhorted the people in the name of Jesus, the temple guard arrested them (4:1–3). The Sadducees, a Levitical priestly group, were the leaders of the temple and temple guard in Jerusalem. This group constantly opposed Jesus (Mark 11:27, 28; Luke 20:1, 2). In addition, this group denied any concept of future judgment, resurrection, and angels (Acts 23:8; Mark 12:18). Obviously they didn't like Peter and John talking about Jesus' resurrection or any other resurrection.

In addition, the Sadducees had the most to lose if Peter and John stirred the crowds to rebellion. Typically, the Romans allowed a type of self-government by the states they conquered. The Sadducees held the powerful political positions within

Beginning in chapter 4, a series of confrontations occurred between the apostles and the Jewish authorities.

These confrontations climaxed in chapter 7 with the stoning of Stephen.

Jerusalem. If the crowds rebelled, the Romans would send additional troops and Roman leaders to take over the ruling positions, marginalizing the Sadducees.

Even if Rome left the Sadducees in positions of power, the Jewish rulers would lose their influence over the Jews if the crowds responded to Peter and John's message. Sadducees protected their power and influence at all cost, blindly discounting the miracles the apostles performed.

**ASK:** What three words might you use to describe the Sadducees' reaction to God's grace? (Q9) *Perhaps selfish, blind, and foolish.*

By contrast, about five thousand people responded to God's grace by putting their faith in Christ (4:4). No wonder the Sadducees were worried! Christ was building His church and threatening their rather comfortable and powerful lifestyle. For their self-preservation, the Sadducees had to silence the apostles.

**ASK:** To what might you compare the Sadducees rejection of God's grace in favor of political power and influence? (Q10) *Saying no to a private jet in favor of a tricycle with only two wheels. Saying no to the world's finest steaks in favor of a plate full of worms.*

The Sadducees were worried about what they might lose. They didn't realize that by rejecting God's grace, they were already the biggest losers of their time. Nothing on earth could ever come close to the riches of God's saving grace (Eph. 1:7).

## II. God's Enabling Grace for Service (4:5–37)

### A. Apostles witness by God's grace (4:5–12)

Peter and John found themselves before the highest ruling authorities in Israel. This group was called the Sanhedrin, or *the council* (4:15). It included seventy men comprised of Sadducees, Pharisees, priests, and elders. Israel's brightest and most skilled in the law met to chasten Peter and John. Apparently they also brought in the lame man whom Peter had healed (4:14).

As Peter addressed the council, he boldly declared that he and John had acted in Jesus' name (4:8–10).

**READ:** Acts 4:8. **ASK:** Why was Peter able to be so bold in addressing the powerful Jewish leaders? (Q11) *He was filled, or controlled, by the Spirit.*

Peter argued that Jesus had been crucified; therefore, Jesus' death was a public fact. He also argued that God had raised Jesus from the dead; therefore, Jesus' resurrection was a public fact (4:10). In addition, he quoted Psalm 118:22 to illustrate that these truths did not contradict the Old Testament but, rather, they fulfilled it. God had predicted Israel would reject Messiah.

Peter also added that since Jesus indeed is Messiah, He is the only way to salvation (Acts 4:12), a restatement of Jesus' own teaching. Salvation, then, is no longer associated with the temple or other Jewish institutions. Rather, salvation is through Jesus. Believers should not speak arrogantly regarding this truth. Salvation comes only through Jesus because Jesus is the only perfect God-Man, Who died, rose again, and now resides in Heaven with the Father (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

With commendable courage, Peter and John spoke to the mightiest, wealthiest, and most powerful in Israel.

### B. Apostles answer by God's grace (4:13–22)

The Sanhedrin were amazed that unlearned men such as Peter and John could speak with such clarity and confidence (Acts 4:13).

**READ:** Acts 4:13. **ASK:** What did the Sanhedrin conclude about Peter and John? (Q12) *That they had been with Jesus.*

**ASK:** What might you include in a list of qualities that would be reflected in the life of a person who had been with Jesus? (Q13) *Bold, humble, sure, compassionate, fervent.*

The council sent Peter and John out of their presence to come up with a plan. They agreed that a miracle had occurred, though they would not acknowledge that Jesus had performed it (4:14–16). The Sanhedrin had no answer for the miracle, but that mattered little to them. Their continued political power was of greater concern.

The Sanhedrin forbade Peter and John to continue to speak in Jesus' name (14:17, 18). Note how this legal council established a legal dictum: do not teach or speak in Jesus' name. Thus the council could implement punishment if anyone violated their command. Peter and John, however, could not disobey the risen Savior.

**READ:** John 4:19, 20. **ASK:** How compelled were Peter and John to speak the truth about Christ? (Q14) *They said they couldn't help but speak the things they had seen and heard. It would be impossible for them to be quiet.*

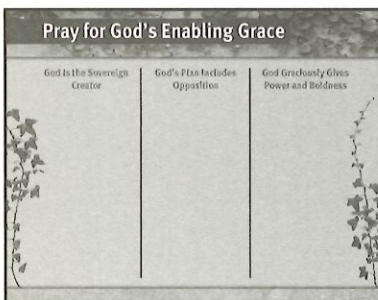
The Sanhedrin responded to Peter and John by threatening them again and then letting them go (4:21, 22). No doubt their threats increased in intensity after Peter and John revealed they could not comply with their demands.

Peter and John weren't superhuman. They spoke boldly in a tense, dangerous situation because God's grace enabled them.

### C. Believers pray for God's grace (4:23–30)

The church responded to Peter and John's experience with the Sanhedrin by praying. The early believers were thankful for Peter and John's release. However, they prayed in relation not only to the men's release but also to what the chief priests and elders had commanded John and Peter (4:23). The early Christians' prayer involved three interconnected ideas: God's sovereignty (4:24), acknowledgment of evil and opposition as part of God's plan (4:25–28), and a petition for boldness (4:29, 30). The early part of the prayer mentions God's creative power.

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 5. **ASK:** Why is focusing on God's position as creator of the universe important when we face apprehension and fear about serving Him (4:24)? (Q15) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *It reminds us of His infinite power and ultimate rule over all. It helps us put our fears into proper perspective.*



Clearly the early disciples recognized a history of opposition to God's plan, although they still acknowledged God's absolute sovereignty. Luke wrote to help believers understand that the newly born church would face opposition. The believers' prayer recalled specific individuals and acts of opposition: Herod, Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, and even Israel herself (4:27). These individuals, however, could only do *whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done* (4:28). These believers affirmed God's complete sovereign rule.

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 5. **ASK:** Why is it important to understand that God's plan sometimes includes opposition and persecution? (Q16) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *We won't see the opposition as a sign of God's weakness or disinterest. We will continue to trust God through the opposition.*

**READ:** Acts 4:29. **ASK:** Why is it important to request boldness when we are fearful or apprehensive about serving God? (Record learners' answers on the resource.) (Q17) *Praying for boldness is a humble acknowledgement of our need for God's grace. It shifts our dependence off ourselves and on to God. God will answer our prayers for boldness.*

The believers did not assume God would automatically empower them with boldness, nor did they simply operate in their own strength. Luke recorded the perfect balance between acknowledging the reality of dangerous threats and the proper focus and concentration on Who God is to meet the challenges.

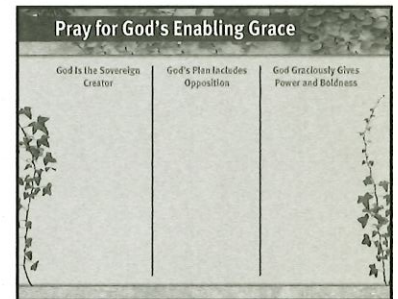
#### **D. God gives His grace (4:31–37)**

God immediately answered the believers' prayers, as *the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness* (4:31).

As the early church grew, believers faced many obstacles, including the need for food and lodging. Many who had traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost and received Christ chose to remain for some time. But they faced opposition from Jewish leaders. So converted Jewish individuals who had depended on the temple and synagogue for food and support found themselves requiring additional assistance.

The church provided that assistance. Luke used the believers' example to illustrate the unity of the early church (4:32–37). He linked this unity directly to the Spirit's work. Believers were caring for one another and even selling property to assist other believers. Note that no one forced this unity and sharing of possessions. Rather, the Holy Spirit prompted this sharing.

**ASK:** Why is generosity and caring between believers a measure of God's enabling grace? (Q18) *Generosity and care go against our sinful nature. To excel in these areas must be attributed to God's enabling grace. Our growth as believers is because of God's great grace.*



## MAKING IT PERSONAL

### Sufficient Grace

If God's grace was sufficient to save us, then it is just as sufficient to enable us to serve Him effectively. Having been saved by faith, we ought to serve God by faith. As we serve God, our lives will testify to God's grace. As we face opposition, our boldness in witnessing will show that God's grace is sufficient.

**ASK:** What is true of those who believe God's grace is sufficient to enable them to serve God effectively? (Q19) *They pray for boldness; they acknowledge their weaknesses; they act by faith, not by sight; they rejoice in the Lord's grace; they glorify God with their service.*

**ASK:** What evidence is there in your life that you believe God's grace is sufficient for serving Him? (Q20)

### Prayer for Enabling Grace

**ASK:** For what do you need God's enabling grace? (Q21)

Pray for boldness rather than looking for an excuse for not serving God. God is trustworthy. He will give you the great grace you need to obey Him. (Q22)

### Review Resource

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Pray for God's great grace.

