

life group study guide

GRACE DOES BIG THINGS

November 25, 2012



God's Grace is the overflowing favor of God toward us, the power of God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And the fact is we cannot do anything for ourselves. Jesus says, "...without me ye can do nothing". (John 15:5) Grace is what God has already done for us, independent of any worth or value on our part. Grace is getting the good that we do not deserve, eternal life, NO death. If it's tied to some goodness of ours, then it's not true grace. God, by grace, has already provided everything we will ever need. Grace is the voice that calls us to change and then gives us the power to pull it off.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". (2 Corinthians 12:9)

When our days go from bad to worse, we must turn to God and trust Him. When we find ourselves in a situation that suddenly reverses field and begins going in a direction we don't want, we are humbled, and that forces us into a position of dependence on the Lord. Circumstances that force dependence teach us patience. We dread that word, but how we need it. Circumstances that teach patience make us wise. Our dependence will lead to patience, which will lead to wisdom and maturity. Wisdom becomes the gold crown of our adverse circumstances. We all want to grow up, but we want to do so without experiencing any growing pains, but that is not possible.

Q. Do we allow Satan to just give us an appearance of trouble and make us give up on all of the promises of God?

Q. Why does God sometimes lead us into trying situations? (James 1:2-5)

Q. Is grace the freedom to do as we wish? (Romans 6:14; Romans. 5:19-21; Titus 2:11-15)

Q. Why does God give favor? (John 3:16)

Q. Why does God favor man? (Hebrews 1:5; 2:6-10; Acts 17:26; 28-29; 1 John 3:1)

We judge the Lord by circumstances. If we find life comfortable and peaceful and rewarding, we judge the Lord faithful. If we find it arduous, we judge him uncaring. Of course, few of us ever directly accuse the Lord of unfaithfulness, so we grab whoever is close at hand – our spouse, our employer, our children – or in Israel's case, Moses – and blame them.

When we think of Moses, we think of a great leader, a faithful servant. He was given a great task to do and he was certainly a great leader. But he, like many of us, was initially unwilling to be involved in God's master plan. We all know the story of the burning bush and Moses' excuses before God. He had 4 excuses and God had 4 answers.

-Who Am I? - (Exodus 3:11-12). God's answer was - it doesn't matter Moses who you are - what is important is who I am and that I will be with you.

- I won't know what to say - (Exodus 3:13-15). God's answer was I will tell you.

- They won't listen to me - (Exodus 4:1). God's answer was that I will work through you in power. They will see and believe.

- I can't speak well, I don't have the skills - (Exodus 4:10-17). God's answer was to speak through him.

Q. Do you have similar excuses as Moses? God has similar answers for you.

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"I wish I was... I can't.... I'm not... I could never..." To speak negatively towards yourself can put you in the state of mind that you are not as good as someone else and you could never be more than what you are. But God has given every one of us the Gift of His Favor. He'll take you places and allow you to be more than what you could ever imagine! Your words and beliefs carry more power over your life than you realize... change those "Negatives" into "Positives" and have Faith in that God has greatness in store for you, and you'll change your Life into something Extraordinary!

"Let the Words and the Thoughts of my Heart be pleasing in your eyes, O Lord, my Rock and the One who saves me." (Psalm 19:14)

God does not tell Moses that he will stop the troubles, he tells him to wait and see what He is going to do. Now that is what we must do. (Exodus 3:19-20) After we pray the troubles may not stop, but what we are supposed to do is patiently wait to see what God will do.

There are many ways that God will answer our prayers. In Israel's case, he started to answer by sending Moses to demand that Pharaoh let them go. That was the beginning of it. But Israel and even Moses did not like the prayer being answered in that way. They looked at what was happening; how Pharaoh was responding and it frightened them. They became sorry that they had prayed. The more they prayed the worse things were becoming.

Pharaoh got himself at this point on a collision course with God, digging the hole a little deeper each time, each time more and more torn between following the instincts of the heart and relenting to the twisted logic of the hardened heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart, over and over again. 19 times it says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened: 11 times the text reports that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, 8 times that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. The text tells us that the king almost yielded to God's will, almost let the slaves go free, but time and again his heart was hardened, and he enslaved them again.

Q. Why? What's going on?

Q. What exactly is a hard heart?" – (Ezekiel 33:31-32)

Q. What are the consequences of a hard heart? (Proverbs 29:1; Hebrews 3:8–11; Psalm 95:7-11, 2 Peter 1:5-9; Matthew 15:18-19)

The heart is important because it is the center of our thoughts and ideas. In Proverbs 4:23, Solomon, under inspiration of the Holy Ghost, wrote, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."*

The heart perceives – Deuteronomy 29:4; understands – Proverb 8:5; deliberates – Nehemiah 5:7; reflects – Luke 2:19; plans – Proverbs 16:9. The heart feels joy, pain, despair, love, hate, and every emotion in between; it is the centre of our feelings and affection.

Do you see yourself in Pharaoh, with grand plans that you'd rather not give up, fond desires that run counter to the will of God, and sometimes find it hard to set them aside in order to do what God wants done. That is what a hardened heart will do to us; back and forth we go, seeing what we could do with God, for God, out there, and running off to do it, only to be pulled back, hardened and calloused by the call of ambition, caught up in the power of peer pressure. The hardened heart can never quite bring itself to do the radical thing. The hardened heart, Pharaoh's kind of heart, can never quite say an unreserved yes to God. There is always something held back, something less than a radical commitment.

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Q. Do we often settle for the ordinary, the usual, and the conventional? Why?

The ten plagues were ten chances for Pharaoh and all the Egyptians to be beneficiaries of God's grace. In addition to marking the end of the reign of Pharaoh and the beginning of freedom from bondage of God's people, each of the 10 plagues was also an attack on one of the false idols of Egypt. Just as Egypt was a symbol of the power of sin in the world to hold God's people under its bondage, so the plagues are a symbol to remind us that God will bring judgment upon those things that we treat as idols in our lives. God did not tolerate the idolatry of Egypt and he won't tolerate it in us either. And the cost to Pharaoh and Egypt was beyond great.

Q. How many of us have an idol in our lives right now?

Q. What is there in our life that keeps us from breaking free from the bondage that Satan has placed us under so that we cannot worship God, work in his Kingdom, or be a productive member of the Body of Christ?

Q. What do we place on a pedestal that is higher than Jesus Christ or more important than our service to him?

How many warnings must we get before we will listen to the voice of God? Sometimes our hearts are hardened to His voice and we presume upon His grace before we come to Him and humble ourselves before Him. Pharaoh's arrogance is a sad reminder of what can happen when someone stubbornly makes a stand against the living God and refuses to accept His grace.

We become proud, too proud to humble ourselves and weep before Christ and repent and beg his forgiveness. We call our pride "being consistent, being together"; but the Lord says, "*Today, harden not your hearts.*" In Hebrews 3:7-19 we receive the warning three times - Today - (v. 7), Today - (v. 13), Today - (v.14). Today of course indicates urgency. It does not necessarily mean a 24 hour period but rather it means "now!" In other words it refers to this present moment in time. In (2 Cor. 6:2) the Apostle Paul stated, "... *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*" The time to respond to God is always, now! We need to take action. But then we do nothing! The heart gets harder every time we say "no" to Jesus or to any part of His truth or will.

The Israelites left Egypt as if they just triumphed on the field of battle, but the fact of the matter is, they didn't. God did. They didn't lift a finger. They were resistant to His work. They were skeptical of His promises, but God made Israel to be more than conquerors through His grace, His promise and through His faithfulness. It's a picture again of how the story of redemption is not us, gloriously accomplishing God's will and work in purposes, but God using us in spite of ourselves and God bringing about His purposes. And so the families of Israel leave Egypt like a conquering army, even though it was God who had done the conquering.

READ – Psalm 86 to see the relationship between grace and forgiveness.

John 8:2-11 to see how grace functions in opposition to the law.

READ - examples of Godly grace can be found in – John 1:16-17; Romans 1:5; Romans 5:19 – 6:2; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Ephesians 2:8-9.

God is at work for our good in all things. "All" means exactly that: All. Nothing in your life is wasted. In everything you're living through today God is doing more than you know. The sovereign and good providence of God still works that way. What seems to us bitter and hard to take is never evidence of God's neglect. The good purposes of God for you cannot be thwarted by apparent missteps, wrong

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turns, or tragedies. John Piper rightly states that "all the perplexing turns in our life are going somewhere good. They do not lead off a cliff. In all the setbacks of our lives as believers, God is plotting for our joy" (*A Sweet and Bitter Providence*, pg. 100).

"Often God seems to place His children in positions of profound difficulty, leading them into a wedge from which there is no escape, designing a situation that no human judgment would have permitted had it been previously consulted. The very cloud directs them there. You may be involved in a situation like this at this very hour. It does seem perplexing and mysterious to the last degree, but it is perfectly right. The issue will more than justify Him who has brought you there. It is a platform for the display of His almighty grace and power. Not only will He deliver you, but in doing so He will give you a lesson that you will never forget" (F.B. Meyer. *The Life of Moses: The Servant of God*)