



Leader's Guide

THE GRACE COURSE

An **8-Session Guide** to Experiencing
Freedom and Fruitfulness in Christ

STEVE GOSS

& Freedom in Christ Ministries



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Thanks!

I feel embarrassed that my name is the only one on the cover of this book because so many other people have made such significant contributions to the content of the course and to the process of making it happen.

The hallmark of our amazing global Freedom In Christ team is that they don't look for recognition or reward beyond knowing that they are contributing to seeing this life-changing message continue to bring transformation.

But I want to let you know who these amazing people are who gave so much time and put in so much effort to make this new version of *The Grace Course* possible. Thank you all so much.

Steve

MY CO-AUTHORS ON THE ORIGINAL GRACE COURSE

Jude Graham, a key member of Freedom In Christ's team based in Northern Ireland, was the inspiration for putting this message of grace into the form of a course. Jude made huge contributions to the original version of the course, particularly to *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace*.

Rich Miller, former president of Freedom In Christ USA and co-author of the first edition of *The Grace Course*, has a wonderful gift for communicating God's truth. Many of his wonderful illustrations and insights endure in this new version.

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Foreword

By *Dr. Neil T. Anderson*

Founder and President Emeritus of Freedom In Christ Ministries

A newly adopted child found himself in a big mansion. His new Father whispered in his ear, "This is yours, and you have a right to be here. I have made you a joint heir with my only begotten Son. He paid the price that set you free from your old taskmaster who was cruel and condemning. I purchased it for you because I love you." The young boy couldn't help but question this incredible gift. "This seems too good to be true. What did I do to deserve this?" he wondered. "I have been a slave all my life, and I have done nothing to earn such a privilege!"

He was deeply grateful, however, and began to explore all the rooms in the mansion. There were many other people in the mansion who also had been adopted. He began to form new relationships with his adopted brothers and sisters. He especially enjoyed the buffet table from which he freely ate. Then it happened! While turning away from the buffet table he knocked over a stack of glasses and a valuable pitcher that crashed to the floor and broke. Suddenly he began to think, "You clumsy, stupid kid! You will never get away with this. What right do you have to be here? You better hide before someone finds out because they will surely throw you out."

At first he was caught up with the wonder of living in the mansion with a whole new family and a loving Father, but now he was confused. Old tapes laid down in early childhood began to play again in his mind. He was filled with guilt and shame. The thoughts continued. "Who do you think you are? Some kind of a privileged character? You don't belong here any more, you belong in the basement!" "The old taskmaster was right about me, I don't belong here," thought the newly adopted child. So he descended into the basement of despair.

The cellar was dreary and dark. The only light came from the open door at the top of the long stairs. He heard his Father calling for him, but he was too ashamed to answer. He was surprised to find others in the basement. Upstairs everybody talked to each other and joined in with daily projects that were fun and meaningful. Nobody

talked to each other in the basement. They were too ashamed, and most felt that the basement was where they really belonged anyway. Those old tapes questioned the love of this new Father, and he began to question whether he was ever adopted in the first place.

He made a few halfhearted attempts to return to the light, but eventually he found a dark corner to lie down in. Then one day a shaft of light penetrated his mind and reason returned. He began to think, "Why not throw myself on the mercy of this person who calls Himself my Father? What do I have to lose? Even if He makes me eat the crumbs that fall from the table, it would be better than this." So he decided to take the risk of climbing those stairs and to face his Father with the truth of what he had done. "Lord," he said, "I knocked over some glasses and broke a pitcher." Without saying a word, his Father took him by the hand and led him into the dining room. To his utter amazement, his Father had prepared for him a banquet. "Welcome home Son," his Father said. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1 ESV).

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus, and the matchless grace of God! The door is always open for those who are willing to throw themselves upon the mercy of God. "In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:4–6). He doesn't want us to live self-condemned lives in the basement of shame, guilt, fear, pride, and legalism. He wants us to know that we are adopted, forgiven, and forever alive in Christ, and that we can live every day as beloved children.

I urge you to take seriously this course that will help you live a liberated life under the grace of God and go on to bear much fruit, fruit that will last forever—and equip others to do the same.

Welcome!

Welcome to *The Grace Course*!

The original *Grace Course* has had such an impact on our own lives and ministries and has gone right around the world.

We feel humbled, privileged, and very excited to share this totally revised version with you and are delighted that it is at the center of *The Grace And Freedom Project*, a collaboration between a number of Christian ministries and publishers.

Our intention is to put a tool into your hands that will enable you to see Christians in your church become more fruitful than they could imagine as they allow God's grace to permeate their lives.

This Leader's Guide is designed to give you everything you need to run a highly effective course. We suggest that you get started as follows:

- Register with us for free access to all the additional online info and downloads (below).

- Read these few introductory pages—they will help you understand the scope and intention of the course and how to run it well.
- Watch the teaching sessions on video (available separately) or read the session notes in this Leader's Guide thoroughly.
- Ensure you have grappled with the concepts in your own life and have been through the ministry component (*The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace*) personally before leading others.

Remember that we at Freedom In Christ Ministries are always ready to respond to questions from church leaders so feel free to get in touch.

May God bless you as you lead others into this amazing grace of His!

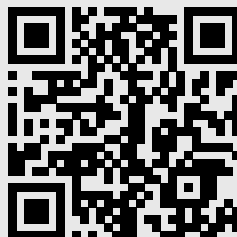
Steve Goss and the Freedom In Christ team

PLEASE REGISTER AS A USER!

It costs nothing and you will receive

- access to a web area with helpful info for course leaders
- downloads that will make running your course even easier
- publicity material for your *Grace Course*
- *Grace Course* timings calculator
- sample documents for the ministry component of the course.

Register at: www.FreedomInChrist.org/GraceCourse



We never share your contact information with third parties. We will not bombard you with unwanted emails.

> ABOUT THE GRACE COURSE

WHAT IS THE GRACE COURSE?

Jesus said that people would recognize His disciples by their love (John 13:35). Paul said: “For Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). *The Grace Course* is a tool for churches to help Christians recover their first love for God (see Revelation 2:4) so that they go on to love others and make a great impact on the world. In order for Christians to be motivated purely by love, we have to help them get rid of “false motivators” such as:

SHAME

How we see ourselves determines how we will live. We give mental assent to the truth that we have become “new creations” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), but in practice shame leads us to allow our identity to be determined by our past rather than by what Christ did for us on the cross. Many of us feel that we are “a let-down” to God and other people, that we are fundamentally flawed. This is compounded when we find ourselves stuck in sins that we can’t seem to escape from.

GUILT

We know, in theory at least, that salvation is by grace through faith, and that we cannot earn it. But many of us unconsciously fall into the trap of believing in effect that we maintain God’s acceptance by working hard and “doing the right things.” Guilt conditions us to believe that our ongoing acceptance by God is a product of how well we are performing and makes us behave as if our growth in Christ is primarily up to us. We end up stressed out, burned out or fed up.

FEAR

Some know full well that they are in the grip of fears but have lost hope that they can resolve them. Others don’t see themselves as fearful because they have learned to live with their fears, thinking, “That’s just how I am.” In both cases, fear holds us back from stepping into all that God has for us and from telling others the wonderful news about Jesus and His salvation.

PRIDE

Pride leads us to take charge of our lives and try to control events and other people instead of trusting the God of all wisdom. It leads to anxious performance and burn-out. Pride also turns a living relationship with Jesus into nothing more than dry religion where we put rules above relationship and laws above love and become more concerned about being right than being real. Humility is the gateway to true unity amongst God’s people, which is what will lead to the world knowing that the Father sent Jesus (see John 17:21).

A true understanding of God’s grace provides the antidote to these false motivators. *The Grace Course* is designed to help Christians understand the mind-blowing benefits of what it means to be God’s child: that, no matter what’s in the past, we are perfectly acceptable to God; that we don’t have to try hard to “act like we think Christians should act;” that we can simply live out of the truth of who we now are—free, unashamed, innocent, victorious, courageous, and calm—so that we humble ourselves before God and bear fruit and humble ourselves before other Christians, working in unity to make disciples and see the nations transformed!

The Grace Course puts the emphasis on *knowing* the truth, not just in our heads but in our hearts. It is full of practical exercises for people to engage with and has a gentle, effective ministry component called *The Steps To Experiencing God’s Grace*, and a powerful tool for renewing your mind called *Stronghold-Busting*.

If you can encourage Christians to “do business with God” during *The Grace Course*, you are likely to see them so impacted by a new sense of God’s grace that they will go on to live for Him, not because they feel they have to but just because they love Him. And they’ll go on to bear lots of fruit, fruit that will last (see John 15:16). Imagine how different your church could be! Imagine what an impact that would make on your community!

WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE?

There are eight main teaching sessions followed by a practical ministry component, *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace*, and a further practical session on how to replace faulty beliefs with the truth from God's Word.

SESSION 1: FREE!

Luke 15:11-31

God's grace means that you are not just forgiven, not just saved. You are completely restored. Deep down inside, you are a totally new person. And God doesn't just love you. He absolutely delights in you, even when you go wrong.

God's love, acceptance, and favor have nothing to do with our behavior, good or bad. But they have everything to do with His grace.

Most Christians don't know what they already have or just who they already are. They know they are saved by grace but slip into thinking that being a disciple of Jesus means somehow having to maintain that favor by doing the right things.

In Christ we are perfectly loved and accepted for who we are, not for what we do. From that position of security, we can make a free choice to serve God because we love Him, and get rid of any other false motivation.

Yet what we do does matter. Sin has horrendous consequences. God has prepared things for each one of us to do and at the end of time He will test what we have done. Anything where our motivation was not love will not count for eternity.

SESSION 2: UNASHAMED!

2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 10:19-22

God is love. Everything God has ever done or ever will do is motivated purely by love. And discipleship is about becoming more and more like Him. So our starting point in any situation is always love—and our middle point and our end point, too!

Out of love, God created human beings and gave us a task to work with Him to continue bringing order out of chaos as we looked after the Earth. He did not make us robots who had to do what He told us to, but instead gave us the ability to make genuine choices which had genuine consequences for good or for ill.

God warned Adam of the consequences of eating from a certain tree: "You will surely die." But, deceived by Satan, Adam chose to disobey, and he and Eve suffered spiritual death—they lost their spiritual connection to God and all that came with it: their significance, their intimate relationship with God, their security. They were cut off from the fellowship with God they had enjoyed. They didn't know Him any more.

There were consequences for all of their descendants too. All of us were born as "sinners" without the spiritual life and connection to God we were designed to have. We instinctively felt shame because we were not the people we were meant to be.

Our sense of shame can be intensified by our upbringing or negative experiences.

Jesus *became* sin and we *became* holy ones. Knowing our new identity resolves shame so that we can be motivated only by love.

SESSION 3: INNOCENT!

Philippians 3:4-6, Colossians 2:13-14, Luke 7:48-50

Most Christians have come to see God as someone whose primary concern is how we behave and we therefore feel constantly guilty because we feel we don't measure up to His expectations.

We think that Jesus came primarily to forgive our sins rather than to give us back the life that Adam lost. We lose sight of the other emphases in the Bible which tell us that Jesus came to set us free from slavery to death, to the flesh, to sin and to Satan.

God does not want us to be motivated by guilt but wants us to know that all of our sins—past, present and future—have been completely and utterly dealt with by Christ's death on the cross so that we can stand confidently before God.

If we do go wrong, God does not want us to feel guilty but does want us to experience godly sorrow that motivates us to walk in the light with Him—totally open and transparent.

It's grace, not guilt, that is the most powerful motivator not to keep sinning.

SESSION 4: VICTORIOUS!

Romans 6:3-14, 7:14-24

What we *do* comes from who we *are*.

When we chose to follow Jesus, we became totally different people to who we were before. We are no longer *sinners*. We are *holy ones*. But truth doesn't set you free unless you *know* it.

We have understood that Jesus' death and resurrection dealt not only with the *penalty* of sin but also the *power* of sin. It is now genuinely possible at any given moment to make a choice how to behave and there is a way out of every temptation we face. But if we choose to offer our bodies to sin, we allow evil to reign in our bodies. We can resolve this by submitting to God and resisting the devil. You don't grow into freedom. You take hold of it.

All God has ever wanted of His people is that they obey Him, not because they *have* to but because they *choose* to. Freedom is being put in the position where you can do that.

SESSION 5: COURAGEOUS!

Joshua 1:5-6, Hebrews 13:5-8, 2 Timothy 1:7

God has prepared things for you to do that will make your life count for eternity. He's always looking for ways to help you grow so that you can do them in His strength.

We will experience fear at many points in our lives and it will try to make us hold back from doing what God wants us to do. Courage is not the absence of fear. It's making the right choice in the face of fear. But if we allow fear to dictate our actions, it will imprison us.

We do not have to allow unhealthy fears to control us or set the agenda in our lives because God is all-powerful and everywhere-present and has given us the grace gifts of power, love and sound judgment.

SESSION 6: CALM!

1 Peter 5:6-8, Isaiah 30:15, Psalm 46:10

The uncertainties we face can make us anxious but living in anxiety makes us "double-minded" and unstable and

provides an opportunity for Satan to take advantage of us.

If you are feeling habitually anxious, it is a strong indication that you are still trying to handle your life yourself and this is essentially pride.

God's goal for your life is that you become more and more like Him in character. It's not so much about what you *do* but what you're *like*. Humbling yourself under God's mighty hand means cooperating with Him and adjusting your goals to His.

Even though we live in an age of anxiety, we can live without unhealthy anxiety. It comes down to knowing just who our Father God is, trusting His character and ways, and choosing to cooperate with Him.

When we genuinely know God as He is and understand His true character of love, we can cast our anxiety onto Him, leave it with Him, and live free of it.

SESSION 7: FRUITFUL!

Philippians 2:2-8, John 15:1-5, Hebrews 12:5-11, Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 131

If we want to be fruitful, our focus needs not to be on bearing fruit but on staying connected to Jesus. Apart from Him we can do nothing of any eternal value.

Fruitfulness comes when we submit to God and what He says in His Word, when we set aside our pride and choose to humble ourselves before Him.

God genuinely offers us rest for our souls, a light burden and an easy yoke. We no longer need to try to control events or people but can choose to humble ourselves before God and other people and trust Father God to take care of the things that are outside our control.

The gateway to fruitfulness is brokenness. In His love God uses the difficult situations we encounter to cut away self-centeredness, self-reliance and pride.

The appropriate response to God's grace towards us is to offer our whole selves to Him as a living sacrifice.

SESSION 8: PEACEMAKER!

Matthew 28:18–20, John 13:35, 17:21, 1 Corinthians 5:9–11, Revelation 19:6–8

When you came to Christ, you became part of the most significant body of people that have ever lived. The Church is the body of Christ—we literally are the flesh and blood through whom God works in the world. There is no Plan B.

Our calling is not to condemn people for their issues but to show them the way out. Discipleship is not about telling people what is *wrong* with them. It starts with helping people understand what is *right* with them, now that they are in Christ.

The one thing Jesus prayed for us, who come after His original disciples, is that we would be one “so that the world may know that you have sent me.” Maintaining the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace is a prerequisite for the Church to make the greatest possible impact in this world.

Historically Christians have assumed that unity comes from a common understanding of doctrine. And paradoxically the result has been disunity. Peacemakers unite around their love for Jesus, submit to one another, and are passionate about being part of the Bride of Christ.

And there is cause for great optimism because Revelation 19:7 tells us that the Bride will have made herself ready for the wedding of the Lamb!

THE STEPS TO EXPERIENCING GOD’S GRACE

The Steps To Experiencing God’s Grace is a practical session that will help you ensure that the Biblical principles we’ve looked at in *The Grace Course* become real in your experience.

You will ask the Holy Spirit to help you see areas of sin that are giving the enemy some influence in your life. As you submit to God by acknowledging the issues and

turning away from them, you will close the “doors” you opened. At the end of the process you will resist the devil and he will have no option but to flee from you.

All of this is done in a kind and gentle way, and it’s just between you and God.

During the process you will be able to identify areas where your beliefs have been out of line with what is actually true according to God’s Word, the Bible. The *Stronghold-Busting* Session will equip you with a simple method to demolish those strongholds, one that you can use for the rest of your life whenever you become aware that your belief system is off-kilter with the Bible.

STRONGHOLD-BUSTING SESSION

Romans 12:1–2, 2 Corinthians 10:3–5, Ephesians 2:1–3, Colossians 2:8

We are transformed by the renewing of our mind, a lifelong process of recognizing faulty thinking we have developed by comparing it to the truth in God’s Word, and then consciously choosing to bring our thinking into line with what God says is true.

Faulty beliefs that have become deeply ingrained are referred to as “strongholds” by Paul. They matter because our actions always flow from our beliefs and strongholds lead us to make bad choices and ultimately prevent us from experiencing the abundant life that God intends.

“Stronghold-Busting” is a simple methodology that will enable you to demolish the strongholds in your thinking. It is straightforward but does require sustained effort over a period of six weeks or so. For many participants on *The Grace Course*, it is the element that brings the most lasting change and helps them go on to become genuinely fruitful disciples of Jesus.

> WHAT HAS CHANGED IN THIS REVISED VERSION?

The original *Grace Course* was incredibly well received and translated into many languages. We are so grateful to leaders from around the world who fed back to us various comments on the content and made suggestions. In making this revised version, we have endeavored to take the comments and feedback into account while preserving the essential elements of the original course. Every part of the course has been revised, but the main changes are described below.

Despite all the rehearsals and practice, when we recorded the six sessions in the original *Grace Course*, we were enjoying ourselves so much, we ended up making them significantly longer than we had intended. The result was that small groups found it very difficult to go through a session in an evening, and most split each session over two weeks, which made it somewhat unwieldy. Rather than simply reduce the content, we decided to take the course apart and rebuild it from first principles—and we applied an iron discipline to our recording sessions to ensure that we kept to time!

The essential teaching principles remain the same with the parable of the prodigal son at the heart. We have, however, comprehensively revised the teaching, changed its order somewhat, and expanded it, especially in the areas of anxiety and the importance of taking our place alongside our brothers and sisters in the Church. In one area—teaching on the Old Testament Law—we have reduced the teaching (but have included it in full in *The Grace Connection*, the accompanying book).

In order to ensure that each session is not too long, we have increased the number of main teaching sessions

from six to eight. Additionally, we have created a separate “Stronghold-Busting” session that is designed to accompany the ministry component, *The Steps To Experiencing God’s Grace*, which has also been completely revised and adapted to reflect the teaching emphases of the main course. It is the content of this session that is often the key to ongoing transformation and fruitfulness, and we hope that this separate session will be a constant guide to disciples until renewing their mind to God’s Word becomes second nature.

The Pause For Thought questions have been thoroughly revised, and a new Reflect section is included at the end of each session to make space for personal response to what has been taught.

We are excited to have been able to add some hugely significant elements to the total “package,” in order to increase the ways that people can connect with the teaching. It has been a privilege to work with RightNowMedia to produce *The Wonder Of Grace*, a brand new video series that can serve as an excellent introduction to *The Grace Course*, and to produce for YouVersion a brand new daily devotional—*Daily Nuggets Of Grace*—to accompany participants on their *Grace Course* journey.

We have also been able to have two books published that take participants deeper in the principles we teach. Rich Miller has written a revised edition of his excellent devotional, *40 Days Of Grace*. Now titled *The Wonder Of Grace: A 40-Day Devotional Journey*, it is designed to help participants focus on the principles in the six weeks or so after they finish the course, and Steve Goss has written a new book, *The Grace Connection*, that expands on the teaching in the course and presents it in a slightly different way.

> HOW DOES THE GRACE COURSE WORK TOGETHER WITH THE FREEDOM IN CHRIST COURSE?

The Freedom In Christ Course is a bestselling course consisting of ten sessions plus *The Steps To Freedom In Christ* ministry component—there are further details on page 193 or visit www.FreedomInChrist.org. The look and feel of *The Grace Course* is modeled on *The Freedom In Christ Course*, so it will be instantly familiar to previous users.

The Grace Course can stand alone but is also designed to work well with *The Freedom In Christ Course*. They very much complement each other.

The overall theme running through both courses could be characterized as, “know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Both courses have similar main emphases: knowing who you are in Christ and the importance of renewing the mind.

With ten sessions, *The Freedom In Christ Course* is more comprehensive. In particular, it has more to say on the crucial areas of why we need to forgive others, the battle for our minds, recognizing that all of us are predisposed to a particular worldview, and understanding how to bring our goals into line with God’s goals for our lives. It tends to draw from the epistles a little more than the Gospels. *The Grace Course*, on the other hand, covers some key areas in a lot more depth than *The Freedom In Christ Course*: shame; guilt; fear; anxiety; pride; and ministering out of rest. It tends to draw from the Gospels a little more than the epistles.

Churches report that the two courses work together extremely well. Leaders tell us that, having experienced one course, people usually want to go on and do the other, and it would be highly beneficial for them to do so.

Nearly all tell us that they use both courses, for example by running one course for a period followed in the next period by the other course, giving participants the opportunity to do both.

So, if you choose to use both courses, our recommendation is that you do not worry too much which order you do them in. We would, however, recommend that, if you do *The Grace Course* first, you consider giving participants an opportunity to go through *The Steps To Freedom In Christ* (the ministry component from *The Freedom In Christ Course*) before they go through *The Steps To Experiencing God’s Grace* (the ministry component from *The Grace Course*). It would also be beneficial if possible to show the video of Session 7—“Forgiving From The Heart”—from *The Freedom In Christ Course* during the Away Day retreat for *The Grace Course* because forgiveness is an integral part of the ministry components for both courses and is covered much more comprehensively in *The Freedom In Christ Course*. There is more information on this on page 193.

In summary

- Each of the courses stands alone so can run perfectly well without the other.
- There are real benefits to participants if they do both courses.
- If participants do *The Grace Course* on its own or before *The Freedom In Christ Course*, consider finding a way for them to do *The Steps To Freedom In Christ* and Session 7—“Forgiving From The Heart”—from *The Freedom In Christ Course*.

> HOW CAN THE GRACE COURSE BE USED?

The Grace Course works equally well with those who have just become Christians and those who have been Christians a long time. It has been designed to be flexible enough to use in a variety of church situations:

IN SMALL GROUPS

This is how most churches use our discipleship resources. If people miss a session, make sure that they have access to the videos so that they can catch up.

We recommend that, where possible, small groups use the teaching sessions on video and that you use the Pause For Thought discussion questions. Each small group session is designed to last two hours and you will find a detailed time plan for each session in this Leader's Guide.

It works equally well in face-to-face or online small groups.

SYSTEMATIC PREACHING WITH SMALL GROUP FOLLOW-UP

Each of the Word sections can be delivered as a straight talk (in person or via video). You could, therefore, use them as a main church teaching program (for example in a Sunday service or US Sunday school program). This could be followed up in small groups during the week if there is no opportunity for group discussion.

MID-WEEK MEETING

In a mid-week setting where there are no established small groups, you could bring everyone together and deliver the talk (in person or via the videos) and then divide people into groups for the group discussion questions. Alternatively, you could deliver the talk in sections, allowing the groups to discuss the Pause For Thought questions as you go.

ALONGSIDE AN OUTREACH COURSE

It is possible to combine the course with an outreach course such as Alpha. You could bring both groups together for a meal before sending the not-yet Christians into the outreach course and new Christians into *The Grace Course*. Even if people have not become Christians on the outreach course, this should not preclude them from going on to *The Grace Course*, which will show them clearly in the first couple of sessions the differences that take place when someone becomes a Christian.

ONE-ON-ONE DISCIPLING

It is time-consuming to run the course for just one person but it works very well indeed. It's a great way to disciple a new convert or a mentoring tool for those who have been Christians for a while.

> WHICH METHOD DO YOU RECOMMEND?

Freedom In Christ Ministries has been producing resources for churches around the world since 1988, all designed to help Christians become fruitful disciples. We have found that by far the most effective way for most people to learn in a church environment is in a small group where they are encouraged to discuss what is being taught. In preparing *The Grace Course* our focus has primarily been on creating a small group resource but you will find it will work well in any of the ways outlined above.

> RUNNING YOUR COURSE WHAT MATERIALS ARE REQUIRED?

The Grace Course has three core elements and four additional optional elements. They are listed below and further information (including how to order) can be found at freedominchrist.org/GraceCourse and at GraceAndFreedomProject.com

Your national Freedom In Christ office can supply most elements and will be very pleased to help you with any questions you may have. For contact details please go to freedominchrist.org.

> CORE ELEMENTS

LEADER'S GUIDE

We recommend that everyone leading a small group has their own copy of this Leader's Guide. It contains a guide to running each session, the teaching content of each session, discussion questions, etc.

It is published by Bethany House in North America and by Freedom In Christ Ministries International in the rest of the world. Versions are available in different languages.

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Each participant will need a copy of the Participant's Guide which contains notes for each session, Pause For Thought questions, and the ministry component, *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace*.

It is published by Bethany House in North America and by Freedom In Christ Ministries International in the rest of the world. Versions are available in different languages.

VIDEO PRESENTATIONS

Most churches use the video presentations to teach *The Grace Course* and they are also helpful to watch even if you are planning to present the course yourself using the notes from the Leader's Guide. We envisage that the main teaching videos will be watched by a small group all together but participants can also engage with it—perhaps to go through it again—on their own.

The videos are presented by Nancy Maldonado, Leisha Lyn-Cook, Rob Davies, and Josh Shaarda and the Participant's Guide has a section that introduces them

They also feature testimonies from people from around the world that illustrate the teaching points being made. There are a variety of English accents and you will almost certainly find that participants will struggle to understand one or two of them that are particularly different from your local English accent. The streamed versions of the videos contain closed captions / subtitles in English and you may like to consider turning these on to aid comprehension.

The streamed versions of the videos also contain captions in other languages—these are being added to constantly as new translations become available.

Available to stream from Freedom In Christ's Discipleship Hub, and from RightNowMedia, and available in North America on DVD (published by Bethany House).

For information on the different elements and where to get them, please go to www.GraceandFreedomProject.com (more info on the following page).

> THE GRACE AND FREEDOM PROJECT

The Grace Course is at the heart of *The Grace and Freedom Project*, a collaboration between a number of leading producers of discipleship and devotional resources.

That means there are some wonderful optional additional resources for participants to take advantage of as they go through *The Grace Course*.

THE WONDER OF GRACE VIDEO SERIES

An 8-session series of short, punchy videos presented by Sidhara Udalagama that cover key themes from *The Grace Course* and are designed to challenge and surprise participants as they grasp that grace is totally counter-intuitive but essential to understand if they really want to make their life count for Jesus. The themes of the sessions correspond to the main *Grace Course* sessions and participants are recommended to watch them in advance of the corresponding *Grace Course* session as a compelling introduction.

Available to stream from Freedom In Christ's Discipleship Hub (free of charge for those who have purchased *The Grace Course* videos on the platform), and from RightNowMedia.

DAILY NUGGETS OF GRACE YOUVERSION DEVOTIONAL

A 56-day (8-week) daily devotional designed to accompany participants on their journey through *The Grace Course*. It consists of short thought-provoking messages to begin each day. Participants are encouraged to begin it on the day they attend the first session of *The Grace Course*. They will then be able to go through seven daily devotionals on the theme of that session. The devotionals are instrumental in reinforcing what has been taught and encouraging participants to engage with it.

Available on The Bible App from YouVersion—search for "Daily Nuggets Of Grace." There is currently no charge for this.

THE GRACE CONNECTION BY STEVE GOSS

A book that sums up the principles of grace and freedom outlined in the other resources. Written by Steve Goss, it will help you connect with grace at a deeper level than ever before and know what it means to take hold of your freedom in Christ.

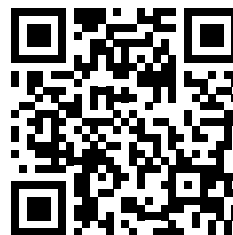
Published by Freedom In Christ Ministries International. Kindle version available.

THE WONDER OF GRACE: A 40-DAY DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY BY RICH MILLER

A revised and updated version of *40 Days Of Grace*, the devotional book by Rich Miller that has been so popular with participants on the original *Grace Course*. It is designed to be used directly after *The Grace Course* for a six-week period and will help participants process the principles they learned and put them into practice.

Published by Freedom In Christ Ministries International. Gift edition published by Christian Art Gifts.

Scan the QR code to find out more or go to www.GraceandFreedomProject.com.



> HOW DO I LEAD A TEACHING SESSION?

We recommend that you start with coffee and get people to chat and mingle for a while.

Each main teaching session follows the same format and contains the following elements:

LEADER'S NOTES

An introduction for the leader of the session to help you prepare.

CONNECT

This opening time is about connecting with God and with each other. It typically consists of an open question designed to help people get to know each other, and a question that directs people's thoughts toward God.

During this part of the session, it's much more important to encourage group participation and interaction than to do any teaching.

You might like to include sung worship here too, or play a worship song.

If your participants are using *The Wonder Of Grace* videos to prepare for each session, you might simply ask them for their comments on what they have seen.

Or you might invite feedback from the previous session. What struck people particularly from last week? Have they benefited from what they learned during the week in any practical ways? Have they been using the *Daily Nuggets Of Grace* devotional or reading *The Grace Connection* book?

But you almost certainly won't have time to do all of those things!

PRAYER AND DECLARATION

This is an opportunity to encourage people to pray together out loud and then to make a declaration. A prayer is said to God while a declaration is spoken out to the spiritual world in general.

A recurring theme in the course is that, as new creations in Christ, participants have the ability and responsibility to take charge of their Christian life, which includes taking a stand against their spiritual enemies. The

declaration at the start of each session is to help participants get used to wielding the power and authority they have in Christ. It may well be a new concept for many, but encourage everyone to declare it boldly as the children of God they are!

FOCUS TRUTH AND VERSE

Introduce the Focus Verse and the Focus Truth for the session. There is no need to say more than is written in the Leader's Guide. Then go straight into the Word section.

WORD

This is the main part of each session. Each talk lasts between 33 and 35 minutes in total (excluding Pause For Thought discussions) but is split into three parts of between 9 and 14 minutes separated by Pause For Thought discussions. This includes filmed testimonies on the videos that help to illustrate the main points.

We envisage that the teaching will be delivered as part of your session and that is the method we assume in this Leader's Guide. However, some choose to ask participants to watch the video in advance of the session and then devote the face-to-face time to fellowship and discussing the Pause For Thought questions. You may like to consider that as an option.

If you choose to present the material yourself, you will find the talk written out in full in this Leader's Guide together with some useful additional material. We recommend that you stick as closely as possible to the notes (but without reciting them parrot fashion), ideally supplementing them with illustrations from your own experience to replace those of the video presenters.

Play the video or start the talk, pausing for discussion at the Pause For Thought questions as indicated. If you are presenting yourself, keep an eye on time and try to resist the temptation to deviate too much from the notes so that the main points are not lost. The small group time plans for each session will help with time-keeping. Registered users can download a customizable version of these on a spreadsheet so that you can insert your own start time and adjust the timings to your own preferences.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT DISCUSSIONS

The Word section contains two groups of Pause For Thought questions between sections and one Reflect time at the end (see below). It is in these times that the real learning often takes place, and they are of crucial importance.

In the time plan at the beginning of each session, we have suggested timings—do guard against shortening them if at all possible. For settings where the Word section has been delivered elsewhere (for example, in a Sunday service) and follow-up only is required, you can plan a session based exclusively on the Pause For Thought and Reflect times. It is not necessary for people to go through all of the questions listed. The most important thing is that they spend the time grappling with what has been taught, and if that means looking at just one question in more depth, that's fine.

If your group is larger than eight, split people down into subgroups of no more than seven or eight for the discussions and mix the groups up each week. Occasionally it is helpful to split people up by gender. For variety, consider some discussions in smaller groups of three to four to allow quieter ones to talk. As a leader of a discussion group, one of your main roles is to try to get others to talk. Don't be afraid of silences and feel you have to fill them.

In addition to the questions given, you could start any Pause For Thought with the following open questions:

- What do you think about what you just heard?
- Was there anything you heard that you didn't understand or that needs further clarification?
- How do you think what you have heard applies to you?

You do not have to cover every Pause For Thought question. It can be more valuable to go into depth on one question than cover three questions in a cursory manner. Try not to let the conversation wander too far from the main points and keep an eye on the time (a suggested time for each Pause For Thought section is given at the start of each session). Draw the discussion to a close at the appropriate time by summarizing briefly.

REFLECT

Whereas Pause For Thoughts are discussions designed for groups, the aim of a Reflect time is to give individuals an opportunity to respond to what the Holy Spirit is saying to them personally. Ideally they will feel like unhurried times in God's presence during which key truths sink in and people make their own response to Him. Sometimes there is an element of interaction with others. At other times it's more about spending time quietly with God. This can feel a little strange to some but it is good to encourage them in this. It can help to play soft instrumental worship music during these times (music with words or music that is too lively can be distracting however).

> WHAT IS THE MINISTRY COMPONENT?

The Steps To Freedom In Christ is a structured process of prayer and repentance written by Dr. Neil T. Anderson (founder of Freedom In Christ Ministries) which has been used by millions of people around the world. It has been published in many languages and formats and is the ministry component of *The Freedom In Christ Course*.

The ministry component of *The Grace Course* is a similar process called *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace*. It is based on the same principles of the believer taking responsibility for their life and choosing to submit to God and resist the devil (James 4:7).

Both processes work in a similar way. The person going through (whom we will call “the freedom seeker”) takes responsibility for their life and growth by asking the Holy Spirit to show them any area in their life where an issue needs to be resolved. They then choose to repent of everything He shows them, thus removing any grounds the enemy may have had in their life. It is a very straightforward approach that is kind and gentle—but amazingly effective. Both have seven steps, each of which deals with a specific area of the freedom seeker’s life. Each step starts with a biblically-based prayer of repentance which the freedom seeker prays as a general preliminary, asking the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the specific areas that apply to them. Then there are particular instances

listed and a short written prayer of renunciation which the freedom seeker will use to deal with specific areas they want to renounce. Some sections also include doctrinal affirmations which are declarations of the freedom seeker’s choice and acceptance of primary Scriptural truth set out in a very straightforward way.

We recommend where possible that participants on *The Grace Course* go through *The Steps To Freedom In Christ* before *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace*. Many will already have been through them as part of *The Freedom In Christ Course*, but if you have a group that has not done that course, you could choose to do *The Steps To Freedom In Christ* instead of *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace* after Session 8 and then come back to *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace* at a later date. In order to do that, you would need to purchase *The Steps To Freedom In Christ* book for participants and use *The Steps To Freedom In Christ* video which guides a group through the process. We recognize that this involves a small amount of additional cost but if you want to make these principles a “way of life” in your church, it would be well worth it. It is not, however, essential to do this and you can run *The Grace Course* just as it is and expect great results!

It is possible for people to go through the process either in the context of a group Away Day retreat or in an individual “freedom appointment” in the context of their local church. There is more information in *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace* section.

> RENEWING THE MIND—“STRONGHOLD-BUSTING”

In Romans 12:2 (ESV), Paul tells us what it is that will cause transformation in a Christian: “be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” “Transformed” is a strong word. Its literal meaning is “metamorphosis,” the change a caterpillar undergoes in order to become a butterfly.

Most people will come to *The Grace Course* expecting to “receive,” and of course, we expect them to receive some really helpful teaching. But it’s unlikely that they will be transformed if all they do is “receive.” In order to be transformed, they have to work on the renewal of their mind, which means throwing out old ways of thinking based on lies they have come to believe and replacing those ways of thinking with what God tells us is really true in His Word.

All of us have been conditioned by past experiences to believe things that do not line up completely with God’s Word. Given that God’s Word is the truth, we can legitimately call these false beliefs “lies.” When a lie becomes deeply ingrained it becomes a “stronghold,” a habitual way of thinking that is inconsistent with what God says in His Word (or, if you prefer, any wrong belief or action that has a “strong hold” on you). It’s like having a solid wall

in your mind that prevents you from going the way God wants you to.

Directly after *The Steps To Experiencing God’s Grace* session, we introduce a strategy called “Stronghold-Busting.” It is a forty-day process of replacing lies with truth. Why forty days? Psychologists tell us that it takes around six weeks to form or break a habit. Once you have dealt with any footholds of the enemy, a mental stronghold is simply a habitual way of thinking.

We cannot emphasize enough how significant Stronghold-Busting is to participants who actively engage with it. They really are transformed at a deep, core level. The challenge is to help people believe that genuine transformation really will take place so that they will follow through on the process.

Please plan how you are going to run the Stronghold-Busting session, and, whatever you do, do not be tempted to miss it. It is an absolutely fundamental and essential part of the course. The reason we have put it into a separate session is to give you flexibility. Some people will want to run it on their Away Day directly after the steps. Others may want to run a ninth teaching session in the week following the Away Day.

> HINTS & TIPS

Church and course leaders—send a message that “this is for everyone” by going through the teaching and the ministry component and writing a Stronghold-Buster yourself first.

Surround your course with prayer. It is a vital part of preparation for your course and should not stop once the course gets underway. If you can assemble a group of people to pray for your course, you will really notice the difference. Consider meeting before each session for prayer with another leader.

Emphasize that every participant will need to apply ongoing effort to maintain the freedom gained and continue to grow as a disciple.

Take it slowly—our courses are not generally something that a church does just once but tend to become a regular part of church life. As such, it is worth taking the time and effort at the outset to make sure that the courses run as well as they possibly can.

Look out for the enemy’s attack—often through the least expected people.

Decide early on how you are going to approach running *The Steps To Experiencing God’s Grace* (there are more details in *The Steps To Experiencing God’s Grace* session). If you decide on the Away Day retreat approach, ensure that you book a suitable venue in good time and give everyone the date as early as you can. Make sure participants understand that this is an integral part of the course and not to be missed!

Keep emphasizing that this is discipleship for everyone—not just for “hard cases” or any particular section of the church.

“Transformed lives transform lives”—be prepared for the course to make a positive difference throughout your church and beyond as people come to a fresh understanding of God’s grace. Think about how it could impact your community as Christians discover afresh for themselves that Jesus really is the answer to the issues out there.

Remember that Freedom In Christ Ministries exists to equip leaders. Don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have a question or need any advice.

PERSONAL PRAYER OF PREPARATION

God, You're the bedrock under my feet and I depend completely on You. You protect me and clear the ground under me so that my footing is firm. You're the one true and living God. You're a tower of salvation, a shield to all who trust in You, my refuge and my deliverer.

I humbly accept Your call to lead this *Grace Course*. On my own I can do nothing whatsoever that will make a difference but I stand in the truth that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to the resurrected Christ, and because I am in Christ, I share that authority in order to make disciples and set prisoners free.

Thank You that You have cleansed me and washed away my sin. As I declare Your Word in Your strength and power, please fill me afresh with Your Holy Spirit.

Strengthen me by Your Spirit, so that I'll be able to take in to a greater degree the extravagant dimensions of Your love and grace and pass that on to others on the course. I declare that I have a spirit of power and love and a sound mind, and that the Word of Christ dwells in me richly. I've been made holy by Your Word of Truth. The anointing I've received from You abides in me.

Your Word is an indispensable weapon to me, and in the same way, prayer is essential in ongoing warfare. So I declare that because I've made You my dwelling place, no evil shall come upon me. Your promise is that You will give Your angels charge over all that concerns me, and You will keep me in all my ways.

I welcome the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ afresh today into my life, my home, my family, my work, and into all I do within the ministry of making disciples in my church.

I pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Based on: 1 John 4:4; 2 Samuel 22; Psalm 51; Psalm 19:14; Ephesians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:7; Colossians 3:16; John 17:17; 1 John 2:27; Ephesians 3:8; Psalm 91:9-11; 2 Corinthians 4:1-7.

TEAM DECLARATION

We declare that Jesus is our Lord. He's greater than the one who is in the world and He came to destroy all the devil's works, having triumphed over him by the cross.

We declare that God has given us *The Grace Course* at this time to share His Word, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The words that come out of God's mouth will not return empty-handed. They'll do the work He sent them to do.

As those who are seated in the heavenly realms, we agree that Satan and every enemy of the Lord Jesus must not in any way interfere with the running of this course. We commit the place where the sessions will take place to Jesus. We cleanse it in Jesus' name from any impure thing.

We declare that the truth of God's mighty Word will be planted and established in [name your church or organization] and that those who come will know the truth and be set free. We will use our powerful God-given tools for tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, and for building lives of obedience into maturity.

We announce that what God has promised gets stamped with the "yes" of Jesus. We declare that our God can do anything—far more than we could ever imagine or guess or request. Glory to God in the Church! Glory down all the generations forever and ever!

God is striding ahead of us. He's right there with us. He won't let us down. He won't leave us. We won't be intimidated and we won't worry. The battle belongs to Him!

Based on: Colossians 2:15; John 10:10; John 8:32; Matthew 16:18; Isaiah 55:11; 2 Corinthians 10:4; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Ephesians 3; Deuteronomy 31:8, 1 Samuel 17:47.

> INTRODUCTION TO THE WORD SECTION

We have set out below full scripts for the teaching for each session. This is for your reference but also so that you can teach the sessions yourself if you choose to.

We have based the scripts largely on what the video presenters say. Much of the impact comes from their use of personal stories that illustrate the key points. We have retained many of these, putting them in italics, the idea being that, if possible, you replace them with your own stories.

Occasionally we have replaced a presenter's story with a more generic illustration that we feel will make it easier for you to deliver the teaching yourself.

session **01**

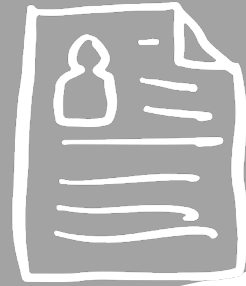
FREE!

OBJECTIVE



To understand that what really matters to God is not only what we do but why we do it.

LEADER'S NOTES



THE THEME RUNNING THROUGH THIS FIRST SESSION COULD BE DEFINED AS “SONSHIP VERSUS SLAVERY.”

We will focus on the story Jesus told that is generally known as the parable of the prodigal son. We prefer to call it the parable of the two sons because the context makes clear that the focus of the story is not so much the younger son who went astray but rather the elder brother who appeared outwardly to be doing everything right yet inwardly was far away from his father.

The story appears in a string of parables in Luke 15 dealing with things that are lost: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and then this one, which could easily be entitled the parable of the lost son. The question is, which of the sons was lost—the younger, the elder, or both? By the end of the story, it's clear that the younger son, though once lost, has now been found, but the elder son is still lost.

Although the elder son is free to enjoy right now everything his father owns, he is deceived into thinking he has to “slave away” to earn it as a future reward. This attitude keeps him from intimacy with the father and makes him behave in ways that are more in keeping with a hired hand who “slaves away” rather than the son he is.

The key point we want to help participants understand is that they are not just in the position the younger son was in immediately upon his return, that of a “forgiven sinner,” someone who has been forgiven but is still essentially the same no-good person they always were. We want them to know that, even though they don't deserve it, they have become “sons” with all the authority, responsibility and privilege that implies. From their position as sons, they are free to choose whether to live for the father or not. But when you understand just what this father is like and what he has done, why on earth wouldn't you want to serve him?

We finish the session with something of a paradox. Having said that we don't need to “slave away” for God, we note that the New Testament actually often gives a positive slant to the word *slave* (*doulos* in the Greek), with Paul, for example, calling himself a “slave of Christ” (Romans 1:1 NLT). Even though we are free not to serve Him, when we understand how good He is and how loving He is, of our own free will we can commit ourselves to becoming His bondslaves.

> THE DANGER OF ANTINOMIANISM

Antinomianism is an old heresy that has afflicted the Church through the ages. The term means “anti-law” and was coined by Martin Luther to refer to the practice of pushing the doctrine of justification by faith alone too far and saying, in effect, that since Christians are saved by faith alone, it does not matter at all how they behave.

The teaching in this session may sound to some as if it is heading in that direction but that is categorically not the case. Encourage any who express concern to bear with it and reassure them that, as the course develops, they will see the whole picture.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the great proponent of evangelical theology and minister of Westminster Chapel in London, who was prominent in the middle of the Twentieth Century, said:

“There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it that it really amounts to this: that because you are saved by

grace alone, it does not really matter at all WHAT you do, you can go on sinning all you like. . . .”

Note how he says that interpreting gospel preaching as meaning that it doesn’t matter how you behave is to misunderstand it. His point is that, if you don’t find some people misinterpreting your teaching in this way, then you are not actually preaching the true gospel of grace. He goes on to say even more directly (and in capital letters!):

“I would say to all preachers: IF YOUR PREACHING OF SALVATION HAS NOT BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD IN THAT WAY, THEN YOU HAD BETTER EXAMINE YOUR SERMONS AGAIN, and you had better make sure that you really ARE preaching the salvation that is proclaimed in the New Testament.”¹

Our objective in this course is to help people receive a revelation of God’s grace. Most people find that revelation profoundly shocking when it comes. On the face of it, it may seem that we can behave however we like, but anyone who persists in that way of thinking has not had a genuine revelation of grace. Those who truly understand it go in the opposite direction: they fall more in love with God and want to serve Him with all that they are and have.

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapter 6, The New Man*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), pages 9–10.

SMALL GROUP TIMINGS



The following plan is designed to help those leading the course in small groups. It assumes a meeting of around ninety minutes in length, and suggests how long each part of the session should last, with an indication of cumulative elapsed time. You will find a time plan in each

session. The second column shows the time allocated to each individual element in minutes and seconds. The third column shows the total elapsed time in hours and minutes.

Session 1	Minutes:Seconds	Hours:Minutes
Welcome, Focus, Connect	15:00	00:15
Word Part A	13:30	00:28
Pause For Thought 1	14:00	00:42
Word Part B	09:30	00:52
Pause For Thought 2	13:45	01:05
Word Part C	10:15	01:16
Reflect	14:00	01:30

The time allocated for the Word sections is based on the length of the corresponding section of the videos.

Registered users of the course (see page 11) can download an Excel spreadsheet with these timings. Simply enter your own start time, adjust the length of the various components if desired and you will have a timed plan of your session.

FOCUS VERSE



We love because he first loved us.

1 John 4:19



FOCUS TRUTH

In Christ we are perfectly loved and accepted for who we are, not what we do. From that position of security, we can make a free choice to serve God because we love Him, and get rid of any other false motivation.



CONNECT

One definition of *grace* is “getting what you don’t deserve.” Tell about a time you got what you didn’t deserve. What did you deserve? What did you actually get?

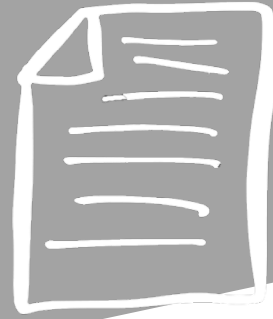
If you watched *The Wonder Of Grace* introductory video for this session, what was the main thing that struck you?

PRAYER & DECLARATION



Heavenly Father, Thank You that the grace You showed us when Jesus went to the cross is available to us day by day. We pray today that You will guide us into all truth, reveal to us the strongholds in our minds, and help us to renew our minds, so that we will be transformed. We want to be disciples who bear much fruit. We choose to set our hope fully on the grace to be given to us when Jesus Christ is revealed. In His name. Amen.

We declare that, even though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does—we fight with weapons which have divine power! For every unhelpful way of thinking that has a “strong hold” on us, we choose to believe God’s clear promise that we can demolish them. Not just cope with them, work around them, or do them a bit of damage. Demolish them! And in so doing we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds.



> INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *The Grace Course*!

What's your favorite hymn? Different people like different ones. If you were a dentist you might perhaps go for "Crown Him With Many Crowns." If you were a paramedic, you might be whistling "Revive Us Again." I guess if you were a baker it would be "When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder!"

For many people, their favorite hymn is "Amazing Grace:" "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." Apparently John Newton's 250-year-old hymn is sung around 10 million times a year. I've been a Christian a long time, and I think I have probably sung it nearly as many times myself!

This course is all about grace. Paul tells us in Romans 5:2 that we have obtained by faith "our introduction . . . into this grace in which we stand" (NASB). When I first became a Christian, I understood grace as being primarily about God's love when He sent Jesus to die for me. Peter tells us that God wants us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The grace that God wants us to experience is for every moment of every day, and that's what this course is about.

And, although John Newton's great hymn starts by talking about the grace that saved us the moment we first turned to Christ, it goes on to say:

Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;

'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far And Grace will lead me home.

The objective of the course is to help you know what it means to experience God's grace every day so that you can be fruitful to the fullest possible extent. And that's an exciting prospect.

[Do you have a story of God's grace and what it has meant in your life that you could share at this point?]

Grace is so needed in the Church. In preparation for writing a book on legalism and grace with Dr. Neil Anderson and Paul Travis, we contracted the George Barna Research Group to do a scientific survey of American Christianity. We asked followers of Christ to respond to six statements. One of them was: "The Christian life is well-summed up as trying hard to obey God's commands." To our astonishment, we discovered that 82 percent of those surveyed agreed with that statement; 57 percent strongly agreed! Well, there's nothing wrong with that statement aside from the fact that it's totally wrong! There's nothing in there about grace . . . about faith . . . about love . . . about relationship. There's nothing in there about Jesus! Our conclusion was—and remains—that law-based living rather than grace-based living is endemic in the Church.

> UNDERSTANDING GRACE

To get us started, I want to ask you to consider a question. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey my commands” (John 14:15 NCV). Imagine Him saying that personally just to you. How do you hear Him saying it? What expression is on His face? This? . . . Or this? . . . What expression is in His voice? Before we finish this session, we’ll do our best to resolve that question.

> THE STORY OF THE TWO BROTHERS

Let’s look now at a story that Jesus told that will really help us come to grips with God’s grace.

THE YOUNGER BROTHER

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’”

Luke 15:11–12 esv

Do you realize that he might as well have said, “I wish you were dead”? A father’s inheritance was to come to his sons after his death. But this son just couldn’t wait.

“So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.”

Luke 15:12–20

The younger boy had turned his back completely on his father and the way of life he had been brought up in.

What Jesus is doing here is painting a picture of someone whose behavior was the worst imaginable in his culture. He showed no respect whatsoever for his father. He engaged in adultery, spending money on prostitutes. Then, when he had no money left, he even stooped so low as to take a job looking after the animal that, to Jews, represented the height of uncleanness—pigs. It’s difficult to imagine that he could have behaved any worse, or any less deservingly of his title as son. He himself knew that he had blown it completely and decided to return to his Father, not expecting to be received as a son but hoping simply for a job as a hired hand, one who would have to earn anything that might come from the father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.”

Luke 15:20

Note that the father ran—in that culture, wealthy men never did that. Love for his son overcame all the social norms.

“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

Luke 15:21

Was that true, that his sin made him no longer worthy to be called a son? Yes, undoubtedly, though of course nothing could change the fact that he was a son and always would be. But watch how the father reacts: It’s almost as if he was not even listening to the words of his son’s well-rehearsed confession. The father knew the son’s heart and that he was sorry and had come back. And that’s all that mattered!

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. [This is the only character in the story for whom the whole thing is really bad news!] Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”

Luke 15:22–24

The son expected to be disowned or at best to be severely punished—and that would have been what

he deserved. Yet the father immediately embraces this smelly, dirty, broken individual, puts the best clothes on him and throws a party to end all parties!

He also gives him three things that had great significance:

First, the robe wasn't any old robe but was the best robe in the house, perhaps the father's own robe. It symbolized that the son had once again been given the right to enjoy the place of "right standing" with the father. He had always been loved, but now he was completely restored.

Second, the ring would have been a signet-type ring that would make a mark on official documents and could be instantly recognizable as the father's mark. Without that mark or seal there would be no authority behind the instructions in the document. The ring symbolized power and authority to carry out the father's business.

This boy, who had squandered his father's wealth in wild living, is being recommissioned and honored with the trust of his father to go about his father's business once again, telling people what they need to do. And they will have to do it, because he wears the ring on his finger.

The third thing he tells the servants to bring is sandals. In a Jewish household, the only people allowed to wear footwear in the house were the father and his sons. The father was declaring in no uncertain terms that the boy, despite everything he had done, was still his son, entitled to the rights of a son.

This is *The Grace Course*, but what is grace? Let's pause for a minute and take in that scene. A son who has behaved in the worst way imaginable returns. His father, however, restores him simply because he loves him and wants a relationship with him. This is grace: a child utterly bereft of anything throwing himself on the mercy of his father who picks him up, dusts him off, and restores him.

This son who has completely and utterly blown it, who has no right whatsoever to expect anything from his father except what he might be allowed to earn, who doesn't deserve any favor whatsoever, stands there in his rich robe, with his ring of authority and the sandals that mark him out as one of the family. This is grace.

Those of us who have been Christians a while know this story well, and we tend to relate it to the time that we first came to God, gave our lives to Him, and accepted

His free gift of grace. But what about now? Does this part of the story have anything to say to us as we live our Christian lives today, or does it just reflect a one-off moment in the past?

[Do you have an incident from your own experience like the one below from Rich Miller that illustrates such grace?]

When I was a kid, I wanted just about every kind of animal that I saw on TV, but what I wanted most was a horse. I didn't know how much a horse cost, but I knew it was more than I had. So I concocted a plot. One Thursday evening I discovered my Mom's purse with a roll of twenty-dollar bills in it. My Dad had just been paid. I figured they wouldn't miss one of them, so I took a twenty.

The next day I grabbed an envelope and the twenty dollars and went to the woods where I often played. I put the twenty dollars into the envelope and rubbed it in the dirt to make it look like it had been there a while. Then an hour or so later, I rushed home and yelled to my mom, "Hey look! I found twenty dollars in the woods!" My mom said, "Great, you can use that toward your horse." I thought I had committed the crime of the century. But I didn't count on one other factor . . . my conscience. The next day I was playing baseball, and my Dad was watching from a low hill nearby. When I finished playing, I started walking toward him, and the closer I came, the worse I felt. Finally when I got to him, I sort of blubbered, "Dad, I didn't find that money. I stole it!" My dad said, "Son, your mother and I knew that you stole the money. We were just waiting for you to come and tell us." And with that, he hugged me, and I was bawling.

What is the worst thing you have ever done? Have you got it in your head? Okay, write it down on a piece of paper and hand it to the person sitting next to you. . . . Just kidding! But what if you went out of here and did it again or did something even worse . . . and then sincerely came back to God, what reception would you get? The logic of this story is that you would be treated in exactly the same way as this boy.

This is grace. And it genuinely is amazing

Does the thought that you as a Christian could behave in the worst way imaginable and then come back to God with the relationship still secure not sit quite right with you?

> THE CONTEXT OF THE STORY

Let's step back and look at why Jesus told this story in the first place. The context is that He was clearly setting Himself up as a religious teacher but He sure didn't act like one. He was always mixing with the "wrong" crowd, tax collectors and so-called "sinners," and the religious people complained, saying "This man welcomes sinners and even sits down to eat with them." In response Jesus told a series of stories, of which this is the third. So He told it in response to the accusation that His behavior was wrong—that it was displeasing to God. The whole point of the story is that it is not our behavior that puts us into a right relationship with God—it's His grace.

> BUT BEHAVIOR DOES MATTER

As we will see, it's not that the son's behavior did not matter. It did. Sin has consequences. But the ending of his relationship with his father was NOT one of those

consequences. That's what it means to be a child of God. You will always be a child of God. Even if you fall flat on your face and make a complete mess. God gives you freedom to fail. He is rooting for you and has given you everything you need so that you do not have to fail. But if you do, His loving arms are there to welcome you back and pick you up no matter how badly you have messed up. This is genuinely shocking, don't you find? But that's exactly what the Bible says in 1 John 2:1:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

There's an old heresy—nearly as old as the gospel itself—called antinomianism which pushes biblical truth too far and says that, since we are saved by God's grace through faith, there is no need for a moral law, so our behavior doesn't matter. If it's starting to sound a little like that's where we're going, let me reassure you that it isn't. If you bear with us, you'll get the full picture.

See the section on
antinomianism in the
Leader's Notes on page 33
for more information on this.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT 1



OBJECTIVE

To help people start to come to grips with the shocking concepts of God's grace and particularly their new position as children of God.

1. What does "grace" mean to you?
2. The father gives the younger son three gifts which symbolize things that God has given to you. Which gift is most meaningful to you? Why?

PART B

> THE ELDER BROTHER

What is the worst thing you ever did? If you did it again or worse . . . and then sincerely came back to God, what reception would you get? The logic of this story is that you would be treated in exactly the same way as the younger son was.

Does that thought—that you could behave in the worst way imaginable and then come back to God with the relationship still intact and secure—not sit quite right with you?

Let's step back and look at why Jesus told this story. He looked like a religious teacher, but He didn't do what the religious people expected. In particular, He was mixing with the "wrong" crowd, and they were saying "This man welcomes sinners and even sits down to eat with them."

Their accusation is that the way Jesus is behaving is plain wrong—and this story is part of Jesus' response.

So now Jesus introduces a character who is often overlooked but is in fact the main point of the story and is clearly meant to represent these religious people.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Luke 15:25–31

The older brother hadn't turned away from the father and thrown everything back in his face. He had stayed and worked hard. He had done what was expected of him.

It seems his motivation was the inheritance that he would one day receive in return for "slaving away" day after day, as he put it. To him, it was clearly a transaction: You *earn* the father's favor by what you do.

When his brother returned after all he had done and, instead of being turned away or at least severely disciplined, had a party thrown for him, you can almost hear him spluttering, "But, but, but . . . All these years I have done everything right. I've played by the rules. And you never threw a party for me. It's so unfair!"

He didn't understand that the father's love and acceptance was as little to do with his *good* outward behavior as it was with the younger son's *bad* outward behavior. And that's Jesus' point: God's love, acceptance, and favor have nothing to do with our behavior, good or bad. But everything to do with His grace.

The traditional picture is of a rich father taking his son around the estate and saying, "One day son, all this will be yours." Future tense. This father says something similar but different: "Everything I have is yours." Present tense. "Look around you. It's already yours."

And perhaps it dawns on him that instead of working in the fields for years, he could have been enjoying everything the father had. . . . What a tragedy to go through life slaving away to try to earn something that in fact you already have.

Most Christians I know are like this brother. We don't know what we already have—or, more to the point, just who we already are. On one level we know we are saved by grace, not by obeying rules. But we slip into thinking that being a disciple of Jesus means somehow having to *maintain* that favor by doing the right things.

The mind-blowing point of Jesus' story is that God's acceptance of me, of you, today, tomorrow, and every day after that does not depend on what you do or fail to do. It depends solely on His grace.

That's what it means to be a child of God. God gives you freedom to fail. I remember, as a parent, having to let go of my toddler daughter's hand, knowing there's a risk

she's going to fall. And she did fall. But even if you fall flat on your face and make a complete mess, God is there to pick you up, dust you off, and welcome you back.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT 2



OBJECTIVE

To help people recognize how they tend to view God and His reaction to good and bad behavior, and how that works out in their lives.

- 1. The younger brother has been received back as a son, but the elder brother refuses to go into the house with the father, preferring to remain in the fields acting like a slave. Why do you think he does that? Which son do you identify with more?**
- 2. If you knew for sure that God's acceptance of you and love for you did not depend on how well you behaved, how might that change the way you live?**

PART C

> SLAVING OR SERVING?

The younger son went to a “distant land” whereas the elder brother stayed at home. But Jesus doesn’t put him where you would expect to find him, in the home with the father. He’s out in the fields. Where, in his own words, he’s “slaving away.”

The younger son thought the best he could hope for was that the father might just possibly allow him to become a hired servant where he would earn anything that came from the father. But the older son has beaten him to it. That was exactly the identity he had taken on.

Both walked away from their true identity as sons. Both removed themselves from their relationship with their father. Both ended up thinking they had to earn the father’s favor.

At the start of our Christian life, most of us identify strongly with the younger son. We know we need forgiveness and salvation and are so grateful to receive them.

At that point we begin a new relationship with our Heavenly Father. And the idea is that we begin a journey of knowing Him and becoming more and more like Him.

But some of us are sidetracked by the world out there and its false promises, and we become like the younger brother.

Others are sidetracked by religious rules and become like the elder brother, thinking that being a Christian, is about doing the “right” things. And most churches have been happy to come up with a whole list of things to do: read your Bible every day; come to church every week. Now those are good things. But when discipleship becomes just a load of rules that we struggle to obey, it all becomes a joyless trudge.

It’s supposed to work the other way around. Imagine the younger son after the celebrations are over. As he returns to his old duties—the duties he had thrown off when he walked away—how do you think he feels about those duties? Especially as he now realizes that even if he chooses not to do them, the father will still love him and he will still be his son.

Knowing what he now knows about the father and out of this incredible new relationship with him, won’t he choose to do them and do them well? Not because he *has* to but because he *wants* to. Not to earn anything. Just out of love.

WHAT WE DO MATTERS

Paul tells us (1 Corinthians 3:12–15) that a day will come at the end of the age when God tests what we’ve done to see if it has any real value. What we do does absolutely matter. He uses the analogy of a building that’s on fire and says that the fire will burn up the things that are of no value—“wood, hay, straw”—while things we do that are of value—“gold, silver, precious stones”—will remain forever.

Jesus tells us that some will come to Him at the end of time and say they did amazing things like driving out demons and performing miracles in His name. Are those wood, hay, and straw, or gold, silver, and precious stones? Well, Jesus says He will say to them, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:22–23 NIV).

IT’S NOT JUST WHAT WE DO BUT WHY WE DO IT

Two people can do the same thing—feeding the poor, perhaps, or spending an hour a day reading His word and praying. One will delight God and count for eternity; the other will not.

What’s the difference?

“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

If our motivation is not love, then no matter how good our actions look, they are worth precisely nothing. They are wood, hay, and straw. What is important to God is not just what we do but why we do it.

God chose a very unlikely candidate, David, to be king of Israel—unlikely because he was the youngest and

smallest in his family. But the Lord told Samuel, “The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). I used to picture Him saying that with a stern expression on his face like a strict teacher. Now I know He is smiling, and His eyes are full of love. He’s simply explaining a fact. If I love Him, I will obey His commands. I just will. As night follows day.

What’s important to God is not just *what* we do but *why* we do it.

1 John 4:19 says, “We love because he first loved us.” If we know how much He loves us, we will love Him back. We just will. As night follows day. And that means we’ll do the things that please Him. Automatically. Not out of obligation. And that makes understanding grace the most important thing we can do as Christians.

When our understanding and experience of grace makes that long journey from head to heart, we really “get it.” It’s only then we can be like Paul who said it’s “Christ’s love [that] compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV).

God wants our motivation to be love and nothing but love. It’s so easy to be sidetracked and allow our motivation to become something else: shame, guilt, fear, pride, the need to perform and impress or please others.

As you go through *The Grace Course*, you’ll have the opportunity to work out what’s been motivating you. You’ll be able to root out these “false motivators” so that you can make sure that it’s love for Jesus that drives you on. And nothing else.

> THE FATHER

The Father is looking out for you. Whether you’re in full rebellion or slaving away in the fields. When He sees you, He will run out and embrace you—and call for the robe, the ring, and the sandals. Will you put them on?

When He tells you that all He has is already yours—His whole, vast, rich estate—it’s already yours! Will you come back inside the house and enjoy it with Him?

From that position of love and security, will you do the things He has prepared for you to do—even though you don’t have to? But just because you love Him? Will you make Jesus not just your Savior, but your King?

REFLECT

Introduction

In our own eyes it's very possible to believe we are doing all the right things, while in God's eyes, we're doing them for all the wrong reasons. God isn't simply concerned about what we do but also why we do it. In our first "Reflect" time, ask God to talk to you about what motivates you to do what you do as a Christian. And remember, He's the God of grace who loves you just as you are!

Reflection

Think about what you are doing to serve God across the whole of your life. Are these things motivated by your love for God or by other things? Ask God to help you understand what needs to change so that your motivation becomes love and nothing but love.

Why do you think God puts so much importance on your motivation being love?

> CONCLUDING THE SESSION

Recommend that participants go to the YouVersion Bible App *right now* and search for "Daily Nuggets Of Grace," the devotional that accompanies this course. If they start it today, they will be able to follow seven short daily devotionals in the coming week that will help them continue to reflect on the themes of this session and prepare them for the next one.

Tell them about *The Wonder Of Grace* introductory videos (if you haven't already) and suggest that they watch the second one to prepare them for the next session.

Show them a copy of *The Grace Connection*, the book that accompanies *The Grace Course*.

If you have a date for an Away Day to go through *The Steps To Experiencing God's Grace*, ensure that participants have it in their calendars.

Close in prayer.