

Keep Your Eyes On Jesus

We're [called to a radical life](#).

This is a life in which we're called to follow someone we've never seen. We've heard about him but we've never seen him with our own eyes. We've 'believed the report', the good message about who Jesus is and why he came, and our hearts have been convicted to follow him. And even though we haven't seen him, we love him.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" | 1 Peter 1:8, ESV

The Redemptive Power Of His Sacrifice

We have come to realise that, without Jesus, we are nothing more than 'dead men walking'.

We're reminded of the story of the serpent placed on the pole during Israel's wilderness wanderings (Numbers 21). Their criticism of God and His way brought a plague of poisonous snakes throughout the camp. Moses was told to place a copper snake on a pole for all to see and anyone who fixed their gaze on that serpent on the pole would be healed and live.

A snake on a pole has come to represent medicinal healing throughout the medical world today and we can, of course, see the redemptive symbol in this story for our Christian lives. The bronze serpent is the clearest type of the saving work of Jesus. Jesus himself used this symbol to appeal to the people in his day (John 3:14). Like the serpent, Jesus was to be raised on a stake for all to see, and all those who looked to his redemptive sacrifice would live.

We fix our gaze on Jesus, crucified, believing in the power

contained in his name, and though we are dying, yet we live! Death no longer has the final say.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”
| 1 Corinthians 15:-20-23, NIV

Believing And Becoming In Jesus

Our Christian life starts the moment we turn our eyes to Jesus and [acknowledge him](#) as Lord of our heart and our life. But our gaze must never leave him.

The Christian life is one of transformation; of more than just believing, but of becoming, where the impossible is possible. We are able to become more than conquerors through him who loved us.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” | Romans 8:31-32, 37, ESV

We are learning to follow where Jesus has gone already and we are learning, day by day, to trust him as our good shepherd.

A Leap Of Faith

Living the Christian life is often stepping out into the unknown. It's often an exercise in surrender, trust, and faith.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” | Hebrews 11:1-3, ESV

We look around us and see how things presently are, in this life, **and yet we believe that there is more** and that **we can be more**. This belief is underpinned by the [evidence of the risen Christ](#). Resurrection, the most unbelievable, incredible event to have possibly happened **has** happened. When Christians gather together for communion, we celebrate and witness to this remarkable event. The ramification for us as believers is not a small thing: the [same power](#) that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us!

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.” | Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT

“And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.” | Romans 8:11, BSB

Jesus promised his followers that he would be with them, even to the end of the world. This is his promise to us. Sometimes he will lead us through fire and across water, through deep valleys and up high mountains. There is no promise that the Christian life will always be easy but he promises he will never leave us or forsake us.

Some of you may be feeling the heat of those flames. Or

perhaps you feel like your feet are sinking and you're going to drown. Raise your eyes and fix them on Jesus! He goes before us, he stands beside us, every day of this Christian life.

Faith Is Learning From History

We learn a lot from the story of Israel and their exodus from Egypt. When the children of Israel were delivered out of slavery, that moment only signaled the beginning of a journey of faith. And almost immediately, they were brought to the edge of the ocean, with churning water ahead of them and the enemy hard at their heels. There was no way forward and no way back. And then, suddenly, a miracle was performed and God parted the ocean before them – a way out – seemingly impossible but clearly visible. They had to make a decision of faith – to step into that path cut through the ocean and cross through to the other side. Moses, their leader, spoke boldly at this moment:

“Don't be afraid, stand firm and watch God do His work for you.”

Some of us may be in that moment right now, afraid of what is behind us and unable to see a path ahead of us. Sometimes, the step of faith involves standing still and watching God go to work for us. Sometimes, faith asks us to step out into the unknown.

We have the story in Matthew 14:24-31 of Peter being called by Jesus to step out of the boat and onto the churning water. And we realise from reading this story that sometimes faith asks us to step out of the boat, out of the place where it feels comfortable and relatively safe and into the dark and churning ocean. In those moments, too, we must not lower our gaze. Faith will keep us afloat, fear will sink us.

We must look for Jesus and keep looking for Jesus. He is the

good shepherd, who laid his life down for the sheep, and, like the Psalmist, we can confidently say,

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” | Psalm 23:4

Keeping Our Eyes On Jesus

How do we keep our eyes on Jesus? How do we ‘follow him’ and keep him front and foremost in our minds, day by day?

We need to make him real! We need to learn about him, discover what kind of leader he is, read about his character, his personality, his emotions. We need to talk to him, tell him our struggles and our fears. We need to ask for his courage to be ours. We need to invest in **relationship** with him; deep and personal and transformational.

We need to be reminded and convicted in our hearts that he is not just our personal saviour and friend, but [the resurrected King](#), in whom all power rests and with whom all things are possible!

When we come together as church, we are reminded that the church was born from the sacrifice of a man who, while we were yet sinners, died for us. Who, for the joy that was before him, endured the cross. And whose resurrection assures us that the best is still yet to come.

“The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest. It’s the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God – “Jesus is my Master” -embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what He did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not “doing” anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting Him to do it for

you. That's salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between Him and me!" Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this – heart and soul – will ever regret it." | Romans 10-10-13, MSG

The Christian life isn't always easy and the next step isn't always clear. Sometimes we need courage to make that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.

What Is A Disciple?

The word *disciple* occurs frequently throughout the Bible and [‘discipleship’](#) is something that the Bible references often. But what does the word *disciple* actually mean? And what does it mean to be a *disciple of Jesus*?

What Is A Disciple?

Our English language Bibles were translated from manuscripts written primarily in two languages; Hebrew (in the Old Testament) and Greek (in the New Testament). The translative history of the Bible is a fascinating journey, from an academic and historical perspective, and is well worth exploring. You can [read more about the translation process here](#).

In the original language of the New Testament, the word *disciple* is translated from a Greek word, *mathētēs* (μαθητής), from *manthano*, meaning “to learn”. *Mathētēs* therefore means (unsurprisingly) *a learner, a pupil or a scholar*. More

accurately though, it means to be a learner *in the style of an apprentice*, that is, someone who not only accepts the views of their teacher but is also practising the same so as to eventually become like their teacher (Matthew 10:24, Luke 6:40).

It's a word that would have been in common use during ancient times and its meaning was applicable beyond a Christian or religious setting (ie as a disciple of Plato or Socrates). Although the word has several applications, in the widest sense it refers to those who accept the teachings of anyone, not only in belief but also in life and practice.

Who Is A Disciple Of Jesus?

When we come to the Bible, we see the word *disciple* used most often in the context of a follower of Jesus and sometimes of John the Baptist (Matthew 27:57, Luke 14:27, Matthew 11:1, John 3:25). Throughout the gospels, it's the only name used for those who followed Jesus, and even those who had only been baptised with the baptism of John the Baptist (and hadn't received the Holy Spirit) were called disciples (Acts 19:1-4).

It would be accurate to say that a disciple of Jesus was someone who [believed the teachings of Jesus](#), who surrendered to his leadership, and who endeavoured to imitate his life.

When we move into the early history of the church (found in the book called the Acts of the Apostles), we see these disciples began to be called *Christians* (from the Greek word Χριστιανός (Christianos), meaning "follower of Christ") (Acts 11:26).

The Acts Of The Apostles

The book of the Acts of the Apostles provides a unique glimpse into the story of the early Christians, and to a time when these disciples of Jesus took their faith and began boldly

proclaiming it to the world. In Acts, we are observing the very birth of Christianity – the movement which recognised and preached a resurrected Jesus as the promised saviour and king of the world.

The Book of Acts opens with this introductory paragraph by its author, Luke, also one of the four Gospel writers and one of Jesus' 12 closest disciples:

“Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he said goodbye to the Apostles, the ones he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God.” | Acts 1:1-4, MSG

The book's narrative describes the disciples as first-hand witnesses to the resurrected Jesus; witnesses to the astonishing truth of the Gospel message, and how they took that Good News to the world, beginning first in Jerusalem, then moving throughout Judea and eventually to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

The interactive map below shows the power of their witness to the gospel message, demonstrating not just areas where professing Christians are the majority of the population, nor where Christianity has been declared the national religion, but also the true extent of the global spread of the gospel since the first century. It's a powerful, visual reminder of God's promise to save people “from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9)

What Was The Good News?

Peter the Apostle, when making his speech to the Jews in Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost, summarised the Good News

in this way:

“Jesus the Nazarene, a man thoroughly accredited by God to you – the miracles and wonders and signs that God did through him are common knowledge – this Jesus, following [the deliberate and well-thought-out plan of God](#), was betrayed by men who took the law into their own hands, and was handed over to you. And you pinned him to a cross and killed him. But God untied the death ropes and [raised him up](#). Death was no match for him...All Israel, then, know this: There’s no longer room for doubt – God made him Master and Messiah, this Jesus whom you killed on a cross. Change your life. Turn to God and [be baptised](#), each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away–whomever, in fact, our Master God invites.” | Acts 2:26-40, MSG

Peter is attesting to the validity of Jesus of Nazareth, as God’s appointed saviour and king. He is witnessing to the truth of the resurrected Jesus and the confirmation of his true identity as Son of God. And he is urging his listeners to believe this truth, to surrender their lives to Jesus and receive God’s promise of forgiveness of sins and the hope of life, even after death. In short, he is urging them to become disciples of Jesus, followers and imitators of the Christ. He is urging them to become Christians!

The number of people who heard his message and believed his words on that day was incredible! The book of Acts tells us that over 3000 people [were baptised](#). And not only that, every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. (Acts 2:47)

“That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptised and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, [the life together](#), the common meal,

and the prayers.” | Acts 2:41-42, MSG

The Teachings Of Jesus: The Gospel Of Good News

Peter was, in reality, only reconfirming the teachings of Jesus; that of the Good News of salvation for humanity and truth of the kingdom of God; God’s rightful rule and sovereignty over all the earth ([Matthew 16:27](#), [Luke 21:26-27](#), [James 2:5](#), [1 Corinthians 2:9](#), [Numbers 14:21](#), [Psalm 22:27](#), [Habakkuk 2:14](#)).

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” | Mathew 4:23, NIV

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. “The time is fulfilled,” He said, “and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!” | Mark 1:14, BSB

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.” | Isaiah 61:1, NLT

“Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” | Matthew 9:13, ESV

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is

within you.” | Luke 17:20-21, NKJV

How Do I Become A Disciple?

Becoming a Christian and becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ **is the same thing**; we just don't really use the word disciple much anymore. The basis for us to become Christians remains the same as for those in the first century, who were Jesus' followers. So what is it that makes us a *disciple of Jesus*? What is it that makes us a *Christian*?

We need to look no further than Peter's words to the people at Jerusalem (Acts 2:22-42):

- We must believe that Jesus was **God-sent and God-endorsed, as the appointed saviour and king of the world**. We acknowledge that Jesus came as one of us, [like us in every way](#), so that he could defeat sin and death on our behalf (1 John 4:14, Galatians 4:4, John 3:16, Hebrews 2:14-17, Romans 5:12).
- We must believe that Jesus **died for the sins of the world** and was [raised to life, never to die again](#) (1 John 2:2, John 4:42, 1 John 3:5, Acts 2:32, Acts 3:15, 1 Corinthians 6:14, Romans 8:11).
- We must be **convicted of our sin, acknowledging our need for God's forgiveness and recognising that [the name of Jesus](#) is the only name under heaven by which humanity can be saved** (Ecclesiastes 7:20, 1 John 1:9-10, Romans 3:23, James 1:15 Acts 4:12, 1 Timothy 2:5).
- We must believe in the teachings of Jesus and **surrender to his [guidance and leadership in our life](#)**, not only as an apprentice to a teacher, but as a willing subject of God's designated King. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he has first claim on our affections, he is the motivating force in our decisions

and the final judge of [our soul](#) (Matthew 28:18-20, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 1:33, Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, Ephesians 3:16, Acts 10:42, John 5:22. 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:25).

- We must **follow [the example of Jesus and be baptised](#)**, as directed in Mark 16:16. Baptism is God's arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based on their faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We choose to end one kind of life and begin another and the way of demonstrating that choice is to be baptised 'for the repentance of our sins'. The Bible compares baptism to burial, 'dying' to our past course of life and beginning a new one as a Christian, dedicated to God and saved through Jesus (Matthew 3:15, Matthew 10:28, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:12, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:4-6).

Written about 300 years after the birth of Christ, [the Apostles' Creed](#) summarises foundational Christian beliefs taught by the early church and is a bold declaration of our faith in Jesus Christ. It particularly affirms the teachings regarding Jesus, that of his virgin birth, his crucifixion, his death, and his subsequent resurrection; core elements of the gospel of good news. It is a primary statement of faith shared by Christians around the world, uniting them in common union with the work achieved in and through Jesus.

Not Just A Disciple Of Jesus But Family Of God

Welcome to the family! When God puts you in Jesus, He also puts you [in community](#). When you believe and are baptised, you become a disciple of Jesus – a Christian – but not only that, you also become a valued member of God's family (1 Corinthians 12:27, Galatians 4:7, Romans 8:17, Galatians 3:26, 1 John 3:1-2, Ephesians 2:18-19, Ephesians 3:14-19). Becoming a

Christian means you join a great cloud of faithful witnesses to the truth of the resurrected Christ (Hebrews 12:1), as believers of the message of Good News and disciples of Christ the King.

“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” | [Romans 10:10, NIV](#)

<https://vimeo.com/113801439>

Grasping Hold Of Grace: Repentance

Imagine a man lost the middle of the Atlantic ocean. He doesn't remember how he got there or where he's going, all he knows is this endless swimming in circles. No ships in sight, he's been treading water for hours and now he's beginning to tire. There's a very real danger that he will actually drown – that's if the hypothermia doesn't get to him first. He doesn't realise this, however. He thinks he'll be fine, that there's nothing precarious about his situation. He'll make it to shore.

Suddenly, almost miraculously, a ship appears on the horizon. The man gazes at it in interest. It could be useful to him – the water is becoming colder and he feels very tired. The ship slowly draws closer and the captain appears, signalling from the bow.

“You poor creature! You look like you could do with saving!

Luckily for you, I've got everything you need right here on board; food, water, dry clothes, first aid... the only thing you need to do is grasp hold of the life buoy I'm going to throw to you."

He leans over the side and throws the buoy into the water, where it lands near the man's head.

The man's expression changes and he looks at the buoy disdainfully. "Conditions for rescue? I've never heard of such a thing. I shouldn't have to do anything, I've been swimming for hours. In fact, I was doing fine before you arrived. I really don't need your help. If you want me to get in the boat, you'll have to come down here and get me."

"Believe me", the captain replies. "I've thought of everything and this is the only way for you to be saved. I promise the buoy is large and easy to grasp and not heavy at all. You won't have any trouble, you just need need to reach out and take hold of it."

The man shakes his head. "Nope. I'm not happy with those conditions. It doesn't seem fair to me. I don't see why I should have to do anything. And look, if we're being honest, I was doing pretty fine on mine own anyway. You can keep going, thanks."

"Well, look, you really don't have to do anything, apart from take hold of the buoy", the captain replied. "I've done everything else for you. I'll pull you in...just grab hold."

The man shakes his head again, angry now. "I really resent you saying you'll save me and making me do all the work. I'm supposedly the rescuee – I shouldn't have to do anything! Nope, I don't like that at all. And in fact, I don't need saving anyway. You can take your buoy and get lost."

The captain shakes his head sadly. "I know you need the buoy. I'm not going anywhere – I'm hoping you'll see sense and change your mind". The man turned his back on the buoy and continued treading water...

Needless to say, the man drowned several hours later.

Although this is a somewhat absurd and unlikely story, it's an

apt illustration of how humans often choose to view God's saving grace.

Grasping Hold Of Grace

God's [saving grace](#) is a remarkable subject, permeating every aspect of [the Gospel](#), giving it weight and power. The saving acts of God, due to the work of Jesus on the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead bring reconciliation ("atonement") between people and God. This is why the Gospel is described as a message of hope for the whole world ([Luke 14:15-24](#)).

We see God's love for humanity demonstrated in His grace – His undeserved favour and kindness, bestowed on the human race. God's grace was shown in action – in [sending His son](#), to save the world through him. This important work was planned and has been done, on our behalf, long before we even existed. We had no part in this, nothing we did or didn't do has influenced God's decision or His plan to save humanity, or how He would achieve this. God loves because of **who God is**, not because of who we are.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16, NIV

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." – Titus 3:5, NIV

There are no disqualifying factors to who is eligible – it's not offered on the basis of race, gender, age or moral character – God's saving grace is offered to everyone. In spite of racial and ethnic prejudices, Christians in the first century came to understand that no one was to be denied hearing and obeying the message of good news.

“...God shows no partiality. Indeed, whoever fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him in any nation.” – Acts 10:34-35, ISV

God wants to save us, He chose to save the world because of **who He is**. His love outweighed our desperate sin and He went to extraordinary lengths to save us.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” – 2 Peter 3:9, NIV

And yet, there is a catch to grace – a condition, if you like. Saving grace exists in the same way that the life buoy floats on the ocean. Available, accessible, obtainable. We exist in the same way as a man treading water in an endless sea. Hopeless, helpless, dying. God calls to us – *I can save you, I can offer you hope and life – just grab hold.*

Like the drowning man, in the middle of the frigid ocean, we must grab hold of the life buoy if we want to be saved. There is a condition. We must do **something**. The condition to receiving grace is **receiving grace**.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23, ESV

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8, NIV

Receiving Grace: Repentance

The Bible calls receiving God’s grace *repentance*. Literally, repentance means to turn back, to change one’s mind. However,

the Bible tells us that true repentance is not only a change of mind but is also a change in actions.

*“...but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, **performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.**” – Act 26:20, ESV*

The Acts of the Apostles focuses heavily on the aspect of repentance relating to salvation. It wasn't a new theme – John himself had preached the baptism of repentance, but now the apostles really seek to impress on believers and non-believers alike the connection between repentance and receiving God's grace – His saving work through Jesus:

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” – Acts 2:38, NIV

“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.” – Acts 3:19, ESV

“When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” – Acts 11:18, NIV

Acknowledging our need for God's grace – changing how we think about sin – and then acting in accordance with that change of mind is the true definition of biblical repentance. It is looking away from our hopeless, ungodly self and looking to God's grace. It is **believing that we need saving and reaching out to receive it.**

We choose to end one kind of life and begin another and the way of demonstrating that choice is to be baptised 'for the

repentance of our sins". The Bible compares baptism to burial, dying to our past course of life and beginning a new one as a Christian, dedicated to God and saved through Jesus.

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." – Romans 6:1-4, NIV

"Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." – Colossians 2:12, NIV

Baptism and the steps that lead up to it are God's arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based on his faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

"This water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." – 1 Peter 3:21, NIV

Preaching the [good news](#) of salvation was the great commission given to the apostles by Jesus and baptism formed an essential part of accepting the gospel and receiving God's saving grace.

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." – Mark 16:15-16, KJ2000

The truth is, we are all adrift at sea – drowning in our sins.

The only way of being saved is to accept that fact and believe that we need saving. Accepting Jesus as the saviour provided by God for the sins of the world and being baptised as an acknowledgement of our belief is true repentance. It is the way home to a [relationship restored](#).

“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” – Romans 10:10, NIV

The White Flag Of Grace

The subject of God's grace permeates every aspect of [the Gospel](#), giving it weight and power. The saving acts of God, due to the work of Jesus on the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead bring reconciliation (“atonement”) between people and God. This is why the Gospel is described as a message of hope for the whole world (Luke 14:15-24).

The word ‘grace’ itself is described by one author as “the last, best word” in English, remaining unspoiled over the years in its meaning. Its many usages still retain some of the glory of the original, with words like *gratitude*, *gratuity*, *congratulations*, and *gratefulness* all carrying the idea of something that brings delight, joy, happiness, or good fortune.

The White Flag Of Grace

The word ‘grace’ in the Bible (*hen* in Hebrew, *charis* in Greek), literally means ‘favour’, with the idea of bending or stooping in kindness to another, together with graciousness in manner or action. The Old Testament use of the word includes

the concept of those who “show favour” by undertaking gracious deeds, or acts of grace, such as being kind to the poor and showing generosity. Examples of God’s graciousness are also seen throughout the Old Testament, as in Deuteronomy 7:8, Numbers 6:24–27, Psalm 119:29 and Psalm 27:7.

In the New Testament, the word grace has many layers of meaning, including the deepest and most transformative – God’s saving grace, as defined by Ephesians 2 – the gift of eternal life, freely given through Jesus Christ. In God’s language, His grace gives us what we don’t deserve and cannot earn. This is why it is so frequently contrasted against the Law of Moses, which still condemned every man or woman, no matter their sincerity or good deeds.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6:23, ESV

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” – Ephesians 2:8, NIV

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” – John 3:16-17, NIV

We see God’s love for humanity demonstrated in His grace – His undeserved favour and kindness, bestowed on the human race. God’s grace was shown in action – in [sending His son](#), to save the world through him.

God’s Grace Is A Gift

Paul the apostle frequently described God’s grace as a gift because he, of all people, understood how easy it was for

Christians to be deceived into believing they could earn God's love or forgiveness. Paul, previously known as Saul, had been an extremely zealous [Pharisee](#). He was strictly religious, scrupulously lawful and he actively persecuted the new Christian religion (believing them to be heretics) – consenting even in their murder, in the misguided belief that he was doing God's will (Philippians 3:5-7).

Yet Paul was confronted on his way to Damascus in a very real way by the [risen Jesus](#), who made it clear to him that God's grace is something that is given freely, not earned.

The truth is, we cannot “earn anything” from God and we don't “deserve anything”, apart from the sentence passed on humanity for [Adam and Eve's disobedience](#) in the beginning – mortality. Yet God generously offers us something quite different, something undeserved – forgiveness and life, **as a gift**. God has, in effect, raised the white flag of grace, enabling a way for us to be reconciled back to Him.

“He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” – 2 Timothy 1:9, NIV

God's call to saving grace has been echoing down the centuries, appealing to any who would listen. Isaiah 55 likens this call to the provision of thirst-quenching water, free of charge, to those who are dying of thirst.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1, NIV

The Spirit Of Ungrace

Grace is, perhaps, the easiest concept to speak about in the

enthusiastic language of a born-again believer (John 3:1-21) but, in reality, the hardest virtue to assimilate into our Christian lives. Legalism, not grace, is one of the first lessons we learn in life; that all things come with a price and that nothing is given for free. We can tend to persist in this mentality after our conversion, even on an unconscious level, viewing God and each other in this light.

Yet, the concept of grace flies in the face of what we perceive to be deserved or fair and offers a completely different way of seeing things – less like ourselves and more like God. Jesus taught in his now famous prayer, known as “the Lord’s prayer”, that we should ask God to forgive us **as we forgive others** (Matthew 6:9-13). Peter later tried to clarify exactly what Jesus meant by this, asking him to specify how many times he was required to forgive (Matthew 18:21). Peter hadn’t grasped the ‘unreasonableness’ of grace, as God sees it. We are to forgive **as God has forgiven us**. Wholeheartedly and without reservation.

Peter’s question prompted Jesus to tell another story – that of the *ungrateful* servant (Matthew 18: 21-35). Despite having been forgiven a massive debt of some several million dollars by his master, the servant proceeded to demand repayment of a debt owed to him by a fellow servant, of only a few dollars. When the fellow servant was unable to immediately repay, he had him thrown into prison, ‘until he could repay the debt’ – which would have been practically impossible from his prison cell. The master soon heard of the ungrateful servant’s behaviour and the conclusion of the tale is sobering:

“Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” [Matthew 18:32-35, ESV](#)

The parable was designed to impress upon the listeners the importance of their attitude towards each other in response to the forgiveness they had received from God. Keeping score or imposing limits of forgiveness simply do not find a place in Christian behaviour. God has already forgiven us a debt so mountainous that any person's wrongs against us shrink to anthills in comparison. How can we not forgive in the light of what we ourselves have received?

In fact, there is a direct correlation between our professed love for God and our love for our 'fellow servants'. John puts it this way:

"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." 1 John 4:20, NIV

Forgiveness Is An Act Of Faith

"One day I discovered this admonition from the apostle Paul, tucked in among many other admonitions in Romans 12. Hate evil, Be joyful, Live in harmony, Do not be conceited – the list goes on and on. Then appears this verse, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." At last I understood: in the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another, I am trusting that God is a better justice-maker than I am. By forgiving, I release my own right to get even and leave all issues of fairness for God to work out. I leave in God's hands the scales that must balance justice and mercy. When Joseph finally came to a place of forgiving his brothers, the hurt did not disappear, but the burden of being their judge fell away. Although wrong does not disappear when I forgive, it loses its grip on me and is taken over by God, who knows what to do. Such a decision involves risk, of course: the

risk that God may not deal with the person as I would want. (The prophet Jonah, for instance, resented God for being more merciful than the Ninevites deserved.) I never find forgiveness easy, and rarely do I find it completely satisfying. Nagging injustices remain, and the wounds still cause pain. I do so because the Gospel makes clear the connection: God forgives my debts as I forgive my debtors. The reverse is also true. Only by living in the stream of God's grace will I find the strength to respond with grace toward others." – [Henri Nouwen](#)

The long and short of it is this: if we cannot show even the slightest resemblance of grace in our lives to one another, then we have totally misunderstood who God is and what exactly it is that He has done for us.

Grace teaches that God loves because of **who God is**, not because of who we are. Therefore, we choose to show that same attitude of grace in our behaviour to others. Showing grace isn't because we **should forgive**, it's because we're reminded that we **have been forgiven**.

"And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...." Romans 3:22-24, BSB