A prostitute in Chicago was in a terrible condition, homeless, sick, and unable to buy food for her two year old daughter. She came to a man who worked with the down and out. Through many sobs and tears, she told of the many terrible things she had done to support her own drug habit. The man didn’t know what to say; now he was legally bound to report the case. At last he asked if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. A look of pure shock came across her face. “Church!” she cried. “Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse.”

The ironic thing is that, in the Bible, women much like this prostitute fled toward Jesus, not away from Him. The worse a person felt about themselves, the more likely they would see Jesus as a refuge. Has the church lost that gift? Evidently the down-and-out, who flocked to Jesus when He lived on earth, no longer feel so welcome among His followers. They certainly don’t flock to the church (drugs, alcohol, suicide, etc). What has happened? What do people of the world think about the church? Grace is the world’s greatest need, and Christianity’s best gift to the world, but can the world still find the grace of God in the church?

So what exactly is grace? The Bible never gives us a one-statement definition, but it is filled with the idea from one end to the other and with numerous stories that illustrate/teach us what it means. The idea of grace comes from an old Hebrew term that meant “to bend, to stoop.”

Donald Barnhouse probably said it best, “Love that goes upward is worship; love that goes outward is affection; love that stoops is grace.”

The best example of this in the Bible is found in the parable of the prodigal son. In Luke 15, God is shown to be like a father who is moved with compassion, running, bending, even falling on the neck of a dirty, shabby, shoeless, sinful son, and kissing him profusely.

Psalm 103:13-14: “The Lord is like a father to His children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him. For He knows how weak we are; He remembers we are only dust.”

1 Chronicles 17:16 – “Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: ‘Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?’”

That’s the passage that inspired the song “Amazing Grace.” Why should King David, murderer and adulterer, receive the magnificent grace of God? Why should the apostle Paul? Why should we?

Every time the Bible teaches us about God’s grace, it makes it very clear that we don’t deserve it. We do not deserve to be saved, and there is nothing we can do to change that. Grace is what we receive from God because He is good and kind and merciful and loving, not because we are.

Grace is not merely a free gift, but a free gift to those who deserve the exact opposite and it is given to us while we are without hope and without God in this world.

Grace is what we need, but absolutely don’t deserve! But grace is what God offers each one of us!

Romans 3:23-24: “…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Titus 2:11 – “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men…”
Ephesians 1:7-8: “He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.”

Augustine would say - “God always pours His grace into empty hands.” We can’t buy salvation; we can’t impress God with our pain; can’t satisfy Him with our sacrifices (Hosea 6:6). He does not sell salvation to the highest bidder.

But He does do for His children what they cannot do for themselves – everything! 1 Corinthians 15:10 – “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

What is involved with the grace of God?

Ephesians 2:4-8: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God…”

I. The great love of God

This is the beginning point of salvation, this is where it all begins. From this, all else flows. The mercy and grace that God shows mankind is based upon the fact that God has a great love for us (John 3:16). This love is not because of who we are but who God is. God does not love us because we are lovable, but because God is loving! 1 John 4:9-10: “God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love - not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”

II. The rich mercy of God

At the heart of the mystery of grace is an essential concept – the idea of mercy, Titus 3:4-7: “But—“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

To show someone mercy is to show kindness and compassion and love to someone who is suffering and in need, even though they may be unworthy or undeserving. We often think of mercy and grace as the same thing, but there is a difference.

- **Mercy** is God withholding the punishment we rightfully deserve!
- **Grace** is God replacing that punishment with the free gift of eternal life.

- **Mercy** withholds the knife from the heart of Isaac!
- **Grace** provides a ram in the thicket.

- **Mercy** runs to forgive the Prodigal Son!
- **Grace** throws a party with every extravagance.

- **Mercy** bandages the wounds of the man beaten by the robbers!
- **Grace** covers the cost of his full recovery.
• Mercy hears the cry of the thief on the cross!
• Grace promises paradise that very day.

• Mercy pays the penalty for our sin at the cross!
• Grace substitutes the righteousness of Christ for our wickedness.

• Mercy converts Paul on the road to Damascus!
• Grace calls him to be an apostle.

• Mercy withholds what we have earned!
• Grace provides blessings we have not earned.

• Mercy closes the door to hell!
• Grace opens the door to heaven.

Grace is at the heart of the gospel, of the good news. We must believe it, teach it, and let it influence our lives. Make no mistake about it - we are saved by the “Amazing Grace” of God. What makes God’s grace so amazing?

III. The Amazing Grace of God

God’s grace is amazing because of what we were when grace saved us! Sing the 1st stanza of the song ‘Amazing Grace.’ The song describes us in our unsaved state as wretched, lost and blind. That’s where the story of grace begins, with our lostness and our inability to save ourselves.

Ephesians 2:1-3: “Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.”

This passage shows us our true condition outside of Christ – we were dead in trespasses and sins. That means separated from God and headed straight to hell for all eternity. The Bible clearly teaches us that by ourselves, we are in big trouble with God:

Isaiah 59:2 - “But your iniquities have separated you from your God…”

Isaiah 64:6 - “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags…”

Romans 3:10 – “…There is none righteous, no, not one…”

Romans 3:23 – “…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 6:23 – “For the wages of sin is death…”

God doesn’t owe us anything, in fact, what we really deserve is death, since all of us are sinners. But with one word God changed everything forever!

2 Corinthians 8:9 – “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”
Romans 5:8 – “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

God sent Jesus with the full understanding that we would kill Him, yet He saves us anyway – that is what makes God’s grace so “Amazing!”

God’s grace is amazing because of the provisions He made to save us! Sing the 2nd stanza of the song ‘Amazing Grace.’

By grace we have been given God’s word, which teaches us the consequences of our sin. We should learn to fear those consequences, and do the things God has told us to do in order to avoid those consequences. So when did we find relief from our sins? The song says “The hour I first believed.”

Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

The plan of God for our salvation is outlined in the phrase “by grace you have been saved through faith.” Eternal life begins with God’s “grace” and results in our “faith.”

Grace is God’s part in our salvation and involves everything He has done and continues to do for us! Faith is our part in our salvation and involves us doing everything God has commanded us to do if we want to be saved and have eternal life!

But God does not count our faith as saving faith until it is obedient faith, until we accept the gift of salvation by grace in the way God has told us to in His Word. Specifically, we are saved by grace when we believe in Jesus, confess our faith in Him, repent of our sins, and are baptized into Christ. So in addition to exposing our lostness, grace provides the way out of our lostness!

If it wasn’t for the grace of God, there would be no salvation! All we can say is 2 Corinthians 9:15 – “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

God’s grace is amazing because it continues to cleanse and lead us! Sing the 3rd stanza of the song ‘Amazing Grace.’ Grace not only has everything to do with our becoming Christians, but also with our remaining Christians. We have become Christians by grace. Now we need God’s grace to remain faithful in living the Christian life. How? God’s grace gives us strength to overcome temptation:

Matthew 6:13 – “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one…”

Ephesians 3:16 – “I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 – “…God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

We need God’s help because temptation is widespread and hard to resist. When we do sin, we are forgiven by grace: 1 John 1:7 – “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
We have the hope of being saved, not because we lead the Christian life perfectly, but because as long as we remain faithful to God, He continues to forgive us even when we do not deserve to be forgiven. [Revelation 2:10] – “…Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

God’s grace is amazing because it will lead us home! Sing the 3rd and 4th stanza. The third stanza ends – “And grace will lead me home…” Then the last stanza concludes that thought by saying – “When we’ve been there…” We must have the grace of God to be saved eternally.

God’s allowing us to enter heaven will be the ultimate act of grace - it is only by the amazing grace of Almighty God that we will ever see heaven!