

Grace

Amazing Grace

When I think of grace, I always think of “Amazing Grace” and that may be dating myself. No, I wasn’t around when it was written in 1772, but it was one of the hymns that I grew up with in church and at other occasions. It was played by bagpipes at our wedding in Scotland, and the words of that song just resonate in my soul when I hear it.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see
T’was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed
Through many dangers, toils, and snares
We have already come
T’was Grace that brought us safe thus far
And Grace will lead us home

John Newton, author of the words of Amazing Grace certainly could have been considered a “wretch” before his conversion. He had been conscripted into the navy, been a slave, became a slave trader, and survived tempests at sea before he accepted that wonderful gift of grace that changed his life. Serving as a parish priest with the Church of England at Olney, Buckinghamshire for over twenty years, he became part of the fight for the abolition of the slave trade in England and encouraged others, such as William Wilberforce to press on fighting for abolition.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that grace is a gift. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, though faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

What is the best gift you have ever received? How can anything we might receive here on earth come close to the gift that God gives us of accepting his gift of salvation?

I wonder if John Newton might have related to the story of the prodigal son in the Bible. (Luke 15:11-24). The son, taking his inheritance before it was due to him, squandered it with free and reckless spending. When he was at his lowest point – starving, feeding pigs in a strange land – he considered how his father treated their servants at home. Being a servant in his father’s home became more appealing than his present situation, but when he returned home, his father lavished grace upon him, gave him gifts of a robe, ring and sandals and forgave him. His father saw him a long way off and ran to him, suggesting that he was in the habit of watching the road down which his son might return. Just as John Newton and the prodigal son were forgiven, we can be forgiven too. God wants to forgive us, and he made that plan through his son Jesus. Romans 5:8 tells us that *“God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”*

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What do we have to do to receive this wonderful gift? The key here is that we cannot do anything to merit it. We are not saved or redeemed or forgiven by what we do, but by the grace of God. We cannot pray, volunteer, attend church, or even read the Bible to earn this gift. It's not until God's grace changes us and our broken heart condition that we can do these things and they have a meaningful impact on our lives. We were "created to do good works", but that is not what saves us, it is a by-product of the changes that He has made in our lives.

The wonderful point about this grace is that it allows us to live in freedom. Sure, we may mess up again...and again, but God is gracious to forgive our sins. That doesn't mean we should continue to live in ways that are dishonoring to God, but we don't have to beat ourselves up when we mess up. God doesn't withdraw his grace when we mess up, he forgives again ...and again. It's a process, we aren't perfect, but the goal is to become more like Jesus as we are followers of Him.

Because of this amazing grace, we fulfill God's purpose for our lives. The Bible says that we are God's workmanship, his handiwork and he prepared us to do good works. Sin draws us away from this plan that God had for us, but because of his grace, we can return to relationship with Jesus. Remember, we aren't saved by the works that we do, but we live out our faith in Christ by doing the good works that he prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10). Some CVM trips are in areas where we can't actively evangelize and spread the Gospel, but the love that we show for others and the work that we do indicate that we are followers of Jesus. Each day we should ask ourselves how we can share the love of Christ with others either by word or deed. Whether it's at home, school, workplace or "on the mission field," there will be opportunities in your way.

- **Have you accepted this wonderful gift of God's grace? If not, why not today?**
- **How does the gift of salvation allow you to live in freedom? How should we respond to a God who keeps forgiving us?**
- **In what ways does grace allow you to live your life with purpose?**



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