

Big Idea: You don't have to earn what's already yours.

Primary Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 3:23-25

Supporting Scripture: 1 John 4:19; Ephesians 1:4

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- Have you ever worked really hard for something but still didn't get it?
 - You studied for that test. Like... *really* studied. Flashcards. Practice problems. The whole thing. But you still didn't pass.
 - Maybe you trained all summer. You even woke up early and stayed late at the gym. You put in the work... but you still got cut from the team.
 - Or you rehearsed for weeks and nailed the audition—or at least you *thought* you did—but you still didn't get the part.
 - You applied for that job, that scholarship, that opportunity. Did everything right. You even had your parents read and re-read your application essay... but you still got rejected.
- Those kinds of situations are the worst because even though you know you did everything you were supposed to do, it still just wasn't enough.
- We live in a world that is constantly telling us: *Work harder. Be better. Earn it.*
- If that's how the world works... if everything has to be earned... what about God? What about salvation? What about love? What about forgiveness?
- But here's where our faith is unique.
 - You *can't* work hard enough. You *can't* be good enough. That's because the goal isn't to be "better than most people" or even "better than everyone else." The standard that we're called to is ***perfection***. And *none* of us can hit that.
 - Which sounds like bad news until you realize that there must be another way.
- We're starting a new series called **Done** where we're looking at what Jesus has *already* accomplished.
- Today we're starting with the foundation: ***You don't have to earn what's already yours.***

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- About 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to a church in a town called Ephesus, a church he had actually helped start years earlier.
- The Ephesians were living in a culture that sounded a lot like how we just described ours: earn your way, work your way up, prove yourself.
- Some of them were starting to wonder... *Am I doing **enough**? Am I good **enough**? Have I **earned** God's love yet?*

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:8-10 – NLT)

- Look at how many different ways Paul said the same thing in just these three verses:
 - *By his grace.*
 - *You can't take credit.*
 - *It is a gift from God.*
 - *Not a reward for the good things we have done.*
- Paul is being repetitive because he knew we love it when we can clearly see the relationship between *cause* and *effect*.
 - Be a good person, go to heaven. Follow the rules, earn salvation. Do enough good things, and God gives you a high-five and a pat on the back.
 - Like Paul wrote to the Ephesians, that logic **definitely** doesn't work in our relationship with God—not because God is unfair, but because God is literally perfect.
 - Since we're not, that means it would be impossible for any of us to ever be *good enough* to earn our own salvation.
 - That's the whole reason Jesus became one of us. He died on the cross and rose again because in the entire history of humanity, not one person has been able to save themselves.

²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God

presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. (Romans 3:23-25a – NLT)

- Paul's message to the Ephesians and the Romans was essentially the same thing: No matter who you are, where you live, or what you've done, God already loves you. And because of that love, God has **already** provided a way for you to be made whole again.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. You can't earn what's already free.

- Let's say I told you that I would give you a million dollars... but only if you could jump to the moon.
 - You'd have to be able to jump 238,000 miles. No matter how tall you are or how athletic you are, you just can't jump that far. No one can.
 - But with a million dollars on the line, would you spend your life trying?
 - No. Of course not. Because, again, it's impossible.
- Earning God's grace is kind of the same thing. To earn it, we'd have to be perfect all the time, and **none of us** can hit that.

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. (Ephesians 2:8 – NLT)

- Grace is a gift... something we can't earn, but that God chose to give us anyway.

2. God chose you first.

- Not only did God give you the gift of His grace... He chose you to receive that gift before you could choose *anything*.

⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. (Ephesians 1:4 - NLT)

- Nothing about you is an accident or a mistake.
- In God's eyes, you are always chosen first. Before the world existed. Before anyone else had a say. God chose you. On purpose.

3. Grace produces gratitude.

- If God's grace isn't about earning anything... if it's a gift... then why does Paul say this in Ephesians 2:10?

¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10 – NLT)

- Thankfully, this passage isn't saying we have to do "good works" in order to receive God's grace. In fact, it's kind of the *opposite*.
- We do good things as **a response** to the love and grace that God has given us.
 - It's not "*I have to.*" It's "*I get to.*"
 - Instead of fear, our good works flow from our gratitude.
 - We're not striving to earn something. We're responding to what we've already been given.
 - The gift came first. The good works are the overflow.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Remind yourself of what's already yours.

- This week, take a few minutes and ask yourself: *Where do I feel like I have to earn God's love?*
 - Whatever it is... write it down. And then, next to it, write yourself a reminder like: "God's love is a gift. I don't have to earn it."
 - Then put that reminder somewhere you'll see it, like your phone, your mirror, or even your locker.
- When you start feeling like you have to perform... when the guilt starts to creep in... when you catch yourself trying to earn what's already been given, let this reminder point you back to what you already know:
 - *You don't have to earn what's already yours.*

2. Look back and see where God showed up.

- Take time this week to think back to a moment when you felt alone. Or scared. Or like you failed. A moment when it felt like nobody was there.
 - Now ask yourself: *What got me through that? Was there a person, a moment of peace, or an unexpected turn that I didn't notice at the time?*

- The more we practice looking for God's grace in the past, the easier it becomes to recognize it in the present.
- When you train yourself to see where God has already shown up, you start to notice when He's showing up *right now...* in the moment when you need His grace the most.

3. Pray prayers of gratitude.

- This week, spend a few minutes, maybe two or three times, praying a very specific kind of prayer: No asking for anything. No requests.

Just gratitude.

- You can thank God for the people in your life... or for the abilities He's given you... or simply for the grace He's given you.
- When we thank God for what He's already given us, we remind ourselves that His love isn't something we earned. It's a gift we've been given.