GRACE THAT RECONCILES • STUDY 1 OF 3

The Problem

Estranged from the God Who Made Us

KEY SCRIPTURE

Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*
Colossians 1:21 *You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.*

Study Aim: To see honestly how sin has broken our relationship with God, and why we cannot repair it ourselves, so that grace is received as the gift it truly is.

Series Connection: A kingdom cannot grow with people who are still estranged from the King. Before we talk about vision and purpose, we must be sure of our standing with God.

OPENING QUESTION

Think of a relationship in your life that was broken, between friends, family, or neighbors. What made it hard to repair, and what did it cost the people involved?

> ***Leader Note:*** *Let two or three people answer briefly. The goal is to open the idea of estrangement without anyone feeling put on the spot. Tie the answers to this truth: sin does the same thing between us and God, only deeper.*

READ TOGETHER

- Genesis 3:1-10 (the first hiding)
- Isaiah 59:1-2 (the barrier of sin)
- Romans 3:9-23 (no one is righteous)
- Ephesians 2:1-3, 12 (dead, separated, without hope)
- Colossians 1:21-22 (once alienated)

POINT 1: MADE FOR RELATIONSHIP

Scripture: *Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 3:8-10*

God did not create us to be strangers. Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden, and the language of Genesis suggests easy, unafraid fellowship. We were made to know God and be known by Him.

Notice what happens after sin enters in Genesis 3. The first response is not repentance but hiding. Shame and fear now stand where friendship once stood. Every human story since has carried that same instinct to cover up and keep our distance from God.

Discuss

1. What does it tell us about God that He came looking for Adam and Eve ("Where are you?") instead of waiting for them to come to Him?
2. In what ways do people today still "hide" from God, even in church settings?

Common Ways People Hide

- **Blaming others:** Pointing fingers at other people or circumstances for mistakes, much like Adam and Eve did in Genesis.
- **Busyness and work:** Filling schedules with tireless service, tasks, or jobs to stay distracted and avoid quiet reflection.
- **Isolation:** Pulling away from community, fellowship, and spiritual mentors so no one can see personal faults or failures.
- **Material wealth:** Pursuing possessions, money, or status to create a false sense of security and self-sufficiency.
- **Religious camouflage:** Using outward piety, good works, or religious routines as a mask to cover inner struggles.
- **Stopping prayer:** Avoiding prayer, scripture reading, and communication with God because of lingering shame.

Leader Note: *Point out that God's question was not for His information but for their invitation to come out of hiding. Grace was already moving.*

POINT 2: SIN BREAKS THE BOND

Scripture: *Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 3:9-18, 23; Ephesians 2:1-3*

Scripture describes our condition in strong terms. Paul says we were "dead in trespasses," "by nature children of wrath," and "alienated." Isaiah says our sins have made a separation between us and God. The problem is not that God's arm is too short to save, but that sin stands between us.

Romans 3 makes the news universal. It does not single out the worst offenders. Jew and Gentile, religious and irreligious, all are "under sin." Sin is not just wrong acts; it is a condition of the heart that makes us enemies of God (Romans 5:10).

- Separation: we are cut off from the life and presence of God.
- Hostility: left to ourselves, our minds are set against God (Colossians 1:21).
- Condemnation: sin carries a real and just penalty (Romans 6:23).
- Helplessness: we are "dead," not merely sick, and cannot revive ourselves.

Discuss

3. Why does it matter that Scripture calls us "dead" in sin and not merely "struggling"? How does that change what we need?

4. Why is it important that Romans 3 says "all" have sinned? What happens to a church when people forget this?

Leader Note: *Handle this section with care. Some in the group may carry heavy guilt, and others may feel they are "good enough." Both need to hear that the diagnosis exists to lead us to the cure.*

POINT 3: WE CANNOT FIX IT OURSELVES

Scripture: *Romans 3:20; Isaiah 64:6; Galatians 2:16*

Humans are remarkably inventive at trying to close the gap on their own. We try religious activity, moral effort, comparison with others, and service to the church. Paul is blunt: "By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight" (Romans 3:20).

This matters for those who have served the church faithfully for many years. Long service is a good thing, but it is never the ground of our acceptance with God. The longest-serving member and the newest convert stand in exactly the same place at the cross: both in need of grace.

Discuss

5. What are some "self-repair projects" people use to try to earn God's favor? Which one is most tempting for you?

6. How does knowing that we cannot earn our way back to God free us to serve with joy instead of pressure?

Leader Note: *Gently let the group see that church work can quietly become a way of earning. Do not accuse anyone; invite honest reflection.*

LIVING IT OUT

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

> Set aside ten quiet minutes this week. Read Romans 3:9-26 slowly and ask God to show you any place where you have been trusting your own record instead of His mercy.
>
> Write down one "self-repair project" you tend to lean on, and bring it to God in prayer.

Memory Verse

Romans 3:23-24 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God, You made us for Yourself, and we confess that we have hidden, wandered, and tried to save ourselves. Open our eyes to the seriousness of our sin and the greatness of our need. Keep us from pride in our own record, and prepare our hearts to receive the good news of what You have done. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LOOKING AHEAD

Study 2 turns from our problem to God's provision: how the Father took the initiative in Christ to reconcile us to Himself.