



SESSION 3

God's Grace - Lavish and unfair?

Key takeaways for new believers:

- We have all sinned and fallen short of God's standards
- God chooses to treat us not as we deserve (death), but as we don't deserve (adoption as children of God). His grace is totally extravagant and amazing!
- God's grace cannot be earned; it can only be received.

Part 1

worship

community

- Review the story from session 2 on baptism. Talk about participants' experiences of retelling the story or contemplating the story since the previous session.
- Is anyone thinking of being baptised? Direct them to discuss with elders.
- Listen to or sing worship songs. Examples:
 - How great the Father's love for us – Stuart Townsend
 - Beautiful One – Tim Hughes
- Allow participants time to discuss any pastoral / spiritual issues on their minds



Part 2 (story)

identity

Transition: Now you understand how to be saved by Jesus and you have decided to follow Him, maybe you are going to be baptised? You have turned from your old life to a new one, but what does that look like? Who are you now?

The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-31)

The religious leaders didn't like that Jesus used to hang out with sinful people, so Jesus told them this story to help them understand why he did what he did.

"A man had two sons. One day, the younger son said to his father "Father, give me my share of the estate."

So, the father divided his property and gave the younger son his share. Not long after that, the younger son gathered together all he had, set off for a distant country and there he squandered his wealth in wild living.

After he had spent everything he had, a severe famine swept over the whole country and the younger son soon became desperate. He went and hired himself out to a boss who sent him into his fields to feed pigs*. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said to himself, "How many of my father's employees have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say "Father, I have done you wrong and heaven wrong. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your employees." With his mind made up, he set off for home.

But while he was still a long way away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him and ran to meet his son, he threw his arms around him and kissed him!

The son said to him, "Father, I have done both you and heaven wrong. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father called his servants and said, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on my son. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring out the calf we have been fattening up and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate! For this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found!" So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. "Your brother has returned," he replied, "and your father has thrown a party because he has him back safe and sound."

But the older brother became angry and refused to join the party. His father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your estate with prostitutes returns home, you roll out the red carpet for him!"

"My son," the father replied, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."

*For a Jew, this would have been the lowest of all jobs, dealing with unclean animals!

Questions for discussion

identity

community

1. What do you like about this story?
2. What bothered you about this story?
3. What does this story show you about God?
4. What does this story show you about people?

Part 3 (practice / takeaways)

identity

mission

community

worship

Ask the remaining questions:

5. What does this story mean for your life? How will you live your life differently having learned this story?
6. How will you remember this story?
7. Is there anyone you would like to tell this story to?

Pray that new believers will be able to live in a way that reflects their new status, especially that they are able to turn away from residual sin. Remind them that no sin is too big for God to forgive, and equally no sin is too small that we can presume to not need God's salvation.

Pray for the new believers to share this story, and pray for the people who will hear it.

Encourage new believers to read and meditate on the following verses:

- Ephesians 2:4-5
- Ephesians 2:8-9
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 11:6
- Galatians 2:21
- Romans 8:15
- Titus 3:5a
- Luke 15:10

Other useful media resources

1. <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=the+prodigal+son+video+clip&view=detail&mid=8272F13145BA72523C3A8272F13145BA72523C3A&FORM=VIRE>
Contemporary portrayal with mainstream soundtrack
2. <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=the+prodigal+son+video+clip&view=detail&mid=35430AADE7045F33383035430AADE7045F333830&FORM=VIRE>
Traditional portrayal with KJV language
3. <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Christian+Song+About+Prodigal+Son&&view=detail&mid=433B81CC17A0F9F77C8F433B81CC17A0F9F77C8F&&FORM=VRDGAR>
Casting Crowns song about the prodigal with lyrics, and references to the Bible story



CHRIST **CENTRAL**



CHRIST CENTRAL

Notes for leaders

Here are some topics / questions that may come up during the group discussion:

- Definitions of key terms (**sin**, **grace** and **salvation**):
 - **Sin** – turning away from God, choosing to live life independently of God’s rule and authority over our lives. It is part of our inherited nature from Adam. New believers are still most likely to think of sin only in terms of breaking moral codes (e.g. murder) without realising how all-encompassing our rebellion is. Don’t expect new believers to grasp this straightaway – it will be learnt over a lifetime of walking with God.
 - **Grace** – God’s unmerited favour shown towards us
 - **Salvation** – God’s rescue plan for mankind, from both the penalty and power of sin. It’s (a) a one-time / past event, (b) a continuing process in which we become more like Jesus, and (c) a promise of a glorious future with God in heaven.
- We all sin, ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed in the garden of Eden. The extent to which we sin will vary, but regardless we all fall short of God’s standard (Romans 3:23).
- Consider the Father’s reaction to his errant but repentant son:
 - He hadn’t given up on his son – indeed, it seems that rather than sitting idly by he had been keenly looking out for his son’s return. It isn’t coincidence that he saw his son while he was still a long way off.
 - The father welcomed the son back even before the son could start his apology. The mere fact of the son’s directional turnaround (repentance) was enough for the father to accept him
 - The father didn’t simply accept his son back into the household (or business) as an employee. He welcomed him back as a fully reinstated son, with all the privileges (wealth, status and authority) it entailed
 - Sheer joy! The father threw a lavish party for his returned son!
- Consider also the father’s reaction to his other son:
 - The father didn’t chide his older son for his petulance. He explained simply that this son too had access to all that he (the father) had, and begged him to join the celebration
- The father’s reaction brings into sharp focus the nature of God’s grace. We can neither earn it by our good works as the older son thought, nor can we ‘limit’ it as the younger son did when he hoped to be welcomed back as an employee only.
- God’s grace seems inherently ‘unfair’ to most people. And yet it is totally fair, in that Jesus’ death balanced justice and mercy. To unpack the concept of ‘unfair grace’, consider the parable of the vineyard workers in Matthew 20:1-16
- In His grace, God not only forgives us our sins but adopts us as sons and daughters into His family, with a future inheritance prepared for us. He rejoices over every person who repents. Our status as children can never be earned. Blood connections cannot be earned – in our case, the ‘blood connection’ is the blood of Jesus, by which we are saved.