

In a SPIRIT *of*

PRAYER

Sermon Growth Guide

May 11, 2025

Caught Up In Grace



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Caught up in Grace - Ephesians 2:4-5

Key Verse: Ephesians 1:18-19a

“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.”

Big Idea: The only way we can pray, the only way prayer is possible, is that we have been caught up in the grace of God.

Foundations

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is filled with thoughts and instructions, but also his prayers for these believers. Last week’s growth guide set up this series by saying, “(Paul) prays that the Ephesians will know God deeply. He prays that they will understand the hope of new life and the inheritance they will have with Christ. He prays that they will know God’s power – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead – which is at work in and through both them and us.” Paul uses this letter to remind the believers who they were and who they are now. In this passage, he recognizes our depravity and gleeful race towards death and then, against the backdrop of death, the absolute necessity of God’s grace in our lives.

When we are caught up in grace, we seek a connection with the grace-giver. It is only natural that we turn towards prayer. The grace of God beckons us to pursue eternal life. We are most alive when we are praying, for we are connecting with the God of the universe. When we hear from Him and call on Him, we are most detached from death.

Grace prompts us to be thankful, to desire life and hope for others, to see God move in the lives of others in the same way. We pray because we remember and know what it is like to get caught up in death and our transgressions. God’s grace frames our prayers.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Ephesians 2:1-10.

Christians often focus on Ephesians 2:8-10. How does it help to read the broader context of this passage?

Paul, a former legalistic rule follower, is known for his focus on grace after His conversion. How do you see the juxtaposition of sin and grace in this passage? How do you see our recognition of God’s grace as leading us toward a spirit of prayer?

Applying God’s Word

What do you focus on in this passage – our sins, God’s grace, or being made alive? Why?

What areas of your life do you live the truth that you’ve been made alive? Are there any areas where you continue to live towards death? Pastor Tim asks us “What are you using to save your soul?”

What are you relying on? What does it look like to pray without ceasing and rely on God’s power through our prayers?

Witnessing God’s Word

When you pray this week, frame your prayers with grace – the grace shown you, and the grace you desire for others. What are ways that you can live to eternal life?

Today is Mothers' Day. But that was just made up by greeting card companies, wasn't it? No, unless you want to peg it as a pagan holiday to celebrate the mother of Zeus, which we don't, it comes from a church in West Virginia where a woman named Anna Jarvis wanted a day to honor, unite and encourage mothers like her own mother. But it became so commercialized that nine years later, Anna Jarvis appealed to Congress to remove the holiday from the national calendar! That's why I didn't buy a card... We celebrate mothers, motherhood, family, parenting; the whole family system ordained by God is taking grievous attack from those who claim it is oppressive or destructive to personal satisfaction. I encourage you to follow a friend of mine from Charlottesville named Brad Wilcox and the Institute for Family Studies at the University of Virginia, and of course we know Focus on the Family here in Colorado Springs. Time and time again statistics prove out that monogamous marriage and family under God's design renders the greatest happiness and fulfillment. You just don't get any sleep.

We are in a sermon series called In A Spirit of Prayer. We are learning to pray again, to live connected to that great power, the God who sustains us. Parents need that great power. And parents, and mothers, need grace. Let's talk about grace today. Caught Up in Grace. Do you understand grace? It is a powerful force. Mercy is not getting what you do deserve; grace is getting what you don't deserve. God's Rewards At Christ's Expense. Pastor David Jeremiah offers a contrast between mercy and grace: "Mercy withholds the knife from the heart of Isaac. Grace provides the ram in the thicket. Mercy runs to forgive the prodigal. Grace throws a party with a robe, a ring, and a fatted calf. Mercy hears the cry of the thief on the cross. Grace promises paradise that very day. Mercy converts Paul on the road to Damascus. Grace calls him to be the great apostle. Mercy closes the door to hell. Grace opens the door to heaven.

The difference between Mercy and Grace is this: Mercy withholds from us what we deserve. Grace gives us what we do not deserve." God saves us from punishment for our sins; that's mercy. God gives us a relationship; that's grace. The only way we can pray, the only way prayer is possible, is that we have been caught up in grace, caught up in the grace of God.

Because here is the truth: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." (Ephesians 2:1) John Calvin says on this, "He does not mean simply that they were in danger of death; but he declares that it was a real and present death under which they labored. As spiritual death is nothing else than the alienation of the soul from God, we are all born as dead men, and we live as dead men, until we are made partakers of the life of Christ." This is one of the clearest pictures of what it means to be separated from God. Look at this. Dead in your transgressions and sins. Transgression means crossing the line. You know God drew a line there, and you don't care. Sin is missing the mark of holiness; living for yourself and turning away from God's light. Paul says it is death. To divorce yourself from the Author of Life is to align yourself with the darkness of death. "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12) "Why do I feel dead inside," people ask.

Ephesians goes on to describe this state of being. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." (Ephesians 2:1-2) When you followed the ways of this world. That's the current of the times, the cultural drift that leaves God's Word behind. And there is the ruler of the kingdom of the air. This is a colorful way of talking about Satan. The Deceiver. The Adversary. The one Jesus called the thief. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come

that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) You were dead when you drifted along with the world, listening to the Deceiver. But it was also your own inner impulses that pulled you into disobedience. “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.” (Ephesians 2:3) Following the desires of our flesh, our internal compulsion. “What’s your inclination? Oh, then go on ahead! You do you.” Listen, some of the things you feel inclined to do are not the best things to do. God’s way is the life-giving way. Three forces availed against you, the world, the flesh and the Devil. Without the grace of Christ poured into your life, your living is nothing but dying. It’s quite a picture, the state of a soul separated from God. You are just kind of sucked down the river.

Does anybody remember Superman II when a boy fell into the river above Niagara Falls and Superman had to fly in and save him? Lois suspected something that day. On July 9, 1960, that actually happened. Not the Superman part. Roger Woodward when he was seven years old and his sister Deanne (17 yrs) went out for a boat ride with a family friend on the river above the falls. The engine failed, the boat capsized on the shoals, and the driver went over the falls and died. Deanne was rescued just twenty feet from the falls. Roger went over, seven years old, wearing an orange life vest and bathing suit. “This water looks like it’s as big as a house with the waves and the rocks,” he said. “One minute you’re pulled underwater, you can’t breathe, you wonder if you’re ever going to breathe again. The next second you’re thrown up into the air and you come down and you’re glancing off of rocks as you’re going through the rapids.” He thought he was dead. Then a hand reached down and plucked him up. The Maid of the Mist, the tourist boat under the falls, found him. Years later, Roger gave his life to Christ. “It wasn’t the hand of fate, it wasn’t the hand of luck, it wasn’t the [river] spirit

of Lelawala, it was the spirit of the living God that saved my life that day and saved my sister and gave us hope that one day we would come to know him.”

Without Christ, we are drifting along headed for destruction, bouncing against the rocks waiting for the big drop. But... “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.” (Ephesians 2:4-6) From death to life. From dead to alive. Because of what? Because of God, rich in mercy. Because of His grace; because of His great love for us. You can live to death or you can know eternal life in Christ. That’s the choice. That’s the difference. Live for yourself and live to death, or give your life to Christ and die to self, and live to eternal life. As Paul says elsewhere, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20) Jesus Himself calls it taking up your cross: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.” (Matthew 16:24-25) You can live to death or you can die—you can give your life over in your heart to Christ—and if you do that, then you live. You live. Not drifting along the river, pulled by the currents, dead to everything around you. You live. You are alive in Christ, and lifted up above all powers and dominions in Christ into the heavenly realms.

“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—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:6-9) He repeats it. By grace you have been saved. How will you save yourself? What works, what great deeds and achievements will make up the existential basis of your life? Boast in them? You didn’t save yourself when you were floating down the river, dead. All glory to God. He loves you so much, He reached down in Jesus—it’s Jesus’ hand you feel pulling you up—and grabbed you and pulled you. Out of loneliness, into family. Out of death, into life. We are caught up in grace. And, finally, in Christ, you will find purpose. Look here: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10) He’s got stuff for you. Stuff you are going to love being a part of—His purposes, for His glory, and to your enduring joy and fulfillment. In Christ, you find purpose. Don’t miss it. Don’t live to death; die to live. Die now, live later. That’s the shift. Instead of live now, die later, it is die now, live forever. Put your life in Jesus’ hands. Caught up in grace.

The point is made very clearly, and repeated: by grace you have been saved. We have a desire to save ourselves, to be our own savior. What are you using to save your soul? As long as you are leaning on anything but Jesus, you will be disappointed and frustrated. We all have little saviors we use. What is it? The last thing you think about at night, the first thing you check on in the morning. That is where you rely, that is where you are resting and founding your life. Is it your money? There will never be enough. If you are leaning on that, when the market crashes, when the business fails, you will collapse. Is it your health and youthfulness and beauty? In ten years when age and time do their thing, you won’t know what to do. Is it adventure? There is nothing so great as that perfect experience in the mountains, that glorious ski day, that epic climb. Listen, it is hard to get

enough of what almost satisfies. These things don’t get you all the way there. They can’t be your savior. There is one Savior. One Lord. Jesus Christ. Your works and qualities and experiences and efforts and accolades, they can’t do it. Only Jesus. Are you caught up in His grace today?

Prayer is possible because of what Jesus did for us. We are on a 40-day prayer journey. To pray we need to be caught up in grace. How did God do it? How did God reach down into the frothy whitewater of my life and pull me out of the river of death, into His eternal life? How am I saved by grace through faith? Look again at verse 3: “...Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.” (Ephesians 2:3) Why? What does wrath mean? God flies off the handle in anger when we don’t do what He wants? No. Wrath is God’s firm commitment to justice and righteousness. It is actually an aspect of God’s love. God loves us and His creation so much, He is just and righteous to correct and punish wrongdoing. That we deserved. Jesus stepped into it on our behalf. God took on flesh in His Son Jesus and drank the cup of God’s wrath for us. He paid it all. Mercy. That’s how a holy and just God can receive an unholy and unjust person like myself into His courts in prayer, caught up in grace.

I want to give us a moment to pray, then, to be caught up in grace. We are quick to pray for things we want, to bring our laundry list to God. We are quick to pray when we are in trouble, to ask God to save us from harm or from the consequences of our own sinful choices. But we sometimes miss, prayer begins with praise and adoration of God just for Who God is, for His grace that saves us. So I want to give you some time to pray in adoration. We also forget to give thanks, to pray with gratitude. So, as we pray together to close, I’m going to give you time to pray in adoration and gratitude. Let’s pray.