

# How to Be Saved

(By Grace Through Faith and Not By Your Own Good Works)

Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:17; Acts 6:8

**The Big Idea:** God's grace is the undeserved, free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, offered to all people.

**Learning Goal:** Learners will trust God's grace, live God's grace, and share God's grace.

**Opening:** Begin by sharing a high and low from this past week. When each person has had a chance to listen and share, open your session together by praying the following prayer together, out loud.

## Opening Prayer

Gracious God, you have given us an incredible gift - one that we don't always know what to do with. Give us courage to not only try to understand your grace, but to live in that grace and share that grace with others. Be with us today and help us see how powerful and amazing your grace can be. Amen

**Read:** The title of this bonus session begs at least three questions: *What does it mean to be saved? What is grace? What is faith?* While it's tempting to give simple definitions for each of these and move on in the lesson, the faith lives of adolescents are probably better served by exploring what these words mean, and don't mean, in our Lutheran tradition. Any answer that ends up being a "how-to" will be too mechanistic to do justice to the fullness of what life in Christ is about.

## Biblical

Salvation in Scripture is not a formula, and it is rarely spoken of in individualistic terms. God's salvation is given to human beings in relationship with the God of Abraham, Moses, David, Mary, and Jesus, and God saves *for* and *from* a variety of life situations and purposes.

From the moment God calls Abraham to leave his father's home and travel to a new land, it is clear that this God is all about relationship. The promises of God for Abraham are about *this* life—land, progeny, presence—and they by being part of this covenant, Abraham is to be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-7). When God rescues the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, it is again not just about the result of liberation for the people, but also about the glory of God, so that all may know who this Yahweh is (Exodus 14).

Whenever God's people begin to equate God's presence or blessing too closely with one gift or blessing, be it a king or the temple, the Scriptures constantly call the people back into this sense of the covenant relationship of a people and their God. This salvation does not remain a vertical relationship, but is meant so that the love of God will be shared within and beyond the covenant community.

When Jesus carries out his ministry, salvation is not so much talked about as enacted. Physical healing is often directly bound up with forgiveness and salvation. Although Jesus is careful not to blame those who are sick for their condition (John 9:1-3), he also asks the question, "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk?'" (Matthew 9:5-6). Salvation is never limited to one physical state, nor is it held out as something that will only be given in the next life. Jesus' parables in Luke of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15) make it clear that God is always the one who takes the initiative,

seeking us out.

The apostle Paul, of course, gives the most direct and clear statements of the "economy" of salvation (Romans 6:23; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9): This economy therefore is a state of constant receiving, of living knowing that God has done all that is necessary for the world. In the words of Desmond Tutu, the gospel means that "there is nothing we can do to make God love us more because God already loves us perfectly. [And] there is absolutely nothing we can do to make God love us less" (from a sermon at St. Paul's Chapel, Manhattan, Feb. 26, 2005).

## My Faith Story

Share a profound "grace moment" in your life. Maybe it was a time that someone did something nice for you that you didn't deserve. Perhaps it was something you read that made you really understand the concept of grace. Or it could have been something you witnessed, either on a large or small scale. Why does this moment make you think of grace? How has grace changed your outlook on the world, on people, on your life?

## How to Be Saved By Grace... Tips

Many religions are built on the idea that the more closely people follow your religious rules or the more morally people behave, the better God will like them - and the better God likes them, the greater their chances of "getting into heaven".

While there is nothing wrong with moral living or obeying God's laws, that kind of behavior has very little to do with the salvation God offers. You don't need to be a follower of Jesus Christ for that.

Christianity, on the other hand, says that out of pure love God was willing to sacrifice everything - even his only Son - to save you forever from sin, death and all your false gods. Including you.

Since God has already done everything needed to secure your salvation through Jesus, you never have to do one single thing to "earn" god's favor, no matter how bad you are at following rules. Still, being saved takes some getting used to.

- 1) Get familiar with the term "grace" - Grace means that God gives you all the good stuff - forgiveness, salvation, love and life - with all its ups and downs - as totally free gifts. Keep an eye out for situations in which you can use the word, and then use it liberally. You'll soon begin to see God's grace all around you.
- 2) Practice letting go of the things you love - Staying focused on yourself can make it difficult to open to a grace filled world. But giving of yourself, your time, and your possessions can put you in a receptive, open frame of mind. This is important, as salvation cannot be "found" by looking at it. It is revealed.
- 3) Lose yourself as soon as possible - An important part of having a receptive frame of mind is losing yourself in whatever you're doing. To do this, give yourself over entirely to the activity. This can be accomplished in prayer and worship, but also through things like playing games, talking with family and friends, reading a good book serving others or playing an instrument. Even work can accomplish this.
- 4) Admit your limitations - Without straying into despair or false modesty, make an honest confession to yourself about what you can and cannot do, what you are and are not. When you see yourself realistically you become more open to God's message of love, grace and salvation.

5) Accept your uniqueness – In God’s eyes, you are so valuable to merit the ultimate sacrifice of His Son, even before you spoke your first words. God will spend your whole life trying to convince you of this. When you accept that to God you are priceless beyond imagination, it becomes easier to understand why God chose to save you.

6) Spend time in worship and prayer – While only God grants a faith that saves, the church gives lots of opportunities where God has promised to come to you.

7) Avoid the temptation to “do” – The “old Adam” or “old Eve” in you – the sinner in you – always wants to be in charge over God. He or she will tell you that God’s grace is too good to be true and that you must “do” something to earn or justify it. Simply remind him or her that you were baptized into Jesus Christ and have all the grace you need.

## BE AWARE

- The Apostle Paul’s summary of the Gospel goes like this: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast” – Ephesians 2:8-9
- This viewpoint about God’s grace, even among many Christians, is unpopular, as it was when Martin Luther and the reformers reminded the church of it almost 500 years ago. Be aware that once you adopt it you will come under fire and be tempted to lapse back into the old way.

## Points to Ponder

- Focus on #3. What do you think it means to “lose yourself”? Are there things that you do wholeheartedly, without thinking about anything else? What kinds of distractions keep you from fully immersing yourself in things like prayer or worship, or even in enjoying time with friends and family?
- Look at #5. Grace is something that is difficult for us to accept - and it's even more difficult if we don't think that we are special. How does it make you feel when you're told that you are unique? Do you sometimes think that those kinds of affirmations are too good to be true? Are you able to believe that God created you in God's image—and loves you just the way you are?
- Finally, read the second bullet point under the “Be Aware” section. Many Christians want to put limits or qualifications on God's love and grace. Remember that grace through faith is a gift that comes with no strings attached!
- After reading Ephesians 2:8-9, what do you think it means to be “saved by grace through faith”? There are three loaded words there - *saved*, *grace*, and *faith* - words that don't have easy definitions. Talk this over. It is ok to struggle with this concept.
- John 3:17 states “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” This verse is often overlooked, because the preceding verse is so popular. However, it has important things to say about grace. Read this verse again. What do you think was God's motive in sending Jesus to earth? (*Not to condemn the world, but to save it.*) What do you think John means by “that the world might be saved through him”? How does this verse help you understand what God is about? (*You might have a hard time with the paradigm shift from thinking of God as judging to God as loving. Perhaps God is both!*)

## Closing Questions

- What is one way to be "saved by grace through faith" that you can focus on this week?
- What do you think it means to be saved?
- How can you tell or show others about God's grace?

## Closing Ritual

Great and Gracious God, thank you for the opportunity to discover how much you love us. Help us stand firm in the knowledge that we don't have to earn your love. Give us the courage to share the good news of your grace with people who haven't heard. Amen