

## Journey into Servanthood

### Lesson 2... Why God's Grace is Amazing (1 Timothy 1:12-20)

**I** like the ads on TV and in magazines about diets and exercise machines with the “before” and “after” pictures. The “before” person is overweight, pale, unattractively dressed, and obviously very unhappy. Then, they show the “after” picture with the person slim, tan, attractively dressed, and happy. I have also noticed sometimes the women’s hair amazingly turns blonde. Many of these testimonials are obviously staged and contrived. God’s grace, which is the essence of the Gospel, also has some “before” and “after” testimonies. In this passage, Paul presents himself as an example of God’s grace, and from his true, unstaged testimony we can learn three awesome things about God’s amazing grace. First...

Paul writes: *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry* (1:12). Paul knew he couldn’t live the Christian life by himself, so he was thankful to Jesus Christ who *enabled* him. The phrase translated *hath enabled me* means “to empower” or “to strengthen.” How is this same phrase used in Philippians 4:13?

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God not only saw what Paul was but what he could become. God saw Paul as he sees all of us, as diamonds in the rough. An amazing aspect of grace is its ability to empower us for the Lord’s service. In Acts 4, the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Court) puts Peter and John in jail because they are very upset with them for preaching the Gospel. The next day the authorities bring them before the court, command them not to preach about Jesus’ resurrection, and then release them. During this very dangerous and fearful time, the apostles witnessed *with great power ... of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus* (Acts 4:33a, emphasis mine). According to the last phrase in that verse, why were they able to keep preaching in the face of such fierce opposition?

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Living the Christian life is often very difficult, especially when we must go across the grain of current culture. However, when we are faithful, God energizes us with His empowering grace.

Paul continues by saying he *was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and*

### Notes

*injurious* ... (1 Tim. 1:13a). This is no exaggeration because he was a religious predator. Paul, who in his pre-Christian life was called “Saul,” hated Christians and *made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison* (Acts 8:3). Paul also assisted in killing the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:58).

Despite all this, Paul writes: *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief* (1 Tim. 1:13b). Paul sincerely believed he was stamping out a sect that was trying to destroy the Jewish faith. Yet, in the midst of his zeal, hate, and killing God came to Saul to show him *mercy*. What is the difference between mercy and grace? Mercy means we don’t get what we deserve. A person convicted of a crime will often throw himself on the “mercy” of the court. This means he doesn’t want what he deserves – justice; he wants mercy. Grace is getting what we don’t deserve – forgiveness. What truth found in Isaiah 30:18a must we never forget?

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Paul continues: *And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus* (1 Tim. 1:14). God’s grace is given abundantly, which means beyond our wildest expectations. **God’s grace is amazing because it empowers us**, and also ...

### **God’s grace is amazing because it saves us (1:15-17).**

God’s amazing saving grace turned Paul the persecutor into a preacher and Paul the murderer into a minister. Now, Paul testifies about God’s amazing saving grace in his own life and writes what has been called the “Gospel in miniature.” Paul begins: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance* (1:15a). Then, what does he write in the next phrase?

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Notice Paul say I *am chief*, not *was chief* (emphasis mine). Grace never makes us feel superior or proud. Like Paul, we should not let the memory or past sin haunt us and make us feel unworthy to be used by God. The memory of God’s forgiving our past sins should fill us with wonder, gratitude, and praise. Paul is amazed at God’s *longsuffering* (1:16), which is a part of His grace. How does Psalm 145:8 describe our gracious God?

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Paul writes he is *a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him [Jesus] to life everlasting* (1 Tim. 1:16). Is the way Paul was saved the example? Paul was on his way to Damascus to bring Christians back to

Jerusalem as prisoners. As he nears Damascus, what happens (see Acts 9:3)?

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I have never met anyone who had that kind of experience. Have you? Paul is the only person in the NT to have such an experience. To the rest of His disciples, Jesus simply said, *Follow me* (see Matt. 4:19a), and they followed Him without any bright light or voice from heaven. That's how most of us are saved. We repent of our sins and follow Jesus without any sensational experience.

How then is Paul a *pattern*? He is proof case that no one is so sinful that God's grace will not forgive and transform him or her. Paul's voice shouts across the centuries, "Don't despair! God forgave me; He will forgive you!" As Paul thinks of God's saving grace, he breaks into spontaneous praise, writing: *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen* (1Tim. 1:17). Paul says God is *eternal* and *immortal*, which means He will never cease to be gracious and loving. *Invisible* means we cannot see or touch Him; we only see Him at work in the lives of people. Not only is God's grace **amazing** because it **empowers** us and **saves** us, but also ...

### **God's grace is amazing because it equips us (1:18-20).**

To encourage young Timothy in the task before him at Ephesus, Paul writes: *This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee* (1 Tim. 1:18a). *Prophecies* probably refers to the preaching and teaching at Timothy's ordination into the ministry. How do 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6-7 describe this event?

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The word translated *gift* (CHARISMA) means "grace gift" or "endowment." God gifted, or endowed, Timothy to *war a good warfare* (1:18b) and fulfill His purpose for his life. The Bible teaches each of us has at least one God-given spiritual gift that equips us in fulfilling His purpose for our lives. How does Romans 12:6a describe this aspect of God's amazing grace?

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At conversion, God's Holy Spirit indwells us, equipping us and giving us the desire and power to fulfill God's purpose for our lives (Phil. 2:13). God does His part by saving us, empowering us, equipping us, and indwelling us.

However, our part, as Paul tells Timothy, is *holding faith, and a good conscience* (1 Tim. 1:19a). Our *conscience* is what brings peace and fulfillment when we do good and guilt when we do wrong. **Our conscience amplifies God’s voice in our lives.**

Paul writes: *which some having put away* (“faith and a good conscience”) *concerning faith have made shipwreck* (1:19b). This is a powerful metaphor to people in a seaport city like Ephesus. Horrible shipwrecks were common in Paul’s day because of the small size of ships, lack of a compass, and unpredictable storms. Refusing to listen to our conscience will lead to a “shipwrecked” (or destroyed) *faith*. When our convictions are tossed by the wind and waves of culture and peer pressure, if we forget our conscience is our moral anchor, we will end up spiritually and morally “shipwrecked.”

We all know of “shipwrecked” marriages, relationships, and reputations because of the forsaking of a *good conscience*. How does Psalm 119:11 remind us to prevent our Christian life from being “shipwrecked”?

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Now Paul cites two examples of men who did not stand true to the *faith* or a *good conscience*: *Hymenaeus* (hi-muh-NEE-us) and *Alexander* (1 Tim. 1:20). We don’t know what happened, but they were blaspheming in some way. Therefore, Paul handed them over to Satan (1:20a), which probably means Paul had them excommunicated from the church and placed back in the world, which is Satan’s domain. Their removal from the church was corrective, not punitive, in intent. That’s why Paul explains, *that they may learn not to blaspheme* (1:20b). Paul wants them to repent and be restored to the fellowship. So, this was an act of disciplinary grace.

**God’s grace is amazing because it empowers us, saves us, and equips us.**

No wonder the lyrics to the most famous song in the world are: “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.” These words were written by former slave trader and wicked sinner John Newton in 1779. What aspect of God’s grace has been most amazing in your life, and why?

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