SUMMER 2023

IT'S ALL ABOUT GRACE

EPHESIANS 2:8-9





2023 BIBLE STUDY

Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp

IT'S ALL ABOUT GRACE

We are very grateful to the following individuals for their work in writing the 2023 Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp Bible study.

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2023 IT'S ALL ABOUT GRACE

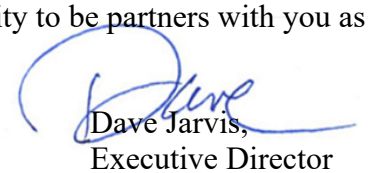
My experience is that kids, and even adults, don't totally "get" grace and even more so, don't trust it. It's not how the world works. Therefore, this concept of grace is foreign to them, or at least not something they are ready to fully count on and lean into. Because of that, our campers can't hear about it enough!! Kids and even staff often want to throw works into the mix. Our goal of this study is to give our campers and staff a firm understanding of what grace is and why our life becomes a response to grace.

In Ephesians, Paul makes it clear that we are saved by grace and grace alone; not by our works. This study will be a chance to see how our lives can be a response to that incredible saving grace of God shown to us through Jesus Christ. Gerhard Forde, a noted Lutheran theologian, once said, "There is nothing you have to do to be saved. Now that you know you have to do nothing, what are you going to do?" The days of this study walk us from an understanding that grace starts with God, to knowing our lives are a response to God's grace by reflecting grace in the lives of others.

1. **GRACE STARTS WITH GOD – THE SWEET SPOT OF GRACE:** Grace starts with God. Grace is God's action toward us. And by **grace** – God's mercy and love – we have been made whole. We are healed. We can't do anything to earn it, work for it, achieve it. It's already ours in Jesus.
2. **GOD DOES NOT GIVE UP:** As we look at Jesus – what he taught, how he treated others, what he did, how he loved, we see the truth of God. We see what grace looks like. God's action of forgiveness, healing and love. Through stories, we witness how God's grace shows up over and over, and God never gives up on us.
3. **TRUST: BELIEVING IS SEEING**: We can't earn God's grace and don't deserve God's grace, still God pours out this grace upon us. God's grace is not about us, it is about God, as God freely pours out this grace for each and every single one of us. Believe it!!
4. **BARRIERS TO GRACE:** We create barriers to God's grace, either believing we are not good enough to deserve God's grace or living in cheap grace where we live however we want, letting grace be our safety net. When we fully live into God's grace and the relationship that develops, we are able to remove these barriers to receiving God's grace.
5. **REFLECT GRACE AND RESPOND:** As we fully live in God's grace, we get the chance to not only experience God's grace but reflect it into the world around us!

Morning Watch is an important part of each day at camp. We will begin each Morning Watch with a welcome, some scriptural reading, a current song, and then move to about a half hour of God Time and reflection. We hope that this discipline of quiet time during the day is one that many will take home with them as they seek to grow in their relationship with God.

I am very excited about this study. This is going to be a challenging study. I hope this study can move campers, staff, and adult leaders to wake each morning, to think about their day ahead, and fully experience and share grace while living a life that impacts others in the name of Christ throughout their day. If this happens, they will transform the lives of others, and in doing so, they will be transformed as well. I also hope this study will help you to continue to grow in your own faith journey. Thank you for the opportunity to be partners with you as we serve the people of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond.



Dave Jarvis,
Executive Director

2023 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
IT'S ALL ABOUT GRACE

INTRODUCTION TO THE OVERALL THEME

Years ago, my mom called me one day and said – "Hey! I'm getting new golf clubs. Do you want my old ones? My initial reaction was, "Why the heck would I want your golf clubs? Golf is a dumb game. You hit a ball and go looking for it. " Then my mom added the hook – "Your dad says when you come down he'll teach you how to play". Now, I love my dad, and I love spending time with my dad – rarely do I get to spend one on one time with him. So, even though I thought golf was a dumb game, of course I said, "Yes!"

So I went, and my dad spent a week at the driving range with me – teaching with all kinds of patience. I learned hitting that little white ball isn't as easy as it looks…but I could whiff and not hit a hundred balls, but then suddenly I'd hit that one ball – and it would sail…and immediately my heart sang – I can do this again! And so I kept at it. The first round of golf I played I beat my sister. I like this game! But what I liked even more was the feel of hitting the ball in that "sweet" spot. The feeling Wow!, of amazingness, of all is right in the world right now! The sweet spot.

In our lives of faith, walking as followers of Jesus – there is a sweet spot and it's called grace.

Grace is one of those things if you're around Jesus followers at all you hear about, you sing about, you pray about, you talk about. But it also quickly gets confusing. Is grace something God gives or is it what we say before meals? Is grace just being nice to others or is it something more? Is grace just a catch all word? Is my giving grace to someone the same thing as God's grace for me? Can grace be simple, or will it always be something we hear about but don't really understand?

These are great questions and not necessarily easy to answer, but this week we are going to dive into grace and hopefully, through our weeklong journey with grace, we will come to know that:

- Grace starts with God
- Grace doesn't give up
- Grace can be trusted
- We are pretty good at putting up barriers to grace – and we can take them down
- As we live in God's grace, we get the chance to not only experience God's grace, but reflect it into the world around us

The goal is that by the end of the week, we will have experienced and know the sweet spot of grace.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us
even when we were dead through our sins, made us alive together with Christ
by grace you have been saved
and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace
in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing;
it is the gift of God
not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
For we are his masterpiece,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.
Ephesians 2:4-10

2023 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
IT'S ALL ABOUT GRACE
DAY 1: Grace Starts with God – The Sweet Spot of Grace

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

When I was little, I lied…about the obvious. When my mom saw a whole bunch of hair in the trash can, she asked my sisters and me who cut their hair. Me, in all my beautiful, safety scissors cut bangs looked her square in the eye and said – I don't know! Walking home from school one day there was a glorious puddle that beckoned my friend and I to walk through it…and so we did. When my mom asked me why my shoes were wet – I looked her square in the eye and said – they're not wet. When I got mad at my sister for changing the channel on the TV, I bit her…on the knee. When my mom asked me why I bit my sister, I looked my mom square in the eye and said – I didn't bite her – I can't help it if her knee got in the way of my teeth! Each and every single time, I earned the chance to sit in the orange rocking chair and think about what I had done. I spent so much time in that chair it was willed to me by my family when I moved out! And all that time spent in that chair, for lying and a myriad of other things…what I internalized was this: my status in life is all about what I do. (or at least what I get caught doing!)

While not necessarily a bad understanding for making my way in this world, unfortunately it carried over into my faith life. I am lucky in that I have never known a day in my life, where I did not know Jesus loved me. But I also grew up to understand that Jesus loved me more when I behaved a certain way. Oh I knew he loved me, he just loved me more, was happier with me when I behaved as a "Christian should". And the problem with that then, is grace became something centered in me or rather in my behavior. Was I being good enough for God? Was I doing all the things, in all the right ways so Jesus would be happy with me? The answer in my heart so very often was – no. And so my understanding of grace became this warped version of grace – because grace doesn't begin or end with me. No, grace starts with and ends with God – and who God is – not me.

When I began to grasp that God's grace is all about God, who God is, what God does – I began to embrace a freedom I hadn't known in my faith life until then. I wasn't a disappointment to God, I didn't "un-earn" God's grace because I didn't do everything just right that day. No, because God's grace is about God and God at work, I now understand that my status with God ALWAYS is Beloved One. No matter what, that doesn't change. Because God is the one who declares me a Beloved One. And that never stops.

Now I'm not the only human being to get confused about this grace thing. If we're honest, we all get confused, tripped up, worked up…and have throughout all of history. So, God, understanding humanity better than we do ourselves, knew we needed to be able to see grace in action. So, Jesus came to be one of us – to live with us. Teach us, lead us, show us what God's love for all looked like. And because the depth of God's love for us is so incredibly deep, Jesus showed us how far God's love will go – all the way to the cross, a painful death, and three days in a grave because of love. But God doesn't stop there – Jesus isn't a human that once dead stayed dead. No, the power of love rose Jesus from the grave and in doing so, grace became ours for all time. Grace brings us home. Home to a God whose love for us will never, ever, end. No matter what.

This is incredibly good news! For ALL of us. Not earned, not worked for, not deserved – but gift. Life giving gift. And it all starts and ends with God.

Today, our goal is to help ourselves and our campers be covered in the grace that is God's love for us – forever – no matter what.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.
The law indeed was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.
John 1:17

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Today you will introduce campers to the truth that grace starts and ends with who God is
- Help campers get to know each other as Beloved Ones of God
- Jump into the story of grace alive here on earth through Jesus' life, death and resurrection

C. MORNING WATCH

Common Welcome

Welcome to this day!
God of Grace
You make us in your image
And your breath breathes life into us
Help us embrace your grace
Knowing it is greater than our wildest imaginings
embraces us as we are and where we are
and draws out of us the people we were created to be

Introduction to the Day

Today we are going to discover that grace begins with God and makes every single one of us a Beloved One of God. We will look at how far grace will go to make sure we know we are unconditionally loved by the God who made us.

Why we chose the passage and Scripture

God's grace is a gift to us – not earned, not worked for, not deserved – but gift. Today's passages remind us of that foundational truth – and Jesus' part in bringing grace alive for us all.

...but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ***5*** *even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved -* ***6*** *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* ***7*** *so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* ***8*** *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—* ***9*** *not the result of works, so that no one may*

boast. [10] For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them. *Ephesians 2:4-10*

Song; "For God So Loved" by We The Kingdom

Come all you weary, come all you thirsty
Come to the well that never runs dry
Drink of the Water, come and thirst no more

Well, come all you sinners, come find His mercy
Come to the table, He will satisfy
Taste of His goodness, find what you're looking for

For God so loved the world that He gave us
His one and only Son to save us
Whoever believes in Him will live forever

Bring all your failures, bring your addictions
Come lay them down at the foot of the cross
Jesus is waiting there with open arms
Can you see His open arms? Here we go

For God so loved the world that He gave us
His one and only Son to save us
Whoever believes in Him will live forever
The power of hell forever defeated
Now it is well, I'm walking in freedom
For God so loved, God so loved the world

Praise God, praise God
From whom all blessings flow
Praise Him, praise Him
For the wonders of His love
Praise God, praise God
From whom all blessings flow
Praise Him, praise Him
For the wonders of His love
His amazing love

For God so loved the world that He gave us
His one and only Son to save
For God so loved the world that He gave us
His one and only Son to save us
Whoever believes in Him will live forever
Oh, the power of hell forever defeated
Now it is well, I'm walking in freedom
For God so loved, God so loved the world

Bring all your failures, bring your addictions
Come lay them down at the foot of the cross
Jesus is waiting, God so loved the world

Questions for Consideration:

- If you had to define "grace" – what would you say?
- What do you know about Jesus? Do you know why he came to earth?
- Later today we are going to talk about being God's "beloved ones". What do you think that means in your life? Do you believe you are a beloved one of God? What makes you say what you say?
- Have you ever thought about how God's grace can/does make a difference in your life? Take a few moments in the quiet of this morning to think about what is means to have God's grace for you.

Closing Prayer

God, I don't always understand what your grace is, or how it makes a difference in my life, but open my heart and mind to you this week and let me see how your grace is in me and for me forever and always, no matter what. In your name, Jesus I pray, AMEN.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

God's grace – in Jesus follower circles we talk about it all the time. There is an assumption we all know what we're talking about, and that grace is clear. But the truth of the matter is – we don't fully understand grace…none of us. And we get it mixed up. That's why we have such a hard time defining grace. Plus, we often try to define grace from a human perspective and it seems too good to be true. So even if we kind of grasp what it is – we often don't believe it's really real.

Today's study is going to lead us back to the basics of grace – what it is (and isn't), where it comes from and the truth of it. We're going to look at grace embodied in the life of Jesus and we're going to see how that grace changes everything for us when we dare to believe it.

Knowing this is the first full day of camp, we will also take time getting to know each other a bit and beginning to see each other as grace sees us – as the beloved ones of God.

The key to this day is to keep things as simple and God-focused as possible.

Texts for the day:
Ephesians 2:4-10

...but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us [5] *even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved -* [6] *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* [7] *so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—* [9] *not the result of works, so that no one may boast.* [10] *For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.* Ephesians 2:4-10

Verses 4-5
To begin with, we have to embrace this truth about grace: Grace starts with, ends with, and everything in-between, with God. True grace is all about who God is and how God chooses to interact with us. These two verses state this clearly as the character of God – rich in mercy and

great with love. Grace is found in the depths of these two God characteristics. Grace happens because God sees us – broken/dying from the disease of sin, and out of love, says – I can heal you.

Now healing is an interesting thing. We have all been sick – and at times we let the virus/whatever is making us sick "run its course". Hoping all the while to feel better soon. And most of us do. But there are some physical illnesses that can't be allowed to run their course, because if left to their own devices – they will kill us. Cancer, heart disease, immune diseases are just a few that if we let them go – will steal our very physical lives. So what do we do? We go to one who can hopefully heal us. I know from my own lived experience with cancer – in those moments of realizing I had something inside me that could literally kill me, I was incredibly thankful that there were those in my life who had the ability to save my life.

When we talk about grace – God's movement to heal us – we're talking about God moving against a disease that literally can kill our soul – the very part of us that gets to live forever. If we will go to great lengths and expense to save our physical lives – why would we not embrace the one who is making sure life eternal is ours? Grace moves and God heals. That's it. Done deal. But it can't be that simple, can it? I mean, healing my physical life took lots of effort and money on my part. So, a healing that is even deeper and more profound – I must have to do something for it!

God understands this about us (remember God created each of us!) which I think is why the next line is SO important: "***made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved."*** This is the grace action. We are healed – made alive at the same time Christ was made alive – raised from the grave. It is done – the healing has happened. And we did nothing, do nothing, can't do anything. By **grace** – God's mercy and love – we have been made whole. We are healed. We can't do anything to earn it, work for it, achieve it. It's already ours in Jesus.

Verses 6-7

As if that news is great enough, Paul (the author of Ephesians) goes on to remind us of even more. Not only have we been healed/given new life, we have been seated beside Jesus – meaning God is claiming us as his own children – not slaves, not workers, not outsiders – but beloved ones of God. Think about that – just as you are – wherever you find yourself today, wherever you are in your faith journey today – God looks at you and calls out to you, "Beloved One"…beloved one – all that I am is yours. The life I created for you can be yours – with Jesus!

I think it easy to read over this and go – yeah sure. Whatever – this doesn't really mean me. STOP! RIGHT NOW!

Why is it that we can choose to see God's grace for everyone else, but so often when it comes to ourselves we automatically discount ourselves?!? For years I lived my life trying to be "good enough" for God – and all I did was end up feeling frustrated and like I was always failing God. When in the midst of that time, life became really hard through some emotional and mental abuse in a really hard work situation – I immediately cried out to God – What the heck (though I will admit my language was a little more colorful than that!) All my life I have tried to serve you, to get closer to you, to be the person I thought you wanted me to be – I even went into ministry so I would please you! And this is what I get in return?!?! I questioned if it was all worth it.

I kept going through the motions though, until one day, the Spirit gave me this thought – stop trying so hard. I already love you more than you can imagine and that will never change – no matter what. No matter what? How could that be? I mean sure, God loves me all the time, but

how could that love not involve disappointment in me when I didn't do what God wanted, when I wasn't the person I thought God wanted me to be? It is in those moments I discovered grace, I think for the first time – for real.

I am a beloved one of God – and so are you. Take a moment and think about all the ways you discount yourself from truly being one of God's beloved ones. Dare to write them down. Then…burn that list, tear it up and throw it away. I mean it – STOP and DO IT NOW! I'll wait!

When you are done – say this to yourself – I AM GOD's BELOVED ONE – just as I am, where I am, how I am…no matter what.

My friends – that is grace. Given freely by God – healing you and me of the disease and brokenness of sin, making us Beloved Ones – no matter what.

And even if you really did the exercise above – God knows you (and me) well enough to know – we are going to pick up those ideas again. We are going to find ourselves trying to earn God's grace and so Paul added onto these verses the next ones…

Verses 8 and 9
Perhaps the most beautiful words in all of creation are – you are saved by grace through faith. We are given the gift of grace and all we have to do is accept it. Pick it up, put it on. It hovers by us, over us, under us all the time – it's never going away – no matter what. No matter what. So, quit trying to earn it. It's yours. Gift. Gift. Gift!

And why is that so important? Because grace isn't about us – it's about God and God moving in our lives. It's not about what we do…it's not about what we do…it's not about what we do!! I cannot say this enough, stress this enough!!

Because when you get to the place you can simply accept God's grace for yourself – there is a freedom and joy that is yours that cannot be had otherwise. Honest. Once I decided to embrace grace and believe and trust that God's grace was true for me – the pressure to perform "right" lifted. I started paying attention to the ways my heart connected to the heart of God – and embraced them, instead of trying to do some formula somebody else laid on me trying to earn God's favor. It has changed my life…literally.

I think this summer is a great time to ask yourself:
Am I willing to choose to embrace God's grace for myself?

Believe me – your willingness to do this can literally transform your life! And if we want this for our campers – we should want it for ourselves. Right? Right!!

Verse 10
You will come to this verse more later in the week – but it's part of the whole grace picture, so it needs to be here too! Read verse 10 carefully:

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them

Do you read in there anywhere – we are created to do good work *in order to earn our way to heaven*? Does it say we are created to do good works *in order to be good enough* for God? Ah, the answer to both of these is a resounding NO!

When we read this verse – this is the response we get to live out! Live out of the joy that is ours because of grace. We are what God has made us – beloved ones, saved by grace – that's what God has made us. Period. And then…because of God's grace in our lives, we get to do good works – which God has prepared BEFOREHAND for us to do. What the heck does that mean?

It means when God created you – healed you – God knew already the talents, gifts, passions, heart you have. And God has things for you to do. Not to earn your way, but because you have this immense, amazing freedom in grace. And God has created you to do what God desires for you. Have a heart for the homeless? God designed it. Feel strongly about working with children? Yep – God planted that passion in you. Love to see the beauty in the world around you and capture it in photos and video? Once again – God created into you. God has created things for you to do – because you can and they will bring you joy and you will be able to reflect God's grace into lives by living into those things God has created you to do.

Some of you are coming to camp because you love working with kids – great! Some of you are here because you have the gifts for building and site maintenance – awesome! This place needs both and more! Just because someone has a passion for something doesn't mean God has created that same passion in you. In fact, God has not created the exact same things for all of us because then some things would get done all over the place and other things would never get touched!

Friends, embrace who you are – beloved one saved by grace – gifted with talents and passions to do what God has created you to do. There is the picture of grace. Embrace it, trust it, live it. And this I know to be true – you will find immense freedom and everlasting joy.

Philippians 2:6-11

[Christ Jesus] who, though he existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a human,
8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
9 Therefore God exalted him even more highly
and gave him the name
that is above every other name,
10 so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This passage is often known as the Christ Hymn – and is often believed to have been an actual hymn in the early Christian church. For me it is filled with beauty and grace and a humbling feeling of amazement at what Jesus did. This is why I've included it on this day.
In these few verses we hear:

- Jesus is God

- Jesus gave up equality with the Trinity (Creator, Redeemer, Spirit) in order to come be a very physical part of our history – Jesus is God joining us in the experience of human life on earth.
- In coming to earth Jesus emptied himself – gave all of himself – to be a slave/servant for us that we might see God in the flesh and see, hear, learn and follow
- But Jesus goes one step further – he doesn't just come to heal, teach, speak and call us – he comes and willingly dies on a cross – a death that is painful, awful and inhumane. And he does it all so we might know the depth of God's love for us.
- And so God (and us) exalt Jesus – lift him up so that everyone knows his name and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess – will speak the truth that Jesus is indeed Christ the Lord.

It is succinct and beautiful all at the same time. It helps us get the gist of the Jesus story even if we don't know a thing about Jesus. We will use it today to help campers understand the Jesus story – and why Jesus' life, death and resurrection is so important to us.

And why is it so important? Because it is God's grace made visible to us, in Jesus.

Try thinking about your faith – without Jesus. It doesn't work. The Christian faith is based on the truth of grace revealed in Jesus. Without Jesus, the story, God's grace is incomplete. Christianity is the only faith where God comes into the world and becomes one of us…and then allows himself to be sacrificed – for us. That is the defining factor for Christianity – Jesus come to earth, living, dying, rising again as God's grace made visible. We are wise to remember without Jesus embodying God's grace for us – our story would read very differently.

ADDENDUM: MARK 14-16
It will be very important for you to know the Jesus story before you head into this day's Bible study. The shortest version of it in the gospels is found in Mark 14-16**. Read it – more than once.** Read it and make sure you know the details well – so you are prepared when some camper asks for more info about Jesus.

Couple of things to note:
- Peter who loudly declares he will always follow Jesus – denies him three times. There is grace for all – for Jesus still uses Peter to build the church
- Verses 38-39 – the temple curtain torn in two – the curtain is what divided the holiest place in the temple from the rest of the temple. It was believed God's presence resided or showed up in this area and so only certain priests were able to go into it. The curtain in a sense kept God separated from the people. When Jesus died the curtain torn in two – and was never replaced – marking the change for God's people. The barrier between God and God's people had come down.
- The centurion was an outsider. Not even a liked outsider. He was a representation of a foreign power under whose thumb the Israelites lived. The fact that in this moment it is a centurion that is named as understanding who Jesus really was – is amazing! He is an outsider, disliked – there would be no point in including this fact other than it teaches us Jesus is for all.
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Things to remember about campers and Bible study:
* Today is your first day of Bible study – your campers are still getting to know each other and still figuring out what and who is "safe". You can **help create a safe space** by setting/creating a **group covenant** around how your crew will treat one another. Suggestions of good practices are things like:
    * We will listen to each other so that when we are talking others will listen to us

* We will hold each other's stories within our group…meaning we will not share someone else's story outside our cabin/Bible study group.
* We consider everyone to be equal and so will treat each other as we would like to be treated

With younger groups it can be as easy as:

- we won't talk when someone else is talking
- we will treat each other with kindness
- we will not talk about another person in our group or share what they shared with anyone else

* Sometimes campers have a **hard time paying attention or need "distractions"** while they engage…here are some ideas that could help:
  - have a talking stone – when you hold the rock that's your time to talk
  - have everyone turn to a partner and share their answer with their partner…then have the partner's share each other's answers with the group or simple each person share what they shared with their partner
  - have everyone stand up and once they have spoken have them sit down (or vice versa) while you're walking to your bible study spot, walk for a short way then stop and ask a question. After everyone has answered, walk a short way further, stop ask another question. Keep this going till you get to your bible study spot.

  A lot of campers won't have much experience with Bible study or the experience they've had has been Sunday School lessons or VBS. WE don't want to teach them Bible study is boring**. Bible study is so much more than just reading scripture!** If we relegate Bible study to just looking at words on a page – we don't let the text live in our campers' lives. Campers, especially the younger ones, like to move and be active. The activities are just as important as the reading of text!

* **The enthusiasm of the group will never rise above the enthusiasm of the leadership.** Which means if you aren't engaged, if you are bored with what you are doing – you can guarantee your campers are the same…or less.

ACTUAL POSSIBLE STUDY:

Today we start off taking a bit of time to get to know each other. As the first day of Bible Study, it is key to set the stage for the week. This group has to be a safe space to share and open up. It's hard to that when we don't know each other. These 3 activities don't take a lot of time – but they progress -from sharing simple non-threatening things to taking the risk to share a little more about ourselves. This will help build the safe space.

I'd Rather

Have the whole group get up and stand in the middle of your area. Tell them you are going to give them two options as an answer to each question of "Would you rather…". They have to pick a side. There's no staying neutral in the middle! 😊Then go thru some of the following:

Would you rather…

To the right:	To the left:
Live in a treehouse	Live in an igloo
Sit on nails	Sit on ice
Go to PE	Go to the library
Have a tiger's stripes	Have a porcupine's quills
Be stuck on a broken ski left	Be stuck in a broken elevator
Skip forward in time	Go back in time

Have a dog	Have a cat
Wear the same socks for a month	Wear the same underwear for two weeks
Explore space	Explore the ocean
Be a kid your whole life	Be an adult
Have a lifetime subscription to Netflix	Have an unlimited gift card to Starbucks
Always get away with lying	Always know when someone is lying
Get everything you ever wanted by die soon	Live your life as it is for a really long time
Never be able to cry	Never be able to laugh
Sell all of your possessions	Sell one of your organs
Be immortal	Be the richest person in the world

Things that Make You Feel
Have everyone sit in a circle. Tell them you are going to say: Tell me something that makes you feel…..and then you are going to add a feeling. After you say that phrase, each camper gets the chance to say some thing that makes them feel that way.

Example: Tell me something that makes you feel: happy
Each child answers with one thing that makes them feel happy.

Other feelings you could choose are: sad, mad, afraid, accomplished, powerful, excited, bored, confused, anxious, creative, embarrassed, content, loving, kind, respected, important, confident, hopeful, appreciated

A variant here could be letting each camper pick one of the feelings. Everyone including the one who picks gets to answer.

Getting started with our Study:
The Sweet Spot
Ask your campers:

Do you know what a "sweet spot" is?

Give campers time to answer – answers could be all over the place – someplace that tastes sweet, somewhere you get candy, somewhere you really like, etc…or they might actually know what a sweet spot is…be prepared for answers you don't expect!

If no one gets what a sweet spot is – **explain** – a sweet spot is a place or time when everything feels like it's going right. In sports a "sweet spot" could be when you hit a ball really well, or when you are playing at your best and it feels good. In music, a sweet spot could be when you are playing an instrument and you get to that point where playing is comfortable and you play well. Or it could be when you are singing with a group of friends and everything feels right. A sweet spot in school could be the class where you feel like you really know what is going on and it's easy for you.

Do you have a "sweet spot in your life right now? A place where you feel confident, feel good about who you are and what you are doing?

Say something like this – there is a sweet spot when it comes to our faith also – and that place we call GRACE.
Ask campers:
Have you heard the word "grace" before? Do you know what grace is? How would you describe grace?

*depending on the age level and "churched" level of you group will often determine kids' answers to these questions. Don't be surprised if no one can really explain grace!

Say something like this:
Grace is a word we use a lot around churchy places – but we don't often talk about what it really is. Today and all week long we are going to discover what grace is and how it can be part of our own lives. So how about we see what the Bible says about grace?

Have everyone turn to Ephesians 2:4-9

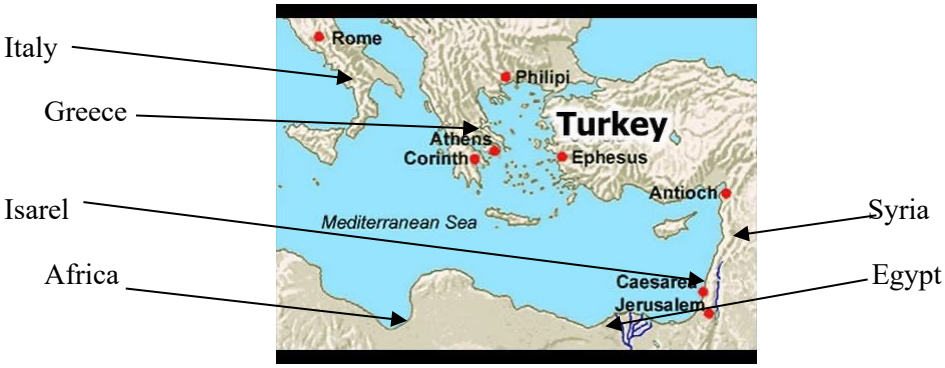
*do not assume that all campers (or any campers) know their way around a Bible – especially younger ones.

Help them find their way to Ephesians then to chapter 2. You might have to explain:

-the Bible is made up of a lot of stories about God and God's people

- Plus there's two big division called the Old Testament and the New Testament – the OT is all about the time before Jesus came – and the NT is all about while Jesus was here on earth and shortly after he left.

- Ephesians is a letter written by a guy named Paul to a bunch of Jesus followers in a city called Ephesus (which is in modern day Turkey - see map:



Once everyone has found Ephesians 2:8-9…ask if someone would like to read it aloud:

. [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—* [9] *not the result of works, so that no one may boast*

Does anyone want to take a guess at what all that means?

Give campers a chance to answer, but don't expect answers – this is all said in a way not easy to understand

After campers have had a chance to answer…say something like:

This is a fancy way of saying that God loves us so much that even when we live here on earth, God wants to make sure we can be God forever. So knowing we needed help – God sent us a gift – Jesus to show us how much God loves us. And the gift we get in is eternal life. And it's a GIFT – we can earn it, work for it, try to be good enough for it – God just gives it to us.

It's like this:

-Tell me about a time when you worked really hard for something – maybe it was good grades, or learning a new sport, or playing an instrument. Maybe it was a report for a class or a new skill learned at a job. Doesn't matter – just has to be a time when you worked really hard for something. (give everyone a chance to answer)

-Now tell me about a gift you got – a surprise gift – who gave it to you? What was it?

-Now ask – how did it feel when you got what you worked hard for? How did it feel when you got the gift? How are the two feelings different?

-That's kind of what the text is talking about – what God gives us – life and love through Jesus – is a gift. We don't have to work for it, earn it, be good enough – God just gives it to us.

If they are having a hard time understanding this…this story could help. You could say something like – OK – I've got a story for you that can help us understand how God feels about us and it helps us understand what grace is:

True story: Once there was a family who adopted a daughter who had been adopted by another family previously. The first family never quite made their adopted child truly one of their family. After a couple

of rough years, they dissolved the adoption, and this new family ended up welcoming an eight-year-old girl into their home.

For one reason or another, whenever the previous family had vacationed at Disney World, they took their biological children with them, but they left their adopted daughter with a family friend. Usually - at least in the mind of the little girl…this happened because she did something wrong that made it impossible for her to go on the trip.

And so, by the time this new family adopted her, the little girl had seen many pictures of Disney World and she had heard all about it. But she had always been the one left on the outside. Once her new dad found out about this, he made plans to take her to Disney World.

He thought he knew all about taking kids to Disney World. He knew from previous experiences that the seeing cast members in freakishly oversized mouse and duck costumes somehow turns children into squirming bundles of emotions.

What he didn't expect was that the very idea of visiting this dream world would produce a stream of downright devilish behavior in their newest daughter. In the month leading up to the trip, she stole food when a simple request would have gained her a snack. She lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She whispered insults that were carefully crafted to hurt her older sister as deeply as possible — and, as the days on the calendar moved closer to the trip, she got worse.

A couple of days before the family headed to Florida, the little girl's daddy pulled her into his lap to talk through her latest escapade. "I know what you're going to do," she stated flatly. "You're not going to take me to Disney World, are you?" The thought hadn't actually crossed his mind, but her behavior suddenly started to make some sense. She knew she couldn't earn her way into the Magic Kingdom — she had tried and failed that several times before — so she was living in a way that placed her as far as possible from the most magical place on earth.

So, her daddy asked her, "Is this trip something we're doing as a family?"
She nodded, brown eyes wide and tear-rimmed.
"Are you part of this family?"
She nodded again. "Then you're going with us.
Sure, there may be some consequences to help you remember what's right and what's wrong — but you're part of our family, and we're not leaving you behind."

Well, her behavior didn't really get better after that moment. Her choices pretty much spiraled out of control at every hotel and rest stop all the way to Disney. Still, they headed to Disney World on the day they had promised, and it was a typical Disney day with lots of lines, lots of people, expensive food, all mingled with just enough magic to consider maybe going again someday.

In our hotel room that evening, a very different child emerged. She was exhausted, thoughtful, and a little weepy at times, but her month-long rebellion had faded. When bedtime rolled around, her daddy prayed with her, held her, and asked, "So how was your first day at Disney World?"

She closed her eyes and snuggled down into her stuffed unicorn. After a few moments, she opened her eyes ever so slightly. "Daddy," she said, "I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours."
It wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours. -
edited from: PROOF: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace By Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones

Then say…
This. This is grace. You can yell at God, you can be your worst self and God is gonna love you like crazy. It's not your behavior that "makes" God love you – God just does. No matter what. And God loves you so much that Jesus came to show us how far love will go for us. That's grace. Love - No matter what.

If we go back to Ephesians really quick let's look at one more thing: verses 4-6 – once everyone is back have someone read aloud:
…but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us [5] *even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved -* [6] *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus…*

Ask:
Does anyone know what this means? (again don't expect a response 😊)
What this means is this – God loves you so much – Jesus came to earth to show you that love.
Do you know how Jesus showed us God's love?
Answers you're looking for: Came to earth, lived as a human, taught us, healed people, died on a cross and rose again

**If you don't get any answers – tell the Jesus story succinctly from what you take away from the Mark text. This is best done if you can tell the story – not read it – too many details, too long to read. If you don't know the Jesus story – you should!

Then say something like:
And in doing that – living, dying, rising again – Jesus made it possible for us to always be known as God's Beloved Ones. Do you know what a beloved one looks like? YOU!!

It's sometimes hard to believe we are one of God's beloved ones because we see all the things we don't like about ourselves. We see the ways we mess up. And then there's people.

ASK: Have you ever been hurt by someone you thought really loved you? Anyone want to share with us a story? (don't push – this might be too soon in the week for this question – but it never hurts to ask – gets them thinking!!) If no one else wants to share – ***share a story from your own life…***

Then say something like:
People love us but sometimes they stop, or they make conditions -we have to act a certain way or do things a certain way before they'll love us – God isn't like that. God's love for you never changes – no matter what! Just like the little girl in the story – her daddy loved her no matter what – and God's love for us is even greater!

Ask:
Do you know what it means to imagine something?
Let campers answer – be sure to make the distinction between imagining something and something that is imaginary. (Imagining something is seeing something that could actually happen – something imaginary is not real and will never be real)

Then say something like this:
I want you to close your eyes and imagine this: Picture Jesus sitting somewhere nice and comfy. Then imagine you walking up to Jesus, and as he sees you, his face breaks into the biggest grin. He jumps up and runs to meet you – swings you up into his arms and gives you the biggest bear hug ever! He is so excited to see you and wants you to know how much he loves you. It's awesome!

Now imagine or remember a really bad day you've had. You messed up. Did some things you aren't proud of. Said some things you shouldn't have said. Were unkind. How are you feeling? Now picture Jesus sitting somewhere nice and comfy. Then imagine you walking up to Jesus,

and as he sees you and he's know you've not been at your best , his face breaks into the biggest grin. He jumps up and runs to meet you – swings you up into his arms and gives you the biggest bear hug ever! He is so excited to see you and wants you to know how much he loves you. It's awesome!

That's God's grace for you his beloved one.

Now open your eyes…how are you feeling? (allow whatever answers are to be their answers – no right or wrong answers)

Say something like this:
I deeply appreciate your trusting us with your feelings. And I know sometimes it's really hard to understand and accept God's love, God's grace for ourselves. So I want to remind you, before we end today that you get God's grace and love always no matter what.

What I'm going to do is take this Sharpie and put a heart on your hand. And then I'm going to remind you who you are and how you are loved by God. As I end for each person – we are all going to say together NO MATTER WHAT! And we're going to say it loud for every single person!

WHAT TO DO:
Have everyone stand up (you've been sitting too long!) – have everyone gather in closely so they can see you drawing the heart on the person's hand. After you draw the heart – hold your camper's hands and look them in the eye while you say:

This is grace: You are a beloved one who is loved by God more than you can imagine and that loves never ends…(everyone) NO MATTER WHAT!

Take time to do this for each camper. Then have someone do it for you – you can let them read the words out of your book – or have the words written on a piece of paper you can hand to them.

Closing Prayer. After everyone has their heart and has heard the proclamation – pray the group out of Bible study.

E. <u>ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS</u>

- Activity is always a good thing if things aren't going well. Especially with younger campers. Play one of the games again. Or pick your Bible study up and move it to another place. Or do Bible study and purposefully move to a couple different places during the time together.
  - While you're walking – have everyone answer questions like:
    - Tell us the name of any pets you've had
    - What's your favorite thing about school? Least favorite?
    - How do you feel about camp so far? What makes you say what you say?
    - What's your favorite thing to do during school breaks?
    - What's your favorite meal?
  - Especially since this is the first day, you could play Two Truths and a Lie – each person tells the group three things about themselves that are not obvious (like toothbrush color, favorite vacation, something they've done that is cool, number of siblings, etc). Two of the things they tell should be truths and one should be a lie. The group then tries to guess which of the three things is the lie. Go around the whole group this way, until everyone, including you have told 2 truths and a

lie about yourselves and the group has to guess which are which. If it's going too long – or you don't have enough time to do everyone – say we're going to do 3 people now and tomorrow during Bible study we'll do three more and we'll keep going each day until everyone has had a chance.

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Desert Oasis - God's grace is an oasis in a dry a world

All Camp could be a scavenger hunt that is around finding water (water bottles, cups of water, stream water,

drinking water, etc)

- Scripture you could use for worship:

Psalm 107:35 He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.

Isaiah 35:5-7 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Isaiah 55:1 – All who are thirsty, come to the water!

- Songs: All Who Are Thirsty,

Time Travelers - God's grace is timeless

All Camp could be a 'race' to see which group could go to each station and complete the tasks. Each station would be set up as a different time era and the task has to do with that era: caveman, (be a dinosaur) wild west ('shootout' – (throw stones at pop cans to knock over) Renaissance (paint like DaVinci), Roaring 20's (dance the cha-cha), etc.

- Worship: different elements could be done in different time eras – Gregorian chant style, contemporary, traditional

G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

* Songs from the camp song sheet

Wounded Soldier	Dance With Me
Jesus, Lover of My Soul	Grace Like Rain
Reckless Love	Stand in Your Love

* Other new songs (list titles and source)

True in the Light – Rend Collective
https://music.apple.com/us/album/whosoever/1634675104

Child of Love – We The Kingdom
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QFibRYApr8&ab_channel=WeTheKingdom

* Additional scriptures

John 1:17

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Romans 3:20-24
For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight.

* Any supporting stories (list source)

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

- This biggest part of this study which younger campers might need help with is the language in the texts. It's not written in easy to understand language – so be prepared to help explain what is actually being said.

- Spend more time on the activities and less time in the texts!

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

- For high schoolers, start with the Would you Rather and take them deeper pretty quick. They will go there and it will help solidify the group even faster.
-When you get to the drawing of hearts – let the campers draw and speak to each other. Print the words out on a piece of paper so they can read them as they look at the next camper.
-If they need help or want to go deeper with the Jesus story – take them to the Philippians text. Have them read the text and figure out what Jesus did from that text. Have them make a list.
    -Ask them about the end of the Philippians text – the praise section. Could they say those words and believe them?
    -Try reading the Philippians text together – as if you were "in church" speaking it all together. Try saying parts in differing voices – soft, louder, shouting, etc. If someone is brave and creative let them sing it!

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: Ephesians 2:4-10

Reflection: Today we start the week of looking at what grace really is – and what it isn't. Grace really isn't what we say before meals (those are prayers), grace isn't anything we earn, work for, can be good enough to deserve. Grace is God's unconditional love given to us no matter what – and that love is embodied in Jesus – his life on earth, his death and his resurrection. Because of God's grace, then we get to be God's Beloved Ones. Today we will start this week off with this good news – God's grace means God loves you no matter what!

Activity: Today take time to gather as a family – over a meal or treat and take time to talk about what you love about each other. Each person gets the chance to say something about every other person. "Rules" are it has to be things we love – sincerely. Not joke time. Be sure you as parents take the time to specifically name to each of your children the things you love

about them individually. Then take a moment to reflect together on – how much greater is God's love for us. Take time to make sure your family understands God loves us no matter what.

Prayer: God of Grace – thank you for the grace you so freely give to us and the love you unconditionally give. Thank you for Jesus, the embodiment of that love here on earth and our example of how far love will go to make sure we know we are your Beloved Ones. Help us live into this truth – we are loved by you no matter what! In your name and power, Jesus, we pray, AMEN.

K. SUMMER STAFF SECTION

- Where have you seen, felt, experienced God grace and unconditional love for you already as this week begins?
- Do you feel like a Beloved One this week? What makes you say what you do?
- Where are you struggling with God's grace for you this week?
- Take time today – time to sit and look at the people around you – imagine God's grace for each of them.
- Then remind yourself of God's grace for you.
  Breathe in the grace of God for you today – if you want to listen to a song that helps you do that, listen. If taking time to pay attention to the beauty around you helps you today, pay attention. Do what you need to do today, to allow the truth of God's grace for you, seep into your soul.