

Natalie Ford  
June 6, 2010

***Why Grace?***  
***Galatians 1:11-24***

Author, pastor, and onetime atheist ***Lee Strobel*** says in one sermon:

How can I tell you the difference God has made in my life? My daughter Allison was 5 years old when I became a follower of Jesus, and all she had known in those five years was a dad who was profane and angry. I remember I came home one night and kicked a hole in the living room wall just out of anger with life. I am ashamed to think of the times Allison hid in her room to get away from me.

Five months after I gave my life to Jesus Christ, that little girl went to my wife and said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy." At age 5! What was she saying? She'd never studied the [Bible]. All she knew was her dad used to be this way: hard to live with. But more and more her dad is becoming this way. And if that is what God does to people, then sign her up. At age 5 she gave her life to Jesus. God changed my family. my world. my eternity.

*Lee Strobel, author and one of the pastors at Saddleback Church, in his sermon, "The Case for Christ"*

The ***apostle Paul*** whose letter we are reading today had what we know as the Damascus Road experience.

He was a highly educated, devout Jew who was persecuting Christians, when on the road to Damascus God blinded him with a vision of Jesus. It was after this experience that he became a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God completely changed his life—he went from ***persecutor*** of Christians to preacher of the gospel.

Most of us cannot claim such a dramatic ***conversion story***.

For some our faith journey has been happening over decades, maybe you grew up in the church all your life.

But all of us have a '***testimony***' of what God has done in your life.

If I asked you to really think about it, there is a time when you remember that you ***got it***—or maybe you are just now getting it—

that Jesus died for you, to forgive you, to give you new life,  
to make you a new creation—  
and you are part of a ***new body***, a body of Christ, now and forever.

If you think about it, when did you know that  
You are God's child, and you have a special place in not only God's heart,  
but in the body of Christ, the church, with a special part to play?

When did you get ***that***?  
***Have*** you got that?

Paul's message to us today is a good reminder of our ***own testimonies***.  
The language can be a barrier.  
It's strident, and strange—from a different time and culture,  
But the basic message is there—a message of grace for people like us,  
who need to hear the message of grace.

For them, they were as I mentioned last week,  
***Divided*** between those who thought that strict Judaism was a necessary  
component of Christianity  
and those who believed that faith in Christ was enough.  
Not much grace for one another.

And for those of us who need a little brush up on faith 101 ***terminology***—  
***Grace is unmerited favor***, that love and acceptance you cannot earn and you  
don't deserve, but God just showers us with it anyway!

Paul says some very ***important*** things about grace in this little passage.  
In verse 15 he says, *But when God, who had set me apart before I was born  
and called me through his grace.....*

Notice who's ***in charge*** with grace?  
Not us.  
***God*** is the one who acts first.  
God ***chooses*** us—not the other way around.  
God brings grace—we don't find it for ourselves.

These are super ***important distinctions*** to make,  
in fact this is something that makes my faith special at least.  
God chooses us first, the Bible says before the ***foundation*** of the world!

This is the reason we *baptize babies*, did you know that?  
Because God chooses us first—before we are even born,  
we are loved and blessed by God!

Paul reminds us that he was *chosen by God* before he was even born,  
Chosen by God's grace.

Sometimes we *turn this around*, thinking and saying  
that we have found God.

I found faith. I found grace.

But the famous old hymn has it right on.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound....*

*I once was lost, but now **am found**....*

We are *found by God*, God is the one doing the looking for us,  
from long before we show up on the scene.

*Grace finds us*. Now, that's some great news of the gospel.

But we're not just found.

God finds us, chooses us, and *transforms* us.

Whatever state we manage to get ourselves into, God can transform us and  
get us out of it.

Paul was a *persecutor* of Christians.

Lee Strobel had some serious anger issues.

We all have *our problems*, our addictions, our hidden hang-ups.

And it's that gift of grace---grace that transforms us.

*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.*

It's grace that *opens our eyes* to what we're doing, or not doing,

It's grace that brings us home,

it's grace that gives us a second chance, and a brand new life.

And it's all for *something greater* than ourselves.

In his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren's first words are

***"It's not about you."***

Being saved by grace is not just about us.

That's a very *individualistic*, American perspective.  
To think that salvation is just about me and my life,  
and my future.....is not biblical at all.

Grace is about *us*.  
We are saved by grace so we can do  
what we've been chosen and found and called to do.

In verse 16 Paul continues, *But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.*

God had a *reason* for giving grace to Paul.  
Paul was called to be a preacher, especially to the Gentiles.

What have *YOU* been called to do?  
We've been called and chosen for many *roles* in life.....  
Mom? Daughter? Father? Son?

We've been found and saved by grace for many *purposes*....  
Teacher? Businessman? Retiree? An Elder or Deacon? A VBS volunteer?  
A tutor or a liturgist?

Remember *Mr. Rogers*?

This famous television personality and Presbyterian minister once expressed some regret that he was most famous for saying "You are special", because, he said that's only *half the story*.

We are special for a *purpose* in this world.

*(Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 3, pg 112)*

*Ephesians 2:8-10 puts it this way: . 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 to be our way of life.*

It's not all about us.

We are saved by grace *for a reason!*

We have been found, chosen, called for *purposes* beyond ourselves....

*To share God's grace in word and deed,*

*especially to the last, the least, and the lost!*

*(Rev. Heidi Husted Armstrong, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 3, pg 112)*

Let's think about it this way:

We need to **Embrace** the grace....and **Care** enough to share

**Embrace** God's grace,  
And **care** enough to **share** it

Our **testimony** is what God's grace has done for us,  
How God has changed our lives, and transformed us into new creations,  
In fact it's God's grace that continues to help us each and every day,

But that's only **half the story**---  
We have to care enough to share that grace.  
There's a **reason** we've been transformed by grace—  
It's so we can spread the joy, and extend God's love,

It's so we can follow the **call** God has upon each of our lives---  
Our different roles, our different talents and abilities,  
Our special parts to play in the body of Christ!

First, we **embrace** God's grace....we were lost and now are found.  
Do you know that grace in your life?  
Have you embraced it in your heart?

Then we **care** enough to share it.....with a world in need of good news.  
We don't keep it to ourselves, it's not for me alone.  
It's for all of us, we're in this together.

May we all receive and embrace God's grace,  
And do more than care enough to share it....Amen.