

**cover to
cover**
Bible Study

7 Sessions for Homegroup
and Personal Use

***The
Prodigal Son***

Amazing grace

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CWR

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Introduction

We often sing the hymn 'Amazing grace', and most of us have an idea that it has something to do with God's love for us.

The story of John Newton, the writer of that popular hymn, is a remarkable illustration of what God's grace can do in a person's life. He moved from being a slave trader to one of the key opponents to the slave trade. His story shows that when God's grace touches one life, it can have a wonderful effect on the lives of many others.

Grace is a far more rich and complex gift than most of us recognise. And our Christian lives would be all the richer and more meaningful if we could really grasp something of its profundity.

Each of these seven studies explores a different aspect of grace, and even when we've covered these seven ... there will still be more to comprehend! Such is the 'amazing' quality of God's grace.

Scholars warn against pushing the message of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son 'too far'. A parable is a story which allows listeners to 'draw their own conclusions', and that is how Jesus intended it to be used. In making seven studies out of this one story I may have allegorised it more than I should and applied the 'father figure' to our understanding of God too frequently. Where possible, however, I have attempted to encourage the group members to 'draw their own conclusions' about each part of the story and tried to keep in tune with its parabolic nature.

Scholars tell us that this is a story about a man who lost two sons, one to a life of reckless living and the other to a life of religious pride. Above all it is a hard-hitting

challenge to the religious Jews to discover the meaning God's grace.

In the first study, 'The Hard Goodbye', we'll begin to understand how God's gift of 'free will' is a mark of His great love for us.

In the second study, 'In the Pigsty', we discover that – even in the filth and stench of our sinfulness and rebellion – we can still smell the fragrance of a love which reaches out to us right where we are. Grace reaching out to us, even when we live as though God doesn't care!

In the third study, 'The Long Road Home', we discover how grace is active in calling us to repentance and in enabling us to take the first step towards 'saying sorry' and starting again.

In the fourth study, 'A Robe and a Ring', we discover that, even in the self-condemnation which the son feels, God's love reaches out to him, receives him and forgives him ... even when he can't forgive himself. This is the grace of the new beginning!

In the fifth study, 'Dead and Alive', we discover something of the beautiful relationship which the father wants to share with his son. The son is not welcomed back as a 'hired hand', but as a member of the family who shares a new and even richer relationship with his father. This is indeed abundant grace!

In the sixth study, 'Party Time', we learn how we should celebrate grace, and how Christians need to enter into the joy of the woman who found the coin, the shepherd who found his sheep and the father who found his son. We

need to learn how to 'party' when grace is around!

In the final study, 'Sour Grapes', we are alerted to ways in which we can live without an appreciation of grace in our lives. We learn from the older son that, in judging others, we can lose the favour of God. If we are too religious or proud ... we can miss the very core of what the Christian message is all about!

The success of this series of studies depends on the willingness of the members of the group to share deeply with each other. There are lots of opportunities for people to wrestle with big questions and to apply this teaching to their lives.

My hope is that these studies will be far more than a biblical exploration of grace! My hope is that we may all live in a fuller awareness of the 'amazing grace of Jesus' day by day.

WEEK 1

The Hard Goodbye

Opening Icebreaker

Describe some of the happy and sad 'goodbyes' that you have known in your life. Is the way that we say 'goodbye' important?

Get Involved ...

Imagine the prodigal son at a bar with one of his mates. He's saying goodbye to him, and telling him what it was like for him to say goodbye to his dad!

Bible Reading

The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11–20





Dig Deeper

1. Why do you think that the son wanted the money so soon?
2. Why was the father so willing to give him his inheritance early?
3. What do you think the son would have done if the father had refused?
4. How do you think that the son felt as he took the money?
5. How do you think that the father felt as he handed over the money?
6. What did the son's departure do to the father and how do you think it affected their relationship?
7. What would you have said to the son as he prepared to leave?
8. What would you have said to the father after the door banged shut?
9. What do you think that the father wished most for his son?
10. What do you think the son wished for his own life?



Insight Readings

Our three insight readings all explore the stories of people who set out on a journey away from God ... a similar journey to the prodigal son's.

In small groups read one of the passages, and try to 'get into' the thinking of the main characters.

Adam and Eve: Genesis 3:1-13

Why do you think that Adam and Eve chose to 'eat of the tree' rather than to obey God's will?

The rich young ruler: Matthew 19:16-22

Why did the rich young ruler choose to walk away rather

The Hard Goodbye

than 'give away all his money to the poor'?

Judas Iscariot: Matthew 26:20-25

Why did Judas choose to betray Jesus rather than to stand with him?

Insight Comment



We often read in the Bible of situations in which God's people go their own way, and of stories in which He even allows them to run headlong into a life of rebellion and self-destruction.

In the Garden of Eden, God could have ring-fenced the Tree of Life with a 100-foot-high electric wire, but instead He simply asked Adam and Eve not to eat of its fruit. He gave them free will – the right to choose, to rebel and to go their own selfish way. It's little wonder, then, that when God walked in the garden they felt so ashamed, and wanted to hide!

This kind of generous offer to choose, with no strings attached, is the hallmark of genuine love. It is one of the ways by which we know just how much God loves us. He makes no attempt to control our will; He just sets us free to make our own choices and to make our own mistakes.

When Jesus met the rich young ruler and offered him salvation, the cost involved in saying 'yes' to Jesus was too great for him to accept. The call to follow Jesus involves selflessness and sacrifice. It was too great a price for him to pay. But Jesus did not run after him, try to make him change his mind or beg him to think again. He simply let him go! Jesus must have been heartbroken at the choice which the rich young ruler made ... but He didn't stop him.