



HG263: Amazing Grace (Verse 1)
Amazing Grace, How Sweet The Sound ...

Ephesians 1:3-14

Home Group Study Notes

10 September 2023 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

You're on a 12 hour flight. You get to choose the passenger next to you. Apart from loved ones or family, who would you choose?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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John Newton's Autobiographical Hymn of Transformation

Amazing Grace is probably the most widely known and sung Christian hymn. No doubt its appeal lies in its clarity and its appeal to Scripture. It communicates directly to the heart, and through it we can trace Newton's own journey from unbelief through mercy to redemption. It is a powerful hymn because it also tells our own story. We, too, have made our own journeys from unbelief through mercy to redemption. Or we need to...

A Wretch Like Me

Without conducting empirical research, I would surmise that a majority of people would be able to sing the first verse of Amazing Grace without the need for a hymn book. It has been performed enough on TV for it to be embedded in our memory. And we should be glad, for every time it is sung, the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. Indeed, we may say that the first two lines represent the distilled essence of the Gospel.

These lines elicit the questions: from whom does 'amazing grace' originate? Whom does this 'amazing grace' affect? What is the outcome for the wretch? The last two lines reveal the effect of God's amazing grace. From the catastrophe of being spiritually lost and blind, there is transformation. Once lost, now found! Once blind, now able to see!

But Now I See

On a voyage in 1748, Newton faced a violent storm off the coast of Ireland. In so much mortal danger, he cried out to God for mercy. The result was his journey to redemption. We know that others witnessed to him, and in his own reading of the Bible, he was grabbed by the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). The story of the prodigal is really about two lost sons. The younger and elder brother were lost because they were neither rooted in their father's love. Luke presents us with a clear pattern as we contrast the lost boys...

They were lost, and to be found, both needed to return. The younger son comes to his senses. But the elder son stays outside.

They were blind: both were dominated by misconceptions of their father. The younger declared, 'I am no longer worthy be called your son...' Whereas the elder said, 'All my life I've slaved for you...'

But to both comes the great revelation. Of the younger son the father said, 'My son was dead and is alive again!' Now, the younger son couldn't feast until he accepted his father's unfeeling love.

To the elder the father said, 'My son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.' But the elder son wouldn't feast because he refused his father's love.

Which Son Are We?

As we read stories like this, we may imagine which character we are. But it doesn't matter with which son we may identify; both are wretches and live entirely from their ego. The younger son decided to go his own way, while the elder remained, but did so in the self-inflicted delusion of self-righteousness. Both are indicative of today's world.

Now it is here that we need to engage with Ephesians 1.3-14. This is an extraordinary passage that may serve as a corrective to our misconceptions about God the Father. And some of the things we think God is like are really only projections of what we think about ourselves. For example, some may say, 'God must loathe me, for I loathe myself.'

Believing ourselves unworthy we feel that God must also believe we are unworthy. He could never be for me! Some may say, 'God must be pleased with me, for I am so good, unlike those wretches whose lives are clearly marked by sin.' Believing ourselves more worthy, we think God thinks and judges like us. But both attitudes are the projections of our illusions about God, and both blind us to the excessive and prodigious love of the Father.

So, here's a question: In Luke's parable, who is the prodigal? By prodigal I mean reckless, wasteful, extravagant, lavish. 'Prodigal' is not found in Luke's text; the younger son being prodigal is implied by the elder son. Who is the true 'prodigal' if not the father! And this extravagant and lavish love is spoken about by Paul in Ephesians 1.3-14, where God's love is intensely more, above and beyond anything we can imagine, and it is bestowed on us!

The key to our lostness and blindness is the truth found in verse 4: *'just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him.'* We are the objects of his plans, his purposes, his love. Let the power of these words overwhelm you: What are you? Chosen in Christ. When did this happen? Before the foundation of the world. To what end? To be holy and blameless before him—in his presence, face-to-face, in a breathtaking relationship of love. And then as we keep reading we are inundated with a catalogue of breathtaking blessing.

And before we can object, before we can say we're not good enough, the choice has already been made. God is for us! The Father knows our wretchedness. And knowing we are entirely lost and blind, he moved first. What prevents us from being free is our own doing. We pretend we've got it together. We pretend all is good. We pretend. And we also fear. We fear letting our guard down. We fear being found out. We fear acknowledging the truth about ourselves, of owning our own wretchedness...

This IS Amazing Grace!

If we walk with Jesus, the words of Ephesians 1.3-14 become an emphatic call to praise and worship in Spirit and truth. We bless God because we know that he has blessed us beyond all that we can imagine. And as we are in Christ, we may know what it is to be filled with the fullness of God. Our journey from unbelief through mercy to redemption continues in Christ.

If you don't know Jesus, Ephesians 1.3-14 is a 'map of redemption' that gives hope and promise. There is no need to cling to wretchedness. There is no need to be lost. Or blind. And in opening your heart to the love of the Father, as the younger son did with his father, you will be able sing with abandon,

*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.*

Emmanuel Church Text 2023



*The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you: the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: What do you think is the appeal of Amazing Grace?

2: Read Ephesians 1.3-14 and identify as many blessings given to us in Christ as you are able. Are there any that are especially precious to you as you journey in Christ?

3: God lavishes us with the riches of his grace (vv7-8). What are reasons we may find it hard to accept the lavish blessings of God?

4: The Father knows our wretchedness. How does this enable us to be free and to live without fear?

5: Share other Scriptures that remind you of the blessings that are yours in Christ.

6: During the next week or so, meditate on Ephesians 1.4 and let the power of these words overwhelm you.

What are you? Chosen in Christ.

When did this happen? Before the foundation of the world.

To what end? To be holy and blameless before him.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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