

Exercises in Seeing Grace

In this morning's lesson, I wanted to show you just how prevalent and powerful God's grace is in the story of scripture. I hope that helps us appreciate our total dependence on his kindness. I want you to see just how solid of a foundation this idea has in scripture. I could print a list for you, but you'll "get it" better if you do some digging to find the answers, so I've prepared two exercises for you.

Exercise I: What Grace Does

I've listed most of the passages in the New Testament where grace acts. In these passages, God's kindness does something. Look at each passage and make note of what grace can do. When you are finished, read over your list and see just how active of a force God's grace is in our lives.

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Grace's action</u>
Romans 3:24	Grace justifies us
Romans 4:16	
Romans 5:2	
Romans 5:20	
Romans 5:21	
Romans 16:20	
1 Corinthians 15:10	
2 Corinthians 4:15	
2 Corinthians 12:9	
Ephesians 1:7	
Ephesians 2:5	
Ephesians 2:8	
Titus 2:11	
Titus 3:7	
Hebrews 2:9	
Hebrews 4:16	
Hebrews 13:9	
Acts 11:23	
Acts 15:11	

Exercise #2: Seeing Grace in the Old Testament

Most people are not well-trained to see God's grace in the Old Testament. They think of the stories of God's wrath and judgment—which are certainly there—and miss the acts of his kindness. It is true that the Old Testament doesn't use the word "grace" as often as the New Testament. The New Testament even says in John 1:17 "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

It would be a mistake, though, to believe that grace and truth are missing from the Old Testament. After all, wasn't Jesus who embodies grace also the pre-existent one who was God and who was with God? (see just a few verses earlier in John 1:1-3).

Beyond that, you can read of "God, who saved us, and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus *before the ages began...*" (2 Timothy 1:9) God's gracious character exists before he created the world in Genesis 1.

So here's your exercise: find 3 examples of God's grace in the Old Testament.

I'll give you a few hints: the Hebrew word *hen* (חַן) is usually translated as "favor." It is the nearest equivalent to the New Testament's *charis* (χάρις) "grace." Don't just look for the word, look for the idea! Look for stories where God shows kindness for no other reason than that God is kind. Look for his unmerited favor, his unnecessary mercy, his generosity. Look for evidence that God's relationship with mankind isn't transactional or *quid pro quo*, it is an outpouring of generosity before, during, and after any human response. Locate five stories where God is truly gracious.

Here are three to get you warmed up:

1. God's promise to Abram. In Genesis 12 God blesses Abram and makes him an incredible promise. He promises to make a great nation of the barren old couple. He promises to bless those who bless him. He promises an unimaginable legacy. Nothing Abram did merited this. In fact, Abram goes on to act inconsistently with this promise on more than one occasion (lying about his wife, sleeping with her servant, etc.), but nothing derails God from keeping his promise. God is kind to Abraham because of who God is.
2. The book of Deuteronomy. Yes, the bulk of the book is filled with law, but the law is given in the context of God's grace. Deuteronomy 1-4 are an account of how God has graciously blessed Israel. The laws are designed to reflect that blessing. Even in the section where Moses outlines the consequences of breaking the law (chapters 27-30), you see promises of restoration after repentance and hope after failure. (Check out Deuteronomy 7:7 and 9:5 as reminders of *why* God did what he did.)
3. Ezekiel and Israel. Ezekiel 16 uses a parable to demonstrate Israel's depravity, but while talking about how bad Israel has gotten, Ezekiel actually highlights how merciful God has been. God poured his love out on Israel when she had nothing to offer. He made her into something beautiful. She rejected him and caused great suffering, but God didn't give up. He brings her back.

What three examples of God's grace can you find?