# *The Riches of God's Grace*

***Scripture*****:** *Ephesians 1:3-8 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious* ***grace*** *He has poured out on us who belong to His dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and* ***grace*** *that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.*

As believers, we are rich in Christ Jesus. We have the message the world needs to hear: Salvation is not by works, not based on what we deserve, but by grace lavished upon us in Jesus' name. God's grace is a gift offered to all humanity. However, each person must be willing to receive the gift before he or she can enjoy its benefits.

***Characteristics of God's riches in grace***

***1-Given by the heavenly Father*** *(James 1:17) Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.*

***2-Given freely*** *(Eph. 1:6) So we praise God for the glorious* ***grace*** *He has poured out on us who belong to His dear Son.*

***3-Given abundantly*** *(Eph. 1:7-8) He is so rich in kindness and* ***grace*** *that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.* Given instantaneously, the moment we are saved.

***4-Given on the basis of Christ's merit, not our own.***

***5-Given eternally—nothing can take them away***

***What are the riches of grace? Because of grace, we are…***

***1-Part of God's eternal plan*** *(Eph. 1:3-4)* ***and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world*** *(Eph. 1:4-5). All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure.*

***2-Redeemed (literally, "bought back")*** Christ's death paid our sin-debt and satisfied God's holy requirement *(Gal. 3:13). But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When He was hung on the cross, He took upon Himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).*

***3-Justified*** *(Rom. 5:1). Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.* We are guilty because of sin, but the Lord pardons us. Justified means "no longer guilty" in God's eyes.

***4-Reconciled*** *(Rom. 5:10). We were enemies of God, but He restored relationship with us. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son.*

***5-Forgiven*** *(Col. 2:13) You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet removed. Then God made you alive with Christ, for He forgave all our sins. He no longer holds our sins against us but will discipline us if necessary (Heb. 12:6). For the LORD disciplines those He loves, and He punishes each one He accepts as His child.*

***6-Unified with Him.*** He abides in us and we in Him *(John 15:5). "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing."* We have the privilege of an intimate relationship with God.

***7-Joint heirs with Christ*** *(Rom. 8:14-17). For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call Him, "Abba, Father. For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are His children, we are His heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share His glory, we must also share His suffering.*

***8-Dual citizens—believers are citizens of both their earthly country and the heavenly kingdom****. (1 Peter 1:3-4). All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by His great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.*

***9-In God's care*** *(1 Peter 5:6-7). He's working all things together for our good. So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.*

***10-Sanctified*** *(1 Cor. 6:9-11). At salvation, we are instantly "set apart" for God's service. We are also progressively sanctified over time through a process of cleansing and refining. Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

***11-Indwelled by the Holy Spirit***, who seals us as children of God, guides and teaches us, equips us to do God's will, and enables us to approach the throne of grace with confidence. *Rom. 5:5; And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. Eph. 4:30; And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. (Heb. 4:15-16); This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same testings*

*we do, yet He did not sin. So let us come boldly to the **throne of grace** of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find **grace** to help us when we need it most.*

***12-Promised a physical resurrection** (1 Cor. 15:50-52) What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever. But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.*

***13-Glorified** (Rom. 8:30) And having chosen them, He called them to come to Him. And having called them, He gave them right standing with Himself. And having given them right standing, He gave them His glory.*

***14-Trophies of His grace*** (*Eph. 2:4-7) But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's **grace** that you have been saved!) For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of His **grace** and kindness toward us, as shown in all He has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.*

***Our God of Grace*** - Many believers don't have an accurate perception of the Lord. He's not a distant, unloving judge, but a God of grace. ***All About Grace:***

***1-Grace can be defined as God's undeserved, unearned favor, goodness, kindness, and love toward us.***

***2-Grace is a free gift that cannot be earned** (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6). God saved you by His **grace** when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. And since it is through God's kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God's **grace** would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.*

***3-God's grace is mentioned 150 times in the New Testament.*** This means the Lord's unearned favor is at the heart of Christianity. Paul opened and closed his letters by mentioning it.

***4-G-R-A-C-E is "God's Riches At Christ's Expense."*** Our sin-debt was paid in full through Jesus' death on the cross. We have the privilege of coming to His throne with all our requests.

***5-Mercy is "not getting what we deserve"***—namely, punishment for our sins. ***Grace is "getting what we don't deserve"***—that is, favor from God.

***Because of God's grace . . .***

***1-He has chosen and predestined us** (Eph. 1:3-6). All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious **grace** He has poured out on us who belong to His dear Son.*

***2-He has justified us*** *(Rom. 3:23-26) …for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His* ***grace*** *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Apart from* ***grace****, we would experience eternal death (Ezek. 18: 4, 20) For all people are Mine to judge—both parents and children alike. And this is My rule: The person who sins is the one who will die…The person who sins is the one who will die. The child will not be punished for the parent's sins, and the parent will not be punished for the child's sins. Righteous people will be rewarded for their own righteous behavior, and wicked people will be punished for their own wickedness.*

***3-He has given us an eternal position in heaven*** *(Eph. 2:1-8). We are living examples of God's* ***grace****. Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's* ***grace*** *that you have been saved!) For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of His* ***grace*** *and kindness toward us, as shown in all He has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by His* ***grace*** *when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.*

***4-We can not only endure suffering but also profit from it*** *(2 Cor. 12:8-9). His grace makes us able to face trials. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He said, "My* ***grace*** *is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.*

***5-We are called to serve Him and there is only one Good News.*** *(Gal. 1:1-6, 15-16) This letter is from Paul, an apostle. I was not appointed by any group of people or any human authority, but by Jesus Christ Himself and by God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead. All the brothers and sisters here join me in sending this letter to the churches of Galatia. May God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ give you* ***grace*** *and peace. Jesus gave His life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen****.*** *I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to Himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News.*

***6-We have been given spiritual gifts*** (*Rom. 12:6-8); In His* ***grace,*** *God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. (2 Cor. 9:6,7) Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."*

***7-He provides for all our needs*** *(2 Cor. 9:8). And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.*

***The Power of Grace Extended – (****Colossians 1:3-6) - We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the* ***grace*** *of God in truth;*

Grace is God's goodness and kindness freely extended to the utterly undeserving—you and me. Because of His grace, He offers salvation through Jesus Christ so that anyone who trusts Him as Savior might have a new relationship with the Father. ***As a result, God . . .***

***1-Declares we are righteous.*** The Father sees Christ's righteousness as our own *(2 Cor. 5:21). For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.* The guilt and shame of sin have been removed and we can live boldly for Jesus, no matter who we were before. *(Rom. 8:1) So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.*

***2-Claims us as family.*** A spiritual adoption has taken place so that we could become children of God and call Him "Father." The world would have us believe the lie that we are insignificant, but God's view is the truth: As believers, we are children of the eternal King and have great worth.

***3-Provides an inheritance for us, as co-heirs with Christ.*** Our inheritance is guaranteed and kept for us in heaven. We are set free from the trap of possessions because we're rich in the only way that matters *(2 Cor. 8:9). For you know the* ***grace*** *of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

***4-Gives us, who were spiritually dead, a new heart and a new spirit.*** We are born again. God has given us a fresh start in Christ *(2 Cor. 5:17). This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

***5-Raises us out of the life we once lived and into a new life with Him.*** Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is love, joy, and peace.

***6-Sets us free from the power of sin, Satan, and self****.* Obedience and victory become a reality in our life as our faith in Jesus Christ grows. We praise God for His unending grace.

***Sustaining Grace*** *– (2 Corinthians 12:6-10) - If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He said, "My* ***grace*** *is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to*

*boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior doesn't guarantee we will never again suffer in this life. The world is a fallen place, and Christians are not exempt from adversity and hard times. The good news is, grace enables us to face life challenges with confidence and assurance. More than simply providing forgiveness, it sustains us through trials.

***Sustaining grace is God's answer to the painful circumstances of life.***

***1-He won't always change your circumstances.*** For example, the apostle Paul was persecuted. *(2 Cor. 11:23-28) Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served Him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.*

***2-God allows us to suffer when it fulfills His purpose for our lives.*** Paul prayed fervently for relief from his "thorn." God didn't remove it because it served a purpose–to keep him from becoming proud *(2 Cor. 12:7). ...even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.*

***3-God's power is most evident in our weakness.*** Paul wrote that he could face anything and be content. He knew God's grace was sufficient to carry him through difficult times. *(Phil. 4:11; 2 Cor. 12:9-10) Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. Each time He said, "My* ***grace*** *is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

***B. Sustaining grace enables us to continue when circumstances don't change.***

***1-When God doesn't answer our prayers, it's natural to wonder if He cares about our troubles.*** Satan wants us to distrust God, handle life on our own, and focus more on our loss than on the Lord.

***2-Grace enables us to come to God when we feel confused.*** He isn't angered by our questions or difficulty in trusting Him.

***C. We know these truths about sustaining grace:***

***1-Giving up is unjustifiable and inexcusable.*** God is on your side.

***2-The Father always has valuable lessons for us in adversity.*** Let previous hardships in your life (that you have come through and learned from) teach you how to respond in difficult times.

***3-God doesn't promise (or owe you) an explanation.*** He wants you to trust Him.

***4-God has a purpose for every crisis and will use it for good*** *(Rom. 8:28). And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

***D. How does grace work?***

***1-Grace releases supernatural strength to keep going in the midst of pain, suffering, and loss.***
The Holy Spirit helps us face adversity. He is our Comforter, our Guide, and our peace.

***2-Grace ignites determination to keep going***.

***3-Grace reminds us that God is always with us.***

***4-Grace points us toward the Father's goal in allowing trials.*** We can be content knowing we are in the center of His will. He always has our best interests at heart.

***5-Grace reminds us that God uses trials to strengthen our faith and deepen intimacy with Him.***

***6-Grace assures us that the Lord sets limitations on what can happen to His children.***

***7-Grace gives us faith to believe God will transform tough times into something good.***

When you feel discouraged and weary, take heart. Your heavenly Father still cares about you. As you remain in close fellowship with Him, God will give you the ability to tackle life's challenges with divine peace and joy. That's the power of sustaining grace.

*(Hebrews 4:16) - Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

When we think of a throne, we think of a king and his kingdom and the people who belong to the kingdom. One always needed to ask permission to approach a king. We receive grace but it flows from the throne where Christ is seated at the right and of the Father. In God's kingdom, Christ is our High Priest, the first-goer, the forerunner, the source and pioneer of our faith. We are told to come boldly to the Throne of Grace. Through prayer, Christ opened up a way where we no longer need to ask or be asked for access. The Throne of Grace is Grace (Jesus) enthroned. On the Throne of Grace is grace personified (embodied, represented ). Until Christ walked the earth, died, and resurrected, we have not seen God's

grace displayed or revealed in its fullness to mankind. *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."(John 1:17).* God's grace to mankind was Christ nailed to the cross.

*Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself had suffered being tempted, He is able to assist them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:17,18).* It behooved Him or He was obliged to, it was imperative to become like His brethren, to take on flesh. To be our kinsman redeemer, taking on our likeness, living and dying in our likeness, Grace personified.

As believers, we are rich in Christ Jesus. We have the message the world needs to hear: Salvation is not by works, not based on what we deserve, but by grace lavished upon us in Jesus' name.

***Living in Grace***

*(2 Corinthians 5:17) - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

God's grace can impact anyone; no sin is beyond the reach of His forgiveness. This amazing gift of redemption changes lives. Contrary to what many think, being a Christian does not mean adding good deeds to one's life. Instead, believers receive forgiveness by God's grace, and a completely new nature. Our inward transformation results in obvious outward changes.

A beautiful illustration of this is the butterfly's metamorphosis. Once it's in a chrysalis, a caterpillar doesn't merely act or appear different from the outside; it truly has changed inwardly as well. Transformation for believers occurs in many areas. For example, our attitudes change - salvation by God's grace results in humility and gratitude. Out of thankfulness for this undeserved free gift flows compassion for the lost and a desire to share the gospel with them. Experiencing Christ's forgiveness also results in a longing to serve Him. This does not need to be in a formal church setting; we serve Him by loving others, helping those in need, and telling them about salvation.

While there are still natural consequences for our sin, God offers us forgiveness and redemption through Jesus. He made a way to restore our broken relationship with Him. What's more, our Father transforms our lives so we will become more like His Son and reflect His heart to others.

***Grace on Display***

Before the apostle Paul's conversion, if someone had suggested that he would impact the world for Jesus, he'd probably have laughed. In fact, his original goal was to rid the world of Christians.

***Scripture:*** *(1Timothy 1:12-17) I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him, even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of His great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they,*

*too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life. All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; He alone is God. Amen.*

What are the limits of God's grace? Are some people so deeply entrenched in wickedness they can't turn to the Lord? Amazingly, the answer is no. God can transform lives and circumstances no matter what kind of sins someone has committed.

***Life Before Grace***

***1-Before we trusted Jesus as our personal Savior, we were sinful*** *(Eph. 2:1-3). Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.*

**2-*Saul of Tarsus, better known as the apostle Paul, called himself the chief of sinners*** *(1 Tim. 1:15). This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all.*

**3-*He was highly educated, well trained in his career, and zealous about Judaism. But he violently persecuted the church and blasphemed the name of Jesus*** *(Acts 7:58-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 22:3-4; 26:9-11). …They rushed at him (Steven) and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died. Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. "I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the very name of Jesus the Nazarene. Indeed, I did just that in Jerusalem. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers there to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. Many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus. I was so violently opposed to them that I even chased them.*

Persecution Scatters the Believers - A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. Paul is the perfect example of God's grace. No sin is too great for the Father to forgive *(1 Tim. 1:13-14, 16) …even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. But God had mercy*

*on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of His great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life.*

***Life by Grace***

***1-Grace is possible only because of Christ's death on the cross.*** It's impossible to do enough good deeds to earn salvation.

***2-God instantly made Saul into a new creation on the road to Damascus*** *(Acts 9:1-6). Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?" "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

***3-Salvation happens at God's initiative, not ours.*** No one can take credit for getting saved. *(Eph. 2:8-9). God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*

***4-Jesus' death covered the sins of the entire world—no one is an exception.*** If you trust Christ as Savior, you cannot have sinned so badly that God won't save you.

***Life in Grace***

***1-After his salvation, Paul's actions changed*** *(1 Tim. 1:8-13). We know that the law is good when used correctly. For the law was not intended for people who do what is right. It is for people who are lawless and rebellious, who are ungodly and sinful, who consider nothing sacred and defile what is holy, who kill their father or mother or commit other murders. The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching that comes from the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him, even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.* Grace isn't about adding good deeds to your life; it's about inner transformation (e.g. caterpillar to a butterfly). God makes us new people and transforms our thoughts, actions, and desires.

***2-After his salvation, Paul's attitude changed.*** He had humility because of his past, gratitude for God's grace to him as a sinner, and compassion for those who didn't yet know the Lord *(1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 9:1-4). This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"— and I am the worst of them all. ...With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!— if that would save them. They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children. God revealed His glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them His law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping Him and receiving His wonderful promises.*

***3-When we experience God's grace, we want to serve Him on a daily basis***. This doesn't have to be in an official church setting or role. Instead, it can happen as we simply reach out to others throughout the day. (*1 Tim. 1:12*) Paul states *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him.*

***4-We must be willing to suffer persecution in our service to the Lord.***

***5-Although we are forgiven in God's eyes, we still face the natural consequences of our sin.***

Before his conversion, Paul would never have imagined that one day his teaching would impact the entire Christian church. No one is so evil that he or she cannot be transformed by the grace of God. His forgiveness is life-changing!

***Sustaining Grace***

***Scripture:*** *(2 Corinthians 12:6-10) - If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*