

LifeGroup Member

Preparing for Life Lesson 8:

The Defense of Grace

February 19, 2012



Key Verse(s): “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” Acts 11:17 NASB

One Church Connection: The church is called to acknowledge that God’s grace, His forgiveness, and His gift of eternal life are available to all who believe.

Focal Passage(s): Acts 11:1-26

Context: Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Caesarea at the home of Cornelius, word of this incredible moment in the life of the church spread quickly to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem. Rather than responding in joy, many church leaders of Jewish descent criticized Simon Peter for going into a Gentile home and questioned the legitimacy of a Gentile conversion. The strict legalism of Judaism seemed to have followed these believers to their newfound faith in Christ. They had yet to discover that such legalism would threaten the grace and freedom found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Today, there are many people who continue in this mindset, believing that salvation is earned based on family, works, or worldly success—anything but grace. While believing that their salvation is deserved, they have a difficult time accepting the salvation of others as a legitimate work of the Holy Spirit. When those of this mindset interact with new believers, the result can cause questions and confusion in the hearts of new believers, making their discipleship journey extremely difficult at best and all but impossible at worst.

Believers must stand ready to give a defense of grace, whether attacked by the religious community or by those with no real knowledge of God. In this passage, Simon Peter made a successful defense of grace before the church leaders in Jerusalem, setting the stage for the conversion of great numbers of Jews and Gentiles. The grace of God continued to spread even as far as Antioch, the city where disciples of the Lord Jesus were first called Christians.

Connecting to the Passage

Pass the Grace, Please!

John 1:17

Maybe it's because we live in the desert and our bodies crave salt to maintain a certain level of hydration or something, but lately we've become big fans of salt around here. Not a day goes by that our daughter, Elianna doesn't ask for "salt in my hand please," lol. "What in the world does salt have to do with grace and truth," you ask. Well, I'll tell you.

As you may remember from chemistry class, salt is a combination of sodium and chlorine. While sodium is a harmless active element, chlorine is a poisonous gas — it's actually what gives bleach that yucky smell. Interestingly, when the two elements are combined, they produce salt — a substance, which we all know, is used to preserve and bring out the flavor in food.

In the same way, if we present the truth of the Gospel without grace, it often produces a very offensive and sometimes poisonous effect on those with whom we share it. However, if we combine the two, we'll be able to preserve and bring out the delicious flavor of our faith!

Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, the scripture says. How much more should we approach the world around us with these two important components?

Have you been struggling to convey the Gospel in an effective way? Perhaps you need more grace... or maybe more truth? Let's give our efforts to the Lord and ask Him to help us spice it up the way He likes! There's so much work to be done!

by George Whitten, Editor of **Worthy Devotions**
<http://www.worthydevotions.com/christian-devotional/pass-the-grace-please>

Connecting with the Passage

1. Read Acts 11:1-26.
2. What are the key words that stand out to you in this passage?
3. What is the main idea of this passage? Is there more than one theme?
4. What does this passage reveal about who God is?
5. What does this passage reveal about what it means to be a disciple of Christ?
6. Is there a truth or a phrase from this passage that is particularly meaningful to you in your current life circumstances? How can this truth or phrase strengthen your walk with Christ?
7. Is there a word, phrase, or verse that you have questions about? If so, write down your questions. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to increase your understanding. Read the passage again.
8. Ask God to help you apply the truths of this passage today. If this time of study has brought to mind any prayer requests you can bring to God about your friends, family, church, nation, or world, talk with God about these prayer concerns.



Preparing for LifeGroup Discussions

1. Why did Peter feel comfortable about going with the men whom Cornelius sent (v.12)? Have you ever had a similar experience?
2. Why did Peter feel confirmed about what was taking place when the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles (vv.15-16)? Have you ever had a similar experience?
3. The Jewish believers first questioned Peter, but when they realized they were wrong and that Peter was indeed right in his witness to the Gentiles, what was their response (v.18)? What does their response teach us about a healthy manner of handling disagreements among believers?
4. Think about Barnabas' encouraging message to the believers in verse 23. How does encouragement bless those who are serving the Lord?