

THE GOD  
WHO SAVES

LEADER'S NOTES

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*The God Who Saves—Leader's Notes*  
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STUDY

1

# GOD THE SAVIOUR

The big idea of this first study is that God saves graciously—when people don't deserve it and without their help.

The word 'grace' is frequently misunderstood by religious people. Many understand grace to be something you get as a reward for being good—a reward for good works. However, in the Protestant church, God's grace is understood to be a free gift—unmerited favour. Because of this, people can use the same words and mean completely different things. For example, Christians understand the phrase, "We are saved by grace" to mean that everything to do with us being saved is God's work, whereas a religious person could understand it to mean that we are saved by God's generous response to our good works.

The aim of this first study is to show that God's grace in saving people is not a reward, but rather a free gift given to people when they don't deserve it, given without their help.

The word 'grace' is deliberately not used in the study, so as to avoid this confusion. Rather, the phrase, "God saves people when they don't deserve it, without their help" is repeated to emphasize the point. Don't be afraid to say this phrase a number of times, as this fact is the foundation for the rest of the studies and, indeed, the gospel.

## *1. What examples can you think of, from the Bible, where God saves people?*

There are many examples but, where possible, it's best for the individual or group to think of them for themselves. This study starts with the example of Israel's rescue from Egypt by God, and then moves to the New Testament to consider the cross of Christ.

If people get stuck when thinking of examples, consider:

- The story of Noah and the ark (Gen 6-9);
- God's rescue of Abraham's son Isaac (Gen 22);
- Joseph's rescue from prison when God gives him the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream (Gen 41);
- The repeated rescues of God's people by the judges of Israel (e.g. Judg 3:7-11);
- God's rescue of individuals such as Ruth and Naomi (the book of Ruth);
- God's rescue of Israel when facing Goliath and the Philistines (1 Sam 17);
- God's rescue of Judah from Assyria (2 Kgs 18-19);
- God's rescue of the Israelites from Babylon (Ezra/Nehemiah);
- God's rescue of people from sin through Jesus.

There's no need to spend a lot of time on this question. The aim is to remind people—or help them to recognize—that God is a God who is known for saving people. That he does so when they are not only helpless but actively disobedient heightens how gracious he is.

2. Choose **one** of these Bible passages about someone being saved, and note down how God did it:

This question reinforces the point of question 1 by looking at three incidents in detail. However, as the study is ultimately about the work of God in saving us through Jesus, it's not necessary to look at all three examples. Each example is a clear demonstration of God's grace. However, focusing on the first example may help you to avoid some tangents about why these people needed saving in the first place, or about whether God's justice is reasonable.

*Exodus 1:15-2:10*

- *How did God save Moses?*

He made sure that Moses wasn't killed at birth, and then ensured that Moses was found in the river by an Egyptian princess. The fact that Moses' mother was then employed to look after him adds to our enjoyment and appreciation of what God has done.

- *What did Moses do to deserve being saved?*

Absolutely nothing. He was saved as a newborn baby.

- *What contribution did Moses make to the salvation?*

None at all. Even his crying plays no part in his rescue; it is not even mentioned until he is found by Pharaoh's daughter.

*Genesis 22:9-14*

- *How did God save Isaac?*

By providing an alternative sacrifice for Abraham to offer.

- *What did Isaac do to deserve being saved?*

Nothing. He was not even aware that he needed saving!

- *What contribution did Isaac make to the salvation?*

None. The alternative sacrifice is provided by God.

*Exodus 12:21-30*

- *How did God save the firstborn children of the Israelites?*

He saved them by providing a means of protecting them through the sacrifice of a lamb.

- *What did they do to deserve being saved?*

Nothing. They just happened to be born into the right family.

- *What contribution did they make to the salvation?*

None at all.

**Read Romans 5:6-10.**

3. *What did the people Paul was writing this letter to do to deserve being saved?*

Nothing.

4. *What contribution did they make towards being saved?*

None. In fact, any contribution they made was negative: they were "powerless" and "ungodly" (v. 6), "sinners" (v. 8) and "enemies" (v. 10).

5. *Why did God save these people?*

It was because of his love for them (v. 8).

***Read Ephesians 2:1-10.***

*6. What did the Ephesians do in order to deserve being saved?*

Nothing.

*7. What contribution did they make towards being saved?*

None. As in questions 3-5, their contribution was, if anything, negative. They were “dead” (v. 1), following the world (v. 2), following “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Satan) (v. 2), “gratifying the cravings of [their] sinful nature” (v. 3), and so on.

*8. Why did God save these people?*

“Because of his great love for us” (v. 4). Verses 8-9 also emphasize that we make no contribution whatsoever; this is entirely a work of God’s grace—his generosity and mercy.



STUDY

2

# WHY WE NEED TO BE SAVED

The big idea in this study is that sin (our rebellion against God) has serious consequences: we will face God's anger and judgement. We are completely responsible for our crimes, but at the same time we are helpless to fix the problem. We need help. We need a saviour.

Religious people often think of sin being like a bank account: the more 'sins' you commit, the worse your account balance becomes. However, if you do good works (like going to church, praying, helping the poor, etc.), the better your account balance becomes. If you die with a positive balance, you go to heaven.

One of the key points to emphasize in this study is that sin is just a symptom of the real disease which is our rebellion against God. Romans 3:20 teaches us that the Law—the ten commandments and all that is associated with them—is there to teach us the reality of our own sinfulness. Unfortunately we cannot fix this problem by trying to be good. We are completely helpless.

Many people today deny the existence of sin and evil (or they did before the September 11 terrorist attacks on the USA in 2001). However this is not usually an issue for religious people. Their problem is more often a feeling of guilt and helplessness in their own struggle with sin, or, conversely, they minimize, hide and deny the presence of sin in their lives. For these people, God's free gift of forgiveness of sin is very good news.

## ***Read Romans 1:18-25.***

### *1. What should people's attitude be towards God as the Creator?*

We ought to recognize "his eternal power and divine nature" (v. 20). We ought to glorify God and give thanks to him (v. 21). It is worth re-emphasizing God's generosity in creation. The world God made was "very good" (Gen 1:31). Just as God is generous in saving people, he is also generous in creation.

### *2. How do people treat him instead?*

According to verse 21, we neither glorify God as God, nor give thanks to him. Our thinking becomes futile and our foolish hearts are darkened. There are moral consequences too. According to the following verses, we become foolish (v. 22), we worship created things that are not God (vv. 23, 25), and our bodies become degraded through sexual immorality (v. 24). The description we have in these verses highlights our helplessness in our sinfulness.

### *3. What is God's reaction?*

The passage from Romans describes God's anger. He judges us, and the lives we live testify partly to our own choices and partly to the reality that God's judgement involves giving us what we choose.

**Read Matthew 22:34-40.**

*4. What are these two great commandments?*

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (v. 37) and “Love your neighbour as yourself” (v. 39).

*5. Do you know anyone who keeps them?*

The question is not asking for examples of good people; it is asking for examples of *perfect* people.

*6. Do you keep these commandments?*

An honest “No” will do!

*7. Where do you think that leaves you with God?*

Push people to answer not from wishful thinking or from what they would *like* to be the case, but help them frame their answer on the basis of what God actually says, especially in the Romans passage.

**Read Romans 3:10-20.**

*8. Who keeps the Law?*

No-one.

*9. What is the point of the Law?*

According to verse 19, the point of the Law is that we might be accountable.

According to verse 20, it’s so that we might know the reality of our own sinfulness.

The passage does not speak at all about the possibility that some would be obedient.

Rather, the opposite is the case.

*10. Is there anything that we can do to become acceptable before God (i.e. “righteous”)?*

No. You might read out the conclusion of the study and then see if people would like to comment.

The next study provides the solution to the problem that this study raises. You might like to reinforce this last point, and encourage people to prepare for the next study (assuming they haven’t already been doing so for the previous studies).



STUDY

3

# THE ATONING SACRIFICE

The aim of this study is to show God's surprising, loving and just solution to the problem of sin. God reconciles himself to us by taking our punishment personally. This part of the gospel is not widely taught outside the Protestant church. As a result, it can come as a real surprise for many religious people. More often, religious people see Jesus' death on the cross as an example of supreme goodness—an example we are to follow. While this is true, it is not the whole story. Seeing Jesus' death as just an example leaves people feeling that it is a distant event—an event which makes them feel hopeless and guilty. Some may even think, "I could never be like that". Understanding that Jesus' death on the cross is his personal payment for each of our sins can be a real revelation. A number of religious people I know have said that understanding the atonement helped them to understand the gospel at last. It made sense of why Jesus had to die. One said angrily, "I can't believe no-one has ever explained this to me before!"

1. *There are a number of ways that God could deal with the problem of sin.*

**Option 1:** *God could just forgive us, irrespective of what we've done, its consequences, or whether or not we want to be forgiven.*

a) *Do you think this solution is just? Why or why not?*

All wrongdoing requires punishment. People may feel that a good God should be able to simply overlook sin, as we sometimes do. However, the problem is really that our standards are considerably lower than those of a perfect God. Everyone will reach a point where they decide that certain actions can't be ignored and need to be punished, whether it be the bullying of a child, paedophilia or genocide. God, being perfect, must be perfectly just.

**Option 2:** *God could give everyone what they deserve.*

b) *What do we deserve?*

We deserve the punishment of death, since we haven't just committed small individual sins; we've rejected the authority of the Creator over our lives. The wrong things we do are simply an outward expression of our inward rejection of God.

c) *Is this solution merciful?*

No.

**Read Romans 3:21-26.**

2. *Who has sinned?*

All (v. 23).

3. *How do sinners become “justified” (= declared to be righteous or acquitted)?*

They are justified freely, by God’s grace (that is, his generosity), through the death of Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. See the explanation of this idea on page 17 of *The God Who Saves*. You might like to invite the person/group to explain what this means in their own words in order to check that they understand this properly.

4. *What contribution do people make towards being saved from their sin?*

None at all. Christ dies for our sin which means that we don’t have to.

5. *Why does God save people from their sin this way?*

In Romans 3:25-26, it is to demonstrate God’s justice. Also, as we saw in Study 1 when we looked at Romans 5:6-10 and Ephesians 2:1-10, it was because of God’s love.

6. *How does this demonstrate God’s justice?*

The full penalty that sin warranted has been paid by God himself.

7. *How does this demonstrate God’s mercy?*

The ones who deserved to die for sin have been shown mercy and have escaped that penalty.

8. *If being saved relies completely on what God has done, can you be certain that you are saved? Why or why not?*

We can be certain of being saved if we trust in God. He is able to do what he sets out to do, and he showed that he intended to save us by giving up his only son to pay the price of salvation.

9. *If being saved relies on what you do, can you be certain you are saved? Why or why not?*

If we look to ourselves—the strength of our faith, or whether or not we are good—we are in trouble, and can have no certainty. The answer to doubts about your salvation is to look to what God has done in Jesus.



STUDY

4

# TRUSTING

# GOD

This study could also be called 'Faith'. The way we receive God's gift of salvation is through faith (Eph 2:8). However, like the word 'grace', 'faith' can mean different things to different people. Faith, for some religious people, is a good work which is rewarded by God with further grace. To avoid confusion, the word 'trust' is used in this study instead of the word 'faith'.

Luke 18:18-30 has been chosen because it demonstrates clearly what trust looks like. It also re-emphasizes the point made by Study 2—that we are helpless to save ourselves (vv. 26-27).

However, another reason why this passage has been chosen is that it addresses the issue of prioritising God even over family relationships. For many religious people, religion functions like culture: it is their family identity. Saying you belong to a particular religion can be a bit like saying, "I'm American", or "I'm Lebanese". Sometimes you see this sort of thing when you approach someone to talk to them about God and they say, "No thanks, I belong to *x* religion". For people whose religion is their family identity, understanding the gospel can involve painful family conflict, particularly if it involves changing churches.

The overall aim of these studies is to enable a religious person to hear the gospel clearly and give them an opportunity to respond to it. While this may have implications for their family relationships and where they go to church down the track, it is not the aim of the study to raise these issues directly. In fact, it is probably not wise to raise these issues early on as it can distract them from hearing and understanding the gospel clearly. However, as the gospel does its work in a person's life, these issues may well come up, and it may be helpful to refer back to this passage then.

## ***Read Luke 18:18-30.***

*1. What did Jesus initially tell the rich ruler to do?*

Follow the commandments (v. 20).

*2. a) What does Jesus ask the rich ruler to do next?*

Sell everything, give to the poor, and follow Jesus (v. 22).

*b) Looking at your answer to question 2a, where is Jesus now telling the man to put his trust?*

In Jesus.

*3. What does the rich ruler put his trust in?*

His own good works, and his ability to do what Jesus commands him to do. (Note: he fails!)

*4. Is it possible for a person to be saved by him or herself?*

No. This would be a good place to remind people of the message of previous studies. Also, the passage says that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (v. 25). Given our relative wealth on a world scale, most people doing this study will struggle at this point. Notice Jesus’ solution to the incredulous question, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 26). He doesn’t introduce a new requirement, or urge hearers to try harder, or reassure people that God’s standard is not really as high as it seems. Instead, he points to God’s action and power: “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (v. 27). It is only through God’s will and power that we can be saved.

*5. What are the reasons why we can trust Jesus enough to give up our money, even our family if necessary?*

The text at this point of the study says:

*God calls us to put our trust in Jesus for everything, but particularly for receiving eternal life. God wants us to trust that Jesus’ death has completely dealt with our sins—past, present and future. God did this while we were still sinful, completely, without our help!*

*We can put our complete trust in this because God is trustworthy.*

*6. a) If we trust that religious rituals (e.g. being baptized or attending church) make us right with God, are we putting our complete trust in Jesus?*

No.

*b) If we trust that going to a particular church makes us right with God, are we putting our complete trust in Jesus?*

No.

*c) If we trust that we must do something to contribute to being right with God, are we putting our complete trust in Jesus?*

No.

In response to each of these three scenarios, people might say, “Surely we need to do A, B, or C to please God, even if he does save us by grace”. Sometimes your answer might be “No” (especially in relation to certain types of religious ritual). At other times, it might be helpful for you to clarify that any good thing we do comes *as a response* to our salvation, not *in order to gain it*—just as treating our husband or wife well flows out of our marriage relationship but doesn’t bring that relationship into existence.

*7. What are we saying about Jesus if we put our trust in things apart from him?*

We are really saying that his death on our behalf was unnecessary, and that his teaching about why he came to die was wrong. This calls into question either his wisdom or his integrity, or both.



STUDY

5

# LIVING FOR GOD

The aim of this study is to show what the Christian life looks like. It addresses the criticism, “If being saved is all God’s work, then it doesn’t matter if I keep sinning!” Often religious people respond to the gospel by saying, “Is that all?” or “It can’t be that simple! Surely I have to do something!” Without denying the fact that salvation is all God’s work, Ephesians 2:10 tells us that God saves people for a purpose: to do the good works he has prepared for them. So what we do as Christians *does* matter. We have a new life to look forward to, one in which sin is no longer appropriate. There is little point in sinning if Jesus is going to destroy all sin when he returns. God’s gift of salvation teaches us and motivates us to live properly as saved people, getting rid of sin and putting on good works. Explaining this clearly can be very helpful, as many religious people mishear the gospel as teaching that it doesn’t matter what you do as a Christian.

Another important point to make clearly is that good works are not a way to be saved, but come about *as a result* of being saved. God’s generosity in saving us *results* in us doing good works, not the other way around!

### ***Read 1 Corinthians 15:13-19.***

1. *What does it mean for Christians if Jesus has not been raised from the dead?*

There are a number of important answers in the passage, but for the purposes of this study, the key is verse 17: “your faith is futile; you are still in your sins”.

### ***Now read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26.***

2. a) *If Jesus has been raised, what confidence can we have about our own future? Why?*

We can be confident that we too will be raised to life (v. 22). It will happen because we belong to him.

b) *If Jesus has been raised, then apart from the resurrection of everyone who trusts him, what else can we expect will happen in the future?*

Any rivals to Jesus’ lordship will be destroyed. Jesus will himself submit to the rule of his heavenly Father, and give all things to him for his glory. Death itself will be destroyed.

### ***Read Titus 2:11-14.***

3. *What has already appeared or been revealed?*

The grace of God.

4. *What has this brought?*

Salvation.

5. *What is yet to appear or be revealed?*

“The blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (v. 13).

6. a) *While we are waiting for Jesus to return, what should we give up?*

We should give up “ungodliness and worldly passions” (v. 12) and “all wickedness” (v. 14), because we’ve been rescued from these things. It doesn’t make sense for Christians to continue in these things.

b) *What should we do instead?*

We should “live self-controlled, upright and godly lives” (v. 12). We should “wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (v. 13). And we should be ‘do-gooders’—people who are “eager to do what is good” (v. 14).

7. *How are we taught or motivated to live godly lives?*

It happens not through our own effort—even if we discover that it is hard work—but by looking only to the grace of God. It is the work of Jesus that transforms us and purifies us. In the same way that we began the Christian life, now we continue.

8. *Do good deeds or godly living come as a result of God’s gift, or in order to earn it?*

The text of the study says at this point:

*It is important to understand the place our behaviour has in our relationship with God. No matter how well we behave, all people fundamentally do what they want and reject what God wants. We all need help. We all need a saviour! Being saved from sin is a gift, because God saves people when they don’t deserve it and without their help. God sent Jesus Christ to give his life as a sacrifice to pay for our sins. All we can do is accept this gift, and trust in Jesus to make us right with God.*

*However, understanding this gift changes us. It starts to teach us and motivate us to live properly—to stop rejecting what God wants and start living the way he wants us to. Christians don’t behave rightly in order to be saved, and to enter heaven. They are already certain of their salvation because it is a gift! But this gift teaches them to stop rejecting God and live for him. Christians start living a new life to please God because they know that they are already saved through God’s grace.*

10. *What does this gift tell you about what you need to give up or start doing?*

It might be good to point out that this study undercuts one specific criticism sometimes made of God’s free grace and forgiveness, which is that if we accept it, it leaves us without a reason to stop sinning.