

Graceful Beginnings Series

for New-to-the-Bible Christians

Grace Overflowing



The Joy of Christ in Your Life
(A Study of Paul's Letters)

MELANIE NEWTON



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Introduction

“The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 1:14)

GRACEFUL BEGINNINGS

The *Graceful Beginnings Series* of Bible studies are specifically designed for the new-to-the-Bible Christian—whether you are a new Christian or you just feel insecure about understanding the Bible. The lessons are basic, introducing you as an inexperienced Christian to your God and His way of approaching life in simple terms that can be easily understood.

Just as a newborn baby needs to know the love and trustworthiness of her parents, the new Christian needs to know and experience the love and trustworthiness of her God. *A Fresh Start* is the first book in the series, laying a good foundation of truth for you to grasp and apply to your life. The other books in the series can be done in any order.

SOME BIBLE BASICS

Throughout these lessons, you will use a Bible to answer questions as you discover treasure about your life with Christ. The Bible is one book containing a collection of 66 books combined together for our benefit. It is divided into two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament tells the story of the beginning of the world and God’s promises to mankind given through the nation of Israel. It tells how the people of Israel obeyed and disobeyed God over many, many years. All the stories and messages in the Old Testament lead up to Jesus Christ’s coming to the earth.

The New Testament tells the story of Jesus Christ, the early Christians, and God’s promises to all those who believe in Jesus. You can think of the Old Testament as “before Christ” and the New Testament as “after Christ.”

Each book of the Bible is divided into chapters and verses within those chapters to make it easier to study. Bible references include the book name, chapter number and verse number(s). For example, Ephesians 2:8 refers to the New Testament book of Ephesians, the 2nd chapter, and verse 8 within that 2nd chapter. Printed Bibles have a “Table of Contents” in the front to help you locate books by page number. Bible apps also have a contents list by book and chapter.

The Bible verses highlighted at the beginning of each lesson in this study are from the New International Version® (NIV®) unless otherwise indicated. You can use any version of the Bible to answer the questions, but using a more easy-to-read translation (NIRV, NLT, NET, ESV) will help you gain confidence in understanding what you are reading. You can find all these translations in the “YouVersion App” or on www.biblegateway.com.

This study capitalizes certain pronouns referring to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit—He, Him, His, Himself—just to make the reading of the study information less confusing. Some Bible translations likewise capitalize those pronouns referring to God; others do not. It is simply a matter of preference, not a requirement.

A map is included in each lesson so you can follow Paul’s journeys, see where he was when he wrote each letter, and see where the receiving church or individual was located.

GRACE OVERFLOWING

The *Grace Overflowing* lessons will give you an overview of the thirteen letters of Paul found in the New Testament. Paul was a very well-educated and devout Jew and the author of more of the New Testament than anyone else. Jesus chose him to be an apostle to non-Jews everywhere, to teach the message of God’s grace to them. And, Paul understood God’s grace overflowing to his life so well because he desperately needed it.

In the first letter he wrote to his close friend Timothy, Paul describes how he had experienced God’s grace overflowing to his life.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance

*and unbelief. **The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly**, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, **Christ Jesus might display** his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)*

The Apostle Paul exclaimed that God's grace is so abundant that it's like a vessel overflowing or a stream overflowing a waterfall into a pool below. It covers and fills whatever is around and beneath it. The Apostle Paul looked at his own history, which was filled with horrid behavior, filled with what many would consider unforgivable deeds. You may have thought of your own life in that way.

Yet, God's chose to extend His grace to Paul and show him mercy. Not just a little bit of grace. Abundant grace. Overflowing grace. Paul didn't deserve anything but punishment and shame. God's grace overcame that. **God's grace is His undeserved favor abundantly poured out on those who desperately need Him.** It is God giving favor to someone, not because they are good enough to deserve it but because His love chooses to do so. God chooses to have His grace overflowing to every believer from the moment of salvation. And, we continue to receive God's abundant grace throughout our lives on earth.

You received this grace overflowing to your life the moment you trusted in Jesus Christ. And, God's grace is overflowing to your life every day because you are in Christ.

Paul's life was changed from the inside out. He became a beacon of Christ's life shining through his own life. Christ displayed Himself through Paul's life because grace overflowed into his life. Paul understood God's grace so well because he desperately needed it for life.

The New Testament contains 13 of Paul's letters. Eight of these letters Paul wrote to churches that he had started or had strongly influenced. He wrote five letters specifically to individuals—pastors and church leaders. Through the *Grace Overflowing* lessons, you will become

familiar with the people receiving each letter, the challenges they were facing (similar to our own), and the “grace-overflowing” solutions God gave to them (and to us) through Paul.

In his letters, Paul presents **Christ as everything we need for life**. Our God wants us to learn to live dependently on His Son as we live out our daily lives. Paul teaches us how to do this through his letters. These lessons do not cover each letter in detail, but you will learn a simple phrase describing how each letter presents Christ as the answer to specific needs we have and how He meets those needs in our lives as we trust in Him to do it.

Trust Him to meet your needs. His grace overflowing to your life.

LIVING DEPENDENTLY ON CHRIST

At the end of each lesson, we will include three things to help you make a fresh start in the right direction: “Bible verse to learn,” “Response in prayer & praise,” and “Getting to know Him more” readings.

1) Bible verse to learn

To renew your thinking and make part of your life as you journey on this adventure. Memorizing Bible verses is not just something “to do.” You are planting God’s words to you in your mind. The Bible calls it “renewing your mind” with truth about who God is and who you are.

If your Bible is a different translation from the one given in *Grace Overflowing*, feel free to memorize the verse from your Bible rather than what is given. The point is to begin a habit of memorizing Scripture. You will be surprised at how soon it just flows from your mind.

2) Response in prayer & praise

To help you begin regular conversation with your God who loves you dearly.

You will be encouraged to talk to God about anything and everything. Tell Him what you are thinking and feeling. He is someone you can trust.

You will be encouraged to praise God for who He is and what He does. Praise is appreciation of God and giving Him credit for who He is.

3) Getting to know Him more

Bible reading of selected portions of Paul's letters highlighting what it means to live as a Christian and experience God's grace overflowing to your life.

Spend a few minutes each day reading these wonderful letters and reflecting on how God's marvelous grace offers you a life of freedom and joy.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

The thirteen lessons in *Grace Overflowing* will cover these truths for you to know:

- ✓ ROMANS: Christ is our righteousness.

"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." Romans 3:22 (NIV)

- ✓ 1 CORINTHIANS: Christ is the wisdom of God.

"but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:24 NIV)

- ✓ 2 CORINTHIANS: Christ is our comforter.

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all **comfort**, who **comforts** us in all our troubles, so that we can **comfort** those in any trouble with the **comfort** we ourselves receive from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV)*

- ✓ GALATIANS: Christ is our freedom from the law.

"My brothers and sisters, you were chosen to be free. But don't use your freedom as an excuse to live in sin. Instead, serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13 NIRV)

- ✓ EPHESIANS: Christ is the powerful head of the church.
“God placed all things under Christ's rule. He appointed him to be ruler over everything for the church.” (Ephesians 1:22 NIRV)
- ✓ PHILIPPIANS: Christ is the supplier of every need.
“And my God will supply your every need according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19 NET)
- ✓ COLOSSIANS: Christ is Lord over everything.
“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” (Colossians 1:16 NIV)
- ✓ 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS: Christ is our returning Lord.
“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NIV)
- ✓ 1 TIMOTHY: Christ is our mediator.
“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus...” (1 Timothy 2:5 NIV)
- ✓ 2 TIMOTHY: Christ is the giver of crowns.
“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8 NIV)

- ✓ TITUS: Christ is our blessed hope.

“That’s how we should live as we wait for the blessed hope God has given us. We are waiting for Jesus Christ to appear in all his glory. He is our great God and Savior.” (Titus 2:13 NIRV)

- ✓ PHILEMON: Christ is the renewer of hearts.

“Renew my heart. We know that Christ is the one who really renews it.” (Philemon 20b NIRV)

Experience God’s grace overflowing to your life every day because you are in Christ, who is the answer to your every spiritual need. With joy, live dependently on Him.

Enjoy!



Paul and His Letters

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1, 7 NIV)

CHRIST IS EVERYTHING WE NEED

If you want to say hello to a friend who lives far away, what methods would you likely use today?

You probably mentioned texting, Facebook, email, and/or phone call. Those are great ways to instantly communicate to someone you know and love. Fifty years ago, the only ways to talk to someone who lived far away was by phone call using a phone attached to the wall and by writing letters or sending a telegram. But, 150 years before that, letters were the only method you could use, knowing that your friend wouldn't receive your letter for a week, maybe a month or more. How would you like that?

In the New Testament of our Bible are 13 letters written by a man named Paul. Once you know some of Paul's story, then you'll see why he wrote so many letters.

Paul was a real person who lived at the same time as Jesus and for many years afterwards. We have no indication that he had ever met Jesus before the Resurrection. Paul was a very well-educated and devout Jew. At first, he didn't believe Jesus was the Son of God and fought against Christians, dragging them out of their homes and putting them in prison. Paul made it his mission to get rid of this group of believers in Jesus as the Messiah. The first Christians were known as "those belonging to the Way." One day, while traveling from

Jerusalem to Damascus (in Syria), Jesus confronted him about this misdirected “mission.”

Read Acts 9:1-14.

What happened to Paul while he was traveling?

What did Jesus say to Paul?

After that, what did Paul do for the next three days?

Paul believed the vision and changed from being an enemy who hated Jesus into a friend who loved Jesus. Right away, Jesus gave him a specific job to do.

Read Acts 9:15.

What specific job did Jesus give to Paul? [Note: The Gentiles were all non-Jewish people.]

Several years after Paul trusted in Jesus as His Savior, he moved up to **Antioch** to pastor the church there with his friend Barnabas. While a group of church leaders was praying, the Holy Spirit told them to send Paul and Barnabas to faraway places to tell people about Jesus. Today, we would call Paul and Barnabas “missionaries.”

Paul made three different “Missionary Journeys” from Antioch to many different cities in the Roman Empire. As a young man, he was known by his Hebrew name “Saul.” But, as he traveled throughout the Roman Empire among non-Jewish people, he most often used his Roman name “Paul.”

In each city that Paul and his co-workers visited, people heard Paul’s message about Jesus and became Christians. They met together and formed a church in that city. Paul loved those people very much and wanted to hear how the young churches were doing. Someone would bring him news about the church members in a particular city then Paul would write them a letter, usually answering some questions they had or teaching them something they needed to know about living as Christians.

The Holy Spirit guided Paul to write those letters and preserved 13 of them for us to have in our Bibles. In fact, Paul authored more of the New Testament writings than anyone else. These letters are a gift to us 2000 years later.

THE JOURNEYS

Follow these brief overviews of Paul’s missionary journeys, including some highlights or important diversions. You can follow their journeys on the map provided.

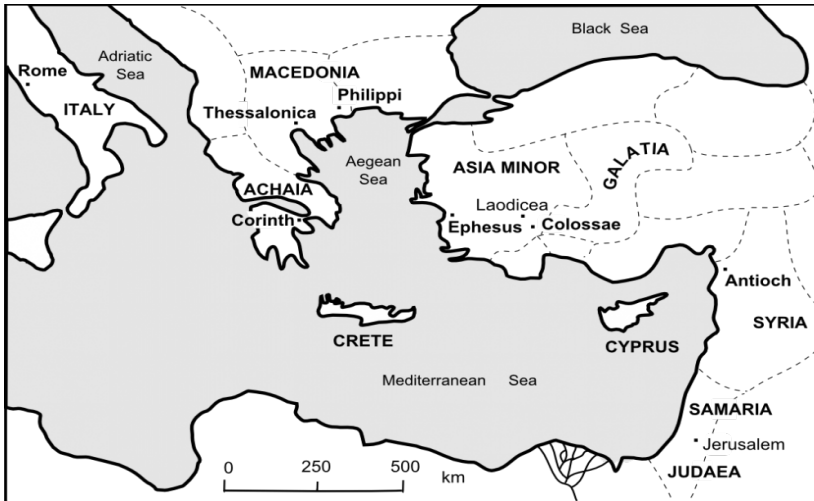
First journey:

Paul and Barnabas started at Antioch and traveled by boat to Cyprus. A few months later, they traveled by boat then lots of walking to towns in the area of Galatia—Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. Most of these people weren’t Jewish and worshipped other gods before believing in Jesus.

Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where Paul wrote *Galatians*, the first letter to a church.

Second journey:

After some time in Antioch, Paul wanted to go back and visit his Galatian friends. He and his new partner Silas walked back to Derbe and Lystra where a teenager named Timothy joined the travelers. Paul wanted to visit other cities in that area, but the Holy Spirit sent him to Troas (along the west coast). At Troas, God gave Paul a dream about



a man from Macedonia (northern Greece) saying, “Come over and help us.”

Paul obeyed the vision and sailed with his friends across the sea then walked to Philippi. They spent a few weeks in Philippi and 3 weeks in nearby Thessalonica. Paul went from there to Athens and then to Corinth where he spent two years and wrote *First & Second Thessalonians* before returning home to Antioch.

Third journey:

Back in Antioch, Paul wanted to go visiting again. He traveled through Galatia then to Ephesus where he stayed for 3 years. Then, he went to Thessalonica, Corinth, and back to Ephesus. Paul wrote *First & Second Corinthians* and the letter to the *Romans* during his third missionary journey. Paul ended this journey in Jerusalem to deliver some money that the Greek churches sent to help the poverty-stricken Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem.

First imprisonment:

From Jerusalem, Paul was transferred to Caesarea where he spent two years in confinement. When he appealed to Caesar to hear his case, he was transferred by boat to Rome for another 2 years of house

arrest. While in Rome, Paul wrote *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*.

Fourth journey time:

After Paul's release from house arrest in Rome, he traveled with Timothy to Ephesus where he left Timothy to pastor the church there. Paul traveled with Titus to Crete and established churches there, leaving Titus as pastor. While Paul traveled back in the area of Macedonia, he wrote *First Timothy* and *Titus* to encourage and instruct the young pastors.

Second imprisonment:

Paul was arrested again and placed in a Roman dungeon where he wrote his last letter, *Second Timothy*. Paul was executed shortly thereafter (~67 AD).

THE LETTERS

Find all thirteen letters in your print or digital Bible's Table of Contents, beginning with Romans and ending with Philemon.

Years after Paul wrote his letters, these 13 were collected and organized in the New Testament by size and type. The first nine in the list were written to churches (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians). The last 4 letters were written to individual people (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon).

When we write a letter, we usually start it by saying "Dear friend" or "Hello there." At the end, we sign our names. Paul both greets the people and signs his name at the beginning of each letter.

In the verses below, look for the words Paul uses to identify himself. Notice the two words—grace and peace—that he uses in each one to greet the recipients.

- Romans 1:1,7—
- 1st Corinthians 1:1,3—

- 2nd Corinthians 1:1-2—
- Galatians 1:1-3—
- Ephesians 1:1-2—
- Philippians 1:1-2—
- Colossians 1:1-2—
- 1 Thessalonians 1:1—
- 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2—
- 1 Timothy 1:1-2—
- 2 Timothy 1:1-2—
- Titus 1:1,4—
- Philemon 1-3—

Paul identifies himself in several ways—as an apostle, a messenger sent by God, and a bondservant of Jesus Christ. In each of Paul’s greetings, you read the same two words: *grace* and *peace*.

Grace means “undeserved favor.” The Gentiles wished each other favor with the gods they worshiped so grace was a familiar word for them. Paul taught that Jesus’ death on the cross is God’s grace gift (His favor) who takes away our sin (wrong things we think and do). God gives us His grace every day so we have strength to live to please Him. Praise God for His grace overflowing to you!

The Jews wished each other “peace” (shalom). So peace was a familiar word for them. Paul taught that Jesus gives us peace with God by making us God’s friends because our sins are forgiven. Nothing can ever take our relationship with God away from us. This helps us to feel

peaceful and blessed by God instead of worried about the eternal future. Praise God for His peace given to you!

Paul used both words in each letter to reach out to both the Jewish and Gentile Christians in the churches and to bring the two groups together in their common faith.

We have the same kinds of problems in our lives today as they did back then, and Christ is still the answer to our problems as well!

Through these lessons, you will become familiar with the people receiving each letter, the challenges they were facing (needs similar to your own), and the biblical solutions God gave to them (and us) through Paul.

Paul presents Jesus Christ as the answer to their need. We'll see that we have the same kinds of problems in our lives today and that Christ is still the answer to our problems as well through His overflowing grace.

With each letter, you will learn a phrase describing how Christ is presented in that letter as the answer to a particular need.

Read Philippians 1:21.

What does Paul declare about his life?

"To live is Christ" is how Paul described his own life. Jesus, God's son who gave his life on the cross for our sins, is also known as Christ. Christ is the title for the one God promised to come and save the world.

He is both savior and king of planet Earth. In many places in the New Testament, He is also called the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

Rewrite verses 13-14, inserting your name and what characteristics defined your life before Christ.

Why did God show mercy to Paul and to you?

Paul's life was changed from the inside out. He became a beacon of Christ's life shining through his own life. Christ displayed Himself through Paul's life because grace overflowed into his life. Paul understood God's grace so well because he desperately needed it for life. He firmly believed this truth: **Christ is everything we need** for life.

Christ is everything you need for life. He is the answer to your specific needs and meets these needs in your life as you trust in Him to do it. Your life will also be changed from the inside out.

Christ's life will shine through your life as you learn to live dependently on Him and His grace overflowing to your life.

LIVING DEPENDENTLY ON CHRIST

1) Bible verse to learn:

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1, 7)

2) Response in prayer & praise:

What are your biggest challenges in life? Ask Jesus to show you through these lessons how He is the answer to each one of those needs.

3) Getting to know Him more:

Spend a few minutes each day reading these passages and reflecting on how God’s marvelous grace offers you a life of freedom and joy. This week you will be reading Acts chapters 9-15 to get a historical perspective on Paul’s life and writings.

Read Acts chapter 9.

Reflect on what you read.

Read Acts chapter 10.

Reflect on what you read.

Read Acts chapter 11.

Reflect on what you read.

Read Acts chapter 12.

Reflect on what you read.

Read Acts chapter 13.

Reflect on what you read.

Read Acts chapter 14.

Reflect on what you read.

Read Acts chapter 15.

Reflect on what you read.

