

Message Extras

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

Message Extras accompany the [weekly message](#).

If there was a support group for people who don't understand the grace of God, I would be in the front row... And every week, I'd be like, "Hi, my name is Steve, and I don't fully understand the grace of God." I use the word fully, because the good Lord, in His grace, has taken me on a journey since 2008 to better understand His grace and what it means, and most importantly, how to live in the center of it. Growing up, I was a preacher's kid. And you may not know this, but preacher's kids don't always receive a lot of grace from the people of their Dad's church. You hear the comments to your parents, "why can't your boys sit still?" And, "Why can't your boys stay quiet?" And "Why don't your boys wear nicer clothes to church?" As I got older, the comments were, "Why can't your boys do a better job shoveling the church sidewalks," and "How can your son afford that car?" My parents were and are the best, and they shielded me from this lack of grace, but let me tell you, we were poor. Dirt poor. And as I got older, I realized and understood it was the people of the church who kept my parents poor, and... well, can you hear the lack of grace in my tone right now?

When I saw the topic for the message extras this week, I was looking for the first ship to Tarshish! There are still a lot of unresolved grace issues in my heart. In fact, pre-2008, I believed with all my being the Lord sat on His throne in heaven, with a giant hammer in hand, just waiting to hit me over the head as soon as I messed up. But the good news is, in 2008, the good Lord broke through this lie and He started a journey with me to teach me about His grace.

So, what happened in 2008? The stock market crashed, the housing market collapsed, and except for the house we live in, and a few of the possessions in the house, we lost everything. And we were 6 days from losing the house too. I worked in the housing industry at the time, and if you recall 2008, times were bad, really bad, especially for those who worked in the housing industry. Prior to 2008, I was a small business owner. That was gone. My car, gone. We sold TVs, furniture, kids' toys, video game systems, and clothes, just trying to make enough money to pay the mortgage and put some food on the table. I asked the church I attended at the time for help, but they said, "times are tough, we will pray for you." I looked for jobs. No one was hiring. I had one last contact to reach out to, and God used him to open a door and provide a job. But, it was a 50% pay cut and when

they gave me the offer, they said, "This is our first and final offer." And I didn't have enough money to pay the 3 months of mortgage payments we owed, so we decided to let it foreclose, and move our family of 5 to the cheapest apartment we could find. At this point, you may be thinking, "Hey Steve, I thought you were going to write about God's amazing grace!" Don't worry, I'm getting to it... I just need you to understand how far from His grace I was, so you might get a glimpse of just how big He and His grace are!

At the time, I didn't see the job God gave me as an act of His grace. I was so mad at the time. But just last night, a dear friend I met on the first day of that job texted me and asked me to pray for her as she was going to speak with her daughter for the first time in five years. She said, "please pray God brings grace to my words so I can reconcile with my daughter." This is just one example of how God repeated His grace again and again at that job where I made so little. God's grace is sufficient for both the present moment and for moments that occur many years in the future.

After about a month in my new job, I got the mail from the mailbox after work... I remember the day distinctly. There were three envelopes. One was the final notice before the bank moved the house to foreclosure, one was a letter from a small church in Tennessee, and one was a letter from my wife's grandmother. The letters from the church and from my wife's grandmother both had checks in them... and the amount of the checks combined was enough to bring the mortgage current and buy groceries for the week. God had provided in the moment, and He used that letter from my wife's grandmother, who was not a follower of Jesus, to forge a bond between her and me. Late in her life, she was near death, and I visited her in the hospital. I looked her in the eyes, and I said, "I love you. Are you ready to receive Jesus into your life?" She nodded and prayed with me. God's grace was sufficient for a moment that would occur many years in the future.

Finally, did I mention 2008 was tough? Well, sometime in early 2009, I was tired, and I was weary, and I was angry. I didn't know who I was angry at, so I guess I was just angry at God. So, I lifted my fist to the sky and yelled, "What do you want with me! Why am I even here!?" And I put my head down, and I cried so hard that I bruised the capillaries around my eyes. I like to say when God taught me about His grace, He literally gave me two black eyes. Hey at least, I wasn't swallowed by a big fish! After I stopped crying, and when I was quiet, the Lord gently impressed on my heart, "you are here, because I made you and I love you." His peace washed over me. His grace was sufficient for the moment. And from that moment on I began writing. God used writing as a method to teach me about His grace and His love and so many amazing attributes about our Great God. If I didn't understand something, I studied the Word of God and wrote about it, until I did. Still, today, if I don't understand something, I open the Bible, grab my journal and start writing. Now, most of you don't know me, but I make a living as a data governance manager. Data and writing - well they are about as far apart as the east and west. But here I am, writing the message extras on

the topic of God's grace. His grace for me, to reveal to me "He made me, and He loves me," was sufficient for this moment 14 years later. God's grace is sufficient for the present moment and for the many moments yet to come.

As I said, God is teaching me to live in the center of His grace, and here is what I have learned. Living in the center of God's grace starts with receiving it, not understanding it. You don't have to understand God's grace to receive it... just receive it. If you have never received God's grace, the journey begins when you receive His Son Jesus into your life. Have you received Jesus? What are you waiting for! Today is your day of salvation. Believe in Jesus, the Son of God, and receive His grace. Then living in the center of God's grace means accepting that His grace is sufficient for the moment. Let's face it, there are moments in life that are hard, really hard! But I know this, no matter how hard the moment is, God's grace is sufficient. And over time you really learn to enjoy God's grace in the not-so-hard moments of this life. Many blessings my friends! May God bless you abundantly with His love, His presence, and His grace.

- What is holding you back from receiving God's grace in this moment? Tell the Lord about it. His grace is big enough. Receive His grace.
- Small Group / Bible Study Challenge: Read Acts 9:1-18 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
 - When Paul asked God for healing, why didn't God heal him completely?
 - What can we learn about God's grace from Paul's experience?
 - What can we learn about how we should respond to God's grace from Paul's experience?
 - Is there anything in your life, in this moment, where you are trying to be strong, and the Almighty is saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness."
 - God's grace is sufficient for the moment. What will you do with this moment of your life?

