

# Saved by Grace, Created For Works

Acceptance Grace ► Empowering Grace

Oli asked me to select any verse or topic from what we've covered in Ephesians so far.

I've chosen Ephesians 2:8-10, because I believe it's not only awesome, but particularly relevant to guys in their 20s.

If you've got a Bible, you can go there now.

It's the topic of Acceptance Grace, and Empowering Grace.

Unmerited grace is the absolute foundation of our faith.

A life time of mission and purpose is the natural outworking. It is the very thing we were created for.

There are many different marks of being a true Christian.

One of the marks of a true Christian is that there's a real ache in their gut that says "I *want* to be used by God, I *want* to hear 'Well done good and faithful servant'".

It's not so much "I *need* to", but "I *want* to".

Unnerving Bible Verse:

"From everyone who has been given  
much, much will be demanded"

Luke 12:48

Every talk should have an unnerving Bible verse!

Verses that make you think, and slightly freak out!

Verses that remind you of your utter dependence and humility before God.

But it's okay, we're going to get to Grace...

This is a line from the story Jesus tells in Luke about watchfulness. About the faithful and unfaithful servants.

This is one of those verses that just sticks to the back of your mind. But it's good, it keeps you sober, it keeps you in check.

The theme is: to whom greater knowledge and resources have been given, more is expected.

It's echoed in other parables Jesus tells, such as the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25.

...To whom much is given, much will be demanded...

We've been given time. Some of us 60 to 70 years from this point on.

Time is precious, don't waste your life.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith.  
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,  
not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Acceptance Grace

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ  
Jesus for good works, which God prepared  
beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Empowering Grace

## **Ephesians 2: 8-10**

Time to get to the text.

There's two types of grace here in the text.

- The first is the message of the gospel.
- The second is the mission we've been called to.
  - The Great Commission.

It's so easy to skip over acceptance grace and go straight to works.

It's so easy to not really digest it. And what you end up with is a legalistic, performance mentality.

On a side note, I found Rob Rufus to a really great guy to listen to on this.

Spent a good couple of years just listening to his sermons and absorbing his messages on Grace.



[www.ccihk.com](http://www.ccihk.com)

This is his website, so jot in down in your mobile phone or something.

He's also on the Kings Church website, on the Sunday Teaching page, in the 2008 section.

Although his message is essentially the same as loads of other preachers, there's just something in way he communicates it that is really remarkable.

He really lingers on acceptance grace, and it's incredibly liberating.

So if you are one of those guys who constantly feels like you're being bludgeoned over the head with condemnation, and general feelings of unworthiness, chances are, you don't really understand grace, or the full extent of the gospel.

Listen to his sermons, listen to a lot of them, and just gradually absorb the truth

"For by grace you have been saved  
through faith. And this is not your own  
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Acceptance Grace

### **Ephesians 2:8-9**

Homing in on Acceptance Grace.

It says we are saved through faith and not by works.  
It is utterly unmistakable.  
It is clear and in plain English.  
No work can contribute a thing to your salvation.

It's actually heresy to think that Jesus wasn't enough.

That his death and resurrection was incomplete, that we need to do something extra to secure salvation.

But the verse goes further.

Right after it says 'saved through faith' the Apostle Paul immediately points out that even the faith that saved you was given to you by God.

"And this is not your own doing"

We don't even get the credit for faith.  
We don't get credit for 'giving our lives to Jesus'.  
They weren't our lives to give.

[insert testimony – *I gave my life* to God at age 4... a feeling of smugness and superiority to others]

So even the faith that saved us was a gift from God.  
It is totally His work.

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This verse doesn't stand in isolation:

"No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit"  
1 Cor 12: 3

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"  
Revelation 7:10

Further, faith is also included amongst the spiritual gifts. It's a gift!  
It doesn't come from within a man, it's imparted by the Holy Spirit.

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That understanding of the gospel changes our whole approach to evangelism and prayer. "Lord, grant them faith".

We are so utterly dependant on grace.

Much more than we acknowledge or realise.



I've taken my design skills to the max here and tried to visualise a concept of shifting focus.

Represented in this slide is the rat race – striving and toil, trying to get ahead, trying to stay in the race, trying to keep your head above water.

A life without God is a striving towards all sorts of things.

Money  
Possessions  
Comfort  
Sex  
Power  
Beauty

You might be striving out in front, or lagging behind, trying not to drop out.

But there's a race, a goal and a striving towards all sorts of things.



When you enter into a relationship with Christ, your focus is pulled off all your previous strivings and effort and focuses on the cross of Christ.

When you focus on Jesus, everything else falls out of focus.

We actually still strive forward in many areas of our lives, but they are now God given pursuits and driven by grace.

They are in the background, in the sense that they are not what saves us.

However, there's definitely a shift in focus that can take place. Almost daily.



We can so easily take our eyes off Jesus, and refocus them on ourselves.



Notice that the contents of the picture hasn't changed one bit.

It's just your focus and perception has changed.

The cross of Christ is still the central thing in your life, you're just looking past it.

I would say that this is my default mode of focus when I wake up every morning. Very much focused on me, and the circumstances of my life.

When God slips out of focus, grace slips out of focus.

We have to strive daily to set our focus on God.

Personally, I know the difference in my own life when I engage with God every day without fail.

I'm quite different to when I only engage three or four times a week (which is still pretty good going).

There's a perpetual communication that needs to take place in our lives to actually live in the good of this grace.

"The first thing for our soul's health, the first thing for His glory, and the first thing for our own usefulness, is to keep ourselves in perpetual communication with the Lord Jesus, and to see that the vital spirituality of our religion is maintained over and above everything else in the world."

Charles H. Spurgeon

I love that idea of perpetual communication.

It's ceaseless, everpresent listening and talking with God.

Perpetual communication is like the glue between grace and works.

And this brings us to part 2.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Empowering Grace

### **Ephesians 2:8-9**

The word 'workmanship' in the original greek is the same word used for 'poetry'.

It like God is an artist, or a master craftsman, shaping and moulding us; engineering us for these good works.

If you go back to Genesis 2, before the fall, you'll notice that nothing has changed.

God created man to walk with him, to be in relationship with him, and to do good works.

As we walk with God, we walk a path of santification, we gradually conform back to this original state.

So good works is not something that is required *for* salvation.

It's an integral part of actually being saved.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations"

Matthew 28:19

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to every creature"

Mark 16:15

Living on this fallen earth, the good works we do are for a massive part wrapped up in the gospel and the great commission.

It's a glorious mission, and the only work in this life that has any real meaning or purpose.

Everything else is passing away.

Recently I watched a feature on Songs Of Praise (as you do) of this elderly female missionary who went out and worked her whole life in Africa.

One of the comments she made that really struck me was that when you get old and look back, the only thing that really counts is your works of service to God.

It must be very pleasing to reach a certain age and know, "I have not wasted my life".

"Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die ... Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if, I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell's torments."

Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758),  
written in his early twenties.

This was a quote from Jonathan Edwards diary written in his early twenties – same age as many of us.

Edwards was an absolutely awesome bloke, and spent his whole life serving God.

He was used instrumentally by God in the First Great Awakening – an American revival in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

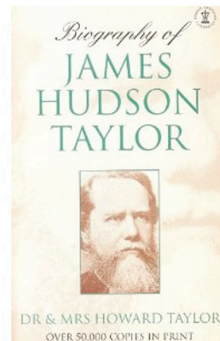
What's interesting is that his life's work stemmed from his thoughts and convictions formed in his early twenties.

And it was exactly the same with guys like James Hudson Taylor.

Saved at 17, was on a boat to China by 21.

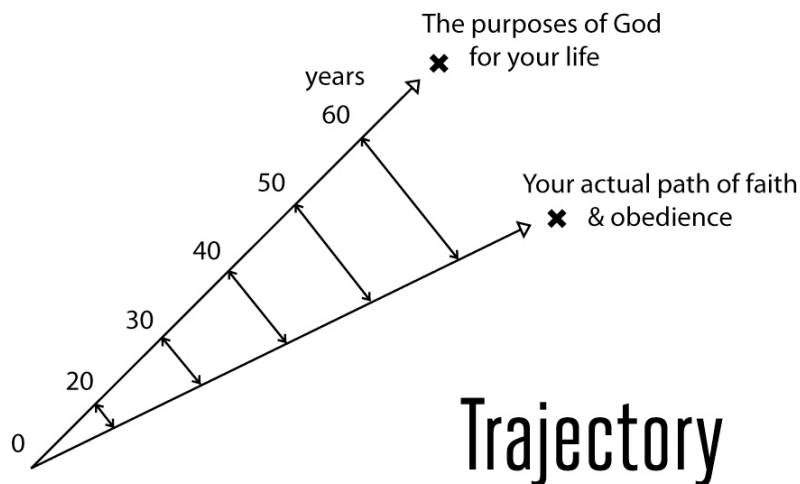
Read his book, it is absolutely unbelievable what God did with a man's life that was totally committed to God's work from an early age.

[Book recommendation – buy off Amazon for £3]



The point is – where you are with your walk with God now is going to fire you off on a trajectory for the rest of your life.

Which leads me to my next slide...



When you read the biographies of the great guys, like Hudson Taylor, Spurgeon, Edwards, Whitfield, you notice that there's a real trajectory to their lives that started early on.

The works achieved later in life were built on the foundations laid down earlier.

There's a real cumulative effect, like building a house. Every new brick is placed on top of previous work. There's no shortcuts.

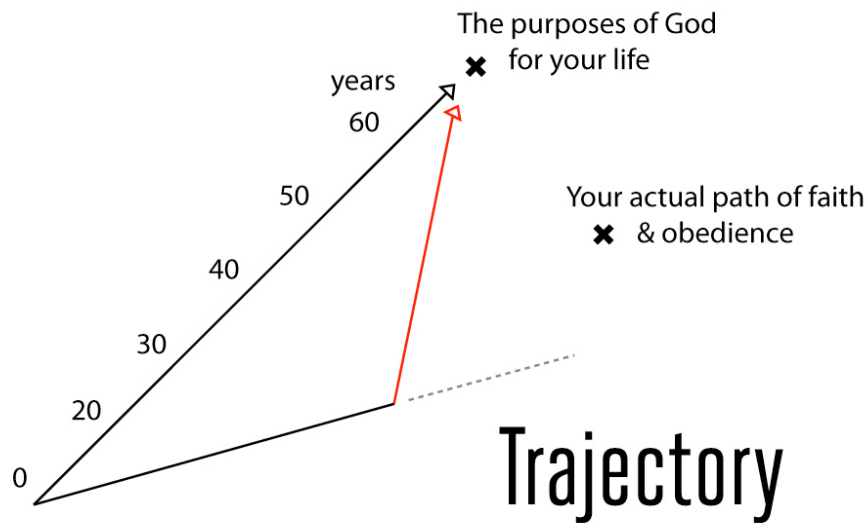
Over the course of time, you can eventually construct something truly amazing to the glory of God.

But you can also waste your life.

You can spend years spinning your wheels, backsliding, out of relationship with God.

And the more years you waste, the harder it is to course correct.

How terrible to reach the later years of your life and realise it was all meaningless vanity.



I think there's a naive tendency amongst us to think that we can fix things later on. To sort of do this on the chart.

In reality, I'm not sure it's physically possible.

I know that God is sovereign, and he will achieve his work. But he may not use us to do it if that's our game plan.

I used to be 20, now I'm almost 30.

PJ's facebook status on his last birthday made me laugh:

"inside every 30 year old is an 18 year old wondering "what happened?""

It's scary how quickly time passes by.

Apparently it's a process keeps excellerating. 30, 40, 50... the markers are going to fly by.



And it's scary how many of my friends from Uni that we're on fire for God when they were 18, but have literally spent the last 10, 12 years in a backslidden, ineffective, unproductive state.

[Not that I'm judging them!]

## **Conclusion**

So in conclusion, it's not a matter of salvation that is in question, but a lifetime of usefulness and effectiveness.

We want to be able to say, just like Jesus, that we finished the work that God gave us.

And we want to hear that "well done, good and faithful servant".

Some concluding verses:

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Galatians 6:9

"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Romans 12:11

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

1 Corinthians 15:58

On another side note, I listened to some most excellent teaching by R.C. Sproul on the subject of knowing God's will for your vocation.

Your vocation is what you're going to spend the majority of your waking life doing. Not a bad idea to get that right.

I've done some CDs which you can come down the front and grab.

They're not available online anymore, but I did a cheeky upload to my own site, which you can download a ZIP file with them in.



[www.sa-design.co.uk/rcsproul.zip](http://www.sa-design.co.uk/rcsproul.zip)