

Jesus Always

B I B L E S T U D Y S E R I E S



WALKING IN
GOD'S GRACE

Sarah Young

*Bible study and discussion questions
written by Karen Lee-Thorp*

WALKING IN GOD'S GRACE

JESUS CALLING® BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Volume 1: Experiencing God's Presence

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JESUS ALWAYS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

WALKING IN GOD'S GRACE

EIGHT SESSIONS

Sarah Young

with Karen Lee-Thorp



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes our busy and difficult lives give us the impression that God is silent. We cry out to Him, but our feelings tell us He isn't answering our prayers. In this, our feelings are incorrect. God hears the prayers of His children and speaks directly into the situations in which we find ourselves. The trouble is that our lives are often too hectic, our minds too distracted, for us to take in what He offers.

This *Jesus Always* Bible study is designed to help individuals and groups meditate on the words of Scripture and hear them not just as words said to people long ago but as words said to us today in the here and now. The goal is to help the heart open up and respond to what the mind reads—to encounter the living God as He speaks through the Scriptures. The writer to the Hebrews tells us:

INTRODUCTION

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

—HEBREWS 1:1–3

God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament gives us the chance to walk with Jesus, see what He does, and hear Him speak into the sometimes-confusing situations in which we find ourselves. The Old Testament tells the story of how God prepared a people to be the family of Jesus, and in the experiences of those men and women, we find our own lives mirrored.

THE GOAL OF THIS SERIES

The *Jesus Always Bible Study Series* offers you a chance to lay down your cares, enter God's Presence, and hear Him speak through His Word. You will get to spend some time silently studying a passage of Scripture, and then, if you're meeting with a group, openly sharing your insights and hearing what others discovered. You'll also get to discuss excerpts from the *Jesus Always* devotional that relate to the themes of the Bible passages. In this way, you will learn how to better make space in your life for the Spirit of God to speak to you through the Word of God and the people of God.

THE FLOW OF EACH SESSION

Each session of this study guide contains the following elements:

- **CONSIDER IT.** The two questions in this opening section serve as an icebreaker to help you start thinking about the theme of

the session, connecting it to your own past or present experience, and allowing you to get to know the others in your group more deeply. If you've had a busy day and your mind is full of distractions, these questions can help you better focus.

- **EXPERIENCE IT.** Here you will find two readings from *Jesus Always* along with some questions for reflection. This is your chance to talk with others about the biblical principles found within the *Jesus Always* devotions. Can you relate to what each reading describes? What insights from God's Word does it illuminate? What does it motivate you to do? This section will assist you in applying these biblical principles to your everyday habits.
- **STUDY IT.** Next you'll explore a Scripture passage connected to the session topic and the readings from *Jesus Always*. You will not only analyze these Bible passages but also pray through them in ways designed to engage your heart and your head. You'll first talk with your group about what the verse or verses mean and then spend several minutes in silence, letting God speak into your life through His Word.
- **LIVE IT.** Finally, you will find five days' worth of suggested Scripture passages that you can pray through on your own during the week. Suggested questions for additional study and reflection are provided.

FOR LEADERS

If you are leading a group through this study guide, please see the Leader's Notes at the end of the guide. You'll find background on the design of the study as well as suggested answers for some of the study questions.



SESSION 1

UNEARNED GRACE

CONSIDER IT

In his book *Proof*, Timothy Paul Jones tells the story of his adopted daughter, who had previously spent two years in a different adoptive home. Several times, the previous family had taken all their children except this one girl to Disney World. She had always been left behind with friends. She believed it was always because she did something that deserved punishment. When Jones learned this, he resolved to take this new daughter to Disney World.

However, a month before the trip, the girl began to act up—lying, stealing, and cruelly ridiculing her older sister. She was disciplined each time, but the behavior only became more outrageous. Two days before the trip, after her latest act of mischief, she said, “I know what you’re going to do. You’re not going to take me to Disney World, are you?”

The young girl, having failed to earn her way into her dream trip several times, was acting in a way that should have placed her as far from the Magic Kingdom as possible. When Jones understood this, he explained that she wasn’t going to Disney World because she was good, but because she was part of the family. She was his.¹

Grace is being treated far better than you deserve. In this session, we will begin to explore grace with a story that shows how completely unearned God’s grace is.

1. *When have you received something good that you didn’t deserve? How did you respond?*

2. When you were growing up, did your parents treat you with grace? Explain.

EXPERIENCE IT

Nurture well your thankfulness, for it is the royal road to Joy! In fact, no pleasure is really complete without expressing gratitude for it. It's good to thank the people through whom you receive blessings, but remember that I am *God from whom all blessings flow*. So praise and thank Me frequently each day. This nurtures your soul and completes your Joy. It also enhances your relationship with Me, providing an easy way for you to draw near Me.

As My cherished follower, you have received the glorious gift of grace—unearned, undeserved favor. No one and no set of circumstances can strip you of this lavish gift. You belong to Me forever! *Nothing in all creation will be able to separate you from My Love.*

When you awaken each morning, say, “Thank You, Jesus, for the gift of this new day.” As you journey through the day, be on the lookout for blessings and pleasures I scatter along your path. The greatest treasure is My Presence with you, for I am the *indescribable Gift!*

—FROM *JESUS ALWAYS*, JUNE 6

3. What evidence is there in your life that you have received unearned favor from God?

4. How do you respond to God's unearned favor?

I am *full of grace and truth*. “Grace” refers to the undeserved favor and Love I have for you. Receiving something you don’t deserve is humbling, and that’s a good thing—protecting you from pride. Grace is a gift of boundless worth, for it secures your eternal salvation. Because you know Me as Savior, I will always be favorable toward you, beloved. My Love for you is undeserved, unearned, and unfailing; so you can’t lose it! Just *trust in My unfailing Love, and rejoice in My salvation*.

I am not only full of truth, but *I am the Truth*. People today are barraged by news and messages laced with spin and lies. As a result, cynicism abounds in the world. But in Me and in the Bible, you find absolute, unchanging Truth! Knowing Me *sets your feet on a rock and gives you a firm place to stand*. This secure foundation for your life makes you a bright beacon in a dark, relativistic world. *Let your light shine* so that *many will see and put their trust in Me*.

—FROM JESUS ALWAYS, NOVEMBER 12

5. Do you find that receiving God's grace is humbling? Or do you tend to find yourself taking it for granted or pushing it away because you don't deserve it? Explain.

6. *How does knowing that God's children can't lose His love make you want to live?*

STUDY IT

Read Matthew 20:1–16. Jesus told this parable to illustrate the outrageousness of God's grace. As you read, note that the story is not meant to be an example of good business practices—rather, it is meant to be shocking to the listeners. Grapes were one of the main crops in Israel, and day laborers (in addition to full-time staff) were needed at harvest time to get them picked before they wilted. A denarius was the normal wage for a laborer who worked all day.

¹ [Jesus said] “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³ “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his

foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

⁹ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

7. *In this story, who gets what they don’t deserve? Who gets what they do deserve?*

8. *Why are the laborers who are hired first angry? Do you think they have a right to be angry? Explain your view.*

9. *What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (verse 16)?*

10. *Which group of workers do you identify with most: the ones who started working for the landowner early in the day, the ones who were hired in the middle of the day, or the ones who joined in toward the end of the day? Why did you answer the way you did?*

11. *The phrase “are you envious” (verse 15) literally means “is your eye evil?” The “evil eye” covets what belongs to someone else. It keeps laborers from being thankful for their pay because they are blinded by greed for more. Why is envy such a temptation for some of us?*

12. *Take two minutes of silence to reread the passage, looking for a sentence, phrase, or even one word that stands out as something Jesus may want you to*

SESSION 1

focus on in your life. If you're meeting with a group, the leader will keep track of time. At the end of two minutes, you may share with the group the word or phrase that came to you in the silence.

13. *Read the passage aloud again. Take another two minutes of silence, prayerfully considering what response God might want you to make to what you have read in His Word. If you're meeting with a group, the leader will again keep track of time. At the end of two minutes, you may share with the group what came to you in the silence if you wish.*

14. *If you're meeting with a group, how can the members pray for you? If you're using this study on your own, what would you like to say to God right now?*

LIVE IT

At the end of each session you'll find suggested Scripture readings for spending time alone with God during five days of the coming week. This week, the theme of each reading will focus on the idea of grace as a

gift from God. Read each passage slowly, pausing to think about what is being said. Rather than approaching this as an assignment to complete, think of it as an opportunity to meet with the One who loves you most. Use any of the questions that are helpful.

Day 1

Read John 4:6–14. This is part of a long encounter between Jesus and a woman who was an outcast in her society. The two meet at a well where the woman is drawing water, at an hour when other people won't be there. "The gift of God" (verse 10) is a gift of God's grace. (The words "grace" and "gift" are related in Greek.) What do you think "living water" means?

How do verses 13–14 further expand on the gift of grace that Jesus is offering?

What are the things for which you thirst?

Today, ask Jesus to quench the thirst you have with His living water.

Day 2

Read Acts 2:36–41. This passage begins with Peter finishing a sermon to a crowd in Jerusalem. What offer of God’s grace does he make to the people (see verses 38–39)?

In what way can the Holy Spirit be a gift in your life?

If you’ve accepted God’s gracious offer, what is the evidence of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Thank God today for the gift of the Holy Spirit that He provides to those who follow Him.

Day 3

Read Acts 8:18–23. Simon was a sorcerer in Samaria who saw the power the apostles were able to release in people’s lives when they laid hands on them. Why is it important to know that the gift of God can’t be bought with money (see verse 20)?

What are some other ways people try to “buy” God’s gifts?

Why do you suppose it’s hard for some people to simply relax and receive whatever gracious gifts God wants to give them?

Examine your own life today to see if you’ve unconsciously been trying to “buy” God’s gifts.

Day 4

Read Romans 4:3–5. How are wages and gifts different?

Does faith in God earn His favor? Why did you answer the way you did?

What do you think is the connection between grace and faith?

Look for an opportunity today—a grace-filled gift—to exercise faith in God.

Day 5

Read Ephesians 3:7–8. In these verses, Paul describes himself as a servant of the gospel. Did Paul earn or deserve the office God gave him? How can you tell?

Why would Paul think of the responsibility to spread the gospel as a gift of grace?

What grace has God given you that carries with it the responsibility to do something about it?

Look for a chance to live out your gratitude for God's many gifts by giving of yourself today.

NOTES

1. Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones, *Proof: Finding Freedom Through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 81–84.

