

# EMBRACING GRACE



Chaplain Ron Schmidt



## FOREWORD

Christ's Home is pleased to present this book to you as a gift. Why? Because at the very heart of the truths in this book is the very gift of God, found in His amazing grace!



The author is our Lead Chaplain, Ron Schmidt. Ron has served in this role since January 2017. Interestingly, as a young man preparing for full-time ministry, Ron came to Christ's Home Retirement Community to practice his preaching skills to an audience of loving, patient, and supportive senior adults.

Ron is a graduate of Gordon College and Dallas Theological Seminary. During his full-time ministry he pastored churches in New York, Florida and Pennsylvania, most notably Davisville Church in Southampton, PA—a suburb of Philadelphia. In addition, Ron taught classes at what is today Cairn University and for 33 years was a speaker at Harvey Cedars Bible Conference in New Jersey.

Our observation of Ron's ministry is highlighted by three things: 1) his love for the Lord Jesus Christ and his profound appreciation for God's grace, 2) his love for God's Word and a desire to teach it practically with theological grounding, and 3) his love for people.

We invite you now to go with Ron on a hike to view the glorious vistas of God's amazing grace!

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# EMBRACING GRACE

*Chaplain Ron Schmidt*

What comes to mind when you think of the word grace? For many it's a blue-eyed blond woman named Grace. For others it may be a blessing you offer before a meal. And then for some it's watching someone dance with grace. Without a doubt this is the most misunderstood word in the world. I say this because it's also the most wonderful concept ever imagined. It's what makes Christianity different than all other belief systems on the planet. There is nothing like it. Peter Drucker, who wrote many books on management and was a member of the Wall Street gurus once wrote that when he discovered the grace of God, he realized it was the best deal on planet earth. That's right, a Wall Street guy telling us that God's grace is the best investment you'll ever make.

Dr. Louis Sperry Chafer who founded Dallas Theological Seminary taught a class on grace to 4th year students for over 40 years. During his last year of teaching, he spoke to his class with these infamous words, “students for 40 years I have taught on the grace of God, and I feel like I've just begun to scratch the surface, and it is wonderful.” The Scriptures tell us to “Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 3:16 Grace is the most amazing concept in the scriptures and with that in mind I'd like for you to join me on a journey into Grace that will help us to embrace the grace of God in our lives. This journey will not only change your life but also your eternal destiny. It is a journey God invites us to take with Him. Climb to the top of this God made mountain with me and take in the view of seven beautiful vistas to embrace – vistas of Grace.



## Vista #1

### *Grace is Truly Amazing*

There's a reason why we sing Amazing Grace. Grace is God's best idea! Of all of God's wondrous works, grace is in my estimation, the *magnus opus*! His decision to ravage people with his love, to rescue passionately, and to restore justly – what can rival that truth? There's nothing about it that is not amazing. It is what separates Christianity from all other religions of the world. C.S Lewis came upon a group of professors at Oxford University debating the difference between Christianity and the religions of the world. The debate had become heated and was going on for hours. When asked what he thought, He replied, “That's easy, it's grace”. All other religions of the world are based on what man can do to get to the better hereafter. Only in Christianity is the truth that it is not what we can do for God, but what He has done for us that we have the joy and assurance of being in heaven someday. May I say that it is wonderful to have the blessed assurance that I will be in heaven one day because of what Christ did for me on the cross! What an Ah Ha moment that will be!

## Vista #2

### *Grace has a Rich Background*

A misunderstanding of grace will lead to heresy. Listen to Paul's strong words regarding a proper understanding of grace.

*“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!” Galatians 1:6-8*

The word gospel means “good news”. It is based upon the foundation of grace. Any system not operating on grace is not a good news system! That

was the concern of the Apostle Paul and rightfully so. The good news of grace is what God has done to bridge the gap of sin and make it possible for sinful human beings to have forgiveness and fellowship with Him.

Grace has a rich history in Greek culture. It described a beauty that could not be expressed in words. Look at the Greek world of art, culture, sculpture, architecture and language. It was superior to other cultures in so many ways. It was so superior that the Romans copied it for their own purposes. As time went on grace came to be known as giving a gift expecting nothing in return. Then it was giving a gift to a friend that was undeserved. By the time of the New Testament, it deepened in meaning as to give an undeserved gift to an enemy. Yes, that's right an enemy. That's exactly what Christ came to do. Prior to salvation we were considered enemies of God. Finally, the word grace became a greeting and benediction among believers. How fitting to be constantly reminded of God's amazing grace!

Let's build our Definition: Grace is God looking with favor upon the guilty even though we deserve His wrath! To qualify for His amazing grace, we have to be guilty and that is what we are – guilty in the first degree! There is no other belief system that takes the initiative with undeserved favor toward sinners. Ready for another vista?

## **Vista #3**

### ***Grace is Always an Undeserved Gift***

Let me ask you a question, “Do you work for a gift or just gratefully accept it?” God has offered us the free gift of salvation. It is the greatest gift you can ever possess. Yet for many they believe they have to work for it or earn it. Therein lies the problem in understanding grace. The Word of God clearly emphasizes that this is freely given and never once deserved. People often ask me, “How are you doing?” My answer is “Better than I deserve!” People look at me like I'd lost it! Oh, it can't be that bad. We live so entitled as if God owes us something, but He doesn't. Every day thank God for His abundant favor which we will never deserve but which He has

freely given to us! Hallelujah! In the Old Testament there is a word called “hesed” which is translated in many ways such as loyal love, lovingkindness, mercy and other words. Michael Card defines it this way: Hesed is when someone to whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything!” How about that? He nailed it! Spot on!!

Why do we need such a gift? That's easy to answer. Without grace we could never make it on our own. We are part of the problem and in need of a Savior who came to save us. Too many people believe they are still good enough to get to heaven on their own. The problem with that is they have the wrong standard and wrong Savior. The standard is God's holiness and His perfection! Or there are those who believe that the combination of their good works and what Christ did for them will get them there. I call that “Jesus Plus” vs “Jesus Only”.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says it so plain and clear,

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

The word “saved” means to be saved from the penalty of our sins. God no longer holds our sin against us to keep us out of heaven because Jesus took our sins upon himself at the cross. How refreshing that truth is that needs to be warmly and fully embraced!

The truth is that we could never be good enough to go to heaven. That is a hard pill for many to swallow. Our pride and ego get in the way. Once again, the standard of going to heaven is not you or me or our neighbor but the holiness of God. That's a different ball game but nevertheless true. One day Jesus made the statement to his disciples,

*“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Now it would help to understand these religious leaders took the ten commandments and turned them into 613 commandments! What an incredible burden that must have been on people's lives. Jesus stuns them to get the point across that we can never keep the law. The bar is too high!

In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us,

*“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Romans 3:21-22*

That's good news.

Why is righteousness apart from the law? Great question! Ever got a bad report card or a scathing review? We all have! This is especially true if you understand the purpose of the law. The law can only condemn us! We are all depraved. Our hearts are idol factories. The law made us prisoners of guilt! If that's the case – where do we get help? The law just condemns us. Now there is nothing wrong with the law. It represents God's holy standard – the problem is we can't keep it! The good thing is that the law points us to Christ who alone can help us meet the standard! The law is like a thermometer. It can only tell us if we have a fever. It signals that we need help to bring that fever down. The law points us to Christ who alone can handle our sin problem and does He ever! The cost of our sin is more than we could ever pay. The good news is: He paid our sin debt in full!

Grace is the inexhaustible supply of God's goodness whereby He does for us what we could never do for ourselves. It is His gift to us. Grace is a gift! You deserve a paycheck. You don't deserve a gift! Grace is God's blessing to us that we do not deserve! Grace is God doing His best for those who deserve His worst.

John Stott said it so well, No other system, ideology or religion preaches a free forgiveness and a new life to those who have done nothing to deserve it but deserve judgment instead.

When you understand that grace is an undeserved gift it will fuel your praise and worship to a new level. Why is that? It is because a proper understanding of Grace will give you a greater appreciation of all of God's gifts to you. Grace is the ultimate gift. Grace means that God didn't have to do one thing for you, but he did it anyway. If you think for one moment that God owes you something or that you deserve something from God, then you don't understand what grace is all about! It will always give you a reason to step up to the plate of worship and give your heart away because that's what Jesus did for you. So, to understand the reality of God's grace we must understand the reality of our own sinfulness. What he did for us should cause us to praise God continually. As I close this Vista let me say that the concept of Grace is so immense that it will not only whet your appetite but take you on a journey that will never end. Grace will never be fully understood because grace is inexhaustible. But the unique characteristic is the more it is used the more it increases. You don't capture grace, it captures you. I encourage you as we go on this journey together that you embrace grace and let it change your life not only for the here and now but for all eternity.

## Vista #4

### Grace is Found in a Person

Jesus was the embodiment of grace. If you were to X ray the heart of God and cut it open God's grace would freely flow out. And so, the story begins....

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.... Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:14,16-17*

Jesus is called the Word which was with God and was God. The Greek word is logos which represented the reasoning or purpose behind the universe. To grasp the logos was to grasp what life is all about – what it was meant to be. Jesus is that logos!

Words communicate. So, Jesus as the Word communicated God to us in clear, down-to-earth ways for us to grasp. I am so grateful for that truth. God the Son became the God-Man when he was born and lived among us. Without grace there would be no Christmas! He came to offer us unending grace. Note that Jesus was full of grace and truth. That can be said of no other person who has ever roamed this planet! He came to offer something better and greater than the law could ever offer but only affirmed our guilt. Jesus made a phenomenal statement to his disciples on the night when he was betrayed.

*“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6*

He made this statement after announcing to his disciples that one would betray him, another would deny him and that he was leaving. Wow, did that ever shake up his team that dark night at Passover. That might also have left them wondering if they had followed the wrong leader for the past three plus years when in the next few hours they would soon see what was going to happen to him. Many attack this statement calling it exclusive and narrow minded. On the other hand, his death would be the only way men could be forgiven and go to heaven. Human effort would never be good enough. So, when you think about it – while Jesus is the only way, it is a gift he would offer to anyone who would place their trust in him and his offer of heaven. I'd say that is pretty fair offer! That is a loving offer! That is a gracious offer! No other religion makes such an incredible offer! Rather than being narrow-minded it is broadminded with a free offer of eternal life in the Father's house forever! No human being has ever been offered a greater gift – than the gift of Grace!

As I said before Grace in my estimation is the Magnum Opus. No other belief system teaches the concept of a God who takes the initiative with undeserved favor toward sinners.

Let me share one final verse before going on to our next Vista. This truth is full of amazing grace.

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9*

The word for “poverty” implies one who is destitute. Jesus left the glories

of heaven for the gloom of a rebellious earth full of rebels like you and me. He came as the God-Man and needed a body so he could be crucified – nailed to a cross. Crucifixion has been called a thousand deaths in one! We get the word excruciating which was Latin for “out of the cross” and we add pain to that word. Excruciating pain. I cannot fathom that the Creator of the universe would choose to suffer more than any of His creation, can you? Yet He did and that is called Grace! I think Grace gives us a greater appreciation for the cross of Christ. The longer you are a Christian if you're not careful the cross can become tame. We get used to it. We take it for granted. But Grace throws a spotlight on the cross of Christ. It humbles us knowing we didn't deserve what Christ did for us. I love John Stott's statement, “Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we must see it as something done by us.”

## Vista #5

### Grace is the Greatest Motivation of Life

Grace helps us to understand in a fresh way how God wants us to live. How is that? It will make the emphasis of your life what God has done for you, not what you can do for God. As that happens you will find yourself being less judgmental and much more thankful! We will focus more on internals than externals. We will serve Him not to obtain favor but because we already have obtained favor with Him. Our daily works of service will be nothing more and nothing less than a thank you note to God for his abundant grace in your life. When that happens you and I can expect to take a giant step toward maturity. To become Christlike, we need to be full of grace like Jesus was. In fact, that becomes the motivating factor in a Christian's life. Here's how:

Paul put it this way when he wrote to Titus,

*“For the grace of God that brings **salvation** has appeared to all men.” Titus 2:11*

Note two great truths: **First, Grace brings salvation.** The word “appeared” refers to Christ's first coming. That's the Christmas story when Jesus came to be our Savior. He made His entrance first in Bethlehem. God's grace was wrapped up in a person! If Christ lives in your life, you

have access to all the grace you will ever need! When Jesus was born, grace appeared and everything changed!

What an Ah Ha Moment this was! The word “appeared” – is the word Epiphany. It is actually the first word in the Greek text. It is an emphatic statement. This word was used by the Greeks to describe the sun's light bursting through the heavens onto a darkened earth. God's grace made an epiphany upon our planet! It burst on the scene of our moral darkness. It was the ultimate Sunburst or should I say Sonburst!

This grace and salvation came in a person. That's why Christ is called our Savior. He came to save us from the penalty of our sin. But it doesn't end there.

**Secondly, Grace teaches us how to live.** It is the greatest motivation. Grace changes us. Listen to what comes next,

*“It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self controlled upright and godly lives in this present age”.*  
*Titus 2:12*

Grace does not leave us as we are. God's grace always wants to take us where He wants us to be. That can be annoying to others. Grace makes us different. It doesn't just keep us out of hell but prepares us for heaven. Grace is not just about the past or future but for right now. Grace should be our greatest motivation in life! We now serve Him not to obtain favor but because we already have it. The great thing about grace is we don't have to do something to get it. We already have it. Having it is what motivates us. Let grace motivate you! God's Grace is life changing!

“I do not at all understand the mystery of grace – only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us.” Anne Lamont

People miss heaven, not because of shortage of God's grace, but because of the rejection of His abundant grace! Transforming Grace keeps us alive every day! It gives us fuel for the rest of the trip! Basically, it teaches us to say No to a world system that wants you to be #1 and say Yes to Christ and make him #1!

I love the words of Elizabeth Elliot, “To pray that Thy will be done I must be willing if the answer requires it, that my will be undone.” Understanding God's grace can make that happen for you. Grace makes the emphasis of life not what we can do for God, but what God has done for us! On to our next Vista!

## Vista #6

### Grace is the Offer of God to Help You Through Adversity

Without God's grace you and I have no hope in our suffering. Every shade of human need has a matching side of God's grace. The Apostle Paul had the great experience of visiting heaven either by vision or in person. To keep him firmly planted on earth he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. We're not told what this thorn was, but it just wouldn't go away no matter how hard Paul prayed. God's wonderful answer was:

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.  
2 Corinthians 12:9*

God's grace would be more than enough to deal with his lifelong adversity. God's grace can transform the unpleasantness of suffering into the pleasantness of knowing Christ's power – experiencing His mighty rippling muscles. In other words, God would not remove the thorn but would increase the strength to deal with it in victory. God would give sufficient divine resources so Paul could grow though his suffering. That's what grace does! It is always more than enough. God will set a table of grace before us and make sure our cup overflows every day. The hope of sufficient grace is that someday His favor will turn our trials into medals of honor! Oh what a day that will be! Can't wait! In the meantime, embrace the hope that grace will carry you through whatever comes your way! Because of Grace God will never waste a hurt!

We come to the final Vista of Grace, and it is quite a view. Take it in with a deep breath.

## **Vista #7**

### **Grace Guarantees Us Heaven Where We Will be Cared for Forever.**

As we have seen Grace clearly demonstrates God's operating principle.

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:4-5*

Grace is unmerited favor extended to us on the basis of Christ's work on the cross! It is God's only way to get us to heaven! God saves lost men and women on the grace principle. Our eternal destiny depends on our understanding of this great truth. For some this seems too easy. Those who feel that way don't realize how bad off we are! The word for sin means "to miss the mark". Let me give you an example that really helped me. Let's go outside and pick up a rock. Got it? Good! Now hit Ocean City, New Jersey. What are you waiting for? You already know you can't even come close. That's true of our sin. We cannot begin to come close to the standard God has set for us. Who are we kidding? That's how bad off we are. We were in dire straits! While trusting Christ to save us may seem too easy — think of what it cost our Savior! Grace is God's one and only offer to get us to heaven and you can see why!

The Scriptures tell us that we need to grow in Grace. The Apostle Peter mentioned this when he said

*"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." 2 Peter 3:18.*

The Apostle John closes out the Great Book of Revelation with these words,

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." Revelation 22:21.*

That is God's final word to us! I'd say that's pretty important and why we should embrace grace on a daily basis for the rest of our lives and eternity!

Christianity is the only faith system that promises heaven up front! Heaven has been described as an everlasting Easter and a million Christmases all in one! That's quite a grace picture and one you will be able to enjoy when you embrace the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did for you on the cross by dying in your place, taking the wrath you and I deserved and offering to forgive us and give us the gift of eternal life.

Max Lucado wrote about Grace:

- *Ponder the achievement of God.*
- *He doesn't condone our sin, nor does He compromise his standard.*
- *He doesn't ignore our rebellion; nor does he relax his demands.*
- *Rather than dismiss our sin, he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself.*
- *God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished and we are redeemed.*
- *God does what we cannot do so we can be what we dare not dream before God.*

Let me give you a grace acrostic to ponder and remember.

**G**—God's gift to you

**R**—Received by faith

**A**—Available for all

**C**—Comes through Christ

**E**—Extends for all eternity

So, the question to ask as we close is, “Have I been saved by grace?” Your answer will determine your destiny and where you will spend eternity. I'd say that is pretty important. All God asks is that we humble ourselves and acknowledge our sinfulness and that we cannot save ourselves. In turn we trust Christ to save us by his death on the cross, give us the gift of eternal life and place us in His forever family. That's what it means to be saved....saved from the penalty of our sins. Oh, what a relief that is! Do me a favor—Embrace Grace today!



# Christ's Home

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