

Key Scripture:

Ephesians 2:1–10 (NLT)

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. 2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. 3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.

4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. 7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- What does it mean to be a religious person? Would you consider yourself religious?

Start **sharing**. These questions are to help get your group thinking and to create openness.

- What does it mean to be spiritually alive? Would you consider yourself to be spiritually alive? What’s the difference between being religious and spiritually alive?
- **Read Ephesians 2:1-3.** Do you find Paul’s statement to be offensive? Do you agree that before Christ we were spiritually dead?
- Verse 3 teaches that we used to live for the cravings of our flesh. As Christians we still sin, but what’s the difference now?
- The end of verse 3 says we were deserving of wrath. Do you believe that your sin deserved punishment? What is God’s wrath?
- What if God didn’t punish sin, what would the world look like? For context: What would your home look like if your kids were never punished for their sins?
- **Read Ephesians 2:4-7.** Why did God save us and give us eternal life?
- Dead people don’t choose. How did God take you from death to life? What does it mean that we’re seated with Christ in the heavenly realms?
- **Read Ephesians 2:8-10.** Will anyone in heaven be able to say, “I’m here because I was a good person?” What does the phrase “saved by faith and not by works” mean?
- What were we saved to do? Are you doing what God saved you to do?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Share the Ephesians 2:8-9 message of hope with at least one person this week: salvation by grace through faith, not by works.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Praise God for His righteousness and mercy. Be thankful that you don’t have to try to earn salvation, that He has graciously given this to us through Christ Jesus.

Question: "What does it mean that salvation is by grace through faith?"

Answer: Salvation by grace through faith is at the heart of the Christian religion. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). The statement has three parts—salvation, grace, and faith—and they are equally important. The three together constitute a basic tenet of Christianity.

The word *salvation* is defined as "the act of being delivered, redeemed, or rescued." The Bible tells us that, since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, each person is born in sin inherited from Adam: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Sin is what causes all of us to die. Sin separates us from God, and sin destines each person to eternal separation from Him in hell. What each of us needs is to be delivered from that fate. In other words, we need salvation from sin and its penalty.

How are we saved from sin? Most religions throughout history have taught that salvation is achieved by good works. Others teach that acts of contrition (saying we are sorry) along with living a moral life is the way to atone for our sin. Sorrow over sin is certainly valuable and necessary, but that alone will not save us from sin. We may repent of our sins, also valuable and necessary, and determine to never sin again, but salvation is not the result of good intentions. The road to hell, as the saying goes, is paved with good intentions. We may fill our lives with good works, but even one sin makes us a sinner in practice, and we are already sinners by nature. No matter how well-intentioned or "good" we may be, the fact is that we simply do not have the power or the goodness to overcome the sin nature we have inherited from Adam. We need something more powerful, and this is where grace comes in.

The grace of God is His undeserved favor bestowed on those He has called to salvation through His love (Ephesians 2:4–5). It is His grace that saves us from sin. We are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). Being justified, we are vindicated and determined to be sinless in the eyes of God. Our sin no longer separates us from Him and no longer sentences us to hell. Grace is not earned by any effort on our part; otherwise, it could not be called grace. Grace is free. If our good works earned salvation, then God would be obligated to pay us our due. But no one can earn heaven, and God's blessings are not His obligation; they flow from His goodness and love. No matter how diligently we pursue works to earn God's favor, we will fail. Our sin trips us up every time. "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20, NKJV).

The means God has chosen to bestow His grace upon us is through faith. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Salvation is obtained by faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, in what He has done—specifically, His death on the cross and His resurrection. But even faith is not something we generate on our own. Faith, as well as grace, is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). He bestows saving faith and saving grace upon us in order to redeem us from sin and deliver us from its consequences. So God saves us by His grace through the faith He gives us. Both grace and faith are gifts. "Salvation belongs to the LORD" (Psalm 3:8, ESV).

By grace, we receive the faith that enables us to believe that He has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and provide the salvation we cannot achieve on our own. Jesus, as God in flesh, is the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Just like the author of a book creates it from scratch, Jesus Christ wrote the story of our redemption from beginning to end. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves" (Ephesians 1:4–6). The Lord died for our sins and rose for our justification, and He forgives, freely and fully, those who accept His gift of grace in Christ—and that acceptance comes through faith. This is the meaning of salvation by grace through faith.