



MORNING SCHEDULE

10am Breakfast & Connect

10:30am BiOY Devotional

Open with prayer, invite people to take turns reading sections, discuss “take aways,” close this segment in prayer

11am - 12pm “What’s Your Story?”

Facilitate using the 5 Conversation questions (pg. 6) / Wrap Up / Prayer

DEVOTIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

As you read (and/or listen to the audio of) the devotional and scriptures below, do so through the lens of our “What’s Your Story?” theme, pay attention to any key verses, phrases, or thoughts that jump out to you, so that you can share them during the brief “take aways” discussion at the end.

**THE
BIBLE**
WITH NICKY AND PIPPA GUMBEL

Day 200

Just Grace

<https://bible.alpha.org>

Express Version

Scripture Readings

Wisdom	Proverbs 17:15–24
New Testament	Romans 5:17–21
Old Testament	Amos 8:4–11; 9:8–14

Introduction

It has been said that the biggest problem on earth is not too little democracy, or too much poverty, or too few anti-viral vaccines, but the fact that two-thirds of the world’s population live outside the protection of the law. A lack of justice has a terrible effect on many of the world’s poor.

The themes of justice and grace flow through the Bible. We cannot fully understand grace without understanding justice. One definition of grace is ‘undeserved love’. There is a mnemonic used to explain grace: **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**. We see today how Jesus Christ makes just grace available for you and me.

Wisdom

Proverbs 17:15–24

15 Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – the LORD detests them both.

17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. 22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. 23 The wicked accept bribes in secret to pervert

the course of justice. 24 A discerning person keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth.

Commentary The vital importance of justice

In numerous countries of the world, the guilty get away and often the prisons are full of innocent people, many of whom have never even been tried or convicted. 'Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – the LORD detests them both' (v.15). Both are terrible forms of injustice. They are detestable to God and have a damaging impact on society.

A great deal of the problem is caused by bribery. 'The wicked accept bribes in secret to pervert the course of justice' (v.23). One lawyer in a developing country told me that if you want a case to get to court faster than the usual approximately ten-year delay, you have to 'oil the wheels'; a euphemism for bribery.

The struggle for justice is a serious responsibility. It requires hard work and could easily lead to burnout. The book of Proverbs is full of balanced wisdom.

It reminds us of the need for family and friends: 'Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble' (v.17, MSG). Do all you can to avoid petty arguments. 'The one who loves a quarrel loves sin' (v.19). Unnecessary quarrelling can separate families and even close friends.

As well as family and friends, fun is important: 'A cheerful disposition is good for your health; gloom and doom leave you bone-tired' (v.22, MSG). Don't take yourself too seriously. We need to laugh at ourselves. Laughter is like an internal workout. It exercises your soul and keeps it healthy.

Prayer

Lord, show us what you want us to do as individuals and as a church to make justice available to all. Help us to keep balance in our lives, taking our responsibilities seriously and still finding a place for family, friends and fun.

New Testament

Romans 5:17–21

17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commentary The abundant provision of grace

How do you see yourself? What do you believe about yourself? How do you think God sees you? What do you imagine he feels about you?

Grace means God sees us as righteous – ‘in the right’ (v.19, MSG). Righteousness is a free gift that comes from God’s grace. Our sin ‘doesn’t have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. When it’s sin versus grace, grace wins hands down’ (vv.20–21, MSG). Paul begins to unfold more of the wonders of grace. He portrays two realms – Adam’s realm and Christ’s realm.

Naturally, he says we are all part of Adam’s realm. Sin, death and separation from God entered the world through Adam (vv.12–14).

Yet Paul also describes a new realm that Jesus has brought into being through his death and resurrection. The amazing thing is that you are transferred from Adam’s realm to Jesus’ realm, not by earning your way into God’s good books, but simply by accepting the gift of God’s grace made available through Jesus.

Paul starts to compare the death that came through Adam with the life that came through Jesus Christ, but his key point is that ‘the gift is not like the trespass’ (v.15). Ultimately, they can only be contrasted because the gift of life is so much greater than the trespass.

The only similarity is that both affected many. Your choices to obey or not to obey not only affect you, but many others as well. As a result of Adam’s sin, many died. But Jesus’ obedience enabled many to have access to the grace in which you stand and to receive the free gift of justification. And the free gift is not like the sin. ‘The verdict on that one sin was the death sentence; the verdict on the many sins that followed was this wonderful life sentence**’ (v.16, MSG).

As a result of Adam’s sin, death reigned. But the one man, Jesus Christ, has reversed the process to bring justification as a free gift and enable you to stand in the grace of God. Instead of death reigning, you ‘reign in life’ (v.17).

Adam’s sin means that we all stand in the dock condemned. Jesus’ act of righteousness on the cross makes it possible for God to count you righteous also and to give you life. Jesus’ righteousness leads to your righteousness. ‘More than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one man said yes to God and put many in the right**’ (v.19, MSG).

Jesus, through his death on the cross, has made God’s grace and his gift possible (v.15). The result of our sin is judgment and condemnation (v.16). If we relied on justice and justice alone, that is what we would receive. But since Jesus died in your place you can receive the gift of justification.

God can be just and still acquit you. There is just grace. Jesus made possible God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness (v.17). You receive justification that brings life (v.18). You are 'made righteous' (v.19). You receive eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (v.21).

All this is by grace (vv.15,17,20–21). Allow these truths to sink deep into your heart. See yourself as God sees you – as righteous in his sight – and believe that, because of what Jesus has done for you, when God looks at you he is pleased with you.

Prayer

Lord, thank you so much for the death of Jesus on my behalf. Thank you that although I deserve judgment and condemnation, you have made it possible for me to be justified and to receive the righteousness from God by grace as a gift.

Old Testament

Amos 8:4–11; 9:8–14

4 Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, 5 saying, 'When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?'— skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, 6 buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

11 'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'when I will send a famine through the land – not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.

CH. 9 8 'Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth. Yet I will not totally destroy the descendants of Jacob,' declares the LORD.

9 'For I will give the command, and I will shake the people of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground 11 'In that day 'I will restore David's fallen shelter – I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins – and will rebuild it as it used to be...

14 and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. 'They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit.

Commentary The God of justice and grace

Amos again speaks out against injustice: 'Listen to this, you who walk all over the weak, you who treat poor people as less than nothing, Who say, "When's my next paycheck coming so I can go out and live it up? How long till the weekend when I can go out and have a good time?" Who give little and take much, and never do an honest day's work. You exploit the poor, using them – and then, when they're used up, you discard them' (8:4–6, MSG).

The condition of the people was not unlike the condition of the people that we see in our society today. People are dying of spiritual hunger. There is 'a famine of hearing the words of the LORD' (v.11).

People are searching – some try drugs, excess alcohol, promiscuous sex, or unrestrained wealth. All this is an attempt to satisfy that deep hunger, but they do not find spiritual food (v.12).

The intention of the covenant law was to protect the disadvantaged. But, as is often the case today, the poor were not receiving justice. They were being trampled upon. They were being cheated. The Lord hates dishonesty because he loves us and he loves the poor. Injustice and dishonesty were at the heart of Israel's sins. As a result of all this Amos says, 'Judgment Day is coming!' (v.11, MSG). Israel will be driven into exile (9:1–10).

Yet, the book of Amos does not end on this note. It ends with the promise of restoration: 'I will restore David's house that has fallen to pieces... Everything will be happening at once – and everywhere you look, blessings! Blessings like wine pouring off the mountains and hills. I'll make everything right again for my people Israel:

They'll rebuild their ruined cities.

They'll plant vineyards and drink good wine.

They'll work their gardens and eat fresh vegetables.

And I'll plant them, plant them on their own land.

They'll never again be uprooted from the land I've given them' (vv.11–15, MSG).

The ultimate future of God's people is beyond your wildest dreams. Even sin and injustice cannot ultimately derail God's plans of blessing. It is the same dynamic as we saw in our New Testament passage. God's grace and mercy far outweigh our sins. Jesus ultimately makes it possible for both justice and forgiveness to go hand in hand.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, that you are a God of justice and of grace. Thank you that through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit we see an in-breaking of that future now. May justice triumph. May the new wine of your Holy Spirit and a great outpouring of grace drip from the mountains.

Pippa adds

Romans 5:20 says, 'Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.'

In The Message translation it says, 'but sin didn't, and doesn't have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace.'

I think that is why in prisons we often find so much faith and love, and transformed lives. The darker it is, the brighter the light shines.

Thought for the Day

Don't take yourself too seriously. Laughter is like an internal workout. It exercises your soul and keeps it healthy.



Summer House Church Gatherings

What's Your Story?

PRE-HOUSE CHURCH ASSIGNMENT

Take a few minutes sometime before House Church Sunday to read, reflect, and write down your answers to the “What’s Your Story?” questions below. Thinking through these questions beforehand will greatly enhance our time together. *NOTE: Our goal is to get to know each other a little better, but we also want everyone to feel comfortable. So, feel free to share your answers at your level of comfort or not at all.*

Introductions (if necessary)

Have everyone share their name, family, and where they live.

What's Your Story?

INSTRUCTIONS: If there’s not enough time for everyone to share, here are some ideas. Hopefully, most everyone was able to answer Q 1-3 at the last gathering on June 14. If not, feel free to do some quick catch up with anyone who was not able to be there. Then today, you can focus Q 4-5. *NOTE: It will help the conversation if, when sharing, everyone can try to be brief (see the share times suggested with each question).*

1. **BIRTHPLACE:** Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What brought you to Atlanta? (Sharing time: 1 minute)
2. **WORK / FUN:** What do you do for work? What do you do for fun? (Sharing time: 1 minute)
3. **GOOD NEWS CHURCH:** How did you find Good News Church GA? What do you like about it? (Sharing time: 1-2 minutes)
4. **UPBRINGING:** Did you grow up in church? Did your religious upbringing draw you to faith or repel you from it? (Sharing time: 2-3 minute)
5. **FAITH EXPERIENCE:** Where there any significant events, life experiences, or turning point moments that were instrumental in drawing you to faith and/or bringing you closer to Jesus (and into church)? (Sharing time: 3-5 minute)