



Paul wrote to his faithful friend Timothy that he was thankful God had shown him grace even though he was once a “blasphemer, persecutor and violent man.” Paul went on to say that Christ poured out his mercy on him, “the worst of sinners,” to “display his unlimited patience.” God does not ask us to believe in Him first to receive grace. He pours it out for us before we even turn towards Him. This is our example of how to treat each other. In the church, our homes and our communities, we should provide grace to those who ask for it and those who do not.

*Is there anyone in your life who needs you to offer them grace? How can you go about doing this?*

*Do you first need to offer yourself grace? If Jesus can love Paul, the worst of sinners, He can surely love you too.*

## GPS for Families

*GrowPrayStudy.org/family*

Get out a family photo album from recent history or even from your childhood. Spend some time looking through the pictures with your children. As you browse, be sure to point out not only the happy times but also a few behind the scenes difficulties. (Maybe the struggle to get everyone to sit still for a pic or the argument you all had about whether or not to go to that particular spot. Perhaps little Johnny refused to put on his “nice” shirt for the portrait.) The idea is to demonstrate that although the pictures may look happy and fun, there were not-so-happy things that lead up to that time.

Ask: Do you ever see pictures in magazines or on commercials or even of your friends’ families that make you think, “They look so perfect,” or “I wish our family was more like theirs.” Say: I know I do. Sometimes I think everyone else’s family seems more “perfect” than ours. But I have to remind myself that just like our pictures, there is always more behind the scenes. No family or person is perfect. And God is not holding up a perfect picture telling us to be like that. He just wants us to be our best selves and tell others about Him. And when we are less than perfect, He wants us to rely on Him for strength, wisdom and courage. God loves us just like we are, no matter how imperfect!

MESSAGE “Picture Perfect”  
SCRIPTURE Philippians 2:1-5

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**“ . . . for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13)**

Joining me in the message today is Tina Schramme, our Director of Children’s and Family Ministries, and Johnny Brower, our Director of Student Ministries. Both lead two of the most successful programs in the Methodist church and are looked to for leadership in and beyond our own church. Tina has led for more than 10 years, and Johnny has been on Student Ministry staff for seven years and has been lead director for two. Tina has a Masters degree in Child Development, and Johnny is getting his degree at Texas Wesleyan and will soon be attending seminary. Both are pursuing ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church.

1. Get on the same boat together:  
Same mind, same love, united, same purpose. (Philippians 2:2)
2. Humility is an open heart that allows God to be involved:  
Lay aside selfishness and walk in humility, looking out for others’ interests.  
(Philippians 2:3)
3. We don’t have to be perfect, but we need to get an attitude:  
Have the same attitude that was in Jesus. (Philippians 2:5)
4. God is at work in you, your family and your church. (Philippians 2:13)

### PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

*Creator God, thank you for the gift of my life and for creating in me the need to live in relationship with others. Lord, I know my own imperfections and the dysfunction that is sometimes present in my relationships, but I celebrate the work you are doing in my life. Enable me, Lord, with the help of your grace, to be a blessing to my family. Amen.*

Did you know that the average church has 40 hours a year to influence a single life while the average parent has 3,000 hours of influence? Isn't that crazy? As a parent, you have much more influence over your child than you may think. Your kids are watching you, mimicking you and learning from you. The spiritual, family and societal values that you share with your children are picked up and later used as the foundation for forming their own values.

Kids need parents who will be intentional about spending quality time together and active in the spiritual development of their kids!

*What are some of the values that were passed down from your family to you?*

*What are the most important values you want to instill in your children?*

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Life moves so fast — especially when it comes to kids! One day it seems like they need you every second, and in the next moment, they don't want you around at all. In Luke 2, we find a similar scenario. Jesus is growing up and expressing his independence. Joseph and Mary anxiously look for him. When they finally find him, Jesus says, "What's the big deal, guys? Didn't you know I'd be here?" (v. 48, 49)

Do you remember what it was like to be a teenager and struggling for your own independence? As the chapter concludes (v. 51, 52), we should take note that even though Jesus, in some ways, was ready to be independent, he still needed his mom and dad. He continued to "grow in wisdom and stature" because of the love of his parents.

*How can we continue to impart wisdom and influence to our kids — even as they learn to exercise independence?*

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In chapter 12 of his letter to the Romans, Paul begins to talk about the practical application of all he has said in the previous 11 chapters. We're beginning to see what following Jesus in every area of our lives actually looks like.

These principles are building blocks for a healthy family life. Too often we are willing to "take the gloves off" after we get home, when home should be the place where grace and forgiveness are practiced the most!

*How do the principles in the reading apply to your particular family context?*

*As children get older, they begin to view family as something that happens to them instead of something with which they can participate. Can this passage be helpful in encouraging children to be a part (not apart) of the family?*

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We not only carry picture perfect ideas for our families, but also for ourselves. And when we do not meet that picture, we have a hard time accepting God's grace. We feel unworthy. But God wants desperately to use you, weaknesses and all, to tell his story of love and restoration. In this passage, God says his "power is made perfect in weakness." You only have to admit your weakness or problem or mistake. Ask Him for his strength, then accept it fully. Let your heart fill with His grace so that like Paul, you can "delight in difficulties."

*Paul boasted about his weakness. Can you begin to admit your weakness to someone you trust?*

*Can you learn to change the picture in your head? Instead of a perfect picture, put a picture of Christ with open arms, always there to give you strength.*

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