James 1:17 (NIV)
Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

God has revealed grace in many different ways. Use the questions below to develop a deeper grasp of the grace of God.

What are some ways God shows grace that everyone in the world benefits from, whether they realize it or not?
- The very fact that the world and life exists.
- The fact that he restrains our sin nature so that we have not destroyed the world.
- Rain for crops
- Balance of nature
- That you woke up today
- Etc.

What are some ways in which God shows grace even when we are opposed to him and his purposes?
- God revealed himself in human form so that we might understand the life he created us to live.
- Christ died for us while we were still his enemies.
- God still sustains lives opposed to him.
- God does not bring judgement immediately, but leaves time for people to repent and turn back to him.
- Etc.

What are some ways God makes grace available to us, but we must actively receive it?
- Salvation must be received by faith
- The fruits of the Spirit are realized as we surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit.
- Spiritual gifts are given to us, but the benefit are only experienced as we step out in faith and use them.
- Fruit bearing and effective ministry is a natural outflow as we abide with Christ and allow him to live through us.
- Etc.
Luke 7:34 (NIV)
The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”’

The term “friend of sinners” was obviously meant as an insult. Jesus most likely took it as a compliment. In what ways was Jesus’ behaviour unexpected and yet a powerful display of grace? Jesus chose to associate with those who were known to defy God’s law. Not only did he associate with them, he called them friends. Keep in mind, this is God in the flesh, holy in every way, and these people are living contrary to his values and character.

Jesus is blessing these people with the opportunity to truly see the character of God in contrast to what had been displayed to them through the religious rulers. He is revealing the love and grace of God in such a way that many of them are willing to leave their sinful life and embrace a righteous life with him as their lord and saviour.

Only through the grace of Jesus were these men able to see clearly the life that God desired for them.

How might things have gone differently if Jesus simply focused on condemning them the same way the Pharisees did?

In what ways does God desire us to show this same grace to others?

27 "But I tell you who hear me:
Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
28 bless those who curse you,
pray for those who mistreat you.
29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.
If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.
30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.
31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Why do we find showing this type of grace so challenging?
Do you sometimes find showing grace to those close to you even more challenging (family members, other church members, co-workers, etc)? Why is this often the case?

In what ways might our feelings be the biggest barrier to showing grace?
If we believe we are being shown love, we often feel love. If we believe we are being mistreated, we often feel resentment. Our feelings either drop barriers or raise them in relationships. If our feelings tell us to put up our defences, we instinctively do what we think we need to do to survive or protect ourselves from harm.

Grace tells us to ignore self-protection and do what is best for the other person. In this way, grace and feelings are often at odds.

Do you sometimes find you have a “grace limit”? In other words, you can show grace to a certain extent, but after that you start resenting the person? Without naming people, can you share an experience?

What determines when we should show grace to another person?
We show grace when revealing God’s love will be more beneficial for the person than justice. This is how God shows grace to us; he withholds condemnation and gives us his love instead. He does this to draw us back to a deeper relationship with him.

What determines if we should limit the amount of grace that we show?
We show grace when we believe it will benefit the other person and give them greater joy and freedom in their life. Sometimes however, our acts of “kindness” may actually encourage negative behaviour and the person will ultimately be worse off. In such cases we become “enablers” instead of helpers.

In such cases, if the person is not helped or encouraged toward righteousness – it is not really love we are giving them. Love always seeks what is BEST for the other person.

Can you think of some examples where tough love is the best kind of grace we can show?

For most of us, most of the time, this is not our major problem. Our greater problem rests in being impatient with people and not looking out for their best interests. How can we start to shift our lives so that they more accurately represent the grace of God?
Ephesians 2:11-13 (NIV)
11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

How might remembering what Christ has done for us affect how we relate to others this week?

Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV)
5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

What does it mean for our conversation to be full of grace or seasoned with salt?

How might you remember to talk in such a way this week?

The New Testament is full of “one another” passages. Hopefully if we can learn to apply these principles within the family of God, we will become a brighter light to the world around us.

Quietly read through the “one another” passages below and check the ones where you find it hard to show grace. Share your responses and reasons with the group.

- Romans 12:10 (NIV)
  Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

- Romans 12:16 (NIV)
  Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

- Romans 14:13 (NIV)
  Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.

- Romans 15:7 (NIV)
  Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

- Romans 15:14 (NIV)
  I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.
1 Corinthians 1:10 (NIV)
I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Galatians 5:13 (NIV)
You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)
Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 5:21 (NIV)
Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Colossians 3:12-14 (NIV)
Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:16 (NIV)
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)
Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)
And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

James 4:11 (NIV)
Brothers, do not slander one another.

1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)
Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 Peter 4:9 (NIV)
Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Which display of grace (from the verses above) will you consciously try to show this week? Share how you might try to do that.
Paul's life was centered on showing grace to those who were far from Christ. Read his perspective of his experience.

2 Corinthians 4:7-18 (NIV)
7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.
13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.
16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

What inspires you most about Paul’s perspective?

What passion is driving Paul that he would be willing to go through such things?

What would you like to emulate?

Wouldn’t it be great if our church was known for its grace?