



40
DAYS
of
GRACE

GRACE HAPPENS

WHEN ORDINARY STORIES
BECOME EXTRAORDINARY

STUDY GUIDE

RICK LONG



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GRACE HAPPENS

INTRODUCTION

This may sound like an unbelievably elementary discovery, but over the years I've found that many people never become the person God actually created them to be. There are one million different reasons why, but they can all be traced back to one major issue: they have failed to see that *Grace Happens*. God's grace is instantaneous and constant. God's grace carries every person through life's changes whether they are a believer or not. Without God's grace, we would not have air in our lungs and our heart would stop beating.

This series is for everyone. During the sessions, you'll hear some incredible stories of many people whose lives have been transformed by the grace of God. Stories that include subjects like suicide, divorce, loss of a child, loss of a job, sickness, and broken relationships. You'll learn about the countless failures and mistakes I made along the way, as well as a few things I managed to get right. You will see how God's grace can take an average "Joe"(or Rick in my case), and use any one of them to make a difference in the world.

Your small group presents a unique opportunity. Whether you are a stay at home parent, business executive, doctor, janitor, truck driver, pastor, missionary, or a student with no idea where you're going in life, these sessions will help you move towards answering the most important questions in life: Why are you on this earth? Does God really exist and does he truly have a plan for your life? And the most important question you'll answer this side of eternity, "Can I know for sure, beyond a shadow of a doubt that I will go to heaven when I die?"

My hope is that this series will encourage your spiritual maturity and prepare you for life's challenges, victories and defeats. Besides the weekly sessions, you will also find daily Scriptures to guide you, and questions for reflection.

I believe there is nothing greater than the fact that Grace happens, especially as it manifests itself in so many different aspects of our life. I have distinguished between six categories of grace, which are purely based on my own experience. There are probably many others. We start with **Simple Grace**, which is the amazing grace of God that

brings us to salvation. **Constant Grace** is the undercurrent of God's grace that motivates and sustains us on a daily basis. When we suffer pain and loss, **Comforting Grace** gives us hope even in the face of life's storms. **Fearless Grace** stands by our side as we face the many challenges the world places before us, and helps us live a victorious life. **Selfless Grace** demonstrates how we are to care for the people around us, and is a key step toward living a fulfilled life. We'll close with **Daring Grace**, which inspires unexpected boldness to change the world, starting with the person right in front of you.

The word "Happens" has been preceded by many different nouns and pronouns: life happens, poop happens, pain happens, joy happens. But I firmly believe there is only one word which truly can be used





with this phrase—*Grace Happens*. Because the only constant in the universe is God's grace.

As I move into my fourth decade in ministry as a pastor, I have discovered how little I actually understand God's grace, and how much more of it I actually need. My prayer is that over the course of these sessions you will find a greater understanding of God's grace in your life, and discover how his grace can direct you along a path of greater significance and purpose than you could ever have imagined.

Thanks for joining us.

Pastor Rick Long





USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

(Tools to Help You Have a Great Small Group Experience!)

1. Notice in the Table of Contents there are three sections: (1) Sessions; (2) Appendices; and (3) Small Group Leaders. Familiarize yourself with the Appendices. Some of them will be used in the sessions themselves.
2. If you are facilitating/leading or co-leading a small group, the section Small Group Leaders will give you some experiences of others that will encourage you and help you avoid many common obstacles to effective small group leadership.
3. Use this as a guide, not a straightjacket. If the group responds to the lesson in an unexpected but honest way, go with that. If you think of a better question than the next one in the lesson, ask it. Take to heart the insights included in the Frequently Asked Questions pages and the Small Group Leaders section.
4. Enjoy your Small Group experience.
5. Pray before each session—for your group members, for your time together, for wisdom and insights.
6. Read the Outline for Each Session on the next pages so that you understand how the sessions will flow.



OUTLINE OF EACH SESSION



Most people want to live a life that is orderly, meaningful, and satisfying, but few achieve this by themselves. And most small groups struggle to balance all of God's purposes in their meetings. Groups tend to overemphasize one of the various reasons for meeting. Rarely is there a healthy balance that includes teaching, evangelism, ministry, practical experiences, and worship. That's why we've included these elements in this study, so you can practice together living a healthy, balanced spiritual life over time.

A typical group session for the *Grace Happens – 40 Days of Grace* study will include the following:

THEME

The lessons we will learn during *Grace Happens – 40 Days of Grace* are best illustrated in the lives of real people. Each session's teaching will include comments by real people reflecting on the significance of the theme for that session in their own lives.

COMING TOGETHER

You have a story and your story of life change can be the most powerful tool God will use to touch others in your group and further his work in your own life. Here are a few questions to help you shape your story.





- 1 What did you think about God before becoming a believer? (If you're not a believer, share what you think now and don't be afraid. We all have questions about God.)
- 2 When did you become a believer in Jesus Christ? (Share some details about that moment in your life. I was in church, a youth group, a Christian event, or somewhere on your own.)
- 3 Now that you are a believer in Jesus Christ, what changes have you experienced and how have you seen God's grace in your life?

It definitely takes some courage to share your story, but don't be afraid. Remember that you're in the midst of people who love Jesus. If you can't talk about your story with those who love Jesus, then you'll never share your story with those who don't.

If you're uncomfortable sharing your story with the group, maybe share with one or two of the people you have made a stronger connection with during the small group. This type of sharing allows your group to go deeper and wider during discussions, prayer time, and even the moments when you just need encouragement.

As your group begins, use the Small Group Agreement and Small Group Calendar to help your group begin to build community. As the group develops intimacy, use the Spiritual Partner's Check-In Page



40 DAYS OF GRACE

and the Prayer and Praise Report to keep the group connected.

LEARNING TOGETHER/VIDEO TEACHING SEGMENT

Serving as a companion to the *Grace Happens – 40 Days of Grace* small group study guide is the *Grace Happens – 40 Days of Grace* video teaching. These videos combine teaching segments with leadership insights and personal stories of life change. Using the teaching video will add value to this 6-week commitment of doing life together and discovering how walking with Christ changes everything.

(NOTE: Questions with a * indicate the crucial ones to use if time is short)

GROWING TOGETHER

In this section, your group will process the teaching from the video curriculum. The focus won't be on accumulating information, but on how we should live in light of the Word of God. We want to help you apply the insights from Scripture practically, creatively, and from your heart as well as your head. At the end of the day, allowing the timeless truths from God's Word to transform our lives in Christ is our greatest aim.

DEEPER BIBLE STUDY

If you have time and want to dig deeper into more Bible passages about the topic at hand, we've provided additional passages and questions, which you can use either during the meeting or as homework. Your group may choose to read and prepare before each meeting in order to cover more biblical



material. Or, group members can use the Deeper Bible Study section during the week after the meeting. If you prefer not to do study homework, this section will provide you with plenty to discuss within the group. These options allow individuals or the whole group to expand their study while still accommodating those who can't do homework or are new to your group.

SHARING TOGETHER

Here is where the Bible is urging us to “be doers of the Word, not just hearers” (James 1:22). Many people skip over this aspect of the Christian life because it’s scary, relationally awkward, or simply too much work for their busy schedules. But Jesus wanted all of his disciples to help outsiders connect with him, to know him personally, and to carry out his commands. This doesn’t necessarily mean preaching on street corners. It could mean welcoming a few newcomers into your group, hosting a short-term group in your home, or walking through this teaching with a friend. During this time, you’ll have an opportunity to go beyond Bible study to biblical living.

GOING TOGETHER

We have Jesus’ affirmation that every aspect of life can ultimately be measured as a way of fulfilling one or both of the “bottom line” commandments: Love God and Love others. (Mark 12:29–31 NIV). The group session will close with time for personal response to God and group prayer, seeking to keep this crucial commandment before us at all times.

This is a good place to have different group members close in prayer, even when the instructions don’t specify. You can also provide some time if the schedule allows for people to reflect on their Prayer and



Praise Report or take a little time to meet with a Spiritual Partner.

DAILY DEVOTIONALS

In the Daily Devotionals pages, you will have a chance to slow down, read just a small portion of scripture each day, and reflect and pray through it. You'll then have an opportunity to journal your response to what you've read. Note that the daily devotionals are numbered 1-42 to match the companion book to this series called *Grace Happens*, which is full of stories that illustrate many of the teaching lessons in these sessions. Use this section to seek God on your own throughout the week. This time at home should begin and end with prayer. Don't get in a hurry; take enough time to hear God's direction.

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

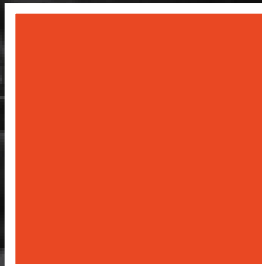
For each session we have provided a memory verse that emphasizes an important truth from the session. This is an optional exercise, but we believe that memorizing Scripture can be a vital part of filling our minds with God's will for our lives. We encourage you to give this important habit a try.





GRACE HAPPENS

10 DAYS OF GRACE



SESSION ONE

SIMPLE GRACE

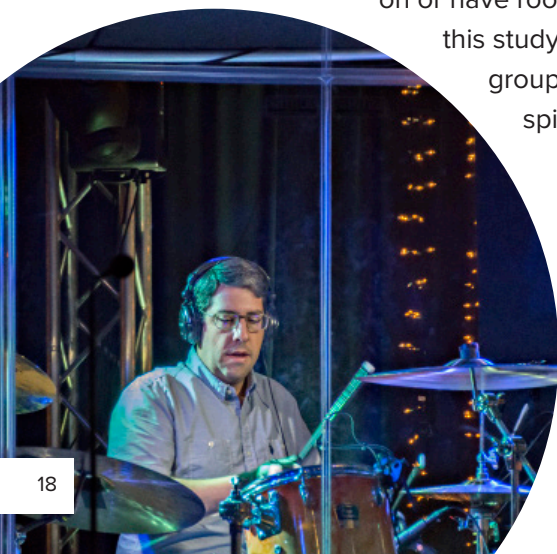
Welcome to *Grace Happens – 40 Days of Grace*! I hope you are ready for an exploration of grace, God's grace. Let me tell you that I've met a lot of people who when they heard about God's grace immediately thought that could never happen to me; that they could never receive unconditional, freely offered grace. I've even been a person like that! But here's the thing that's amazing about grace; those who fully comprehend that they don't deserve grace are those who appreciate it the most when God graciously provides it. And the giving all starts with the one thing we all share, we are all sinners. Grace happens, even and especially when we don't expect it.

COMING TOGETHER

During each session, we will begin with a question or brief activity designed to “put us on the same page” for the session. Since this is your first time together (at least for this new series), take a few minutes to make sure everyone knows names. You may want to review briefly the Small Group Agreement and Calendar from the Appendices. Also, here are a few housekeeping matters:

- 1 As you begin, take time to pass around a copy of the Small Group Roster on page 134, a sheet of paper, or one of your study guides opened to the Small Group Roster. Have everyone write down their contact information. Ask someone to make copies or type up a list with everyone’s information and email it to the group this week.
- 2 Whether your group is new or ongoing, it’s always important to reflect on and review your values together. On page 128 is a Small Group Agreement with the values we’ve found most useful in sustaining healthy, balanced groups. We recommend that you choose one or two values—ones you haven’t previously focused on or have room to grow in—to emphasize during this study. Choose ones that will take your group to the next stage of intimacy and spiritual health.

If your group is new, you may want to focus on welcoming newcomers or on sharing group ownership. Any group will quickly move from being the leader’s group to our group if everyone understands



the goals of the group and shares a small role.

We recommend that you rotate host homes on a regular basis and let the hosts lead the meeting. We’ve come to realize that healthy groups rotate leadership. This helps to develop every member’s ability to shepherd a few people in a safe environment. Even Jesus gave others the opportunity to serve alongside him (Mark 6:30–44). Look at the FAQs on page 125 for additional information about hosting or leading the group.

***3 WARM UP:** As you can tell by the title of this series, we actually believe grace happens. And most of us have some idea about what grace is and how to spot it in action. So let’s take turns describing a situation or experience where we believe we saw grace in action.

4 WARM UP: Simple Grace has a lot to do with failures. What would be some funny or serious examples of colossal failures?





GRACE HAPPENS 40 DAYS OF GRACE



LEARNING TOGETHER

Throughout the sessions in Grace Happens – 40 Days of Grace, we're going to be hearing some pointed teaching from Pastor Rick Long as well as some stories from people who have experienced the many ways God pours out His grace. And we need to be ready to share chapters from our stories, too.



WATCH THE VIDEO



GRACE HAPPENS 40 DAYS OF GRACE

SESSION 1



Use the space provided on the next page for notes, questions and comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.





GRACE HAPPENS 40 DAYS OF GRACE




GROWING TOGETHER



After watching the video, the following questions will help you review and expand on the teaching you just experienced. Have a volunteer read the questions and facilitate the discussion among the group.

- 1 How would you explain simple grace based on what you just experienced during the video?
- 2 Pastor Rick pointed out that we ought to consider two possibilities before we throw Peter under the bus as someone who couldn't take the pressure, "And if you say this [being silent under pressure] has never happened to you, well, there are two reasons why you can say that: One, you've never taken a stand for anything and,





Two, you avoid conflict at all costs.” If we question Peter’s weakness and criticize his failure, what are we missing about grace?

- 3 In John 21, we catch up with Peter on a fishing trip after the resurrection. He was still in failure mode, but Jesus was about to restore him. (Have someone read John 21:15-19). Pastor Rick’s first point was that boldness won’t happen unless we create time for intimate fellowship with Jesus. What are some ways we can do that?
- 4 Point two in Peter’s transformation to boldness was listening with his heart as much as his head. How do you see that in John 21, and what would it mean in your life?
- 5 Concentrating on God’s total and complete forgiveness was Peter’s third move toward boldness. How does radical forgiveness promote personal boldness?
- 6 Similar to the way the group was encouraged to do at the end of the video, who would like to take a small step of boldness and share with the rest of us how God stepped into your life with the simple grace of absolute forgiveness?



GOING DEEPER

You can explore the following Bible passages behind the teaching for this session as a group (if there is time) or on your own between sessions.

READ 1 PETER 1:4-7.

The same Peter whose major failure we looked at in this session also wrote some amazing stuff to keep us hopeful in our own struggles and failures. He's a great example of 'it takes one to know one' as a guide for finding good mentors. Look for someone who is willing to share how they have struggled with what you struggle with and then consider what they have to share.

- Without using the word 'grace,' (this passage is filled with examples of it), what are some examples of Peter's understanding of God's grace in these verses?
- What parts of this passage are about our 'now' experience and what parts are about our 'future' hope?
- How would you use this passage to encourage someone else to lean into God's simple grace?



READ ROMANS 5:1-5.

In the middle of building a great case for God's intimate and timeless plan of salvation for mankind, Paul pauses to break down the way God works out His will in our lives, much along the lines James used above. As we might expect, Paul includes some unique highlights of his own.

- How are the three Persons of the Trinity active in our experience with God, according to these verses?
- Faith, hope, and love frequently show up together in Paul's writing. How is each one present in our spiritual lives?
- Paul's thought process begins and ends with hope. What steps of growth does he spell out in verses 2-5?
- What is your own most current experience of this process in which God is working in your life?



SHARING TOGETHER

Now it's time to apply what we've been thinking about in the last few minutes.

- 1 When Pastor Rick asked us all to close our eyes at the end of the gospel presentation, what was your response? Did you place your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time? If so, please share this with someone in your group so you can celebrate this important decision.
- 2 What's the hardest question or obstacle between you and God's simple grace?
- 3 What would you like to settle or get clearer in your mind and heart about God's grace as a result of this study?

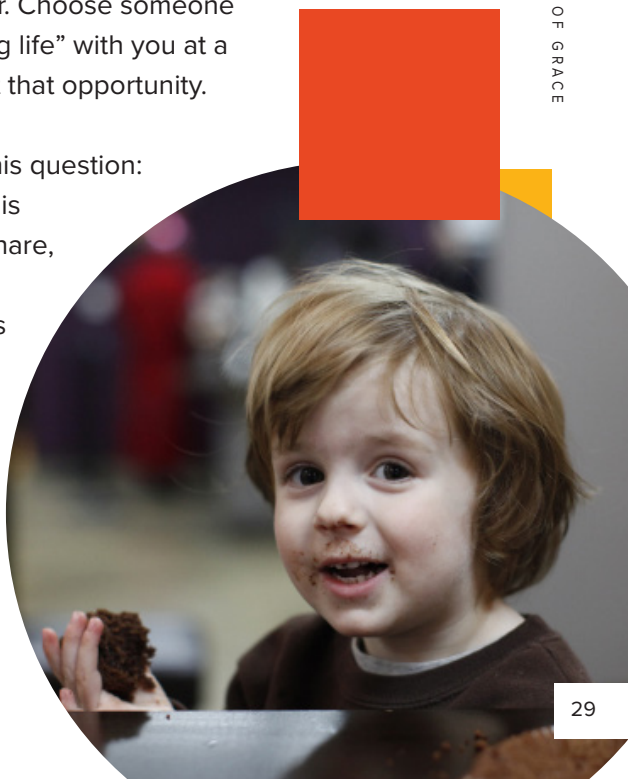


GOING TOGETHER

During these sessions we are doing things “together”: learning, thinking, growing, sharing, praying, etc. Part of meeting together is how we live when we aren’t together. Here are some opportunities to clarify our shared purposes until we meet again.

- 1 Part of the “together” style of these sessions is an emphasis on seeking and welcoming new people into the group. Who might you invite to join us for these sessions? If someone came to mind, write their name(s) here and think about how to best contact them.
- 2 Also consider someone—in this group or outside it—that you can begin going deeper with in a bolder way. This might be your mom or dad, a cousin, an aunt or uncle, a roommate, a college buddy, or a neighbor. Choose someone who might be open to “doing life” with you at a deeper level and pray about that opportunity.
- 3 Allow everyone to answer this question: “How can we pray for you this week?” Invite everyone to share, but don’t force the issue. Be sure to write prayer requests on your Prayer and Praise Report on page 135.

Close your meeting with prayer. Encourage each other to pray audibly for others in the group.



DAILY DEVOTIONALS

DAY 1

(Read Day 1 in *Grace Happens*)

Read Job 23:10

Difficulties and Dross

*But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will
come forth as gold.*

RESPOND:

Where is simple grace in this verse? How does it describe the crucible that is the Christian life for you?

DAY 2

(Read Day 2 in *Grace Happens*)

Read 1 Peter 3:8 (ICB)

The Work of Grace

Christ himself died for you. And that one death paid for your sins. He was not guilty, but he died for those who are guilty. He did this to bring you all to God. His body was killed, but he was made alive in the spirit.

RESPOND:

What three actions did Jesus' death accomplish according to this verse? How do you respond to this amazing grace?





DAY 3

(Read Day 3 in *Grace Happens*)

Read Romans 5:1

New Peace

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

RESPOND:

Before you read this verse again, say, “God has showered simple grace on my life. Therefore”

How do you recognize the peace you have in Christ?

DAY 4

(Read Day 4 in *Grace Happens*)

Read Peter 5:10a (ICB)

Unavoidable Learning

Yes, you will suffer for a short time. But after that, God will make everything right. He will make you strong. He will support you and keep you from falling. He is the God who gives all grace.

RESPOND:

Does Peter’s description of your situation as “suffer for a short time” match your current outlook or does it challenge you to change your perspective on events? How?

DAY 5

(Read Day 5 in *Grace Happens*)

Read Romans 5:8 (ESV)

Grace Anticipated

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

RESPOND:

Which words (maybe all) connect for you most clearly with God's simple grace?

DAY 6

(Read Day 6 in *Grace Happens*)

Read Corinthians 1:3 (NLT)

Transformational Greetings

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

RESPOND:

Most of Paul's letters begin with this greeting. How would it change your relationships if you greeted everyone with grace and peace?



DAY 7

(Read Day 7 in *Grace Happens*)

Read Proverbs 21:21 (ICB)

Simple Living in Grace

A person who tries to live right and be loyal finds life, success and honor.

RESPOND:

In what ways does this slice of wisdom match your daily life?

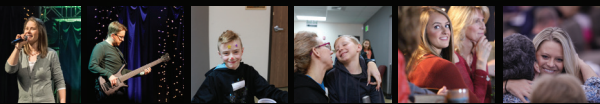
WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Yes, you will suffer for a short time. But after that, God will make everything right. He will make you strong. He will support you and keep you from falling. He is the God who gives all grace.

1 Peter 5:10a (ICB)

GRACE HAPPENS

WHEN ORDINARY STORIES BECOME EXTRAORDINARY



STUDY GUIDE

40
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OF
GRACE



God's amazing grace is the answer to a fractured and polarized world! Grace Happens reveals the unexpected ways God's grace breaks into our everyday lives.

Through this engaging study along with the companion book *Grace Happens* by Pastor Rick Long, you'll learn to recognize God's grace as it weaves through the human spectrum of humor and pain, success, and tragedy. You'll also be challenged and inspired in a down-to-earth way to consider ways you can introduce God's saving grace to the people you live and work with every day.

RICK LONG

Pastor Rick, a native of Colorado began preaching in 1980 and started Grace Church of Arvada in 1989. He remains the Lead Pastor there while also serving as a Purpose Driven Regional Director for Saddleback and Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Ministries.

Rick and his wife Shelley have been married for 32 years and have four children and four grandchildren who all still live here in Colorado.



grace
church

life together

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