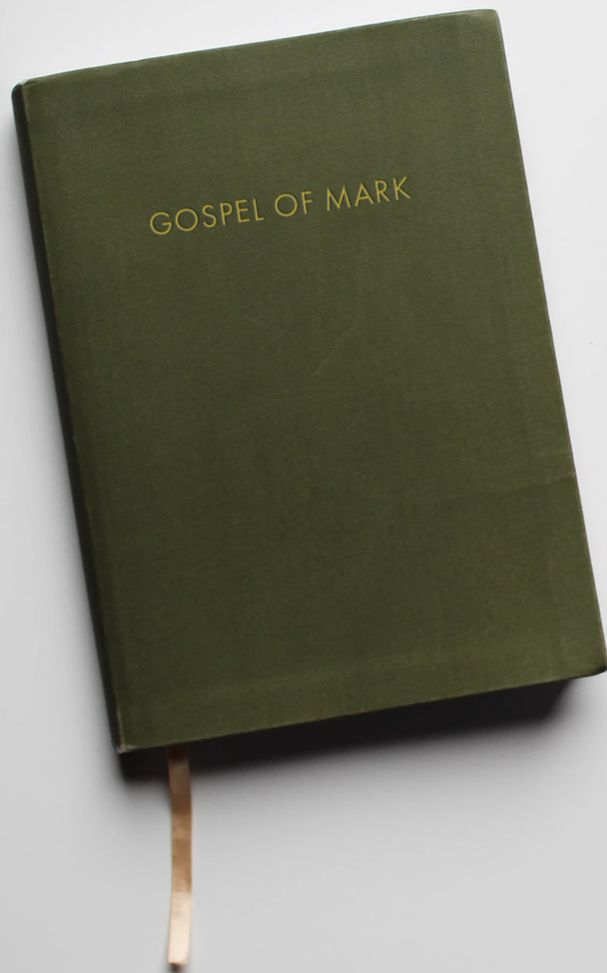


the
story
that
changes
everything



Group Member Booklet

Mark: The Story that Changes Everything

Many of us think we know Jesus, what he was really on about, and how he might have handled a range of situations had he lived in our day and age. And we could be right. But there are plenty of others who hold different views as to what Jesus was on about, and how he might interact with our modern world, if he was on earth today. Clearly, we can't all be right.

So to understand Jesus better, to see him more clearly, and to know him better, we need to go back to the source, the primary documents that testify to his life and person and mission. That is precisely what Mark's Gospel does. But Mark is not a series of disconnected stories and episodes and parables and miracles with which we have a degree of familiarity. Mark's Gospel tells a single, unified story. And in the first verse Mark discloses his singular focus: it is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the earliest and shortest of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John), it was written well within the lifetime of those entangled in Jesus' story. But Mark tells his story for the benefit of those living after the time of Jesus, including us, to show us the extraordinary manner in which the Christian message originated. And to reveal a punchy but profound presentation of our Lord Jesus as the powerful Son of God and the compassionate Shepherd King over his people.

This term we will read the unfolding story attentively, covering only Chapters 4 to 8. And we'll pay attention to how one episode flows into the next, and how each story, parable and miracle adds to Mark's portrayal of Jesus. And as we'll see, this singular story about Jesus is the story that changes everything.

May God's Spirit be at work in us as we study Mark's Gospel together this term.

Grace and peace

p.s. at the back of this booklet there are materials to help you share the Lord's Supper with your group, if you'd like to do that.

Study Timetable

We've prepared these small group studies to use following the Sunday message. Here's a suggested timetable for their use (but feel free to use them in the way that works best for you).

| Sunday Sermon Date | Passage | Mid-week (growth group) | What? |
|--------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Sun 30 January | Mark 4:1-20 | Leader training session: Wednesday 2 February | |
| Sun 6 February | Mark 4:21-34 | 7-10 February | Study 1: Sower & seeds (Mark 4:1-34) |
| Sun 13 February | Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-56 | 14-17 February | Study 2: Storm |
| Sun 20 February | Mark 5:1-20 | 21-24 February | Study 3: Demons |
| Sun 27 February | Mark 5:21-43 | 28 February-3 March | Study 4: Death & disease |
| Sun 6 March | Mark 6:1-29 | 7-10 March | Study 5: Prophet's problems |
| Sun 13 March | Mark 6:30-56; Mark 8:1-21 | 14-17 March | Study 6: Feeding |
| Sat 20 March | Mark 7:1-23 | 21-24 March | Study 7: Clean & unclean #1 |
| Sun 27 March | Mark 7:24-37 | 28-31 March | Study 8: Clean & unclean #2 |
| Sun 3 April | Mark 8:22-9:1 | New song worship night Wednesday 6 April | |
| Fri 15 April | Good Friday | | |
| Sun 17 April | Easter Sunday | | |

Study 1: Seeds & sower

Start

Using either real ones, or pictures on a device, share/show seeds among the group and get them to guess which plant each seed corresponds to, or to guess the size of the plant it will grow into.

Share any feedback or take-home points from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 4:1-20 then share your initial response with the group.

Think & talk

- 1. These parables are about the kingdom of God, which is enacted by the word of God (v.14). How would you describe the kingdom of God?**

- 2. Detail the responses to the word in this parable, and share what surprises this parable holds.**

- 3. What does this parable suggest churches and Christians should keep as their main priority? What should churches and Christians do when their gospel proclamation is met with initial rejection? Or initial acceptance?**

4. Read Mark 4:21-34. What does the parable about the lamp mean? What do the two further parables about seeds contribute to our understanding of the kingdom of God?
5. Compare v.10-12 and v.33-34. Did Jesus speak in parables so that people could understand, or so that they would not understand? What prevents people understanding?
6. What comfort do these parables provide for Christians?

Pray

Lord of the harvest

We thank you for your word, which produces fruit in our lives.

Protect us from cowardice, worry and distraction which can choke the word.

Keep us soft-hearted to listen to the word, and bold-willed to proclaim it.

We look forward to your kingdom growing, and even moreso to the return of Jesus to bring the kingdom in its fullness.

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #1

Read

Mark 4:1-34 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. The parable of the sower is about the kingdom of God being enacted by the word of God. What 4 responses are there to the sowing of the word? Are you in danger of letting persecution, the worries of this life or the pursuit of wealth choke out the effect of the word in your life?
2. What does the parable of the lamp mean? What do the two further parables about seeds contribute to our understanding of the kingdom of God?
3. What comfort do these parables provide for Christians?

Pray

Lord of the harvest

We thank you for your word, which produces fruit in our lives.

Protect us from cowardice, worry and distraction which can choke the word.

Keep us soft-hearted to listen to the word, and bold-willed to proclaim it.

We look forward to your kingdom growing, and even moreso to the return of Jesus to bring the kingdom in its fullness.

Amen.

Study 2: Storm

Start

Over the next few studies we will see Jesus triumph over: demons, death, disease, and nature at its wildest. Of which of these are you most afraid? What do you think is at the core of your fear of any (or all) of these things?

Share any feedback or reflections from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 4:35-41 and share your first thoughts with the group.

Think and talk

- 1. How do the disciples respond when the squall rises upon the lake? How would you have expected the disciples to react by this stage in their walk with Jesus?**

- 2. What is remarkable about Jesus' response to the rising squall? And what are we to make of his quelling of it?**

- 3. What is the big deal with bodies of water in the Bible? What does Jesus' calming of the storm suggest about his authority? How do each of these verses form the background to this miracle:**
 - a. Genesis 1:1-10**
 - b. Job 38:8-11**
 - c. Psalm 106:7-12**

4. **Read Mark 6:45-56, another strange incident involving Jesus and a blustery lake. Are there similarities between the two stories? Have the disciples developed in their understanding of Jesus?**

5. **What conclusion are we to draw in answer to the disciples' question in 4:41? What does faith in this Jesus look like today?**

6. **How would you answer a child who was scared by a news report about a flood disaster or tsunami? How do today's readings speak into that fear?**

Pray

Lord of the wind and waves

We praise you that have power over all things in creation, the swirling waters, the rising tides, the howling winds, and all other things.

Forgive us for our lack of faith, and our persistent fear.

Help us to trust you and look to you for refuge and security through all the storms of life and faith.

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #2

Read

Mark 4:35-41 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. How do the disciples respond when the squall rises upon the lake? How does this contrast with Jesus' response to the storm?

2. What is the big deal with bodies of water in the Bible? What does Jesus' calming of the story suggest about his authority? How do these Old Testament passages form the background to this story:
 - a. Genesis 1:1-10
 - b. Job 38:8-11
 - c. Psalm 106:7-12

3. What conclusion are we to make to answer the disciples' question of v.41?

Pray

Lord of the wind and waves,
We praise you that have power over all things in creation, the swirling waters, the rising tides, the howling winds, and all other things.
Forgive us for our lack of faith, and our persistent fear.
Help us to trust you and look to you for refuge and security through all the storms of life and faith.
Amen.

Study 3: Demons

Start

How would you describe your attitude towards demons and the devil:

- I don't believe they're real; they seem a bit cartoon-ish to me
- I know they're real but can't take either very seriously
- They're not at the top of my list of worries right now
- I am alert but not alarmed
- They freak me out if I think about it.

Share any feedback or take-home points from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 5:1-20 and share your opening observations.

Think & talk

1. **Before Jesus even interacts with this demon-possessed man, what can we understand about his situation?**

2. **What does the initial reply of the demons teach us? How does it contrast with the Pharisees' response to Jesus in 3:22?**

3. **Why does Jesus cast the many demons into the herd of pigs?**

4. What does this incident reveal about the nature of evil and the nature of Jesus' mission?

5. In what ways do the people of the town model an inappropriate response to Jesus?

6. How has the man's life been transformed? And how is his reaction to Jesus one that we should mimic?

Pray

Dear Lord

We thank you that you have overpowered demons and the devil.

We further thank you for the transformation you bring to the lives of all who turn to you.

And we look forward to when you will remove the presence of evil for eternity.

In the meantime help us to trust you, to not fear, and to get on with the task of witnessing to you.

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #3

Read

Mark 5:1-20 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. What does the initial response of the demons teach us? How does it contrast with the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus in Mark 3:22?

2. What does this incident reveal about the nature of evil and the nature of Jesus' mission?

3. In what ways do the people of the town model an inappropriate response to Jesus? How could we mimic the reaction of the transformed man?

Pray

Dear Lord

We thank you that you have overpowered demons and the devil.

We further thank you for the transformation you bring to the lives of all who turn to you.

And we look forward to when you will remove the presence of evil for eternity.

In the meantime help us to trust you, to not fear, and to get on with the task of witnessing to you.

Amen.

Study 4: Disease and death

Start

Disease and especially death are things we try to avoid talking about in our culture. Why is this the case?

Do you think it would have been different in Jesus' day?

Share with the group your recap from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 5:21-43 and discuss your first thoughts.

Think & talk

- 1. How is the woman different to Jairus? How is her situation the same as the demoniac we looked at last week? What do they all share in common?**

- 2. Why does Jesus confront the woman after the touch of his cloak healed her? What were the consequences of her healing in social and religious terms?**

- 3. Moving back to Jairus' daughter, how do we see the complete authority of Jesus over sickness and death?**

4. How should we understand these miracles in the context of Jesus' ministry overall?

5. Should we expect similar miracles today? How do Christians benefit from Jesus' power and authority today?

Pray

Lord and giver of life

We praise you for your promise of life, and your power even over death.

Help us to take to heart these glimpses of your coming kingdom and we thank you for your grace given to us every day.

Lord, where we are sick, make us well. And help us to look forward not to a trouble-free life here, but a glorious eternity with you.

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #4

Read

Mark 5:21-43 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. How is the woman different to Jairus? How is her situation the same as the demoniac from last week? What do they all share in common?
2. Why does Jesus' confront the woman after she touched his cloak? What were the consequences of her healing both religiously and socially?
3. How should we understand these miracles in the context of Jesus' ministry overall? Should we expect similar miracles today?

Pray

Lord and giver of life

We praise you for your promise of life, and your power even over death.

Help us to take to heart these glimpses of your coming kingdom and we thank you for your grace given to us every day.

Lord, where we are sick, make us well. And help us to look forward not to a trouble-free life here, but a glorious eternity with you.

Amen.

Study 5: Prophet's problems

Start

Can you think of a time when you were rejected? What effect did it have on you? Why do we fear rejection so much?

Read

Mark 6:1–29 and share your opening observations with the group.

Think & talk

- 1. In what ways did the people of Nazareth react to Jesus? Was their familiarity with Jesus a help or a hindrance to faith?**
- 2. A frosty reception was not limited to Jesus, as Jesus prepped his disciples for the same response. How else should they prepare for their mission?**
- 3. Do you think we tend to imitate the disciples in terms of their readiness for mission? Why or why not?**

4. Why does Mark introduce the story about John the Baptist at this point?

5. Why is the message of Jesus a greater threat to people than other “worldly” messages? And what do these 3 episodes reveal about following a rejected messenger and proclaiming his message? See also John 15:18-20.

Pray

Heavenly Father

We thank you for your prophets of old, who shared your message and prepared people for the coming of your greatest prophet, the Lord Jesus.

Forgive us for our reluctance to share his message, and our reticence to experience rejection.

Fill us with courage and compassion so that we share your good news with boldness and joy.

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #5

Read

Mark 6:1-29 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. How do Jesus' townspeople treat him? Was their familiarity with Jesus a help or a hindrance to faith?

2. Jesus also prepares his disciples for a frosty reception. Do you think we tend to imitate the disciples in terms of their readiness for mission?

3. Why does Mark introduce the story of John the Baptist at this point? What do these 3 episodes teach us about following a rejected messenger and proclaiming his message?

Pray

Heavenly Father

We thank you for your prophets of old, who shared your message and prepared people for the coming of your greatest prophet, the Lord Jesus.

Forgive us for our reluctance to share his message, and our reticence to experience rejection.

Fill us with courage and compassion so that we share your good news with boldness and joy.

Amen.

Study 6: Feeding

Start

What is the best meal you have ever had? Do you have a signature dish of your own?

Share your thoughts from Sunday's message.

Read

Mark 6:30-43 and discuss your initial impressions.

Think & talk

1. **How does the banquet Jesus throws contrast with Herod's party earlier in Chapter 6, which we looked at last week?**
2. **Verse 34 is a key verse. How does it depict Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament expectations (see Psalm 23 & Ezekiel 34:7-16)?**
3. **At the heart of the feeding of the 5,000 is a miraculous abundance of food. What does this show us about Jesus and his kingdom? Is there any significance in the 12 baskets of food leftover?**

4. **Read Mark 8:1-21, which depicts a similar miracle, the feeding of the 4,000. What does this miracle and the teaching that follows contribute to our understanding?**

5. **Given how Mark presents Jesus in these two feeding miracles, how should we as his disciples follow him?**

6. **Lastly, does the inability of the disciples to believe provide us with any traps to avoid?**

Pray

Lord of the loaves

We thank you for your compassion upon us, that recognizes we are lost and which guides us through your word.

We praise you further for your provision of our daily needs, and the way you consistently supply us.

Help us to be attentive to your voice in Scripture, to not think we've heard it all before, and to remember you are our powerful protector and provider.

And help us to be more concerned for your honour and the welfare of the lowly than to amass power, wealth and kudos for ourselves.

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #6

Read

Mark 6:30-43 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. Verse 34 is a key verse. How does it depict Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament expectations (in Psalm 23 & Ezekiel 34:7-16)?

2. At the heart of this story is a miraculous abundance of food. What does this show us about Jesus and his kingdom?

3. Given how Mark presents Jesus in this miracle, how should we try to follow him?

Pray

Lord of the loaves

We thank you for your compassion upon us, that recognizes we are lost and which guides us through your word.

We praise you further for your provision of our daily needs, and the way you consistently supply us.

Help us to be attentive to your voice in Scripture, to not think we've heard it all before, and to remember you are our powerful protector and provider.

And help us to be more concerned for your honour and the welfare of the lowly than to amass power, wealth and kudos for ourselves.

Amen.

Study 7: Clean and unclean #1

Start

Do you practice any traditions in your household (for birthdays, Christmas, etc)? Can you think of any ways in which human traditions have become obstacles or problems?

Read

Mark 7:1-23 and share your opening impressions , plus any feedback from Sunday

Think & talk

- 1. There is a flashpoint between Jesus and the Pharisees over religious traditions. What seems to be the presenting issue?**
- 2. What is the problem and place of religious tradition?**
- 3. Thinking about the particular religious tradition Jesus picks up on in v.9-13 called Corban, what is Jesus' issue with it?**

4. **Harmful tradition often begins with good intentions. How can we prevent today's "practical application of God's word" becoming tomorrow's "tradition of the elders"?**

5. **In v.14-23 Jesus discusses what makes a person defiled or unclean. What is it that makes a person defiled?**

6. **One practical application for the people of the day is that Jesus declared all foods clean. What practical lessons are there for you? See 1 John 1:7-9.**

Pray

Dear Heavenly Father

We praise you that you look to the heart and are unimpressed by outward human performance.

Forgive us for when we have relied on human tradition or behavioural change without letting you change our hearts.

We confess our evil thoughts, immorality, greed, arrogance and malice to you. Please move us to live a life of submission to you and your word, and a life of love towards others.

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #7

Read

Mark 7:1-23 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. There is a flashpoint between Jesus and the Pharisees over religious traditions? What is the problem and the place of religious tradition?
2. Harmful tradition often begins with good intentions. How can we prevent something that is helpful today becoming a harmful “tradition of the elders” tomorrow?
3. In v.14-23 Jesus discusses what makes a person defiled or unclean. What is it, and what practical difference does this make for you?

Pray

Dear Heavenly Father

We praise you that you look to the heart and are unimpressed by outward human performance.

Forgive us for when we have relied on human tradition or behavioural change without letting you change our hearts.

We confess our evil thoughts, immorality, greed, arrogance and malice to you. Please move us to live a life of submission to you and your word, and a life of love towards others.

Amen.

Study 8: Clean & unclean #2

Start

Some people dismiss the Christian faith, saying it's only a Western religion; how would you respond to that claim?

Do you think Christianity tends to only attract people from a narrow range of backgrounds? Why or why not?

What did you learn or take away from Sunday's sermon?

Read

Mark 7:24-37 and share your first thoughts.

Think & talk

- 1. In v.24-30 Jesus heals another person with an evil spirit. What are some of the important features of the background to this story? What is remarkable about the woman here?**

- 2. What types of people do we tend to expect to respond to the gospel? Which types do Christians tend to shy away from? How do these verses challenge assumptions like this?**

- 3. In v.31-37 Jesus heals another person outside of the land of Israel. Read Isaiah 35:1-6. How does this healing fulfil Isaiah 35, and how does it extend that prophecy?**

4. **Read Mark 8:21-26. Why does Mark include this story, when it is so similar to the healing of the deaf/mute man? What does it reveal about faith?**

5. **Looking back over the stories in Chapter 7 & 8, how does each one develop Mark's idea that faith in Jesus is a gracious gift from God in us?**

6. **What are the implications for Christian outreach? See 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.**

Pray

Dear Lord

We thank you that Jesus is the long-awaited King and powerful Son of God. We praise you that faith is your gracious gift to us, and we further praise you that you give it to many unlikely candidates.

Forgive us for believing you work only in limited ways among limited groups of people. Please graciously give faith to our friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues. And help us to patiently and prayerfully be involved.

For your glory,

Amen.

Core questions / personal study #8

Read

Mark 7:24-37 then write your initial response below.

Think & write

1. In v.24-30 Jesus heals another person with an evil spirit. What are some of the important features of her background that makes this story remarkable?
2. In v.31-37 Jesus heals another person outside of the land of Israel. Read Isaiah 35:1-6; how does this healing fulfil Isaiah 35, and how does it extend that prophecy?
3. What types of people do we tend to expect to respond to the gospel? How do these stories challenge our assumptions? What are the implications for Christian outreach (see 2 Corinthians 4:1-6)?

Pray

Dear Lord

We thank you that Jesus is the long-awaited King and powerful Son of God. We praise you that faith is your gracious gift to us, and we further praise you that you give it to many unlikely candidates.

Forgive us for believing you work only in limited ways among limited groups of people. Please graciously give faith to our friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues. And help us to patiently and prayerfully be involved.

For your glory,

Amen.

Extra material: sharing the Lord's Supper

This extra material is to assist you in sharing in the Lord's Supper together.

Someone will need to make the necessary preparations, to lead the Lord's Supper and to have the supplies of bread and wine (or juice) ready to go.

The words in italics are for the service leader to read out; the bits in bold are for everyone to say/pray.

Read

John 19:17-42 or Romans 5:5-11

Sharing together

1. Introduction

The leader will introduce the Lord's Supper

At the heart of the Christian life is active trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death for sin.

In this symbolic meal, originating from Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, we express and strengthen our trust in him, as we eat and drink with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Lord's Supper is an outward and visible sign of the grace shown to us in Christ.

As we share bread and wine together, we are invited to feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

We are faced again with God's love for the unworthy and are strengthened by faith in the one whose body was given and whose blood was shed for us.

Let us come then with heartfelt repentance and genuine trust in the Lord Jesus, recognising the significance of sharing in this way.

If in good conscience it would not be right for you to participate, please use this time to reflect on God's love for us in Christ.

2. Prayer of Confession

Allow some time for silent, private confession...

Knowing the goodness of God and the times we fail to respond with love and obedience, let us confess our sins together.

**Heavenly Father,
You have loved us with an everlasting love,
but we have often gone our own way
and rejected your will for our lives.
We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.
For the sake of your Son who died for us
forgive us, cleanse us, and change us.
By your Holy Spirit enable us to live for you and to please you in every way,
for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

3. Assurance of forgiveness

*God is slow to anger and full of compassion.
He forgives all who humbly repent
and turn to his Son Jesus Christ,
in whom there is no condemnation.*

4. Thanksgiving

**We thank you Heavenly Father for every spiritual blessing in Jesus our Lord,
in whom we have the forgiveness of sins,
the gift of your Spirit and the hope of sharing in your glory.
We who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of your
Son.
He loved us and gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
Therefore, we lift our voices to praise you, saying,
Glory be to God in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

5. Words of Institution

We thank you, Father, that on the night before he died, Jesus took bread, and when he had given you thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,

'Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'
After the meal, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Therefore Father, we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine, and pray that we who eat and drink them, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, believing our Saviour's word, may be partakers of his body and blood. To Jesus Christ who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

6. Sharing the Supper

The service leader might say these words for every person sharing in the supper, or each person might say them to the person next to them as the bread and wine are shared around the group.

- 1. With the bread: Take and eat this, remembering that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving. Amen.*
- 2. With the wine/juice: Drink this, remembering that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful. Amen.*

7. The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

8. Conclusion

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home.

Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.

May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.

Keep us in this hope that we have grasped;

so we and all your children shall be free,

and the whole earth live to praise your name. Amen.

9. The Grace

The Grace is not a prayer to God but a blessing that should be said to one another.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

And the love of God

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, forevermore. Amen.

Notes:

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