

A person wearing a hat and a light-colored jacket is walking away from the viewer on a dark, pebbly beach path. The path leads towards the ocean, where waves are breaking. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds, and a bright light source, possibly the sun, is visible on the horizon, creating a hazy glow.

GOD GIVES MORE GRACE

WALKING WITH GOD
THROUGH LIFE'S TRIALS

Timothy Valiante

Tim Valiante addresses the important subject of God's sustaining grace for followers of Christ in a theologically responsible way. This study further demonstrates that God provides everything necessary for believers to "will and to work for his good pleasure."

—Brent Belford
Senior Pastor
Colonial Baptist Church, Virginia Beach, Va.

God Gives More Grace has been a solid, Scriptural antidote to the many lives struggling with sin and self. Tim Valiante provides a scholarly yet personal explanation and application to this vital part of the Christian walk—grace. This power and desire to live righteously is found in Christ alone. Tim provides more than a devotional look at this cardinal doctrine of grace; he provides a powerful, Biblical support for this much-needed virtue.

—Marty Herron
Executive Vice President
Faith Baptist Bible College & Theological Seminary

If you are an avid reader, there are times that a book becomes your friend. You look forward to getting together to be encouraged and strengthened and plan on reading it a second time. This is such a book. Your understanding of grace will be multiplied as you meditate on the truths and principles Tim so clearly and thoroughly shares with us (including Gruffalos). God's divine enablement can be enjoyed by each one of us. It is true, by God's "greater grace" we can be as close to God as we want to be.

—Rand Hummel
Director, The Wilds of New England

This book is one of those "coffee shop" friends that warms your heart and encourages your faith. Each chapter invited me into the presence of God, where relationships are personal and grace reigns. If you appreciate practical truth presented with thought-provoking depth, this book delivers. Enjoy the read! Enjoy God's grace!

—J. Mark Kittrell
President, Pacific Rim Missions International

Our generation has seen a number of great books about God's grace. "Why should I read one more?" I wondered as I picked up Dr. Tim Valiante's *God Gives More Grace*. I expected to find that Dr. Valiante was exegetically balanced and true to the Word of God, and he didn't disappoint me. However, his exceptionally valuable contribution to studying grace comes through his presentation style. Using first person, he spoke directly to me as if we were having a discussion over coffee. He guides the reader to growth in grace through plenty of personal examples, pastoral illustrations, and discussion questions. Dr. Valiante makes grace personal. He will help you not only to understand grace, but to live it in every circumstance.

—Jim Lytle
President, Clarks Summit University

God Gives More Grace is the right balance of exegesis and personal narrative to keep readers engaged until the final page. Opening up God's wealth of grace in James 4 in this personal way is refreshing and sanctifying. Dr. Valiante's comfortable way of unpacking deep spiritual truths with down-home illustration makes this book palatable to both scholar and layman.

—Tobe Witmer
Pastor, Lighthouse Baptist Church, Newark, Del.

GOD GIVES MORE **GRACE**

WALKING WITH GOD
THROUGH LIFE'S TRIALS

Tim Valiante



Regular Baptist Books
Arlington Heights, Illinois

Dedication

Dedicated to Sarah, who over the last fifteen years of marriage I have seen transformed by the grace of God and who has been one of the richest expressions of God's grace in my life.

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God Gives More Grace: Walking with God through Life's Trials

© 2019 Regular Baptist Press • Arlington Heights, Illinois

www.RegularBaptistPress.org • 1-800-727-4440

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RBP5037 • ISBN: 978-1-62940-955-9

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Contents

Preface 5

Introduction 7

PART ONE: Grasping Grace

1. Hazy Definitions 15
2. Grace Appeared 21
3. Grace Rescue: God's Grace in Salvation 29
4. Living with Tension 41

PART TWO: Experiencing Grace

5. Setting the Stage 49
6. Spiritual Tug-of-War 55
7. Greater Grace 69
8. Humility: The Overarching Mindset 75
9. Submit to God: Obey What God Tells You to Do 85
10. Resist the Devil: Put Up a Fight against Temptation and Sin 105
11. Draw Near to God: Build Your Relationship with the Lord 123
12. Cleanse Your Hands and Hearts: Remove Sin from Your Life 143
13. Lament and Mourn and Weep: Have a Proper View of Your Sin 159
14. Be Humble: The Key Ingredient 181

Conclusion 193

Endnotes 195

Scripture Index 201

Subject Index 205

Preface

LIFE IS FULL OF STRUGGLE, yet God is full of grace. Believers' lives are often inundated with a recurring flood of trials, tragedies, and disappointments, which in turn produce doubts and despair. Painfully aware of their need to skillfully navigate these troubled waters, believers often struggle in knowing exactly what to do or where to turn. How are Christians able to withstand the overwhelming onslaught of problems? The answer lies in God's grace.

Although grace is a familiar topic within Christianity today, it is also one of the most misunderstood. This book provides an expanded study of James 4:5–10. The book is divided into two parts, with the second part taking up the bulk of the book. The first part, “Grasping Grace,” offers a clear, working definition of the term *grace*. The second part, “Experiencing Grace,” unpacks the text of James 4:5–10, which commands believers to humbly approach God for help by submitting to His Word, resisting the Devil, drawing near to God, cleansing their lives from sin, and having a proper perspective toward sin. God's grace always rises above the tests of life, and those who find it discover that God gives more, or greater, grace.

Introduction

“LIFE IS FULL OF STRUGGLE,” Dave whispers as he slowly turns to look over at me from his hospital bed. The frailty of the man lying before me belies the tower of strength he had been in his youth. As a young teen, well before he could legally drive a car, he flew rickety planes crop-dusting fields. In his early twenties he joined the Air Force, flying combat missions in World War II. But now, seventy years later, Dave’s body has been weakened by a decade-long battle with multiple myeloma. Even though his body is now riddled with cancer, his spirit is stronger than ever. Being in the final stages of this battle, Dave has very little strength remaining. Over the past few days he has often passed in and out of consciousness as his breathing slows, becomes shallower, and is increasingly labored. His eyes open again and a faint smile creeps across his face. With a crack in his voice and his eyes moist with tears, he says, “God has been so good.” His eyes close once more.

Dave displays not only by his words but also more poignantly by his life these two essential truths: life is full of struggle and God is full of grace. Holding to the first truth does not force us to deny the second. Acknowledging that life is full of pain, heartache, loss, and trouble does not require us to call into question God’s goodness, His grace, or His sovereignty. When Dave says life is full of struggles, he is not angrily or bitterly accusing God. He is simply identifying an aspect of life that regularly assaults every one of us. We all face hardships that can arise from any number of sources. This may be the most unsettling aspect of trials. We can face difficulties in our families, finances, health, and work. We can suffer emotionally,

physically, and spiritually. Admittedly, we deal with some issues caused by our own sinful choices, while other problems stem from the sinful choices of others. Then there are trials that seem to come out of nowhere and appear to have no rhyme or reason. These leave us grappling with mysteries well beyond our capacity to comprehend. So the fact remains: trials are an unavoidable part of life. Though we will acknowledge the various problems we encounter, the point of this book is not to bemoan the enormity or the complexity of these trials. While addressing our struggles, we will not dwell on their presence.¹ Instead, I hope to fix our gaze on the immeasurable treasure of God's grace—grace He is ready and waiting to pour out on us.

In reality, it is the grace of God that helps us make sense of life. If our existence were nothing more than a series of random, often heartbreaking events we would have no reason for hope. We would be thrust out to sea having no direction or purpose. Yet those of us who have come to know God in a personal way through His Son, Jesus, do not have to drift aimlessly through the stormy seas of life. Instead, we can find rest in the face of even the most ferocious trials that engulf us. As we cast ourselves upon the Lord on such occasions, calling out to Him for His help, we find His rescue and His grace.

Trials and temptations are extremely effective tools in God's hands to highlight our weakness. When we consider our human limitations and sinful inclinations alone, our desperate need for help becomes readily apparent. We know—all too well—the feeling of utter hopelessness as we walk in the midst of a devastating tragedy or in the throes of what seems to be an insurmountable temptation. You can probably think of a time when life seemed to shatter in pieces as a trial crashed into your life. Maybe it came with the news of cancer or the unexpected death of a loved one. During such tests, and even though we are Christians, our weaknesses and inability seem to dismantle our hope and trust in God. Yet it is in the eye of these storms that God desires to show us not only His greatness, but also His

grace. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson write:

Our weakness is the place where we learn to depend on his power. When we're stripped of everything that we thought we could trust in, when we're absolutely desperate for help, the Lord moves in our circumstance and demonstrates his power. Sometimes he shows us his power by changing the circumstance, miraculously accomplishing what we could never accomplish. At other times he shows us how his sustaining grace enables us to endure situations that otherwise would crush us. Sometimes he makes us feel his strengthening arm upholding us in the trial. At other times he teaches us to walk by faith, believing that his arm is there even though we don't feel it. It is in these varied circumstances that we learn of his greatness, his sustaining grace, and his ability to glorify himself in ways we would never have imagined.²

All believers have felt the crushing weight of trials that seem to bring us more than we can bear. During these seasons of testing, we often pray, "Lord, I need grace to make it through this trial." Depending on the circumstances, this week you may have prayed, "God, give me grace as I face another round of chemotherapy," or "God help me as I am inundated with another wave of financial hardships." Seeing our turmoil, fellow believers may gather around us and tell us that they are praying God will give us grace. And most of us willingly admit we need God's grace. As we will see in the second part of this book, recognizing our need for God's grace is the first step in receiving it. Unfortunately, for many believers the concept of God's grace remains totally abstract and nebulous. Often how to receive God's grace and what it ultimately includes is fuzzy at best. At worst, our understanding of grace is completely distorted from its true essence.

Although the message of grace is a prominent theme in Scripture, one passage in particular, James 4:5–10, has been a great help to me personally, as well as a tremendous resource in counseling and encouraging others. Since God's grace is available to us believers in our time of need, we need to have a clear picture of what it

looks like and how it is dispensed to us. In the first part of this book, I will attempt to sketch an accurate portrait of grace, revealing its fundamental essence. My desire is to cut through the confusion that often surrounds the word itself. We will explore the Scriptural definitions as well as the visible expression of the fullness of God's grace as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. We will also note the out-working of God's grace in both people's salvation and their spiritual maturity as they "grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Once we know what grace looks like, we can move on to the second and more important endeavor of our study: finding out how God commands us to come to Him for His grace. More than any other portion of Scripture, James 4:5–10 clearly lays out the manner in which God expects His children to approach Him for grace. Although the reception of God's grace is not based upon our works, the Lord took time to carefully detail the proper attitude by which His children are to approach Him for help and strength.

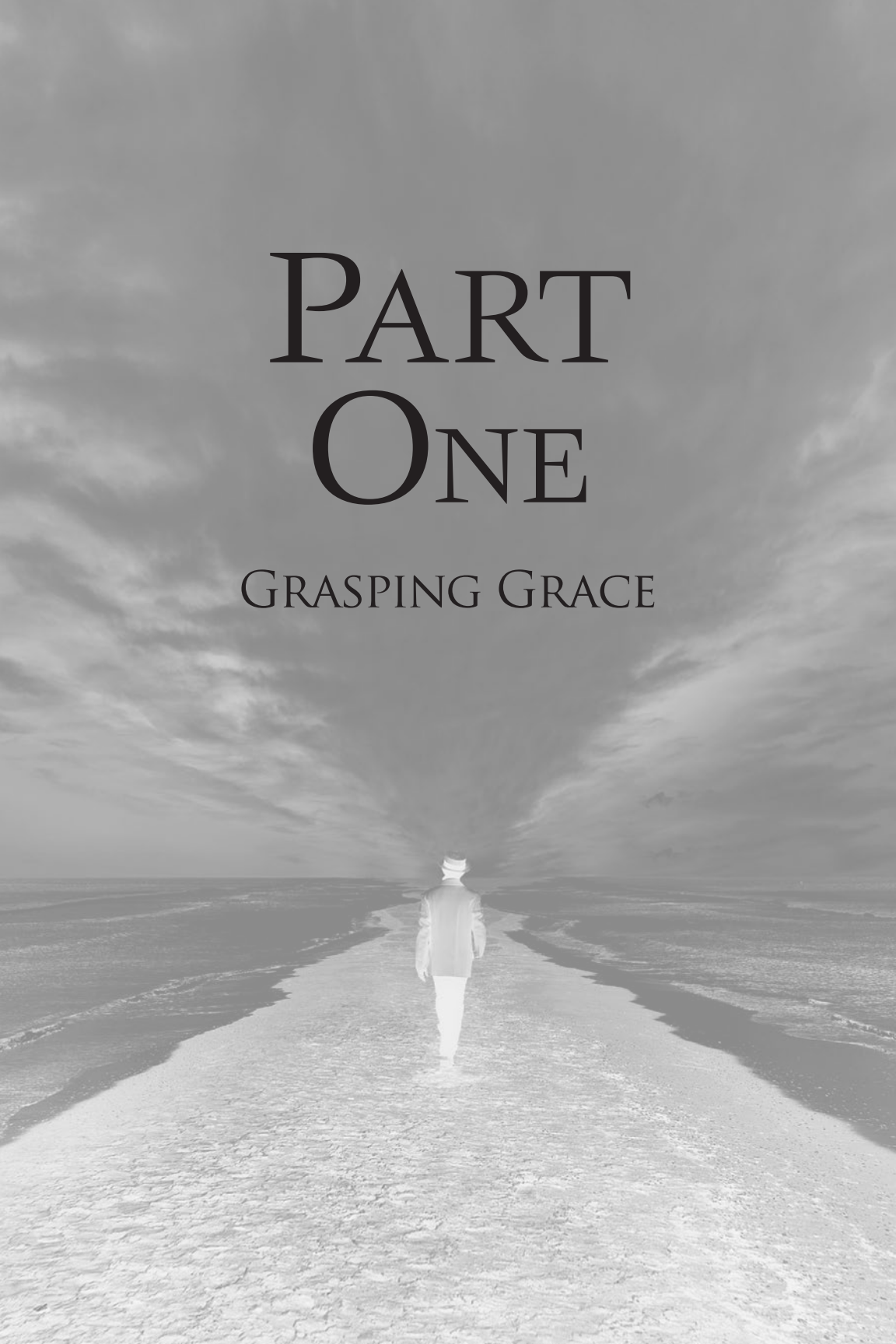
My prayer is that the power of God's Word will produce a genuine thirst for His grace to be revealed in your life. If you do not know Jesus Christ, Who alone is the full revelation of God's grace and truth, my desire is that you will come to know Him as your Savior. He desires to provide grace to meet your greatest need: having a right relationship with God. If you are a believer, my hope is that God's grace will flood into your life, giving you strength during trials and the ability to overcome the temptations and sins that so easily side-track you.

Please do not misunderstand the purpose of this book. I am not setting forth a five- or ten-step method to end any trouble you will ever face. Additionally, this is not intended to be a self-help manual chanting in your ear, "You can do it." In fact, the whole point of this study is to show that you can't do it on your own. That's why you need God's grace! As with any spiritual discipline, the principles found in this book should not be construed as quick fixes. In fact, many of the truths laid out from Scripture will call you to yield to

God any areas that you may have stubbornly held on to for years or even decades. But as you read this book and take God at His Word, I trust you will experience the fullness of His glory, beauty, and grace. God is faithful to keep every promise He has made, and His strength and help are available to all who humbly seek them. May the Lord bless you as you choose to honor Him, put His Word to the test, and experience for yourself that He gives more grace.

PART ONE

GRASPING GRACE



Hazy Definitions

GRACE IS A FAMILIAR TERM in the prevailing culture. Take a moment to consider the word's range of meanings: prayer at meals; part of the title to what is arguably the best-known song in English hymnody, "Amazing Grace"; a girl's name in both English (Grace) and Greek (*Charis*, sometimes spelled "Karis"). We have grace periods on our credit cards. Churches, universities, cemeteries, and even restaurants incorporate the word into their names. Whole ministries have been built on what is branded a "grace philosophy." Regrettably, however, our familiarity with the term *grace* desensitizes us to its powerful reality and meaning.

Grace: An Empty Name?

With such varied uses of this single term within both the sacred and the secular realm, it is easy to see how the Biblical understanding of grace becomes muddled. Many scholars lament the difficulty of pinning this word down with a single definition.³ Though grace is one of the most vital concepts in Scripture, it may also be one of the most misunderstood. Practically every scholar who tackles the subject wrestles with the difficulty of trying to express the fullness of its meaning in simple yet accurate terms. James Moffatt, in his extensive and extremely helpful work *Grace in the New Testament*, weighs in on the subject by recognizing that "the attempt to say over again what is meant by grace is a difficult project. Grace is so central in our faith that any effort to explain its meaning makes it almost necessary to

give an account, at least in outline, of the entire Christian religion.”⁴

Assigning a suitable meaning to grace is a difficult task: how does one define a word that incorporates so many themes, thoughts, and eternal truths into a single sentence—a word that can arguably sum up the Christian faith? Is an attempt to define the word *grace* a worthless venture? Is Moffatt right, as he, playing devil’s advocate, says, “In the past, religion may have found ‘grace’ valuable, but in the present it sounds vague. Once the word may have been significant; nowadays what is it but an empty name?”⁵ He answers his own question by spending the next four hundred pages of his book unpacking the meaning of this single word. The fact that Moffat expends that amount of energy in trying to define one term shows how complex it really is. Grace is anything but an empty name.

Keeping Back a Piece of the Puzzle

Because of its complexity, grace is often viewed as a nebulous or abstract concept. People are often baffled regarding grace’s essential nature and the manner in which it is communicated to us. Noting the gross confusion over the term, Brian Edwards observes, “Though grace is everywhere, it is seen by only a few, embraced by even fewer, and understood fully by none. Grace is often a mystery, a puzzle.”⁶ From Scripture we are confronted with our need for God’s grace, yet our understanding of what it looks like or what it does in our lives remains ambiguous. We might envision God’s grace as a rain cloud that meanders through the sky, filling us with the longing that it would come and hover over us, showering us with God’s blessings. Or possibly it is like a bolt of lightning from Heaven, which we hope will strike us and infuse our beings with supernatural power. We yearn for these mystical moments and feel dejected when we sense we are missing out on a full interaction with God’s grace. Sometimes we might even feel like God enjoys withholding this vital part of the Christian life from us, just as a master might dangle a carrot just out of reach of a donkey’s muzzle.

Feeling discouraged we begin to look upon God with a wary eye

and wonder if He really is as good as Scripture suggests. We may further question whether God wants us to put all of these pieces together in the first place. As you work through this book, I trust you will see that God is not withholding a vital piece of the puzzle to keep you floundering in spiritual darkness. As we will see in James 4:5–10, all of the pieces are laid out in front of us, and once each is in its proper place, we will be left with a beautiful picture of God’s grace.

For the past couple of years my family has enjoyed putting together puzzles. We generally begin one during the winter months when the weather keeps us from venturing outside. Over weeks, and sometimes months, we gradually put the puzzle together. Of course, the goal is to fit each piece of the puzzle into its proper place. When the final piece is situated perfectly into position, it brings a tremendous sense of accomplishment. In our home, everyone wants the honor of putting in that final piece, so we try to alternate who gets to do it. Once all of the pieces are in place, we might glue the puzzle, frame it, and use it to decorate a wall in our home.

Since neither Sarah nor I grew up working on puzzles, we were introduced to this tradition by my brother-in-law Andy. His family’s custom was to finish a puzzle together over a holiday. When Andy was young, he wanted the distinction of placing the last puzzle piece. So, while the family was working on the puzzle, he would quietly hide away one of the pieces, thus ensuring he would be the one to finish the puzzle. It is hard to describe how frustrating it is to work on a thousand-piece puzzle only to find that you are missing a single piece. As Andy’s family feverishly searched for the missing piece, Andy would amazingly “locate” it, run up to the table, and complete the puzzle. After this happened a couple times, his family caught on to what he was doing, and to this day—even though he is an adult—if they find they are missing a piece, he is the prime suspect.

Sadly, we believers are tempted at times to think that God acts like Andy did as a child. We think, *He must be holding back something from me. There’s something He’s not telling me, and that’s why I’m not as close to Him as I should be, or that’s the reason I keep falling into*

the same temptation. In spite of our skepticism, we must recognize that God has laid out all of the pieces necessary to experience His overcoming grace. According to 2 Peter 1:3, God’s “divine power has given to us [those who share this valuable faith in Christ] all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Plainly, we have everything we need for this life and everything we need to live godly in this life. As we will unmistakably find from James 4, God continues to hold out transforming grace to all who humbly seek it.

Defining Grace

Yet if grace is readily available, why is there so much uncertainty surrounding it? On the subject of grace, we are left at times feeling that we have more questions than answers. To get to the heart of this matter, we need to wrestle with important questions: What is the fundamental essence of grace? What is involved in receiving it? How does it come to us? And what are its implications for us?⁷ Since most people’s working knowledge of grace is hazy at best, nailing down a concrete but simple definition at the beginning of this study is critical.

Obviously, for us to discover and experience God’s grace, we have to know what we are looking for. When we do not know what we are looking for, the object is impossible to find! During our marriage, Sarah and I have purchased three homes. I enjoy working on our homes, and through the years I have gathered quite a collection of tools. One problem I keep running into, though, is finding the specific tool I need for the particular project I am working on. I am always amazed how often the very tool I need disappears right when I need it. Whenever I have already checked all of the usual spots but cannot find a tool, I enlist Sarah’s help. I describe the tool to her, explaining what it is used for, its shape, its color, and any other information that will help identify it. Most times Sarah is able to point me in the right direction. However, at times I struggle to describe the tool accurately, and though Sarah is helping me search, she really does not know what she is looking for. Once I find the tool—right where I left it, of course—she says with a quizzical look, “Oh, that’s what you were looking for?”

I am convinced that we believers face the same dilemma in our pursuit of grace. We are searching for it, yet we are not 100 percent certain we know what we are looking for. Thus our first priority is to gain a useful working definition of the term so we can begin our quest for grace in earnest. Any definition of *grace* would need to be quite broad to incorporate its many uses throughout Scripture, but for our purposes I am going to offer a relatively simplistic definition of the term—at least for one facet of the word. Certainly, this definition will not fit every use of *grace* in every passage where it is found, but it encompasses what many Biblical writers attempted to communicate when they used the word.

As we make our way to study James 4, we find God’s strength and help sourced in His goodness and kindness. In almost every occurrence that you see the word *grace* in this book, you can exchange it in your mind for the word *strength* or *help*. When God declares that He is ready and able to give us His grace, He is expressing His desire to give us the strength and help we need to make it through a trial or to overcome a temptation. The help God offers is not merely theoretical, nor is it impractical.

Whether in salvation or in a Christian’s daily life, the grace God provides is real, concrete, and always more than enough. As we will see in James 4:5–10, when it comes to receiving God’s grace, Christians are anything but passive. Instead, we are called to be proactive in specific and concrete ways if we are to experience God’s blessing, help, and strength. But before we move into the second part of this book, I want to fill out our understanding of grace. As we will see in the next chapter, the clearest revelation of God’s grace came in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does the word *grace* possess such an allure—even in our American culture (which is often spiritually bankrupt)?
2. Have you ever felt as if God was holding back something from

you that you needed or that could benefit you spiritually? How can you respond when you feel that way?

3. Have you ever searched for something without being 100 percent certain what you were looking for? How does this apply to your search for God's grace?
4. How can you be proactive in your pursuit of grace?