



Leader note: when you see the “(\*)” icon, that corresponds to the PowerPoint presentation, as a cue to move to the next slide.

Leader note: At a few points in the message, there will be a discussion question. You can have them discuss it in smaller groups or do it together as a whole group if you'd like.)

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Can you believe it's that time of the year already? December is here and that means that Christmas is closer than ever. Lights are being put up on houses, trees are going up inside houses, and stockings are hung by the fire with care in hopes that Visa gift cards soon will be there.

I mean, this is the kind of month where you really try to schedule as little as possible because there's so much else going on. You've got your Christmas parties to get to. You've got your Christmas shopping to get done. You've got your candy canes to put up on your Christmas trees and sneak one off every time you walk by because they are delicious.

You've got your Christmas holidays to plan out. You've got your Christmas carols to sing. You've got your Christmas movies to watch. Let's face it, you've got a lot of stuff going on this month.

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*Group Discussion Question #1 – What are some of your Christmas-related plans for this year? (What are you doing? Where are you going? What are you looking forward to most? What are you looking forward to least?)*

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As December gets going, I'm going to say something that you've all heard before. In the middle of the busyness, in the middle of the hectic schedules, in the middle of everything that you NEED to do, don't forget to take a moment to stop and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

In Psalm 46:10, God encourages us to take time to “[b]e still, and know that I am God.” And perhaps there is no more important time of year than Christmas to do just that, when everyone has so many things to do, maybe

it's best that we not wait until things are "less frantic" to be still and know He is God. Maybe it's best that we do it in the middle of the busy times when we need it the most.

For the next three weeks, leading up to Christmas, we are going to take some time to pause, reflect, and discuss together the One who we celebrate this time of year. We are going to take some time to stop and focus on Jesus.

Our series for the next three weeks is called "Jesus Brings..." and each week we are going to talk about different things that we receive because Jesus came to Earth.

The baby Jesus was born away in a manger on that silent night and brought joy to the world that people went to go tell it on the mountains. Because Jesus came, He brought us things that are only made possible through Him.

Jesus brings us Christmas gifts that we will only receive if we accept them from Him. And out of the many possibilities, I've selected six things that Jesus brings that we are going to look at between now and Christmas. Two per week, for a total of six.

So, let's get going.

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This week, as we begin our look at "Jesus Brings..." we are going to talk about how "Jesus Brings Mercy and Grace". So, today I would like to simply encourage you to spend time thinking about the mercy and grace of God that is found through Jesus.

Throughout this week, I would like to challenge you to intentionally make time—either with your family, with a group of friends, or as individuals—to think about how mercy and grace are made available to us because God became a man and dwelt among us. Your handout has a few discussion and reflection ideas to help you get started, so please feel free to use those as individuals, or even for family devotions this week).

So, what do these words mean?

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1 Timothy 1:2 says “I am writing to Timothy, my true son in the faith. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you **grace, mercy, and peace.**” (NLT)

Hebrews 4:14-16 says “So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our **gracious** God. There we will receive his **mercy**, and we will find **grace** to help us when we need it most.” (NLT)

2 John verse 3 says “**Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ—the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love.**” (NLT)

Three different New Testament authors specifically mention mercy and grace together. Furthermore, these three different authors specifically link mercy and grace to Jesus. Mercy and grace are found in Jesus and He offers these to us.

But what do these words mean? Some people think of them as interchangeable, like they mean the same thing and are synonyms used to emphasize a point. It's kind of like when you say it's “freezing cold” outside. You could just say it's freezing, or it's cold, but you choose to use both words because you want to emphasize that it really is freezing cold outside.

Or you say someone is caring and kind. What's the difference between being caring and being kind. I have no idea, but I know that person is so caring and kind!

Anyway, is that the kind of thing we are talking about when we use the words “mercy and grace” together? Are they two words that basically mean the same thing and together they just emphasize one point? I don't believe so.

Even though mercy and grace are each used so many times throughout the Bible - and they are truly massive words that are used a variety of ways - I believe that there is one key way in which they are different.

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