

# **“Shaped By Grace”**

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**Sermon Preached: Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

**Preacher: Pastor Jason Sander**

**Location: St Peter's Lutheran Church, Loxton**

**Sermon Text: [1 Timothy 1:12-17](#)**

Take a seat. My friends, grace, mercy and peace to you, in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Let me read to you from 1 Timothy again, beginning at verse 12.

I thank Christ, Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Let me pray.

Loving Father, as we gather here around your word this morning, may you grow in our hearts the knowledge of your super-abundant grace. May you transform us through your word to grow more and more in the likeness of our Lord Jesus. Come Holy Spirit and be in my words that your people gathered here will hear.

May they be pleasing to you, O Lord. Amen. Have you ever heard someone say, there's no way that God could ever forgive me? There's no way God could ever forgive me.

Maybe you've thought it to yourself. I hear people saying it seriously and also jokingly. Like jokingly you might be down at the pub or out at a party and as people find out you're a pastor they will say, oh I've got too much sin in my life to do that church thing or I'm not good enough or whatever it may be.

And then seriously I've heard people say, I've done some bad things pastor, I don't think God can ever forgive me. It's that thinking that God is out of reach. But what we learn here today is that if God's grace can reach Saul who becomes Paul, Paul the persecutor, it can reach anyone.

And that's what this opening part of 1 Timothy is about. Paul tells his story, not to glorify his past but he never forgets his past and where he came from. That keeps him humble.

That helps him to keep maturing as a leader. And so he magnifies God's grace through his testimony. And he wants Timothy and he wants us church to see what a life shaped by grace looks like.

And so Paul, he's writing to Timothy. He's a young pastor, appointed leader in the Ephesus church in the surrounding area. And he's encouraging Timothy to keep the gospel central in his ministry and to lead people to know about God's grace.

There's things happening around in that community and different teachings and burdening people with the law of you have to do this, this and this to be accepted by God. And Paul's encouraging Timothy, no, keep the gospel central. Proclaim the gospel.

So Paul opens in verse 12. He says, I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has given me strength that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. So it was the grace of God that called Paul and put him into this service, into this ministry.

We just need to think about that. The man who once tried to destroy the church, who had so many resources to wipe out this Jesus movement, he is now called to build it. That's God's grace in action.

And what Paul says, if you notice in that text, he says that Christ strengthened him. Christ considered him faithful. Not because Paul was, but because Christ made him so.

And then it's Christ who appointed him to serve in ministry. God doesn't wait until we're worthy, until we've got all our ducks lined up. He makes us worthy by his grace.

Maybe we can think of it like a sports coach or a mentor who takes on a junior or a young rookie, not because they're already a star, but because they can see potential. It's like Lionel Messi, the soccer, the football star, one of the greatest probably of all time, he's definitely in that top 10. He was recruited at the age of 13 because they saw potential in him.

Christ does more than that. He doesn't just see potential, he also supplies the strength. He supplies the gifts, he supplies the faithfulness that we lack, that we can't muster up ourselves.

It's Christ working in us. And so we may hesitate to step up and serve Jesus or his church because we feel inadequate. But grace equips us.

If God has placed you in a ministry role, or in a season of life that feels overwhelming, or even in your work or family, remember the one who called you is faithful and he will strengthen you. He will give you the grace, the hyper-grace. And so gospel-shaped living begins with trusting and living in that knowledge that God's grace is more than enough in this life and for the tasks that we face.

And so Paul goes on, he continues by saying, even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy. I'll stop there. Because there's a second mark of grace that Paul's talking about.

It forgives sins and it removes our guilt. He knows here that Paul is describing himself in this kind of downward spiral. He's a blasphemer.

He spoke against Christ, but not just against Christ, against God. Because to be a blasphemer meant breaking that first commandment. I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods.

And he saw that as rejecting God. So he spoke against Christ. Then he was a persecutor, he attacked Christ's people.

He was on a mission to get rid of them. And then he was a violent man. He not only harmed the Jesus followers, but he delighted in it.

In the Greek, this word violent man, as it's translated here, it actually says that he enjoyed the violence. He got pleasure from his violence that he was doing. And so it's this ascending scale of weakness from words to actions to delighting in evil.

That's how Paul describes himself. And then he says, but yet I was shown mercy. God showed me mercy.

And that's the wonder of grace. It reaches where sin abounds. Just as John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace, he said, I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great saviour.

John wrote in his letter, in 1 John 1, it says, If we confess our sins, he is faithful. Talking about God. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Did you hear that? It's not only the sins that we confess, but all unrighteousness, even what we don't see in ourselves, has been cleansed through Christ. And that's that super abundant grace. It's like trying to clean down a table with a dirty dishcloth.

Now, last week I came home and there was this long white smear along the kitchen bench at the black countertop. Someone had spilled yogurt. I know who it is and I'm not going to say who it was.

And they tried to clean it up with the kitchen cloth. And instead of washing out the cloth and wiping it over again, they just kept moving the mess around. They just left the cloth there anyway.

So what did I do? I took the cloth, I washed it out with hot water and I wiped down the bench until it was clean. That's what grace does with our guilt. That's what God's grace does with our guilt.

Maybe you feel unworthy because of your past. Maybe shame still clings. But if grace, God's grace, can forgive Paul, it can forgive you.

See, grace just doesn't cover sin. It takes away the guilt of sin. And that's where this gospel shaped living.

It begins with living free from condemnation, living in that knowledge, yes, I am forgiven. I am forgiven because of Jesus. And Paul goes on, he talks about his transformation.

He says, The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Jesus. That word abundantly. As I said, it's the word hyper abundantly.

We miss that in this translation. Grace not only forgives, it transforms. And Paul names these two gifts of grace.

Grace, faith, and love. So grace, God's grace, gives us faith. As Paul writes to the Ephesians, he says, By grace you have been saved through faith.

It's a gift from God. See, Paul didn't reason his way to Christ. Quite the opposite.

He was heading in the other direction. He rejected Christ. In his mind and through his super brain powers that he had, Jesus didn't make sense.

But it was grace that opened his eyes and gave him the gift of faith. To believe, to trust, and to live by faith daily in Jesus. And then grace gives us love as well.

In Romans 5, verse 5, it says, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. See, when Paul encountered Jesus, his life was changed, and the Holy Spirit began to work grace in his life. We see that in Paul's transformation, from hating Christ to loving him above all.

From hating Christians to loving them as his family. From despising the Gentiles to giving his life to bring them the gospel. And so love is this unmistakable fruit of grace.

1 John 3 says, We know that we are passed from death to life because we love each other. We know we live that transformed life in our love for one another, in other words. So where grace abounds, love abounds.

It's that sacrificial, practical love. So Paul's saying grace shapes our hearts and therefore our relationships. It grows us in Christ-like love toward other people.

Do you see grace growing love in you? Do you see it in your patience, your forgiveness, your service? Do you see a life that is growing in these fruits? To be more patient. If faith and love are absent, perhaps grace has not yet done its work. But grace is always working and we're always growing.

So we pray for grace to shape us and transform us. To keep growing in love. And we pray for our eyes to be open to understand where we need grace to shape us.

And that's where we return back to that gift of baptism, where we find that renewal, where that new life was born. Where we live that repentance and faith, depending on Jesus and his strength so that we can keep growing. And so then Paul goes on to give one of the clearest gospel summaries in his letters.

And he says, here's a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. That's the gospel in a sentence here.

Because Jesus didn't come to help the righteous, but to save sinners. That's what the gospel reading was about. And then Paul says, I am the worst of them.

I am the worst sinner. Was Paul really the worst sinner? Well, from a human perspective, sometimes we like to level who is at the top of the sin list. We might put Paul maybe there somewhere in the top hundred.

I don't know. But we would think there's worse ones than him. But the point is, that Paul is making, is that grace leads us to look in the mirror.

To look into the mirror and to see ourselves clearly. To see our sin and our need for Jesus. To see our sin and to see our need for Jesus, our Saviour.

And see, the closer we come to him into the light, the more we see the depth of our sin. That's what Paul realizes. Just how sinful he was.

And he's not playing this false humility game. He genuinely marvels that it's grace that saved him. That he is a new person in Christ.

And here's the encouragement. He says, for that very reason I was shown mercy. So that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience.

As an example for those who would believe in him. Paul said, if God can save me, he can save anyone. And so his life became a living testimony of grace.

Proof that no one is beyond God's reach. No one is beyond God's reach. Do you believe that? We can.

And we should pray for our children. Or our partners. Or our friends who seem too far gone.

Or that they will never know Jesus. Because no one is beyond God's reach. God saves to the uttermost.

So we keep praying, we keep sharing, we keep hoping. And Paul finishes off. He says, now to the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God.

Be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. And Paul, he just can't help himself here.

After rehearsing God's grace, sharing his testimony, he breaks into praise. What we call a doxology. It's a word of praise that's announcing Thanksgiving.

Like a little song. That's the ultimate mark of grace. It leads us to worship.

It leads us to come before our God, who we're utterly dependent on. Where we remember what we were and what God has done and who he is. That's where our hearts overflow with praise.

With praise and thanksgiving. Because as Paul says, I'm the worst of sinners, but God has shown me grace and mercy. Therefore, I worship him because of what he has done in my life.

It's God's grace that makes us thankful, joyful, humble in our worship. See, Paul's story is our story. Maybe not the exact details, but it's the same grace.

Grace calls us to him. Grace forgives our past. Grace transforms our hearts.

God's grace saves us. As far as the east is from the west, and grace leads us to worship. Can we see these things in our lives as Paul did? Perhaps we need to let go of guilt and live in that knowledge that we are forgiven.

That you are forgiven. Maybe you need to ask God to grow your faith and love. Maybe you need to trust that no one is beyond his saving reach.

Perhaps like Paul, maybe you simply need to fall on your knees and worship him for his superabundant grace. Because as grace shapes us, everything changes.

So my friends, may the peace of God, which passes our understanding, may it guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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