



APRIL MEMORY VERSE

Isaiah 30:18

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

LOWER ELEMENTARY

WHAT WE LEARNED THIS WEEK

God Is Gracious
Parable of the Vineyard Workers
Matthew 20:1-16

PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Matthew 18:21-35

God is gracious, but His grace doesn't always look like what we expect. Through the parable of the workers in the vineyard (or "field," Matthew 20), Jesus gently reminded His listeners to approach God with gratitude for all He's given His people, because salvation and even our next breath are gifts from Him. While it's tempting to compare ourselves with others concerning what we think is fair, Jesus shows how God graciously gives to all of us as He chooses.

Before Jesus told this parable, a rich young man had approached the Lord to ask how he could earn his way into heaven (Matthew 19). Jesus told the man that if he wanted to earn eternal life, he needed to be perfect. The young man went away sad. In response to this, Jesus explained to His disciples that "kingdom economics" differed from what people were used to--that rich men have a difficult time entering the kingdom of heaven. In response to this, Peter wanted to know what the reward would be for the disciples who gave up everything to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:27). Jesus said that in the kingdom there would be rewards, but those rewards would look different from what the disciples expected: many of the last would be first and the first, last.

Knowing this context helps us understand what Jesus was trying to say through this parable: If we want to deal with God on the basis of fairness on our terms, we'll be in for a shock. No one in the parable of the workers in the vineyard was dealt with unfairly. Everyone got at least what he'd been promised. Though God's grace doesn't always look like what we expect, we can always be sure it's His best for us.

God tells us plainly in Scripture that the tangled mess of our lives allows Him to demonstrate His amazing grace. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 12:9, He says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." What things in your life do you consider weaknesses or shortcomings? Do you feel discouraged by a difficult situation or relationship? If so, perhaps it's time to surrender to God's amazing grace. The apostle Paul's response to 2 Corinthians 12:9 was one of empowerment, even in his flawed state: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Maybe it's time to share with a trusted friend your desire to live more fully in God's grace. Maybe God desires to show you, through your faith community and through His Spirit, that His strength is made perfect in your weakness. May God give you the strength you need to see that His grace is more than sufficient for you.

GOD IS GRACIOUS

Parable of the Vineyard Workers

Matthew 20:1–16

DID YOU KNOW

- Each worker in this parable received the same wage—regardless of how late in the day he entered the field.
- Though it might seem unfair that all of the workers were paid the same amount, none of them received less than the amount he'd agreed to.
- Jesus told this parable to explain that He is gracious to all and gives as He chooses.
- Though God's grace doesn't always look like what we would expect, He treats us all fairly and offers grace to all.

CONNECT AS A FAMILY

Talk with your children about scenarios they feel are unfair. Read the parable of the workers in the field in **Matthew 20:1–16**. Ask why the first workers felt upset when they found out the last workers got the same pay. Remind them that the first workers got exactly what they'd been promised. Encourage your children to look back at the scenarios they shared earlier. Explain that when we pray and see things from God's point of view, it changes our perspective. God is not only fair, but also gracious, which means He shows mercy and compassion to everyone.

After reading the Scripture passage, discuss these questions together:

- How do you think the workers hired later in the day felt when they received the same wage as the workers who worked all day? How would you have felt?
- How do you think the workers who worked all day felt when they saw that the workers who came later received the same wage they received? How would you have felt?
- What is the difference between grace and fairness?

These questions can easily extend into the rest of the week. Look for opportunities to bring conversations about how God is gracious to us into your everyday life as a family.

BLESSING

Blessings are often used in the Bible. A blessing can be a prayer of commission, a portion of Scripture, or words to encourage and guide.

A blessing to pray over your child:

(Child's name), may you see God's graciousness in your life. May you notice the ways He shows love and kindness to you.

MINUTE WITH GOD: GOD CELEBRATES

Below are quick devotions your family can use to read, discuss, and pray God's Word together this week!

MAY 2

Psalm 32:11

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

What things cause you to shout with joy?

Shout with joy to the Lord!

MAY 6

1 Samuel 2:1

Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD, my mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation."

How good are you at forgetting the hurts others cause you?

What are some good things going on in your life that you should use as occasions to rejoice in the Lord?

Name some good things God is doing and rejoice in Him!

MAY 3

Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you;

He is righteous and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Has anyone in your family ever been part of a victory parade? How does our salvation place us in a spiritual victory parade?

Thank God that you get to be part of Jesus' victory parade!

MAY 7

1 Thessalonians 5:16

Rejoice always!

How does this simple phrase affect you?

Ask God to help you learn to rejoice always.

MAY 4

Psalm 5:11

But rejoice, all who take refuge in You, Sing for joy forever! And may You shelter them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You.

How does having God as a refuge make you rejoice?

Rejoice that God is your refuge and shelter!

MAY 8

Psalm 145:6-7

People will speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness. They will burst forth in speaking of Your abundant goodness, and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness.

What are some awesome, great, good, and righteous things about God?

Thank God for those things.

MAY 5

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Tell about a friend who is really good at rejoicing and weeping with you.

Ask God to make you the kind of friend who can both rejoice and weep well when others need it.

MAY 9

Psalm 95:1-2

Come, let's sing for joy to the LORD, let's shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let's come before His presence with a song of thanksgiving, let's shout joyfully to Him in songs with instruments.

Why are music and singing such a big part of most of our fun times?

Sing to the Lord!



screen-free summer

I have a challenge for your family. What if, from **Mother's Day to Father's Day**, your family went screen-free from **5 PM to 8 AM each day**? Do I sound crazy? Does this challenge seem impossible?

Before the microwave, car, and the internet people still only had 24 hours in each day. How, after all of these time and labor-saving inventions, do we still feel hurried, busy, and overwhelmed? Where has our time gone? We are giving our time to other things.

Researchers have found the average iPhone user touches their phone 2,617 times a day. Being in the same room as your phone (even if it is turned off) has been proven to hinder one's memory and problem-solving skills. Since the year 2000 the human attention span has dropped from 12 seconds to 8 seconds (a goldfish has the attention span of 9 seconds). Give your next 8 seconds of attention to let that sink in: our attention span is worse than a goldfish's.

I was listening to a podcast recently and heard this line, "What we give our attention to is the people we become." Annie Dillard once wrote, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." We have talked before as a church family about how our habits form us. We are all being formed. What is forming you? What are you and those in your household giving your attention to?

Growing up, my family would observe a TV sabbatical from Mother's Day to Father's Day. My brother and I would groan about it every year, but I am so thankful for that special family time and all of the memories we have from those long and slow days. Think about those evenings when the power goes out. Your family may dust off old board games and play by candlelight or learn how to make shadow puppets. You spend the night creating instead of just consuming. Or consider those first couple weeks of quarantine. I bet your family got creative about how you spent your time inside.

My prayer is that, as we **remove the distraction of screens (phones, computers, tablets, TVs, etc.)** from our evenings, we will find the time and space we need to pursue God and truly enjoy the good gifts He has given us. I don't think this screen sabbatical will be easy, but I believe it will be so very good.

You/your family is not required to do this screen-free challenge, but I do hope you will consider it. Your family may need to adapt this challenge, based on your work schedule, etc.

If your family does choose to take the screen-free challenge, please let me know! I am creating tools & resources to assist your family during this time. I also hope those who participate in the challenge and find ways to encourage one another—maybe we can do a game swap or some screen-free beach time together.

**Screen-Free Summer
May 9-June 20
5 PM-8 AM (each day)**

I look forward to unhurrying my evenings alongside you!

Grace & Peace,

Dani Beth