

“Do You Know the Grace of God?”

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Series: *Romans*

Bible Text: Romans 9:1-13

Preached on: January 11, 2026

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If you have a Bible, you can be making your way to the book of Romans, chapter 9. I think I've, I may not have said this before, but I've felt it before. I don't have great pastoral timing, we could say. The day that we send out a church plant, a day of celebration, is the day that we're wading into one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. So, you know, it is what it is, but here we are. If you've been around, you'll recall that we spent the past two semesters covering Romans, chapter 1 through 8. And so today we're in Romans 9. Lord willing, we'll finish the letter by the end of the semester.

In the course of Paul's argument, he's been laying out the gospel. That's the theme of the whole letter. And he finished chapter 8 with the great hope that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. It was a high note. If you recall at the beginning of the letter, though, he did say that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to the Jew first and to the Gentile. That raises a question. Why aren't all these Jewish people believing this gospel that he is preaching? Why such a limited reach?

And at some level, every pastor feels that weight, not necessarily about Jewish people in particular. But why is it that when we preach the gospel, why do some people believe it and some people don't believe it, even if the arguments were great and it was compelling and there was evidence of changed lives, and they still don't believe it? Why?

Paul actually gives us an answer to that question really in two parts. Chapter 9, he essentially says it really has nothing to do with us anyway. God is absolutely sovereign. That's what we're going to talk about over the next few weeks. And then in Chapter 10, he starts talking about the human responsibility side. You have to have faith. You have to believe. And he gets into that. So we're going to read the passage, but I want to acknowledge here at the front end that Chapter 9 is not it's not easy. We're waiting into the sovereignty of God. And I think what I would just say to you is remember that what we're reading here is not the words of Paul, a guy. And also, this is not like the chapter of the Presbyterians somehow, as if we wrote this right. This is the word of God and it is for God's people, even in all of its complexity. Let's read 9, 1 through 13.

1 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—
2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.
5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.
6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,
7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”
8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.
9 For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”
10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,
11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—
12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”
13 As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

Our Father, every week we need the help of God the Spirit to understand your word. Perhaps we feel it a little bit more this morning. Give us the help that we need. Help us see what's here. Help us understand it with our minds. Help us, Lord, not just that, but to feel about it the way we should feel. We ask that we would be hearers of your word. We ask that we would marvel as we see the glory of our God. We ask, Lord, that we would actually feel the freedom to bring even our questions to the God who is so sovereign that he can handle it. Help us now, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

I have a memory of seeing a show that the writers were genius. They let the viewer be put into the mind of several of the characters in the show so that you could see what the world looked like for those particular characters. So some of them were ridiculous. So they put you in the frame of mind of one of the characters. And as you look at the world through his eyes, every person is a muppet, an actual muppet, just a ridiculous character. And in his mind, all of the world is essentially a children's television show where everything is wonderful and happy and delightful. And you probably know some people that kind of see the world as though it's a muppet show.

They put the viewer into the mind of another character. And all this character sees is when he looks at you, your face is his face. And when he looks at everybody, their faces are all his face. It's the classic narcissist personality. He can only see himself. There's no acknowledgement that there are any other people. And you know some of those people as well. The one that was most interesting to me was a character that when you saw the world through his eyes, you saw people and things. But right next to each of them was a dollar sign that told you how much value those things and those people had. Chair, \$85. Human, \$1,000. Other human, \$7.

That speaks to something about how people operate. That we evaluate people and things based on the value they add to my life. Sometimes it is financial, right? Other times it's relational or it's some other metric. But what this means is that we essentially keep an invisible, to them and us, ledger on every interaction, every human, everything that is in our lives. The problem with that is that sometimes we take that mentality and we assume that that is exactly how God operates with us. There's this ledger. And if I'm doing really well, my value in God's eyes is higher. But if I sin, it drops. Or if I'm from this well-connected family, my value is higher in God's eyes. But if I'm from this lower level family, my value is lower. Or if my education is higher, I'm higher in value socioeconomic level. You see how we how we do it.

The problem with that is that if we were to take the scriptural narrative of what the actual ledger says, it's that every human being is at negative a million. The ledger is always in the negative. It never even hits zero. In God's eyes, we're coming in, we're coming in completely in the red. We've never even been in the black. We actually need God to work with us in a different way altogether. We need a different ledger, a different way. Romans nine is going to give us a lot of questions. But here's the one question that we need to ask as we look at this passage.

Do we know the grace of God?

Because God operates with his people on the basis of grace alone.

So what we're going to do is we walk through this passage is first talk about how is it that we assume God operates? And then how is it that he really operates? OK, that's the outline.

Let's talk first about some of the ways that we assume God operates with us.

There is a decisive shift in Paul's tone from the triumph of Romans eight thirty nine. Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ to Romans nine, one and two, where he declares he has great sorrow, unceasing anguish because of the unbelief of his brothers, his kinsmen in the flesh. This is talking about the Jewish people.

So here's his question at the root of his anguish is if the gospel is for the Jew first, chapter one, and plenty of Jewish people don't believe the gospel, what about all those Old Testament promises to Israel? Has God actually failed to deliver what he promised for thousands of years?

And it's not an academic question for Paul. We're tempted to think because we're twenty first century people and there honestly just aren't many Jewish people in northeast Georgia. And so we think, oh, well, I guess this is just something that was on his mind. No, no, this is this is personal. Look at what he says in verse three. I could wish that I myself were, literally in Greek, anathema cut off from Christ for their sake.

Now, caveat, it's not possible for him to be cut off in there for their sake, right? It's not possible for him to lose his salvation in Christ, even if he were willing to give it up for their sake. This is an emotional statement. It's him saying my identification with my brothers is so deep that I would let myself experience hell if it meant their salvation. And what can ever call somebody to say something like that?

Deep identification and love.

The closest thing we have in our culture is something to the effect of I would gladly give up my life for the sake of my spouse or for the sake of my children. That's the closest that we can get. I would die so that they can live. But this is even deeper than that. This is saying I would take hell so that this person can have heaven.

There's only one person who can say that and mean it and who actually did it. And that is the Lord Jesus. So this is Paul echoing his savior, essentially saying, if I could, it would be my life for theirs.

Now, what makes him say this? What's the what are the points of identification? Look at verses four and five. He lists all the reasons that Jewish people have for believing the gospel. These are also the points of identification that Paul has with them. He listed:

They are Israelites. That's the name given to Jacob. Jacob's name is changed from Jacob to Israel. It's the it's the way that God's people are referred to.

They have the adoption. That is, as a nation, they're considered the people of God. This isn't the same thing as Chapter eight, the adoption that's ours based on our union with Christ. This is something different that as the people of God, he took them to be his own in the Old Testament.

There's is the glory. Think about the physical manifestation of the glory of God at Mount Sinai, the cloud falling on the tabernacle in the temple. There are these moments of glory and sort of a physical manifestation of God's presence.

The covenants, he says, Abraham, Moses, David, all the promises that would make them a people and a nation and give them an eternal king.

There's is the giving of the law. God revealed his will to them.

There's is the worship, the temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood. They can come to God and worship him and know him.

There's are the patriarchs, the men to whom the promises came.

And from their physical biological lines comes the Christ himself. He who is God overall, blessed forever. Amen.

Paul says those things to show their shared history over many, many years. It's a deep identification. And all of these things are the reasons why Israel should have received her Messiah. They had every reason. He's the only one that makes sense out of all of those things that he lists. But they didn't, largely speaking. John starts his gospel by talking about this. He says that Jesus, he came to his own and his own people did not receive him. That's how it started even.

So it begs the question, did God's word fail? Did God's covenant promises fail?

No. But here's why. It is natural to assume that all of the promises were based on race, for lack of a better word.

Race.

It's natural to think the promises came to them as physical, biological, genealogical descendants of the patriarchs. Physical children of Abraham. But what Paul is saying here, verse six, *not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel*. Do you hear that? It means that within ethnic national Israel, there is a true Israel. An Israel within an Israel. He goes on, verse seven, he says, just because people descend physically from Abraham doesn't make them true children of Abraham. That's a reference to Ishmael versus Isaac. Ishmael descended from Abraham's body. He was a biological son of Abraham. And yet, the promise did not go to him. He didn't get the blessing. He didn't get the promises.

The promises, Genesis 18, were made to Sarah, about this time next year I will return and you will have a son. And she laughed. And God got the last laugh because she had Isaac. It's not the children of the flesh who are guaranteed to be children of God. It's the children who get the promise, verse eight.

Human tendency is to assume that God's blessing in his favor is based on physical descent or heritage or some form of who you know and how you're connected to them. If it came that way, then God's promises did fail. But it was always based, as one theologian said, it's based on grace, not race.

The other assumption that we can make is that God's favor and blessing, it's not necessarily based on who you know. It's based on what you do, right? Surely it's based on what we do.

Works.

And he brings that up as well. He points to the other patriarch, Jacob. Remember, Rebecca and Isaac conceived twins. And Paul says, before either of them were born, before they had done good or bad, that's getting into their works, God chose to bless one and not the other. Verse 11, it's so that God's purpose of election might stand not because of works, but because of his call. God revealed to Rebecca, the older will serve the younger. Esau will not be the blessed one. Jacob will. Before they had done good or bad, not on account of their works, God is not taking their moral record into account when it comes to which one he is going to bless.

God's workings have always been on the basis of grace, not on any of the things that we and they might assume. He longs for them to believe. He's rightly heartbroken over their unbelief. Why don't they believe even though they have good reason? Well, because ultimately God doesn't operate in the ways that you think he does.

Physical descent and works are not the basis of God's blessing.

That overturns the entire world. Everything. Every system in the human sphere is based on who you know and what you do. Your connections and your performance. The way that we assume we can acquire what we want can be boiled down to who is it that we know and what is it that we do. What we get in life is based on those two things. At some level, that's just always going to be true in our world. It's the way things happen.

If you come from a wealthy family, no one is going to be shocked that your life turns out really, really good financially, that you probably end up not doing too bad. It's based on who you know. You come from that family, your connection.

If you work really hard and do the right things, no one's going to be surprised if things kind of work out for you and you're relatively successful. That's just kind of how it works.

One thing that does mean is that if you work really hard and you don't get what you expect, you may become bitter.

Or that if you come from a bad family or just a poor family and you do everything right and you can't seem to break out of it, you might become bitter.

The problem comes when we take that human level dynamic and we apply it to the way that God operates with us. And we really begin to think God is happy with me because of the good that I've done or the bad that I've avoided.

And let me just say that into a room filled with Protestants. I bet every single person in this room would say, no, no, no, no, no. I am saved by grace, not by works. Luther was right. I'm a Protestant evangelical. It's always grace. It's not works. And yay and amen.

It's true, and you may still slip into thinking that God blesses you based on what you do or don't do. It's the tendency of the human heart to think that way.

Here's how you know. When you sin, you'll move beyond godly sorrow. It's good to be filled with godly sorrow when you become aware of your sin. That's a gift of God. But there's a difference in being filled with godly sorrow over your sin versus I am worthless. And the enemy's right that I'm a hypocrite and a failure. And I really ought to just give up this charade. You listen to him when he says that, but you don't listen to God when he says that even after you sin, you're still a new creation, forgiven, declared righteous in Christ, a beloved child of the living God. You listen to one voice and not the other. That's moving beyond godly sorrow to some form of worldly sorrow, which is a way of functionally living by what you do.

Put differently, if you're doing great and you're living a holy life and you've had a great year and you've been super obedient and faithful and you are just submitting every single decision, every thought to the Lord, every thought captive to obedience to Christ, and then you suffer. And then you begin to think God is unjust and cruel. Why is he making this happen to me? You just slipped into living by works. I'm doing great. Why would he make me hurt?

We do this in connections and race to less with our ethnicity, probably in the 21st century, but definitely proximity. You know, in most religions around the world, whatever your parents are is what you are. It's just how it works. It's what you are.

There's an American version of that, even within forms of Christianity. If you if you grew up in the north and your family went to church, there's a very high percentage chance that they were Catholic. And guess what you are? You're Catholic, too. In the south, we have a version of that as well. In the south, if you if you are religious at all, you are certainly a Baptist. And then guess what your children are? They're Baptist, too. I always hear that on the obituaries on the local radio station when they say so and so was of the Baptist faith, which was a way of saying culturally. And, you know, they kind of identify as a Baptist. It's like being a Catholic up north, right?

There are blessings for those who grow up in believing homes. We say it every baptism. I'll say it in the second service. But I want you to hear me, especially if you're a kid or a teenager.

Just because your parents are Christians does not make you a Christian.

Just because you grew up in close proximity to holy things does not mean that you know the Holy One.

Just because you are near Christianity does not mean that you know the Christ himself.

It does not work that way. We don't get in simply based on our connection to our parents. Pastor kids may be especially prone to this. I'll speak to my own for a minute.

Just because your dad is a pastor does not make you a Christian or guarantee God's blessings for you.

Sons and daughters of elders and deacons, just because your dad is an officer in the church.

Sons and daughters of really godly moms and grandmothers, just because you have a really godly mom or grandmother does not mean that you are automatically in somehow.

It does not happen based on our connections and who we know, even though there's great blessing in that. God doesn't operate on the basis of works and race.

So how does he operate? How does it work? We need some good news here. If it's not going to be based on how everything else in our world works, how does it work?

Second point, how God actually operates.

God makes promises to the patriarchs. He promised a descendant to Abraham and Sarah, Genesis 18. Remember, they were very, very old, well beyond the age of conceiving. This was a supernatural work of God. It was all of grace. They tried to handle it their way. They agreed, if you recall this, they agreed together that Abraham should take Sarah's maidservant Hagar and have a child with her as if somehow because they agreed to it that that made it OK. And they did have a child, but Ishmael was not the child of promise. It would be grace, not human effort.

It would be the promises of God, not the performance of man.

It's the same with Jacob. Preeminence for him would be all of grace. In the ancient world, the custom was, and in the Old Testament, the firstborn receives the blessing, which includes the favored position in the family, a financial inheritance, preeminence. They take over as the patriarch. And God told Rebecca, no, no, no, with you, the older will serve the younger. Totally overturns and flips the priority of birth order.

And to this end, according to verse 11, God's purpose of election might continue or stand, as it says in the original. God's promise purpose and the idea of election here seem all intertwined.

So let's ask the question. What is election?

To understand it, you cannot parachute in at chapter nine and expect to make much headway. You need the whole letter. And what that means especially is that you need chapters one and two. And if you happen to be here, you'll recall what chapters one and two were about. Every human being born after Adam and Eve's disobedience, every human being comes into the world, fallen, sinful and rebellious. When Adam fell, every human being fell. He was our representative. He was our covenant head. And so his fall is somehow passed along to us and we get his sinful nature.

And what that means is that when we are born, we have a nature that is such that we will sin automatically. We will sin because we are born with a sinful nature.

Have you ever noticed that you've never had to train and teach and instruct your children on sinning? Right? There's no catechism for how to be a worldly person. Right? How can I do evil deeds? Well, you should have harbor evil thoughts and, there's no catechism that trains them on that. It's just automatic. It's natural.

So think of it this way with Jacob and Esau. Here are two twins in Rebecca's womb who apart from God's grace would be two sinners coming into a sinful world where unless God intervenes, they will do exactly what their nature says and they will rebel against him and end up under his wrath and judgment. Their situation is the actual situation of every single human being. Whether you feel that way or not is irrelevant. It's the actual situation of every human being.

We come into the world against God and God is just.

And that means that election is actually not easy news, but good news. That God, simply because he wants to, and not because of anything we do and not because of what he looks down the corridors of history and sees we're going to do, not because of anything that we bring to the table. Remember, all we bring to the table is rebellion and sin and shaking the fist at God. That's all we bring to the table that God would know that about us. And simply because he wants to choose to show mercy to sinners that he would give his favor to people who are not asking him for it. He doesn't tell us why other than he chooses to love sinners. We have to remember that when we come to the most complicated sentence in this chapter, potentially the most complicated sentence in the entire Bible, verse 13.

Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.

A few things to keep in mind as you think about this passage. Remember, every human being deserves God's wrath if left to themselves. We also need to grapple with this. Not all hate is evil. Hate as a word has fallen on hard times in the 21st century. You've seen the signs that people put up at their houses and even their churches that have signs put in their front yard that say hate has no home here. You've seen these. Every time I see one of those, I want to go to that person or that church and say, we need to talk about this. Are you telling me that there is no hate that is ever possibly good? Right. Are there things that we should hate? Of course there are.

We're supposed to hate injustice. Hate has no home here. So I guess they love injustice, injustice and evil. We want God to hate injustice and evil, too, don't we? No one says God shouldn't hate horrific dictators who mass murder people. No one says God shouldn't hate abusers of children and serial killers. No, no, no. We believe that there should be a God who is just because there's massive injustice in the world. Everybody agrees God should hate some things. We should hate some things, too.

Here's one difference, though. When God hates something, he doesn't bring all the baggage that we bring with our hatred, right? When we hate something, even if there's a seed of righteous hatred and we're supposed to be against something, we bring all kinds of things with it.

There's layers of judgmental evaluation where we are pretending to be God and we get to make an evaluation on this. We have malice and unholy jealousy and selfishness and all that. We bring that with us with our hatred. God brings none of it. If he hates something, he does so in a perfectly holy and righteous way.

One more consideration. There are places in the Bible where love and hate are used as degree words. Let me explain what I mean. Jesus used them this way. Remember that passage where he said, compared to your love for him, you must hate your father and mother. He doesn't mean, if you really love me, you're going to go up to mom and dad and just punch them in the face every time you see them. That's not what he's talking about. It's a degree word. It's compared to your love for him. It must appear as though you hate your parents. We use this with romantic love, that if you're married, it had better be the case that compared to your love for your spouse, she had better think that you actually hate every other woman. That's how it better feel to her. So we use it that way.

All right. So what does this mean? It certainly means that God set his electing love and favor on Jacob. And at a minimum, that means he did not set his favor on Esau. He left Esau to go down his own path. Now, keep in mind, Esau was not upset by this. Esau did what he wanted to do. I included a quote from a theologian named Ian Duguid on the front of your bulletin that is actually really helpful here. He says,

"Those who remain outside God's kingdom, who have not received his election and calling to become part of his people, do not lose something they sought to have, but rather something they counted of no value. Noah does not have to fight to keep the masses out of the ark as if it were the last lifeboat to leave a sinking ship. He does not have to stand by the gangplank with a shotgun warding off the crowds. In fact, quite the reverse. Only those whose hearts God has changed would want to take shelter within its confining walls."

That's very helpful. The quote from this passage is actually from Malachi, where he's talking about the nation that would come from Esau, Edom. And Edom became the sworn enemies of the people of God. So in context, God is saying, Jacob, I've loved my people. I've loved and this nation that comes from Esau. I hate because they are his enemies. But in this passage, it's more than that. He's speaking about Esau in particular.

Every human being left to ourselves, standing on our own two feet, measured according to God's standard, will fall under the righteous wrath and judgment of God Almighty.

If it's true that none are righteous, if it's true that we all merit a holy hatred of the living God, what is not shocking is that God says, Esau, I hated. That is not shocking. What is quite shocking is that God would say, Jacob I loved. Amazing.

Esau, I hated. Esau was a scoundrel. Read his story. It makes sense. But guess what? Jacob was a worse one. He was a scoundrel. It's amazing that he says, Jacob, I loved.

That's what we have to remember here, because you're going to be tempted to look at this passage and ask hard questions. Like, what about me? Am I elect? Am I chosen? A heavier one. What about my kids? Are they chosen? A heavier one still. What about my prodigal child? Is this just evidence that he's not chosen or she's not chosen? What about my parent or loved one who already passed? And depending on how you answer those questions, you will find something coming out of you, whether you like it or not, you will be wanting to accuse God of injustice or partiality or worse, ambiguity. And don't worry. Paul will begin to answer those questions. Look at the next verse. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? He knows that that's our question. But we're not going to talk about that this morning, one sermon at a time. So, sorry. You'll have to come back next week if you want to know more.

The key for this week is, Jacob I loved. The doctrine of election is not intended to blow up our minds and get us into philosophical quagmires or moral quandaries. It's also not a doctrine that should make us view God as some sort of ogre who's unworthy of our worship. We struggle with this because he just simply doesn't tell us everything. And that's because he's God and we are not. And that's probably the place to camp out as we look at this.

This doctrine shows us we do deserve wrath and justice because of sin, but he gives grace to sinners. And if you're here and you believe in the Lord Jesus and you've called on him as Savior, guess what? God has given you grace. You, He has loved. Rejoice. Stand in awe of the fact that he would show you such mercy that simply out of the overflow of his own love, he would set his love on a person like you. That should give us humility. If you know your sin, you know that that is absolutely miraculous that he would show mercy to me.

And that gives hope for the people that you love. Because if he can save you. If he can save me. He can save anyone. If he can save Paul, who helped murder Christians, He can save anyone. If he showed mercy to David, an adulterer and a murderer, Moses, who was a murderer. If he showed mercy to, if Samson is in the Hall of Faith, He can show mercy to anyone. This doctrine is hard for us because it reminds us we're not in control of this whole thing.

And we think that that's bad news. But I'd like to ask you to just go down a hypothetical rabbit trail here for a second. What if for one day God put you in charge of who's in and who's out? Guess who you would choose? Guess who I would choose? I would choose people with whom I'm connected and who have done good things. I would choose based on who you are and what you've done. Race and works. That's how humans operate.

What that should show us is that we're tempted in this passage to think that we might be more gracious than God. Brothers, sisters, he is more gracious than us. He's more gracious than we could ever fathom. He chose to save people like us. And it's shocking. And he's always operated that way. And if you belong to Christ, that grace is yours. Marvel, rejoice, stand in awe at it.

You're going to have questions. He'll address some of them. But honestly, he won't address all of them because he's God and we're not.

So the other thing to take away from this passage is you're just going to have to trust him. I can't explain to you every single detail of the doctrine of election. But I can tell you that based on the scriptures, you can trust him. And he is going to demand that you actually trust him, not only with your own salvation, but with the salvation of all the people that you love and all the people that are on your heart, when you think about this theology.

He doesn't tell us his purposes and plans. He simply tells us there is a purpose and a plan, and we're going to have to trust him.

And if you happen to be here this morning and you're not yet a Christian, weird Sunday for you to show up. You're joining us in the theological deep end of the pool. So I'm not going to ask you to try and figure out the doctrine of election. But I am going to urge you and plead with you to look at Jesus, to look at Jesus who actually did more than Paul did, who actually said my life for theirs, who actually on the cross took hell so that people like us can have heaven. That's the gospel. That's what he came to do for people like us. Look at him and believe. Believe that he actually will forgive you and give you heaven if you trust him.

If you are a Christian, marvel. Before you had done anything good or bad, not according to your works, he chose you before the foundation of the world. He started it. He'll complete it. And you can trust him in the middle of it. Fight against your own assumptions about how God operates. Our works will never be enough. So we're going to have to trust the works of another. We trust the works of Jesus, not our own. Our connections will never be enough. The goodness of your family or whatever your lineage is, there's one connection that matters. And it's being connected to Christ by faith in a union with him. He is our hope. Rejoice that God is in charge. But ultimately, brothers and sisters, rejoice that God operates on the basis of grace to sinners. Let's pray that we would know it and rest on it. Pray with me.

Father, we bring to you the incomprehensible, the things that we can slightly apprehend but cannot comprehend. We praise you that you tell us that you are in charge. We praise you that you tell us that you're sovereign. We praise you that you operate with us on the basis of grace and that you do not treat us as our works deserve. And that you give us a connection that's so much better than any family connection we could ever have. Help us to find rest in the person and work of Jesus. And as recipients of your grace, help us to marvel and to worship. And help us to trust you, especially as we think about friends and family members. You tell us to pray for them and to tell them the truth. So help us, Lord, to pray for our friends that don't know you, our family members that don't know you. Help us to share the gospel with them and trust that you use those means somehow, even in your sovereignty, to bring them to yourself. Would you do that? I pray that for every single person that is on the hearts of your people in this room today. Would you draw those people to yourself and open their eyes? Would you show them the mercy that you've shown to us? And help us to rejoice as we see your grace extend to more and more people. We thank you for your word. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.