# Grace in Hebrews

Hebrews 4:16

*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Jesus Christ sits on the throne of heaven as king over God’s entire creation – the heavens and the earth and all its inhabitants.[[1]](#footnote-1) From there He exercises all’ authority over every creature.[[2]](#footnote-2) From that position everything in all creation is open and in His sight(4:13). There is nothing hidden from Him. Everyone will give account of their lives before Him. He has been given authority to judge everyone because He is the Son of Man.[[3]](#footnote-3) He Himself is holy blameless and pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It is to this throne that Heb 4:16 says we can come for the help we need. But there is a problem. Sinners cannot approach a holy God. Everybody has sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.[[5]](#footnote-5) Those who have tried their best to be law abiding citizens or even tried to live up to God’s laws are judged by the law they have tried to live by.[[6]](#footnote-6) They are found guilty. Every mouth is silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.[[7]](#footnote-7)

God Himself provides a way for sinners to approach His throne with confidence and without compromising His holiness. It was an extraordinarily costly way. God’s Son was equal with God, but He volunteered to make Himself nothing, to become a man, live a fully human life and humble Himself to die on a Roman cross of torture – crucified as a condemned criminal.[[8]](#footnote-8)

As He grew up, He shared in all experiences common to human beings[[9]](#footnote-9) but, He did not sin,[[10]](#footnote-10) not even once. He limited Himself to the same resources available to all – prayer – with loud cries and tears to God who could save Him from death.[[11]](#footnote-11) He even learned obedience through suffering.[[12]](#footnote-12)

When He arrived at God’s appointed time for Him to die, He had accumulated a whole lifetime of completely obedient and righteous living. He had lived a perfect human life, the only human being to ever do so. He could have died and gone back to God to receive the just rewards of a perfect life on His own merits. But this was not God’s plan. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem sinful human beings.[[13]](#footnote-13) To achieve redemption God’s moral law of justice had to be satisfied. The wages of sin is death.[[14]](#footnote-14) The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men.[[15]](#footnote-15) God satisfied this demand by doing the unthinkable - He unleashed His fury against sin on His own Son and so demonstrated His justice.[[16]](#footnote-16) All that remains for a sinner to have their sins wiped out now is to repent and turn to God.[[17]](#footnote-17) The penalty of their sin is cancelled by the work of Christ.

When a person repents and trusts Christ s/he is born again[[18]](#footnote-18) and receives the Spirit of God.[[19]](#footnote-19) Then we begin a lifetime process of being set from free the power of sin. Scripture, the Word of God, becomes God’s personal message to every believer. This brings us to Hebrews 4:12, and the lead up to approaching the throne of grace with confidence in Heb 4:16.

The Word of God becomes ‘living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword’. Such a cutting instrument could allow its user to easily separate organs and tissue of any physical body. It would first put the body to death then dismember the body. It is an effective and ruthless instrument. Similarly, the Word of God, is used by God metaphorically to ‘divide’ soul from spirit. Soul refers to our personality, our mind, emotions and will. We are souls living within bodies. Our soul controls and works through our body. Our mind works through our brain. Our emotions produce hormones. Our will is at the very core of being human. We are free to make decisions beyond mere instinct. When we read or hear the Word of God, we discover that our soul has been out of line with God’s ways. This process of discovery lasts a lifetime.

Our ‘human nature’ is a term scripture uses for our soul behaving out of line with God’s will. “When we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies so that we bore fruit for death.”[[20]](#footnote-20) It is not just our behaviour that comes under scrutiny by the Word of God, but also the “thoughts and attitudes of the heart” v12. We had spent a lifetime learning behaviour that allowed us to live acceptably in community. We may even have a reputation of being a good, upright citizen. But on the inside, we have thoughts and attitudes which we learned to hide from other people, but they are exposed by the Word of God. Jesus, who knew what was in everyone’s’ heart[[21]](#footnote-21), listed greed, malice, deceit, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.[[22]](#footnote-22) These have been part of our strategy for making life work but the Word of God distinguishes these and labels them sinful. They must be put to death. They must be cleaned.

This process of coming under the scrutiny of the Word of God is not just a mechanical exercise. It is very personal. We have entered a personal relationship with God Himself won at great personal cost by Jesus, the Son of God, and brought to life by the person of the Holy Spirit of God. It is far more deeply personal than any human relationship. Heb 4:13 says there is nothing in all creation that is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before His eyes. That includes all our previously hidden (or so we thought) attitudes and motives and lusts and desires and ambitions and judgements and every thought. All are open in full view before God. The intention of all of these was to live independently from God. Now we ‘take every thought captive to obedience to Christ’.[[23]](#footnote-23) It is a lifetime process. There is a lot to be changed. But we must cooperate with the process because, as v13 says, we must each give account of ourselves before God.

This process of scrutiny and exposure and change is a very difficult one. At times we may experience guilt, inadequacy, failure, defeat and even doubt. The Throne of grace to help us in these times of need is just what we need. But these are the times we feel most unworthy to approach God. We may feel our sins have made a separation between us and God. Anticipating this problem God points us to a picture of the Old Testament High Priest. Painted in more detail in Heb 5:1-3, he was selected from among men, he was one of us, he was subject to our weakness, so he was able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray. He would take the blood of animals, sprinkle it on those needing cleansing and make sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of the people. Then he would enter the Most Holy Place with the blood on behalf of the people right into God’s presence.

Hebrews 4:14 says Jesus is such a High Priest with one exception; He had no sin of His own but He did carry sin – ours. And He entered the presence of God with blood – His own. The blood of animals offered an outward cleansing. The blood of Jesus Himself ‘cleanses our consciences’.[[24]](#footnote-24) That which needs to be cleansed may be hidden deeply because it may carry shame. Jesus fully identifies with us in our shame as He was nailed naked up to public gaze on the cross, mocked by soldiers and a criminal[[25]](#footnote-25). Jesus identifies with us in every human weakness and pain. He was tempted just as we are but without sin v15. He freely walked into the place of fear, to an unjust trial where He was condemned to death by crucifixion. ‘He did this so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death’.[[26]](#footnote-26) Jesus endured every condition common to human lives except sin and then offered His own blood for our cleansing and then rose from death and returned to His Father in Heaven.[[27]](#footnote-27)

To dramatically illustrate that Jesus’ death removed every barrier between sinners and a holy God, the curtain in the temple in Jerusalem was torn from top to bottom (ie. By God)[[28]](#footnote-28) at the time Jesus died.

Now we return to the glorious invitation of Heb 4:16, ‘Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence’. This is not a flippant nor casual approach. But it is with confidence and with boldness. Let there be no hesitation. Rather than keep us away, let our need bring us near to God. When sin and guilt is our issue know that we come, sprinkled with blood, the precious blood of Jesus. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who endured the cross, its scorn and shame and the hostility of men.[[29]](#footnote-29) Jesus identified Himself with us whatever our need. We need not lose heart because we walk the path He prepared on His own journey back to the throne of God.

When we arrive at the throne, what do we find? We find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. God does not treat us as our sins deserve but He has compassion on us as a father has on his children when they are in need.[[30]](#footnote-30) He takes pity on us. He sees our need not our faults. He has every resource necessary to meet every need. He is willing and eager to freely give His resources. He is willing and able to supply every need of ours out of His unlimited riches.[[31]](#footnote-31)

How much will it cost? Nothing! It is fully paid for by the blood of Jesus. It is given according to His grace, not our worth. When we are most aware of our depravity and unworthiness then His grace seems all the more relevant. His grace is sufficient in our weakness.[[32]](#footnote-32) God delights to turn our world upside down just as He did for His Son. When Jesus had stooped down ‘even to death on a cross therefore God exalted Him to the highest place’.[[33]](#footnote-33) When we find ourselves in greatest need, any need, God’s invitation to approach His throne for grace is loudest. Often, we do not come until we have tried all other options and failed. His invitation to come remains open. It will remain open to the thirsty till the end of the Age so that whoever wishes may take the free gift of the water of life.[[34]](#footnote-34) Whoever comes, weary and thirsty and burdened, Jesus promises rest for their souls.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Sometimes the rest which Jesus gives is experienced by faith but not yet seen by a change of circumstances. What has changed is the one who now carries our burden.[[36]](#footnote-36) We have offloaded them onto God by faith and rest assured that with Him they are in safe hands. When and how He sees fit to change our circumstances lies with Him in all wisdom.

This Rest will be accompanied by a promise from God from scripture. We will hear His quiet voice and His Rhema Word confirming a scripture.[[37]](#footnote-37) The timing of God’s tangible answer may not be our preferred timing because God’s higher purposes are the process of redeeming us from the power of sin. His ways are higher than our ways.[[38]](#footnote-38) We may have idols in our heart which need to be discarded.[[39]](#footnote-39) God uses our trials to advance this process. His ultimate purpose is to prepare us to receive the ‘crown of life’.[[40]](#footnote-40)

The process of coming to the throne of grace may seem difficult, testing and even prolonged. But there we can be assured we will find grace and mercy in abundance. So, let us be bold, confident, and expectant. It is grace, abundant grace, from beginning to end. The truth of God’s word will lead us to grace. And this grace will lead us back to truth and the sure promises of God. Indeed, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.[[41]](#footnote-41)

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# Grace in Hebrews - Discussion Questions

1. What need do you have for which you could use the grace of God?
2. What might be stopping you from receiving the grace you need?
3. What has Jesus done to open the door to God’s grace for us?
4. What are some reasons why God’s grace may seem delayed?
5. How does God use the needs we feel to achieve His higher purposes in our lives?
6. What is the function of God’s Word?
7. Why might we resist scrutiny of every part of our lives?
8. What was the role of the Old Testament High Priest?  
   How does Jesus fulfil this role in our lives?
9. Describe in your own words the extravagance of God’s grace.
10. Return to the need you mentioned in question one.  
    Describe your own confidence and boldness to approach God’s throne for the grace you need.

1. Eph 1:20-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Matt 28:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 5:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Heb 7:26 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rom 3:23 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rom 2:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rom 3:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Phil 2:6-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Luke 2:51,52; John 1:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 2 Cor 5:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Heb 5:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Heb 5:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. John 3:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Rom 6:23 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rom 1:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Rom 3:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Acts 3:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. John 3:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. John 7:39 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Rom 7:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. John 2:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Mark 7:21-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. 2 Cor 10:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Heb 9:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Luke 23:36,29; John 19:22,23 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Heb 2:14,15 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. John 16:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Luke 23:4,5 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Heb 12:2,3 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ps 103:10,13 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Phil 4:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. 2 Cor 12:9,10 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Phil 2:8,9 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Rev 22:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Matt 11:28,29 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Psalm 68:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Isa 30:19-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Isa 55:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Isa 30:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. James 1:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. John 1:14,17 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)