



TIME OF GRACE®

The Power of "And": Me and God

Study Notes

Summary

How does Paul open his letter to his dear friend Titus? By talking about our hope, our peace, and the eternal life we have in Jesus . . . and God! Every verse of Paul's introduction contains the name of God, a theme that runs through the entire book (and the entire Bible). In fact, only by focusing on God do we experience true hope, peace, and life.

- **Titus 1:1-4:** ¹Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—²in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior, ⁴To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.
- Big Idea: The Bible is about you . . . _____.

Points to Ponder

1. When you open the Bible, do you expect it to speak primarily about God or to your life's circumstances? Explain your answer.
2. Eavesdrop on the conversation Jesus had with his friends after he came back from the dead in Luke 24:40-49. According to Jesus, what are the Scriptures all about?
3. Evaluate: The more you think about God, the more joy you will have in your life.

Homework for Next Week

Read Titus 1:5-9.

Time of Grace Ministry
The Power of "And": Me and God
Titus 1:1-4
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Pastor Mike Novotny

A few years ago, God taught me the immense power packed into that little word "and."

Did you know in the history of Time of Grace, our media ministry partner, every month pretty much they have this little book that you can get and for the past 18 years, 18 times 12, the number one best-selling book that they have ever had is that one. And I think that little word was the reason why; it is because it challenged all of us. The "and" asked all of us to change. The "and" made all of us better Christians. We had to wrestle with people and passages.

And the more I think about it, the same thing is true for life. Whether it's dating or marriage or raising kids, whether it's politics or church or work or life in the neighborhood, so much seems to live and die on the inclusion of that little word "and." Anyone can make a one-sided argument, anyone can tell half the truth. Anyone can dig in their heels based on one little snippet of the evidence. It's only when we include the "and" that life becomes entirely true and the kind of life that God wants us to have.

I bet some of your most frustrating moments at work or in relationships have been with people who've chosen to tell just half of the story. I lost someone I love. I lost my job. She doesn't want to be married anymore." It could be true. "And God is with me. And God has a plan for me. And God will never leave me. And God will never forsake me. And nothing can touch the hope that I have in Jesus." Do you see? Everything - you can focus on the little slice of the truth because the devil would love you to put a period where God would love to see a comma and a conjunction. And. Hope and life and peace and all the stuff that you want and what God wants for you can come down to that little word "and."

Which is why starting today and for the next few weeks, I want to jump into this little book of the Bible called Titus. Titus is super short - three chapters long, 46 total verses. You could read it in under three minutes but I want to dig deeply into it for the next few weeks and I want to show you how much life can change when you don't just listen to one part of the story; you add an "and" and listen to all of it.

It says: "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness." A few years ago, there were three Christian songwriters who handed the lyrics of a new song to a popular young artist and when she read through the lyrics of the song, the emotion gripped her heart and came welling out of her eyes. The lyrics of the song said this: "You plead my cause, you right my wrongs, you break my chains, you overcome. You gave your life to give me mine; you say that I am free. How can it be?" Remember that song? Lauren Daigle's classic hit moved her when she first read the words and I hope it moves you to think about the words, too. God - how can it be that he would elect you? God was perfectly fine and yet, he chose to be with you. God is God so he could see

all the future at the same time. He could see everything wrong you would ever do in your entire life and yet, what did he do? He elected. He chose. Some of you haven't been chosen for a date or a promotion or a job or much of anything but all of us through Jesus can say that we are God's elect.

So agree or disagree: The Bible is about you? Well, yeah! This passage says that God actually picked you to believe in him and spend forever in his presence. And there's verse two. Paul continues: "In the hope of eternal life, which God who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time." Did you know that "let there be light" was not the first word that God spoke? That's the first thing he said to start time in history here in our universe but apparently, before he said that, he said, "I pick you." That's crazy to me! If the Father, Son and Spirit had kept a journal, they would have said, "Before the beginning of time, here's what we did." They picked their people. They elected people. Isn't that crazy to think about? Before Jesus walked the earth, before there was a David or an Abraham or an Adam or an Eve, God was thinking about you. So agree or disagree: The Bible is about you? Yeah, my goodness, the Bible is written to tell us that we have hope with God, right?

And there's a verse three; are you still with me? Verse three: "And which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior." Oh, I love this verse. You know, if I could be critical of you, y'all are really mean to the word "preaching." Preaching has kind of lost its good reputation in our culture, hasn't it? "Don't preach at me," or "He's so preachy," or "I really like that church; the preacher, he doesn't really preach." I think - you know, I'm trying not to be personally offended by all that - but do you know what the word "preach" actually means in the Bible? It means to repeat what the king said. When the king says something with a royal decree, it's authoritative and no one can contradict it and the messenger comes running through the village and he repeats the news. He doesn't share opinions or feelings or his own spin; he just says what the king says. That, in the Bible, is what it means to preach.

And according to this verse, you end up in the light through preaching, you end up learning that God elected and chose you, you find the hope of eternal life through preaching. It's not until someone stands up and repeats what King Jesus said that we step out of spiritual darkness and we see life and eternity like God always intended. So what you really should be thinking, as you sit there right now, is, "Pastor Mike, preach!" "Come on, Pastor, preach at me. Like, I don't need your little human opinion. You're 38 years old; that's probably worthless," right? "I don't need you to share your feelings or what you think about God. I need you to preach. Like, I'm going through life, I'm going through stuff, and I need to hear what King Jesus said. Pastor, I've been busy, I've been running to my job, working crazy hours, raising kids, but we pay you to sit in an office with one book so what does it say? You tell us. You've been spending time with the King and his decrees all week so you tell us, you preach, you just repeat what he says." Because if I do, the words of King Jesus give you light and life and hope and they remind you that you are his chosen people.

And there's one last verse for today. Check out verse four. Paul says to Titus, "My true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." Is the Bible about you? Well, apparently, it's about grace, which is God's undeserved love. You don't

deserve it but you still get it; that's for you. And it's about peace. That means there's no war anymore with God, it's all good with your Father in heaven, you can be whole and complete because you have him; that's for you. It's from God the Father, which means there is a dad who loves you, who wants you, who listens to you, who always has time for you, who's not going to bail on you, reject you, or leave you. That Father is for you. And it's from Christ Jesus our Savior, which means when you think of Jesus, he's not just a judge; he saves, he delivers, he rescues us from the danger of sin. You have grace, you have peace, you have a Father, you have a Savior, so agree or disagree: The Bible's about you? Agree! In fact, let me show you. If I put all these verses together, let me go back to my original question. As you look at that, is this passage about you? God's elect, hope, eternal life, promise, light through preaching, our Savior, faith, grace, peace, Father, Savior. Is the Bible about you? Yes, it is. Yeah, thank you very much. Alright, I was getting a little bit nervous about that for a second. And - and, and, and - and did you see what else it's about? In fact, did you catch the noun that shows up in this passage more than any of the others? Let me help you; take a look. God, God's, God, God, God. Five times, four verses. At the end, a he, a his, a Father, and a Savior. And you have a paragraph of the Bible that's filled with not just you but you and God. In fact, you long-time Christians who have read the Bible before, do you know what the very first verse of this book says? "In the beginning, God created." Do you know on the first page of the Bible, through its first 31 verses, the name of God explicitly shows up how many times? Thirty. God created, God said, God saw, God blessed, God said, God saw, God said, God saw, God said, God saw, God said, God blessed - 30 times in 31 verses because on the very first page, God wants to make sure that you know that the Bible's a lot about you but it is primarily about God.

So grab a pen and write this down; this is huge for your faith. I want you to know the Bible is about you and God. And however much space you've got on that blank in your bulletin, I want you like a kid with a crayon, I want you to make those three letters as big as they can be, G-O-D, because it's not even in the Scriptures. The Bible is about God. And if you remember that, it will bless and change you in all the right ways.

It's kind of like this: Let's imagine that this grape is planet earth. There's you, listening to me right now, right? And if you're in Milwaukee, it's down there. If you're watching this on TV in D.C. If you're in India, hey, there you are. Tell me this for a second: Why, when you woke up this morning, you weren't frozen to death? Why could you blink your eyes open and see your pillow, maybe your spouse, maybe that hot cup of coffee? Why is there life and light and hope and warmth on planet earth? The answer is this: Oh, we did it - nice! We were practicing before church. The answer is because of the sun. My scale is a little bit off. Do you know the sun is so big that one 1.3 million earths could fit inside of it? And it's only because the sun is so massive that it's gravitational force is so strong that the earth orbits close enough for life to exist. So you might not have thought about the sun's existence when you woke up this morning but the reason there was warmth instead of being frozen, the reason there was life instead of death, the reason you could enjoy anything today is not just because earth is so amazing, it's because of the existence of something else.

It's because of this that there's an orbit. Without it, it would go flying off into space, which is a lot like you and God. My fear for you, spiritually, is that you would forget the most important thing in your existence. That you would think so much more about what is going on in your life

that you could actually come to church, actually read this book, and forget it's about God. See, here's the nice thing about life on earth: If you forget about the sun, you still get its warmth. The hard thing about spiritual life on earth is that if you forget about God, you lose the warmth of his love.

I was thinking about that the other day. So with Time of Grace, our media ministry partner, we are blessed with an amazing opportunity to speak to so many of you on television, on Instagram, on YouTube; millions of people engage with our content each month. But because that digital church is so big, I obviously don't get to meet every person face-to-face. I don't get to know them and so Time of Grace has made up these kind of character profiles of the kind of people who engage with our content. The other day, I got these sheets of paper - they have a little picture, here's Tyler, here's Tara, here's Tanya, here's Tiffany, here's the average TV watcher, the average Instagram user - and they're like all broken down by the average person, you know, what they want, what they desire, what their story is with faith so that I can read over them and remember all these people on the other side of the camera who will hear this message. Well, each profile has this little section called "wants and desires" based on what we see on people's social media posts, on what they tell us about themselves, the kind of things they request in their prayers when they call Time of Grace. We have a whole list of what people want more than anything in the world and I wrote it down; let me tell you the list. Our Instagram users want to graduate, want to get a good job, want to save money, be good friends, and be independent of their parents. Our YouTube users want to be valued, to be debt free, to make their parents proud, to find a serious relationship. Other people want to be good parents or good grandparents, be healthy, lose weight, have more time for family. They want financial breathing room, a healthier lifestyle, success in business, and more time with their grandkids.

And I would say those are great goals and they're really concerning because if you seek after those things in your life, if you put all your mental and spiritual energy into school and graduation and your job and raising kids and your marriage, you could actually get it. But guess what happens without this? Poof. You go flying out of orbit and you end up in this place where God doesn't want you to be. And here's how I know that: Because the people who did graduate sometimes don't have hope. And the people who did find a serious relationship aren't as happy as you think. And the people who make 10 times as much money as you do don't have as much peace as you would assume. It turns out no matter how life looks on earth, without the presence of something bigger like the sun, we go flying off. Which is why Paul's words matter so much. He's teaching us it's okay to think about life and family and forgiveness. Just make sure you don't forget about the biggest and most important thing of all.

So I'll give this back to my friend Chad; not bad for a soccer player, thank you very much. Let me remind you of this little tip that can help you so powerfully: And God. Students, I'm going to work hard on this test, on my ACT's, on getting into college and God will be with me no matter where I end up. And God says I have worth and value no matter what the scores end up to be. And God says I matter to him whether I get an amazing job or I don't have a job at all. God says my life has value no matter what the world says. Those of you fighting for love and romance, for love and respect, go crazy - you should. The Bible commands us to. Just remember, and God says that if he stays with me, it's good. And if someone I love wants to leave me, I still have God. It's wonderful when I feel affection in marriage and God promises

that no matter what they choose, no matter if they're able to forgive, I will always have him and he's God. I hope it's nothing, I hope the treatments work, I hope the chemo goes through - great prayers. And God says that there is nothing - not sickness, not death, not angels or demons - there is nothing in all of creation that can take away the hope of eternal life that I have in him. Whenever you're worried, whenever you're anxious, whenever you're stressed, whenever you're depressed, the devil has somehow convinced you to put a period and God erases it and he says, "comma, conjunction, and God." And God, right? There is nothing you can do to me, devil, that will undo the power of these words - and God. Not some little dinky god with a small "g." Not the official church God with a capital "G." I'm talking caps lock on, G-O-D, my hope, my peace, my joy, my satisfaction and God is right here. And you cannot take him away. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, he is mine and that fact will never change. That simple fact, those two little words, will keep you in the orbit of what God calls life. No matter what happens on your little personal planet, nothing can take you out of it.

That's what Mabel believed. I recently heard a story about a guy named Tom who met an elderly woman named Mabel. Here's how Tom described their first interaction. He says, "As I walked into the nursing home, I saw an old woman strapped up in a wheelchair. Her empty stare told me that she was blind, the large hearing aid over one ear told me that she was almost deaf. There was a discolored and running sore covering one part of her cheek and it pushed her nose to one side. She drooled constantly. Mabel was 89 and had been bedridden, blind, and nearly deaf and all alone for 25 years." But Tom got to know Mabel through a lot of conversations and he built enough trust with her that he got to ask her a really honest question and hear her answer. He asked her, "Mabel, what do you think about when you sit here? When they wheel you out of your room and you sit there for another day, another month, another year, what do you think about?" And Mabel said, "I think about my Jesus. I'm kind of old-fashioned," Mabel said to Tom, "and some people around here think I'm kind of weird but I don't care. I'd rather have Jesus." And then old Mabel would drool on her chin, she broke out into the words of the old song, "Jesus is all the world to me, my life, my joy, my all. Jesus is my strength from day to day, without him I would fall."

Brothers and sisters, how can that be? How can you be blind, deaf, and sit in a poor nursing home for two and a half decades and be satisfied? Well, if you remember those two little words, what seems impossible to people is absolutely possible with God. So I want you to remember no matter what you're going through, the best week of the year or the worst, a great financial time or something that's really making you afraid, things are amazing at home and relationships, or you have no clue what tomorrow will bring, I want you to make sure the devil does not get to put the period on that sentence. Instead, let God erase it, draw a comma, and end every thought with those powerful words: And GOD.

Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, without you and without your spirit, we will think of you too little and not often enough. But with your help, heavenly Father, we can know you. We can seek you today until we see you. Heavenly Father, with every good thing that we experience in life, every great moment, every cup of coffee, every good meal, we can think of how glorious you must be if you're better than everything. And so, we ask you, Father, for help. Open our eyes to see your

glory. Help us to be amazed by your presence so that all the things of this earth would seem so small in comparison to you, the sun that we orbit around. It's crazy, Jesus, that you gave us the hope of eternal life. You chose us before the beginning of time and in time, you died on the cross. In time, you sent someone to preach to us that we could hear that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords chose us. We love you for it and we want to seek you because of it. Bless us today with great faith. We ask this for your glory and for our good and we pray, Jesus, in your name, Amen.