



# checkpoint.

SUMMER 2021/22

CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY MAGAZINE

# GRACE

*In this edition:*

Grace: the heart of mission | Overflowing grace | Was blind but now I see





# From the Editor

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)*

In Romans and elsewhere (“by grace you have been saved”—Ephesians 2:8) Paul explains that the Christian life, from before the beginning until the glory of new creation, is a life of grace. God ‘foreknew’ us by grace. We are predestined by grace. We are called through the gospel of grace, we are justified by the resurrection of Jesus, and we are glorified, becoming like Christ through grace. All is grace, from beginning to end.

This edition of *Checkpoint* is all about grace. In our lead article, CMS QNNSW director Mark Fairhurst tells us how, he first came to know God’s grace for himself.

God’s grace surpasses any ‘knowledge’ that another religion might offer, as Dave Painter tells in his article ‘Knowing God’. It is a grace that

challenges the idea of paying back good for good, as Joel Atwood highlights in his article about reciprocity. Such grace is incredibly difficult for Muslims to grasp, as B encounters in her daily conversations. God’s grace in Christ is a grace that no one seems to understand by nature, whether from the Middle East, Argentina, the Pacific, South East Asia, or Australia.

The struggle to comprehend God’s mercy in Christ is a universal human affliction, answered only by the grace of God.

Please pray as you read this *Checkpoint* that God in his mercy would enable us, CMS missionaries, and those amongst whom CMS works, to know his amazing grace in Christ.



Gordon Cheng

## Contents

|                                      |       |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Grace: the heart of mission          | 3-6   |
| Grace from beginning to end          | 8-9   |
| Knowing God                          | 10-11 |
| With God all things are possible     | 12    |
| What Jesus has done for me           | 14    |
| Grace that frees                     | 15    |
| From reciprocity to reconciliation   | 16-17 |
| Was blind but now I see              | 18-19 |
| Too good to be true?                 | 20-21 |
| Giving thanks & missionary spotlight | 22    |
| Check out Checkpoint Online          | 23    |

## checkpoint.

© 2021 Church Missionary Society – Australia Ltd. Permission to reproduce material may be obtained from the Editor. *Checkpoint* is published four times a year by CMS Australia. CMS is a member of Missions Interlink. For information and feedback, please email us at: [checkpoint@cms.org.au](mailto:checkpoint@cms.org.au). Please send CHANGES OF ADDRESS to your CMS branch office (see back cover). Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the New International Version® Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ CMS Australia contracts an independent professional to receive complaints – 1800 070 511 | [helpline@smr.org.au](mailto:helpline@smr.org.au)

Editor: Gordon Cheng; Editorial Coordinator: Naomi Jones; Sub-editor: Sarah Barnett; Communications Manager: David Carpenter; Design: Clarisse Avila; International Director: Peter Rodgers.

CMS is a fellowship of Christian people and churches committed to global mission. We work together to set apart long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our vision is for a world that knows Jesus. We aim to do this by:

- Reaching gospel-poor peoples for Christ
- Equipping Christian leaders for church and society
- Engaging churches in cross-cultural mission



Please **DO NOT DISTRIBUTE ONLINE** any articles marked with this symbol. This includes but is not limited to reproducing, emailing and uploading to a website.



We don't have the space to cover all the wonderful stories that CMS has to tell within the pages of this *Checkpoint*. If you want to read more, scan the QR code or go to: [cms.org.au/checkpoint](https://cms.org.au/checkpoint)

# GRACE : *the heart of mission*



Can you remember when God first opened your eyes to grace? CMS QNNSW Branch Director **Mark Fairhurst** describes such a moment, explains it from the Bible, and explores why this insight matters in the vision for *a world that knows Jesus*.

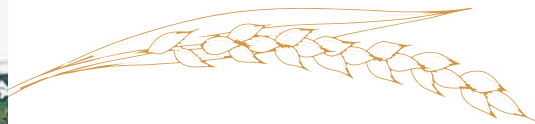




Can you remember when God first opened your eyes to his saving grace in the Lord Jesus Christ? For me, I was 18 years old. I was just about to start university and had been invited to a beginners' Bible study, the week after joining a new church. Sitting on my bed that night, I opened a small booklet of memory verses I had been given and read these words:

*Altogether too many people make the mistake of measuring the certainty of their salvation by their feelings. Don't make this tragic mistake; believe God. Take him at His Word...*

These words turned my eyes to Jesus and set me free. I'd spent the previous two years struggling to be a 'good enough' Christian, judging my relationship with God on how well or badly I was living, and how close (or more often distant) I felt to him. Suddenly, the Bible came alive to me. Instead of seeing it as filled with unreachable expectations, it became the place where I could know Jesus, and the riches of God's mercy, love and grace.



## Our vision: grace

Our CMS vision says: *We work with churches to set apart, equip and support long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

At the heart of the gospel is the message of salvation by grace. As Paul spoke of this in Ephesians, he summed up in this way:

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9)*

It's not surprising that these verses from Ephesians 2 have become memory verses for many Christians. They are such a clear statement of the gospel of grace.

Yet this concept is fundamentally counter-cultural to every person and society in our world. Natural religion is founded on salvation by some form of human effort. Whether people follow one of the world's major religions, local cultural beliefs, or even a secular moral system, we naturally judge our 'righteousness' on what we do and the genuineness of our response. In the end the focus will be on what 'I' do. This is the sea our missionaries swim in, as we do.

The message of the gospel of grace cuts through these natural beliefs. We can do nothing, and our salvation depends on God's mercy and grace alone. Paul cries out: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

This belief in grace does not come easily. Our own efforts in evangelism, and the experiences of our CMS missionaries, tell us how strongly natural religion binds to our human hearts.



## The missionary challenge

Many of our missionaries work in gospel-poor areas of our world, where natural religion is bound into the cultural worldview of those they live among. In some societies, even trying to find a word or idea that will translate the concept of grace is hard because it is so unknown in that culture. Sending missionaries long-term to such cultures is vital if they are to build the linguistic and cultural understanding—and grow the depth of relationships—needed to share the revolutionary message of grace in words and actions that people will understand.

The task is no easier for those working among churches that are growing rapidly. Equipping Christian leaders with a clear understanding of the gospel is vital for the health of these churches. Despite the gospel being widely proclaimed, it often becomes layered on top of, or mixed in with people's previous religious beliefs. When the missionary digs beneath the surface, they will often find natural religion.

**Belief in grace does not come easily. Our own efforts in evangelism, and the experiences of our CMS missionaries, tell us how strongly natural religion binds to our human hearts.**

Recently CMS missionaries Andrew and Margie Newman, serving in Uganda, shared the story of Tezrah, their language helper. Margie described an early conversation they had about repentance and faith: “We realised Tezrah believed that...salvation was dependent on her constant repentance. As we talked about the completed work of Jesus’ death and resurrection, Tezrah had a light bulb moment about grace.” Tezrah has been sharing her newfound assurance and knowledge of God’s goodness with her friends, her family and the children at an orphanage where she works.

Reflecting on this, Andrew said: “We’ve learnt... never to assume an understanding of the gospel even when people have been in church for many years. Here, often people presume their friends are Christians, so telling them about Jesus is not high on the agenda. We encouraged Tezrah to share her Bible stories and see what opportunities for conversation about Jesus would come.” Communicating grace is impossible without God’s help, and so Paul asked the Ephesian Christians to pray for him in the spiritual battle he faced. “Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.” (Ephesians 6:19-20)

We need to be praying this prayer for our missionaries daily, whether they are involved in primary evangelism or seeking to grow Christians in their understanding of grace.

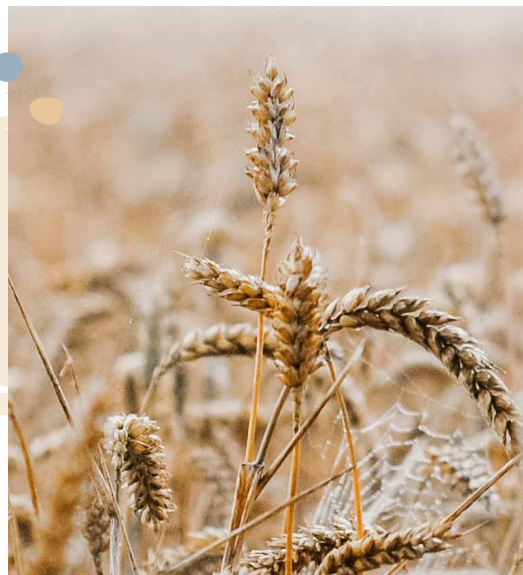
## Living out God’s grace

The calling we have received by grace must be lived out. At its heart this will be seen in the humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance we show towards each other.

Here is what Paul says:

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)*

In a church I pastored some years ago, we had services in English, Cantonese and Mandarin (that church has now added Korean and Indonesian to the mix). But we were always united in the gospel of Christ. Despite significant cultural differences and the potential that brought for conflict, there was a very real love and acceptance of one another in Christ. If multicultural churches are to work, here or in other locations, their daily life together must flow from God’s grace determining all aspects of how people relate to one another. ►





CMS missionaries are very aware that the gospel of grace must be backed up by a life of grace. But they have to live out grace in the midst of cultures and languages they are still seeking to understand. They must ask themselves questions like, is a particular action—one that seems hurtful and ungracious to us—genuinely sin? Or have we simply failed to understand cultural cues and ways of relating? One lesson CMS missionaries learn, that is especially vital in their early years on location, is to withhold judgement until they have begun to understand the situation and culture. Such an attitude can only proceed from a commitment to act with grace.

A life of grace will make us distinctive in every way to the world around us. In Ephesians 4 and 5 Paul speaks of its effect on our speech, sexual purity, family and work relationships—the list goes on. The careful working out of grace in the life we live (5:15) is not only for our personal godliness—it makes the most of every opportunity to show the power of God’s grace in us to the evil world we live in. As the other articles in Checkpoint will show, grace lived is a powerful outward witness to the grace we proclaim.

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

EPHESIANS 3:16-17

## Praying for grace

This is a spiritual battle—it cannot be won in our strength alone. It is God’s grace and power that raises us from death to life, and it is his grace and power that enables us to live and stand against the evil powers of this world (6:10-20). Paul’s prayers reflect this. He prays constantly (1:15-17) because he knows that only God in his power can bring this about. He keeps asking that they may know God better (1:17-19) because he recognises how easily we will move away from this true knowledge of him. He prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts and we will know the length, breadth, height and depth of his love (3:14-21), because this is the only way we will be able to live out the life of grace he has called us to (4:1-2).

Are we praying these ‘big’ prayers for our missionaries and the Christian brothers and sisters they work among? Praying about the details of their lives and ministries is important, but praying these big prayers is essential if we and they are not to be ‘blown here and there by every wind of teaching’ (4:14), but to ‘become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ’ (4:13).

We work in partnership to send workers to share the gospel of Christ across the world, because we know that grace alone can set people free from the power of sin and death. It is by the proclamation of grace that our Father achieves his good purpose, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

pray



Thank God for the grace that he reveals in Christ. Pray that CMS missionaries would know the length, breadth, height and depth of God’s love so that they can reveal his grace to the people he places in their lives.







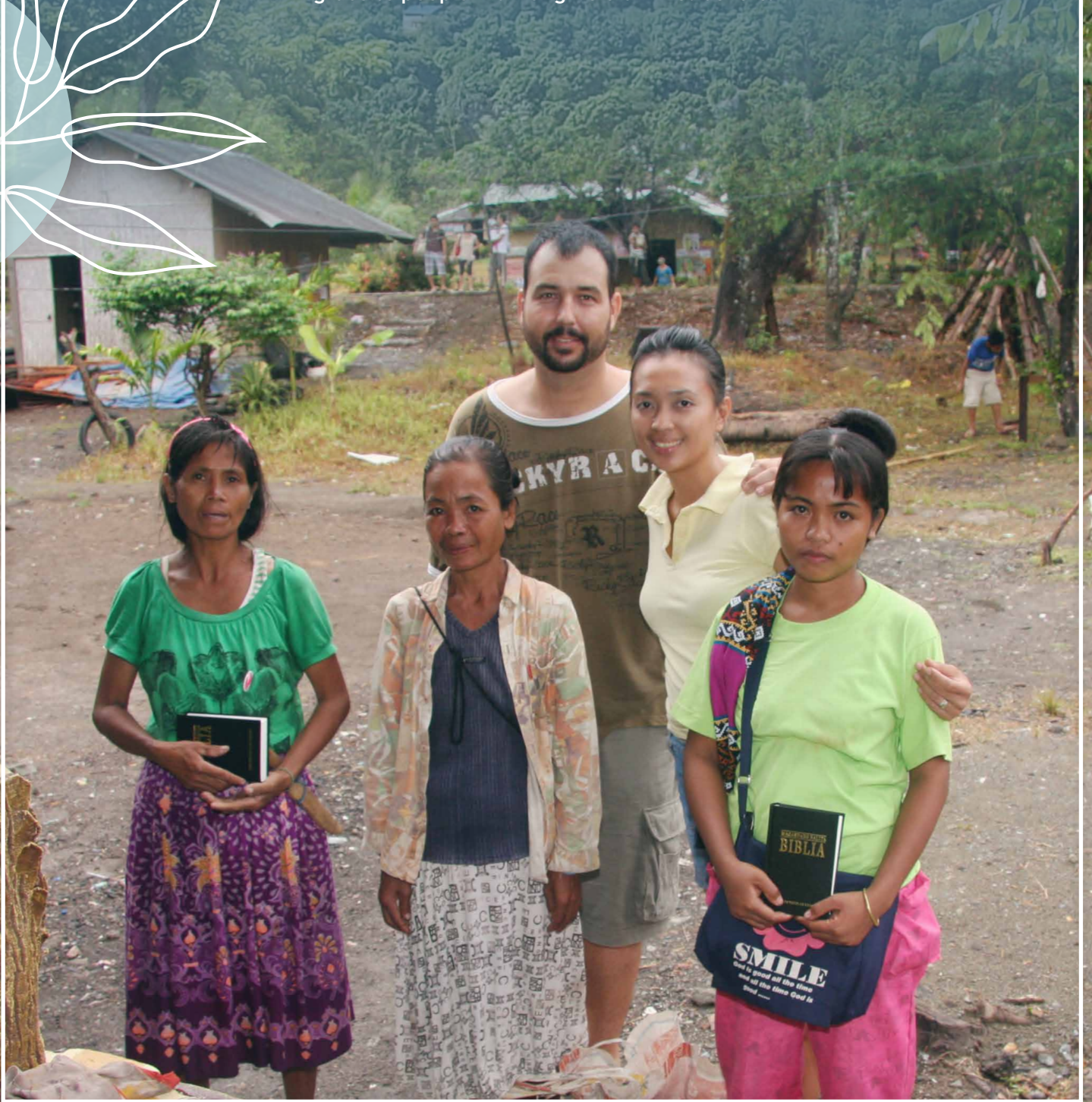


# Grace

## FROM BEGINNING TO END



CMS missionaries **Howard and Michelle Newby** have had a long-term connection with the Philippines and notice that the role of 'obedience' can often cause confusion in relation to grace. Howard speaks of how he is learning to teach God's grace to people with long-held animist beliefs.







When we first arrived in the Philippines, we were confronted with teaching that promoted obedience as the sign of a true follower of God, often with a question: “If you are not doing [insert good works here] then you have to ask yourself, are you really a Christian?”

At face value this seemed to undercut the Bible’s clear teaching that we are saved by grace, not works. But in our training at St Andrew’s Hall, we’d been reminded not to rush to judgement, but to observe and ask questions. So, our questions to ourselves included: Is this a straightforward denial of grace? Are we hearing ‘grace plus works’ salvation? Or are those speaking, simply expressing their desire to honour God by emphasising his lordship?

In our part of the Philippines, phrases like, ‘Jesus is Lord’ are often emblazoned on vehicles and shops, almost like a magical talisman seeking the blessings of safety or success. Is this expressing true belief, or is it about gaining blessing in this life? The answer to our questions, is probably a bit of ‘yes’ to both.

But one of our important questions was this: how does the lens through which locals view the world—animism—shape belief and behaviour?

## Understanding worldview

Animism is the belief that the world is full of easily angered spirits that must be appeased. This appeasement consists of rituals and practices (protective amulets, signs on shops or vehicles) designed to avoid harm and bring blessing. Angry spirits can mean illness, failed crops, bad weather, even death. Our landlord would not allow us to destroy termite mounds because it might bring sickness from angry spirits living in them.

In 1521 the Spanish arrived in the Philippines, bringing teaching that ‘grace plus works’ was essential for salvation. The Spanish Catholic priests publicly burned wooden idols and then introduced their plaster saints. Such teaching dovetailed nicely with animism, for in both systems good works and rituals were and are, essential to making spiritual progress. Then in the early 1900s, Protestant missionaries came with their brief message of salvation in Christ alone, plus a long list of rules and expectations for Christian living.

Fast forward to today and animistic beliefs still linger, often combined with remnants of other Christian teachings.

## Grace from the beginning

Along with other missionaries in similar animist contexts, we are responding to these syncretistic beliefs through ‘Chronological Bible Teaching’. As the name suggests, we work from the beginning of the Bible story onward. People hear, by listening to the Bible’s message from the beginning, that God created all—including the spirit world. Therefore, God alone has ultimate spiritual authority. Animistic spirits are not to be feared.

## Are we hearing ‘grace plus works’ salvation? Or are those speaking, simply expressing their desire to honour God by emphasising his lordship?

Other profound truths become clear as the Bible story unfolds: God is holy, mankind is sinful, God requires death for sin. Yet God always keeps his promises to bless! Through the Old Testament the message is clear: ‘Like Israel, I break God’s law, I cannot save myself. I need a saviour’. We are praying for God to work through his Word to bring people to this understanding in his good timing.

Here in the Philippines, we long to see people no longer bound in spiritual fear, no longer seeing God as a means of gaining material blessing. We want to see them living to serve the promised Saviour, safe in the security of eternal blessing through the forgiveness of sins.



Do you have the patience to listen and learn how to share God’s grace meaningfully in another culture? God may be able to use you in cross-cultural mission. To discover more about the opportunities, speak to your local CMS branch.

## Read more online...



In this article Howard refers to Chronological Bible Teaching, a tool that has been used by several CMS missionaries in different contexts. Scan the code for an in-depth discussion of this tool.

# Know With



**CMS missionaries Dave and Leoni Painter serve in Cambodia, where the dominant Buddhist religion values ‘acquiring knowledge’ as a good work. How to help students of the gospel understand grace?**

The lesson was proceeding well. I followed the Khmer language textbook on this subject that I had been developing over the last few years. The previous night I had been up carefully preparing PowerPoint slides. I’d remembered all the relevant Khmer technical words, the class engaged in an active and sometimes heated discussion, and the students’ understanding of the subject matter seemed to have grown over the last three hours. Then one of the students said, “Thank you, Teacher, you gave us good knowledge.” My heart sank...

First, some background.

## New missionaries doing serious Bible teaching

It felt like an anomaly when Leoni and I, relatively new and inexperienced missionaries, were assigned to teaching positions. The task was to instruct eager local Christians how to serve God’s people through an understanding of God’s word in their language so they might serve in their own culture. We were assigned to teach the Bible, an ancient document written by human hands, yet inspired by God.

As teachers of theology, we had to consider that the Bible is written in a different language, to a different cultural and historical situation, and, in the case of the Old Testament, under another covenant. When our students correctly read the Bible it seriously challenges their worldview as they enter into the biblical world and encounter Christian doctrines with fresh understanding and vigour. They come to a better understanding of grace, atonement, the state of the dead, and the new creation, that at first leaves many of them dizzy, some in shock, some upset, but many craving for more.

## How Buddhism affects our students

Most of our students are new Christians, often coming from Buddhist families who follow Buddhist traditions. Their communities are centred on the local wat (Buddhist temple) where the state primary school is typically located. The local school language syllabus is crammed with explanations of religious doctrines built upon a Buddhist and animistic worldview.

Therefore, I should not be surprised that even though my students identify as Christian, read their Bibles daily, and pray and fellowship with other Christians regularly (they often pay a hefty price, in their communities, for their confession and baptism), much of their thinking and reasoning remain entrenched in the Buddhist milieu.

**“Thank you Teacher, you gave us good knowledge.” My heart sank.**

An essential component of the Buddhist worldview is obtaining ‘knowledge’. When the Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree to contemplate the world’s problems of suffering and death, he did so in order to gain the knowledge which became the foundation of Buddhist teaching. Thus, the Buddha was able to enter Nirvana (cessation of existence) through understanding the universe, that is, through the knowledge gained by contemplation (or study).

The Buddha shared this knowledge with his followers, who rapidly grew in number. Buddhist teachers preached sermons and Buddhist monks became missionaries. Buddhism subsequently split into various schools and sects as different interpretations of their sacred texts arose, especially when it encountered foreign cultures. Buddhist monks translated these scriptures so they might be more widely understood, and the teachings were practised far and wide. When described this way, Buddhism and Christianity have some similarities.



# g GOD

## The problem: knowledge

However, when my students say, “Teacher, you give us much knowledge...”, this is a sign to me that they remain entrenched in the Buddhist worldview.

As Paul reminds, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:1–2). While the student might be seeking to pay the teacher a compliment, it shows that they are probably still walking along the path to Nirvana. Studying the Bible, reading books on theology, understanding Greek and Hebrew morphology, syntax, and grammar can all be seen to be a means for personal improvement leading to a very different salvation.

## Knowing about God versus knowing God

There is a difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God. In the Khmer language, there are two different words for ‘knowing’ that separate these ways of knowing God. We can know (*deng*) about God, that is, knowledge of his attributes such as his divine providence, sovereignty, omnipotence, omnipresence etc. This can remain a purely academic or intellectual exercise.

On the other hand, we can know (*skoal*) God by coming into a living relationship with him because of grace. This should result in a confession of personal sin, true repentance, and active submission to his Lordship. It means a change of allegiance, where loyalty goes from self to Christ the King. Evidence of such a change is seen in the lives of believers in both word and deed.

## Students who truly know God

When I am teaching my students, I want them to approach their study with a firm Christian motivation: “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16–17) The apostle Paul says nothing here about the study of scripture being simply interesting, or a stimulus for intellectual growth, or the means of finding a pathway to escape the suffering of this world (Nirvana). Of course, we try to make our classes stimulating, but this is not an end in itself. My students should be preparing themselves both in the classroom and on our school campus for a life of gospel service. If they remain righteous and truthful, grounded in grace, their teaching will be effective for gospel ministry, perhaps bearing fruit 30, 60 or 100-fold.

pray



Pray that in the grace of God, Bible students in Cambodia and elsewhere will learn that knowing God is not the same as knowing about God.



# WITH *God* ALL THINGS ARE *possible*



CMS missionaries **Peter and Terry Blowes** have been ministering in Argentina for many years. Frequently in their university work they encounter the challenge of students who believe in God's sternness and judgement, but not in his mercy and grace. Terry gives a recent example.

I was sitting in the loft area of the Economics Faculty café, reading Matthew 19 with four students. Two were committed Catholics and the other two were life-long Protestants. We were reading of the rich young ruler and the sacrifice Jesus calls on him to, "sell what you possess and give to the poor." The disciples respond in astonishment to Jesus' requirement and ask, "Who then can be saved?" In response Jesus says, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." As we approached the end of our study each group member shared their application. The two Catholic girls said, "I am going away grieving because I can't live up to the standards Jesus sets." I was then shocked to hear the two Protestant girls share exactly the same application!



## Going away sad

One of the challenges we face is how our local students read biblical narrative, including the gospels. Time after time I've heard students say they will "go away sad" after reading passages like the beatitudes. "How can we ever live up to Jesus's requirement of perfection?" If the Old Testament law was impossible for the Jews to keep (e.g. You must not kill), how much more difficult were Jesus's commandments? (e.g. If you hate your brother or call him rude names you are worthy of hell! Matthew 5:21-22)

In Latin society it is the sad, dying Christ, who is the example of sacrificial obedience to God, that is most commonly seen. The God who is hard to please and always ready to condemn is the one people grew up with. Leadership is about being heavy-handed and discipleship is about subservience and losing your own identity. Sadly, these ingrained attitudes are just as present in the evangelical (Protestant) churches as they are in the rest of the society.

## What are they missing?

To read biblical narrative well you must read each story within the bigger story. The gospels are marvellous examples of narrative—building suspense, involving the reader and causing them to feel more and more hopeless—until the climax where the mystery is solved. The innocent one dies so the guilty can go free! God's gracious love freely given to unworthy people.

As we teach our students to read Bible narrative in the context of the finished work of Christ on the cross, they begin to be free to love and serve with joy. The grace of God shows them how to be grace-filled people. It's a message that leaves them, "walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:8), not going away grieving and fearful of losing their salvation.

## Grace applied

So, what was *my* application in the study of the rich young ruler?

I know I can never be good enough to enter the kingdom of God on my own merits. But Jesus said in this passage ((Matthew 19:26)) *with God all things are possible*. Jesus died to take the punishment for my sin, and I am forgiven by God. I have the assurance that the rich young ruler lacked, based in what Jesus did for me, not in what I do or who I am. I have been saved by his grace.

Please pray with us for the students of Argentina, that they would be overwhelmed not by the demands of the law, but by the greatness of God's grace, and this would overflow to the wider church and community here.

## pray



Pray that believers around the world (including in Argentina) would be fully convicted of the overwhelming mercy and grace of God in Christ.



*How precious did  
that grace appear  
the hour I first  
believed.*

*John Newton*



*CMS is looking for Christians who can  
share God's grace across cultures.*



Where will you serve?  
**[cms.org.au/opportunities](https://cms.org.au/opportunities)**

# WHAT Jesus HAS DONE FOR me



CMS missionaries **Simon and Jess Cowell** are serving in Bari, Italy, discipling university students. Simon and Jess reflect on witnessing to the revolutionary truth of what Jesus has done in meeting both religious and secular thinking with the gospel of grace.

## The threat of legalism

Italy is steeped in spiritual legalism. Almost all Italians, even those who are not observantly Catholic, have a legalistic mindset, where people must do things in order to be acceptable to God. Even in the evangelical church, where there are some severe reactions against Catholicism, legalism is a constant threat.

The danger for any Christian group, including the groups we are part of in Italy, is that a certain set of behaviours become the definition—when what we do (or don't do) is what sets us apart. At one level this is a good thing. The Scriptures exhort us to be distinctive in our conduct. We are no longer to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2). And yet it's not our conduct that defines us as Christians. It is the Lord Jesus himself. We are rightly called Christians, those who belong to Christ. He is our distinctive, and everything else flows from that, including our moral performance (see Ephesians 2:8-10). We have the joy (and challenge) of embodying the grace of Jesus in all our relationships.

We've had conversations with a dear brother from our church who was (and perhaps still is) convinced that if someone doesn't explicitly follow Jesus, they will still be saved by God if they are a 'good person' and 'do the right thing'. Yet at the same time, he would say that a real Christian would supposedly never have a tattoo, or struggle with certain sins (especially around sexuality). This is also a very popular opinion amongst university students, most of whom have never read the Bible for themselves and have the same legalistic assumptions as the rest of their culture.

**...a real Christian would supposedly never have a tattoo, or struggle with certain sins...**

## Discovering Jesus

One of the joys of GBU ministry is inviting non-Christian students to read the Bible and discover for themselves who Jesus really is. Last year Martina\* was invited along to one of our GBU Bible studies, where we just happened to be reading Ephesians together. Martina saw all religions as being fundamentally the same: telling people to be good.

We had the chance to let her see for herself in the Scriptures, that the gospel of grace is the exact opposite of that—that instead of telling you what to DO, the gospel tells you what Jesus has DONE for you. It speaks of his love and care, of his sacrificial death so that we might

be the beloved children of God. We continue to pray for Martina, and for the numerous other students like her who think God is severe, judgmental and distant without any understanding of his mercy and grace.



go



Do you have a heart to share the good news of grace with young people? There are opportunities for gospel workers to support high school and university ministries in several locations. Contact your local branch to find out more.



# Grace THAT frees



**CMS missionaries Chris and Karen Webb serve at Broome Peoples Church in the Anglican Diocese of North West Australia. In this article Chris shares how grace lifts the burden of self-condemnation.**

Over a cuppa, Jenny\*, an Aboriginal woman from the East Kimberley, tells us that one of her nieces is now a Christian.

“How long ago did she become a Christian?” we ask excitedly. “Well, she gave up drinking about six months ago,” is Jenny’s reply.

It is common for people in Kimberley church circles to equate being a Christian with abstaining from one or more of the three ‘g’s—grog, gunja (marijuana) and gambling.

Another day we run into Jim at the shops, and he comments that he used to be a Christian but was tempted to go back to drinking. Although he firmly believes that Jesus died for him, he doesn’t think he’s a child of God at the moment because alcoholism has the better of him.

## The burden of seeking righteousness

While many people understand that they need Jesus’ help, they carry the burden of thinking that they must be on top of their problems before they can come to Jesus. While many people understand that Jesus died for their sins, they carry the burden of thinking that a person can only call themselves a Christian while they are walking the righteous road. One slip up and you’re out!

## The good news of grace

When teaching the Bible in an environment where many people struggle with addiction, it’s tempting to simply urge people to change their behaviour. But that’s not where God’s good news starts. It starts with another ‘g’—grace!

The message of the Bible is that we are powerless to rid ourselves of sin. But the good news is that when we believe in Jesus, God no longer counts our sin against us. And as we go on trusting in Jesus’ done and dusted work for us each day, his Spirit will empower us to change to be more like him.

## The joy in relying on God

It’s so thrilling when people in our church express a solid understanding of grace. When Matt’s relatives comment on his changed lifestyle, he tells them that it’s not because he’s better than them. He’s still a sinner like them but God has helped him change.

Martha told our congregation of the liberating moment when she realised that she was still a child of God because of Jesus, even though she didn’t feel like she was acceptable to him.

Rather than despairing when he messes up, Derek is willing to admit his wrong to others and ask them to pray for him.

Our hearts warm when we get a glimpse of our brothers and sisters’ reliance on God’s grace for their salvation and security. Pray that we too would give glimpses of that same reliance in our lives as we serve here in Broome.

*pray*



Give thanks for the ministry of Chris and Karen Webb and for the community of believers in Broome. Pray that Christians in the North West would know the truth that they are only saved by grace.



# FROM RECIPROCITY *to reconciliation*



How does ‘grace’ work in a place where the rule for maintaining good relations is not grace but reciprocity? CMS missionary **Joel Atwood**, working with students in Vanuatu, explains.

Vanuatu is an intensely relational country. Even though it’s a little unfair to treat over 115 language groups across 96 islands as a single entity, a common aspect we’ve noticed across the archipelago is the deep, almost fundamental, place of reciprocity.

## ‘May I borrow your ute?’

In Vanuatu, all the relationships you find yourself enmeshed in have to be kept in a rough balance and harmony. One of our dear friends works in a bakery. He occasionally brings a basket of bread and hangs it on our gate after his night shift. Who doesn’t appreciate fresh bread in the morning? Then it clicked that the frequency of the bread aligned with requests to borrow our truck, or our mower, or some help with this or that. The bread doesn’t ‘pay’ for the mower or the ute, but it frontloads an appreciation of the relationship that allows the borrowing to happen.

We were saved early on from embarrassment by a long-term missionary friend who caught us washing up a container someone had brought with food in it to a party. We thought to clean the box and hand it back. How rude of us! To honour their gift of food to us, we needed to fill up the box with some of our own food and then hand it back. Under this system, no one misses out, everyone is honoured for their contribution. Relationships must be balanced to keep all things in harmony.

## When reciprocity works, and when it doesn’t

On the one hand, this reciprocity makes excellent sense of how we respond to the gospel. If God has treated us so unbelievably kindly, we can only respond with a radical outpouring of our own life in thanks to him. We cannot just offer token actions of recognition or treat such a gift lightly. We are radically indebted to our Saviour!

Where this way of maintaining relationships may be less helpful is when our students start to understand the magnitude of what God has done for them in Jesus, they feel a drive to ‘frontload’ their relationship with God, to perform the right level of religious and moral actions to ensure that God is sufficiently well-inclined towards them so that he will bless them with salvation and its fruits in life.

This leads to an unfortunate tendency to look to works, morality, and religiosity as the prerequisite for salvation and God’s favour. Overlay this on the already strong hierarchies within communities, and churches become= very forceful in imposing high standards of behaviour on their members, especially young people. Do this and this and this—NEVER do that—and then God might spare you, might bless you. Sadly, this often coexists with high levels of hypocrisy amongst leaders who fail to meet the very standards they enforce on others.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

EPHESIANS 2:8-9





## Tired of perfection

How do these influences and experiences shape a person? You become exhausted from performing for the religious crowd so as to not let your family down. As one of our graduates shared upon leaving university, she had come to campus ready to let her faith drift away, because she was, “tired of having to be perfect all the time.”

According to the cultural mores of Vanuatu, when you sin, it is either swept under the rug to be ignored or overlooked, or you are publicly ‘hung out to dry’ as an example of the bad people you’ve always been warned about. And beneath it all is the persistent message that God would never, ever want ‘someone like you.’

Of course, as we are, none of us is worthy or loveable. But that is the point of grace. It is while we are still enemies of God, still dead in our sins, that Jesus in his grace came to reconcile us, resurrect us, and carry us home. But when you’re wired up to keep all your relationships in harmony, maintain a balance, it is almost inconceivable that God would bother with you at all.

## Speaking and living grace is hard

We have found grace incredibly hard to articulate simply here. We can talk and talk about the great gift God has given us in Christ, and all will nod approvingly, familiar with the words. But seemingly it doesn’t get any deeper in than the nod.

When you are caught out in sin here, it is normal to disconnect from those you think you’ve disappointed (because you can’t keep the harmony). Sadly, over the last few years a remarkable number of core students, graduates, board members, and future staff workers have stepped away from our ministry due to sexual sin. Here, it’s considered ‘normal’ for these people to disappear from your radar for a few years, then slide back into churches and groups as if nothing had happened.

## Grace against the grain

It took us a while to decipher this pattern. But when we did, we wondered what would happen if we pushed against the cultural grain and persisted in seeking a relationship with those who were pulling away from us. We had already had the hard pastoral conversations about sin, repentance, and consequences for ministry and life. Now we wanted to model grace by not allowing that sin to sever our relationships.

The first phase has been incredibly uncomfortable. Messages have gone unanswered. Attempts to catch their attention on the street were ignored. But with the considered pigheadedness of a cultural outsider, we have kept doors open long enough that some, at least, have seen that disappointment, hurt, and consequences do not have to destroy relationships. Even when we don’t deserve it, sin can be forgiven, (although not overlooked). If we can show grace in this small way, perhaps, in God’s kindness, he can show something all the greater through it.

*give*



Your sacrificial partnership with CMS missionaries enables them to share the counter-cultural message of grace long-term. Support the Atwoods and other CMS missionaries at [give.cms.org.au](https://give.cms.org.au)

*Read more online...*

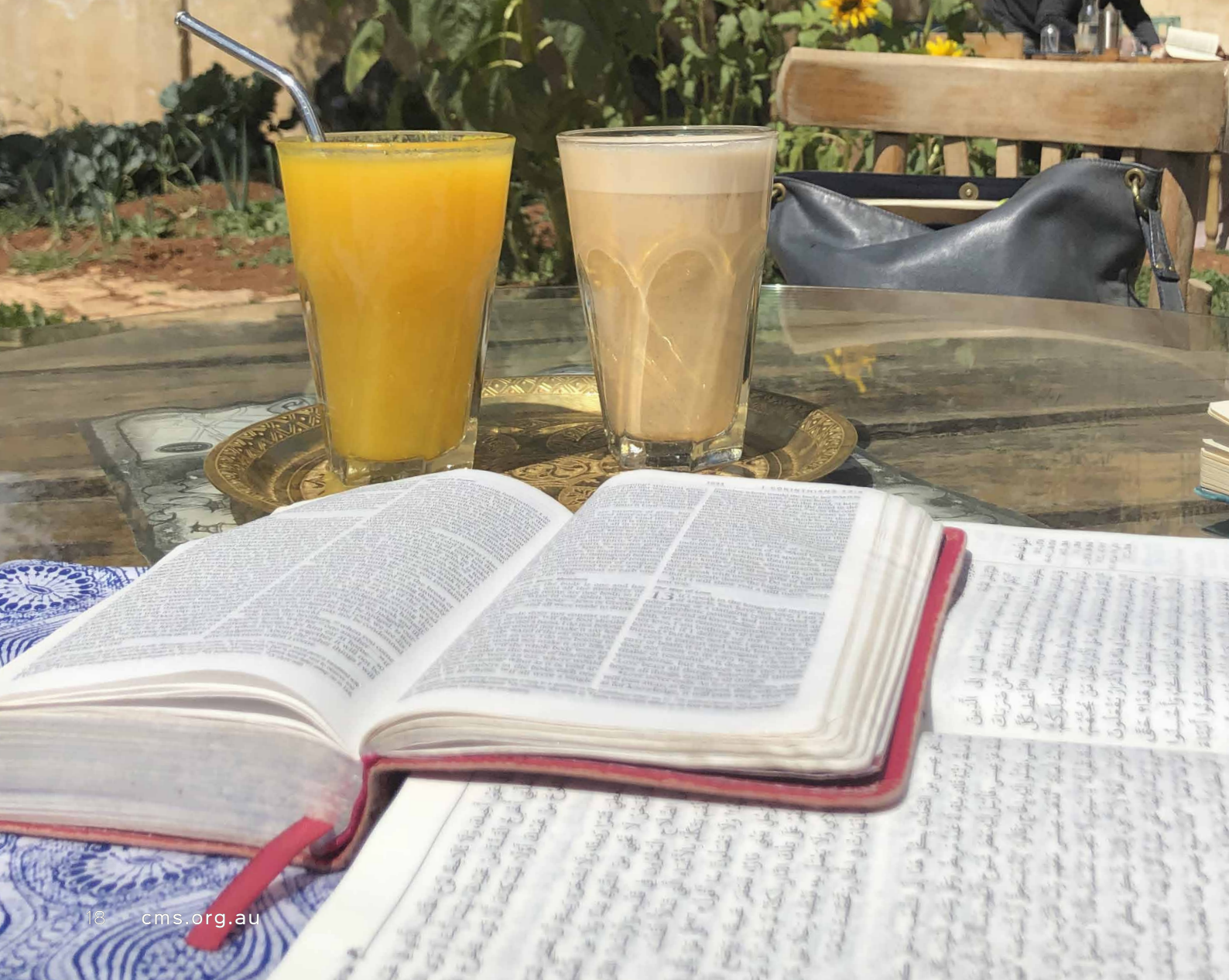


Reciprocity guides relationships in many locations where CMS missionaries are serving. CMS missionary Kellie Nicholas reflects on living out God’s grace in Japan, and the way this helps people come to faith in Jesus.





WAS BLIND  
BUT NOW  
*I see*







**CMS worker B serves in the Middle East, teaching English and learning about her adopted culture. Here she speaks of the challenges in communicating grace to Muslims.**

My lecturer drew her chair closer to mine. It was the last class for my course in formal Arabic at university, and she was conducting a conversational review of topics we'd covered, including Islamic history, principles and practice. She taught with passion, gentleness and dignity; my heart had warmed to her and she too appreciated our rapport. "In your interactions as you've got to know people here, have you experienced any significant, core difference between the two faiths?" she asked me, the only Christian in the class.

With Islam often portrayed negatively in the West, she is keen to redeem its image. And rightly so; my Muslim-majority neighbours are kind, generous, seeking of peace and full of love. To her, the differences between us are largely superficial. But there is a difference—right at the core. I faltered. How could I explain? Our conversation moved from motivations for good deeds, to Jesus' gift of forgiveness and life, and then to the accounting by God that will occur. "Yes, there will be an accounting," I said, "But the account has been paid."

**I've found that my Muslim friends struggle to understand the need for atoning sacrifice, let alone accept that Jesus is that sacrifice, provided by God himself.**

## Earning forgiveness

Time and again, over the past several years living in the Middle East, I have been struck—and at times frustrated—by how incomprehensible the concept of grace is to my Muslim friends. Several friends have told me how life's purpose is basically an exam: life in this world is a test to determine whether or not we deserve to enter heaven. One friend described how there's an angel that sits on each shoulder—one writes down a person's good deeds, and the other angel records all the bad deeds.

At one level, these friends recognise that we can't actually be good enough to attain God's standard of perfection. We must rely on God's mercy and willingness to forgive. However, there is never any assurance of this forgiveness. How could there be, without Christ's decisive, victorious act in history? I've found that my Muslim friends struggle to understand the need for atoning sacrifice, let alone accept that Jesus is that sacrifice, provided by God himself. It's as though they've been blinded, by lies and distortions of truth that are passed down the generations through lines of trust.

## Receiving grace

But there are glimmers of hope—where God's Spirit seems to be at work, giving sight to the blind. One dear friend, Milak\*, once commented to me, with remarkable clarity, "You Christians depend on Jesus. We depend on our own works." Milak has been a language tutor for me and several other co-workers over the past six years. I've been told by colleagues that for a long time she was not at all open to talking about Jesus or what we believe. However, through years of sharing life and friendship with us and in observing our interactions with each other, she has softened and changed.



Milak is wrestling with questions around what is true. She still holds to Islam. But she is attracted by what she sees in the lives of believers in Jesus: the outworking of God's grace. In fact, she recently commented that she has noticed a change in her own attitude. She shared about a shameful situation concerning a female relative. Whilst other family members were judging the woman, Milak found herself standing up for her. Years ago, she said, she too would probably have sided against her.

It's only by the powerful work of God's Spirit that any of us can accept his gift of grace. I long for these dear friends, and many others, who are blinded by lies, to truly know Jesus and have life in him! And as I stumble along—with moments of frustration, joy, failure, and unexpected blessings—I am reminded that it's only by grace that I, also, live each day.

*pray*



Thank God for the opportunities that B has had to explain the gospel of grace to her friends. Pray that their lives will be transformed as they grasp the offer of forgiveness through Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

# Too good to be true?



**CMS missionaries Chris and Grace Adams serve in Timor-Leste, a country where following rules is deeply ingrained and the reality of grace is almost too shocking to comprehend. Chris shares how he is helping people understand grace.**

Timor-Leste is highly religious, not unlike the Athens that Paul addressed in Acts 17. The worldview of most Timorese people reflects a syncretism of folk Catholicism and tribal animism. These two sets of beliefs have a deep dependence on works and subtly pervade the whole of society, including the church. Most people in Christian churches have come from this background either personally or through their family within a couple of generations. As a result, many churches teach that obedience to rules is the mark of a faithful Christian, and even acceptance by God.

**All their life they have been taught that being a 'good Christian' is about following rules. Realising the truth of grace rocks their world.**

## Unveiling truth

As part of my ministry here, I teach a unit on Galatians at Dili Bible Institute (DBI). One of the major challenges for the students is understanding the role of the law in the life of a Christian. The students are mostly university age, though some are much older, including some current congregational pastors from a variety of Protestant denominations. Most assume that all the rules in the Old Testament need to be followed for the 'Christian' to be saved. However, the message of Galatians cuts against this.

*We...know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. (Galatians 2:16)*

As I ask a few questions and point to a couple of OT laws, students see that in practice, nobody does what the law requires. All their life they have been taught that being a 'good Christian' is about following rules. Realising the truth of grace rocks their world. They are often surprised to find that rules like wearing long pants and long dresses to church are not actually in the Bible, but are institutional rules that their church tradition has created.



## Barriers to grace

In our ministry here we have observed significant barriers to people understanding salvation by grace. Firstly, many, have not encountered the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many leaders, like the students at DBI, have not been taught salvation through faith by grace and therefore they do not teach it to people. How can people believe if they have not heard?

Secondly, Scripture is often inaccessible due to low literacy levels and not having access to a good Bible translation in the local language, making it hard for people to engage personally with the gospel. Thankfully, there is progress being made in literacy and translation.

Thirdly, the religious context and general sinful nature of people gives people a default disposition toward salvation by works.

## Amazing grace

The reality of salvation by grace is amazing, even shocking. When I have seen students or people at church confronted with grace for the first time, the response is often the same: "That sounds too good to be true...doesn't it mean we can just do whatever we want, if we do not need to follow the laws?"

As Paul explained, this way of thinking is not grace but legalism. Paul counters not with more rules, but with an appeal to grace:

*For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)*

As I share with people at church, and in my role of training and supporting current and future church leaders for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Timor Leste, I am trying to teach them that a shift needs to take place because we now live under grace.

## Grace brings change

How should knowing salvation by grace change people's lives? Firstly, humility is a direct result of truly knowing salvation by grace (Ephesians 2:8). There is no room for boasting because grace is independent of personal effort and dependent on Christ's sacrifice. Humble acceptance of the grace offered is the only right response. Humility in leadership is extremely counter cultural in Timor Leste. When leaders show humility through serving others it shouts grace.

Likewise, forgiveness is a counter-cultural sign of grace in action. A willingness to forgive others and recognise one's own sin goes against the norm of retribution for wrong and refusal to admit fault. Someone who understands salvation by grace understands that at the most fundamental level forgiveness of sins is an act of God's gracious love in Christ (Colossians 3:13).

## Playing a part

We long to see the church in Timor-Leste knowing God's grace. So how do we respond to legalism within the church? We are seeking to proclaim, pray and practice grace.

### Proclaimers

We endeavour to proclaim grace alongside our Timorese brothers and sisters, and to help raise up more proclaimers who know the gospel of grace. We also attempt to make God's word more accessible and to engage people with the gospel of truth.

### Pray-ers

We seek to be humble pray-ers and ask God to show his grace to those who are trying to earn their salvation through effort. We need to humble ourselves and be reminded daily that grace is given in Christ and received freely.

### Practice

We practice grace by being humble servant leaders, willing to forgive and seek forgiveness. At the cross Christ relieves people of the burden of the law's demands. Therefore, in our preaching, teaching and conversation, we want to ensure that we do not place extra burdens on our Timorese brothers and sisters.

Our heart is to continually point people to the amazing grace of God shown in Christ.

pray



Give thanks that CMS missionaries like Chris and Grace are helping church leaders and churches discover the reality of God's amazing grace. Pray that they and their Timorese brothers and sisters in Christ may be able to show grace through humility and forgiveness.

## Read more online...



For a deeper perspective on grace in Timor-Leste, read the longer version of this article on *Checkpoint Online*.

Image: Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Timor-Leste (EPCTL) in Dili.



# GIVING *thanks* TO GOD



## SHIRLEY DENTON

Praise God for the life of Shirley Denton, who died in July, aged 90. Shirley and her husband John, (who died in August 2020), served with CMS in what was then known as Tanganyika from 1956 until 1964. Shirley and John had two daughters while serving with CMS, and two sons born after they returned to Australia. Shirley suffered a stroke in her 30s that left her with hemiplegia and significant brain damage, but she coped through God's grace and her determination. Pray for comfort for her family as they grieve.



## MARJORIE FOULKES

Give thanks to God for the life of Marjorie Foulkes, who died in August, aged 101. Marjorie and her husband Francis served with CMS UK in Nigeria 1953-1963. Following their time in Africa, they moved to Melbourne where Francis became the founding principal of the newly opened St Andrew's Hall. Marjorie served alongside him in caring for the many missionaries who trained there between 1964 and 1973. They served next in university college ministry in Auckland, New Zealand where Francis died in 1977. Marjorie remained in New Zealand and continued supporting world mission through CMS NZ. Pray for her family to know God's peace and hope at this time.



## BEVERLEY OVENS

Praise the Lord for the life and service of Beverley Ovens, who died in September, aged 75. Beverley served as a nurse with CMS in Tanzania 1974-1982. After training at SAH and studying Swahili in Nairobi she worked at Murgwanza Hospital in northwest Tanzania, close to the borders of Rwanda and Burundi. Beverley was well-loved by fellow missionaries Ross and Margaret Hall who recall her professionalism and legendary laugh. After returning from Tanzania, Beverley managed the Chesalon Nursing Home in Jannali before moving to Bowral where she married Alan Ovens (died 2016). Beverley had an active role with the Mothers' Union and took a particular interest in MU ministry in Myanmar. Give thanks for her life of service and pray for her friends and family to know the peace of God as they grieve.



## MAX MORRIS

Give thanks to God for the life of Max Morris, who died in September, aged 93. Max and his wife Eula served with CMS in East Africa 1954-64. He taught at the Teachers' College in Kahuhia, Kenya before joining the staff at the Alliance Secondary School in Dodoma, Tanganyika (Tanzania). After retiring from CMS, Max continued to teach science at The Illawarra Grammar School and preached regularly in local churches. Pray for comfort for his family in their grief.

## MISSIONARY *spotlight*



### Jon & Deb, South East Asia

"What I see in my rural students... is an understanding of action and then blessing or consequence. If they are diligent farmers and the season is favourable, then they are likely to get a good crop and meet the needs of their family. This cause-and-effect thinking is reflected in the practical outworking of their faith: they are brought up knowing that they are saved and forgiven by the death of Jesus, but life in general teaches them (incorrectly) that their actions should affect how God blesses them materially."

Read more here:



### Kellie Nicholas, Japan

"(Due to) the obligation to give and receive in Japanese culture [known as *giri*], understanding the biblical concept of grace can be challenging. God made the ultimate sacrifice in giving his own son so that we may be brought back into relationship with him... Coming to understand that there is nothing we can do to earn God's forgiveness is a huge step in coming to faith for anyone, but presents particular challenges if *giri* is your experience of relationships."

Read more here:





# Check out

## CMS ONLINE

[cms.org.au](https://cms.org.au)



By Gordon Cheng

Many CMS readers will soon, or even now, be looking at the world through post-lockdown eyes. Although many of us have spent a lot of time on screens, we still want to encourage you to check out the CMS website ([cms.org.au](https://cms.org.au)). You can register for a CMS Summer Conference or CMS youth event, or partner with a CMS missionary by subscribing to their prayer points and/or becoming a regular giver. But did you know there is also a growing array of mission-related stories and articles on the site?

### Articles

Every article published in CMS Checkpoint magazine (with some exceptions for secure workers and locations) is now also published on the website. Articles on Buddhism, ministry of and to women, the need for ongoing Reformation, university work, how to persevere when ministry is hard...all these articles and more are there on the website.

### Book reviews plus!

As well as this, we are slowly adding book reviews that give up-to-date and recent recommendations from mission courses around Australia. There is more: look out for links to 'mission thinking' articles by CMS Director of Training and Development David Williams, Bishop Greg Anderson (long involved in mission in the Northern Territory) and former CMS missionary Simon Gillham, head of the Department of Mission at Moore Theological College. This section of the website will continue to grow with regular contributions.

### Mission thinking

In the most recent of these 'mission thinking' series, David Williams writes on the Homogeneous Unit Principle. Should we set up churches and missions targeted at a single ethnic group? Should we further subdivide by language, class, age, even gender? In this excellent series, David Williams pushes us to consider such questions against biblical rather than pragmatic criteria.



Whether lockdowns continue or return, and even if not, check out the CMS website at [cms.org.au](https://cms.org.au). Why not start with Greg Anderson's article on 'How Western missionaries are perceived'. Scan the QR code to read more.



CMS is a fellowship of Christian people and churches committed to global mission. We work together to set apart long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our vision is for *a world that knows Jesus*.

## OUR MISSION



## OUR DISTINCTIVES



BIBLE-BASED



GOSPEL PRIORITY



IN-DEPTH  
TRAINING



LONG-TERM  
FOCUS

Read the full CMS vision: [cms.org.au/vision](https://cms.org.au/vision)

## GET INVOLVED

Go to [cms.org.au/get-involved](https://cms.org.au/get-involved)



pray

Visit [cms.org.au/get-involved/pray](https://cms.org.au/get-involved/pray) to find out more



care

Visit [cms.org.au/get-involved/care](https://cms.org.au/get-involved/care) to find out more



give

Visit [give.cms.org.au](https://give.cms.org.au)



go

Visit [cms.org.au/go](https://cms.org.au/go) or contact your local branch (see back page) to talk to someone about becoming a missionary.

# MISSION IS FOR KIDS TOO!

## Looking for activities for children that teach them about mission?

Our Kids Activity Sheets and Missionary Prayer Sheets help kids learn about God's global mission. The sheets include fun activities and interesting facts so that kids can discover more about all the locations where CMS missionaries are currently serving. There are also Bible activities and prayer points, to help kids pray for *a world that knows Jesus* too.



Download the Kids Activity Sheets here.



Download the Missionary Prayer Sheets on their individual CMS web pages here.



CMS (Church Missionary Society) works with churches to set apart, equip and support long-term workers who cross cultures to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### CMS NSW & ACT

Level 5, 51 Druitt St SYDNEY NSW 2000  
PO Box 21326 WORLD SQUARE NSW 2002  
(02) 9267 3711 nswact@cms.org.au  
[cms.org.au/nswact](http://cms.org.au/nswact)

### CMS QNSW

Level 1, 80 Petrie Terrace,  
PETRIE TERRACE QLD 4000  
PO Box 220 RED HILL QLD 4059  
(07) 3171 3020 qld@cms.org.au  
[cms.org.au/qldnsw](http://cms.org.au/qldnsw)

### CMS SANT

37 Angas Street ADELAIDE SA 5000  
(08) 8212 4838 sa.nt@cms.org.au  
[cms.org.au/sant](http://cms.org.au/sant)

### CMS TAS

PO Box 501, SANDY BAY TAS 7006  
0438 590 559 tas@cms.org.au  
[cms.org.au/tas](http://cms.org.au/tas)

### CMS VIC

Level 1, Building 1, 630 Mitcham Rd  
MITCHAM VIC 3132  
PO Box 2150 RANGEVIEW VIC 3132  
(03) 9894 4722 vic@cms.org.au  
[cms.org.au/vic](http://cms.org.au/vic)

### CMS WA

31 Acheson Cr WOODVALE WA 6026  
(08) 6209 9159 wa@cms.org.au  
[cms.org.au/wa](http://cms.org.au/wa)

### CMS Australia

Level 5, 51 Druitt St SYDNEY NSW 2000  
PO Box 20095 WORLD SQUARE NSW 2002  
(02) 9284 6777 cmsa@cms.org.au  
[cms.org.au](http://cms.org.au)

### St Andrew's Hall

190 The Avenue PARKVILLE VIC 3052  
(03) 9388 1663 sah@cms.org.au

[cms.org.au](http://cms.org.au)