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## ***Wisdom Worksheet: Sin and Grace (Exodus 33:18-34:9)***

### **Introduction**

*Sin* can be defined as desiring life apart from God. It is the pursuit of the satisfaction of our desires apart from the only One who is designed to fulfill them. Since the first sin in the Garden of Eden, man has embodied a bent toward evil from his cradle to his grave (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). A toddler pushes her dish of food off her highchair while staring her warning mother in the eyes. An elementary school student fights another during a game on the playground. A struggling high school student cheats on an exam. A brash college student contrives a scheme to romance an unsuspecting girl into his bed. A salesman fudges on his expense account. A talkative mother gossips about a woman in her small group. A pastor clicks where he shouldn't. A holier-than-thou Bible thumper condemns a fellow church attendee who exercises his liberties. A professional athlete breaks the rules in order to gain an advantage. A businessman baits and switches. A dissatisfied woman captivates her husband's best friend with the gaze of her eyes. An elderly man curses his nurse though she happens to be pregnant with a child who—despite repeated warnings—will eventually push her dish of food off her highchair. All the while others look on prideful that they are able to refrain from committing such sins. No wonder Rabbis said, “Sin begins as thin as a spider web and ends like a cart rope.”

Sin takes us farther than we wanted to go, keeps us longer than we wanted to stay, and costs us more than we wanted to pay. Still, God remains engaged.



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*Grace* is undeserved love, or unmerited favor. Even though we break God’s law, He pursues us with His affection. Grace flows from the heart of God. After Moses had literally broken the law—the first stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments (Exod. 32:19)—Yahweh called him to a cleft in the rock on Mount Sinai where the moral law would be rewritten on the new stone tablets chiseled out by Moses. First, God’s glory would pass by (Exod. 33:18-34:5). *Glory* referenced His character and presence also known as His heart. With the stone tablets in Moses’ hand, God passed by and proclaimed that He was indeed full of grace (Exod. 34:6). *Gracious*, the word selected by Bible translators for God’s attribute, is translated from the Hebrew root word, *chanan*, meaning “to bend or stoop to one who is inferior.” In spite of our sin, in Christ God bends the knees of His heart like a beggar in order to engage us, the undeserving, with His love. Paul penned, “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich*” (2 Cor. 8:9). God’s radical idea can be remembered in an acronym: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.

Moses’ response to the grace of God on Mount Sinai was the only affirmative posture one can take in order to receive unmerited favor. In an act of self-examination and surrender, he not only bent his physical knees; he also bent the knees of his heart. “*Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped*” (Exod. 34:8). The Hebrew word used for *worship* is *shachah*, the term most frequently translated *worship* in the Old Testament. It means “to bow down.” In order to receive grace, we must bow down and humbly receive it from the One who stooped down to us in order to extend His loving



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offer. Then in a phrase depicting a heart of confession as well as repentance and belief in God's grace, Moses said only what one who receives grace can say, "I can't. You can." *"O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes," he said, "then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance"* (Exod. 34:9). *Go* is translated from the Hebrew, *halak*, which means "walk." In spite of their sin, God graciously walked with the Israelites. We can learn from Moses' response to grace. Moses examined his heart and surrendered it to God; he confessed sin; he repented and believed in God's grace; and he walked with God.

#### **Four Styles of Sin and God's Contrasting Grace**

The New Testament writers used several Greek words for sin. However, those most frequently selected can be summed up in four predominant terms: (1) missing the mark (*hamartia*), (2) twisting a wrong to make it right (*adikia*), (3) missing on purpose (*anomia*), and (4) leaving good undone (*paraptoma*). Each can be illustrated using a basketball free throw analogy.

##### **(1) Missing the mark (*hamartia*)**

###### **Sin (Romans 3:23)**

*Missing the mark* is attempting to make the shot, but missing it. When Michael Jordan steps up to the free throw line, making 88 percent of his past free throws, he brings an expectation that he will make 88 of his next 100 attempts. But does he miss 12 of 100 on purpose? The answer is, "No." Missing the mark is how everyone sins. Using this term for sin, the Apostle Paul said, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). *Have sinned* is translated from the Greek root, *hamartia*. Its



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etymology stems from an archer who missed the mark of the target. Regardless of the level of excellence in any area of our lives, we miss the goal and fall short. No one can make every free throw. No one can place every tennis or volleyball serve within the service lines. No one can connect with every pitch. No one can hit every golf ball where he desires. Similarly, no one can get it morally right 100 percent of the time. No matter how hard we train, we will miss the mark in honoring God or others.

### **Grace (Romans 6:23)**

That is why we need grace, and God gives it freely. In the same letter to all in Rome who were loved by God and called to be saints Paul said, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). Paul juxtaposed three pairs of terms in this verse: (1) *wages* and *gift*; (2) *sin* and *God*; and (3) *death* and *eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*. *Wages* implies that we earn the results of sin, both by nature and by choice. Consequently, we deserve what comes our way. *Gift* in contrast communicates that we merely receive a loving act from another. *Sin* means that we miss the mark. By contrast, *God* is the mark that we miss; He is holy—totally apart from sin (Habakkuk 1:13). *Death* (*thanatos*) is separation from God. *Life* on the other hand is the abundant and uninterrupted spiritual vitality that God designed for us to have in Christ Who provides His Spirit to dwell in us. Left to ourselves, we cannot right our every wrong. Our falling short earns us separation from a holy God. We need grace. Christ who was sinless, yet the underwriter for all sin fills the gap where we fall short (2 Cor. 5:21). He rebounds our misses and scores for the kingdom.

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Examine your heart and life. Surrender them to Christ—including both your makes and your misses. Sometimes, our makes (the things that we get right) are bigger barriers to God than our misses. We tend to lean on our giftedness rather than our godliness. Humbly receive the gift of eternal life in Christ. Pray, “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner*” (Luke 18:13). If you are already in Christ, ask God to examine your heart and reveal any offensive way in you then surrender it to Him (Ps. 139:23-24).

## **(2) Twisting a wrong to make it right (*adikia*)**

### **Sin (1 John 5:17; Romans 1:18)**

*Twisting a wrong to make it right* is missing the shot, yet telling everyone that we made it. We twist the miss into a make. *Adikia* in Greek literally means “no righteousness.” John said that all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). We must realize the kingdom damage of justifying our unrighteous actions into righteous ones, especially when our twisting is in the form of legalism or religious pride. Onlookers will see our hypocrisy much clearer than we think. Using this term, Paul said that twisting a wrong to make it right suppresses the truth. “*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness*” (Romans 1:18). Whereas the NIV translates *adikia* as wickedness, the NASB translates it as unrighteousness.

An example from the Bible of someone who twisted a wrong to make it right is Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25). Luke, the writer of Acts, recorded that Simon had practiced sorcery in Samaria, boasting that he was someone great and most likely profiting financially from his efforts. In fact, he performed his wonders so well that



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many thought he might be the Messiah. Consequently, the Samaritans followed his magic. However, when the Apostle Philip came to town preaching about the grace of God, the people believed and were baptized...including Simon the Sorcerer. He followed Philip and was astonished by the miracles he saw empowered by the Divine. News had hit Jerusalem that Samaria had accepted the word of God when Peter and John were sent to them. As the disciples prayed for the Holy Spirit to come upon the Samaritans by the laying of hands, Simon saw another income opportunity. Consequently, he offered Peter and John money for them to bestow him with this power. He twisted a wrong (a selfish desire to become powerful and significant) into a right (praying for the Holy Spirit to come upon people by the laying of hands). Peter rebuked him. He commanded Simon to repent and pray to the Lord for forgiveness regarding the thought in his heart, saying that he had become full of bitterness and captive to sin, or unrighteousness (*adikia*).

### **Grace (1 John 1:9)**

When we twist a wrong in order to make it right, we need grace. The key that unlocks the door to God's grace is confession. John said, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). *Confess* means "to agree with." *Unrighteousness* is *adikia*. Confession is not for God to know our unrighteousness. He already sees it. Rather, confession allows us to see our own sin as God does. When we agree with God that we indeed missed—seeing the shortfall as God sees it—then God forgives us, purifying us from all twisting of wrongs in order to make them right.

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Confess your sins to God. Are you captive to a sin in your life? Is it a legalistic one? Are you twisting a wrong in order to make it right? If so, just like Simon the Sorcerer you are justifying a miss into a make. Agree with God's perspective of the sin. Even Simon the Sorcerer appeared to confess his sin to Peter and John (Acts 8:25). Read 1 Samuel 15. What wrong did King Saul attempt to twist into a right? What were the consequences?

### **(3) Missing on purpose (*anomia*)**

#### **Sin (1 John 3:4)**

*Missing on purpose* is obviously shooting to miss, similar to the strategy implemented by a player at the free throw line whose team is down by two points with less than a couple seconds on the clock and one foul shot remaining. *Anomia* literally means "no law." It is breaking the law, or committing a transgression—which is stepping over the line. John said, "*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness*" (1 John 3:4). *Lawlessness* is translated from the Greek, *anomia*. This is not too far from the first sin in the Garden. Adam knew what was wrong, understood the consequences, and sinned anyway. *Anomia* includes a surrendering of our desires to temptation and its consequences. An example is divorce. The marriage dissolution rate is a tick higher among church attendees than it is among those who do not darken the church doors. A married Christian man or woman knows that God hates divorce, understands its consequences, and separates anyway.

#### **Grace (Romans 4:7)**



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The clarity of the need for grace is crystal in terms of *missing on purpose*. At the same time, God's radical love is quite possibly most visible in this light. Quoting David who had experienced God's grace when he missed on purpose, Paul wrote, "*Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered*" (Romans 4:7; cf. Ps. 32:1). *Transgressions* is translated from *anomia*. God forgives us purposeful misses with His boundless grace in Christ when we trust in Him (Romans 4:5). This trust leads us to repentance which saves (2 Cor. 7:10). Mark recorded the first words of Jesus' public ministry. "*The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (Mark 1:15). *The kingdom of God* is God's reign, rule, and order in our hearts and lives both now and in the future in Christ. *Repent* and *believe* are two inseparable sides of the same coin. *Repent* means a total shift of the mind—seeing everything differently. *Believe* is the verb for *faith*. *Repent* says to God, "I can't." *Believe* says to God, "You can." These simple words move us from a back-row seat with an obstructed view to the court of play in God's kingdom where we stand forgiven.

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Repent of your sin to blatantly break God's law (which exists for your benefit), and believe the good news of God's grace in Christ. Write down on one side of a note card Jesus' words in Mark 1:15. On the other side of the card write the text of Romans 4:7, and carry it with you for the next four weeks. Read each verse when considering a call, a text, an email, a note, or a glance sent where it shouldn't. Pray to God these words: "*I knew that this behavior was missing the shot on purpose; I recognized its consequences; and I still chose it anyway. I can't pay for my sin. You can, and you did*





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*as Savior of my life. I can't free myself from the power of sin. You can as Lord of my life. Please free me from this prison of sin."* Then obey through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and turn from the sin experiencing the freedom found through forgiveness.

#### **(4) Leaving good undone (*paraptoma*)**

##### **Sin (James 4:17; Ephesians 2:1)**

*Leaving good undone* is not shooting at all. We step up to the line with the basketball in our hands knowing what to do and never release it toward the goal. James, the half-brother of Jesus said, "*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*" (James 4:17). This sentence concluded James' thoughts regarding Jewish Christians who had been experiencing strained relationships from desiring life apart from God. They had been resisting God's grace and falling away from Him evidenced in their judgment of others (James 4:1-16). When we operate on our own agendas apart from God, we don't do the good we are designed to do. Paul enlightened the universal Church on this manner, "*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*" (Eph. 2:1). *Dead (nekros)* refers to a lifeless corpse, in essence doing nothing. *Transgressions*—translated *trespasses* in the NASB—stems from the Greek, *paraptoma*, meaning "to fall beside, or to fall away." When presented with an opportunity to do something good, we fall away from it and do nothing. Jesus gave us an example in His parable, *The Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37). An expert in the law wanted to justify that he had loved God and others without fail. Jesus told him a story about a beaten man left half dead alongside a highly traveled road. After leading worship in the Jerusalem



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Temple, a priest and a Levite who knew the good they ought to do, passed by the beaten man leaving the good undone.

### **Grace (Ephesians 2:4-5)**

God gives us grace beyond the removal of sin's penalty. He gives us grace to remove sin's power, providing the initiative for us to do good works. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul went on to say, "*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*" (Eph. 2:4-5). By God's grace, through faith in Him, we are made alive in Christ to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10). Each of us is God's workmanship, His poem, as Paul alluded in Ephesians 2:10. Just like a great basketball player at work is poetry in motion, each of us is created with a unique expression of God's kingdom in us that is poetically written in the hearts and lives of others when we are made alive in Christ to walk with God.

### *Pause and Let Wisdom Work*

Walk with God. Walk across the room. Walk across the street. Walk across the city limits. Walk across the state line. Walk across the national border. Walk across the international dateline. Rather than fall away from opportunities to reveal the heart of Christ, walk with God in order to do the good works which He prepared in advance for you to do. Poetically live out your unique expression of God's kingdom in you.

### **Conclusion**

Are you missing the mark? Are you twisting a wrong in order to make it right—twisting a miss into a make? Are you missing on purpose, breaking God's law?



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Are you not shooting at all, leaving good undone? Examine your heart and life, and fully surrender them to God. Confess your sins. Repent and believe in God's grace. Walk with the forgiving God Who walks with you.