

Being Presbyterian in a Dysvangelical America

Fall 2026 Adult Education Book Study

Session 1: Sunday September 20, 2026: Introduction “Grace Is Our Word,” Chapter 1 “The Bible is Authoritative, Not Literal,” and Chapter 2 “Faith and Salvation are Gifts, Not Transactions”

Welcome, Distribution of Remaining Books, and Opening Prayer

Overview of the book’s Introduction:

- 1) Why did the authors see a need for and write this book? (pg. 1-4)
- 2) Three core convictions (p. 2)
 - a. God’s grace and the claims of God’s grace are the primary characteristic of God’s interactions with the world.
 - b. When we experience this unmerited grace, we live in gratitude and awe.
 - c. Community is central for our shared human well-being.
- 3) How do the authors define *dysvangelical*? (p. 3)
- 4) Being Reformed: Some Basic Ideas about God and the Nature of the World (pg. 4-6)
 - a. At its core, the Reformed tradition sees the nature of God (and thus reality) as grace. Grace is an assertion that life is a gift given freely and with no strings attached.
 - b. The second key component of the Reformed way is a more complicated and complex claim of God’s sovereignty.
 - c. The third key component of the Reformed faith understanding is the claim that we are “reformed and always reforming.”
 - d. An additional affirmation of the Reformed tradition is an emphasis on humility when we struggle with our understanding of God as it relates to our lives and tradition.
- 5) The author’s task in the book (pg. 7-9, 11-12)

Overview of Chapter 1: The Bible is Authoritative, Not Literal:

1. Is the Bible Literal and Inerrant? (pg. 14-16) (*In a word: No*)
2. Does the Bible Have Any Authority, or Should I Just Ignore It? (pg. 16-17)
3. The Dangers of Biblical Interpretation (pg. 18-19)
 - a. The example of the Slave Bible
 - b. “Each of us runs the danger of interpreting the Bible in ways that simply reflect our own partialities and perspectives...All interpretations reflect bias...The first task of any biblical interpretation is to begin with humility and acknowledge our own limited perspectives and biases.”
 - c. “It is exactly a very good question to ask ourselves and clarify what principles guide our interpretation. The first task of any biblical interpretation is to name these principles from the start.”
4. How Presbyterians Interpret the Bible (pg. 19-22): **Presbyterian Principles of Biblical Interpretation** handout from book
5. The Word that Transforms Our Hearts (pg. 24-25)

Overview of Chapter 2: Faith and Salvation are Gifts, Not Transactions:

1. When Were You Saved? (pg. 28-29) – For Presbyterians, a problematic question!
 - a. “We preach grace and understand that God’s love and forgiveness do not depend on our words and actions but on God’s graceful actions on our behalf...we confess and strive to live out God’s love that comes to us unmerited, unearned, and with no strings attached.
2. The Story of Grace throughout Scripture (pg. 29-30)
 - a. “Grace permeates the unfolding story of God’s love throughout the Scriptures...[although it is interesting to note that] God’s overwhelming grace is offensive for a lot of people.”
3. Transaction in Dysvangelical America (pg. 31-32)
 - a. “In US Society today, our purpose, our goal, our very existence is directed toward consumption. This is the consumer world in which we live. Our concern is how this ethos invades all aspects of human life and faith and how we define our connections with God and one another primarily in terms of a transaction. It has become difficult for us to imagine relationships as something more than transactions, a tit for tat.”
4. A Theology of Transaction (pg. 32-34) – Not a recent religious phenomenon!
 - a. “There is an underlying assumption that if I do this, then God or the universe will do that. Dysvangelical Christian theology and its offshoots are transactional thinking to the extreme.” (Example: how is the prosperity gospel reflected in today’s politics?)
5. A Theology of Grace (pg. 34-36) – The parable of the Prodigal Son (*Father?*) Luke 15:11-32
6. Grace is the Word (pg. 36-37)

Study Guide Questions (in back of book starting on p. 127)

Two guiding Scriptures: Matthew 7:12 & Luke 15:11-32

Introduction & Chapter 2:

1. How would you define *evangelical*? How does your definition compare to the authors’ definition?
2. How do you respond to the question of when you were saved?
3. How do you define *grace*?
4. Why do so many of us find grace so offensive?
5. In what ways do you think of relationships in terms of transaction? Are there any relationships you resist thinking of in terms of transaction? [*When or why is it problematic to think of our relationship with God as transactional?*]
6. When have you experienced gratitude and awe? [*And how did you respond? Did the experience impact your actions in some way?*]

Chapter 1:

1. What is appealing (if anything) about a literal interpretation of Scripture?
2. What authority, if any, do you attribute to the Bible?
3. Which principles in the guide for interpreting Scripture are most important to you?
4. In what ways do translations and context matter in interpreting Scripture?
5. What is your experience of changing your (or someone else’s) mind about a literal biblical assertion?