



Week Four:  
GRACE THAT FORMS  
*Bible Study*

MAY 13-19, 2019

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## KEY VERSE

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*My little children, I'm going through labor pains again until Christ is formed in you. — Galatians 4:19 (CEB)*

## BIBLE STUDY

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*Galatians Chapter 4*

## GATHERING PRAYER

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Consider using one of the Opening Prayers, the Prayer for Illumination, and/or the Statement of Faith from the Week 4 Worship Helps for this series.

## OVERVIEW

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This chapter of Galatians contains three sections, each highlighting a different aspect of relationship—our relationship with God, with each other in faith, and with the law and scripture.

The first section, *Galatians 4:1-7*, continues and expands Paul's discussion from *Chapter 3* on the purpose of the law. He describes how our relationship with the law changes due to the decisive moment in time when God sends the Son into the world to redeem those under the law and call them into a new relationship as children and heirs. In the act of sending Jesus Christ the son, God forms a more intimate relationship with humanity. Now our primary relationship with God is not through obedience to the law but it is through faith in the Son who came "so he could redeem those under the Law so that we could be adopted" (*vs. 5, CEB*). The Holy Spirit is sent to us as we respond to this good news of grace and begin a close relationship with God who we can now relate to lovingly in the way that Jesus did, as "Abba." The Holy Spirit guides us in this relationship as the image and likeness of Christ is formed in us.

The second section, *Galatians 4:8-20*, is about Paul's relationship with the Galatians. Paul shares a clear picture of how close he felt to them when he was with them in Galatia and how appreciative he was of the way they received him and the gospel despite the physical challenges he was experiencing at the time. Now, especially because of the closeness and the joy he had in the way they received the good news, he is deeply grieved and perplexed at the decision they have made to listen to others who have convinced them that their faith in Christ is not enough, but that they must also follow Jewish law and practice in order to be true children of God. Paul describes his heartache in this situation as like a parent whose children have turned their back on what they have been taught in their childhood. He declares that he will continue to go "through labor pains until Christ is formed" in them (*vs. 19, CEB*). His grief over their current choices and his commitment to continue to be in relationship with the Galatians until they are formed in Christ provides a picture of the power and vulnerability of Christian community and invites us to consider how we too might lovingly persevere in our outreach and relationships until Christ is formed in those we are called to share the good news with.

Finally, in the third section, *Galatians 4:21-31*, Paul draws on the story of Hagar, Ishmael, Sarah and Isaac to help the Galatians understand their freedom as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. This story from *Genesis 16-18, & 21* may seem like an unusual allegory for Paul to use here. There is some thought among scholars that Paul might have chosen this story because it was one that his opponents were using to convince the Galatians that they must follow Jewish law in order to be true children of God. Many commentaries give a detailed analysis of the way Paul uses this story to assert that the opposite is in fact true. Through this story he asserts without reservation that those who believe in Jesus are children of the promise, freed to be in a new and Spirit directed relationship with God and Christian community that reflects Christ in all things and draws the world into God's new creation. As Paul uses this story, he models for us that in this new relationship, scripture is still a guide. It still provides the foundation for the Holy Spirit to speak and yet as he shows here with this story, the Spirit may speak through these portions of scripture in ways that clarify that the good news in Jesus Christ is about freedom to live out the law of grace and love in transformed relationship rather than being held in bondage by rules and judgement. The scripture is a means that the Holy Spirit uses to form us in Christ.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. As you reflect on your life and your faith, what are some of the primary relationships (positive or negative) that have formed you in who you are? In what ways?
2. Who are those in your life that you have influence in forming? How does your faith shape your understanding of your role in that formation?
3. In *Galatians 4:4* Paul writes, *"But when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son, born through a woman, and born under the Law. This was so he could redeem those under the Law so that we could be adopted"* (CEB). How are we formed differently by grace when we put our faith in Jesus rather than in the law?
4. How does grace lead us to a place where we, like Jesus, can have a close relationship with God that is signified by calling God 'Abba?' What other names do you use for God to signify this close relationship with God that is based on grace?
5. Paul cherished his relationship with the Galatians and the opportunity to help them know God's grace for them in Jesus. Now he is filled with heartache as they listen to others who are leading them back to practices that enslave them, rather than his words of true care for them. How would you describe Paul's feelings? When have you had a similar experience? How did you respond? How does Paul respond?
6. Paul's deepest desire is that Christ is formed in the people of the church in Galatia. How might this formation he hopes for happen? How will he know when it has taken place?
7. How does the formation of the image and likeness of Christ take place in us and in others? How do we move from being people who know the rules of God in our heads to those who live them out of our hearts in a way that begins to form our character so that people know Christ in and through us?

8. “John Wesley taught that God’s grace is unearned and that we were not to be idle waiting to experience grace, but we are to engage in the means of grace. The means of grace are ways God works invisibly in disciples, hastening, strengthening; and confirming faith so that God’s grace pervades in and through disciples. As we look at the means of grace today, they can be divided into works of piety (such as participating in the sacraments, study, and holding one another accountable) and the works of mercy (visiting the sick and those in prison, feeding the hungry, working for justice)” (<http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace>). How have you felt God forming you in new ways through the practice of the means of grace? Why should we engage in them regularly rather than waiting to experience grace?
  
9. Paul turns to scripture using the story of Hagar and Sarah as the basis for his claim that we are all the free children of God. Paul’s opponents also used scripture to support their stance. What do you do when people offer opposing interpretations of scripture? What framework do you use for your interpretation of scripture? How did you come to that framework?

## SENDING FORTH

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Close in prayer.

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