

Free Ride

Tommy Gray | September 25, 2011



In a nutshell: Life is ultimately about relationships, and the ultimate relationship is with God. We can't earn the right to this relationship; we can only accept it as a free gift.

Icebreaker: Tommy always went to the same place for vacation with his parents.

Discuss: When you were a child, did you go to the same place year after year or go to different places each year? Which was your favorite?

How to accept a Free Ride:

A lot of spiritual confusion can be summed up in two questions:

Do all roads lead to heaven? Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6). John Duncan said "Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine." C. S. Lewis famously phrased this: "Liar, Lunatic, or Lord."

Can I earn my way to heaven? The Apostle Paul wrote that salvation is a gift to be received, not a wage that can be earned: "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)

Discuss: Do either of these questions trouble you?

Read Romans 3:19-26 in multiple translations. Compare and contrast the different versions.

The Down Side: *Everyone is accountable to God* (vs. 19/23). We have all sinned. We are all messed up. Our relationship to God is broken. We don't have the answer and cannot solve our problem ourselves. If we try, we just take on a burden that we cannot carry.

Works don't work (vs. 20). We cannot earn our way to God.

Discuss: How does this make you feel? If this were the end of the story, where would it leave us?

The Up Side: *Grace works when works don't* (vs. 25). "Prevenient" grace means that God is working in our hearts, pursuing us, even before we have a relationship with Him. We can see it in the cross of Christ: He died in our place. *Jesus is the solution* (vs. 25). He is the sacrifice of *atonement* (reconciliation of the relationship between God and man). God has chosen to solve our problem, to restore what is broken, by accepting Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. God has not given us a "to do" list as a burden. It's a free gift.

Discuss: How does it feel to know that God wants a love relationship with us?

Hitching a Free Ride: Our moment of "conversion" (or salvation) is when we say yes to God's offer of a relationship and are *justified* (vs. 22, 26). "Justified" means "just as if I'd never sinned." Our sin is separated from us "as far as the east is from the west."

Discuss: Have you accepted God's free gift? Are you still trying to earn God's favor instead of receiving and resting in His free and "complete" gift?