

Living a Chocolate Life

SESSION 2 SHARE

A CHOCOLATE SAMPLER

Check all that apply to you, and then discuss as a group:

- You live a chocolate life as you savor God's sweet grace in Christ! (Share a nugget from the last session and have a Memory Morsel moment.)*
- You have dipped treats into the liquid treasure of a flowing chocolate fountain.*
- You have been drawn to chocolate by its rich aroma alone.*
- You think that your favorite chocolate desserts and confections are simply beautiful!*
- You willingly share your chocolate with loved ones—most of the time.*

MEMORY MORSEL

*"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.
And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Ephesians 5:1–2*



Overflowing Grace

Have you ever observed a chocolate fountain flowing? Thick, gooey liquid bubbles up and overflows, trickles down, layer upon layer, and spills pools of chocolate into the basin below.

Have you wondered what it would be like to stand beneath the fountain, allowing the chocolaty liquid to cover you, opening your mouth to catch it and drink to your heart's content?

As we imagine chocolate raining down on us, we can be reminded in another way of the undeserved, freely flowing grace that God pours over us through Christ, even in the midst of our sin. **“The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 1:14).** God's abundant grace and forgiveness lavished on us overflows, spilling onto others so they, too, are able to *smell* and *see* and *taste* God's grace through us. Because we are *living a chocolate life*, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we *share* God's sweet, extravagant grace with others. And sharing grace isn't like sharing chocolate. As we let it flow toward others, it is never depleted! God's favor continuously flows richly over us too.

So how do we flow in grace toward others? **Colossians 3:13** gives us some clear direction: **“Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”**

#1 dig in!

- a. Read these powerful words from **Ephesians 4:32–5:2**, which provide direction. God's forgiving love in action for us permeates this passage, which includes this session's *Memory Morsel*. And woven through it are several calls to action for us. What are they? As you find each one, personalize it as you picture someone you may be struggling to forgive.

- b. As God's own beloved children in Christ, we are to imitate Him! (And what child hasn't imitated his or her loving parent?) Look at the context surrounding this phrase. The word “therefore” gives us a hint that we should take a look at the words just preceding it (to see what it's *there for!*), as well as the words that follow. What does it look like to imitate God and “walk in love”?

On our own, pouring out God's grace onto others would be impossible. But because His forgiving power is at work in us through the Word, grace can overflow onto those who betrayed us, mistreated us, or hurt us, even onto those who don't seek or deserve our forgiveness. People get to experience the delicious taste of the grace of God in Christ through us as we walk in His sacrificial love. Let's take one more peek at our previous passage:

#2 dig in!

“A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” This beautiful description of Christ in **Ephesians 5:2** is rich in meaning with the history of God's people. Under Old Testament law, priests offered repeated sacrifices to God on behalf of the people; the blood of animals was shed to cover the people's sins. (For further information, take a look at **Leviticus 1**.) As the sacrifices burned on the altar, the smoke of the offerings rose toward heaven, **“with a pleasing aroma to the LORD” (Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17)**. Why would the smell of burnt offerings provide an aroma that was pleasing to the Lord?

When Christ, the sinless Son of God, offered His life as payment for the penalty of death for our sins, it was the final and complete sacrifice offered to the Lord, a perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament laws that completely covered the sins of all people for all time. This was a fragrant offering, a sweet sacrifice, perfectly pleasing to God. (Check out **Hebrews 10:1–18**.) In Christ's single sacrifice, we receive forgiveness and salvation! And by His grace-filled work in us, we are able to present our bodies **"as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"** (see **Romans 12:1**), dedicating our lives to Him, walking in His love, forgiving as He forgave us.

Because of the Spirit's power at work within us, we are able to be kind and tenderhearted, sharing God's *freely flowing favor* with everyone around us. And as we've begun to talk about fragrant offerings and pleasing aromas, let's inhale deeply and read on!

The Aroma of Christ

As chocolate bakes, the fragrance that wafts through the air draws us from across the room to the front of the oven where we pace, impatiently waiting to sink our teeth into the delicacy baking inside. The mouthwatering pleasure we receive from its mere scent elicits a response in us, doesn't it?

As people cross our paths, does the fragrance of Christ waft to them? Are we aromatic reminders of God's love for them? Yes! By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, we can spread the Good News of His saving love everywhere, once again *sharing* His sweet grace.

When we share God's freely flowing favor, we spread its sweet aroma and rich flavor as we pass through and touch others' lives. **"Thanks be to God, who . . . through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God"** (2 Corinthians 2:14–15).

✕ TAKE A BITE:

Who has impacted your life with his or her sweet fragrance?

Whose lives can you touch with the aroma of Christ today? In the weeks ahead?

Picture this: You're in a fine restaurant, and a decadent dessert is carried right past you to the table nearby. As the server delivers a molten lava fudge cake to the delighted diner, the warm scent wafts toward you and you inhale deeply, nearly jumping from your seat to capture the attention of the server before he walks away. "Excuse me! Sir?" You gesture to the woman with the dessert and declare, "I'll have what she's having!"

Ladies, we are the aroma of Christ to God! By the Holy Spirit, His fragrance fills us and permeates us. As Christians, we are called to share the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ with everyone around us. His scent in us elicits a response, and through us, others are drawn to Him. When they catch the fragrance as we share His Word, they will breathe in deeply and exclaim, "Mmmm . . . I'll have what she's having!"

#3 dig in!

- a. Open your Bible and take a longer look at **2 Corinthians 2:14–15**. What is the triumphal procession in which Christ is leading us?

- b. Again we see the word "fragrance" connected to Christ. Based on what we've already learned from Scripture, share what it means to spread **"the fragrance of the knowledge of Him"** (v. 14) and how that's connected to us being called **"the aroma of Christ"** (v. 15).

#4 dig in!

God works through us to spread the sweet fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere. As we tell others about our Savior, a perfect place to start is with His saving *grace*. We've been savoring His grace since our first session. What do the following verses confirm and clarify concerning this grace? Think about and discuss opportunities you may have to share these truths in the days ahead.

• Acts 15:11

• Romans 3:23–24

• Romans 5:1–2

• Titus 3:4–7

We pray that every opportunity we take to share His grace and every gift we offer to help another person will rise toward heaven as **“a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18).**

True Beauty

The aroma of chocolate entices us, and the mere sight of it causes our salivary glands to activate! Chocolate is just downright beautiful, isn't it? Visualize with me: cupcakes delicately decorated with sprinkles, golden cookies with dark chocolate chunks, and richly layered chocolate-raspberry tortes. Can we picture anything more attractive? Our hearts palpitate; our heads swim. It's love at first sight!

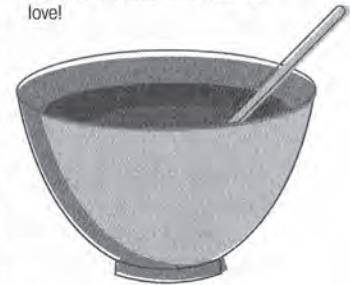
What really attracts us to these beautiful creations? Is it their outward appearance? Perhaps, but these delicacies could be cleverly created imitations, like a sample dessert display that tempts us to try the edible version. Could the attraction lie instead in our anticipation of the taste—the inner qualities of each treat? We know from experience that when the delicacy is in our mouth, it has truly appealing inner beauty. I believe this is what draws us to chocolate.

What attracts others to *us*? And what does this say of our beauty? We are often trapped into thinking that we will be more compelling to others if we lose weight, have the perfect hairstyle, and wear the cutest clothing, the right makeup, and the most fashionable jewelry. Our society prizes outward beauty, which is vain and fleeting. Our true and lasting beauty, our identity and value as redeemed Christian women, is defined not by outward appearance, but by whose we are in Christ, by the inner beauty we have in Him. We are made in His image (**Genesis 1:26–27**), that we may reflect His character. We are God's beloved (**John 15:9**). We are His children (**1 John 3:1**) and new creations in Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)!

God continues to lavish His grace in Christ upon us, forgiving us for our mixed-up priorities and the world's trappings that often ensnare us. The Holy Spirit fills us with His love and compassion for others, which we *share* in our reverent fear of the Lord. **“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30).** In His strength, we let love flow freely onto an ugly, sin-filled world that watches our every move, looking for *true beauty*.

CHOCOLATE FUN FACT

The color of chocolate varies greatly, from light milk-chocolate brown to deep, dark, nearly black, but color can vary among chocolates containing the same percentage of cacao. Why? It depends on the type of cacao bean used and the methods by which the chocolate is processed as it is harvested, fermented, and dried, then roasted, ground into paste, and finally combined with sugar and other ingredients to form the beautiful creations we love!



✂ TAKE A BITE

Do you have a complaint against someone right now? Are you finding it difficult to forgive that person, to “bear with” him or her? If you feel comfortable doing so, share or write about it here.

What is true beauty? When we extend our hands in the name of Christ to carry someone's burden, when we move our feet to walk beside those who would otherwise walk alone, when we offer our ears to listen and our mouths to give words of comfort and cheer, when we share what we have with others (yes, even chocolate!), when we devote our time and our lives for the good of someone else, sharing our hope in Christ as we do, it's beautiful! Attractive! Compelling!

#5 dig in!

Earlier, we read from **Colossians 3:13** for some clear direction about flowing in grace toward others. Open your Bible to this verse, now looking at the immediate context surrounding it. Read **verses 12–14** and envision a picture of true beauty as you “put on” each item listed. On a card, write out this beauty list and encircle the list of words with a heart for a special visual reminder of **verse 14**. Post your beauty list on a mirror.

#6 dig in!

Find further direction about grace in **Romans 12:9–21**. Write down, share, and discuss the true beauty illustrations in this passage that stand out to you as you consider how you may share God's grace with someone He has placed in your path.

The unbelieving world around us is drawn to this inner beauty, and God does something amazing with it. He enables people to see Jesus in us and they are drawn to Him. All we do can cause others to look right through us to the beautiful face of Jesus as He works in and through us. Our imperfect offerings are made perfect in Christ. This is *true beauty*.

Secret Ingredient

While the aroma and beauty of chocolate draw us near and entice us, it's the very taste of our favorite confections that causes our heart to race and our appetite to go into overdrive.

When a friend asked me to share my chocolate chip cookie recipe, I gladly obliged. (I share it with you at the end of this session too.) After attempting my recipe several times, she admitted that she was disappointed. Her cookies never turned out like mine. Hers lacked *taste* and flavor. After more discussion, I found out she was purposely omitting the salt, thinking it unnecessary and unnoticeable. Salt in sweets? Who needs it?! But salt is like a secret ingredient. Leaving out one little spoonful left her cookies lacking.

Salt is my favorite secret ingredient. Just a pinch enhances flavor in almost any dish or dessert. Just a teaspoon makes an entire batch of cookie dough sing with sweet flavor.

#7 dig in!

- a. Read **Colossians 4:5–6** and write the verses here. What does the apostle Paul mean when he encourages believers to let their speech be “seasoned with salt”? Earlier, he said to get rid of slander and obscene talk. (See **Colossians 3:8**.)

- b. This secret ingredient should permeate all our conversations. **Colossians 4:5** makes specific mention of “outsiders.” Why might it be especially important that they hear tasty, salt-seasoned words from us?

No matter how unsalty your speech has been, God forgives you in Christ and gives you the faith and the flavor to begin anew, seasoned with salt, prepared to know **“how you ought to answer each person”** (Colossians 4:6). Make the most of the time you have.

In the strength of the Spirit, you can *share* the Gospel of grace today, remembering that you are the *aroma* of Christ to God. Through you, others will see the *true beauty* of Christ. And don't forget about *taste*. (Remember to include your secret ingredient!)

*Living a Chocolate Life,
we share His rich, sweet grace
with others!*

PRAYER

Sweet Supplication

Lord Jesus, as Your grace overflows for me, enable me to let it flow to others, that I would share this undeserved forgiveness and favor with the world around me, spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ to a world in need of a Savior. Thank You for the inner beauty You give me through faith. Forgive me for any unsavory speech that has come from my mouth. Continually fill me with Your Spirit that my words may be gracious and salty, and that others would be drawn to You through my words and my actions. In Your name I pray. Amen.



Best-Ever Chocolate Chip Cookies

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1 c. real butter, softened (not melted) | 1 c. sugar |
| 1 c. brown sugar | 2 eggs |
| 1 tsp. vanilla extract | 2 c. flour |
| 1 tsp. baking powder | 1 tsp. salt |
| 2 c. (12-oz. bag) chocolate chips | 1 tsp. baking soda |
| 2 (1.55-oz.) milk chocolate bars, grated | |
| 1 c. chopped pecans, optional | |
| 2½ c. oatmeal, measured first, then
powdered in blender or food processor | |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cream butter and sugars in mixing bowl. Add eggs and vanilla; continue to beat until light. Add flour, powdered oatmeal, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Mix well. Fold in by hand the grated chocolate, chocolate chips, and pecans. Chill at least 1 hour or overnight. Spoon dough into 2-inch balls for large cookies. Bake 8 to 10 minutes or until edges are lightly browned and center is moist and chewy. Serve warm with a glass of cold milk, if desired. **Mmm . . . make, bake, and take! Make the most of every opportunity to share these with others as you share His grace!**

CHOCOTIVITY

Chocolate Chip Cookie Bouquets

Share God's grace *and* this delicious gift! Prayerfully consider who might be the recipient(s) of a cookie bouquet, lovingly baked and crafted. Work individually or as a group. Supplies are few and construction is simple. The appearance, aroma, and taste of this bouquet make it the perfect gift to share!

Directions: Prepare dough for *Best-Ever Chocolate Chip Cookies* (above). Drop **cookie dough** onto pan in uniform sizes using medium or large cookie scoop. Select **long lollipop sticks** (available where cake-decorating supplies are sold) or **wooden skewers** (available in kitchen section of many stores). Insert stick in bottom of each cookie; bake according to recipe directions. (Sticks will be secured as cookies bake and cool.) Cut squares of **cellophane** and wrap cookies individually, then tie **ribbon** around sticks. Place **tissue paper** in bottom and up sides of **clay pot or small basket**. Fit block of **plastic foam** snugly into container. Arrange six to twelve cookie stems in foam and cover foam with more **tissue or paper raffia**. (Add splashes of color to bouquet when choosing ribbon, tissue, and container.) Add a stick with a **Scripture verse** attached and a personal note, as desired. *Suggestion:* "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Psalm 34:8).

✿ TAKE A BITE

Name some specific examples of *true beauty* in your life. How have you used your hands, your feet, your ears, and your mouth? In what ways have you devoted your time and life for the good of others?

✿ TAKE ANOTHER BITE

Have you listened to your conversations lately? Are they seasoned with salt or lacking in flavor? Do your words build up or destroy?
