

Grace

by WAYNE PALMER

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DAY 1

LIPS FILLED WITH GRACE

Read Psalm 45.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–9.)

You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever. (Psalm 45:2)

During fall, the fields are ripe for harvest and farmers work day and night to bring in the bounty of the fields, the undeserved gifts from the hands of our loving heavenly Father.

The selected readings are all about God's grace for undeserving sinners. Like mercy, which we examined over the summer, grace is a form of undeserved love, but it is quite different. Mercy is in the heart—a reaction of concern, care, and pity when looking upon someone who is suffering. But without grace, it is impossible to feel mercy. Grace is in the mind and in the will—it is the decision and commitment to love someone who does not

deserve that love and may never accept, appreciate, or return it.

Our first passage is a messianic psalm that speaks of Jesus as a gracious King. He comes to us with words full of grace, undeserved love, and kindness. Perhaps none are as filled with grace as when He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” as they nailed Him to the cross (Luke 23:34).

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, throughout the Gospels we see Your grace clearly at work in the words and miracles of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Let me always treasure Your boundless grace, which saved an undeserving sinner like me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

DAY 2

FOR JESUS' SAKE, NOT MINE

Read Psalm 86.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–7.)

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. (Psalm 86:6)

There are some very interesting contrasts in this psalm. David is a man of faith. In verse 2, he says he is godly and trusts in God, yet merciless men are seeking his life. So when he prays for God's help against the ungodly, he doesn't ask God to help him because he is godly and trusts. Instead, he clearly confesses he is a needy sinner who does not deserve the help he seeks from God (vv. 3, 5, 7).

It is most clear in verse 11, where he prays, "Unite my heart to fear Your name." Like David, we trust God and seek to please Him with our words and deeds, yet our hearts are divided between the sinner and the saint within us.

When we cry out and appeal to God to deliver us

from our needs and protect us from the dangers in our lives, we do not ask God to do this because we have in any way earned or deserved it—or because we are trying hard to live Christian lives. Instead we rely on God's undeserved grace and the merits of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, who gives us His perfect righteousness and took upon Himself the punishment we deserve for our sins as He suffered and died on the cross. That is why we close our prayers with the words “for Jesus’ sake” and not for our own sakes.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, though I certainly do not deserve Your help and loving kindness, I boldly ask it for the sake of Your Son, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Forgive my sins and give me confidence to pray to You in every situation for His sake. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

DAY 3

GRACE: NOT GETTING WHAT WE DESERVE

Read Jeremiah 31.
(If time is short, read vv. 1–9.)

Thus says the LORD: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness.” (Jeremiah 31:2)

The kingdom of Judah was in a time of great turmoil. After a long siege by the Babylonians in which many died, a large group was taken into exile to Babylon. Soon the Babylonians would return and mount another siege, and the temple would be destroyed.

Judah’s punishment was just—they deserved nothing but to be captured and exiled because of their sins, idolatry, and bloodshed. God could not have been accused of being unjust if He exterminated them from the earth.

Sadly, the same is true for us. Paul says it this way,

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Like the people of Judah, we deserve nothing from God but earthly suffering, death, and eternal torment in hell.

Now look at God’s words of comfort to His exiled people. “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued My faithfulness to you” (v. 3). Though we are faithless, God is faithful. Through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, He has satisfied His righteous wrath at our sins, and now He can lavish His grace and kindness on us, even making us His children and promising us eternal life.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for not repaying us for our sins as we deserve, but showering Your grace, love, kindness, and mercy on us for Jesus’ sake. Fill our hearts with love, grace, and forgiveness for those who sin against us, that they, too, may find salvation in Jesus Christ, our Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 4

A SPIRIT OF GRACE AND MERCY

Read Zechariah 12:10–13:1.

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over Him, as one weeps over a firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

What striking words of prophecy as the preincarnate Christ speaks through the mouth of His servant Zechariah. Yet, if you look at the crowds standing around the cross on Good Friday, you won't see a lot of mourning.

"The people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him sour wine and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!' There was

also an inscription over Him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, ‘Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’” (Luke 23:35–39).

Where is the mourning and weeping? Look again at Zechariah’s words. First God must “pour out . . . a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy” and then “when they look on Me, on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him” (Zechariah 12:10). It started with the penitent criminal—God poured upon him His spirit of grace, and the thief saw his King and said, “Remember me” (Luke 23:42). God poured out His spirit of grace on the centurion, and he proclaimed, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54). God poured out His spirit of grace upon the silent crowds and “all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts” (Luke 23:48).

Fifty days later, many members of this crowd were back in Jerusalem for the Pentecost festival. Luke writes, “Now when they heard [Peter’s words] they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). God poured out His spirit of grace, and they repented. Peter’s answer pointed them to faith and salvation: “Repent and be baptized

every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38).

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, forgive me the times I make light of my sin and underestimate the price my Savior paid on the cross. Pour upon me Your spirit of grace, that I may repent and trust in none but Jesus Christ, my Savior. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 5

FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH

Read John 1:1–18.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

After a few Old Testament passages, we turn to the New Testament. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are filled with the gracious words and miracles of Jesus, our Lord, yet we do not find the word *grace* anywhere but in this first chapter of John. It is a theological word that will be unpacked in Acts and the letters that follow.

But here, John sums up the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: a life of His gracious words of forgiveness, peace, and the kingdom of heaven; a life of His healing miracles, which show so much love and compassion for the crippled, the lame, the sick, and the demon oppressed and possessed, the blind, the deaf, the mute, and even the dead.

And as if that were not enough, His grace

shines most brightly in His sacrificial death and resurrection. He was despised and rejected. He was persecuted and tormented. He was slapped and spit upon. He was whipped and crowned with thorns. He was nailed to a cross. He was mocked, insulted, and jeered at. And His response? “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

John had it right, “we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for humbling Yourself to come down from heaven, become human, serve us, and give Your life as a ransom for us. Forgive my sin and strengthen my faith, that I may tell others about Your amazing grace. Amen.

DAY 6

GRACE FROM GOD OR FROM MEN?

Read Acts 4.

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:33)

After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles preached boldly and with great power. Where did that boldness and power come from?

These men showed nothing but cowardice when they fled as Jesus was arrested in the garden, denied Him in the high priest's courtyard, and hid behind locked doors even after seeing Him risen from the dead. Clearly the bold preaching of these apostles did not come from within themselves—it was the power of God working within them; strong evidence of God's grace.

And Luke adds, “great grace was upon them all” (4:33). There is some confusion among Bible scholars about the source and nature of this grace. Was it God's grace and favor, giving the apostles

the power to preach and love one another? Or was it the favor of the people of Jerusalem, who gladly listened to them and held them in high esteem—even if they were not ready to believe and join them (see Acts 2:47)?

Either way, it is still evidence of God's grace and kindness toward them. As God created goodwill in the hearts of the Jews toward the apostles, it provided a time of peace and growth for the Early Church, a chance to gain a foothold and grow before the persecutions broke out.

In the United States, the Christian Church has long enjoyed the favor of our leaders who recognize the value in the morals we teach and practice. But that time may be ending as our culture abandons the morals of our God and considers those who oppose them as hateful and narrow minded. But if the grace of our culture and our neighbors diminishes, we know God's grace never will. That is a source of great comfort and strength.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for working through Your Word to create faith in hearts You have made receptive to the Gospel. Pour Your grace upon our land, that many may be receptive to hear the good news Your people proclaim. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 7

HOW GRACE TRANSFORMS OUR WORK

Read Acts 6.

(If time is short, read vv. 8–15.)

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. (Acts 6:8)

Stephen was not one of the twelve apostles; he was one of the seven deacons. After Pentecost, the believers stayed together in Jerusalem—even those who had come for the Pentecost festival from distant parts of the Roman Empire. When Greek-speaking Jewish widows were overlooked in the distribution of aid, these seven were chosen by the people to oversee the distribution. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on them. The deacons were not responsible for the apostles' Word and Sacrament ministry, but they were in charge of distributing the Church's aid to the poor.

Two of these men would be remembered for the great things they did by God's grace. Philip shared the Good News in Samaria and met the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot (see Acts 8). And Stephen was the first Christian martyr.

Though Stephen was not one of the apostles, God empowered him to work great wonders and signs among the Jewish people, much as the apostles were doing. Again, this was a clear indication of God's grace—empowering His servants for the work He set them aside to do.

Likewise, God's grace rests on you, to equip you to do the work to which He has called you. That may be being a husband or wife, mother or father, son or daughter. It may involve your work and the people with whom you work. But either way, you don't need to rely on your own strength and ability to complete the tasks God sets before you. He will be in you and work with you by His amazing grace.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, sometimes the work set before us is overwhelming. When I feel exhausted and without a clue to know how to move forward, pour Your grace upon me, that I may know what You would have me do, and have the strength to accomplish it. For Jesus' sake and in His name I pray. Amen.

DAY 8

A GREAT NUMBER OF BELIEVERS IN AN UNEXPECTED PLACE

Read Acts 11:19–30.

When he [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose. (Acts 11:23)

After Stephen was martyred, the Jewish authorities lashed out against the believers. Though these Christians scattered, they didn't keep their faith to themselves. Wherever they found themselves, they shared the Good News of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Some of these spoke only with Aramaic-speaking Jews. But others shared the Good News with Hellenists. These were Jews who spoke Greek

and accepted the Greek or Hellenist culture. God blessed this sharing of the Good News, and a great number of these Hellenist Jews and their Gentile neighbors were given faith.

When word of this got back to Jerusalem, the apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas was glad to see their faith, and he knew it was the work of God's grace. After all, the rejection in Jerusalem could have been found throughout the Roman Empire. The fact that so many of the Hellenist Jews and Gentiles believed shows the grace of God at work.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for graciously working faith in so many who heard Your Word. Give me that same faith, and grant faith through my witness to others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 9

THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD AND HIS GRACE

Read Acts 13:13–52.

(If time is short, read vv. 26–43.)

And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. (Acts 13:43)

Paul and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey together. On the Sabbath in the city of Antioch, they boldly shared the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ in the Jewish synagogue. This was a pattern they followed in nearly every town they entered.

After worship ended, they were invited back for next week. As they were followed by many Jews and converts to Judaism, Paul and Barnabas spoke with them and urged them to continue in the grace

of God.

These people had heard Paul and Barnabas testifying about Jesus, and they believed. But Paul and Barnabas recognized their faith was not a result of Paul and Barnabas's wisdom or eloquent speech. It was God's grace that caused the seed of faith to sprout and grow.

That's how it is when you tell a family member, friend, or neighbor about Jesus Christ. It is not your job to create faith in their hearts by the words you choose. It is God's grace that creates faith from the words you plant.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, the Church seemed to grow so rapidly in the days of Acts, but that was evidence of Your amazing grace. Give me boldness and confidence to share my faith with the people You bring into my life, and by Your grace create faith in them. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 10

CONFIRMING HIS WORD

Read Acts 14.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–7.)

So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. (Acts 14:3)

Paul and Barnabas were driven out of Antioch when Jewish opponents were able to convince religious authorities and prominent citizens to oppose them. They went on to the town of Iconium, where a great number of Jews and Gentiles came to faith. But again, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and convinced them to bitterly oppose Paul and Barnabas.

This is where God stepped in with His grace and did an amazing thing. He granted Paul and Barnabas the power to work miraculous signs and wonders. The miracles could never create faith—the Holy Spirit uses only the Word of God to do that. But

they demonstrated the power and authenticity of the Word of God that Paul and Barnabas declared.

The two evangelists remained for some time, but the city was deeply divided between believers and unbelievers. Finally, when some city rulers tried to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas, the two fled to other places.

God won't always grant us miraculous signs and wonders when we share His Word. But when He creates faith through the Word, we declare that is, in itself, a far greater miracle.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for the miraculous signs You gave to Barnabas and Paul, just as You gave them to some Old Testament prophets, to the New Testament apostles, and especially to Your own Son, Jesus Christ. By the grace of Your Holy Spirit, convince us of the authenticity and power of Your Word, that we may believe and confess this saving faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 11

SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH, NOT MOSES' LAW

Read Acts 15:1–35.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–12.)

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. (Acts 15:11)

As more and more Gentiles were brought into the faith, a huge debate arose—must they be circumcised as Moses commanded? Paul and Barnabas insisted that we are saved by God's grace through faith apart from works. The Judaizers (Pharisees who became Christian) insisted that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, and those who would follow Him must submit to the Law of Moses. The Church in Antioch formed a delegation that traveled to the apostles in Jerusalem to settle the issue. This Council in Jerusalem is considered the first ecumenical council of the Church.

Paul and Barnabas presented their position, then described the work of God's grace in bringing so many Gentiles as well as Jews to faith in the Gospel. Peter stepped up and recalled his visit to Cornelius the centurion in Acts 10, where he was witnessing to a house full of Gentiles and the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles and they began speaking in tongues as the apostles themselves had done on Pentecost.

Peter asked why the Christian Pharisees would place a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither the Jewish Christians nor their ancestors were able to bear. He pointed out, "We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (v. 11). Grace—not our works. It almost sounds like something Martin Luther would say nearly 1,500 years later.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for this Jerusalem Council and the wise words of Peter by which You made it clear that we are saved by Your grace, through faith, for Jesus' sake and not because of our works. Make that truth clear in my life and in all Your Church. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 12

GOD GRACIOUSLY PREPARES A NEW HELP FOR HIS PEOPLE

Read Acts 18:24–28.

And when he [Apollos] wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed. (Acts 18:27)

After the Jerusalem Council, Paul completed his second missionary journey and began his third. Luke introduces us to a Jew named Apollos from Africa. He was trained in the Old Testament Scriptures, believed Jesus was the Messiah, and taught eloquently. He went to the synagogue in Ephesus and accurately taught about Jesus.

Then one Sabbath two of Paul's Jewish Christian

friends, Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, heard him. He was speaking accurately, but his knowledge was not complete. Afterward, they took him aside and explained Jesus' salvation more accurately. It seems Apollos was an eager student.

When they learned he wished to enter Achaia, the Christians of Ephesus encouraged him and wrote letters to the Christians in Achaia to welcome him. He proved to be a great help for those who believed in Jesus by God's grace.

No matter how much we know about Jesus and His work, we can always learn more and have a deeper, more accurate understanding. That is why it is so important to be humble and open to what God would teach us through His Word, no matter how learned we are in the faith.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give me a deep hunger and love of Your Word, and open my mind and heart so I may receive Your grace and grow in faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 13

TRUE PRIORITIES

Read Acts 20:17–38.

(If time is short, read vv. 17–32.)

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

Paul started making his way to Jerusalem to bring an important collection he had gathered from the congregations he had founded by God's grace, to help supply the needy in Jerusalem during a time of famine. He hoped by this collection to further unify the Christian Church—both Jew and Gentile. But to accomplish that, he avoided passing through Ephesus. Instead he summoned the Ephesian pastors to meet him at a town called Miletus.

Paul was convinced that God was guiding him west to Rome and perhaps beyond to Spain. He would not again travel through the Near East, to Asia Minor where Ephesus could be found. He encouraged the pastors to faithfully carry forth their work, and he told them he would not see

them again during this life.

Paul knew his path was dangerous and difficult. That was why he told the pastors that he was not afraid about what would happen to him. He did not consider life itself to be precious or valuable. For him, the value was in finishing the ministry Jesus Christ gave him and testifying to the Gospel, the Good News that shows God's amazing grace in sending His Son.

You and I can benefit from such thinking as well. By God's free and gracious gift, our eternal life is safe in His keeping—nothing can snatch or steal it from us. So why should we be overly attached to this life? Our money, our possessions, none of that is of any lasting value or importance. It is the people in our life who, like us, have eternal worth in God's eyes. They are the ones to whom we should want to testify to the Gospel of God's grace.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, teach me to number my days—to realize how short my life really is. By Your grace, free me from being obsessed with small trifles, and set my heart on the people to whom You are sending me with the sweet Gospel of Jesus Christ, Your Son. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 14

ASHAMED OF MY SINS—BUT NEVER THE GOSPEL

Read Romans 1.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–15.)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:7)

In this month when we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Reformation, it is fitting to take some time studying God's grace in the Book of Romans, which was so transformative for Martin Luther's understanding of salvation by God's grace alone, by Christ alone, through faith alone, by Scripture alone.

Are the words of Romans 1:7 above familiar? Many pastors recite them at the beginning of their sermons. At the very beginning, Paul makes clear the goal of his letter. As a result of what he has written, Paul wants the grace of God our Father and the peace won by our Lord Jesus Christ to be yours.

To understand this grace for undeserving sinners, Paul must convince us that we are undeserving. In the second half of chapter 1, beginning in verse 18, Paul discloses the guilt and unworthiness of Gentiles. In chapter 2, he turns to the guilt of the Jews.

But after showing our unworthiness, Paul gives us the sweetest Gospel promise of God's grace and undeserved forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Anticipating this, he tells us, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we truly are undeserving sinners, all of us. Thank You for making that clear by Your Law, but then, through Your Gospel, revealing Your wondrous grace and mercy in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Let us never be ashamed of the Gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 15

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD APART FROM THE LAW

Read Romans 2–3.

(If time is short, read 3:19–28.)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23–24)

In chapter 2, Paul convicts the Jews of their sins, just as he convicted Gentiles in the close of his first chapter. In chapter 3 verse 9, he concludes that “both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.” God’s Law speaks so that “every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Romans 3:19).

But then comes the great news: “But now

the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law” (3:21). At first, Luther didn’t understand this righteousness of God. He thought it was the righteousness God requires of us. Then finally he understood grace. It isn’t that God requires righteousness from us—He gives His righteousness to us by faith. We are credited with Jesus’ righteousness, and Christ takes our guilt and bears it on the cross.

Read carefully through Romans 3:21–31, and you will see the bright rays of heaven shining on you.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us sinners when we deserve nothing but Your bitter wrath and punishment. Grant us true repentance for our sins and a genuine knowledge of our guilt and helplessness, so we may grasp Your gracious forgiveness in Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 16

GOD'S PROMISE RESTS ON HIS GRACE, NOT OUR WORKS

Read Romans 4.

(If time is short, read vv. 13–25.)

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all His offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham. (Romans 4:16)

In chapter 4, Paul takes us back to Abraham at the time God promised to give him a son and make him a great nation. It was not Abraham's works and obedience that God counted to him as righteousness, but Abraham's faith in God's promises. Likewise, God counted him righteous before Abraham's circumcision, not after. Paul

points out that God's promise to Abraham rested on God's grace, not Abraham's obedience.

The same is true for us. If our salvation rested on our works rather than God's grace, we could never be sure that we would be saved—in fact, we could only be sure that we would NOT be saved, because the wages of sin is death. But since our salvation rests on God's grace, through the faith given to us and preserved in us by the Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus—and not the sake of our works—our salvation is secure.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for resting our entire salvation upon Your promises and the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and not upon our works. Thank You also for the faith created and sustained in me by Your Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacraments. Keep me in this faith and salvation all my days. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOSTILE ENEMIES

Read Romans 5:1–11.

Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2)

What a wonderful passage! We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By faith, we have access into this grace of God, a grace in which we stand secure and unmovable.

And what was our state when Christ won that peace in response to the grace of God, which sent Him into this world to be our Savior? Were we saints of God, striving to do good works pleasing in God's eyes and trying to abstain from sin? No. We were still weak, and even worse, enemies.

This makes the true nature of grace as undeserved love stand out even more clearly. There was absolutely nothing we did for God that contributed to His choice to save us through His Son. It wasn't as if God was sitting back and saying, "Well, I have to give them credit for trying to live a good life. Now I'll send My Son to do the rest."

No, while we God's enemies, hostile to Him—

completely undeserving—God sent His Son in His grace to save us.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Your grace is unfathomable. While we were hostile enemies, You sent Your Son to save us. And in the midst of our rejection and mistreatment of Jesus, He still prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Strengthen my faith and trust in You for Jesus’ sake. I pray in His holy name. Amen.

DAY 18

TOTALLY UNDESERVED

Read Romans 5:12–21.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (Romans 5:15)

In the remainder of chapter 5, Paul compares Adam's sin and disobedience and the effect it had on all of us, his offspring, with Jesus' obedient death and resurrection and the effect it had on all believers. He tells us, "As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (v. 18).

This is one thing that troubles many people. Why should I be punished for something Adam and Eve did long before I was born? It seems totally undeserved. Of course, we have no room to complain, because we sin daily, adding to the guilt

we inherited from our first parents.

But the grace of God is likewise totally undeserved. We are sinners who are subject to death because of our sins. Yet God has had mercy on us, and in grace provided His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be the one He would punish in our place on the cross, so by that one act of obedience, we could be justified and given eternal life.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for not leaving us in Adam's condemnation and death. Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, You have given us pardon and peace. Strengthen me to share that great news with all the people You bring into my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 19

LIVING UNDER GRACE

Read Romans 6.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–14.)

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! (Romans 6:1–2)

One thing about the Reformation really troubled Martin Luther. He noticed that members who had once rejoiced to be set free by the Gospel from guilt and fear had now grown uncaring and apathetic. Even worse, without the coercion and threats of the Law and the works-righteousness of the papacy, many of these members were indulging their sinful desires in a new freedom.

We, too, may be tempted to use the grace of God as a license to indulge our sinful desires. But Paul warns against this in the strongest language and with compelling reasoning. We have been united with Jesus Christ in our Baptism. We died along with Him on the cross, and we have been raised

to new life by faith. So we are set free from sin and guilt. Returning to that sin would enslave and entangle us all over again.

But by God's grace, we can expect better things. "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (v. 14).

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, guard my heart against a casual, uncaring attitude toward Your grace. Let me not indulge my sinful nature, but let me be mindful of the grace of my Lord, Jesus Christ, and the steep price He paid for our salvation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 20

THE REMNANT

Read Romans 11.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–6.)

So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 11:5–6)

Paul turns to the Jews, many of whom have rejected their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Paul asks if God has rejected them. Then He reminds us of the answer He gave in His still small voice to Elijah when he appealed to God against the Israelites. God reminded him there was still a remnant, “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (v. 4). Notice, they did not keep themselves for Him—He kept them for Himself. Without God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, they would have bowed the knee as well.

Paul assures us that there is a remnant of Israel, chosen by God’s grace, not by their merits. And, Paul reminds us, if God has kept them by His grace, then, by definition of the word *grace*,

they are saved by faith, not on the basis of their works. God has not set two different standards for salvation—as though Gentiles were saved by faith while Jews were saved by their observance of the Law of Moses.

Even in the Old Testament, no Israelite was saved by works; rather, they were saved by God's grace through their faith in the Lord's promise to send His Son as their Savior. This salvation on the cross was foreshadowed by the offerings and sacrifices brought to the temple. It was fulfilled in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for the remnant from the people of Israel that You have reserved for Yourself. By Your grace, bring them to faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ, that they may know this great salvation with all of us believers. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

GOD'S GIFTS

Read Romans 12.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–8.)

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. (Romans 12:6)

Paul points out that the Holy Christian Church functions as a body with Jesus Christ as the head. Just like every part of the body is different and has different functions and purposes as God saw fit to design it, so each member has different gifts chosen and given according to God's gracious plan.

First off, it's funny how we forget what a gift is. Anything I have as a gift was given to me by someone else. I can't take credit for it as if it were my own creation or doing. Every spiritual gift of which we are speaking here has its source in God. And since we are sinners, we don't deserve any of these gifts. They are given to us solely through the grace of God.

So what gift(s) do you have? And how do you feel about those gifts in comparison to the gifts God has chosen to give to others? Our sinful nature makes us envious of those who have received gifts

we wish we had. Or we want to compare our gifts to those of others to feel better about ourselves.

Paul is careful to place all gifts within the realm of grace, where they belong. They are undeserved, given to us by God for His own purposes. He does not intend them to be used in selfish schemes or to lord over others. But we are to humbly use them in service to Him and His Church. The praise must always go to God, the Giver of all that is good.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for graciously giving me gifts to use to Your glory and in the service of Your Church. Forgive me where I have been proud or envious of the gifts You chose to give others. Teach me great contentment and thankfulness for the gifts You have entrusted to me, and help me use them always according to Your grace and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 22

SATAN UNDER OUR FEET?

Read Romans 16.

(If time is short, read vv. 17–20.)

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (Romans 16:20)

How wonderful will it be when Satan is crushed under our feet? When war, crime, oppression, injustice, hatred, and violence are gone forever in the new heavens and the new earth? The fascinating thing is that Paul doesn't say, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under His feet," or under the feet of Christ. But under your feet—yours and mine.

Again, that is a gift of God's grace, His undeserved love. You and I, by nature, are slaves of Satan and sin. In our own wisdom and strength, we could never break ourselves free from him, rise up against him, or defeat him in battle. If Satan lies crushed under our feet, it is not because of you and

me, our devotion, or our efforts.

Jesus has won the victory over Satan by His life, death, and resurrection—just as God told the serpent in the Garden of Eden, “He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). Yet in His grace, by faith, He allows us to stand over Satan and crush him beneath our feet. What a wonderful day that will be!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, in Your grace You have given us forgiveness, pardon, and eternal salvation. But even more, by Your gift of faith You give us the victory over Satan, sin, death, and hell, which Jesus, Your Son, has won for us. Soon bring to us that day when he will lie crushed beneath our feet. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 23

IT WAS NOT I

Read 1 Corinthians 15.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–11.)

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

In this great resurrection chapter, Paul starts with a list of eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. They include Peter (Cephas) and the Twelve. They include more than five hundred believers who saw Jesus at the same time. Paul points out that some of these have died, but many remain—just in case any of his readers might like to silence their doubts by talking to them. Then Jesus appeared to James, His brother (see Mark 6:3), and all the apostles. Last of all, Paul mentions his own visit from the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus in Acts 9.

As we have said before, grace is undeserved love. Paul clearly points out that of all the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, he is most undeserving because

he persecuted God's Church. Yet God was gracious to him, and if you lined them up side by side and compared their accomplishments, Paul's would far surpass the others. But before any pride can rise, Paul quickly says, "it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (v. 10).

When we are complimented for doing something well, we are taught to say, "To God be the glory"—meaning "give God the credit; don't give it to me." But Paul goes deeper—to the source of that thing well done. Paul says he was not the one who accomplished all that he did as apostle—God's grace that is with him did it.

So the next time you are complimented for something you do at church, you might want to try a different answer. Not "To God be the glory," but "It was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your grace that is with us, the grace that enables us to do good works to Your glory and for the good of our neighbor. Humble us with the realization that it is not us, but Your grace alone that accomplishes all the good things that we do. Empower us to do more as You give us opportunity. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 24

THE GRACE OF SIMPLICITY AND SINCERITY

Read 2 Corinthians 1.

(If time is short, read vv. 12–24.)

For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. (2 Corinthians 1:12)

Paul was not universally loved, revered, and respected in the Corinthian congregation. His authority as Christ's apostle was denied by some who tried to discredit his words. In 1 Corinthians 3, he talked about divisions within the congregation as some pledged their allegiance to Paul, others to Apollos, others to Christ. Paul's reply was to point to Jesus as the Lord of the Church; he and Apollos were simply servants. But false prophets, whom Paul called "super apostles," began belittling Paul.

In response, Paul humbled himself. The thing he and his associates chose to boast about was not the number of people who followed them, not their own eloquence and intelligence; but their simplicity and godly sincerity. Staying simple doesn't always impress the proud and arrogant of this world. That is why this kind of simplicity and sincerity do not come by way of worldly wisdom, but by the grace of God.

That is a fascinating observation—God who is glorious, all-powerful, and all-knowing delights in humility and simplicity. No wonder Jesus said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (Matthew 11:25).

By God's grace, He gives us the heart and faith of little children—His dear sons and daughters.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank You for hiding Your glory from those on earth who consider themselves wise and understanding, and revealing it to unworthy people like me. In Your grace, give us humble confidence, that we may serve the people around us and share the wondrous story of salvation with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 25

THE GRACE OF GIVING

Read 2 Corinthians 8.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–15.)

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. (2 Corinthians 8:1)

Paul is on a mission, a mission of a lifetime. It's not just going from town to town sharing the Gospel with people who have never heard of Jesus before—though that is his missionary journey. He is engaging in a collection that he hopes will unite the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians into one.

Ever since Christians began preaching to Gentiles, some Jewish Christians got defensive about it. They were afraid to lose the Jewish distinctiveness that almost threatened to destroy them in the time between the Old and New Testaments when Greek leaders tried to stamp out the cultural isolation God had demanded of His

people in the Old Testament. They saw Paul and his Gentile congregations as enemies who were trying to subvert the church of the Jewish Messiah.

But then this collection came along. Some time back, a prophet named Agabus predicted a severe famine that would strike the land of Israel. Paul saw it as a golden opportunity for his Gentile churches to raise a huge collection to help their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters who were suffering such want.

The Gentiles felt such gratitude to the church in Jerusalem and to the apostles and leaders who shared the Gospel outside of Jerusalem. By God's free, undeserved grace, the Jews shared the saving story of their Messiah through men like Paul. Now the Gentiles, touched by God's grace, had the opportunity to express their gratitude with a generous gift.

Paul recognized God's grace in both. The Gentiles did not deserve the privilege of hearing the Gospel, nor did they deserve the blessed opportunity to share their material blessings (themselves undeserved) with those who had given them such rich spiritual blessings.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You fill our lives with grace upon grace. First with the grace of Your salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, then with the opportunity to pass that faith along through words and deeds of loving kindness. Bless all our efforts to share Your love, and bless Your Word to create faith in those who hear. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THORN IN THE FLESH

Read 2 Corinthians 12.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–10.)

But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Paul tells us about his “thorn in the flesh.” He doesn’t specify what it is—some have surmised a chronic health problem like poor eyesight, others a relationship problem. Whatever the thorn might have been, Paul felt it was interfering with his work; he could be more efficient without it dragging him down.

God’s answer was, “My grace is sufficient for you” (v. 9). Once again, God focuses us on His grace. It is all we really need. When Paul felt too weak to go on, God would give him the needed strength in a way that made it clear the strength was from God

and not himself.

Maybe the Holy Spirit chose to leave unknown the specific thorn Paul suffered so that you and I can see our own particular thorns in the flesh and realize that all we really need is God's grace. He has power enough to help us through any and every situation.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your divine, fatherly wisdom—even in choosing thorns in my flesh. When I struggle with times of weakness, drive me to Your grace, that I may be assured Your mercy and strength will carry me through. In Jesus' name. Amen.

A NEW GOSPEL— NO GOSPEL

Read Galatians 1.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–10.)

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. (Galatians 1:6)

When you read the opening verses of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, you may notice how perplexed he is. The Galatians received the faith with great joy, but now they have lost that first love and are turning to what false teachers are calling "a new gospel," but as Paul points out, it is not a gospel at all.

This new gospel is all about works, the works a Christian does to be on the right side with God. Paul clearly and promptly exposes the way this new gospel sets aside grace in favor of human works. Paul is perplexed that the Galatians would fall for such talk.

Do we fall for it? Our sinful nature does incline

us to look at ourselves and rely on ourselves for everything. But God's grace turns our eyes to look outside of ourselves to Him. He sets our lives in order, reminding us that He is our God and Creator, our Lord and our Savior. We never were, never are, and never will be our own masters. If we deny God's rightful place over us, then Satan becomes our master. There are no alternatives—either you will serve God or you will serve Satan.

By God's grace, and by His grace alone, Jesus Christ has freed us from Satan's destructive dominion and brought us into His kingdom of forgiveness, peace, joy, and light.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, rescue me from every false teaching that would lead me away from Your grace, away from my Savior, Jesus Christ. Teach me true contentment with the lot You have given me in life—a wonderful and delightful lot indeed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

PARADISE

Read Galatians 5.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–12.)

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (Galatians 5:4)

Paul is not subtle as he speaks to the Galatians who want to be circumcised. They have been convinced that following Moses' Law is the way to live a full Christian life. Paul uses striking words that take us back to our first parents in the Garden of Eden: "You have fallen away from grace" (v. 4).

In Paradise, Adam and Eve were living in the grace of God. They were holy, sinless, and pure. They were at peace with God and each other. But they wanted more. They severed themselves from God by disobeying His clear command, and relied on their own works, their own wisdom. They fell away from God's grace, were driven out of the garden, and forced to work the land from which they had been taken.

The fall the Galatians were toying with was much more dangerous. The remedy for Adam and Eve's

fall was Christ, the promised Seed of the woman. But if we sever ourselves from Christ, there is no remedy. Only the merciless wrath of God and the eternal torments of hell.

Instead, Paul teaches us to walk by the Holy Spirit. Rather than doing the works of the flesh, we can enjoy the fruit of the Spirit. Again, this is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, where a variety of trees full of ripe fruit were constantly at hand. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). What a wonderful life of grace we would enjoy eating this fruit!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we constantly live in a fallen world, suffering the consequences of our sins, the sins of others, and life in a damaged creation. Protect me from falling away from grace, being severed from Christ. Let me walk in the Spirit in Your amazing grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

DEAD IN OUR TRESPASSES

Read Ephesians 2.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–10.)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)

Paul begins this chapter reminding the Ephesians, “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked” (Ephesians 2:1–2). He adds, “we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” (v. 3).

Was there ever a clearer description of our lost condition before God? By nature, we were children who stirred nothing but God’s wrath and displeasure. And was there ever a clearer description of what it means to be the undeserving recipients of God’s grace?

Thankfully, God’s grace is wondrous. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with

which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (vv. 4–5). A little later, Paul adds, “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (v. 8).

“Dead in our trespasses.” Go to a graveyard sometime and ask one of the dead to go and bring you a glass of water. As powerless as the dead are to help the living, we poor sinners are absolutely powerless to do anything good for God. Yes, we are “dead to God.” But that’s what grace is all about—God’s love for undeserving sinners.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I am in awe of Your boundless grace and love. I am totally undeserving, dead to You, yet You have made me alive in Jesus Christ, Your Son, my Lord. I have no boast to bring, no claim of my own merit or righteousness. Receive my thanks and praise for all Your good gifts. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 30

LEAST OF ALL THE SAINTS

Read Ephesians 3.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–13.)

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Ephesians 3:8)

Back in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul described himself as the least of the apostles, not even deserving to be called an apostle. Now he goes even deeper; he calls himself the very least of all the saints. He deeply feels his sin and unworthiness.

Paul understood, very intimately, what grace was really all about. He considered himself the very least of all the saints—not deserving in any way to be a Christian at all—because he persecuted the Church of God.

But in God's astonishing grace, He called Paul on the road to Damascus and brought him to faith by the Holy Spirit. The mere fact that God wanted to

include such a violent, murdering persecutor into His Church was already amazing evidence of the depth of God's grace. But what He does next totally blows Paul away.

God chooses him to be His spokesman, His ambassador to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. He has searched the riches of Christ, and has barely begun to scratch the surface of all that Christ brings to us. But that is the message God enables him to preach.

Some parents among us feel totally disqualified to teach their children because of things they've done—a sinful lifestyle they lived or an act of abuse or betrayal to their spouse or child. But God's grace transforms us; it empowers us to be the husband or wife, the mother or father, the boss or employee that God always wanted us to be.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, like Paul, I am the very least of the saints and don't deserve to be called one. When I feel acutely unworthy of tasks and responsibilities You lay upon me, remind me of Your grace, which washes away all my sins in the blood of Christ and sets me firmly on my feet, forgiven and equipped for every good work. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HE GIVES MORE GRACE

Read James 4.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–10.)

But He gives more grace. Therefore it says “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)

James writes to Christians who seem to be so in name only. From all outward appearances, there is no way to distinguish these Christians from every other sinner with whom they live their lives. Their candle is hidden deep within the basket—if the flame of faith is burning at all.

James cuts right to the heart of the problem. “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (v. 1). So the Christians covet what they do not have and try to gain them by their own devices. But this is not the way of God. “Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (v. 4).

James writes, “Do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that He has made to dwell in us?’” (v. 5). Doesn’t that sound like the Close of the Ten Commandments? “I the LORD your God am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5). He is jealous because we owe Him our life, our love, our devotion, our loyalty—yet we give it to the world and our own desires.

The solution is to humble ourselves before God—to confess our guilt and sin, and to plead for His forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. But even this repentance is impossible without the grace of God. Only He can give us eyes of faith to see who we really are and how far we have fallen from His perfect will. But that repentance and faith flow out of the grace God gives. The grace to turn from our sins and recognize we have been wrong, then to follow Christ, our Savior, in meekness and humility.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open my eyes to the times when my faith is cold and I am preoccupied with my own sinful desires. Grant me Your grace to repent and walk in faith, that I may glorify Your name. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Grace

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