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RECORD

Overflowing Grace
2003 Week of Prayer Readings

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A Marvelous Promise

A message from the officers of the General Conference

The apostle Peter says: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2).

What a marvelous promise! Grace and peace! As sinners, we are in such need of grace. Our hearts should be overflowing with gratitude for the grace of God in our lives. It is of great significance that the word “gratitude” comes from the Latin word *gratia*, which means “grace.”

The famous hymn “Amazing Grace” was written by John Newton, on whose tombstone in Olney, England, we find this inscription: “John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy” (*100 Hymn Stories*, p. 28).

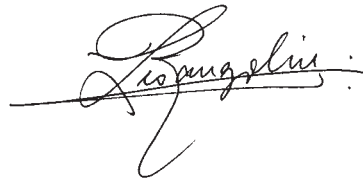
Newton’s was a marvelous transformation. An erstwhile slave ship captain, he surrendered his life to God and became a preacher of the gospel. Now we can understand the verses he wrote in the beautiful hymn that has become a Christian classic:

“Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

Because of God’s abundant grace we are united in Christ, and we have peace. Peace with God, peace with our fellow humans, peace with our families, peace with ourselves.

Describing this marvelous grace in our lives, Ellen G. White says: “There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 18).

Let us all pray that the message of grace, the theme of this year’s Week of Prayer, will awaken our hearts, our emotions, and our minds and bring us closer to Jesus Christ, our Savior. May these readings touch our hearts with gratitude for this amazing grace.



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Leo Ranzolin



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Our vision is to...
know
experience
and **share**
our hope in Jesus Christ!

Meaningful Grace

Why we need it so desperately

BY JAN PAULSEN

When the Old Testament talks about grace, concepts such as an undeserved favor or gift, a benevolent action in behalf of someone else, kindness, and steadfast love are involved. In the New Testament grace is kindness and mercy, a special manifestation of God's presence, power or glory, a gift or favor, gratitude, blessing, something pleasant. What a wonderful concept! Scripture is full of references to the freely given unmerited favor and love of God toward us.

But let's explore this crucial concept a little further, taking a look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

An Attribute of God

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:2).^{*} Paul starts his letter and ends it (Eph. 6:24) with the wish that his audience may experience grace. It is a blessing and "a prayer that his readers may know fully the free, undeserved favour of God, restoring them to himself, and adding to them all that they need."¹

Grace is *from God*, and Paul continues by talking about the "glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:6), then adds the expression: the "riches of His grace" (verse 7). But as if that would not yet sufficiently describe the excellency of God, Paul intensifies his previous statement by talking about "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us" (Eph. 2:7). Thus Paul praises the grace of God in higher and higher terms.

In the Old Testament God introduced Himself to Moses with the following words: "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Ex. 34:6). The writers of the Old Testament again and again return to this self-revelation of God and praise His grace. David states: "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth" (Ps. 86:15). Joel calls his people to repentance and declares: "Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil" (Joel 2:13). Jonah, being angry because of God's graciousness, prays: "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity" (Jonah 4:2).

Paul may have had God's self-testimony in mind when he referred to God's grace. In Ephesians 1:6 he even mentions the concept of grace twice: "To the praise of the glory of His *grace*, in which He . . . [has *graced*] us in the Beloved." It is important that we understand who God is and how He is. For the perception we have of God determines to a large degree the quality of our relationship to Him and therefore also the quality of our own life.

Our God is the God of grace. Grace is part of His divine character. Grace means that God turns His "bright happy

countenance”² toward us and blesses us with undeserved gifts or favors. We can pray for His intervention, but grace cannot be coerced. It is a freely given benefit, granted by a superior to an inferior party, by the powerful to the weak, and it is engendered by love and pity. Thus grace is not only a favorable disposition to a person or a group, but it becomes active. God helps the poor, the oppressed, the mortally ill, those who suffer. He turns toward those who have needs and fulfills these needs that no one else can meet. His actions involve deliverance and protection, help and empowerment. God is very much concerned with good relationships. His grace is His unexpected and loving decision to forgive our shortcoming and to restore broken relationships.

Someone has said: “When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day’s pay for their time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for their performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for their long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award—yet receives such a gift anyway—that is a good picture of God’s unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.”

We Need It

In Ephesians Paul does not only marvel about the “surpassing riches of His grace,” he also lets us know that we really need it. After having briefly described the Christians’ new status, namely their redemption, their acceptance as God’s children and heirs, and their sealing with the Holy Spirit as a result of God’s grace (see Ephesians 1:3-14), in chapter 2 he elaborates on their previous condition and their subsequent salvation. We must know where we came from. We must know who we are, namely sinners and people on death row. Never should we forget this fact, because should we ever lose sight of it, we will stop appreciating

our salvation and treasuring God’s goodness and grace.

At this point, please read the great passage of Ephesians 2:4-10.

Not only does the word “grace” occur several times in this passage; Paul tells us that our human condition is one of desperate need. Without God’s grace we are dead, spiritually dead. We are enslaved and inescapably entangled in the coils of sin. We need liberation. We are in need of being bought back to becoming the sole property of our real owner, our Creator and Lord. New life, and nothing less, is needed.³ But aside from God’s grace there is no way to get it.

In this passage Paul informs us about three things. *First*, salvation is entirely of grace. The same thought is stressed three times: “By grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:5, 8, NKJV). The second time Paul reinforces this reality by adding “not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” And he goes on to make really sure that we get it: “not of works, lest anyone should boast” (verse 9, NKJV). Salvation is always the free gift of God. If salvation could be earned or if we could add to our salvation, grace would cease to be grace.

Paul Francisco, reporting about his childhood, writes that in the church which his family attended, the offering plates were passed twice during a Communion service. The second offering was taken just prior to the passing out of the emblems and was designated to benevolences. When he turned 9 his mother gave him a dime for the second offering. After having given the dime he also wanted to participate in the Lord’s Supper, but his mother told him: “You can’t take the Communion yet.”

“Why not?” he responded. “I paid for it.”

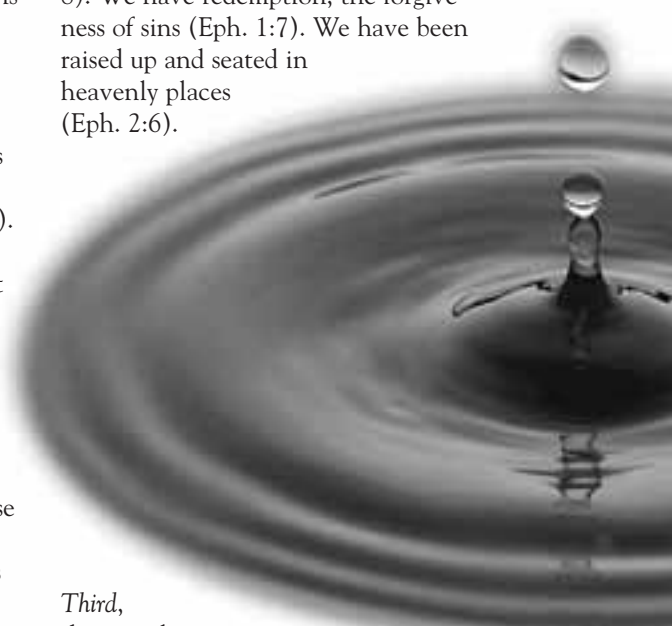
The notion that we can pay for our salvation or that we at least can somehow add to our salvation seems to be ingrained in our human nature. Oftentimes humans seem to be too proud to admit that they are lost, helpless, and desperate and cannot contribute to their redemption.

Oftentimes they are too proud to accept by faith God’s free gift. As much as we admire God’s grace, it means that we have to come down from our pedestals and in humility recognize our utter helplessness and dependence on the Lord. Paul tells us: Salvation cannot be paid for. It is undeserved. Good works are a *consequence* of salvation, not the *grounds* for it (Eph. 2:10).

Second, Paul presents salvation as an accomplished fact. Through God’s grace we are already saved (verses 5, 8). We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7). We have been raised up and seated in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

Third, there is also a future dimension. What God has done for believers and what is a present reality will be fully known only in the ages to come. Although we are already saved, the final salvation still awaits us, when we will not only be freed from the power of sin but also from the presence of sin. It is that final consummation to which we are looking forward.

Moving on in Ephesians we detect that God’s grace is not limited to our salvation. In chapter 3 Paul talks about the grace of God, who has assigned him a special task and ministry (verses 2, 7). He adds: “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (verse 8, NKJV). The grace of God had made him all that he



was, a new person in Christ (1 Cor. 15:10).

But don't get it wrong! God's grace called not only Paul to a specific ministry, but all of us: "To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift," Paul says in Ephesians 4:7, enumerating a number of spiritual gifts. Through the grace of God each individual believer has received at least one spiritual gift, unmerited, with no place for boasting. These gifts were given to build up the body of Christ, the church, to help it grow spiritually and also numerically, and to foster its unity (verses 12-16).

Do we need grace?

Indeed, we need

it.

We need it for our salvation.

We need it for our daily life. We need it for our ministry. Grace is the undeserved favor of God that brings to us all that we need for living a Christian life and serving others.⁴ We pass it on.

Ellen G. White summarizes grace in a wonderful way: "God loves the sinless angels, who do His service and are obedient to all His commands; but He does not give them grace: they have never needed it; for they have never sinned. Grace is an attribute shown to undeserving human beings. We did not seek after it; it was sent in search of us. God rejoices to bestow grace upon all who hunger and thirst for it, not because we are worthy, but because we are unworthy. Our need is the qualification which gives us the assurance that we shall receive the gift."⁵

Revealed to Us in Christ

So far we have studied the grace of God and our need for it. Yet the most essential part is missing. God's grace is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Without Jesus, salvation would not and could not be offered to us as an undeserved gift. Therefore, right at the beginning, when Paul addresses the Christians in Ephesus and wishes them grace and peace, he immediately introduces not only God the Father but also "*the Lord Jesus Christ*." When in Ephesians 1:6 Paul praises the glory of God's grace he hastens to add: which he has graced us "in the *Beloved*." The Beloved is no one else than Jesus our Lord. God's grace is bestowed upon us in Jesus and in Him alone. One verse further we are assured that "we have redemption . . . , the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7, NKJV). How? "*In him*," Jesus

Christ our Lord and "*through His blood*." Salvation by grace is dependent on Jesus. Voluntarily He shed His blood so that we may be freed, an undeserved gift. We were dead in sins. But He saved us. That is grace.

Jesus paid the price for our transgressions of God's law. He took upon Him our unrighteousness so that we may enjoy His righteousness. Therefore, God "made us alive together *with Christ* . . . and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*" (Eph. 2:5, 6, NKJV). Paul goes so far to indicate that the purpose of God for the church reaches beyond salvation and re-creation, beyond its unity and the proclamation of the gospel to the world. The church is to be a demonstration of God's love and grace in Christ to the entire creation (Eph. 2:7). Notice again, "*in Christ*."

The Adventist Church has chosen to stress certain core values, namely quality of life, growth, and unity. All of them are found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. All of them are linked to the grace of God. All of them are dependent on our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we are saved by grace and enjoy a new quality of life.

Through Him we receive gifts, ministries, and all that we need to grow individually and as a church, to proclaim the everlasting gospel of God's love toward humankind, and to maintain and advance the unity of His remnant church.

Grace is a wonderful attribute of God. We desperately need it. It is offered to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let us accept this gift of grace and come to the throne of grace boldly through Jesus our Savior and High Priest. "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love" (Eph. 6:24, NKJV).

*Unless otherwise noted, Bible references in this article are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

¹F. Foulkes, *Ephesians* (Eerdmans), p. 53.

²J. S. Kselman, "Grace (OT)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday), vol. 2, p. 1085.

³See Foulkes, pp. 80, 81.

⁴See Foulkes, p. 98.

⁵Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 519.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. Not a few Christians see the Old Testament as a legalistic document, a book of law. How does the author destroy this myth?
2. Why did Paul dwell so heavily on grace? Do you see any relationship to his own spiritual journey?
3. It would seem that everyone should welcome grace. So why is it often such a difficult concept for people to accept? How has it been with you personally?

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Abundance of Grace

Nothing is too hard for it; and there's nowhere beyond its reach.

BY WESLEY TORRES

Grace is the English word translated from Latin, *gratia*, which in turn is translated from the Greek, *charis*, meaning “undeserved favor.” Love is the twin sister of grace (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8). Christ is the personification of God’s grace, and that’s why His death to save the human race is the utmost act of love. Jesus came to manifest grace and love, to rescue humankind from its condemnation and bondage to sin.

Without Grace

Because of sin, we’re all without hope and deserving of death. But because of Christ, we can experience the abundance of grace, which results in salvation and life. Christ’s communication of grace and love exceeds and overrides the guilt and wrath caused by Adam and Eve’s sin. Beyond that, we are promised: Where sin abounded, grace overabounded (Rom. 5:20).

This is a wonderful solution to the problem of sin: Christ freely gives His abundant grace to all who wish to cover themselves with His righteousness and mercy.

Grace Needs to Be Accepted. During the administration of United States president Andrew Jackson, George Wilson, a postal clerk, robbed a federal payroll from a train and killed a guard. The court convicted Wilson and sentenced him to hang. Because of public sentiment against capital punishment, however, a movement began to secure a presidential pardon for Wilson (it was his first offense).

Eventually President Jackson intervened with a pardon. Amazingly, Wilson refused it. The Supreme Court was asked to rule on whether a person could refuse a presidential pardon. Chief Justice John Marshall handed down the Court’s decision: “A pardon is a parchment whose only value must be determined by the receiver of the pardon. It has no value apart from that which the receiver gives to it. George Wilson refused to accept the pardon. . . . We cannot conceive why he would do so, but he has. Therefore, George Wilson must die.”

Wilson was hanged. Pardon, declared the Supreme Court, must not only be granted, it must be accepted. So it is with God’s grace. He offers it to us, but it can be experienced only if we accept it.

To obtain the gift of grace we need only to claim God’s promises (2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 2:5-7), pray for grace (John 14:13, 14), and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts, awakening us to the reality of our need (Eph. 1:12, 13; Ps. 51:1).

Three Dimensions of Grace. God’s abundant grace has three dimensions—past, present, and future. When we accept His grace we are made new, and our past is buried in Christ. As we walk with the Lord our transformed lives are evidence of His abundant grace in us. Even if we sin His grace is, and will always be, available to pardon us if we confess and repent of our sins.

Grace Preserves Life

The presence of sin in the human heart brought competition, division, discrimination, and differences between God’s creatures. Through His care for nature, God’s grace controls life on earth, because nature also suffers sin’s consequences (Rom. 8:20, 22). God’s wonderful promises include the redemption of nature from sin and its consequences when sin is finally destroyed (Isa. 35:1, 2, 7; 55:13).

Nature Portrays God’s Grace. God’s grace is easily perceived in the maintenance of life on our earth. Sunshine and rain sustain life on the planet and cause the land to produce food. Seasons come and go, benefiting human beings and nature itself.

Everything in the universe testifies to a Creator and a Sustainer, despite the intrusion of sin and its consequences.

God’s Grace on Our Planet. Nature’s ecological equilibrium has been disturbed in some parts of the world, usually out of ignorance or because of limited vision and economic ambitions (many times in the name of development and progress) without consideration for long-term consequences.

Despite the destruction imposed on our planet, we can see traces of God's wonderful work: the beautiful fields of Alberta, Canada; the Great Barrier Reef in Australia; the Norwegian fjords; the amazing, mysterious, and untouched nature in Africa; the magnitude of the Amazon rain forest; the numberless varieties of birds daily sustained by God's gracious hand; unimaginable kinds of animals peculiar to each region on our planet; countless types of trees with their fruits. Is there any reason to believe that any of these are here by chance?

The evidence suggests a Creator and Maintainer of life.

Those of us who have experienced God's abundant grace have a responsibility to do our part in preserving nature. God's grace protects and enhances life on our planet; and we, as His witnesses, are called to testify about this.

God's Grace Extended

God's grace is free to everyone regardless of ethnic, racial, social, gender, national, or tribal differences—mere human classifications.

Christ came to destroy all human barriers or divisions that separate His children from God or each other. He came to reconnect humanity with God and establish a new order in which people live in peace and harmony when they choose to be transformed by His grace.

God's Promises in His Word. God makes no distinction between us in His dealings, because He accepts us just as we are. "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (Col. 3:11, NIV). That means there is no male or female, Jew or Gentile (or Palestinian), Zulu or Xhosa, Serbian or Croatian, Hutu or Tutsi, White or Aboriginal, Black or White. We are all *one* before God (Gal. 3:28).

The Bible is full of promises assuring us that God's grace brings salvation, hope, and life if we simply come to Him. There are no limits to what His grace can do to transform us.

Acceptance and Renewal. When we experience God's overabundance of grace in our lives, the natural consequence is the transformation of our character. This in turn leads to our acceptance of one another and the desire to live together as children of God. All intrigue, prejudice, or discrimination—so much a part of our sinful nature—will be changed by Christ's marvelous grace. This is the practical and visible evidence of God's overabundant grace to our society. The world cannot understand it, but it will marvel at it.

Christ is the personification of God's grace.

God's Ideal Plan. God's original plan involved face-to-face communication with His created beings in a setting in which they would enjoy His company eternally. This was temporarily obliterated by the intrusion of sin.

The Bible employs the symbol of angels (messengers) commissioned with the task of proclaiming the plan of salvation to every nation, tribe, language, and people (Rev. 14:6, 7). The truth enveloped here is clear: God invites every person to be part of His kingdom regardless of his or her ethnic, racial, gender, social, national, or tribal differences.

A Practical Grace

God's grace is a gift to us. The conditions for receiving God's grace are a recognition of our need and a willingness to surrender ourselves completely to Him in order to be changed and made new by His grace.

When I think about God's grace being manifested in human actions, I remember what happened to me when I was 8 years old.

The bank manager with whom my

parents dealt was to be a dinner guest in our home. My mother was preparing for that distinguished occasion, and I watched her rush to get everything ready. I wanted to help her. I kept asking and begging her to let me do something more than just wash the pans.

When it was nearly 5:00 I saw my mother bring down from the cupboard our best and most beautiful dinner set. I asked and asked, and she finally allowed me to place those lovely plates on the table. Wanting to prove my ability, I picked up three plates at once. Step by step, very slowly, I walked toward the dining room.

Then I stumbled, and the plates slipped from my hands, shattering into hundreds of pieces on the floor. I couldn't bear to look at my mother. Instead, I began to cry and longed to run away.

Just as I hesitated, Mother gently approached me. Holding me in her arms and looking into my tearful eyes, she said, "Wesley, there are still three plates to be put on the table. Please, let me help you try again."

That's how I understand God's abundant grace that works for you and me.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. Give an example from the past week when you experienced "undeserved favor" from someone; also when you extended it to someone else.
2. Why is it so hard to accept the concept of grace? What would make it easier to grasp?
3. List three reasons a proper understanding of grace is more important now than ever before in earth's history.

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Grace and Obedience

Together providing assurance and transformation

BY J. DAVID NEWMAN

Boris Kornfeld was a Jewish physician who had fallen victim to Stalin's purges. We do not know his "crime" except that he was sentenced to a concentration camp for political subversives at Ekibastuz.¹

Kornfeld was an ardent Communist, a cultural Jew, and an atheist. Because he was a doctor, he lived a little better than the other prisoners—the prison authorities needed doctors to care for the prisoners who were constantly dying under the primitive conditions of their imprisonment.

While in the concentration camp Kornfeld began to reexamine his beliefs in Communism. One of his patients was a Christian who witnessed to him the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. He struggled over giving his life to God.

One day as he worked to save the life of one of the prison guards who had been knifed, he was tempted to suture the severed artery in such a way that it would reopen shortly after the surgery. The guard would die, and no one would be the wiser. As his hands paused while tying the suture he suddenly became appalled by the violence and hatred in his own heart toward the guard and all those like him. He despised his persecutors. He could gladly kill them all. He then realized that he was trapped by the very evil that he despised.

He began to retie the suture properly, and as he did, he found himself repeating the words he had heard from his fellow prisoner: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." These were strange words for a Jew. But he continued to pray the Lord's Prayer and recount other passages about God's love and forgiveness.

One day he discovered an orderly stealing some of the food meant only for the patients. Orderlys were quislings, prisoners who had betrayed some other prisoner. The prison authorities used them to keep order, and turned their backs when they abused other inmates. Kornfeld reported this infraction to the prison commandant.

The commandant placed the orderly in three days of confinement. Kornfeld knew that his life would not be safe once the orderly was released. But eventually he found he was not

afraid. A remarkable peace had come into his heart. He wanted to share his new faith.

One afternoon he examined a prisoner who had been operated on for cancer of the intestines. The eyes of this man were filled with sorrow, and his face was etched with years of misery. Kornfeld felt mysteriously attracted to him.

Kornfeld shared what had happened to him, how God had transformed his life. The patient drifting in and out of consciousness did not catch it all. But he heard enough to know that this man, this doctor, was different.

The next morning the young patient awoke to the sound of running feet and a great commotion. That very night someone had bludgeoned Boris Kornfeld to death. But his testimony did not die. The patient pondered the testimony of the doctor and became a Christian. He survived that prison camp and went on to tell the world about it. His name was Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He is most famous for his massive exposé of conditions under Stalin in his book *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Even though Kornfeld did not live long, he followed the path of the apostle Paul, who also was transformed by grace from a persecutor of Christians to a Christian himself.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).*

Think for a moment about your greatest need—emotional and relational. The cry of humanity, the cry of every individual, is acceptance for who they are. We want to be loved, to be valued, and to be accepted just as we are.

When Adam and Eve took the forbidden fruit, they knew they had done something wrong. They were afraid that God would no longer accept them as they had become, so when God came looking for them, they hid. We have been hiding ever since. We are afraid that God will not love us.

We find it difficult to confess our sins, our problems, and our difficulties, because we are afraid that others in the church will look down on us. We are afraid of rejection just

as Adam and Eve were. Yet we need each other in order to grow in Jesus.

So how do we find the power, the resolve, to lose our fear? How do we become transformed to be like Jesus and to conquer the sin in our lives? It comes from understanding the grace that transformed the life of Boris Kornfeld.

What Is Grace?

Grace begins with acceptance: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom. 15:7). What did we have to do for Christ to accept us? Nothing! Paul tells us that “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Christ does not wait until we are good before He accepts us. The Bible is clear that no one is good or will never be good enough (see Rom. 3:10-12, 23).

If no one is good enough and there is nothing that we can do that will make God love us, how then are we saved? “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30, 31).

Believing in Jesus means that you have come to the place where you recognize that you are helpless and there is nothing you can do to get to heaven. You realize that you are guilty and you deserve to die. You are sorry for your life of sin. So you place your full trust in Jesus. You accept as yours the perfect life Jesus lived, and you change from being dependent on yourself to being dependent on Jesus.

When God gives you His grace, His pardon, He does not expect you to keep on living the same way as you lived before. Your surrender to Him allows Him to place the Holy Spirit in your life. He transforms you so that you desire to do good things. You desire to follow Christ’s commandments because you love Him (John 14:15). This is why the apostle Paul said that God had commissioned him to “call . . . the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” (Rom. 1:5).

Boris Kornfeld knew when he

became a Christian that he would change, and that his behavior would change. When you accept Christ, your life will change. God always accepts you *as you are*, but He never leaves you *where you are*. When you accept His gracious gift of salvation, He places all the resources of heaven at your request so that you can grow to become more like Jesus.

What does a person who is growing like Jesus look like? Just because a person has accepted the seventh-day Sabbath, or changes how they dress, or

*God always
accepts you
as you are,
but He never
leaves you
where you are.*

returns tithes to God does not make them a Christian. A person can do all these things without surrendering to the lordship of Jesus. There is something more basic that Jesus wants.

Back to Basics

At the Last Supper just before He died, Jesus explained how people would know who His followers were. He said that everyone would know them by how they loved one another (John 13:35).

Ellen White endorsed what Jesus said when she stressed how God’s people are to live in the last days: “Those who wait for the Bridegroom’s coming are to say to the people [the world], ‘Behold your God.’ The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love.”²

“A loving, lovable Christian is the most powerful argument in favor of the truth.”³

A Bicycle Built for Two

I like to illustrate the connection between grace and transformation to a bicycle. A bicycle has two wheels. If we separate the wheels, we no longer have a bicycle, but it is important to distinguish the difference between the wheels. One steers the bike and the other powers the bike. Both are equally important and necessary.

Salvation is made up of two parts—grace and transformation. Both are necessary for heaven, and if we separate them we no longer have salvation.

But just as with the bicycle, it is vital that we distinguish their unique functions.

Grace is what saves us. Grace comes entirely from God. It is outside us and is given to us freely when we place our trust in Jesus.

Transformation begins to take place the moment we receive grace. Transformation takes place inside us. We always look to grace for the assurance of our salvation, yet are always conscious that we are growing in obedience to God. As we cooperate with God He changes us into His image.

*Scripture references in this article are from the New International Version.

¹This story is condensed from Charles Colson, *Loving God* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1987), pp. 19-29.

²Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 415.

³White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 21, p. 25.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. What does Kornfeld’s life tell us about the reward and consequences of living a grace-filled life?
2. How do grace and transformation relate to each other?
3. How has the grace of Christ made a difference in your life?

J. David Newman is the senior pastor of New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burtonsville, Maryland.



The Transforming Power

Face to face with the greatest agent of change in the world

BY PARSON MWANSA

In the small village where he lived, Wilfred was known by both children and adults as the cursing, swearing, fighting man, and nobody dared cross him. A day went by without his cursing or swearing at someone.

His hot temper caused him to slap his children if they misbehaved and to fight with strangers in the beer-drinking hall if they said or did something he did not like.

One day there was a church meeting in the village, and Wilfred, though drunk, attended the meeting. He was swearing even at the meeting place. At the end of the message the pastor talked to him, and he followed up with a visit at Wilfred's house the next day. In the days that followed, Wilfred attended church services and became a believer.

People could not believe the change that took place in him. He stopped cursing and swearing. One day his own wife said to him, "If there is anything this church has done to you, it has taken away your swearing and cursing." To which Wilfred responded: "My dear, it is not the church; it is the transforming grace of God that has changed my life. Jesus has taken away my old self and given me a new self."

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14).*

Salvation and Sanctification Go Together

The work of grace is not just being forgiven of our sins, but also includes sanctification. To sanctify is to make holy, to purify, to consecrate. Sanctification is the work of God purifying a believer into a clean and holy life. The same grace that brings salvation sanctifies our nature, creating out of us a peculiar people, eager to do the will of God as we wait for the appearance of our Lord Christ Jesus. This is what Paul is saying in Titus 2:11-14.

When a sinner responds to the love of Jesus and accepts Him as a personal Savior, Jesus accepts such a sinner just the

way they are—filthy (Rom. 5:8). He forgives them, clothes them in His righteousness, and presents them in the presence of God as God's child (Eph. 1:7). We stand in the presence of God, and He accepts us through the blood and righteousness of Jesus and offers us eternal life (John 3:16). We receive the Holy Spirit as a constant presence to help us live as children of light, fitting us for heaven and eternity (Gal. 4:6).

Grace and the New Birth

Scripture pictures the life of a believer as a new birth. This is the truth that Jesus told Nicodemus when he said: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

Birth of anything implies a new beginning. The Greek words translated "born again" in this passage mean to be born from above, bring forth from above, to be conceived from above. This implies that the Christian birth is a new beginning. It therefore does not build on the old self. Ellen White says: "The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether."¹

This new birth comes from God. No other means can give birth to heavenly things. "This change can be brought only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit."² We must not think to patch up the old building, but begin from the foundation. This calls for a new nature altogether, a nature that comes with divine principles and affections.

The new birth spoken of in this passage is a real experience. A new birth in the Spirit is real. The Bible says this in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

The new birth is a miracle and cannot always be explained. Jesus told Nicodemus that one cannot explain how wind blows. But one can see the effects. So it is with this new birth. We cannot fully explain how it happens, but one can see its results.

Sanctification—Growing in Grace

While I was preaching at a camp meeting in 1982, the deacons handed me a note written by one of the attendees. I

Power of Grace

had just preached about the parable of the sower. Interpreting this story, I appealed to the congregation not to be like the seeds that fell among the thorns and got choked by “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth” (Matt. 13:22). A woman who had been listening was touched by the Spirit and wrote me the note the deacons gave me.

It read: “Pastor, I love the Lord, but I fail to obey Him all the time. Many times I pledge to God that I will live for Him, especially after I hear messages that lift me up, but within a few days I find myself doing the things I know I am not supposed to do. Pastor, is my experience normal? When should I expect to stop sinning? How can I obey God all the time? How can I grow into a relationship with God in which I obey Him fully? Please help me.”

The words of the apostle Paul would help us to find answers to this woman’s questions. Paul wrote: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12, 13).

Certain points are clear in this passage:

1. Paul did not claim that he was perfect or that he had stopped sinning.

But he claimed that the direction he desired in his life was that of upward growth.

2. When we sin, we are counseled to “confess our sins” and God is “faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Christ Jesus is our hope in dealing with our sinful nature. He will give us victory. This was Paul’s conclusion (see Romans 7:14-23). The presence of Jesus, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, is our only hope of victory over sin.

Grace and Victory Over Sin

The question most needing attention is this: “How do I grow into a relationship with God in which I live a life of loyalty to His will?”

Jesus provided the answer to this question. “Remain in me,” He said, “and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5).

The relationship that exists between a vine and a branch is key to the bearing of fruit. And the fruit referred to here is the character of loyalty to God, a character with divine similitude. This is the fruit of the Spirit. Paul identified the fruit of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

The Bible teaches that grace comes from God, full and free. In this salvation experience God gives us the Holy Spirit, who, working in us, purifies us and enables us to bear fruit.

The work of this transforming grace continues in us as long as we live. We continue through grace to become more and more like Jesus.

The great saints whose lives are recorded in Scripture never claimed that they had become sinless. But they claimed and preached that there is victory over sin in Christ. Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil. 3:12).

We can be victorious over sin, but this can be done only in Christ Jesus our Lord. And because of this, the daily prayer of every child of God will be: “Lord, supply me today with grace, grace needed for me to live a victorious life and to keep a steadfast walk with You.”

*Scripture references in this article are from the New International Version.

¹Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 172.

²*Ibid.*

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. What do you see as the role of grace in the process of sanctification? Is that role different from that by which grace saved us in the first place?
2. What is the strongest testimony we can bear to the saving power of Christ? How does the author illustrate this in the reading?
3. What hope is there when we fail?

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The Limits of Grace

God's will can be thwarted.

When we speak of divine grace, we're not talking of human goodness or humanistic noble-mindedness. We are referring to God's basis of redemption from sin. As sinners we deserve death; God offers life. We are separated; He offers reconciliation. We are under judgment; He provides freedom. We are prodigals in swine land; He brings us home. All for free.

Human works, however good and noble, have nothing to do with divine forgiveness. To the apostle Paul, so far as salvation is concerned, grace and works are mutually exclusive. Salvation is by grace through faith alone; there is no such thing as divine grace plus human something. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).*

The Bible describes God's saving grace as:

- the means whereby "we might be justified . . . and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).
- God's free gift, "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom. 3:24, 25).
- all-surpassing (2 Cor. 9:14).
- "riches . . . which he lavished upon us" in order that we have redemption "through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph. 1:7, 8).
- the instrument through which God has saved us from death unto resurrection (Eph. 2:5).
- that which gives us eternal encouragement (2 Thess. 2:16).
- abundant and free (Rom. 5:17).

Thus the Bible's teaching is plain, clear, and simple. No sin is too great to be forgiven; no person has gone too far to be brought home by God's grace when that person

approaches God in absolute surrender and faith. "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37, NIV) is the divine promise and provision.

God's grace is amazing, limitless, abounding, and ever-assuring. And yet today's reading carries the unusual title "The Limits of Grace." The key to understanding the difference between the unlimitedness and limits of God's grace is to be found in the biblical process of salvation. The limit of grace can be seen in four ways: (1) God's love and human freedom; (2) futility of righteousness by works; (3) fruitless life; and (4) the possibility of falling from grace.

God's Love and Human Freedom

Redemption has its source, its means, its completion, in God's love as manifested in Jesus Christ. That's the foundation upon which the entire gospel is built and proclaimed. Those who believe in Jesus are saved, and those who do not believe are condemned. "The gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith. . . . For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'" (Rom. 1:16, 17).

But the very fact that salvation is intertwined in God's love shows that the first limitation of God's grace is our human response to that grace. "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and love cannot force allegiance. All that God does—His plan of creation, providence, redemption, relationship, restoration, and judgment—proceeds from love. While He does not "drive away" any sinner who may come to Him (John 6:37, NIV), He cannot force anyone to come to Him against that person's will.

Freedom of choice plays an essential role in salvation. If salvation comes by a forced allegiance to God, it would not be an act of a loving God, but the desperate measure of a

super tyrant—something totally different from the very character of God. Hence God's abundant, free, and all-powerful grace cannot save a sinner unwilling to come to Him and accept through faith the redemption that God has provided in Jesus. Our freedom of choice can effectively limit the working of grace.

Righteousness by Works

Another limitation to God's grace comes from human pride that one can save oneself by one's own works. The doctrine of righteousness by works is as old as sin itself. "The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion," wrote Ellen White.¹

The history of finding salvation through one's own works repeats itself even today. It has taken many shapes and forms: philanthropy, ethics and lifestyle, humanism and moral uprightness, social justice and social gospel, universal meditation, and even obedience to the Ten Commandments.

Another word for such pretension is legalism. The apostle Paul indicted the Galatians for quickly deserting "the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel" (Gal. 1:6, NRSV).

The Galatians, who accepted Christ and entered into a salvation experience through faith in Him (Gal. 3:1, 2), were now in serious peril of losing that experience because they were attributing their salvation to their works. The apostle asked, "Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?" (verse 2, NRSV).

Paul was quite firm: "We have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16, NRSV). Wrote Ellen White: The robe of Christ's righteousness, "woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising."²

Good and honest people who accept salvation by faith in the crucified Savior can slip back to another so-called gospel, the "gospel" of works. But legalism can never be the good news of salvation. It is indeed the sad news of adding to the burden a sinner already bears.

The antidote to the Galatian heresy must ever be to keep before the Christian the finality of the cross. Even if "we or an angel from heaven," wrote Paul, "should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!" (Gal. 1:8, NRSV). Any limitation to that divine act places a limitation on grace.

Fruitless Life

A third limitation to grace is the claim that God's grace makes us free

There is no such thing as divine grace plus human something.

from the demands of obedience. Grace frees us from sin, but it does not remove from us the obligation to obey the law. Paul asked: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? . . . We were buried therefore with [Christ] by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:1-4).

We are saved by grace through faith, and the resulting freedom is not meant to live as one pleases, but to live in accordance with God's will, as revealed in His law. Salvation comes by faith, but must lead to obedience, the natural sequence to God's gracious liberation from sin.

Consider Jesus' assertion and hope

in John 14 and 15. Just as the relationship of Jesus with the Father preceded His obedience to the Father, so should the disciples' relationship with Jesus precede their obedience to Him. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

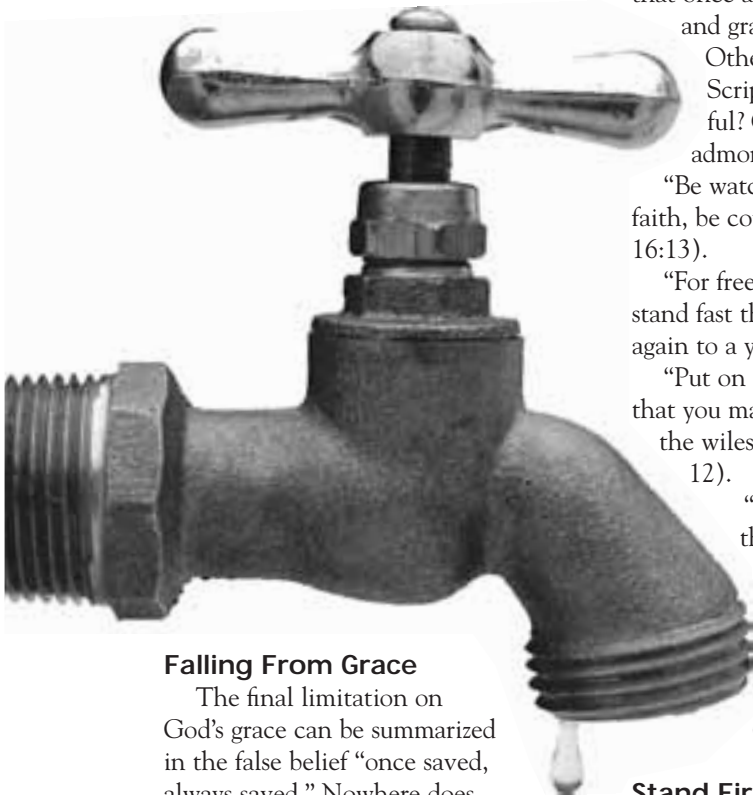
Observe the hope Jesus has for His disciples. "Abide in me," He said, "as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (John 15:4, NRSV).

Christian discipleship is not the achievement of a moral status, but the reception of Christ's calling; it is not moral perfection, but a constant abiding in Him. Once that abiding is established through faith in God's grace, fruit follows as a natural course. The principle is simple: first love, then fruit; first grace, then obedience.

Christian discipleship has no room for either the heresy of legalism or the luxury of cheap grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, wrote: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."³

To be a disciple is to be a follower, and being a follower of Jesus is no cheap trick. To the Corinthians Paul wrote: "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 [the apostles], though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). Paul did not receive grace in order to lead a vain, empty life.

The grace of God has not come to redeem us from one kind of emptiness to place us in another kind of emptiness. Having come into God's family, we bear fruit of God's love through the power of His grace. Cheap grace that ignores obedience and fruit bearing places a limitation on God's grace.



Falling From Grace

The final limitation on God's grace can be summarized in the false belief "once saved, always saved." Nowhere does the Bible teach such a false assumption. Indeed, it is Satan's cunning ploy to lead Christians to take their salvation experience for granted and lead lives of lethargy and indifference.

While the power of God's love and grace is great and abundant, it does not guarantee

that once a person accepts that love and grace he or she will not fail. Otherwise, why would the Scriptures warn us to be watchful? Consider the following admonitions:

"Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11, 12).

"Let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

"Be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall" (2 Peter 1:10).

Stand Firm

Our call and election into God's family are made possible through the free grace of Christ when we accept them in faith. Having come into the family, we bear fruit of God's love through the power of His grace. As long as we abide in that grace, bearing fruit, living a love relationship with Christ, we need not fear any limitation

on the workings of God's grace. He is able to save us to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25).

*Unless otherwise noted, scripture references in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

¹Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 35.

²White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 47.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. Which of the four limitations to God's grace do you think is especially perilous? Why that one?
2. How does one experience all the benefits of grace that God intends? What practical steps do we take to stay in "a state of grace"?
3. How would you approach someone who had embraced one of the four factors that limit God's grace—legalism, a life without discipline, "once saved, always saved," for example?

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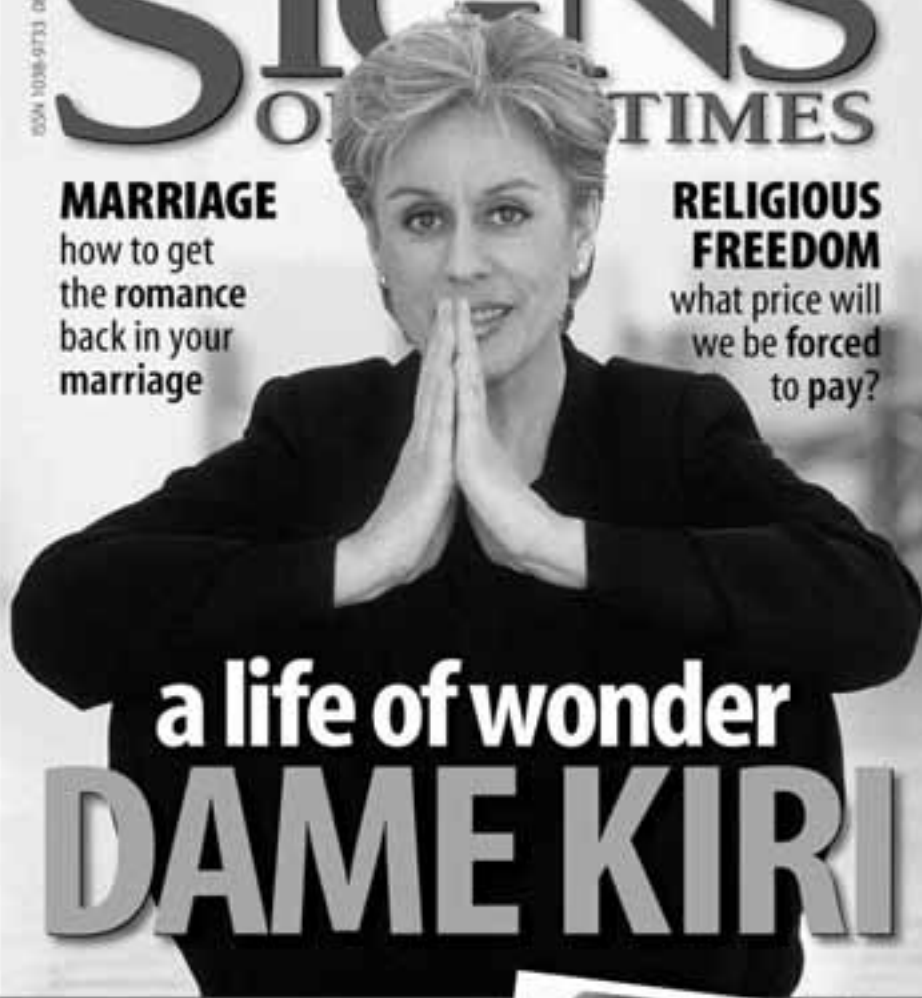
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GET SERIOUS;
GET **SIGNS!**

Blown Away by Grace

Toppling the accuser of the brethren is only a breath away.

BY BONITA JOYNER SHIELDS

Our story takes place in the Temple on the eighth day of the Festival of Tabernacles—the day marked out to be a “holy convocation.” God commanded that no customary work be done on this day.

The religious leaders upheld this commandment—at least technically. Attempting to entrap Jesus and using a vulnerable victim to accomplish the task is *no* customary work. They thought they were protecting their nation and their law from the deception of a man who couldn’t possibly be the Messiah—He didn’t have the proper credentials. It didn’t matter what means they used to accomplish their task; only the end result mattered—the entrapment of Jesus. No, although the religious leaders were not engaging in customary work that day, working they were. But whose work?

Woman Caught in Adultery

“Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act.’” (John 8:2-4, NKJV).*

Jesus was in the Temple, seated and teaching the people, when these religious leaders brought the woman to Him. Actually, they *dragged* her. They dragged her from her bed to parade her through the streets as an example of what happens to those who transgress God’s commandments. And I’m sure they thought it their duty to humiliate her, spit on her, and have mothers explain to their young daughters as she passed by what they *didn’t* want to be when they grew up.

But she deserved it, didn’t she? She was a prostitute.

As she stood in front of the crowd of people in the Temple, her accusers approached Jesus and questioned, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (verses 4, 5).

They were correct—almost.

The law states that if a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, or if the woman is a betrothed virgin, the woman is to be stoned (Deut. 22:22-24; Lev. 20:10). Here’s what the accusers failed to recognize and admit: 1. This woman was unmarried. 2. The law stated that both the woman and the man who committed the adultery were to be stoned. *Where was the man?* 3. The law required witnesses

who had seen the act. *How long did the accusers stand around to confirm what was really taking place?*

The accusers stood, waiting, confident that they had Jesus right where they wanted Him. If He said, “Let her go,” He would be accused of not upholding the law. If He said, “Stone her,” He would be accused of placing His own authority above the Romans, who did not allow the Jews to carry out their own death sentences.

Jesus said nothing. He began writing on the ground with His finger. The accusers, growing impatient, moved toward Jesus. Yet as they did, their eyes fell to the ground, and they were horror-stricken. There, traced before them in the dust, were the guilty secrets of their own lives. *How did this teacher know the dark recesses of their souls?* They had them hidden so well with their brilliant robes and finely crafted reputations.

Jesus then said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7).

The accusers were speechless. This wasn’t the response they expected. Now *they* had become the ones on trial. If they threw a stone, they would be saying that they were sinless. The accusers—humiliated, shamed, naked before the crowd—rushed away, no longer able to bear the presence of one who knew their every thought.

The Accuser of the Brethren

In the Hebrew language the name *Satan* means “accuser.” Scripture refers to Satan as the accuser of the brethren. It was Satan who was in the garden, accusing God of lying. It was Satan who stood before the council of God and accused Job of serving God merely for what he could get out of it. It is Satan who accuses you and me of being so worthless that it would be impossible for God to accept us.

These men, acting as accusers against the woman, were acting as agents of Satan. Anytime we stand as accusers of others, we are allowing the spirit of Satan to work through us. We are doing Satan’s work.

But wait! That woman deserved it. She was a prostitute! Of course, I wouldn’t parade her through the streets. But I sure would let her know that I think it’s just terrible what she’s doing. I might invite her to church, but I would definitely make sure she knew exactly how to dress and behave.

It may not even be a woman of the streets we’re dealing with. “Did you hear about Johnny? I can’t believe he calls himself an Adventist Christian and . . .” “I don’t mean to be talking about Dona, but somebody’s got to uphold the standards.”

Unfortunately, at one time or another all of us have acted the part of an accuser. It's a role that comes quite easily to us humans. Yet God takes it quite seriously.

Ellen White states, "It is the work of Satan to seek some stain upon the character of Christ's followers, to talk of their faults, and magnify their errors. Satan is the accuser of the brethren, and all who engage in this work show that they are actuated by the same spirit."[†]

We are in a war, brothers and sisters. The accuser of the brethren is fighting for his last breath. He is prepared to take as many people with him as possible. If we are to win this war, we must stop turning our weapons on each other and shooting our own wounded. We must be careful how we treat each other, and in humility come to each other when we have wronged them. Revelation 12:11, 12—considered by some theologians as the climax of John's revelation—tells us that we will defeat Satan, the accuser, by the power of Jesus and the sharing of our stories—not by accusing our brothers and sisters.

For most people I know who leave the Adventist Church, their reasons have nothing to do with the doctrines. They leave because they have been wounded by the criticism and condemnation of others. Yet while we cannot be responsible for the choices people make to leave our church, we can still strive to be more Christlike—to neither condemn nor condone.

Jesus' Response

When the woman's accusers left the Temple that morning, she was cowering with fear. She had expected the pain of stones being thrown at her to engulf her at any moment. Yet as the last of her accusers were leaving, Jesus rose from stooping in the dust and, with compassion in His voice, said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (John 8:10).

The woman arose slowly, saw that her accusers had left, and in disbelief

replied, "No one, sir" (verse 11).

Jesus, being the sinless Son of God, could have cast that first stone. Jesus had every right to enumerate for Mary every sin she had ever committed. Why didn't He? This was His chance to impress upon her the seriousness of her disobeying the law. Instead, He chose grace.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (verse 11).

If the sinless Son of God could offer pardon instead of punishment, grace instead of disgrace, who are we to do less?

To Neither Condemn nor Condone

Why did Jesus pass up this golden opportunity to talk some sense into this woman? By not casting judgment on her actions, wasn't Jesus condoning them?

After Adam and Eve had sinned, they hid. With sin comes fear and shame. And we hide. No one need call attention to our sin. We realize it all too readily. Satan has captured us. The accuser condemns us. Who needs more?

This woman knew her sin. The fear, shame, and isolation held her tightly in their grip. She knew what it meant to hide—hide from God, from family, from herself. Jesus' words of pardon freed her from the bondage of fear and shame. Jesus offered grace to her that day. Freedom. And that freedom came

through the power of unconditional love.

If the sinless Son of God could offer pardon instead of punishment, grace instead of disgrace, who are we to do less?

Through the power of grace, Jesus sought to bring her into relationship with Him. She no longer had to hide. He then called her to obey His word for her life. He offered to not only be her Savior, but to be her Lord. Yes, we are called to walk in obedience to His word, but we walk in obedience because *we have received and are continually receiving* that noncondemning love. We do not obey in order to receive that love.

It is the grace of Christ that gives us the power to obey, and it is our love, not our condemnation, that will strengthen our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Real Work

Are you up for the job? Do you want to join God in His work of grace—in bringing down the accuser of the brethren by building each other up? It's no regular work, to be sure. But the means to accomplish this work has been supplied. It was supplied when the writing in the dust was blown away for us by the one who knows our every thought—and loves us still.

*Unless otherwise noted, Bible references in this article are from the New International Version.

[†]In *Review and Herald*, Nov. 6, 1883.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. What was Jesus' attitude toward the woman caught in adultery?
2. How can we neither condemn nor condone?
3. What are some ways we can strengthen our brothers and sisters in Christ who are struggling?

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Grace and the Church

What can Peter's story teach us?

BY LARRY PITCHER

People want the facts. We don't appreciate superlatives in the polite conversations we have in church or Sabbath school. We credit people with the intelligence God gave them. But *maybe* we should use words such as *audacious* and *bodacious*, *awesome* and *stupendous*. The Gospel writers did. They had to use words that pushed the zenith of expression to describe Jesus' incredible acts. As you read the Gospels, you can sense the awe they had for Jesus.

The stories that Jesus told to the Gospel writers reveal that God's grace puts His love into action. Because God's grace is active, it has the power to bind us to Christ, to unite us to God's people, to equip us with His promised gifts, and to empower our witness. God's grace and love create a fellowship in which the Christian can live and work to build the kingdom of heaven.

The Fellowship of Grace

We can learn how God's grace binds us to Christ by studying some experiences Jesus had with Peter. From John's account, we learn how Jesus found Peter actively engaged in his world of smelly fish, leaky boats, iron-muscled men, and dangerous storms.

Two of John the Baptist's disciples had heard the Baptist proclaim that Jesus was the "Lamb of God" (John 1:35). His words aroused in Andrew and John a wonderful curiosity that impelled them to get to know this Man.

During that time, God's love filled Andrew's heart. Convicted that he had encountered the Messiah, Andrew would not rest until he found his brother. To entice Peter to meet Jesus, Andrew used this startling announcement: "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41, NKJV). Shocked, yet interested and hopeful that his brother might be right, Peter followed Andrew to Jesus.

In their first meeting Jesus does something remarkable. He renames Simon. No longer would Jesus call him by his old name, Simon, the son of Jonah. Instead, Jesus named him Cephas (the rock), which translates to Peter. Jesus

employed the claiming power of grace to bind Peter close to His heart. This bond would become so strong that this bragging, blustering, big-muscled fisherman gave up his own plans and devoted himself to building up the kingdom for Jesus.

First Observation About Grace

God's grace actively draws us into fellowship with Jesus. Grace actively searches for the hopeful, looks for the lost, seeks out those rejected, and hunts for ways to reach closed minds. Grace wants everyone to meet Jesus.

And when they do, Jesus has a special promise for those who join the fellowship of God's grace: "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a *new name* written on it, known only to him who receives it" (Rev. 2:17, NIV).

Isn't that wonderful? Just as Jesus claimed and renamed Peter, He promises to claim and rename us when we come to Him. Jesus pledges to include us in the fellowship of His grace. Once we belong to Jesus, no one, no power on earth, absolutely nothing can prevent our God from keeping us in His fellowship.

Second Observation About Grace

God's grace will not allow us to rest forever in sweet fellowship with the grace we have in Jesus. Neither does God's grace wait for what we consider to be a handy time. Grace calls us to work to build up God's kingdom when God knows the time is right for Him and for us. Jesus' call to action came to Peter while he was at work—not at worship (see Matt. 4:18). Jesus didn't wait for the convenient time. Instead, grace confronted Peter while he was very busy. Jesus asked Peter to leave everything and become a disciple. That is an audacious, bodacious request. That is the call of grace to action.

Perhaps you may be hearing Jesus' audacious call to action. You know you have so much to do. What with the kids, the house, the job, the neighbors, the in-laws, and

friends, you don't have time for more. Yet you feel the active pull of grace to do something special for Him.

Maybe you should heed Peter's example, stop what you are doing, and respond immediately to Jesus' gracious, audacious invitation. This may not be the convenient time for you, but in God's plans it is the right time. When we positively respond to Jesus' invitation, we join a group of people who have heard the call and have said, "Yes, Lord, You can count on me!"

Notice how Ellen White describes the scene in which Jesus commissioned the disciples for ministry:

"When Jesus had ended His instruction to the disciples, He gathered the little band close about Him, and kneeling in the midst of them, and laying His hands upon their heads, He offered a prayer dedicating them to His sacred work. Thus the Lord's disciples were ordained to the gospel ministry."¹

Third Observation About Grace

By this significant act Jesus showed the importance of the disciples being united as a team. Jesus was their leader. But they were not alone in their work. Jesus bound them to one another as colleagues, as a team of evangelists.

"Christ sent forth His disciples to preach the gospel, not singly, but by twos, that they might labor unitedly in spreading the truth. Jesus saw that this plan would result in much more good than if one was sent alone. There is need of two working together; for one can encourage the other, and they can counsel, pray, and search the Bible together."²

Fourth Observation About Grace

God's grace provides healing and comfort, love and assurance, hope and strength when we are plunged into life's terrible times. Remember Jesus' promises, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NJKV) and "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, NKJV).

But grace is not a magical force that repels any and all tragedies and storms from God's church. The storms of life will come. A market crash may wipe out your retirement income. A cancerous enemy may spring up from nowhere and take the life of your beloved. Recession-induced downsizing in your company may eliminate your job. A rebellious child may break your heart.

Belonging to the fellowship of God's grace does not prevent tragedy.

God wants everyone to meet Jesus.

However, when the storm is the worst and we think we are about to go under, God's grace appears. Look up! Jesus is with you in the storm. He offers you His help.

If you are experiencing a storm today, listen to Jesus speak to you through the prophet Isaiah: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God" (Isa. 43:1-3, NKJV).

One last insight from Peter's experience with the love and grace of Jesus is the fellowship of the forgiven. Peter had sworn to defend Jesus even if it killed him. But then Peter failed—miserably failed. That crushed him, shamed him.

One night, following Jesus' resurrection, Peter proposed to his fellow disciples that they once again go fishing. That night, however, they caught nothing.

But Jesus intervened, filling their

nets with fish. Then He fed them breakfast. Awed yet silent in His presence, Peter remembered that Jesus had now twice filled his nets with fish. What would He do now? Peter wondered.

He didn't have long to wait. "Peter, do you love Me?" With Peter's teammates listening, Jesus' trio of questions crushed the once self-assured disciple, deflating his pride, destroying his pretentiousness, and breaking his heart.

In front of everyone, Peter bared his soul to Jesus. "Lord, I love You, but You know everything." Three times Peter had denied Jesus. Three times Jesus asked him, "Do you love Me?"

The grace and love of Jesus toward Peter taught him and his teammates to meet the sinner with forbearance, understanding, and unblaming love. Although Peter had denied his Lord, the love and grace of God publicly restored him to his place on the team.

From Peter's experiences we learn these timeless lessons. One, God's awesome grace attracts and then unites us to Christ. Two, grace binds our varied lives together into a single team—God's team. Three, the grace of Jesus impels, characterizes, and empowers our witness. Four, grace heals our broken lives and restores the fallen to fellowship. Five, God's audacious grace transforms sinners like you and me into saints who eagerly love to serve Jesus.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 296.

² White, in *Review and Herald*, July 4, 1893.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. How does God's grace unite believers?
2. What can we learn about grace and love from Peter's story?
3. What is "the call of grace to action"?

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Grace and Faith

To accept them and understand their source is to be transformed into powerful agents for witnessing.

BY ELLEN G. WHITE

The grace of Christ and His righteousness are offered to men as a free gift. The apostle Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, says: “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken. If he can control minds, so that doubt and unbelief and darkness shall compose the experience of those who claim to be the children of God, he can overcome them with

temptation. The simple faith that takes God at His word should be encouraged. God’s people must have that faith which will lay hold of divine power; “for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Those who believe that God for Christ’s sake has forgiven their sins should not, through temptation, fail to press on to fight the good fight of faith. Their faith should grow stronger until their Christian life, as well as their words, shall declare, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us, and knows best what is for our good. Thus instead of our own way, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing. Truth, uprightness, purity, have been pointed out as secrets of life’s success. It is faith that puts us in possession of these principles. Every good impulse or aspiration is the gift of God; faith receives from God the life that

alone can produce true growth and efficiency.

How to exercise faith should be made very plain. To every promise of God there are conditions. If we are willing to do His will, all His strength is ours. Whatever gift He promises is in the promise itself. "The seed is the word of God." As surely as the oak is in the acorn, so surely is the gift of God in His promise. If we receive the promise, we have the gift.

Faith that enables us to receive God's gifts is itself a gift, of which some measure is imparted to every human being. It grows as it is exercised in appropriating the Word of God. In order to strengthen faith, we must often bring it in contact with the Word.

Those Who Trusted

How often those who trusted the Word of God, though in themselves utterly helpless, have withstood the power of the whole world—Enoch, pure in heart, holy in life, holding fast his faith in the triumph of righteousness, against a corrupt and scoffing generation; Noah and his household against the men of his time, men of the greatest physical and mental strength and the most debased in morals; the children of Israel at the Red Sea, a helpless, terrified multitude of slaves, against the mightiest army of the mightiest nation on the globe; David, a shepherd lad, having God's promise of the throne, against Saul, the established monarch, bent on holding fast his power; Shadrach and his companions in the fire, against Nebuchadnezzar on the throne; Daniel among the lions, against his enemies in the high places of the kingdom; Jesus on the cross, against the Jewish priests and rulers forcing even the Roman governor to work their will; Paul in chains, led to a criminal's death, against Nero, the despot of the world's empire.

Such examples are not found in the Bible alone. They abound in every record of human progress. The Vaudois and the Huguenots, Wycliffe and Huss,

Jerome and Luther, Tyndale and Knox, Zinzendorf and Wesley, with multitudes of others, have witnessed to the power of God's Word against human power and policy in support of evil. These are the world's true noblemen. They are its royal line.

As the plan of redemption begins and ends with a gift, so it is to be carried forward. The same spirit of sacrifice which purchased salvation for us, will dwell in the hearts of all who

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become partakers of the heavenly gift. Says the apostle Peter: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Said Jesus to His disciples as He sent them forth, "Freely ye have received, freely give." In him who is fully in sympathy with Christ, there can be nothing selfish or exclusive. He who drinks of the living water will find that it is "in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The Spirit of Christ within him is like a spring welling up in the desert, flowing to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the

water of life. It was the same spirit of love and self-sacrifice which dwelt in Christ that impelled the apostle Paul to his manifold labors. "I am debtor," he says, "both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Our Lord designed that His church should reflect to the world the fulness and sufficiency that we find in Him. We are constantly receiving of God's bounty, and by imparting of the same we are to represent to the world the love and beneficence of Christ. While all heaven is astir, dispatching messengers to all parts of the earth to carry forward the work of redemption, the church of the living God are also to be collaborators with Jesus Christ. We are members of His mystical body. He is the head, controlling all the members of the body. Jesus Himself, in His infinite mercy, is working on human hearts, effecting spiritual transformations so amazing that angels look on with astonishment and joy. The same unselfish love that characterizes the Master is seen in the character and life of His true followers. Christ expects that men will become partakers of His divine nature while in this world, thus not only reflecting His glory, to the praise of God, but illuminating the darkness of earth with the radiance of heaven. Thus will be fulfilled the words of Christ, "Ye are the light of the world." . . .

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the Temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his decep-

tions. It places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood.*

The Gospel's Basic Theme

The grace of God is the chief theme of the gospel. God's grace is the manifestation of His love—a love that makes it possible, through Christ, for fallen man to be saved, makes possible the union and cooperation of humanity with divinity.

Not because we first loved Him did Christ love us; but “while we were yet sinners,” He died for us. He does not treat us according to our desert. Although our sins have merited condemnation, He does not condemn us. Year after year He has borne with our weakness and ignorance, with our ingratitude and waywardness; notwithstanding our wanderings, our hardness of heart, our neglect of His Holy Word, His hand is stretched out still.

At what infinite cost to the Father and to the Son was the merciful, wondrous provision made for our redemption! Christ stepped down from His high estate as Commander in the heavenly courts; and laying aside His royal robe and kingly crown, clothed His divinity with humanity, and came to this earth, that He might dwell with us and give to men and women grace to overcome as He overcame. The disobedience of Adam in believing the falsehood of Satan cost the life of the Son of God; but notwithstanding the great and immeasurable cost, the love and goodness of God shine forth brighter than even at the first creation. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

The Lord God through Jesus Christ holds out His hand all the day long in invitation to the sinful and the fallen. He will receive all. He welcomes all. It is His glory to pardon the chief of sinners. He will take the prey from the mighty; He will deliver the captive; He will pluck the brand from the burning; He will lower the golden chain of His mercy to the lowest depths of human

wretchedness and [woe], and lift up the debased soul defiled with sin.

Every human being is the object of loving interest to Him who gave His life that He might bring men back to God. Souls guilty and helpless, liable to be destroyed by the arts and snares of Satan, are cared for as a shepherd cares for the sheep of his flock.

The Saviour's example is to be the standard of our service for the tempted and the erring. The same interest and tenderness and long-suffering that He has manifested toward us, we are to manifest toward others. “As I have loved you,” He says, “that ye also love one another.” If Christ dwells in us, we shall reveal His unselfish love toward all with whom we have to do. As we see men and women in need of sympathy and help, we shall not ask, “Are they worthy?” but “How can I benefit them?”

The wonderful example of the life of Christ, the matchless tenderness with which He entered into the feelings of the oppressed, His joy over those who rejoiced in His love, cannot fail to have a deep influence upon the character of all who follow Him in sincerity. Learning of Him, they will give their sympathy, not grudgingly, but liberally; by kindly words and acts they will try to make the path easy for weary feet. By the grace of God revealed in human kindness and love, many things that appear formidable will be overcome. Self-renunciation will be the law of the life. . . .

It is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. In order to convince others of the power of Christ's grace, we must know its power in our own hearts and lives. The Gospel we present for the saving of souls must be the gospel by which our own souls are saved. Only through a living faith in Christ as a personal Saviour is it possible to make our influence felt in a skeptical world. If we would draw sinners out of the swift-running current, our own feet must be firmly set on the Rock, Christ Jesus.

The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross

or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.

To everyone who becomes a partaker of His grace, the Lord appoints a work for others; and the grace of God in all its fullness and efficiency is promised to those who engage in His service. The love that is bestowed by the Holy One is to be manifested by them to others. As we study the life of Christ, talk of Him, become more and more able to behold Him; as we avail ourselves of His grace, and receive the blessings He proffers us, we shall have something with which to help others. That which is good in the world will be stronger for our words and our presence, while evil will be made to appear as it is.

* The reading up to this point is taken from the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 24, 1908; the rest comes from *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 12, 1908.

QUESTIONS FOR SHARING:

1. The author says Satan does not want the truth that the righteousness of Christ is a free gift to be clearly presented. What is the devil afraid of?
2. How does the author describe the spirit in which we should work for others? And what does she present as the chief motivating factor(s)?
3. What about the Christian will bring the deepest conviction to the world? Where do you see yourself in this equation?

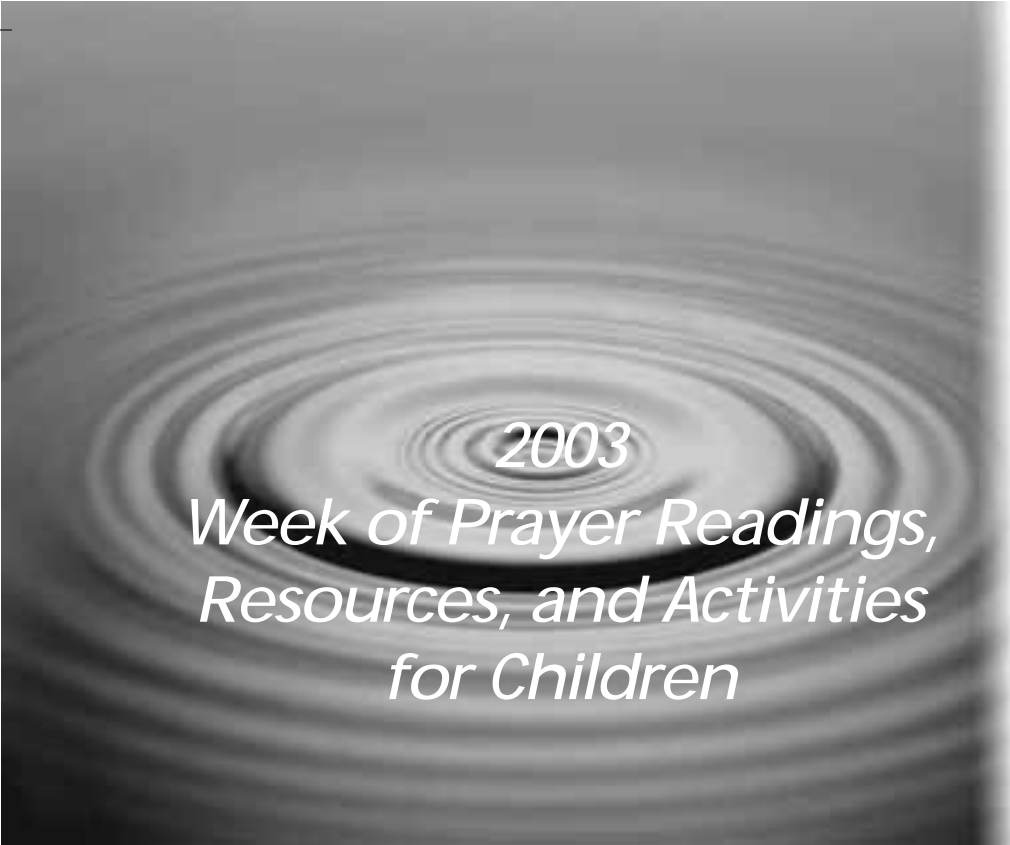
Ellen G. White was one of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her work continues to be a prophetic voice among Adventists.





Grace Is for Kids, Too!





2003
Week of Prayer Readings,
Resources, and Activities
for Children

BY GLORIA LINDSEY TROTMAN

Introduction for Teachers

The theme for this children's Week of Prayer is "Grace Is for Kids, Too." We introduce the theme with a child-friendly explanation of grace and conclude with our response to God's grace—our love for Him. Throughout the text you will see teachers' notes in italics.

Motivational Device

We introduce each presentation with a motivational device. It could be a display, dramatization, pictures, any other type of visual aid, or a small activity. We want to stimulate the children's interest right from the start. Have a ready supply of paper, pencils, crayons, scissors, and any other art supplies you may want to use.

Story

Present the stories with energy and interest. Allow the Holy Spirit to use you. Involve the children by inviting comments. This encourages them to participate and realize their thoughts are valuable. If possible, have the children sit in a semicircle around you. By asking open-ended questions you will stimulate their minds and get ideas

from their answers how they are interpreting what they hear. Keep eye contact.

Application

The purpose of the application is to encourage the kids to consider committing themselves to a relationship with God. Note their responses carefully, but don't force them to respond.

Activity

This section gives the children an opportunity to express how they understand the story. It may involve a group discussion, drawing, coloring, etc. You may group the children according to age, and adjust the activity to each group. Be sure to allow enough time for the activity part of the program, for this is the fun part.

Assignment

We give the children an assignment to keep them thinking about the story. As they leave the meeting you may want to give them slips of paper with the assignment written on it. Feel free to adjust the assignment to suit your group of children. Spend a few minutes at the beginning of the next day's meeting for the children to report on the assignment.

SABBATH

This Is Real Grace

*The Fall and the meaning of grace
John 3:16, 17*

Motivational Device

Provide a globe or a map of the world and have some items that represent the things God created on each day of the week—a flashlight, flowers, stars, fruits, a stuffed animal, etc. Give these to the children. Ask what God created on each day and have the children put the things on the table as they answer. Remember to tell them that God made the Sabbath day. Perhaps a picture of a church could represent the Sabbath.

Story

How long do you think it would take you to build a house? (*Give some time to answer.*) That depends on how big the house is and how many persons help you build it. Many thousands of years ago God made this whole world in six days. That sounds like a lot of work, but not for God. He made a beautiful world with swaying trees and sweet-smelling flowers and singing birds. He made frisky rabbits and scampering squirrels, tall giraffes and playful monkeys, and fish with stripes, dots, and circles. Big and small creatures splashed in the water. (*Ask someone to show how the creatures might have splashed in the water.*)

God made a man and called him Adam, and then made a woman and named her Eve. Then they had a wedding, and God married the two of them. When God looked at all the things He had made, He was very happy. Then on the seventh day God rested. Instead of working, He spent time with His new children, Adam and Eve. On the Sabbath God likes us to rest, go to church, spend time with people, and enjoy the wonderful things He made.

Adam and Eve had fun in the Garden of Eden, where they lived. They liked to sink their toes into the velvety green grass and pat the lions

and cuddle the tigers. If you lived in the Garden of Eden, what would be your favorite thing to do? (*Allow time for answers.*) They could eat any fruit they wanted except the fruit from one big tree in the middle of the garden. God told them to leave that tree alone, or they would die. Let's read Genesis 2:16, 17.

One day Eve went to that tree, and whom do you think she met there? (*Wait for some answers.*) Oh yes, Satan. (*Ask kids what they think Satan might have looked like. Be sure to get answers from the tiny ones, too.*) Actually Satan appeared as a beautiful talking snake. He told Eve to eat the fruit and disobey God, because, he said, she wouldn't die. Did Eve believe what God had said, or did she believe Satan? Do you know that Eve ate that fruit and then gave some to her husband? They both disobeyed God. An awful and sad thing they did—they sinned. Read about it in Genesis 3:6.

This made the angels and God very sad, because they loved Adam and Eve and didn't want them to die. From then on everything and everybody on earth would die. Ugh, how terrible! But God didn't stop loving them. You see, God does not stop loving us when we do wrong. I like that about Him, don't you?

God and Jesus had a plan. Jesus would come to this world, live here, and teach us to love and obey God. Then He would die in our place, so that we would not have to die forever. When He came, wicked people killed Him on a cross one Friday! He rested over Sabbath, and on Sunday morning, God, His Father, called Him out of the grave—alive! Because Jesus died and lives again, we can live forever with Him.

That's the meaning of grace. When someone does good, kind, and nice things for people who don't love them,

that is grace. You see, boys and girls, God's grace is love given to people so that they can be saved from dying forever. Although some people still don't love Jesus, He loves them and wants to save them. That's *real* grace.



Application

What did you learn from today's story? (*Listen to their answers and pray that the Holy Spirit will help you respond appropriately.*) John 3:16 shows us that God loved us so much that He sent His

Son to die for us. He thinks you are special enough to be saved so that you may live in heaven with Him. Isn't grace wonderful? Let's say, "Thank You, Jesus."

Activity

Draw a picture of Adam and Eve before they sinned. Draw another picture showing how you think the angels felt after Adam and Eve sinned.

Assignment

Read John 3:16. Write it down, putting your name in place of the word "world." Then replace the words, "whosoever believeth in him" with your name. Show the new verse to the members of your family.

SUNDAY

Enough for Me, You, and Everybody Else

*The abundance of grace for all of us
Romans 5:17; Ephesians 4:7*

Motivational Device

Provide a tray with small sandwiches or crackers. Have the children and teachers stand in a line, with the teachers at the end, to receive the treat. Share the sandwiches and crackers generously at the beginning, so that as you get nearer to the end of the line you will have fewer and fewer, and those at the end (teachers) may not get any at all.

Story

(Ask those who got few sandwiches/crackers or none at all how they felt.)

Have you been to a wedding? Did you like it? A while back Jeremy went to his cousin Cindy's wedding. She wore a beautiful gown, and Jeremy's mom said it was very elegant. *Who cares about a bride's gown? That's girl stuff*, thought Jeremy. But he had to admit the groom looked handsome.

The wedding ceremony seemed to



Jeremy to take several years. The choir sang, Uncle Ron played his violin, and the preacher spoke for a long time. Meanwhile Jeremy's stomach ached. Mother had been so busy helping with wedding preparations that she didn't have time to fix his lunch. "Here's an apple and some juice, Jeremy," she said. "It will keep you until the reception." Then they hurried to the wedding.

Lots of people attended the reception. Jeremy watched the servers pile up plates of delicious food. He could hardly wait for his turn. Finally a woman passed him a plate. Jeremy couldn't believe his eyes—one half of a baked potato and two carrot sticks! Jeremy felt the tears coming fast. Just then Mother came along. "Mother, look at my plate! What happened to all that good food on other people's plates?" he asked. Jeremy felt sorry for himself. This was not what he'd call a good day.

"Oh, Jeremy," Mother said. "I'm so sorry. The food ran out. Really, son, this is all we can give you." (*Ask the kids if they ever had a similar experience. Allow them to say how they felt at that time.*)

My Bible tells me God's grace never runs out. Let's read Romans 5:17. Did you notice the word "abundance" in that text? That word means "a whole lot, much more than enough." There's even a lot of grace for naughty people. Please read Romans 5:20. Paul, the apostle, says, "Yet where sin was powerful, God's kindness was even more powerful" [CEV]. Jesus has so much love that it will not run out. Jesus gives His love and grace to the millions and billions of people in the whole world at the same time. We don't have to be cute, pretty, rich, popular, strong, or good. He has enough for all!

Application

What did you learn from this story? (*Time for answers.*) You don't have to be at the front of the line to get a large share of God's grace. His grace reaches you anywhere you are. Wouldn't you like to say, "Jesus, I am thankful and happy for all this grace?"

Activity

Invite each child to tell what they would like to have a lot of. How much would each one be willing to give up in order to get what they wanted? Ask them, "Is that the same way Jesus felt? What can you learn from His choices?"

Assignment

Based on what it is you want a lot of, is there something in your life that you would like Jesus to change? Think about this and talk to Jesus about His grace, asking Him to make you more like Him.

MONDAY

You're Sorry; That's OK

God's forgiveness and our need to forgive
Matthew 6:14, 15

Motivational Device

Set up a pretend store. Have a few items (radio, book, doll, truck, and any other items that a child would want to buy) with price tags on them. Give a few children some play money or bits of paper with a monetary value written on them. Be sure that the money they receive is not enough to purchase the items. They will have to go to a banker (one of the leaders supplied with play money) to borrow money. Give them a card with the word "debtor" on it.

Story

Have you ever been in debt? That means you borrowed money and had to pay it back. People who borrow money are called "debtors." (Invite children to share their experiences of indebtedness. They may be real or imaginary. However, listen to them and make appropriate comments.) It isn't fun to have debts to pay; but whenever we borrow anything—money, toys, or anything else—we should give it back as quickly as we can.

Junie and Michelle were turning the rope for Tammy to skip. Suddenly Michelle's end of the rope slipped from her hand, flew through the air with a

whirl, and landed on Tammy's left cheek. "Aahouch!" screamed Tammy, holding her cheek as she spun around and dropped into a heap on the playground. Blood and tears trickled down her fingers.

Junie and Michelle ran to Tammy's side. "Oh, we are so sorry," they cried. "Tammy, we are really sorry."

Tammy's mom rushed her to the hospital, where Dr. Lee washed and dressed the cut. Dr. Lee assured Tammy that she was going to be all right.

The next day at school Michelle and Junie kept thinking about Tammy. The girls had heard that Tammy's cheek would be scarred. "Now she is really going to hate us for this." Suddenly they saw Tammy.

"Hi, Junie. Hi, Michelle," she called.

"Oh, Tammy," they said, "it's so good to see you. We are very sorry you got hurt. Please don't hate us for this."

"Of course not," chuckled Tammy. "I don't hate you. I know you're sorry, and it's OK."

Jesus told an interesting story one day. Let us read it in Matthew 18:23-35. (Ask the girls to read the verses that are odd numbers, and the boys, the verses that are even numbers.)

So that servant who owed the king millions of dollars was glad that the king "forgave him the debt" [verse 27]. This meant that he would not have to sell his furniture and his family or go to jail. That was what happened to people who could not pay their debts in those days.

Soon after that, along came a man who owed the servant only a few thousand dollars—a lot less than he had owed the king. Guess what our forgiven servant did! He grabbed the other man by the throat and demanded the money. Was that nice? When the king heard of this, he put that horrible servant in jail.

In the Lord's Prayer we ask God to forgive us just as we forgive others [Matthew 6:12]. Jesus does. He did that when He was dying on the cross. Someone please read Luke 23:34. Satan wants us to think that when we do bad things, Jesus won't forgive us. No, no. But when we tell Jesus we are sorry, He

says, "That's OK. I forgive you and still love you. That's why I died for you." We call His forgiveness grace. When our friends say they're sorry they hurt us, what should we say? Even if they don't say they're sorry, we can ask Jesus to help us to forgive them.

Application

(Have a backpack full of stones for volunteers to wear.) When we don't forgive others or ourselves, it is like carrying around a backpack full of heavy stones. The "stones" of hurt, anger, and hate make us unhappy. When we believe that Jesus has forgiven us, we no longer carry these heavy stones. We can forgive ourselves when we do wrong, because Jesus' grace is there for us. Bow your head and quietly ask Jesus to help you forgive others, and yourself, too.

Activity

Draw some stones on your paper, and on each one write something you would like Jesus to forgive. Now cut out those stones and throw them in the waste basket. You are now free because of God's grace.

Assignment

Ask for forgiveness from anyone you have hurt at home or at school. Is there someone you need to forgive? Ask Jesus to help you do that, too.

TUESDAY

All Dressed Up With Somewhere to Go

The new birth and Christ's righteousness
Zechariah 3:3, 4

Motivational Device

Hang some attractive clothes of various sizes in the meeting room. As you point to them, have the children tell you where they think it might be appropriate to wear them—to a party, school, or church?

Story

Many little girls like to play "dress-up." They put on their mothers' dresses, high-heeled shoes, and hats, and some-



times even borrow their handbags and sunglasses. What about you? What do you like to put on?

Boys are often too busy to dress up for no reason. But a boy might quickly offer to pretend to drive his sister to wherever she wants to go. It is too bad, though, that our dressed-up little girl has no place to go.

Stores carry a variety of clothes—from suits to faded, frayed jeans. There are all kinds of clothes these days. The Bible talks about clothes. We read about the first clothes in Genesis 3:7. After Adam and Eve sinned, they made themselves aprons of fig leaves. How would you like to wear one of those? Then do you remember the coat of many colors that Jacob gave to his son Joseph? (*Have the boys read Genesis 37:3, 4.*) The hardworking woman in the book of Proverbs made beautiful clothes too. (*Girls will read Proverbs 31:19, 21, 22.*) Jesus had such a beautiful robe that at His crucifixion, the soldiers wanted it. You can read about it in Luke 23:34.

Boys and girls who belong to Jesus want to look good. What do you do to look good? (*Encourage answers.*) We take our daily baths, brush our teeth, comb our hair, and put on clean clothes. Not only does that make us feel good, but people like to be near us when we are clean, tidy, and nice-smelling. Clothes can make us look either better or worse. When Dad or Grandpa changes from old garden coveralls and muddy boots into smart-looking jeans and a cool shirt, we think, “H’mmm, how handsome.”

Jesus promises us a nice new look not only on the outside but also on the inside. He will give us a new heart. That means He will help us think pure thoughts and do good things. He will make us all new again. Some people who don’t like the shape of their noses or think their eyes are too puffy or their lips too small have plastic surgeons give them makeovers. They have their faces changed. It’s different with Jesus. He does not do just a makeover; He gives us a new birth! We can become new boys and girls by accepting Jesus’ love, because He died for us.

Someone please read 2 Corinthians 5:17. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” [NIV]. We don’t have to wear dirty old rags. We get dressed up in a new outfit that Jesus puts on us. The new clothes are called the robe of righteousness, because they cover us with Jesus’ goodness. What’s more exciting is that Jesus chooses not to remember our sins. That’s grace. He will not say, “There’s Marianne. She likes to tell lies.” Or “Justin stole money from his mom’s purse twice last month.” Oh no, Jesus forgives, forgets, and saves. That’s Jesus’ grace again, all because of His love and His death on the cross. So in our new clothes and new bodies we will be welcomed in heaven one day and be with Jesus. We’ll be all dressed up with *somewhere* wonderful to go.

Application

Someone please read Zechariah 3:4. “See, I have taken away your sins, and now I am giving you these fine new clothes” [TLB]. When you see clothes you would like to have, think about the clothes Jesus is giving you. Remember that the grace of Jesus makes us look and feel better than anything we can buy in a store. Thank Jesus for making you a new person.

Activity

Draw a picture of children not wearing Jesus’ “fine new clothes.” Draw a second picture showing boys and girls wearing the robe of Jesus’ righteousness. (*Hint: the behavior shown will indicate whether they are wearing Jesus’ robe or not.*)

Assignment

Tell someone near you about the “fine new clothes” Jesus offers us. Think about how these fine new clothes would change boys and girls. Put on some really old clothes and look at yourself in the mirror. Then change into some better clothes and look again. Write down how you looked or felt in each set of clothes. Write down what you think Jesus’ robe of righteousness can do for you.

WEDNESDAY

Some Did, Some Didn’t

Bible stories of people who did and didn’t accept salvation

Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8

Motivational Device

Put some numbered gifts on a table. Let each child pick a number from a bag. Give each one the gift that has his/her number on it.

Story

I like to watch people when they receive gifts. Some shake the parcel; others squeeze it. Some rip the package open, while others carefully unwrap it. What do you do when you get a present? (*Wait for answers.*) Most people like receiving gifts. Have you ever received a gift you didn’t like? (*Have children share how they dealt with getting a gift they didn’t like. Try to keep their accounts brief.*)

Will someone please read Luke 23:39-43. Some people turn away from Jesus, but the smart ones accept His love and grace. The thief who accepted Jesus was smart. He saw Jesus dying and realized that Jesus was dying because He loved people. The thief became sorry for all the bad things he had done and said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Let’s read Jesus’ reply in verse 43. Jesus seemed to be waiting for the thief to accept His special gift of grace.

King Agrippa was not so smart though. Authorities put the apostle Paul in jail because he preached about Jesus. That’s why Paul had to go to court and talk to the judge, who was King Agrippa. (*Ask if they know what a court and a judge are.*) King Agrippa listened to Paul’s story. When he heard how Jesus died to save everyone, and about the grace of Jesus, the king thought about accepting the love of Jesus too. He said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” [NKJV]. Poor King Agrippa. Can you believe he “almost” accepted Jesus? It is

not smart to “almost” accept Jesus. We must really take His grace. That’s the way to a happy life in heaven.

Now, what kind of people would refuse the gift of Jesus’ love? Maybe Satan has lied to them, and they stopped to listen. Satan tells young people, “You are too young. That stuff is for the old and weak.” Then he tells the older folk, “You are too old and have been bad for too long.” The Bible says that Satan wants to keep you out of heaven. Don’t fall for his lies.

Application

Who needs to accept Jesus’ grace? (*Encourage answers.*) Everyone does, and don’t let anyone get you to put off this decision. Accept Jesus’ love and His grace *now*. Let’s repeat together Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8. Bow your head and say quietly, “Jesus, please help me accept Your gift of grace. I really love You. Thanks for Your gift.”

Activity

Draw/make two gift boxes. On one box write “Jesus’ gift to me—GRACE.” On the other write, “My gift to Jesus— [then write YOUR name].”

Assignment

Take your gift boxes home and place them where you can see them often.

THURSDAY

Thank You; Have Some Too

Accepting God’s grace and sharing His blessings.

Ephesians 4:7; 6:24.

Motivational Device

Stand at the door with a bag of surprises. Invite each child to take two and share with a friend at the meeting. Ask them to tell you how they felt about being able to share something special with a friend.

Story

The other day, while little 3-year-old Wayne was eating an ice-cream

cone, he saw a little girl come into the store. “Mommy, Mommy, she doesn’t have any ice cream. Give her some, Mommy,” begged Wayne.

In Ephesians 4:7 we read that God has given each of us grace. We thank Him for this grace, but now we want to share what we have. Can we share grace? (*Ask for any ideas.*) The grace of Jesus brings us many blessings, and we can share the blessings. One of the blessings that comes from grace is joy. Joy is a good feeling that is deep down inside us. When we have joy, it doesn’t last for only a short time; it can be in our hearts day after day.

The Bible tells us about joy. Someone please read what David says in Psalm 16:11, “In thy presence is fullness of joy.” That means that when we love Jesus and keep company with Him, we have joy.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full,” says Jesus [John 15:11]. So Jesus likes us to be happy, fun-loving Christians. Do you know that some people are afraid to become Christians, because they think they will not have any more fun? Big mistake! Of course, the fun that Christians have does not come from using drugs and alcohol, watching bad things, or saying bad words. Those things get us into trouble. When we love Jesus, He shows us how to have a good time being happy and making others happy too.

The best way to share our blessings is to let others know about the wonderful love of Jesus. We may not be able to preach a sermon or show them texts in the Bible, but we teach them about Jesus by the nice things we do. Can you think of something to do that will help others learn about Jesus? (*Encourage responses.*) What about obeying our parents right away? We can help at home without whining or pouting. Are you kind to elderly people, poor people, and those who are disabled? What are some ways in which we can help them?

When our friends and neighbors see

us doing nice things and when they see our happy faces, they will want to be around us and get to know Jesus too. Knowing Jesus means loving Him and enjoying His blessings. That is a wonderful secret we want to share with others. So if you have been enjoying the blessings of knowing and loving Jesus,



whom do you want to share the secret with?

Application

What did you learn from the story today? (*Encourage answers. Be accepting of all responses.*) By telling Jesus every day that we love Him and by doing what He wants us to do, we can have “joy, joy, joy, joy, down in our hearts.” Then others will catch that joy. That’s what sharing Jesus is all about. Try it.

Activity

Divide into small groups and have each child role-play something they can do to share their blessings with others.

Assignment

Remembering Jesus and His grace, sing a song or two during the day to help you keep that feeling of joy. Then remember to smile often and share Jesus’ love with others.

FRIDAY

In God’s House

What’s church all about?

Psalms 122:1; 46:10

Motivational Device

Give a card to each child with a word such as “reverence,” “praise,” “thankfulness,” “prayer,” or “love” on it. These will be their offering. Collect the offering while the children sing during activity time.

Story

Sometimes people come to our house. What do you do when you expect visitors? (*Wait for answers.*) There are other times when we go to someone else’s house. What are some things we don’t do when we go to other people’s houses? If a president, king, queen, prime minister, or governor of your country invited you to their house, what would you do? Would you sit, stand, and speak in a way that would be OK in such a place? Do any of you live in a palace or mansion, or have you ever visited one?

Church is God’s house, and He meets us there with armloads of blessings! We go to church to worship God with other people. By singing and praying, we say, “Lord, we love You and thank You for making us.” Jesus loves it when we worship Him. Do you like your friends to come to your house? Tell us some of the things you and your friends do when they visit. (*Wait for answers.*) Suppose when your friends came to visit, they said, “We really didn’t want to come, because we don’t like your house.” Then they stuck gum on your chairs and scrawled a big red crayon mark on your couch. How would you feel? Wouldn’t that be terrible?

When we come to God's house, what can we do to show Him we're glad to be there? (*Get answers.*) We show our respect and love when we walk softly, and we whisper if we have to talk to someone. Because we need to listen to what God has to tell us and let other people hear too, we sit quietly in church. Will someone please read Psalm 46:10? By reading our Bibles, singing songs, and listening to the preacher, we learn about Jesus and His grace. Because He knows how important this is for us, God says, "I command you to respect . . . the place where I am worshiped" [Lev. 19:30, CEV]. This is called "reverence."

Praying is like talking with our friends. We tell Jesus we love Him and thank Him for His blessings. We also tell Him we're sorry for the times we've been naughty, and ask Him to forgive us. We pray for other people, too. We always pray when we come to church.

We like to meet our friends at church. Although we can't play with them in church, we can let them know we are glad to see them. Some people prefer to stay at home instead of going to God's house. That's like telling a friend we don't want to visit their house. The Bible advises us to not "neglect our meeting together, as some people do" [Heb.10:25, NLT]. It's wonderful to go to God's house. He is the King of the universe, and He wants us to visit Him with His other friends.

Application

What did you learn from today's story? From now on, would you like to go to God's house? Ask Jesus to help you. Say, "Dear Jesus, please help me to love Your house a lot more. Amen."

Activity

Draw a picture of a church with happy people. Then sing with enthusiasm some of your favorite songs. *Take up the offering of cards the children have been holding, showing their gifts of praise, worship, and songs to God.*

Assignment

Invite a friend to come to church with you. *Plan some way for the children*

to participate in the church service, so it will be more interesting to them than just sitting and listening.

SECOND SABBATH

I Love You, Jesus

Celebrating God's grace and loving Jesus in return

1 John 3:1; 1 John 4:19

Motivational Device

Hang a picture of Jesus on the wall and put a plain large sheet of newsprint or construction paper just below the picture.

Prepare for the children to make hearts out of paper during activity time. Teachers will need a supply of pins.

Story

"Oh, what am I going to do with all this love?" smiled Mother, with tears in her eyes. Jenny and Jimmy, her 11-year-old twins, and 3-year-old Jana had planned a big surprise for Mother. No, it was not her birthday. It wasn't even Mothers' Day. They just picked a day to show her how much they loved her. The children fixed a tray with a delicious breakfast and three beautiful red long-stemmed roses—one from each of them. "Ta-dah!" they shouted excitedly. Then they placed on her lap a big red heart made of tissue paper with frilly white lace all around the edges and said, "We love you, Mom!"

Love makes us do nice things for people. What is something nice you have done for someone you love? (*Get answers.*) What else are you planning to do to show your love?

This world faced trouble after Adam and Eve sinned, so Jesus came to live with us. Just imagine! He came as a little baby and grew up here on earth. Would you leave a beautiful home in Paradise to come to this world with all its sadness, sickness, and death? (*Share with the children stories of people you know who left one country to go to another where things were better, not worse.*) Would you plan to die for people who don't like you? Would you just let them kill you? Jesus shows us love like that,

and it's hard for us to understand. Rough soldiers dragged Him up a hill. They beat Him. Then they crucified Him! The good news is that He didn't remain dead. Three days later God, His Father, called Him from the grave. Will someone please read Mark 16:2-6? This is why we too can go to heaven. All because of His grace, His great gifts of love and kindness.

So what are we going to do with all this love? Love Him in return. When Jesus becomes our close friend, our greatest joy will come from living, playing, and working with Him. Boys and girls who love Jesus will share with others what He is like. Then everyone will know how much He loves them.

Application

What did you learn from today's story? (*Encourage responses.*) As you think of all that Jesus has done, you can say, "My Jesus, I have seen Your great love for me. I love You, too. Please help me to be the person You want me to be. Amen."

Activity

Take the heart you have made and stick it under the picture of Jesus. This is your way of saying, "I love You, Jesus." (*Have children take their hearts to place on the paper under the picture of Jesus, then lead them in singing a favorite song that tells about love for Jesus.*)

Assignment

Take a few minutes every day to think of Jesus' love and grace, and tell Him, "Thank You."

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Grace for Troubled Times

A word from President Jan Paulsen

For Christians there is hardly a more significant word than “grace,” God’s grace. Whatever we are as individuals or as a world community of believers is the outwork of God’s mysterious and wonderful grace. This glorious grace, located in the depth of God’s love, reached out to undeserving sinners like you and me, offering us the richness of heaven through the gracious work of Christ.

The church should make this topic a constant object of reflection and meditation, because its very existence is a manifestation of that grace. Reflecting on the wonder of God’s grace is, in fact, an exploration into the ministry, death, resurrection, and mediatorial work of Christ on our behalf.

But grace is more than a topic for reflection; it is a way of life. It is power that transforms us and makes us gracious persons who constantly manifest in our lives the wonder of God’s grace toward others. Indeed, grace unites us in our sense and need of forgiveness, in the realization that salvation is exclusively through Christ, and in our mission to a world that desperately needs to hear the good news of God’s forgiving and sanctifying grace.

The readings for this Week of Prayer provide an opportunity for our church members around the world to meditate on and recommit themselves to the wonder of God’s grace. It is that grace, embodied in Christ, that keeps us united in the proclamation of our message and the fulfillment of our mission. We have asked church members from different parts of the world to write the devotional materials to be used during the week in order to stress the international flavor of our church. Study these messages, go beyond their content, and praise God for the wonder of His grace.

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14, NIV).

