



2019

Lenten Devotional



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April 21

Easter

The Alternative

John 20:1-18

Mary!

Rabboni!

John 20:16

What a beautiful encounter. Can you imagine the love in that moment? Mary was at the foot of the cross as Jesus died, and now he is standing in front of her. Let this moment take shape in your mind's eye. Feel Mary's joy!

Today Jesus is standing ready to meet you in the garden, to call you by name, to open your eyes to see Him.

May you feel His love, and know great joy!

What's So Amazing About Grace?

My grandmother's name was Grace. I never knew her... she died when my mother was just a young teenager... but in so many ways, I feel like I have known her all my life. From the time I was old enough to understand, my mother would tell me "Grace" stories. Those stories brought "Grace" alive in my mind and heart, so much so that when Greg and I were blessed with a beautiful little girl we named her "Grace". We hoped that our precious little one would have the courage, the determination, and the love of her great grandmother. I loved those "Grace" stories- they helped me to understand my mother's story, and to understand mine. What a gift those stories have been!

This Devotional is full of Grace stories... not stories about a grandmother... but stories about a Father who loves His children with abandon! These stories will touch your heart and mind... they will remind you of how very loved you are... I hope they will help to shape your story in the year to come.

God's grace is His free, unmerited gift- forgiveness, love, strength, hope, joy... and so much more. The Bible teaches us that *every good and perfect gift is from above*, and all of those gifts come without cost. We are blessed beyond measure. Every breath, every glimpse of beauty, every taste, every smell, every sound that inspires our heart, every touch of love is a gift of God's grace. These stories will witness to the richness of God's grace that gives us life.

May you be blessed as you read, so that you will be prepared to be a blessing!

Blessings!

Anita

March 6, Ash Wednesday

An Honest Moment

I Corinthians 15:1-10

Every Sunday we have what I call a “*come to Jesus*” moment. We pause to confess our sins. This moment in our Sunday morning routine is far different than what we are encouraged to do in our culture.

Out in the world, we are taught to “*toot our own horn*”... celebrate our achievements... remind those around us that we are important. We honor people for their accomplishments with awards and riches and accolades. But then we come to church and bow our heads for a very different assessment... one that we want to keep private.

This assessment is of our faults and failings. Use a word at church that is seldom heard in our modern culture- *Sin*- missing God’s mark. *Ash Wednesday* begins the season of Lent with that honest moment- a moment when we remember how very human we are... flawed... selfish... in need of grace. If we are truly honest, this moment is uncomfortable at best, unbearable at worst... yet it is the necessary starting point for receiving grace.

Take time this week to have an honest moment... to realize with Paul that we are the “*least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle*. (I Corinthians 15:9)

But by the grace of God *we are who we are*- the beloved children of God... not justified by our works, but loved with unending grace.

Easter Saturday

April 20

Grace and Friendship Finale

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.
Proverbs 27:17

I shared my plan to attend divinity school, teach and write. “I love it!” he responded. “Do it! Do it without doubt or hesitation. You won’t regret it.” On the day of their departure, I wrote Warren a note., “I can’t tell you how much this weekend has meant to me. Seeing you again and enjoying time together has been truly special and really very therapeutic. My own illness (workaholicism) is in many ways more devastating and fatal than your cancer.” I ended the note with, “Thank you for reminding me what life is really all about before it was too late for me. Your friend forever, Fred.”

I maintained contact with Warren after that visit. Sue kept me informed about Warren’s condition, so I knew when the end was near. In mid-June of 2006, I called Warren. He was weak and heavily medicated, but his spirits remained high. “I love you, Warren,” I told him. I love you, and I owe you. You were instrumental in my decision to retire at fifty-nine and attend Yale Divinity School. I’ve done it, my friend, and I can’t thank you enough for your trust in the strength of our friendship and for pushing me so hard.”

With tears streaming down my face, I said, “Warren, I love you, and I’ll see you on the other side.” A couple of days later, Warren passed away. I attended his funeral in Michigan, along with hundreds of others, in celebration of the life of a remarkable man.

Our life’s journey is sharply defined by the people we encounter — especially those we ultimately consider close friends — who reflect God’s love through their loyal, supportive and enduring friendship.

Excerpted from *Grace Revealed: Finding God’s Strength Through any Crisis* by Fred Sievert

Good Friday

April 19

Grace and Friendship Part 4

My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend. Job 16:20-21

We all took a private guided tour of New York City with an eccentric but fascinating city historian, had front-row center seats to The Lion King on Broadway and took a ferry to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Warren was able to inquire about his ancestors

In the sweetness of our arm-in-arm walk to the Statue of Liberty, I also felt the impending loss. I'd finally reconnected with my friend, and now he would leave me. And I thought about my own mortality and how I'd one day be saying my own good-byes. With my whole heart, I suddenly felt the value and great joy of true friendship and how the power and purity of God's love can find expression in such relationships.

The most meaningful for me were the times during the five-day visit when Warren and I had a chance to be together privately. We spoke about his illness and prognosis. "Warren," I assured him, "you are immortal. I'm sure of it. I know it through my faith; I truly believe in a glorious afterlife. Warren didn't say a lot, but he later shared with me and others how important those reassurances were and how he derived such hope from my expressed certainty.

Warren provided me with valuable insight during that visit, too. He told me, "Fred, you've got to stop and smell the roses. Why don't you at least consider retiring early so you can spend more time with Sue and the kids? You need time to follow your passions while you're still here."

Excerpted from *Grace Revealed: Finding God's Strength Through any Crisis* by Fred Sievert

Thursday, March 7

So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy and we will find grace to help us when we need it.

Hebrews 4:16 (New Living Translation)

Several years ago, when our children were still in school, I contracted Lyme's disease. My physician put me on a regimen of antibiotics for two weeks and then off for a period of time. Each time he took me off of the medication my symptoms of a low grade fever, stiff joints and exhaustion would return. This went on for more than a year. Due to the relapses, he decided that he would need to become more aggressive in the treatment and possibly hospitalize me. Needless to say I was very discouraged. I felt completely drained.

During this time Ray and I were part of a small group. The members decided to start a Wholeness and Healing Ministry at Lenape Valley. Over time the new ministry prayed for several people in the congregation.

When my doctor indicated the need for more aggressive treatment, I asked our group to lay hands on me and to pray for guidance for my physician and wholeness and healing for me.

I will never forget that day. When the group laid their hands on me and began to pray, a sense of love, warmth, peace and calm filled my being. I knew at that point that God's grace was flowing into my body through my fellow believers. It was a feeling that cannot be described in words.

A few days later my last regimen of antibiotics ended. My symptoms of Lyme's disease never returned. The physician tested my blood and the test came back negative. I was cured by the mercy and grace of God.

My fellow believers prayed for me with boldness and assurance that God listens to our humble prayers. When we draw close to God, he grows close to us and his grace flows through us.

Prayer: Father, I kneel humbly before you and pray that your grace will flow through me today and bless someone in need of your light.

Karen Greer

Friday, March 8

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into his grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5: 1-2

One Sunday morning as I slid into the pew and opened the church bulletin, an envelope came out. “What’s this?”, I thought as I opened it. Much to my surprise, in it was \$5 and a message stating that I was to make it grow. “Well, what can I do?”, I thought. Later, as I prayed about it, the answer came. I can buy ingredients and make cookies to sell, which I did. After explaining to Clemens Market what I was doing, they graciously allowed me to stand in front of their store and sell them. I was soon sold out and with the profit decided to make more cookies and a cake. Soon, people were watching for my baked goods and I was starting to really make my \$5.00 grow.

When Mel Wolff asked me to make a wedding cake, I told her I had never made one before. She insisted I could do it and I thought, “well, a wedding cake is just a series of small cakes”, and so the business began. Soon I was making 2 and 3 wedding cakes every week, besides celebration cakes. I put my God-given talents to good use, drawing custom pictures on cakes and still selling at Clemens.

My daughter, Faith helped me decorate and sell and my husband, Scott, helped me deliver the wedding cakes. The \$5 was steadily increasing by leaps and bounds. I was now involved in a full-time business. Who could ever have foreseen this? In the end, I had increased the original \$5 to over \$1200. It was also interesting to hear what other people had done with their money. I continued for many years, baking and baking; giving the profits to missions, until I retired. To God be all the Glory!

Mary Ann Nissley, *submitted by Dan Reid*

Maundy Thursday

April 18

Grace and Friendship Part 3

A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for a time of adversity. Proverbs 17:17

Surprised by my feelings after such a long time, I contacted Warren immediately. His voice, too, surprised me. Not only was he in excellent spirits, but he was genuinely excited to hear from me. As if not time has passed, we resumed our easy conversation, catching up on what had transpired over the years and reminiscing about old times at Franklin with some of the more colorful students and teachers from that era.

We finally ended our conversation, and I told Warren I would be praying for him and his recovery. His cancer was late stage.

Warren and I stayed in touch, and in the process, I connected with another dear friend from my teaching days, Barb. Warren, Sue, Barb and I exchanged many emails, calls and cards over the next couple of years. I started to talk to Sue and Barb about them visiting the New York area with Warren. He had always wanted to travel to New York City, to go to Ellis Island to see if he could track down records of some of his ancestors.

The three of them made plans to stay with my wife, Sue and me in our home in Connecticut for five days in May 2005. From the moment the group arrived until the sad moment when they departed, the experience was a glorious reunion of friends and a timely blessing from God. Warren was his normal, ebullient self; had it not been for the chemotherapy-induced hair loss, I would not have been able to tell he was ill. His positive attitude, his appreciation for our friendship and his gusto for living were remarkable and inspiring.

Excerpted from *Grace Revealed: Finding God’s Strength Through any Crisis* by Fred Sievert

Wednesday, April 17

Grace and Friendship Part 2

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Warren had a zest for life, an amazing sense of humor, and a presence and charisma greater than almost anyone I had ever known. He loved his work, his students and his fellow faculty members. We soaked up each other's company and loved sharing our classroom experiences and our successes, as well as our failures in impacting students' lives.

And we were tested. There was no greater satisfaction than realizing I had touched a student on meaningful levels and helped change his and her life. But few frustrations compared to the inability to touch certain students, a situation that could be depressing.

Despite my respect, appreciation and affection for my teaching colleagues- especially Warren- I left that school after six years. I could no longer live with the uncertainty of getting layoff slips in the spring and not knowing until summer whether my contract would be renewed in the fall. So in the summer of 1977, I decided to move on. Given my strong mathematics background, I wanted to try my hand at the actuarial profession, and my young family and I moved to Boston.

It was a decision I would never regret, but as often happens with long-distance relocations, I lost touch with my former friends. Communication became less frequent. Many years later after Warren and I had last been in contact, a mutual friend and colleague, Sue Johnson Googles me and found out that I was working at New York Life Insurance Company. She called me and said "Warren has cancer. He's not doing particularly well; he's retired." She told me Warren would enjoy hearing from me, and she gave me his contact information.

Excerpted from *Grace Revealed: Finding God's Strength Through any Crisis* by Fred Sievert

Saturday, March 9

Grace-Full Parenting

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
Colossians 3:21

Respond with Grace When Your Child Misbehaves

Because our kids grow up in an increasingly complex and precarious world, filled with expectations and agendas that at times feel impossible to navigate, the odds are great that your child will "cross the line"... What do we do then?

Default with compassion. When our kids go through rough spots...because of circumstances or the choices they make, their greatest need from us is gentle stability and compassion. Regardless of the offense, whether getting a D or getting arrested... underneath the outbursts, your child is not doing this to get at you... Remember that they are, at the core, suffering, and they need you to care. As Jesus cares for us in all we go through, so we too are dispensers of his grace.

Don't panic. There are very few issues you will face as parents that are irredeemable... Becoming overly distraught or emotional, especially within earshot of your child only heightens your child's sense of dread, fear and shame. We can take Paul's words seriously: "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life". (Philippians 4: 6-7)

Take the long view. The ultimate hope... of trusting God is the hope...that in the long run, God's mercy will win. We may not see it or experience it exactly the way we want to for months, or even years, but trusting Christ means we believe that he is at work, bringing healing and redemption to the most hopeless of circumstances. Parenting is a marathon, but in Christ, as we trust him, we are offered the gift of hope.

Excerpted from *Sticky Faith, Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*

Sunday, March 10

Face in the Mirror
John 13:21-30, Romans 3:9-20

***There is no one righteous, not even one;
There is no one who understands,
No one who seeks God... Romans 3:10***

Take a moment... perhaps more than one... to make an honest assessment of your life. Paul helps us with this assessment in his letter to the Romans. His perspective is rather bleak... even harsh... in its critique of our lives.

What do you think of Paul's perspective?

Is he close to your reality?

What do we do when we face the "face in the mirror"?

Take another moment to remember God's infinite grace... offered for that person you see in the mirror.
*Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saves a
wretch like me.*

Tuesday, April 16

Grace and Friendship- Part 1

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24

When I graduated from Amherst College in Massachusetts in 1970, I moved back to Michigan to pursue a teaching career. I was dismayed to find a market cluttered with teachers, primarily because the Viet Nam war offered a draft deferral for teachers. The application process was extraordinarily frustrating and demoralizing with hundreds of applicants for every position. Just getting an interview was a major success, and securing a job seemed impossible.

The best job I could get was an entry level position teaching largely remedial mathematics at Franklin Junior High School in the Wayne-Westmoreland School District. Although it was less intellectually challenging to teach mathematics at the junior high school level, the younger students were far more impressionable and in far greater need of positive role models than were high school students.

As a result, I felt I was doing noble work and changing the world in my own small way-not only teaching, but coaching football, wrestling and track. I sensed I was doing the work God intended me to do.

Eventually I moved into more advanced math courses and also taught a beginning-level course in photography, which I pursued as an avocation. Not only was it something I loved, but teaching photography allowed me to spend each morning preparing for class in the darkroom in the school's science wing. It was there that I met and became friends with a number of science teachers-among them Warren, who became my best friend among the faculty.

Excerpted from *Grace Revealed: Finding God's Strength Through any Crisis* by Fred Sievert

Monday, April 15

Grace and Cinderella

But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 1 Peter 3:4

When talking with children about God's grace, consider the story of Cinderella. Cinderella was being treated unfairly by her stepmother and stepsisters. While we don't know the back story, we can assume that the wicked behavior came from some past hurts in the Stepmother and her daughters. Cinderella was doing her best to bring love to a situation overrun with the angry emotions of her stepfamily.

When the Fairy Godmother appears she doesn't commiserate with Cinderella saying "Your Stepmother and Stepsisters are so mean- we'll show them a thing or two". The Fairy Godmother saw that they were out of line and she wanted to resolve the problem- that's why she brought her magic wand! You'll notice she didn't come to judge, she simply came to heal the situation.

Cinderella's didn't entertain thoughts of revenge and that was what caused the Fairy Godmother to come to help her. Cinderella was willing to give grace and forgiveness to her Stepmother and Stepsisters. Her Fairy Godmother acknowledged that willingness by putting her in a place where her love could be acknowledged and returned. She was refreshed and strengthened for the next part of the story.

Cinderella reminds us of an important lesson that Jesus gave to us all- that people deserve love not because of what they do, but because of who they are. God's grace is there for the taking and it is there for us to put on and wear out into the world – like a magical gown and glass slippers.

Loretta Clift

Monday, March 11

Grace for the Asking

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2: 8-9

Anita has emphasized in her sermons that It is by faith alone (sola fide) and grace alone (sola gratia) men are saved. Good works are something believers should undertake out of gratitude towards their Savior; but they are not necessary for salvation and cannot earn anyone salvation; there is no room for the notion of "merit" in Luther's doctrine of redemption. (Wikipedia)

In my own mind salvation is the sum of -Our faith in God plus -God's Faith in us. God's faith in us was proven by God giving us his only Son, Jesus Christ.

Each of us every day are faced with decisions and choices, it is our faith that allows us to be at peace with whatever decision we have made. If we decide to steal, lie or hurt, we can have peace, we can have faith. Peace comes with knowing we are mortal, that we make mistakes, that we can change. I think true lifelong spiritual behavior is as striving, but is never realized. Peace comes with believing that it is OK... that God Forgives, that we can change.

I believe people know the best decision or choice to make. To love thy neighbor as yourself is a simple guidepost. Treat the world as you would treat yourself. What could be more clear? Yes... the warmth you feel from following these words is strong, but so should be the depth of peace when you don't follow these words. Put the damaging regrets behind you. Remember you can heal, forgive, love, and give back. God's infinite grace, his forgiveness, his love of us is proof.

Don Hamp

Tuesday, March 12

Grace in a Difficult Time

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore will I boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Corinthians 12:8-9

As I know Grace. She is sweet, and wise. She is lovely and kind. I met her at my job years ago. She was our dental hygienist. She was more mature than the rest of us in those times. She had gone to school after she had experienced a difficult experience and refused to give up. We had become friends, as my mother lived in New England and her daughter lived in Texas, and shared our experiences. Fast forward twenty five years, we had lost touch and each of our lives had changed. Her husband of forty plus years had passed away, and my young marriage of ten years had ended.

Our paths crossed one day, and we agreed to get together and catch up. So we did, and she was the same sweet and wise, and lovely and kind person that I had known. I was sad and torn and lost and needy.

She spent time with me and I began to hear her telling me to be patient and certain that God will see me thru . She reminded me to wait on the Lord, and commit my ways to him and he will guide me.

Today I call this God's grace in my life. His timing was perfect, she has now gone home to be with the Lord. I thank God for how he helped me in my unbelief and brought his Grace to me.

Gracious God we give you our praise,

Nancy Groshens

April 14

Palm Sunday

God's Return Policy
Luke 19:28-40, 23:13-25

II Corinthians 12:7-10
My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness.
II Corinthians 12:9

Take out your prayer list... you may have it written down... perhaps you just keep that list in your mind. How is God doing- answering your requests? You probably consider your requests reasonable and good... that of course God would want to give you what you are asking for. But often God's ways are not our ways.

Remember back to a time that your prayer was not answered in the way you desired. How did that feel? What happened to your faith in that moment? In II Corinthians 12 Paul describes just such a time. He pleaded with God to take away his "thorn in the flesh". God's answer was very different from what Paul asked.

How does he respond?

What happens to his faith?

What is God's call to you today?

Saturday, April 13

Grace-Full Parenting

In my distress I cried to the Lord and He heard me.
Psalm 120:1

Recently I met a couple who was helping their adult son overcome an opioid addiction. I shared with them that years ago, I received some extremely wise advice from a business man, who later became a minister and my spiritual mentor. He told me that in situations like this “The parents can do two things and only two things for their son: love him and pray for him.”

He emphasized that “Parents shouldn’t judge, argue or get nasty. Parents can’t condemn, criticize or complain. And they should forget the ‘tough love’ thing. Just love your addicted son or daughter and pray for him or her.”

I have learned from speaking to many parents in this situation, he was right. They repeatedly report that it was only through unconditional love and answered prayer that their sons or daughters ultimately recovered.

Another friend of mine who specializes in addictions, agreed with the love and pray advice, and added the most effective path to change and recovery is often a mother’s unconditional love. He adds that sons often feel they can’t live up to the successes and expectations of their fathers, and in those cases the mother’s love and prayers are compounded in importance and effect.

If you or a loved one is experiencing opioid addiction, please consider this advice. And turn your cares over to God. He will sustain you and your loved ones during the darkest, most trying times of your life.

Excerpted from *Grace Revealed: Finding God’s Grace in any Crisis* by Fred Sievert

Wednesday, March 13

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

I was 9 years old, sitting on my bed listening to my parents cry all night long, My sister had been diagnosed with polio and I was certain that our family was shattered never to recover. But by daybreak, the crying stopped and was replaced by prayer. My parents found strength and determination in their faith. Leaning on the Lord, they would do everything in their power to bring their daughter back to health.

However, one logistical problem remained. My sister was in a hospital in Norristown. We lived in Hatboro and we didn’t have a car. A neighbor and family friend, Anna May Hinkel, stepped in. When people asked, “Is there anything I can do?”, she said “Yes” and arranged for a driver to be at our house to take us to the hospital every evening at 5 pm for 3 months. Many of these people were neighbors and friends from church, but some were complete strangers. What a gift of grace!

Through the Lord, my family was restored and my sister grew to be the dynamic and successful person she is today. Yes, we must cry our tears when life becomes bitter and then Jesus steps in to revive and remake us.. Through His grace we will walk again.

Carol Stern

Thursday, March 14

Grace-Full Parenting Part 1

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13-14

I never dreamed that taking a child to Disney World could be so difficult — or that such a trip could teach me so much about God’s outrageous grace.

Our middle daughter had been previously adopted by another family. I am sure this couple had the best of intentions, but they never quite integrated the adopted child into their family of biological children. After a couple of rough years, they dissolved the adoption, and we ended up welcoming an eight-year-old girl into our home.

For one reason or another, whenever our daughter’s previous family vacationed at Disney World, they took their biological children with them, but they left their adopted daughter with a family friend. Usually — at least in the child’s mind — this happened because she did something wrong that precluded her presence on the trip.

By the time we adopted our daughter, she had seen many pictures of Disney World and she had heard about the rides and the characters and the parades. But when it came to passing through the gates of the Magic Kingdom, she had always been the one left on the outside. Once I found out about this history, I made plans to take her to Disney World the next time a speaking engagement took our family to the southeastern United States.

I knew from previous experiences that seeing cast members in freakishly oversized mouse and duck costumes somehow turns children into bundles of emotional instability. What I *didn’t* expect was that the prospect of visiting this dream world would produce a stream of downright devilish behavior in our newest daughter.

Friday, April 12

What is *Grace*?

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. Ephesians 4:7

Grace. 5 letters, 3 consonants and 2 vowels, seemingly arranged in no particular order. What does it mean? As a follower of Christ, I can say I have experienced the mercy, healing, love, and *grace* that comes from being in a relationship with Jesus. But, how would I explain it to someone who hasn’t? Better yet...as Christians, how can we identify when we are touched by “*it*” in our own lives?

What is *grace*? This question was posed to our staff by Pastor Anita Bell today, and much to my surprise...I was completely stumped? I am embarrassed to tell you, that your “brand new shiny Contemporary Worship Leader” had ZERO to offer on the subject! I could not clearly define *the* fundamental principal our faith is built on. Not good.

After a long day of worship planning, scheduling teams, answering emails, returning phone calls and leading worship for a local addictions ministry, I made it home just in time to put my youngest son to bed. As soon as he was settled, I made way for my office, only to stare at my computer’s blinking cursor. What is *grace*?

What seemed like an eternity later, my 16 year old son Samuel came strolling through to check in on me as he often does. “Whatcha workin’ on Dad?” was the question. I answered with a brief and semi snarky, “Nothing you can help me with bud.” As he began to walk away I thought...what the heck? “Hey Sam, what is grace?” I asked. He thought for a moment and simply said:

“Justice...is getting what we deserve”

“Mercy....is not getting what we deserve.”

“*Grace...is getting the opposite of what we actually deserve as sinners.*”

Perfect.

“Dear Jesus, I ask that you would reveal Yourself to each and every person reading these words. May they willingly seek and receive Your blood bought gift of grace. I pray that You would call them to Yourself Father. May they truly experience Your love, and the peace that comes from living into an intimate relationship with You. Please continue to give us the courage to boldly submit to You as Lord of our lives. Amen.”

Brian Bortnick

Thursday, April 11

Finding Grace in our Grief Part 2

*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace
in our time of need. Hebrews 4: 16*

Grace watched as I would prepare dinner, and she told me that I was a good cook. My mom was a good cook, too. Grace knew I had a son and she shared her experiences with her boys and their situations. I had two great brothers. She went swimming three mornings a week. I had been a swimming instructor and I loved she was able to go to the pool near her.

Finally the blue skies had begun to clear and it was time for me to resume finding my new place and for Grace and Irma to leave for Florida. I know this was God's grace one more time in my life. Grace's daughter drove them to Florida, I had spent several months there with my mom and we had such fun.

Grace is now in her late nineties and has given up swimming, but not card playing. I haven't seen her in a while and I know she is in her bible everyday as I had seen her do. This is what Gods grace is like to me. It's a gift that cannot be explained.

His Grace is Sufficient!

Nancy Groshens

Friday, March 15

Grace-Full Parenting Part 2

*Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
Matthew 7: 9-10*

In the month leading up to our trip to the Magic Kingdom, she stole food when a simple request would have gained her a snack. She lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She whispered insults that were carefully crafted to hurt her older sister as deeply as possible — and, as the days on the calendar moved closer to the trip, her mutinies multiplied.

A couple of days before our family headed to Florida, I pulled our daughter into my lap to talk through her latest escapade. “I know what you’re going to do,” she stated flatly. “You’re not going to take me to Disney World, are you?” The thought hadn’t actually crossed my mind, but her downward spiral suddenly started to make some sense. She knew she couldn’t earn her way into the Magic Kingdom — she had tried and failed that test several times before — so she was living in a way that placed her as far as possible from the most magical place on earth.

In retrospect, I’m embarrassed to admit that, in that moment, I was tempted to turn her fear to my own advantage. The easiest response would have been, “If you don’t start behaving better, you’re right, we won’t take you” — but, by God’s grace, I didn’t. Instead, I asked her, “Is this trip something we’re doing as a family?” She nodded, brown eyes wide and tear-rimmed. “Are you part of this family?” She nodded again. “Then you’re going with us. Sure, there may be some consequences to help you remember what’s right and what’s wrong — but you’re part of our family, and we’re not leaving you behind.”

Saturday, March 16

Grace-Full Parenting Part 3

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. Romans 9:14-16

I'd like to say that her behaviors grew better after that moment. They didn't. Her choices pretty much spiraled out of control at every hotel and rest stop all the way to Lake Buena Vista. Still, we headed to Disney World on the day we had promised, and it was a typical Disney day. Overpriced tickets, overpriced meals, and lots of lines, mingled with just enough manufactured magic to consider maybe going again someday.

In our hotel room that evening, a very different child emerged. She was exhausted, pensive, and a little weepy at times, but her month-long facade of rebellion had faded. When bedtime rolled around, I prayed with her, held her, and asked, "So how was your first day at Disney World?"

She closed her eyes and snuggled down into her stuffed unicorn. After a few moments, she opened her eyes ever so slightly. "Daddy," she said, "I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours." *t wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours.* That's the message of outrageous grace.

Excerpted from: *PROOF: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace*

Wednesday, April 10

Finding Grace in our Grief Part 1

*Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.
2 Peter 1:2*

It was after my mother had gone home to be with the Lord and I was in a deep period of grief, unable to figure out why I was still feeling so blue. It was just after Christmas and my lease had ended, so I was under some pressure to find my next place.

I had been visiting with some friends and they invited me to attend church with them one Sunday. That's when I met Grace. She was in her early nineties and she was preparing to go to Florida with her friend Irma. She needed someone to stay at her place while she was away - and she'd be leaving in a few weeks.

We had lunch that day and as we chatted she invited me to stay with her for a brief time until she was on her way to Florida . She knew immediately what I was suffering from as she had six grown children. She understood I was grieving the loss of my mom. She introduced me to her friends from her card club and soon I was joining in the game. My mom loved playing cards, and it helped me have warm memories of her.

Nancy Groshens

Tuesday, April 9

Grace and Comedy Part 2

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the foremost of all. Yet for this reason, I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

1 Timothy 1: 15-16

You see, Crenshaw learned that Pete Davidson's father was a firefighter who had died in action trying to save others when Davidson was a young boy. Armed with this knowledge, in a moment of grace, Crenshaw honored a true hero, and encouraged SNL watchers to understand and forgive Pete Davidson. His words cast Davidson in a new light- as a man who carries his own secret pain. Like the rest of us, he is in desperate need of redemption and relief. This was an unusual feat of strength- Crenshaw did not condemn the act as many others might have done. He accepted the apology and offered forgiveness to the transgressor.

It turns out that there's still a market for grace in American social media. Within minutes, clips of the apology and Crenshaw's tribute to Davidson's dad were all over Twitter. Within 48 hours of the broadcast the YouTube clip of the moment had more than 5 million views. A hopeful sign.

It will be interesting to see whether this episode has an effect on Pete Davidson's future comedy and the content of SNL moving forward. Audience memories are short for some things but unrelenting for others. Time will tell...

Sunday, March 17

Grace on the Move
Luke 15

Let's celebrate!

***For this child of mine was dead and is alive again;
My child was lost and is found.*** Luke 15:24

Luke 15 is full of stories of finding the lost... a lost coin, a lost sheep, a lost son. Look at the diligence of the one who is searching.

Imagine God's diligence in searching for you... for your loved one... for our world.

Today, God is searching for you, to draw you into His warm embrace, to put His cloak around your shoulders, to mark you as His own child.

Let that reality sink in and then join the celebration that God has planned!

Monday, March 18

Honor your father and your mother....Exodus 20 :12

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 2 Peter 1:2

February 22 is my late mother's birthday and my thoughts turn to the year I gave her a 90th birthday celebration in 2005. She was living in a retirement center in Ft. Myers, Florida. I sent out invitations to all relatives and friends who might be able to come to Florida and arranged for those who couldn't come to phone in on a conference call on the Saturday night after we had the dinner and cake! I was happy that the two relatives still alive in England were able to call in. I was able to keep it a secret that so many were coming to the Saturday dinner. But the best laid plans always go astray or at least incomplete! As people started to arrive on the Friday evening of that weekend questions of where to eat became urgent especially from the husbands. It was a lovely evening so we headed down the road to look for a restaurant. I began to panic as I counted heads and realized that we were a group of ten.

The first restaurant was busy as were the next two in line. But my prayers were answered as we went back to the middle restaurant and a group began to get up! I asked the waiters if they could seat us explaining that it was my mother's birthday and we were all here to celebrate. Of course, was the answer. That began a magical weekend. I felt the working of the Holy spirit all through that weekend as I saw my mother beam with delight at each surprise. I learned I had to trust in the Spirit that all plans are His first!

Julia Mapes

Monday, April 8

Grace and Comedy Part 1

In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.
Ephesians 1:7

On November 3, *Saturday Night Live* comic Pete Davidson mocked Texas Republican Dan Crenshaw's eye patch, saying he looked like a "hit man in a porno movie" — then adding, "I know he lost his eye in war or whatever". Tasteless and cruel—anything for a laugh?

A liberal comic had gone too far- mocking a man who was maimed in a horrific IED attack, that had taken the life of his interpreter and nearly blinded him for life. Davidson mocked a courageous man's pain.

Dan Crenshaw refused to be offended. He noted that the joke was bad, but his handling of the whole affair was — as the *Washington Post* described him — "cool as a cucumber." Then *Saturday Night Live* called. The show wanted to apologize, and they wanted Crenshaw on-air. He said yes, and here's how it went:

Davidson came on the "Weekend Update" set and offered his apology, and then Crenshaw joined. SNL took the opportunity to take a shot at Davidson — Crenshaw's phone had an Ariana Grande ringtone (Grande had recently broke her engagement with Davidson), and he mocked Davidson's appearance. Then Crenshaw demonstrated an act of grace for millions of viewers.

Crenshaw briefly spoke of the meaning of the words "never forget" to a veteran, saying that "when you say 'never forget' to a veteran, you are implying that, as an American, you are in it with them." Then he addressed his next words to Davidson: "And never forget those we lost on 9/11 — heroes like Pete's father. So I'll just say, Pete, never forget."

Sunday, April 7

Grace on Tap
Matthew 5:43-47

Love...
Love your neighbor...
Love your enemies...
Pray for those who persecute you...
Matthew 5:43-44

Who is easy to love in your life? Remember some of the special times spent with that person. Enjoy those memories.

Who is not so easy to love in your life?

Perhaps you would even consider that person your enemy... Remember some of the challenging times spent with that person.

What would it mean to love that person?

When Jesus talks about love, he is not talking about a swoon of emotion, but about our actions. How could you concretely choose to treat that person with love?

Take a moment today to choose to love a person who is not so loveable.

Tuesday, March 19

Confession as a Means to Grace

I acknowledged my sin to You. And my iniquity I did not hide; I said "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord". And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah!
Psalm 32: 5

Confession

It is not for me to decide whether you should confess your sin to a priest or not...but if you do not, you should at least make a list on a piece of paper and make a serious act of penance about each one of them. There is something about the mere words, you know, provided you avoid two dangers, either of sensational exaggeration- trying to work things up and make melodramatic sins out of small matters- or the opposite danger of slurring things over. It is essential to use the plain, simple, old-fashioned words that you would use about anyone else. I mean words like theft or fornication or hatred instead of "I did not mean to be dishonest" or "I was only a boy then" or "I lost my temper". I think that this steady facing of what one does know and bringing it before God, without excuses, and seriously asking for forgiveness and grace, and resolving as far as in one lies to do better, is the only way.

"Miserable Offenders" from God in the Dock
by C.S. Lewis

Wednesday, March 20

Growing in Grace

*Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise glory in his wisdom,
neither let the mighty glory in his might,
let not the rich glory in his riches. Jeremiah 9:23*

It was the fall of 1961, and I was sure I had arrived as a preacher. That summer, while on vacation from our church in Minnesota, I had preached both in Amy's home church, 1st Presbyterian in Lancaster, and in mine, 1st Presbyterian in Germantown—both to rave reviews. We returned to Minnesota, and I knew I had grown too big for that little congregation of 200 in Southwestern Minnesota. But what to do? Where to go to share my extraordinary gifts?

The answer came in the person of a pastor I knew casually. He had just become pastor of the 3rd largest (at that time) Presbyterian congregation in Minnesota: Lakeside in Duluth. Would I come be his associate? Of course!

I finished out the year in Brewster, and we moved in June of 1962. Things did not go as well as expected. As I later discovered: my ego was writing checks on an account severely overdrawn. But – as He always does – God fixed the problem. In the spring I was invited, out of all the pastors in Duluth, to give the invocation and benediction at the annual Alcoholics Anonymous banquet. There, listening to the recorded testimony, I heard myself being described, and my life was changed forever. I realized that my personality was such that, had I ever drank, I'd have made a dandy alcoholic! What a come-down!

We left Lakeside and spent 7½ wonderful years in two congregations in southern Minnesota. It was all grace, pure grace!

Dan Reid

Saturday, April 6

Chosen by my Father's Grace

I am weak.
I am finite.
I am human.

Yet by my Father's Grace, "*even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.*" (Ephesians 1:4)

How can I possibly fathom that wonder my Father's infinite grace of healing, wholeness and belonging?

And my Father's word is clear for what is expected: "*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults... forgive anyone who offends you... forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love... let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts... you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*" (Colossians 3:12-15)

And my Father knows of the lack in me and my life, yet still my Father's "*grace is all you need... His power works best in weakness... so that the power of Christ can work through me.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9)

And my Father is all-knowing, not just the outward appearances but all-knowing deep into the layers upon layers intertwined in my heart, mind, body and soul. (Psalm 139)

"But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful Grace of God." (Acts 20:24)

"I am chosen, Not forsaken. I am who You say I am"
(excerpted lyrics "I am who You say I am" by Hillsong Worship)

Friday, April 5

Dependent on My Father's Grace

The "stories" of my Father's Grace in my life are too numerous to share, but what about extending grace and receiving grace with others?

Grace is given; when undeserved.

Grace is received; when forgiven.

Grace is denied; when bitter.

When grace is denied, love is missing.

When love is missing, sacrifice is lacking.

When sacrifice is lacking; life is no longer lived for Christ.

But why is grace denied? When I *"live under the freedom of God's grace."* (Romans 6:14)

But why is love missing? When if I *"didn't love others, I would be nothing."* (1 Corinthians 13:2)

But why is sacrifice lacking? When I don't *"give up my own way, take up my cross daily..."* (Luke 9:23)

Dependent on my Father's Grace, I am warned to *"look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many."* (Hebrews 12:15)

When grace is not given or when grace is not received and when grace is denied, I will turn to my Father's Grace and *"...depend on God's grace, not on my own human wisdom..."* (2 Corinthians 1:12)

"For God saved us and called us to live a holy life... not because we deserved it... that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 1:9)

"You are for me, Not against me. I am who You say I am."
(excerpted lyrics "I am who You say I am" by Hillsong Worship)

Thursday March 21

A Friendship Saved by Grace

Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:12-13

I know two ladies that have been friends for about 30 years. Let's call them Marge and Elizabeth. Marge has been closely associated with the church and has an understanding of the meaning of God's grace. Elizabeth has less association with a church and the context of God's grace.

One day an argument arose between the two as a consequence of the recent deaths of Elizabeth's parents. During a telephone conversation between the two, Elizabeth was describing her loss to Marge. During that exchange Marge tried to show that she was empathetic by relating loss to a painful experience that she had had. As a consequence of Marge's story, Elizabeth became extremely angry believing that Marge was not listening to let her release her penned up emotion of loss. Elizabeth was angry to the point that she was ending their long-term relationship.

This left Marge in a difficult situation, but she thought about it for a while, swallowed her pride and accepted blame for the argument. Later that day they both admitted that their relationship was worth more than a few misunderstood words.

By following God's teaching of grace, the friendship was saved.

Audrey Wettach

Friday, March 22

Grace for a Stranger

God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them. Hebrews 6: 10

We wanted to get rid of the crib. It was taking up space, we had no little ones who needed it, and we knew there was probably someone who would put it to good use. So we placed it on Facebook Marketplace.

Within a few hours a message came- “I *really* need this for my baby” and they wanted to pick the crib up that day. Within a few hours the family arrived- Father, Mother, an infant and a little girl. For the parents English was a challenging language, so the little girl spoke for the family.

She told us her name was Christina and she was nine years old. She brought a gift- a box of cornflakes and a candy bar in a holiday gift bag which she handed to me. This was meant to be in exchange for the crib. My husband and I were both embarrassed and horrified to be taking food from a family who likely had little. I told Christina payment was not necessary.

Christina looked at her Mother who shook her head and she handed me the package again. I realized it would be offensive if I did not accept the gift and so I thanked her. Christina’s parents looked at the crib that was now theirs and cried with relief. We helped them put the crib in their car and they drove off.

After they were gone I turned to my husband and said, “I have never felt so good- doing something that meant so much for someone” and he agreed. We thought we were getting rid of something we no longer needed, but God chose to use a family we didn’t know to help us experience His grace.

Carol Kirner

Thursday, April 4

My Father’s Grace

I am unworthy. Or am I worthless?
I am unqualified. Or am I disqualified?
I am guilty. Or am I condemned?

“LORD, if you kept a record of our sins, who, O Lord, could ever survive?” (Psalm 130:3)

In my struggle to find words for grace, I must consider “*have I tried to hide my sins like other people do, concealing my guilt in my heart?*” (Job 31:33). And since knowing that I am truly “*utterly helpless*” (Romans 5:6), it is simply true that I have sinned and “*fall short*” (Romans 3:23).

Yet it is the truth of my Father’s Grace, “*by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 15:11)* which secures me in knowing that my “*sins—and they are many—have been forgiven*” (Luke 7:47), and it is the truth of my Father’s Grace which is the reason why, “*I love you, LORD; you are my strength*” (Psalm 18:1).

I am holy. Redeemed by Love.
I am flawless. Ransomed by Sacrifice.
I am blameless. Restored to Life.

“But because Christ died, God has brought you back to himself. Christ’s death has made you holy in God’s sight. So now you don’t have any flaw. You are free from blame.” (Colossians 1:22)

Resting in my Father’s Grace, I ask Him: Why do you love me so much?!

“What great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1)

“In my Father’s house, There’s a place for me. I’m a child of God, Yes I am.”

(excerpted lyrics “I am who You say I am” by Hillsong Worship)

Wednesday, April 3

Miraculous Grace

And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." Exodus 33:19

When I was a child there was a well-known commercial for V-8 juice. Someone would drink something else and then realize “Wow I coulda had a V-8”. As an adult, I’ve realized many times, “Wow I coulda had a miracle”.

I could have had a miracle...*except*...! Except that I didn’t think miracles were possible. I didn’t think in a miraculous way. I didn’t stand firmly on the principle that God can do anything, No problem is too hard for God to solve. This is an important point to remember, as it’s hard to have a kinda-sorta-powerful God.

Faith in God, however, is inseparable from faith in love. To say there is nothing God cannot do is to say there is nothing love cannot do. It does little good to ask God’s help, if we ourselves remain unwilling to open our hearts in places where they are closed. It is not just God’s love for us, but our love for each other, that paves the way for miracles.

If we fail to express God’s love through faith, or compassion, or forgiveness, then the problem is not the absence of God’s power, but our failure to align our will with His. He cannot do for us what he cannot do through us. A house might be wired for electricity, but it still needs lamps if it is to be lit...

Each of us can live in the victory of spirit, claiming for ourselves the miraculous power that has been given to us as children of God.

Marianne Williamson, Author and Motivational Speaker

Saturday, March 23

Family Discussion About Grace

***Do not lie to each other,
since you have taken off your old self with its practices.***
Colossians 3: 9

Jewel told a new friend Shellie that she would go to the movies with her on Saturday. On Saturday morning, other friends asked Jewel to go—friends she’d known a long time. It’s always hard for new kids at school, and sure enough, some of Jewel’s friends didn’t want Shellie to come. “She’s annoying,” one girl said. “I just don’t like her,” said another. Jewel sensed her friends were being harsh and judgmental, but when she said so, they rolled their eyes and told her it was them or the new kid. Jewel ended up telling Shellie she had “other plans,” which wasn’t exactly lying; other plans meant “other friends. At the movie theatre, just after Jewel bought her ticket, she saw Shellie across the candy counter with a cousin two years younger. Totally embarrassed, she plastered a huge smile on her face and walked up to Shellie. She’d figure out what to say when she got there.

Questions for discussion:

What should Jewel do?

Is there a way that Jewel could show grace to Shellie?

Is there a way that Shellie can show grace to Jewel?

Have you ever had a time where one set of friends didn’t want you to spend time with another friend?

What did you do?

Sunday, March 24

The Scent of Scandal
Matthew 20:1-16

The last will be first, and the first will be last.
Matthew 20:16

Grace is fundamentally unfair! We feel that unfairness every time we see good happening to those we define as “bad”.

Take a moment to think about examples of when God’s good gifts seem to go to the wrong people. Then take the next step and imagine God’s forgiveness offered to those people.

How dare God bless those who hurt others?

How dare God bless those who persecute us?

Take another moment to think about examples when God’s good gifts are given to you even when you do not deserve those blessings. Imagine being welcomed to the table by Jesus not because you are so good, but because He is so loving. Let that grace sink in...

Tuesday, April 2

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord. Psalm 102: 18

A Father’s Experience Continued...

It’s the grown-up sitting on a park bench having a meaningful conversation with someone else’s inquisitive child. It’s God sacrificing his Son on the cross to forgive us of our sins.

One lyric I often land on in my head when I’m struggling in my day-to-day is this one from Alexi Murdoch’s song “Something Beautiful”:

*May the grace of God be with you always in your heart
May you know the truth inside you from the start
May you find the strength to know you are part of
something beautiful*

Drew Deeter

And a Grandfather’s Wisdom:

A few years ago, my wife and I were celebrating a milestone birthday and while we were trying to “stay under the radar” and treat it as just another day and another year, we knew our two sons and their wives would probably like to get together and do something to celebrate. With one of our actual birthdays approaching, the sons recommended a cookout at one of their homes and we thought that would be really nice and lots of fun.

On the appointed day, all went well and we both thought this was the perfect “low key” celebration we had been looking for and expecting. That all held true until we pulled into the driveway of our son’s home and were greeted by nearly 100 relatives and friends lining the sides who had traveled to Doylestown from all across the country to “surprise us.” If seeing all of them was not gift enough, they all came in costumes from “The Wizard of Oz”... my wife’s favorite story and film.

Bill Deeter

Monday, April 1

Grace Through The Generations

*One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare you mighty acts.* Psalm 145: 4

A Daughter's View:

Grace is when you believe in God and have a tendency to be kind and forgiving. For example, when Jesus died on the cross that showed that God had a grace. When I think of grace I think of God forgiving us. Another example of grace is when kids die from school shootings, the parents forgive the gunman. They forgive them because they know that God had that plan for them to go heaven. So when I hear the word grace that is what I think of, forgiveness and kindness.

Katie Deeter

A Father's Experience:

I've heard the term "grace" for most of my life. As a songwriter and musician, I've used the word in lyrics I've written and sang it in the songs of others. I've been in Bible groups that have studied God's grace and was in a small group focused on the book "What's So Amazing About Grace?" Still, I find that I struggle to clearly define the word.

So with all of this background, I have come to the conclusion that grace simply "is what it is." To me, it's one of those things that you know it when you see it. It's the ability of a friend to look past a transgression you may have made and still lift you up when you're down. It's the person who stops in the midst of a crazy and hectic day to take a small bit of time to offer to return someone's shopping cart to the cart return bin at the grocery.

Bill Deeter

Monday, March 25

Neighborhood Grace

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in.

Matthew 25: 35

I volunteer in a Helping Hands program in my life community. We get mail and pick up dinner for members of our community who are sick or recovering from surgery. People who need us receive a directory of volunteers and contact one of us, then give us their meal orders from a menu. We pick up their meal, deliver it and visit for a short time, providing food for their healing and encouragement to prevent loneliness while they recover. The service lasts for two weeks, but I have bent the rule and served longer when someone needed extra attention.

Recently, I was requested to help a gentleman in my building I didn't know. His first menu included a request to pick up two hardboiled eggs with his dinner, so he could have them for his breakfast. I told him I wasn't sure I could get the eggs because they were not available in the evening but I would do my best. Sure enough, when I went to get his dinner I was told that hard-boiled eggs were only available at specific times.

Over the week I was retrieving his meals, he continued to request the eggs. I realized he may not have been remembering that I had told him "no eggs" the day before. Seeing how much this meant to him, I started making him the eggs myself and delivered them with his dinner. It was a small thing, but he was thrilled. He is now well enough to get to dinner with others again, but we have developed a friendship- that started with two hardboiled eggs.

Anonymous

Tuesday, March 26

Grace Through Illness Part 1

*Children obey your parents in everything
for this pleases the Lord. Colossians 3:20*

Alzheimer's. It's a nasty disease. It robs a person of their precious memories. It doesn't discriminate—it can affect anyone. Families that must care for a person who has Alzheimer's are forced to make extremely difficult decisions for their loved one. My family was in this situation with my mother, Gertrude. We began noticing behavioral changes early on. At first, we all just laughed it off, including my mom. Then as it began to be evident that something was really wrong, we started the road on doctor appointments. I specifically remember leaving one of those appointments and my mother looked at me with tears in her eyes and said "I won't know who you are". As I'm writing this my own eyes still fill up as I hear her saying that in my mind. It's clear in my memory. I said to her "mom, you may not outwardly know who I am, but your spirit will always know me and mine will always know you."

People at church were wonderful. The choir helped her continue to sing. People offered to drive my parents to and from events when the doctor took away her license. But, ultimately we had to move her to Lakeview's Memory area within Pine Run. Within a year, she had progressed so much that she was moved to the Alzheimer's floor in the nursing center at Pine Run. I recall one instance where I needed to get her signature and she had forgotten how to hold a

Marci Woods

Sunday, March 31

***Breaking the Cycle-
Matthew 18:21-35***

***Practice Makes Perfect
How many times must I forgive my brother
when he sins against me?
Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times,
but seventy times seven.
Matthew 18:21-22***

They say, "Practice makes perfect." When it comes to forgiveness, we need a lot of practice! Often when we forgive someone, the anger and resentment comes back again and again. Those moments of relapse call us to practice forgiveness yet again. How many times? Infinitely! Paul writes, "Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you." (Colossians 3:13)

Take a moment to remember how graciously God has forgiven you. Let that gift touch your heart.

Who do you need to forgive today?

Remember God's forgiveness and then practice offering that gift to another.

Saturday, March 30

Grace-full Parenting

2. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3. Not lording over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

1 Peter 5: 2-3

Daughter 17

I have a daughter 17

When she lies to me... I love her.

When she disappoints me... I love her

When she doesn't live up to my expectations.... I love her

When she reflects poorly on my name... I love her

"Now I can understand how when she pleases you.....

and obeys you.... and fulfills you"...you say

But that's not what I'm talking about.

It's when she does none of these things.... I love her

AND for a very simple reason:

I'm her father... she's my child.

When your kids disappoint you (note I said when, not if), you may be tempted to distance yourself from them to teach them a lesson or maybe even to protect yourself. Everywhere they turn, your kids have grown up in a culture in which when they struggle or fail, people tend to walk away. Especially during their lowest times, your kids need to know that , above all else , you are there for them, regardless of what they are going through.

Excerpted from Sticky Faith, Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids

Wednesday, March 27

Grace Through Illness

*Listen to your father who gave you life,
and do not despise your mother when she is old. Proverbs 23: 22*

My mother was in the nursing facility for seven long years. Each year my brother would say 'this is the year. This is the year she'll go home'. God finally took her home on February 13, 2010. What a blessing!!

So, where was God's grace in all this? Ah, let me tell you I saw his grace personally in several ways during this journey she and our family were on. The instance that stands out the most in my mind was when my late husband and I were leaving the area to move to Lebanon where he had gotten a Senior Pastor position. While I was excited about this new chapter in our family's life, I was devastated to leave my mother. Unfortunately, she had not known who I was for over a year by this point. She was uncommunicative.

The last time I saw her before the move I began crying and telling her I didn't want to leave her. I wanted to stay and just be with her. Then, in a surprising move, she took my head in her hands and said 'we knew this day would come. You need to be with your husband and family'.

Friends, in that moment I knew God's grace. He allowed her to be 'with' me for that split moment and give me the assurance that I could leave and she would be okay. While it was still hard for me to leave her, I knew in my heart that God was there with her and would never ever leave her and would give her His grace always.

Thursday, March 28

Grace and Politics

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3: 21-24

Former US President Richard Nixon is infamous for his place at the center of the Watergate scandal. He disgraced both the office of the President of the United States and the United States itself in the eyes of the world. As one of his first official functions after his impeachment, Nixon attended the funeral for Hubert Humphrey, a U.S. Vice President. Dignitaries came from all over the country and the world were in attendance, yet Nixon was made to feel decidedly unwelcome. People turned their eyes away and conversations ran dry around him.

Then Jimmy Carter, the serving US President, walked into the room. Carter was from a different political party than Nixon and well known for his integrity and Christianity. As he moved to his seat President Carter noticed Nixon standing all alone. Carter immediately changed course, walked over to Nixon, held out his hand, and, smiling embraced Nixon saying “Welcome home, Mr. President! Welcome home!”

The incident was reported by Newsweek magazine, which wrote: “If there was a turning point in Nixon’s long ordeal in the wilderness, it was that moment and that gesture of love and compassion.”

Carter gifted Nixon with love and compassion which Nixon had done nothing to deserve. It was an act of pure grace on Carter’s part. When the Bible speaks of God’s blessing it speaks in the same way. Blessing is never a reward for good behavior. It’s a gift of pure, unadulterated grace.

Friday, March 29

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! Psalm 27:14

Last year I read a story about waiting in Daily Guideposts written by Stephanie Thompson. Thompson remarked on the amount of time she spent waiting- in carpool lines, in lines at the grocery store and waiting for couple conversation with her husband at the end of the day. As the story began she was waiting for a tire rotation.

Like most of us, she opts to use the time searching her smartphone for how many hours the average person spends waiting. While searching, another customer walks in. She sees a young man with a cane wearing fatigues limp across the floor. His short hair suggests he is military. She goes back to her phone.

That is until she over hears the awkward conversation between the young man and the salesman when he discovers he can’t afford the cost of the four tires his car needs. The salesman man offers a lower price (and no doubt quality) option and the young man refuses, deciding to buy two.

The young man takes a seat across the room to start his “waiting”. Thompson goes back to an article about wasting time waiting when a voice inside her head tells her: *Pay for the other two tires.*

Stephanie Thompson ends her story this way: “Holy chills run down my back. I’m not wasting time. I’m waiting for a divine opportunity such as this one. Grace can occur in our waiting.

Retold from Daily Guideposts story by Stephanie Thompson