

tip of my head to my toes and back to my head. The beings slowly disappeared and I was without fever for the first time in over two months. I knew I would survive.

I was incredibly blessed to be saved by God's grace and mercy. Why was I healed when others aren't? Was it the surrender? I may never know, but this I do know: Put your hope in His grace and surrender to His will. He has plans for you.

Patty VerDouw

## Day 5: The Big "IF"

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**"You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." Matthew 17:20 (NLT)**

**"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (NLT)**

Scripture is replete with such passages. God promises us many things, but there's often a caveat introduced with one little word: If. It is one of the largest words used Bible, I think. Not the most powerful, but one with deep meaning. A word so small, it could easily be overlooked.

If (see what I did there?) we remove the "ifs" from Scripture, we could too easily infer that God requires nothing of us in order to reap the benefits he offers us. That means I can move mountains with a thought and be saved with no other action on my part.

For more times than I can count, I have expected God to do all the work while all I did was show to receive his blessings. Instead, however, I found myself accepting darker consequences, feeling lost and abandoned, and not at all blessed.

All because I neglected to notice that tiny, yet ever-important little word.

That's not loving or being faithful to God. It's taking him for granted, and treating him like Santa Claus instead of the Creator of the universe who makes the rules.

Still, God wastes nothing, not even our mistakes. When I ignored that little "if," and faced the consequences accordingly, I learned just how important looking for the that little "if" is.

Andra Marquardt



## Even Now: God's Soul-Saving Love

### Day 1: Life Begins With Grace

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**"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 most." Hebrews 4:16 (NLT)**

**And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6 (NLT)**

God's grace has changed my life. When I was a child, the God that I heard about in church focused on the sins of His people, and their potential punishment of eternal life in Hell. This primarily relates to the God of the Old Testament where His focus was more on punishment than grace. In our church, fear, and guilt were used to convince people to accept Jesus as their Lord. As a child and even as an adult, I just could not accept this God, and I felt frightened and guilty for years.

Then one Sunday morning, we had a visiting minister preach at our church. This minister began his sermon describing the God that I had heard about all my life. He said he could not accept a God like that earlier. Then, using the lens of the New Testament, he described God as full of grace, love, mercy, forgiveness, and peace.

For me it was as if a very bright light had been turned on in my brain and I thought, "This is the God I can believe in also." That was the beginning of my walk with faith. It took a while for me to fully commit my life to Christ, but that Sunday morning God's grace was the beginning.

I realize that I can't deliberately live a sinful life and expect to be saved by God's grace, but if I try to follow God's guidance, I know that His grace will be there for me when I fail.

Jim Karn

## Day 2: Grace in Relationships

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**“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” Philippians 1:6 (NLT)**

When I was a freshman in college, I was dating someone I thought was going to be “the one.” She was a runner like me, introverted like me, and smart (I’ll let others decide if that describes me too). We had conversations about the future including whether we wanted kids and what type of house we’d like. The summer came and we made some plans to keep in touch as we lived a couple states away from each other. She visited once, but she didn’t keep in touch much after that.

When I got back to school, I found out that she was seeing an upperclassman and that their relationship had started at the beginning of the summer. I was pretty devastated for a while and wondered what I had done wrong. I had many other emotions, but after that, I became almost devoid of emotions. When it came to relationships, whether friends, family or dating kind, I had this feeling like nothing really mattered anymore. I wouldn’t say I didn’t care about anyone, but it was like I didn’t care very deeply for anyone. I didn’t want to get hurt again.

God’s grace comes in many forms. We have been saved by grace. God also gives us grace in and through our relationships. God, “who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” (Philippians 1:6) Sometimes, we go through emotional struggles to allow us to receive God’s grace.

Go eventually introduced me to my future wife who helped teach me how to receive God’s grace and live my life for Him. I can’t promise you won’t have relationship problems. I can promise that God is always working in your life and will help you grow through your relationships.

Jeremy Skoglund

## Day 3: Childlike Faith

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**“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Romans 3:22-24 (KJV)**

When I was eleven years old, my old brother treated me unfairly. My stubborn response to his actions resulted in a minor catastrophe on our farm. All of the details of the event won’t fit into this brief devotional, but I must share how God revealed his grace through

answered prayer.

In a repentant prayer soon after our scuffle, I asked God to cleanse me from my sin. My worldly response to my brother’s actions caused guilt and regret. As I dumped my sin upon my Father in Heaven, with a childlike faith fitting my age, I made a bold request. I asked Jesus to reverse the consequence affecting the farm. It was a ridiculous request, one that was physically impossible and certainly not justified. My brother and I deserved the penalty for our actions, however my Dad would also pay a hefty price. As soon as I made this bold request of the Lord, He answered! Like a leper who walks or blind man suddenly receiving sight, I immediately heard my father exclaim that a miracle had just occurred.

Now the tears ran down my face. My Father in Heaven loved me so much that he was willing to conduct a miracle that day and save me any heartache. He had heard my prayer, forgiven my sin and shown me his grace.

Do you think my brother and I got along perfectly from that time on? Of course not. The grace of the cross, however, is ever-present in my life. If you question your comprehension of His grace, bow your head with childlike faith and ask for His blessing and understanding. He is eager to show His love.

Kenton Carlson

## Day 4: Life-Giving Grace

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**“You have already thought enough of your servant to do me the great kindness of intervening to save my life.” Genesis 19:19 (CNAB)**

It was the fall of 1999. I was a single mom of two and had been feeling less and less well. I attributed my back pain to being rear-ended in a recent car accident. Then during one early morning meeting, I started shaking uncontrollably and was near collapse. I ended up in the hospital for five days. A fever returned within 48 hours of discharge. More tests revealed one kidney had a kidney stone the size of a ping pong ball and the other was so infected it was about to rupture. I had multiple infections, and sepsis, in its worse form, had developed.

Surgery was performed, but standard antibiotics were not working. The CDC was called to provide experimental drugs. I spent the month of October in the hospital. Within 48 hours of discharge, the raging fever returned. I was too exhausted to fight any longer. I surrendered, telling God I was OK with whatever He decided for me. I only asked that He take care of my children.

It seemed so natural when two spiritual beings appeared, telling me they were there to heal me. The sensation of a hot fire went from the