

Consider Paul's words to the Romans, **"Do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit... So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves."** Romans 14:16-17, 22 (NIV)

Jeremy Skoglund

Day 5: Grace Bring Freedom

Grace is a gracious, unmerited favor from God. God does not judge or cause evil that we deserve, but gives us a blessing we don't deserve. Stories of God's grace permeate the Bible. In the Old Testament book of Hosea, we find the story of the Northern Kingdom of Israel pulling away and worshiping false gods rather than Yahweh. Hosea was told to marry Gomer, a prostitute, who was unable to identify with her new identity. She left Hosea, and returned to her old ways. She was sold into slavery, and it was Hosea who bought her back and gave her grace and unfailing love. This is comparable to what God did to Israel, even though they were worshiping false gods, he found a way to win them back in his grace and unfailing love.

When we face difficult situations, are mistreated or disrespected, we need to model these biblical examples of grace. Extending grace does not condone the wrong actions of others, but allows us to let go of the situation and move forward. If we don't, we keep ourselves enslaved in unnecessary chains that will take away our peace and joy.

I learned years ago that giving grace to others allowed me to be free of that incident. However, I struggle with giving grace to myself. It is in these moments that I need to realize that God gives me grace for the awful things I've done and therefore, I need to give myself that grace too.

Today, I will look at myself in my mess and remember that I am human being capable of mistakes and I am loved, and I am accepted, and I am worthy of God's grace. **Romans 6:15 tells us that "sin shall no longer be our master, because we are not under the law, but under grace."** God paid to bring us back to him with the price of Jesus' life and our mistakes are not greater than God's grace.

Irene Merck



Even More: God's Character-Shaping Love

God loves us, and God wants to grow us into the likeness of Jesus. This is God's character-shaping, sanctifying grace. God's grace not only provides a way to get to heaven someday; it starts a lifelong adventure of letting God love us so that God can move more of heaven into our hearts now.

Day 1: God's Gracious Love

"But Lord, your nurturing love is tender and gentle. You are slow to get angry yet so swift to show your faithful love. You are full of abounding grace and truth. Bring me to your grace-fountain so that your strength becomes mine. Be my hero and come rescue your servant once again!" Psalm 86:15-16 (Passion Translation)

These past few days have been gut-wrenching, where I have messed up, again, and again, and again, AND AGAIN! I wish I had a great "undo button" on my life, but I do not.

Even with the many mistakes I keep making (that I think disqualify me from being able to be a witness unto Jesus), God is so kind, tender, and merciful to me. In all my messing up, God is gracious and He places Scriptures like this Psalm in front of me.

"Your love is tender Lord, you are slow to get angry, and your grace-fountain gives me strength."

I look back on the events of the past few days. I am upset because I did not perform perfectly, but God keeps dropping these little notes that He is somehow still proud of me.

I have a hard time understanding, until I look at my daughter. This week, she had to perform. I think she did brilliantly and I am so proud of her. I know she did not feel she did perfect. But my love for her did not depend on how she would (or would not) perform.

God speaks to my heart with the same grace, "My love for you does not change, it is not based on what you can or cannot do but it is because I just love you."

So when you make mistakes, remember that God loves you, He cares for you, and His grace is sufficient.

Jen Einrem

Day 2: Examples in Grace

“Be mutually hospitable without complaining. As generous distributors of God’s manifold grace, put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure he has received.” 1 Peter 4:9-10 (CNAB)

My Mom had an extraordinarily difficult life and easily could have been the poster child for a survivor. Her firm belief that only God’s grace got her through life’s challenges sustained her. She always considered herself blessed in spite of all the hurdles she encountered. She saw the glass of life as half full and demonstrated that to her family every day. She lived her faith. She took in the orphan, visited the sick, helped the less fortunate, was the picture of hospitality, and was a champion prayer. She refrained from complaining about trials, was quick to forgive, and encouraged her children to do the same.

I vividly remember one extremely stormy Sunday. We had to walk four blocks to church but the pounding rain, hail, high winds, and lightning were too great a hazard. Mom watched the storm rage from our enclosed porch and cried. I couldn’t understand, and asked why she was crying. She explained, “Because I really wanted to go to church today. I needed to go to church.” After that, my vision swung from church being an obligation, to it being a privilege. I may not have understood her daily example as a life lesson in my younger years, but now consider it one of the sanctifying graces of my life.

Thank you, Lord, for the role models you give us as examples of your grace. Open our eyes and ears to fully appreciate the lessons given.

Patty VerDouw

Day 3: Grace in the Form of Forgiveness

What does “grace” mean to you? The definition “undeserved favor” best embodies the meaning of grace to me. When reflecting on this topic in preparation for this devotion, God immediately placed a story of forgiveness on my heart and the following verse: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesian 4:32 (The Daily Walk Bible NIV)

In November of 2017, my dad and I got in an ugly fight caused by his explosive anger. I vowed I would never speak to him again and was successful for four months. The rift in our family devastated my mom. In March of this year, I found myself in a situation where I mishandled my emotions and displayed unwarranted anger toward a co-worker. It was a very humbling experience. Even though it cost me to lose the trust and respect from a valued peer, God used the situation for a purpose. The event was the catalyst to me forgiving my dad. If God showers me with grace and forgiveness when I am so undeserving, who did I think I was to hold such a grudge against my Dad?

Our God is one of grace, love, mercy and forgiveness. He takes the broken and makes it beautiful. He took two ugly situations and turned them into a story of grace and forgiveness. Each day is a work in progress in rebuilding our relationship, but we both are fully relying on God and His timing. The joy my mom shows on her face and the tears of thanksgiving that roll down her cheeks are also a welcoming sign that things are moving in the right direction.

Can you relate to conflict with a family member, friend or possibly a co-worker? Is there a situation God has placed on your heart that needs to be addressed? Is there anyone you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from? Fully rely on God and his grace to get you through!

Corrie Lund

Day 4: Grace at Church

I was raised in the church. I was baptized, received first communion, attended daily Mass with my mom, became an altar boy and was confirmed. This Christian heritage is a big part of who I am. However, I didn’t always agree with everything in the church. When I needed a sponsor in confirmation, I wanted to ask an individual from a different church, but was told that my sponsor had to be from our faith community.

As an adult, I’ve studied many denominations and seen numerous things with which I don’t agree. I understand the frustrations people experience with practices such as withholding sacraments from perceived “outsiders” or requiring tax statements for membership. However, here’s the thing: No matter what church we might attend, we are still all flawed, sinful people. We are not better because we are a part of a great church. I should not look down on people because they attend another church. While I appreciate the practices at our church, who am I to condemn another church’s beliefs? Will I be the one deciding who is saved? Shouldn’t I also show grace to them?