



Grounded in Grace



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Foundry's 2025 Lenten Devotional

Every year since 1996, authors and artists of Foundry have contributed to a collection of daily reflections for Lent. This year's creative collaborators had something to say about God's grace, and they dared to share it. They hope their expressions resonate.

For a deeper spiritual connection, try starting each day's meditation with a centering breath.

After receiving the devotional, take time to:

- Reflect on how the sharing relates to your life.
- Be still. Ask God to speak to you. Listen.
- Give thanks.
- Pray for yourself, those special in your life, the contributor, and your community.

Whenever a devotional moves you, consider sharing your response with the author or with someone who came to mind in the day's meditation. Authors you do not know personally may be reached through an email to: LentenDevotional@FoundryUMC.org

In making connections through the devotional, you may find new, renewed, or deeper relationships with yourself, God, and others.

Grounded in Grace also is available online at
foundryumc.org/devotional

The Gift of God's Grace

In Lent, we are offered an opportunity to pause and take an honest look at our lives.

- Who am I? Who am I becoming?
- What needs attention in our lives?
- What needs to change? What needs to heal?
- What gets in the way of trusting God more?
- What gets in the way of believing you're forgiven or beloved?

There's no need to be anxious or defensive about this honest introspection because we are grounded in grace, held firm in God's love and mercy. There's no need to fear.

Some of you have heard me tell of times when I realized that I had been holding old stuff — things I'd done that were destructive and hurtful to others and to me. I thought I had to carry around all that shame and regret as my penance for ever.

Then I realized God was loving, understanding, and having compassion for me even when I was doing the awful thing. And I realized God forgave me a long time ago and wanted to liberate me from the weight of that shame and guilt. What a relief!

You and I really are grounded in grace all along the way and so it's OK to be honest with yourself and with God. God knows all of it anyway. And the God who formed you in love, who gifts you with this life and with life together, is merciful and compassionate.

God desires only your wholeness and liberation. Life is too precious to allow anything to keep you from those things.

So this Lent try to trust God enough to be honest with yourself and to receive the love and compassion God is always waiting to share.

Compassionate God, thank you for grounding me in your grace. Help me trust your love for me. Set me free...

Ginger Gaines-Cirelli
Senior Pastor

Earthbound in Time, Transcendent in Spirit

"Sin happens whenever we refuse to keep growing."
– Gregory of Nissa

There have been times in my life when I've glimpsed the greatness and vast creativity of God, and seen it working in my own life. Have you sensed it in your life as well?

It might be a time when you were trying to find a solution to a problem, said a short prayer, and the answer appeared. Or when you experienced a natural wonder, like Niagara Falls. Or marveled at how a certain group of friends can spark a creative repartee. Or sensed the presence of a departed loved one, gone from the earth, but near in spirit.

At such transcendent moments, it seems like anything is possible for us; that we are "swimming in infinity," to use Richard Rohr's term.

Although that might be true in a spiritual sense, we occasionally need to come to terms with the limited time in our days and in our lives. In our imaginations, we create parallel universes of the futures we might live, but the restriction of time means we can never do all that we would like.

As time passes, we find ourselves needing to winnow, separating wheat from chaff in our scheduled and non-scheduled time. "Is this really a necessary use of my day? Do I have to read this whole article, when I've gotten the basic idea from the headline? How can I prioritize relationships over staying home and spending hours watching my shows?"

While some dreams may not come true, we can still allow ourselves to dream. Remembering our purpose, grounding, and the transcendent moments in our lives can help us make the sometimes difficult choices needed to live a life of meaning, focusing on loving our neighbor.

Paul Keefer

Transformative Power of Grace and Prayer

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16 NIV

In reflecting on what "Grounded in Grace" means, electrical grounding came to mind.

I recently had the opportunity to observe the basics of electrical grounding from an electrician's service call. Troubleshooting the issue required testing the level of electricity flowing to the appliance and checking the electrical panel to identify any inactive power sources.

The purpose and principles of electrical grounding that protect our earthly environment are profoundly applicable to prayer as a power source to safeguard and sustain our spiritual dwellings.

Unceasing prayer connects us to God and provides 24/7, 365-day access to the unmatched expertise of a Master Technician, divinely certified and able to troubleshoot and resolve any and all situations that confront us.

Prayers, spoken and unspoken, enhance our spiritual well-being as individuals and as members of a loving and caring covenant community. Countless answered prayers along my life's journey and the privilege of serving on Foundry's prayer team attest to God's faithfulness and grace.

I am grateful that prayer and spiritual grounding constitute the divine breaker box. It redirects excessive currents that seek to overwhelm us, short circuit us, shock us, or immobilize us.

Prayer:

Dear heavenly parent and guardian, thank you for your steadfast faithfulness, grace, protection, and love. We are never powerless as long as we stay connected to you.

Cheryl Gibbs

The Greatest Deal Ever

I started to understand grace seven years ago in the **Disciple's Path** class at Foundry, and it's making a huge difference for me.

I hope readers will not be offended by my use of common terms to describe grace. Grace should be described in poetry, lyrics, or sky writing on a beautiful sunrise over a beach, but those are beyond my reach.

Grace is the greatest deal that's ever been known or will ever be known. You get the love of God, period. There's no consideration required on your part. This is liberating; it feels like a load removed from my shoulders.

I have a tape on a loop playing in my head about all the mistakes and even just awkward moments in my life. God knows about the tape. And yet, he loves me. Together we're working on deleting the tape.

I've seen grace — like when parents and grandparents hold and stare into the eyes of their infant. The love is palpable.

As you would expect, there are lots of ways to think about such an enormous idea, and when I get confused, I think Love.

You can even be like God, and pass grace to others. Thanks to the Wesley brothers, there are directions as to how to do that.

Doug Smarte

Breath of Spirit

Grace is freely given to each of us and is ever present. Yet all too often it can be hard to discern, let alone to really feel grace amongst all the busyness and distractions of modern life.

One proven path toward more fully embodying our natural state of grace is through becoming still and focusing on our breath.

I invite you to sit comfortably with your feet firmly grounded on the floor.

Begin paying attention to your breath.

Take slow and deep inhalations through your nose and full exhalations through your mouth.

Now gently close your eyes and prepare yourself to take three or more full and slow breaths.

With each inhalation say silently to yourself something that resonates for what you need right now, it could simply be "Grace" or "Love" or "Peace" or "I am full of God's grace" or whatever SPIRIT brings to your attention.

With each exhalation you can silently repeat the same word or words or say something like "I let go" or "I share God's grace."

When you're ready, return to your normal breathing. Notice how you feel.

Reflect on any insights or messages that SPIRIT might have for you.

With a heart of gratitude, thank God for your natural state of grace and thank yourself for taking the time today on your Lenten journey to center yourself in loving grace.

With your mind and heart open to the grace that grounds you in the love of God, go forth in peace, power, and free-flowing grace. You are a vital, beloved, participant in the beautiful kin-dom of life.

Doug Barker

Grace In My Rear-View Mirror

This past year has been a difficult one, and many times I wasn't able to see God's grace at work in my life.

We invited a cousin to stay with us after she decided to stop treatment for cancer and receive in-home hospice services. Her pain increased and mobility lessened. As her only caregivers, we became exhausted and overwhelmed. We felt God had called us to care for her but were unprepared for the length of her decline.

My faith was severely tested throughout these months. I became angry that God would allow our cousin to suffer, and that hospice wasn't able to provide more support. I resisted going to church and felt my prayers went unanswered. I questioned whether God existed when there seemed to be no relief in sight for her. It was one of the lowest times in my faith journey.

Now that God has called our cousin home, I am starting to see God's grace was always present. Looking in my rear-view mirror, I can see we were surrounded by loving friends who checked in on us and prayed for our cousin when I couldn't. We had a caring, faithful medical team at the inpatient hospice facility during her final two months.

Most of all God gave us the opportunity to be a family for someone who had lived alone most of her life.

God never promised us that life would be easy and that we wouldn't face hard times.

It's ok to be angry at God and we may not be able to see grace when we are in the midst of life's challenges. However, by looking in the rear-view mirror we may be able to see that God was there, surrounding us with grace all along.

Sara Eakes

Overwhelmed and Scared

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
Philippians 4:13 NRSV

When Paul wrote his letter to the church in Philippi, he was in prison – an experience most of us have never had.

I woke up a few nights ago imagining I had been picked up by ICE, handcuffed, shoved onto a plane and flown to an unknown place.

I had been wondering what it would be like to have risked my life leaving the violence in my home country, walking hundreds of miles, riding on top of trains, giving all my money to someone promising to get me across the border safely and then being sent back, maybe not to where I came from.

Many of our neighbors are afraid of what may happen next.

In our fearful moments it is easy to forget that God's grace is right there with us. When we acknowledge to ourselves that we are not alone, that God is with us, we can endure pain and difficulties.

I can remember incidents from my teenage years on the family farm when I had to approach a burning barn to attempt saving some equipment or had to swim to unplug the irrigation intake in Lake Ontario when the waves were high. I invoked Philippians 4:13 believing that I wasn't alone, and I could attempt difficult tasks.

My adult years brought insights and confidence as I was involved with more complex human relationships. I learned to listen and to find courage to engage with difficult situations, realizing that God brings both strength to be honest and wisdom to continue listening for God's new thing.

As we live our way through the difficult years ahead we can feel confident that God's Grace will be there, no matter what.

Hal Garman

Blankets

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you... Isaiah 41:10 NIV

There's a boogeyman out there, and he's trying hard to get you,
You say his blades of darkness have lit you up in chandeliers of fear,
That his legions of armies are under your bed,
And there's a village of monsters dancing in your head.

And they're trying to trap you; they've got teeth in their words,
Do monsters eat only bad boys and bad girls?
Well, the answers are never that clear, you know,
When the things that you're scared of won't let go.

Refrain: But don't be afraid.

**You've got the cover of Love,
To blanket those dragons with kisses and hugs,
And I'll tuck you under a moonlit sky,
And when your prayers are done, I'll wrap you in my arms,
Keep the mystery warm,
Until your bravery comes.**

Cause there's a world of hurt out there,
and it's trying hard to get you,
Three little sparrows on a yellow bus
who made up their minds not to sit with you.
Like the squirrels on the playground who won't pass the ball,
And the bears in the math club who know it all.

Yes, kids can be wild, but they'll follow a crowd,
and they'll single you out for the difference you are.

Refrain: But don't be afraid...

Yeah, monsters are scared that nobody cares,
Cause they don't have a light of their own,
So we'll pray that they find you and the kindness you cling to,
Because God made you great enough,
And your heart can be strong enough to give them your light,
just to brighten the night.

Refrain: So don't be afraid...

Audrey MillerHallett

Pause

November 6, 2024, was one of the most tragic days of my life (as it was for many of us). My country had just elected a convicted felon as our next President.

I felt nauseous, angry, shocked and sad. I did my best to actively connect with friends and my community and express gratitude for them. Still, I wondered, what actions could I take to move forward?

At our Bible study that Sunday, the election was THE topic. We were all asking the same question: What can we (Foundry) do as a church community?

Then our seminary intern, Benjamin Musasizi said something profound: "Why don't we just PAUSE and reflect on where our true refuge and source of strength resides?"

When times are difficult, it takes intentional action to PAUSE. For me these actions are:

Profess – Reclaim God as the source of our safe space and shelter in stormy times.

Ask – Ask God for guidance and direction for living as Christians through challenging times.

Understand – Working to truly understand someone or some situation can show us our way forward.

Shift – Once centered, we can shift our thoughts and actions to doing the next right thing,

Embrace – Through it all, we can embrace the love and grace of Jesus Christ. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39 NIV

Prayer:

In troubled times, Lord, help me to PAUSE and remember that "[you are] my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Psalm 91:2 NIV

Wil Rumble

Standing in Grace, I Surrender

God has given me the freedom to choose. Yet, again and again, I see my own greatest efforts and plans come up empty. Only that which God chooses brings life, life within me and life for others.

All works are empty unless they are Your works through me.

For so long, I have walked a lonely road, and as the song goes, "the only one I have ever known." I have felt God near and spoken with Him. God and Jesus have held me in their hands, yet I have failed to accept what I myself have seen.

My soul cries for rest and renewal in the Light of God.

Even falling to my lowest in hopelessness, surrendering to my oldest angers at God for everything that was and is, God has not forsaken me. He knows that only by walking through my darkest fears can I finally put down my judgment, rest my resentment, surrender my anger, and see the Truth.

I collapse in exhaustion from carrying the weight of my ego up the mountain. When I cry from the deepest depths of my soul, I surrender. With nothing left, I am finally, deeply, and authentically grateful.

Psalm 23:4:

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

With God, everything is possible.

What does it take for me to fully surrender to the only source of life, to know that no matter how it looks, that this is the Hero's journey He has for me?

Standing in Grace I surrender unto Him. I invite the Holy Spirit to flow through me.

"... for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" ... Luke 15:24

Pol Klein

Guideposts for the Journey: Jesus's Commands in Lent

After the inauguration in January, I caught myself beginning to respond to Facebook posts, only to stop and wonder, "What's the point?" So instead, I shared this reflection.

In the fall of 2024 I closely studied the Gospel of Mark, which contains stories about the life and meaning of Jesus Christ. I did this to identify the instructions Jesus **actually** gave for living, in their most granular form.

His commands in Mark are (in order of their appearance, and often repeated):

- Follow me.
- Truly listen.
- Do not fear.
- Be awake against religious corruption.
- Guard against personal complacency.
- Be last and servant of all.
- Cut off what leads you to sin.
- Forgive everyone for everything.
- Have faith in God.
- Give to rulers what is theirs and to God what is God's.

Jesus's instructions to humanity are incredibly difficult to put into practice. I often don't know how to fully reconcile them with being an American citizen here and now. But they are my guideposts. I find it clarifying and liberating to remember the three concentric circles of my life, of every life, and where Jesus's instructions fit.

1. An outer circle of what I **cannot control**, my constraints.
2. A middle circle of what I cannot control, but **can influence**.
3. An inner circle of what I **can control**.

There is something both empowering and comforting when I remember that the instructions of Jesus are within my circle of control. And as I practice his teachings, I will have a positive influence on my circle of influence in the world and on others.

Lent is a period for examining our lives and realigning our actions with Jesus's teachings. Identifying and embracing Jesus's commands in Mark provide the challenge and the encouragement I need in this time and place, this Season of Lent 2025.

Hiding Place

*You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.*
Psalm 32:7 NIV

You hope.
You pray.
You cross your fingers.
You cross your toes.
Then it happens.
Not the outcome you were hoping for.
Where do we run?
Where do we hide?
Whom can we trust?

The psalmist shares that God is our ultimate safe-space. I hope you will take a moment today to reflect on Her graciousness through the words and music of the 1980s hymn, "You Are My Hiding Place" by Michael Lerner. *Use the QR Code or link to listen to the hymn sung by Maranatha.*

You are my hiding place
You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance
Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you
I will trust in you
Let the weak say I am strong
In the strength of my Lord
I will trust in you.



<https://youtu.be/Wc4b-wKj11c?si=iRHfvs7mUGQRb49w>

One Woman's Journey of Faith

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5: 16–18 NIV

The young woman leaned over the railing of the large vessel. It was April 29, 1923, and she was just arriving in Ellis Island from St. Vincent, B.W.I. The Statue of Liberty loomed ahead. It was an 8-day trip, after stopping in Trinidad to pick up more passengers.

Her shipmates were from other West Indian islands – Barbados, Grenada, St. Kitts, Nevis and more. They were all striving for the same thing – economic opportunities.

Leolin's husband had migrated to Cuba two years earlier to work on the sugar plantations. She left her son with a sister in St. Vincent. Her brothers had migrated to Panama in 1909 to work on the Panama Canal. Her sisters migrated to Trinidad and Aruba. They had all scattered throughout the Caribbean because there was no work on their small island.

With all the resolve she could muster, Leolin traveled further than all of them, going to the United States. Her vision was both short-range and long-term. Immediate relief for her young family and visions of promises for the future. She was a woman of faith. She prayed daily.

The following year her husband and son were able to join her in New York.

Although Anglican, she joined her husband's church, Wesleyan Methodist, founded by other West Indians who wanted to worship in the tradition of their birthplace. These immigrants wanted to pray and thank God for a chance to develop economic well-being for their families. They wanted to acknowledge God's grace bestowed on them.

Leolin's faith in God never wavered. The Lord was her refuge and strength.

Leolin, my grandmother, taught me that too.

Celeste Carr

Grace in All Its Senses

The word Grace can be used in a passive sense – receiving the undeserved gift of God's love and favor without doing anything to get it.

But grace can also be an active word – elegance, beauty in manner, motion, or action, like a graceful dance or a gracious act of giving. The most meaningful application engages both active and passive meanings.

My Grandma Gay (back when it only meant *happy*), lived in grace throughout her life with compassion, humor and good will. Having grown up on a West Virginia mountain farm, she worked hard, raised a family, and buried her siblings, husband, and two children. In her last decade, she settled into a retirement home, assembling welcome baskets for incoming residents, adding soaps and shampoo bottles I had collected from travels. It was never about her; it was always about others – that was her superpower.

She started a non-denominational church service on Sundays at the convalescent home, which became so popular that Jewish residents joined in the sing-alongs. There, she played her most cherished song, Amazing Grace, which carried her through her griefs, fears and doubts straight to God and the loving hands of Jesus.

*'Twas grace that brought us safe thus far
And grace will lead us home*

Grace was a safe space for her and a gift to share with others, while it also drew her closer to God. Anchored in unrelenting love, she was never triggered by disagreeable others; she made no critical judgments, just infinite room for compassionate listening to inform appropriate action.

I am grateful for what she taught me. During this Lent, we are all in a time of great "*dangers, toils, and snares*". May we dwell in and act with grace in all its senses.

Jeff Wheeler

No Lookin' Back

Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Proverbs 4:25-26 NIV

Sea^son 1, Episode 1 of *The Rifleman* first aired on September 30, 1958. Set in the 1880s, it starred Chuck Connors as Lucas McCain and Johnny Crawford as Mark McCain. During a poignant moment when father and son had just moved into a rustic house on a ranch near the fictional town of North Fork in the New Mexico Territory, Lucas said to his son Mark, "There's no lookin' back. We've come too far." Mark replied, "I wasn't really looking back, just remembering back." Even though I wish I could say I am all about looking forward, I more often find myself looking behind rather than ahead. That, no doubt, has to do with the actual number of years on both sides — more behind than ahead.

Today, I cannot control much of anything in my life. Health and lucidity are not guaranteed. I cannot protect those I love from pain and loss and tragedy and illness. Brian Doyle in *One Long River of Song* says the trick is knowing how to be fully present and filled with bountiful love. My parents knew that trick. Throughout their lifetimes they faced the world with quiet grace and hope. They demonstrated to my brothers and me how to live in the moment and make a difference when opportunities arose. Today, I find myself striving to model their behavior. Can I make a sliver of a difference during my remaining years? By the grace of a long-handled spoon, I can.

Prayer:

God, please remove doubt, fear, anxiety and discouragement from my mind and replace them with abundant hope. Amen.

Stephen Roberts

Grace 2.0

As a child, I remember my mother asking a friend, "How are you?" My mom's friend began her response by stating, "Oh, but for the grace of God..."

These words were spoken serenely, above the clamor, pain, and seemingly insurmountable challenges of this sojourner's life.

She understood the powerful dynamic between God's grace and the unpredictable nature of human existence. Her testimony meant she could overcome whatever arose in life due to God's grace that provided her strength and hope in troubled times.

What a refuge!

Throughout my lived experience of God's gifts, my understanding of grace has taken on new meaning. Recently, two close relationships that meant the world to me ended abruptly, not to death, but for reasons that remain unclear.

One lost relationship involved a close family member and the second a long-term friendship from college. Their alienation and estrangement were unthinkable. Where, oh Lord, do I find consolation in my struggle to understand and accept this relationship withdrawal? How do I incorporate these losses into my life for positive change?

I have come to rely on the constancy of family and friends to guide me through the disruptions and joys of life. Perhaps I should more carefully consider what God offers in a grace-filled life:

Acceptance – As a child of God, she hears my cries and accepts me just as I am.

Patience – As a work in progress, God is always refining me for kingdom building.

Love – God will restore joy through her loving presence.

Healing – Grace offers divine restoration where there is brokenness.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the gift of grace. Help me embrace the dynamic nature of human life and the unconditional love and salvation offered by you. Thank you for loving me just as I am. Amen.

Paula Blair

Growing Deep. Growing Up.

The powdery sandy soil of southeastern North Carolina produces forests of long leaf pines with wild dogwoods and azaleas dotting the understory. These tall thin pine trees seem to reach forever to the sky, swaying from side to side in the breeze. If you close your eyes, the whoosh of the branches and pine needles in the wind would make you swear you were near the ocean.

I was also planted in this powdery sandy soil. It was great for play and dreaming. It was in this ground that I was nurtured with unconditional love from family. I was watered with a curiosity of faith that encouraged me to look for God in the questions. And this ground was a safe place to stretch my roots deeper and to grow up.

I've been transplanted in DC almost as long as I was in North Carolina and I'm grateful that my roots have found grounding at Foundry.

When storms come, this grounding has allowed me to bravely sway in the wind.

When I feel my very being changing in new unexpected ways, this grounding has given me confidence in what I might become.

When I peek out from under the blanket of winter to see the sky, this grounding gives me hope in the new day.

From ground like this, let's reach up towards the sun. And together, let's lean into this new season bravely, with confidence, and with hope.

David W. Rice

Staying Grounded

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.
Proverbs 16:9 KJV

My parents were grounded in the wisdom of this proverb by how they lived and got through hard times. Trust God.

They also conveyed to me the need to seek and find daily a grounding connection to know God's grace. A couple of examples of the importance of staying grounded illustrate this.

Buildings need to be properly grounded. Grounding systems do not prevent lightning strikes in electrical storms; they channel an extreme atmospheric charge to dissipate into adjacent ground minimizing severe damage or destruction to buildings and harm to inhabitants.

Similarly, I need a grounding system in life's storms. Trust God.

For gardeners, maintaining and enriching soil is an essential factor for success. Working the ground is a year-round task for a healthy root system. Gardeners today are rediscovering the importance of using materials most people discard such as leaves and composted kitchen scraps to enrich soil. In God's plan, nothing goes to waste, even life's "manure;" things may not be evident for a season or two.

Similarly, I need to nurture my spiritual soil in ways that God intended. This involves having patience and fallow times. Trust God.

Spiritually, Bible verses ground and enrich me through times of worry, fear, anxiety and despair. Repeating favorite Bible verses like the beatitudes or the 23rd Psalm have reminded me that I am grounded and sustained in God's grace.

These verses are my "rosary" of sorts reminding me of my true relationship with God. Trust God.

Meditate on Psalm 55:22 KJV: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he will sustain thee: he will never suffer the righteous to be moved."

Joe Steller

Biology of Kindness

(aka Religion per Dalai Lama)

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. 1 Corinthians 13:4 NRSV

Since my hip replacements 15 and 13 years ago I have fallen on the sidewalk twelve times. Each time, an angel picked me up — whether I was in the Metro or on the sidewalk.

I guess they see it happening and are in shock just like me. After bruises or stitches, crutches or boots, healing takes time and I'm grateful for being myself again, based firmly in, you guessed it, GRACE, God's gift.

I live, you live, we all live in the shadow of God's Holy Spirit, always there as needed.

My gift to you, Lord, is my gratitude and unending love. Help me grow to comfort others as needed. Sometimes I still feel like a seed, so strengthen me please. Amen.

Jeanette Barker



Grace Greater Than All Our Sin

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

Almost 40 years ago, during my cross-country skiing days, I attended a winter retreat at the Casselman Inn, a Maryland hotel that dates to 1842. The parks have many hiking trails and beautiful views. In winter, it turns into even more of a wonderland, as Great Lake-induced snows are lifted into the Appalachian Mountains — a true skier's paradise.

More than the snow, however, I remember the hospitality at the Casselman Inn. The owner, with his deep baritone, took a few moments to sing to us at dinner from Hymn 365 in the United Methodist Hymnal, *Grace Greater Than All Our Sin*:

*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

*Grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
grace, grace, God's grace,
grace that is greater than all our sin!*

I encourage you to read and sing the rest of it from a hymnal. I leave you with a few words from 20th century theologian, Paul Tillich:

"Sometimes ... a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying. 'You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later... Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!' If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience, we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement."

Chuck Kluepfel

Grace Greater than Our Sin

Grace, Grace, God's Grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within; Grace that is greater than all my sins.

Grace Greater than Our Sin, The United Methodist Hymnal #365

The year 2024 presented many challenges for many people.

Loss of jobs. Loss of health. Loss of loved ones to death expected and unexpected. Sometimes there were many losses in one family.

These losses sometimes left family members asking,

"Where is God in this? Why us?"

At times those grief-stricken were blaming themselves. "If I had done more! If I had said more!"

Then, after each questioning, "Will there be light at the end of the tunnel? Where and when will we find the answers? Where and when will we find peace?"

Friends can listen, pray and remind each other that the God we serve goes before us always and is at the crossroads waiting for us.

He knows us by our names and our needs.

He is ready to provide.

We need only to ask.

God's Grace is sufficient.

Prayer:

Dear God. Remind us that we are your children, that you promise to provide all our needs and that you will never let us fall. Our job is to look at you and hold on. Amen

Fay Allen

Grounded in Grace by Using the Word "Grace"

Although I can barely carry a tune, lyrics of the many wonderful hymns in the Methodist tradition have been teachers of theology for me.

The meaning of the word "grace" as in "the unmerited and love action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit" [Our Theology of Grace, the Baltimore-Washington Conference] comes through clearly in such well-known hymns as "Amazing Grace" and "God of Grace and God of Glory."

The meaning of "grace" as in "the sum total of all God's gifts and blessings upon humanity from the moment of creation" [John Wesley] is captured for me in the act of "saying grace" before meals. Many family graces explicitly mention the "many blessings" for which we are grateful and ask God to "make us mindful of the needs of others" who may not be experiencing the same degree of abundance.

Asking the Holy Spirit "to grace" us with its presence is another way of saying "bless us." The ways in which we commonly use the word "grace" quite effectively define its meaning.

Margie McKelvey

Grounded in Jesus, Grounded in Grace

"God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does."
Martin Luther

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Philippians 2:13 RSV

Metanoia is a Greek term describing a transformation that dramatically alters oneself, how one sees others, or one's relationship with God. Martin Luther underwent such a change, releasing him from years of spiritual terror and inability to love God.

Luther's gradual understanding of the Grace of God awakened him to truths about God's love, forgiveness, and acceptance of him in spite of his human shortcomings. He had grown up believing that he had no peace with God and that God was constantly finding fault with him, making it impossible for him to measure up or to be justified without spending hours each day confessing his sins and living the harsh life of a monk as a sort of lifelong punishment.

But Luther had access to the Bible, which the average person did not, and knew how to read it in Greek and Latin. He gradually came to realize that through faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive sacrifice on the cross, the Grace of God was a gift to him as a believer, inexhaustible, free, and unmerited.

When Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the church door in Wittenberg, he was challenging the Catholic Church to debate him and reconsider the validity of indulgences, by which common people could supposedly purchase forgiveness for sins somehow not covered by the price Jesus Christ paid when He died and rose again. Luther's response when told to recant his writings and teachings – "Here I stand. I can do no other" – has inspired us for 500 years.

When we live in Christ, we live in Grace. We lay hold of that Grace by faith in Jesus alone.

Ruth Brown

Grace is Costly

Grace, as a concept, has historically frustrated me, as it often seemed to be used to justify the moral laxity across denominations and deeply embedded in our society.

This form of grace, where people justify their obviously anti-Jesus actions and beliefs with statements like, "I'm imperfect — Jesus loves and forgives me anyway," feels sacrilegious. While it may be technically true, I feel it doesn't reflect the depth and power of true grace.

I've found more peace in a different, more nuanced perspective of grace.

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, pastor and anti-Nazi dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer distinguishes between cheap grace and costly grace.

He writes: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession."

In contrast, costly grace "is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock... It is costly because it costs a man his life."

While grace is freely given by God, receiving it in its fullness requires serious commitment and sacrifice on our part.

Grace must be tended to, cultivated, and nurtured if we are to heal wounds, forgive the unforgivable, and reconcile the irreconcilable — actions which feel increasingly difficult.

I've been angry — so angry, in fact, that I feared I wouldn't have anything uplifting to share for Lent this year. But I do, and here it is:

In the midst of anger, there is a profound invitation in the message of grace. Grace invites us not to excuse ourselves, but to be transformed. Accepting grace fully allows God to change our hearts so we can become agents of peace and understanding in our society and in the world.

This Lenten season, I'm challenging myself to embrace costly grace.

Anne Hardin

Secure Shelter

Why can we rely on living in the shelter of God as such a refuge, such a fortress? Scripture tells us:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8 NRSV

Seminary was a diverse environment. Students came from and were pursuing different faith traditions. Students reflected a variety of socio-economic, ethnic, sexual and gender orientations and identities. We ran the theological spectrum from very conservative to radically progressive. Some had always been in church, while others were there now because God had saved their lives.

In this setting I further developed my understanding of grace in one's life. The life experience of the lifetime church-goers was vastly different from those who had been saved from an abyss.

Preaching classes were often student sermons followed by group evaluations. One cradle Methodist preaching on grace offered a significantly insignificant incident as an example of his receipt of God's grace.

After polite encouragement, a virtual chorus of the class suggested if this was his best example of God's grace, he would be better off preaching on a topic with which he was familiar. It struck me that people who have deeply struggled often have a keener sense of the source of their grace.

While the snarky comments were aimed at his weak illustration, they also pointed to the truth that grace is God's work in us, often given when we are unable to fix or even see our own failings.

Moreover, grace is God's costly work through the cross of Jesus Christ, work that brings us to salvation and shows us the perfecting love of God in Christ. During this Lenten season, let us reflect on how God's work provides us such secure shelter.

Garey Eakes

Oh Ground. Oh Freedom.

Oh Ground, you received us.
You made space for us.

Oh Ground, you fed us.
You collected rain for us.

Oh Ground, you held us.
Until we were ready.

Oh Ground, you cracked open.
You gave us Freedom.

So, Freedom, what will we do
from this Ground?

Oh Freedom, who will we receive?
Oh Freedom, who will we feed and hold?
Oh Freedom, who will we crack open for?

Psalm 139: 13–19 The Message

*Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out;
you formed me in my mother's womb.*

I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking!

Body and soul, I am marvelously made!

I worship in adoration—what a creation!

You know me inside and out,

you know every bone in my body;

You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit,

how I was sculpted from nothing into something.

Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth;

all the stages of my life were spread out before you,

The days of my life all prepared

before I'd even lived one day.

Your thoughts—how rare, how beautiful!

God, I'll never comprehend them!

I couldn't even begin to count them—

any more than I could count the sand of the sea.

Oh, let me rise in the morning and live always with you!

Concrete

When I was a younger person
I had a yard and a garden.
I would weed and water
And once a season, plant.

The seeds intrigued me
In every stage of their development.
From hardened shells, pushed into darkness,
To tender, spry fingers stretching toward light.
Eventually, strong shoots, rooted in that same darkness,
Gave structure to the chaos of loose soil, and
Withstood pelting rain.

When I was a younger person
I lived in a semirural suburb.
I could breathe cool night air,
And I could see the stars.

The stars were a constant in my life.
Orion would jump out from the sky, and
occasionally, Cassiopeia would catch my eye.
The distant lights shone, and I could ground myself
In their breaking the darkness for millions of years.

Now I live in the city,
Where my feet pound pavement
And "go touch some grass" is a sardonic rejoinder.

Now I live in the city,
Where light pollution covers the night sky in dull orange,
And I have to travel to see the stars.

But I still keep the lessons
Of Seeds
Of the Stars
In my heart.
And remind myself
Of their natural constancy
That will outlast anything
In this world of concrete, glass, and steel.

Kinship by Grace

In the mid 90's when we saw poor people "living on the streets" and Mitch Snyder was one of the nation's best-known advocates for the unhoused, my office was in downtown DC.

We saw people asking for "some change." A colleague and I talked about how best to be helpful in systemic ways. We did not just want to look for change to give to a person who approached us and decide who we deemed worthy. That did not mean that we would not give an individual person "change," but we wanted to support organizations.

Through the years we got to know people we saw regularly.

On very cold or extremely hot days, we were especially concerned about the unhoused. A male white veteran had said he usually made enough money asking for change to rent a room each night. If the weather got bad, he could stay with his sister. Connections and community.

One day after work, I was waiting at the bus stop to go home.

A stocky Black man who I recognized from the streets, asked me for change. I apologetically said, "I just have enough change to catch the bus. I am sorry."

He misunderstood me, and thought I said I did not have enough change to ride the bus.

As I prepared to get on the bus, he rushed toward me saying, "Take this," as he handed me his change. "You said you did not have enough money to ride the bus. My mother always told me to help people. Take this."

I thanked him profusely. An impulse from God to do good resided in his heart. On that day he and I were God's beloved, kinfolk sharing the loving action of God in human form.

Prayer:

May our connections give a glimpse of God's Grace.

Catherine Hargrove

Connection and Commitment

When I first thought about the topic of Grounded in Grace, my initial thoughts were about the people and events in my life right now, connection at home, at work and in the community. There is also a bit of uncertainty about the immediate future of the work I do, as well as the direction of my home area, the state and country.

After reading Pastor Ginger's theme description, the word that comes to mind is commitment. I seek to continue to focus on a of couple personal goals, one being the continued journey of releasing a first publication and the other being to increase my fiber intake and lower the amount of dairy and meat products I eat, which will help lower my LDL cholesterol, which was found in late 2024 to be slightly elevated.

Self-care is something I really want to make a higher priority in 2025, not just for Lent and the Easter season. I want to be able when necessary to allow more time to reflect on what I have done and rest when my body and mind tell me to do so. I am growing to appreciate the people in my life and seek to not take them for granted.

Being present with people is very important and time cannot be taken for granted. Those we love and care about carry us through the tough moments and circumstances we are put in. "We are held in God's strong arms" are words from Pastor Ginger that fit very well with the theme of commitment.

We are committed to serve Him and in turn, he is committed in protecting us and helping us to see the direction in which we need to go. May it be so. Amen.

Daniel Conklin

God's Blessings

...to each one of us grace has been given ... Ephesians 4:7 NIV

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – German Lutheran pastor, theologian, anti-Nazi dissident, martyr – made these distinctions about grace:

CHEAP grace is "forgiveness without repentance, baptism without discipline, communion without confession."

COSTLY grace is "the gospel which must be sought after again and again...the treasure hidden in a field, the pearl of great price."

Bonhoeffer emphasizes that we must "leave all to follow Christ, be torn out of our own existence and set down in the midst of the holy history of God on earth." God gives us grace, but we must also ask continually for it, realize it, be thankful for it. It is free but not cheap.

On April 9, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged, naked, at Flossenburg concentration camp, two weeks before the United States liberated it. He said, "this is the end – but for me the beginning of Life."

The cost of following Jesus is high. But the blessings are numerous. Consider Mark 10: 29–31: Jesus says that if we leave house, family, children, fields, etc. for His sake, we will receive them one hundredfold, now and in eternal life.

Having hundreds of children in my life has more than compensated for giving up biological children. What blessings!

Ella Cleveland

When Is Helping, Hurting?

*"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.
Mark 10:51 NIV*

GratITUDE for God's grace makes us more compassionate.

We want to give others aid and that makes us feel good besides.

I just this week asked a friend for a ride to get a cashier's check, and she was glad to oblige.

She also printed out all the paperwork required.

Thoughtfully, she asked if I needed assistance getting into her SUV or closing its heavy door.

I was glad she asked and glad to show I did not need that help.

We had a long wait at the bank while the cashier's check was created.

My friend asked if I'd like to sit, which by then, I would. (Scoliosis) So she brought a chair over.

This far, excellent help, always asking before doing.

Once I was sitting, things took a turn.

The cashier began to direct her questions to my friend.

After I quickly stood up to answer myself twice or thrice.

Matters improved as both of them only meant to be nice.

I was shocked at how it had felt to be ignored — demeaned, incompetent, of no account.

It was a blessing to be able to regain speaking for myself.

After the transaction, I felt a great sense of accomplishment.

If it had all been done for me, I'd have felt relief, but also dependent.

True help requires sensitivity, and asking first.

Patricia Wood

The Truth of My Life

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.
Genesis 1:31 NIV

The earliest experience of my life was as an outsider looking in at the world. Born gay in a rabidly homophobic society, I instinctively knew its danger even before I understood my own nature.

The dispassionate account by an elder of a gay man beaten by a mob left me wondering why I was alone with my silent compassion. A few years later happening upon a mob gleefully pummeling a thief into bloody submission, I couldn't understand why I was alone in my revulsion.

It is said that one of the greatest human desires is to be fully known, and to be fully known is also one of our greatest fears. Both are mine.

In response, the arc of my life's experience has been an inquiry into who I am, even before understanding that this was what I was doing.

My lived experience of the journey inward – the work of dying to self which Jesus directs, dying to the egoic self with its deluded belief of separation from the Creator – revealed the presence of the divine grace within all creation.

The work is not outward to acquire something I don't have, but inward beyond subjective thoughts and feelings that create the stories of my life, to know through experience the undivided divine spirit within, with its fulfilling nature of peace.

We spend our lives looking for something that will satisfy us. We look outside because we do not know that our own nature is inherently complete.

"There is a huge silence inside each of us that beckons us unto itself, and the recovery of our own silence can begin to teach us the language of heaven." Meister Eckhart.

Karl Marshall

Grounded in Grace

A Walking Meditation Playlist – Playtime: 40 minutes

Intro

1. "Genesis" Amelia Day
2. "In the Gloaming" The Story

"Rooting"

3. "Though My Soul May Set in Darkness" Carl Weingarten
4. "You Are My Hiding Place" Selah
5. "I Know Where You Are" Girlyman
6. "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing / If I Could Hie to Kolob"

Elenyi, Sarah Young

7. "Take This Body Home" Rose Betts
8. "Found/Tonight" Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ben Platt
9. "The Call" Regina Spektor

Outro

10. "Come Tenderness" Lisa Gerrard
11. "Northern Lights" Ola Gjello, Voces8



Shortened Link: <https://bit.ly/4jGo9Zz>

Permalink:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4P6emrFVrfkPTglmBJ5Jkt?si=fL1vUVhMRRWOK6DanDypgA>

Curated by MJ Jean

Learning Grace from a Soap Opera

Several years ago I participated in a workshop at Metropolitan Memorial UMC. During a small group session, we were asked to share a brief story of someone we had encountered who lived their faith. I was a tad embarrassed to say that the first person who came to mind was a soap opera character. As I started describing her, a man in my group who was much younger than me waved his hand excitedly and said "Yes! That was Emma Snyder on *As the World Turns!*"

I used to watch that show with my mother while we did chores like ironing and folding laundry. Emma lived on a farm outside of Oakdale, the fictional setting for the soap opera. In those daytime dramas, many of the characters were lovable, but often with some huge character flaws — things like stealing their twin brother's wife or cheating someone out of their inheritance.

Often these flawed folks would end up at Emma's farmhouse door to escape the people they'd harmed. And each time I'd think "Ok, even Emma isn't going to let this guy in." But she always did. She offered them coffee and comfort food, listened to their stories, and calmly made it clear that they had done wrong, but could find a way to make amends and be forgiven.

At that time in my life, I attended church regularly with my parents, but didn't yet understand the concept of grace. I was surprised every time by Emma's welcoming warmth and her ability to see the good in people who had done horrible things. For years, when I encountered someone who tested my patience, I "channeled" Emma. I later discovered what she offered them was grace.

Lynn Smarte

My Journey

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart. Jeremiah 29:13 NIV

I was shaken to my core when a medical emergency landed me in the emergency room, essentially transforming my active lifestyle into a restricting shadow.

My journey toward healing challenged my faith, my motivation, and my determination toward building a stronger foundation.

A procession of doctors, physical therapists, and Foundry's Care Team members formed by my side.

The doctors diagnosed, the physical therapists strengthened me. The empathetic Foundry Care Team drove me to doctors' appointments, delivered groceries, addressed difficult topics.

I challenged myself by walking twice daily hallway laps, with additional walking outside along neighborhood blocks and getting to Foundry for Sunday services.

The diversity of Foundry's musical choices and the meaningful sermon themes resonate with me. Practicing Spirituality classes immerse me in spirited discussions.

I am recreating my life with renewed faith and gratitude in God. While uprooting my core, God is planting seeds for renewal, resilience, and rejuvenation toward a stronger future.

Prayer:

Dear God of bountiful blessings and inspiration, guide me on my journey with your steadfast love. Amen.

Diane Seeger

Prayer as a Gift of Grace

What does grace mean to me? Grace is an unmerited gift from God. No effort is required of me. Grace is available to all, like rain, sunshine, or air. Yet, knowledge of the suffering in our world has led me to understand that I enjoy privileges that many of the human family do not – a safe, peaceful neighborhood, clean water, abundant nutritious food, a comfortable bed, a loving family. So much to be grateful for that is pure grace. Over the years, I have come to realize that Grace might be another name for our benevolent God.

What does it mean to be "grounded in grace"? To me, it means being deeply rooted in God – having a deep trust in God, and feeling safe, knowing that God never leaves me.

Being grounded in Grace is also a journey. It is being intentional about availing myself of means of connection with God – prayer, worship, scripture study, time in nature and with beloved family and friends, to name some. These draw me close to God and fill me with peace. Not that I am shielded from, or immune to stress, or pain, or grief, but God's grace helps me respond to challenging circumstances with calm, and not be destroyed by them.

As I reflect on the theme of this year's Lenten Devotional, I am beginning to understand that grace is abundantly given to me so that I may share it. One way I can do that is through intercessory prayer. Last October, I was introduced to the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, a year-long prayer journey through every region of the world. Praying the Cycle in addition to my regular list allows me to share God's grace with others in diverse regions of the world.

Josiane Blackman

Grace Rising

*...Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise...
...Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise...*

Excerpted from *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou

When yeast meets warm liquid, grain, and salt, it does a magical dance. It uplifts ingredients into risen dough that, once baked, becomes sustenance: bread.

A similar sustaining phenomena happens when the spiritual yeast of God's grace meets our souls. Grace is always there, unfailingly waiting within us. All we need to do is receive it and let it manifest.

So often this past year I found myself in need of spiritual leavening. I kept falling flat under the weight of depressing news, overwhelming events, and sad life changes.

My inner dialog did not help.

"Who am I — a relatively healthy woman of privilege — to complain?"

"Look at Maya! She is rising from a heritage of slavery and her Black lived experience. My pain is nothing compared to that, or to that of my ill friend, my troubled family member, my work-battered neighbor, the innocents suffering war, or the lives shattered by natural disaster."

One day, God interrupted.

"Honey," God said, "You could teach the master class in self-denial! Your pain is real pain. It's okay to feel it. Be still. Breathe. Know I'm here. You'll get through it by and by."

Heard, God.

Your message resonates. I can rise through your grace toward a glimmering daybreak moment that's "wondrously clear."

Prayer:

God, I love hearing you say: "Because you, my beloved child, love me, I will rescue you; I will protect you, for you acknowledge my name. You will call on me, and I will answer you. I will be with you in trouble." Psalm 91:14-16 NIV

Joanne Steller

The Transformative Power of Prayer

On a Sunday in January, eighteen people joined at Foundry and online to share experiences of prayer and pray together. "I want to hear stories of how prayer can transform lives," said one participant. The stories abounded as people shared experiences of unexpected grace, signs of God dwelling among us, faithful prayers asked for many years that were finally answered.

As Christians we have a special pathway to grace: the gift of connecting to God and each other through prayer. "We are a community that has the privilege of praying with and for one another," say our pastors as they open our Call to Prayer.

In these times of distress, loneliness, and lack of meaning that so many are experiencing, prayer can help us draw strength from one another and God. That strength sometimes comes in the inexplicable mystical wind, fire, miracles, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. As Richard Rohr summarizes in *Falling Upward*: Prayer opens us to the workings of the Divine.

I am blessed with several prayer partners with whom I connect on a daily or weekly basis. We pray with thanksgiving for God's work in the world; for friends, children and parents; for those suffering and those who need miracles to get through tough times. We pray when life makes no sense and in the face of overwhelming heartbreak. May you be comforted with a prayerful connection to others and Holy Spirit.

Prayer:

Almighty God, we pray for comfort in challenging times and for hope when things feel hopeless. Please help us to see clearly our purpose in You. May your light shine upon us as we strive to be your presence in the world. In Christ's name we ask these things.

Camilla Taft Hicks

At Home at Foundry

My journey to Foundry followed a near death experience in 2023. Once out of the hospital, I knew that spiritual nourishment was missing from my life. I didn't know how to address that. Then, as part of the process to get Medicaid, I was instructed to go to Foundry's ID ministry. I was intrigued by what I found out about the church, and I wanted to know more.

I found that everyone at Foundry cared. It was blissful – everyone had an open heart! Now I go to both services, Sunday School classes, plus anything else that's going on. Margaret Yao mentored me; she held my hand and led me to classes that I've gotten a lot out of.

Since I was a child, it's been hard for me to read, comprehend and retain information. I'm working on that, because everything I do at Foundry includes reading, like the classes on *My Grandmother's Hands* and *Jesus and the Disinherited*. I feel compelled to read, and it's therapeutic. I feel good, strong and whole at Foundry.

I've always prayed the verse "Be slow to speak and quick to listen" (James 1:19). With my comprehension issues, I struggled to listen. I felt afraid I would forget what I wanted to say. But in groups at Foundry, I can really listen to what people say. The interaction and camaraderie are special. The prayer workshop was more of that connection, and I believe I shared something meaningful with my prayer partner.

I've never been in a church so committed to each person, giving everyone a platform to worship God and to enhance their spiritual lives. My connection with Foundry people is genuine.

Now I say, "Foundry, where have you been all my life?"

Jimmie A. McGill

Grace That Sustains Us

In these challenging times,
when the world feels so uncertain,
and leaders incite violence and spread fear,

We seek refuge in Your grace, O God.
Your presence is our sanctuary,
a place where we find peace amidst the chaos.

Help us to trust in Your unwavering compassion,
to feel the safety of Your embrace,
and respite for the challenges ahead.

Let Your grace anchor us,
providing the strength to face each day with courage,
and the will to extend grace, even when it's difficult.

Ground us, O Lord, give us bravery to stand firm,
the fortitude to seek justice,
and the power to not lose hope.

Through Jesus, we find the path to Your love,
the ability to love ourselves and each other,
and to experience the grace that sustains us.

Prayer:

God, with grateful hearts we invite you to fill us with your grace and ground us in your love. In Jesus name, Amen.

Shawn Steffy

Mad About God

I read somewhere that a false religion will say "Fear not! Believe in me and nothing bad will happen to you." while a true religion will say "Fear not! Everything you are afraid of might happen to you, but that is nothing to be afraid of."

Being grounded in faith that God is with us will not save us from heartbreak and suffering. Jesus was the beloved of God, but Holy Week remembers his fear in the garden which was followed by his torture and death. But we will not be alone, and suffering will not be the last word. Easter is coming.

In a time of my life when many of my fears all happened at once, I tried hard to remain grounded in God. And looking back if I had to say the thing that saved my faith, it was allowing myself to get **really** really mad at God.

I did not say "Your Will be done." I said some choice words that I cannot repeat here. Loudly. Usually in my car but sometimes at home or in my journal. Being grounded in the love of God means that God can handle your anger. Take comfort in the Psalms which feel free to yell at God. Consider this from Psalm 44: *Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?*

Now years later I look back and I know I was held by God during that time and the rebuilding years that followed. The times I went through were not fun, and I was not rescued from them, but they did not define my life, and I am happier now than I was before.

Joanne Garlow

A Fortress of Grace

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Psalm 91:1-2 NIV

A fortress is a stronghold, a place of safety and defense against external threats. Within ancient castles, fortresses were foundations constructed with thick walls, watchtowers, and gates to withstand enemy attacks.

Here we are in the present age, in fear, surrounded by terrorist attacks, natural disasters, diseases, and civil unrest. Despite security technology, scientific discoveries, and peacemaker voices, our confidence, trust, and faith are diminished. Cynicism sets in, and we build barriers to protect us — physically and emotionally — from the world.

In Psalm 91:2, we encounter a divine fortress, not built of stone and mortar to hide from those out to get us, but one that shields us from the attacks of life's pressures, fears, and uncertainties. This is the fortress of God's enveloping and unwavering protection and grace.

No storm can breach the shelter of God's grace. No enemy can penetrate the walls of God's love.

When we surrender and put 100% trust and confidence in God, we are met with a refuge of peace and strength. It is because of this surrender that, as we draw closer, we can build our lives on a solid foundation more substantial than stone, one which endures forever.

"A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing....the Spirit and the gifts are ours...God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever." *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, The United Methodist Hymnal, #110.*

Drew Williams

Living into the Basics

My outrage in reaction to the racism, hatred, toxic condescension and lies being circulated in our country could overwhelm me. I want to be grateful for God's embracing and loving presence in my own life, but also stand up for justice, the rule of law and honesty.

In outrageous times, where is the balance between justice and kindness?

I'm not sure I have the answer, but I'm going to try to live into the action of "doing justice, loving kindness and acting with humility" that is God's expectation of me — the basics.

Of course, God would still love me if I lashed out in anger instead. But I've walked outside the ring fence of kindness and humility enough to know it feels awful.

Yet, doing nothing feels like abandoning "active justice."

For me, avoiding passivity means keeping an attitude of "honesty, kindness and integrity," without returning fire for fire, and hoping that my steadiness provides a good example for others. There are people of good will and intent, and possibly even hard-core "haters" who are tiring of the constant vitriol and hollow attacks. There is no greatness in anger and violence.

We are living in a challenge. Let's feel called to keep the light of non-judgmental grace and service glowing. Let's keep our own hearts out of the mud of anger and outrage so common among burned-out and disillusioned people of all stripes.

Living in DC, maybe there are those that have a big voice. I don't have a national platform, but I can work in my community to serve people in need. And it will be doing God's will in the context of God's grace. The basics.

The steady, daily action of serving community needs may be the seeds planted for bigger messages. There is work to be done....

Karin Berry

When Grace Is the Motivator

For God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13 RSV

Jesus was speaking to a crowd of tax collectors and sinners when Pharisees and scribes, proud and staunch legalists, accused him of associating with outcasts. Jesus told the Parable of the Prodigal Son to illustrate that God's grace, mercy, and desire for reconciliation over-ruled Jewish law and the customs that Jews had lived by for generations.

This parable would have sounded far more shocking to the legalists than it may to us. A son asking for his share of the father's estate was disrespectful and unthinkable. It was typically to be met with a slap on the face and a disowning of the audacious young man. The family would have held a funeral for him to finalize his departure.

But the father grants his son's wish, just as God allows sinners to go their way if they are determined to do so.

Shocking the listeners further, Jesus tells them that the son wasted all he had taken in debauchery and careless spending until it was gone. A famine arose, further adding to the desperate situation that resulted, analogous to what it means to separate oneself completely from God's grace and mercy.

But the son eventually does return, humbling himself and intending to beg for forgiveness from a father he remembered was a loving, generous and kind man, even to his lowliest servants. His memory held true. The father runs to his son, kisses him repeatedly, and orders a joyous celebration.

It was through God's grace that the son was finally moved to come home and ask for reconciliation, and through grace that the father forgave all. There is hope for both repentance and forgiveness, when grace is the motivator for both.

Ruth Brown

The Silent Protector

In *The Dark Knight*, Batman chooses to shoulder the blame for crimes committed by Harvey Dent, a fallen hero. By doing so, he protects Gotham's fragile hope, even if it means enduring shame and rejection himself.

This is a striking picture of grace: voluntarily taking on another's burden, especially when you are not at fault.

Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

To "carry another's burden" is more than a gesture of kindness; it reflects the selfless love Christ showed on the cross. Jesus, though innocent, bore our sins so we could be free.

His sacrifice reminds us that true grace rarely comes without cost.

Grace shines brightest in moments of sacrifice. We may not patrol rooftops in capes, but we can follow Batman's example — and more importantly, Christ's example — by stepping in when someone is weighed down.

It could be as simple as offering a listening ear, covering an unexpected expense, or defending a friend who faces criticism. Each act of grace communicates that we see and value them enough to share in their struggle.

Though we may not receive applause for these efforts, we follow in the footsteps of a Savior who took on the ultimate burden.

Our silent, often unseen choices to bear one another's burdens can preserve hope and bring healing in a hurting world.

May we courageously walk in that grace each day.

Jonathan Brown

Associate Pastor

Director of Discipleship

Sunny Breakthrough

In these troubled times, where the forces of darkness and division are having their day, the light is always in the shadows, looking to break through.

Our Lord is Eternal, and His Light guides us and enables us to overcome and endure many things. Let this Amazing Grace be a reminder to be the people we are called to be by His Spirit!

Serge Thomas



Run to God

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16 KJV

There is an invitation extended to each of us, a standing invitation from the heart of God. The Apostle Paul encourages us to approach God's throne boldly. Not timidly, not with uncertainty, but with confidence, knowing we will receive mercy and find the grace we need.

What an incredible gift to hold onto from Resurrection Day forward!

On Easter morning, we celebrate Christ's triumph over sin and death. Because He lives, we are no longer bound by fear or shame. We are children of a risen King, and with that comes the promise that God's throne is not one of judgment but of grace.

When life overwhelms us, when failure grips our hearts, when hope feels distant, what do we do?

Run. Not away from God, but toward Him.

In the same way that the disciples ran to the empty tomb, desperate to see and believe, we can run straight into the arms of God, who is ready to receive us with love and mercy.

This Easter, let the empty tomb remind you of the fullness of God's grace. Let it embolden you to approach Him in prayer, praise, and even in your brokenness.

You never have to walk alone or carry your burdens without help.

So run with joy, with faith, and with the confidence that the One who conquered the grave goes with you, every step of the way.

Benjamin Musasizi

Foundry's Seminary Intern

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