

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

NEW MORNING MERCIES

*A Daily Gospel Devotional*

LARGE PRINT EDITION

“Each morning for years, Paul Tripp has served fresh-brewed wisdom and encouragement through his pithy, thought-provoking tweets, reminding us again and again of the all-sufficiency of Christ and his grace. *New Morning Mercies* offers more of the same! These devotional readings will strengthen, nourish, and recalibrate your heart, and open your eyes to behold God’s fresh mercies at the dawn of each new day.”

**Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth**, author; Founder, Revive Our Hearts and True Woman

“*New Morning Mercies* is a daily shot in the arm of fresh gospel grace, reminding us we never have to spend a single day of our lives without the merciful presence of Jesus. I’ve used it over many years and don’t ever want it far from my nightstand. It will be wonderfully encouraging for any believer.”

**Sam Allberry**, Associate Pastor, Immanuel Nashville; author; speaker

“There are few writers I trust more with my soul than Paul Tripp. A lifelong student of the Scriptures and the human heart, he knows how to open up the one and apply it to the other. This format might perhaps be the best medium for absorbing Tripp’s insights. He gives us so much to ponder; I find myself meditating on one weighty truth for the rest of the day. Filled with fresh insight, pastoral wisdom, and gospel depth, it’s not an exaggeration to call this book life-changing. I’ve recommended this devotional more than any other for several years now.”

**J. D. Greear**, Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

“Over the last year, *New Morning Mercies* has been a great source of life to me. Paul Tripp’s writing encourages those who have grown weary of the struggle, living under the weight of the world.”

**TobyMac**, hip-hop recording artist; music producer; songwriter

“Paul Tripp beautifully blends wisdom that has been gained through years of counseling, insight into the biblical story of redemption, and his strong grasp of Christ as our substitute to produce a series of daily devotions that both warm the heart of the hurting and challenge the complacent. You will find this book to be both deeply rooted in scriptural truths and yet eminently readable. I highly recommend it!”

**Elyse Fitzpatrick**, coauthor, *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women*



*New Morning Mercies*

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# NEW MORNING MERCIES

*A Daily Gospel Devotional*

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional (Large Print Edition)*

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*Ben, you asked to be mentored  
and you became a substantial contributor.  
Isn't that just the way our God works?*





# INTRODUCTION

Each morning, I “tweet” three gospel thoughts. That is, I post three brief thoughts about the Christian faith on the social media site Twitter. My goal is to confront and comfort people with the life-rattling truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I want people to see that the grace of the gospel is not so much about changing the religious aspect of their lives, but about everything in life that defines, identifies, and motivates them. I am calling people to see the gospel as a window through which they are to look at everything in life.

By the Lord’s grace, these tweets have been well received, and numerous people have encouraged me to use them as the basis for a devotional book, with 365 meditations on the gospel truths expressed in the tweets. The book you are holding in your hands is my response to those requests. Each day’s reading opens with one of my gospel tweets, lightly edited, and then a meditation that expands on it.

It is a daunting task to sit down and write 365 devotions. My willingness to attempt such a feat wasn’t rooted in my pride in my ability as an author, but in my confidence in the amazing breadth and depth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As I began writing, I was excited to do some spiritual spelunking, that is, venturing down into the cavernous depths of the faith that I hold so dear. I did so, not so much as an expert, but as a pilgrim or an explorer. I sat down to write, not thinking that I had the gospel mastered, but that there was evidence in my life that I needed to be further mastered by the very message of grace that sits at the epicenter of everything I do in ministry.

Now, I have to be honest here—I didn’t write this devotional just for you. No, I wrote it for myself as well. There is no reality, principle, observation, truth, command, encouragement, exhortation, or rebuke in this devotional that I don’t desperately need myself. I’m like you; familiarity causes me not to treasure the

gospel of Jesus Christ as I should. As the themes of grace get more and more familiar and common, they don't capture my attention and awe as they once did. When amazing realities of the gospel quit commanding your attention, your awe, and your worship, other things in your life will capture your attention instead. When you quit celebrating grace, you begin to forget how much you need grace, and when you forget how much you need grace, you quit seeking the rescue and strength that only grace can give. This means you begin to see yourself as more righteous, strong, and wise than you actually are, and in so doing, you set yourself up for trouble.

So this devotional is a call for you and me to remember. It's a call to remember the horrible disaster of sin. It's a call to remember Jesus, who stood in our place. It's a call to remember the righteousness that is his gift. It's call to remember the transforming power of the grace you and I couldn't have earned. It's a call to remember the destiny that is guaranteed to all of God's blood-purchased children. It's a call to remember his sovereignty and his glory. It's a call to remember that remembering is spiritual war; even for this we need grace.

The title of this devotional is not only a reference to the way the Bible talks about God's grace (Lam. 3:22–23), but also an allusion to a famous hymn that I think we should sing every day.

“Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!  
 Morning by morning new mercies I see:  
 All I have needed thy hand hath provided—  
 Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!”

One of the stunning realities of the Christian life is that in a world where everything is in some state of decay, God's mercies never grow old. They never run out. They never are ill-timed. They never dry up. They never grow weak. They never get weary. They never fail to meet the need. They never disappoint. They never, ever fail, because they really are new every morning. Formfitted for the challenges, disappointments, sufferings, temptations, and struggles with sin within and without are the mercies of our Lord. Sometimes they are:

- Awe-inspiring mercies
- Rebuking mercies
- Strengthening mercies
- Hope-giving mercies
- Heart-exposing mercies
- Rescuing mercies
- Transforming mercies
- Forgiving mercies
- Provision-making mercies

Uncomfortable mercies  
Glory-revealing mercies  
Truth-illuminating mercies  
Courage-giving mercies.

God's mercies don't come in one color; no, they come in every shade of every color of the rainbow of his grace. God's mercies are not the sound of one instrument; no, they sound the note of every instrument of his grace. God's mercy is general; all of his children bask in his mercy. God's mercy is specific; each child receives the mercy that is designed for his or her particular moment of need. God's mercy is predictable; it is the fountain that never stops flowing. God's mercy is unpredictable; it comes to us in surprising forms. God's mercy is a radical theology, but it is more than a theology; it is life to all who believe. God's mercy is ultimate comfort, but it is also a call to a brand-new way of living. God's mercy really does change everything forever, for all upon whom this mercy is bestowed.

So read and remember God's new morning mercies and celebrate your identity as the object of mercy that reaches beyond the ability of the heart to grasp and the words of one author to describe.



# JANUARY 1

*Here's the bottom line. The Christian life, the church, our faith are not about us, they're about him—his plan, his kingdom, his glory.*

It really is the struggle of struggles. It is counterintuitive for us all. It is the thing that makes our lives messy and our relationships conflictual. It is what sidetracks our thoughts and kidnaps our desires. It is the thing below all the other things that you could point to that argues for our need for grace. It is the one battle that one never escapes. It is the one place where ten out of ten of us need rescue. It is the fight that God wages on our behalf to help us to remember that life is simply not about us. It is about God—his plan, his kingdom, and his glory.

This is precisely why the first four words of the Bible may be its most important words: “In the beginning, God . . .” These are four thunderously important words. They really do change everything, from the way that you think about your identity, meaning, and purpose to the way that you approach even the most incidental of human duties. Everything that was created was made by God and for God. All the glories of the created world were designed to point to his glory. The universe is his, designed to function according to his purpose and plan. That includes you and me. We were not made to live independent, self-directed lives. We were not meant to exist according to our own little self-oriented plans, living for our own moments of glory. No, we were created to live for him.

Where is this Godward living meant to find expression? It is meant to be expressed not just in the religious dimension of our lives, but in every aspect of our existence. I love how Paul captures this in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” When Paul thinks of the call to live for the glory of God, he doesn't first think of the big, life-changing, self-consciously spiritual moments of life. No, he thinks of something as mundane and repetitive as eating and drinking. Even the most regular, seemingly unimportant tasks of my life must be shaped and directed by a heartfelt desire for the glory of God. Now, I don't know about you, but in the busyness of life I lose sight of God's existence, let alone his glory!

Let's start the new year by admitting that there is nothing less natural for us than to live for the glory of another. This admission is the doorway not to despair, but to hope. God knew that in your sin you would never live this way, so he sent his Son to live the life you couldn't, to die on your behalf, and to rise again, conquering sin and death. He did this so that you would not only be forgiven for your allegiance to your own glory, but have every grace you need to live for his. When you admit your need for help, you connect yourself to the rescue he has already provided in his Son, Jesus. Reach out for hope by reaching out for the rescue again today.

*For further study and encouragement: Psalm 115*

# JANUARY 2

*Your rest is not to be found in figuring your life out, but in trusting the One who has it all figured out for your good and his glory.*

We were on our way to the local mall with our two young boys when the three-year-old asked out of the blue, “Daddy, if God made everything, did he make light poles?” I had the thought that all parents have, again and again, as they deal with the endless “why” questions that little ones ask: “How do we get from where we are to where we need to be in this conversation?” Or, “Why does he have to ask me ‘why’ questions all the time?”

Human beings have a deep desire to know and understand. We spend much of our daily mental time trying to figure things out. We don’t live by instinct. We don’t leave our lives alone. We are all theologians. We are all philosophers. We are all archaeologists who dig into the mounds of our lives to try to make sense of the civilization that is our story. This God-designed mental motivation is accompanied by wonderful and mysterious analytical gifts. This drive and those gifts set us apart from the rest of creation. They are holy, created by God to draw us to him, so that we can know him and understand ourselves in light of his existence and will.

But sin makes this drive and these gifts dangerous. They tempt us to think that we can find our hearts by figuring it all out. It’s the “If only I could understand this or that, then I’d be secure” way of living. But it never works. In your most brilliant moment, you will still be left with mystery in your life; sometimes even painful mystery. We all face things that appear to make little sense and don’t seem to serve any good purpose. So rest is never found in the quest to understand it all. No, rest is found in trusting the One who understands it all and rules it all for his glory and our good.

Few passages capture that rest better than Psalm 62:5–7: “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.”

In moments when you wish you knew what you can’t know, there is rest to be found. There is One who knows. He loves you and rules what you don’t understand with your good in mind.

*For further study and encouragement: 2 Corinthians 5:1–10*

# JANUARY 3

*If eternity is the plan, then it makes no sense to shrink your living down to the needs and wants of this little moment.*

There is no doubt about it—the Bible is a big-picture book that calls us to big-picture living. It stretches the elasticity of your mind as it calls you to think about things before the world began and thousands of years into eternity. The Bible simply does not permit you to live for the moment. It doesn't give you room to shrink your thoughts, desires, words, and actions down to whatever spontaneous thought, emotion, or need grips you at any given time. In a moment, your thoughts can seem more important than they actually are. In a moment, your emotions can seem more reliable than they really are. In a moment, your needs can seem more essential than they truly are. We are meant to live lives that are connected to beginnings and to endings. And we are meant to live this way because all that we do is meant to have connection to the God of beginnings and endings, by whom and for whom we were created.

It's hard to live with eternity in view. Life does shrink to the moment again and again. There are moments when it seems that the most important thing in life is getting through this traffic, winning this argument, or satisfying this sexual desire. There are moments when our happiness and contentment shrink to getting those new shoes or to the steak that is just ten minutes away. There are moments when who we are, who God is, and where this whole thing is going shrink into the background of the thoughts, emotions, and needs of the moment. There are moments when we get lost in the middle of God's story. We lose our minds, we lose our sense of direction, and we lose our remembrance of him.

God reminds us that this is not all there is, that we were created and re-created in Christ Jesus for eternity. He reminds us not to live for the treasures of the moment: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19–20).

Think about this: if God has already granted you a place in eternity, then he has also granted you all the grace you need along the way, or you'd never get there. There is grace for our fickle and easily distracted hearts. There is rescue for our self-absorption and lack of focus. The God of eternity grants you his eternal grace so that you can live with eternity in view.

*For further study and encouragement: Luke 12:13–21*



# JANUARY 4

*The best theology will not remove mystery from your life, so rest is found in trusting the One who rules, is all, and knows no mystery.*

Her voice quivered that morning as she told me to get home as quickly as I could. My wife, Luella, is a very emotionally stable woman. She isn't easily rocked. I knew what we were facing was serious because it *had* rocked her. I was about six hours away; with my assistant, I made the nervous trip home.

Nicole, our daughter, had started her walk home from work late the previous night, as she had done many nights before. A car driven by a drunk and unlicensed driver careened up on the sidewalk and crushed Nicole against a wall. She had devastating injuries, including eleven breaks of her pelvis and massive internal bleeding. When I finally got to the hospital and walked into Nicole's intensive-care room, I did what any father with a drop of parental blood in him would do. I fell apart. I crawled up on Nicole's bed, not sure if she could hear me, and said, "It's Dad, you're not alone, and God is with you, too."

When I walked into that room, it was as if the whole world went dark. My heart cried, "Why, why, why?" If I could choose, I wouldn't have any of my children go through such a thing. And if I had had to choose one of my children, I wouldn't have chosen Nicole at that moment in her life; she seemed so vulnerable. In an instant, we were cast into life-changing mystery, and our theological non-negotiables didn't take that mystery away. Nicole did recover well, but we lived through four years of travail.

I held onto the thought that our lives were not out of control. We were comforted again and again with the thought that when it came to Nicole's accident, God was neither surprised nor afraid. You see, there is no mystery with God. He is never caught off guard. He never wonders how he is going to deal with the unexpected thing. I love the words of Daniel 2:22: "He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him."

God is with you in your moments of darkness because he will never leave you. But your darkness isn't dark to him. Your mysteries aren't mysterious to him. Your surprises don't surprise him. He understands all the things that confuse you the most. Not only are your mysteries not mysterious to him, but he is in complete charge of all that is mysterious to you and me.

Remember today that there is One who looks at what you see as dark and sees light. And as you remember that, remember, too, that he is the ultimate definition of everything that is wise, good, true, loving, and faithful. He holds both you and your mysteries in his gracious hands, and because he does, you can find rest even when the darkness of mystery has entered your door.

*For further study and encouragement: Isaiah 40:12-31*

# JANUARY 5

*If you obey for a thousand years, you're no more accepted than when you first believed; your acceptance is based on Christ's righteousness and not yours.*

The fact is that sin is a bigger disaster than we think it is and grace is more amazing than we seem to be able to grasp that it is. No one who really understands what Scripture has to say about the comprehensive, every-aspect-of-your-personhood-altering nature of sin would ever think that anyone could muster enough motivation and strength to rise to God's standard of perfection. The thought that any fallen human being would be able to perform his or her way into acceptance with God has to be the most insane of all delusions. Yet we all tend to think that we are more righteous than we are, and when we think this, we have taken the first step to embracing the delusion that maybe we're not so bad in God's eyes after all.

This is why the reality check of Romans 3:20 is so important. Paul writes, "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight." If you prayed every moment of your life, you could not pray enough prayers to earn acceptance with God. If you gave every penny of every dollar that you ever earned in every job you ever had, you could not give enough to deserve acceptance with God. If every word you ever spoke was uttered with the purest of conscientious motivations, you would never be able to speak your way into reconciliation with God. If you gave yourself to an unbroken, moment-by-moment life of ministry, you could never minister enough to achieve God's favor. Sin is too big. God's bar is too high. It is beyond the reach of every human being who has ever taken his or her first breath.

This is why God, in love, sent his Son: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). You see, there was and is no other way. There is only one portal to acceptance with God—the righteousness of Christ. His righteousness is given over to our account; sinners are welcomed into the presence of a holy God based on the perfect obedience of another. Christ is our hope, Christ is our rest, Christ is our peace. He perfectly fulfilled God's requirement so that in our sin, weakness, and failure we would never again have to fear God's anger. This is what grace does! So as the children of grace, we obey as a service of worship, not in a desperate attempt to do what is impossible—independently earn God's favor.

*For further study and encouragement: Galatians 3:1-14*

# JANUARY 6

*Contentment celebrates grace. The contented heart is satisfied with the Giver and is therefore freed from craving the next gift.*

Sin does two very significant things to us all. First, it causes us all to insert ourselves into the center of our worlds, making life all about us. In our self-focus, we are all too motivated by our wants, our needs, and our feelings, and because we are, we tend to be more aware of what we don't have than of the many wonderful blessings that we have been given. But there is more; because we are self-focused, we tend to be scorekeepers, constantly comparing our piles of stuff to the piles of others. It's a life of discontentment and envy. Envy is always selfish.

There is a second thing of equal significance that sin does to us. It causes us to look horizontally for what can only ever be found vertically. So we look to creation for life, hope, peace, rest, contentment, identity, meaning and purpose, inner peace, and motivation to continue. The problem is that nothing in creation can give you these things. Creation was never designed to satisfy your heart. Creation was made to be one big finger pointing you to the One who alone has the ability to satisfy your heart. Many people will get up today and in some way will ask creation to be their savior, that is, to give them what only God is able to give.

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:25–26). These are the words of a man who learned the secret to contentment. When you are satisfied with the Giver, because you have found in him the life you were looking for, you are freed from the ravenous quest for satisfaction that is the discouraging existence of so many people. Yes, it is true that your heart will rest only ever when it has found its rest in him.

Here is one of the most beautiful fruits of grace—a heart that is content, more given to worship than demand and more given to the joy of gratitude than the anxiety of want. It is grace and grace alone that can make this kind of peaceful living possible for each of us. Won't you reach out today for that grace?

*For further study and encouragement: 1 Timothy 6:6–10*

# JANUARY 7

*Every day you need it. You and I simply can't live without it.*

*What is it? The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.*

I don't know where I was when the memo went out. I'm not sure why I missed the discussion. I can't explain why I had this miserable gap in my understanding of the gospel. I can't tell you why this item was missing in my theological outline, but it was, and the fact that it was missing made my Christian life pretty miserable.

Here was my functional theology of my life as a child of God: I knew that by grace I had been granted God's forgiveness and I knew that I had been graced with an all-inclusive pass into eternity, but I thought that between now and then, my job was to just gut it out. It was my responsibility to identify sin, to cut it out of my life, and to give myself to living in a much better, more biblical way. I tried this, trust me; I tried it and found it didn't work. I messed up again and again. It seemed that I failed more times than I succeeded. I became more and more frustrated and discouraged. It felt as if I had been drafted into a game that I had no ability to play by someone who kept perfect score. I can remember the moment in college when it all came to a head. It was six o'clock in the morning, as I was having the devotions that I really didn't want to have, when I finally put my head down on my desk and cried, "I can't do what you're asking me to do!" Then I read the next chapter in my daily Bible reading, and by God's grace it was Romans 8.

I read that chapter over and over, including these words: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (v. 13). They were like fireworks going off in my head. God knew that my need as a sinner was so great that it was not enough for him to just forgive me; he had to come and live inside me or I would not be what I had been re-created to be or do what I had been reborn to do.

I need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit living inside me because sin kidnaps the desires of my heart, blinds my eyes, and weakens my knees. My problem is not just the *guilt* of sin; it's the *inability* of sin as well. So God graces his children with the convicting, sight-giving, desire-producing, and strength-affording presence of the Spirit. It can't be said any better than Paul says it at the end of his discussion of the gift of the Spirit: "He gives life to your mortal bodies" (Rom. 8:11, my paraphrase).

*For further study and encouragement: Romans 8:1-17*

# JANUARY 8

*God calls you to believe and then works with zeal to craft you into a person who really does live by faith.*

I don't know how much you've thought about this, but faith isn't natural for you and me. Doubt is natural. Fear is natural. Living on the basis of your collected experience is natural. Pushing the current catalog of personal "what-ifs" through your mind before you go to sleep or when you wake up in the morning is natural. Living based on the thinking of your brain and your physical senses is natural. Envyng the life of someone else and wondering why it isn't your life is natural. Wishing that you were more sovereign over people, situations, and locations than you will ever be is natural. Manipulating your way into personal control so you can guarantee that you will get what you think you need is natural. Looking horizontally for the peace that you will only ever find vertically is natural. Anxiously wishing for change in things that you have no ability to change is natural. Giving way to dependency, discouragement, depression, or despair is natural. Numbing yourself with busyness, material things, media, food, or some other substance is natural. Lowering your standards to deal with your disappointment is natural. But faith simply isn't natural to us.

So, in grace, God grants us to believe. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, faith really is the gift of God. There is no more counterintuitive function to the average, sin-damaged human being than faith in God. Sure, we'll put our faith in a lot of things, but not in a God we cannot see or hear, who makes promises so grand they seem impossible to keep. God gives us the power to first believe, but he doesn't stop there. By grace he works in the situations, locations, and relationships of our everyday lives to craft, hammer, bend, and mold us into people who build life based on the radical belief that he really does exist and he really does reward those who seek him (Heb. 11:6).

Next time you face the unexpected, a moment of difficulty you really don't want to go through, remember that such a moment doesn't picture a God who has forgotten you, but one who is near to you and doing in you a very good thing. He is rescuing you from thinking that you can live the life you were meant to live while relying on the inadequate resources of your wisdom, experience, righteousness, and strength; and he is transforming you into a person who lives a life shaped by radical God-centered faith. He is the ultimate craftsman, and we are his clay. He will not take us off his wheel until his fingers have molded us into those who really do believe and do not doubt.

*For further study and encouragement: Mark 6:30–52*

# JANUARY 9

*For the believer, fear is always God-forgetful. If God is sovereign and his rule is complete, wise, righteous, and good, why would you fear?*

The words of Hezekiah, king of Judah, ring as true today as they did in the scary moment centuries and centuries ago when they were first spoken. Judah had been invaded by the powerful king of Assyria, Sennacherib. Hezekiah prepared and armed Judah for battle, but that is not all he did. He addressed the people with a more significant issue. He knew that in these moments God's people were often given to fear, and he knew where that fear came from. Often in these moments of challenge the people of God would panic because they were *identity amnesiacs*. They would forget who they were as the children of God and they would forget who God is in all his almighty power and glory. So at this moment, Hezekiah knew that he couldn't just be a good king and a skilled general; he must also be a wise pastor to his people.

As they were preparing for the Assyrian onslaught, Hezekiah didn't want the people of Judah to think that they were left to their battle courage, their war experience, and their skill with weapons. He wanted them to know that they had been amazingly blessed with another ingredient, one that they could not, must not forget. So he said: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him. . . . With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. 32:7-8).

There will be a moment when you will ask, "Where is courage to be found to face what I am facing?" Hezekiah gives you your answer: "Look up and remember your God." As God's child, you are never left to battle on your own.

*For further study and encouragement: Isaiah 51:12-16*

# JANUARY 10

*The DNA of joy is thankfulness. Have you noticed that entitled, complaining people don't happen to be very joyful?*

I wish I always  
carried it with me.  
I wished it always  
shaped the way  
I look at life.  
I wish it directed  
my desires.  
I wish it was  
the natural inclination of  
my heart.  
I wish remembering  
your boundless grace  
would silence  
my grumbling.  
I wish  
my worship of you,  
my trust of you,  
my rest in you  
would drive away  
all complaint.  
If my heart is ever  
going to be freed of  
grumbling  
and ruled by  
gratitude,  
I need your grace:  
grace to remember,  
grace to see,  
grace that produces  
a heart of humble joy.

*For further study and encouragement: Psalm 107*

# JANUARY 11

*If you have been freed from needing success and acclaim to feel good about yourself, you know grace has visited you.*

It is an intensely human endeavor. It is the quest we all pursue. We all want to feel good about ourselves. We all want to think that we are okay. It is a fearful and anxious quest from which only grace can free you.

Here's what happens to us all—we seek horizontally for the personal rest that we are to find vertically, and it never works. Looking to others for your inner sense of well-being is pointless. First, you will never be good enough, consistently enough, to get the regular praise of others that you are seeking. You're going to mess up. You're bound to disappoint. You will have a bad day. You'll lose your way. At some point, you'll say or do things that you shouldn't. Add to this the fact that the people around you aren't typically interested in taking on the burden of being your personal messiah. They don't want to live with the responsibility of having your identity in their hands. Looking to people for your inner self-worth never works.

The peace that success gives is unreliable as well. Since you are less than perfect, whatever success you are able to achieve will soon be followed by failure of some kind. Then there is the fact that the buzz of success is short-lived. It isn't long before you're searching for the next success to keep you going. That's why the reality that Jesus has become your righteousness is so precious. His grace has forever freed us from needing to prove our righteousness and our worth. So we remind ourselves every day not to search horizontally for what we've already been given vertically. "And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever" (Isa. 32:17). That righteousness is found in Christ alone.

*For further study and encouragement: 2 Corinthians 6:3–10*



# JANUARY 12

*God calls you to persevere by faith, and then,  
with powerful grace, he protects and keeps you.*

It is a wonderfully encouraging name for the God you serve, yet it's possible to let it pass through your eyes and into your brain without stopping to celebrate its glory. In Romans 15:5, Paul calls your Lord "the God of endurance." This title really gets at the center of where your hope is to be found. Let me state it plainly: your hope is not to be found in your willingness and ability to endure, but in God's unshakable, enduring commitment to never turn from his work of grace. Your hope is that you have been welcomed into communion with One who will endure no matter what.

Why is this so important to understand? Because your endurance will be spotty at best. There will be moments when you will forget who you are and live as a grace amnesiac. There will be times when you will get discouraged and for a while quit doing the good things God calls you to do. There will be moments, big and small, when you will willingly rebel. You may be thinking, "Not me." But think with me—when you, as a Christian, say something nasty to another person, you don't do it because you're ignorant that it is wrong, but because at that point you don't give a rip about what is wrong.

You see, perfect endurance demands just that, perfection, and since none of us is there yet, we must look outside ourselves for hope. Your hope of enduring is not to be found in your character or strength, but in your Lord's. Because he will ever be faithful, you can bank on the fact that he will give you what you need to be faithful too. Your perseverance rests on him, and he defines what endurance looks like! It is the grace of endurance granted to you by the God of endurance that provides you with everything you need to continue to be what he calls you to be and do what he calls you to do between this moment and the moment when you cross over to the other side. When difficulty exposes the weakness of your resolve and the limits of your strength, you do not have to panic, because he will endure even in those moments when you don't feel able to do so yourself.

*For further study and encouragement: 1 Timothy 6:11-16*

# JANUARY 13

*Yes, it is true—God will remain faithful even when you're not, because his faithfulness rests on who he is, not on what you're doing.*

Second Timothy 2:13: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.” This verse pictures a radically different way of living, one not natural to most of us. Most human beings buy into a view of life characterized by the “life is on your shoulders,” “you make or break your life,” “pay your money and take your choice,” or “you have no one to look to or blame but yourself” outlook. In this view, you are the master of your fate. You have little to rely on other than your instincts, your strength, the wisdom that you’ve collected over the years, your ability to anticipate what is around the corner, your character and maturity, and the natural gifts that you have been given. It is a scary “you against the world” way of living.

But your welcome into God’s family turns all of this upside down. God not only forgives your sins and guarantees you a seat in eternity, but welcomes you to a radically new way of living. This new way of living is not just about submitting to God’s moral code. No, it is about God covenantally committing himself to be faithful to you forever, unleashing his wisdom, power, and grace for your eternal good. Think about this. The One who created and controls the world, the One who is the ultimate definition of what is loving, true, and good, and the One who alone has the power to finally defeat sin has chosen, because of his grace, to wrap his arms of faithful love and protection around you, and he will not let you go.

You can take your life off your shoulders because God has placed it on his. This doesn’t mean that it doesn’t matter how you live, but that your security is not found in your faithfulness but in his. He can be trusted even when you cannot. He will be faithful and good even when you’re not. He will do what is right and best even when you don’t. And he is faithful to forgive you when convicting grace reveals how unfaithful you have been.

Rather than giving you license to do whatever, this truth should give you motivation to continue. His grace calls you to invest in the one thing that will never come up short, and that one thing is the faithfulness of your Lord.

*For further study and encouragement: 1 Corinthians 1:4–9*

# JANUARY 14

*Don't be discouraged today. You can leave your "what-ifs" and "if-onlys" in the hands of the One who loves you and rules all things.*

Even though you're a person of faith who has acquired some degree of biblical literacy and theological knowledge, there's one thing you can be sure of—God will confuse you. Your theology will give you only a limited ability to exegete your experiences. The commands, principles, and case studies of Scripture will take you only so far in your quest to figure out your life. There will be moments when you simply don't understand what is going on. In fact, you will face moments when what God, who has declared himself to be good, brings into your life won't seem good. It may even seem bad, very bad.

Now, if your faith is based on your ability to fully understand your past, present, and future, then your moments of confusion will become moments of weakening faith. But the reality is that you are not left with only two options—understand everything and rest in peace or understand little and be tormented by anxiety. There is a third way. It really is the way of true biblical faith. The Bible tells you that real peace is found in resting in the wisdom of the One who holds all of your "what-ifs" and "if-onlys" in his loving hands. Isaiah captures this well with these comforting words: "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you" (Isa. 26:3).

Real, sturdy, lasting peace, peace that doesn't rise and fall with circumstances, isn't to be found in picking apart your life until you have understood all of the components. You will never understand it all because God, for your good and his glory, keeps some of it shrouded in mystery. So peace is found only in trust, trust of the One who is in careful control of all the things that tend to rob you of your peace. He knows, he understands, he is in control of what appears to be chaos, he is never surprised, he is never confused, he never worries or loses a night's sleep, he never walks off the job to take a rest, he never gets so busy with one thing that he neglects another, and he never plays favorites.

You need to remind yourself again and again of his wise and loving control, not because that will immediately make your life make sense, but because it will give you rest and peace in those moments that all of us face at one time or another—when life doesn't seem to make any sense.

*For further study and encouragement: Luke 12:22–34*

# JANUARY 15

*Unlike human love, which is often fickle and temporary,  
God's love never fails, no matter what.*

I love Psalm 136. I love all of the psalms, but Psalm 136 blows me away every time I read it. I love the repetition that makes this psalm stand out from all the others. I love the fact that Psalm 136 is a history psalm that, because of its refrain, gets turned into a love poem. I love that it affirms again and again what we desperately need to hear again and again—not once or twice, but twenty-six times! Now, I think that whenever God speaks, you and I should humbly shut up and listen, but I also think that we should pay careful attention to those places where God chooses to repeat himself, and even more so when he repeats himself so many times!

Why does God repeat, over and over through the pen of the psalmist, “for his steadfast love endures forever”? There are two answers to this question.

First, there is no reality more radical and foundational to a biblical worldview and a personal sense of identity than this. What is the biblical story? It's the story of a God of love invading the world in the person of his Son of love to establish his kingdom of love by a radical sacrifice of love, to forgive us in love and draw us into his family of love, and to send us out as ambassadors of the very same love. The entire hope of fallen humanity rests on this one thing—that there is a Savior who is eternally steadfast in redeeming, forgiving, reconciling, transforming, and delivering love. Without this, the Bible is a book of interesting stories and helpful principles, but it is devoid of any power to fix what sin has broken.

The second reason God repeats this refrain is that we have no experience in our lives of this kind of love. You always begin to understand anything that is new to you from the vantage point of your own experience. All the human love we've experienced has been flawed in some way. But not God's; his love is perfect and perfectly steadfast forever. It is the single most stunning reality in the life of a believer. God has placed his love on us and he will never again remove it. There's a reason to continue, no matter how hard life seems and how weak you feel.

*For further study and encouragement: Psalm 118*

# JANUARY 16

*There's not a day without sin rearing its ugly head and not  
a day in which God's abundant mercies are not new.*

They really are the two foundation stones of a God-honoring life. They must be held together; neither side can be forsaken. Every day you and I give empirical evidence to the existence of both. Here are these foundation-stone realities: you still have sin living inside you and God is abundant in mercy. You and I must stand on both these stones. Letting go of either casts us into danger. Because I am a sinner, I need mercy, and because God is merciful, I can face the reality of my sin.

The words in Nehemiah 9 describe us all: “They . . . did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules” (v. 29). Maybe it’s a thoughtless word, a selfish act, a prideful thought, a moment of envy, a flash of lust, a willing act of disobedience, an attitude of vengeance, or a minor moment of thievery; maybe it’s wanting your glory more than God’s, failing to give grace where grace is needed, bending the truth, giving in to an addiction, or working to make these kinds of things in your life look not as bad as they actually are. In some way, we all give daily proof to the truth that sin still lives inside us. None of us is yet sin-free. We all continue to fail in word, thought, desire, and action. It is humbling but important to admit, because it’s only when you admit how deep and comprehensive your problem is that you get excited about the rescue that only God’s mercy can supply.

We aren’t just left in our sins. Nehemiah 9 continues, “Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God” (v. 31). You can be courageous in admitting your sin precisely because God is richly abundant in his mercy. He comes to you in mercy not because you are good but because you are a sinner, and he knows that because of this condition, you are unable to help yourself. Since sin means that you are a bigger danger to you than anything else in your life and since it is impossible for you to run from you, there is only one hope for you. It is that someone with power, wisdom, and mercy will invade your life, forgive your sins, and progressively deliver you from the hold that sin has had on you. That mercy comes to you in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his mercy is always fresh, uniquely fashioned for the sin struggles of this new day.

*For further study and encouragement: Ephesians 2:1–10*

# JANUARY 17

*To think today, when your life doesn't work as planned, that it's out of control is to forget that Jesus reigns for your sake and his glory.*

What are you facing today that you wouldn't be facing if you were in control? What are you required to deal with that you really wish you could avoid? Where have your plans dripped like sand through your fingers? Where would you like to take back choices and redo decisions? Where do you tend to look over the fence and wish you had someone else's life? Where do you feel troubled, inadequate, weak, defeated, overwhelmed, alienated, or alone? Where do thoughts of the past tend to flood you with regret, or visions of the future make you a bit afraid? What causes you to wish life was easier or at least a bit more predictable? If you could change a couple of things in your life right now, what would they be? Where does it feel to you as if you're on an amusement park ride that you never intended to be on?

If you're not in one of the moments I've described above, you will be someday, and you are near to someone who is. Life in this fallen world is often very hard. This world and everything in it are not functioning the way God intended. The brokenness of this fallen world will enter your door and somehow alter the trajectory of your life. In those moments, it is tempting to conclude that life is all about surviving the chaos. You feel that you don't have much power, you have been confronted with the fact that there's not much that you control, and you have no idea of what might be lurking around the corner. It all seems impossible and scary.

But this is not where God's Word leaves us. Yes, it does confront us with our smallness, weakness, and lack of control, but it doesn't leave us there. The Bible declares something to us that is the opposite of the way we tend to think. It tells us that the difficulties that we face every day, the seeming chaos that regularly greets us, are not the result of the world being out of control, but the result of the reign of One who is in complete control. Paul says in Ephesians 1:22, "And he [God] put all things under his [Christ's] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church" (the explanations in brackets are mine).

So no matter how it looks to you at street level, your world is not out of control; no, it is under careful rule. As radical as that thought is, it's not radical enough, because it does not do justice to all that Paul says. Paul wants you to know something else. That rule has you in view! Right now, Jesus rules over all things for the sake of his children. This is where peace is to be found.

*For further study and encouragement: Acts 17:22-28*

# JANUARY 18

*If you're God's child, you will never again have just you to depend on.*

*No, you've been blessed, right here, right now, with grace.*

It's a bigger problem than I think most of us think it is. It's something I have encountered again and again as I have traveled around the world. It's in the lives of singles and the married, the old and the young, men and women, and leaders and followers. It is one of those subtle omissions, the results of which are anything but subtle in the lives of so many. It has the power to leave you feeling frustrated and unable or overwhelmed and discouraged. It causes you to miss the answers that are right in front of your face and to look for answers where they aren't to be found. It has the power to put your Bible on the lower shelves of your life rather than on the top shelf, where it needs to be. It turns you into a passive and somewhat cynical waiter, just hanging around until the good stuff finally happens. It changes the way you think about yourself and the way you make decisions. I'm not sure how we got here, but I am sure that it is terribly important that we find our way out.

What's the problem that I'm fretting about? It's the fact that so many of us have a huge dark hole in the middle of our gospel. Sure, we have a pretty good understanding of the gospel past, the forgiveness that we have received through the sacrifice of Jesus, and a fairly clear understanding of salvation future, the eternity that we will spend with Jesus, but have we really understood well the benefits of the work of Christ in the here and now? The Bible powerfully declares that Jesus didn't just die for your past or your future, but for all the things that you face right here, right now. We need to study, examine, teach, preach, counsel, and encourage one another with the *nowism* of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Listen to the present tense gospel in the words of Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ [a statement of historical redemptive fact]. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me [a statement of present redemptive reality]. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me [living in light of the gospel right here, right now]."

What does the gospel say you have been given right here, right now, so that you can be what you've been called to be and do what you've been called to do? The answer is Christ! He is in you. He is with you. He is for you. In him, you really do have everything you need. You simply have not been left to yourself.

*For further study and encouragement: Hebrews 12:7-17*

# JANUARY 19

*If you look into the mirror of God's Word and see someone in need of grace, why would you be impatient with others who share that need?*

Maybe one of the biggest sins in our relationships with one another is the sin of forgetting. I wish I could say that this is not my problem, but it is. It is so easy to forget how profound your need of grace is, and it is equally easy to forget the amazing grace that has been freely showered upon you. And when you forget the grace that you've been given, it becomes very easy to respond to the people around you with nongrace.

It is very clear that grace toward others isn't best born out of duty. Pretend with me that I plop down on the couch next to my dear wife, Luella, and say these words: "You know, Luella, I have come to the realization that it's my duty to be gracious to you. So I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you grace, not because I really want to, but because I guess it's what I have to do." Do you think that Luella would be encouraged by that statement for a moment? I think not. A joyful life of grace toward others grows best in the soil of gratitude. When I really reflect on who I am, when I take time to consider the grace that I couldn't have earned, achieved, or deserved but which has been lavished on me, and when I remember that that grace came at the cost of the life of another, then I am joyfully motivated to give that grace to others.

For the believer, harsh, critical, impatient, and irritated responses to others are always connected to forgetting or denying who we are and what we have been given in Jesus. It is very clear that no one gives grace better than a person who is deeply convinced of his own need of it and who is cogently aware of the grace he has been, and is being, given.

Because we forget so quickly, because we fall into believing that we are deserving, and because we tend to think that we're more righteous and capable than we actually are, we all need to be given grace right at the very moment when we are called to be a tool of grace in the life of another. The God of grace is working his grace into everyone in the room. First John 4:19 really is true: "We love because he first loved us." Now, that's worth remembering.

*For further study and encouragement: Ephesians 3:14-21*



# JANUARY 20

*Where is hope to be found? In five life-altering words: "I am with you always."*

You and I are on a constant quest for hope. We all want a reason to get up in the morning and motivation to continue. Here are some things you have to know about hope:

1. *God hardwired human beings for hope.* We don't live by instinct; we all find our identity, meaning, purpose, and inner sense of well-being in something.
2. *What you place your hope in will set the direction of your life.* Whether you know it or not, your life path is directed by hope. Whether it's hope in a philosophy, a person, a dream, a location, or whatever, your life will be shaped by what you place your hope in.
3. *Hope always includes an expectation and an object.* I am hoping for something and hoping that someone or something will deliver it.
4. *Hope, to be hope, has to fix what is broken.* Hope that does not address your needs isn't very hopeful. You place your hope in your mechanic only if he has the ability to fix what's broken in your car.
5. *You always preach to yourself a gospel of some kind of hope.* You're always reaching for hope and preaching to yourself the validity of what you reach for.

But here is the radical truth of the gospel. Hope is not a situation. Hope is not a location. Hope is not a possession. Hope is not an experience. Hope is more than an insight or a truism. Hope is a person, and his name is Jesus! He comes to you and makes a commitment of hope: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Now, there's hope. You have something profoundly deeper to hold on to than the hope that people will be nice to you, that your job will work out, that you will make good choices when tempted, that you'll be smart enough to make good decisions, that you'll be able to avoid poverty or sickness, or that you'll have a good place to live and enough to eat. No, this is eternal and deeply personal hope. It rests in the truth that Jesus has wrapped his powerful arms around you and he will never, ever let you go. If nothing you envisioned ever works out and all the bad things that you've dreaded come your way, you still have hope, because he is with you in power and grace.

*For further study and encouragement: Haggai 1:12-15*

# JANUARY 21

*When we ask the present to give us what only eternity can give, we end up driven, frustrated, discouraged, and ultimately hopeless.*

It's a case of modern evangelical schizophrenia. It causes us so much confusion, frustration, and discouragement. It leaves us with unrealistic expectations, naïveté toward temptation, and regular disappointment. It leads us to ask far too much from the people around us and to expect more than we should from the situations and locations in our lives. It makes us search over and over again for what we will not find and spend endless hours wondering why we haven't found it. It even results in some of us beginning to doubt the goodness of God.

“What is this schizophrenia?” you ask. It is the fact that we declare that we believe in forever, yet we live as if this is all there is. This functional contradiction between our belief system and our daily living cannot work. Here's why.

First, you cannot make any sense out of the Christian life without eternity. This is the whole argument of 1 Corinthians 15. If the One you've given your life to doesn't ultimately fix all that sin has broken, so that you can live with him forever without its effects, what is your faith worth?

Second, you and I have been hardwired for eternity. Ecclesiastes 3:11 declares that God has placed eternity in every person's heart. That means everyone hungers for paradise. No one is satisfied with things the way they are. So either you try your hardest to turn your life right here, right now into the paradise it will never be and therefore become driven and disappointed, or you live in this broken world with the rest and peace that comes from knowing that a guaranteed place in paradise is in your future. You're sad that things are as broken as they are, so you work to be an agent of change in God's gracious and powerful hands, but you're not anxious or driven. You know that this world is not stuck and that it hasn't been abandoned by God. You know that God is working his eternal plan. He is moving things toward their final conclusion. You can't see it every day, but you know it's true. In the middle of your sadness there is celebration, because you've read the final chapter and you know how God's grand story is going to end.

So you get up every morning and give yourself to doing the things that God says are good, because you know that if grace has put eternity in your future, there's nothing that you could ever do in God's name that is in vain.

*For further study and encouragement: 1 Corinthians 15:12-34*

# JANUARY 22

*You and I don't need to be rescued only from the idols around us.*

*No, we need to be rescued from our idolatrous hearts.*

I was in Northern India, in one of the high, holy cities of Hinduism. It was my first time ministering there, so I was on a four-day introduction tour of Hinduism. We had entered a temple that held the most horrific idol I had ever seen. I had no idea that things like this existed. It was a huge, maybe 20-foot-high, image of a male sexual organ. The Hindu pilgrims around me seemed emotional as they entered the temple. They seemed joyous, grateful that they were there. Many of them laid down flat on their stomachs before it. They kissed its base. It was one of the darkest spiritual scenes I had ever seen. Through our translator, we interviewed the members of a dirt-poor Indian family who had walked for months to get to this holy city, to this temple of darkness. The scene was so spiritually oppressive that all I wanted to do was get out of the building.

I found myself trying to get through the busy streets to our vehicle, and as I did I kept saying to myself, "I thank God I'm not like these people, I thank God I'm not like these people." Then it hit me—I am! No, my idols aren't the dark idols of formal religion; they're the subtle idols of my everyday world. They're things that claim the place in my heart that only God should have. And they are just as vomitous to my Lord as that idol was to me. At that moment, I confessed to the worship war that takes place in my heart every day. I cried out for the rescue that only the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ could provide and I longed for the day when that war would finally be over.

Worship is not something we do only in formal religious settings once a week. God designed us to be worshipers. Everything we do is the product of worship. We are always giving our hearts to something, and if it's not God, it's something God created. All of this takes place in the little moments of our lives, and for that we need moment-by-moment grace. That's why John counsels us in 1 John 5:21 to keep ourselves from idols. There is no greater argument for our need for grace than the ease with which our hearts fall under the rule of things other than God. But that grace is yours for the taking. Won't you live in that rescuing grace today by resisting and running from the idols that challenge God's place in your heart?

*For further study and encouragement: Ezekiel 20*

# JANUARY 23

*Hope is not a thing, not a location, not a situation, not an experience. Hope is a person, and his name is Jesus.*

If you pay attention and listen carefully to what you and the people around you are saying, you will realize that we are hope obsessed. Day after day, the things we do are fueled by hope. Little third-grader Sally says to her mom as she gets ready for school, “I sure hope the girls at school like me.” Mom thinks to herself that day, “I hope our marriage gets better.” Teenager Tim says to his buddy, “I got a new job after school; I hope it’s decent.” Dad worries in the hope that he won’t be one of the guys who’s caught in the downsizing that his corporation is doing. From hoping that a certain meal will be good to hoping that we will have the moral strength to do the things we should do, our lives are fueled and directed by hope.

What we’re all searching for is hope that won’t disappoint us, that won’t leave us hopeless in the end. And we all want to convince ourselves that what we have placed our hope in will deliver. What are you asking of something when you place your hope in it? You’re asking it to give you peace of heart. You’re asking it to give your life meaning. You’re asking it to give you purpose and direction. You’re asking it to give you a reason to continue. You’re asking it to help you get through difficulty and disappointment. You’re asking it to free you from envy or anxiety. You’re asking it to give you joy in the morning and rest at night. Now, that’s a lot to ask of anything. That fact confronts you with this reality—if your hope disappoints you, it’s because it’s the wrong hope.

Romans 5:1–5 talks about a hope that won’t disappoint you even in times of suffering. Maybe you’re thinking, “Where can I find that hope?” Sturdy hope that does not vanish with the constant changes in situations, locations, and relationships that make up all of our lives—hope that simply will never, ever disappoint us—can be found in only one place. It is not to be found in a certain thing. It is, in fact, a person, Jesus. Whether you have realized it or not, he is what your hoping heart has been searching for, because what you’ve really been searching for is life, real heart-changing, heart-satisfying life—life to the fullest, life abundant. People can love and respect you, but they can’t give you life. Situations can make your life easier, but they can’t give you life. Locations can bring some changes to your life, but they can’t give you life. Achievements can be temporarily satisfying, but they can’t give you life. True lasting hope is never found horizontally. It’s only ever found vertically, at the feet of the Messiah, the One who *is* hope. Place your hopeful heart in his hands today.

*For further study and encouragement: Colossians 1:15–29*

# JANUARY 24

*Your little kingdom of one cannot compete with the glory of the kingdom of God, which is yours by grace and grace alone.*

One of the sweetest, most encouraging things that Jesus said to his followers is recorded in Luke 12:32: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” You and I are kingdom oriented. We are always in pursuit of and in service to some kind of kingdom. We are either living in allegiance to the King of kings, celebrating our welcome into his kingdom of glory and grace, or we are anointing ourselves as kings and working to set up our own little kingdoms of one.

Here is what is important for us to understand. God didn’t give us his grace in order to make our little claustrophobic kingdoms of one work, but to invite us to a much, much better kingdom. We think we know what is best for us, but we don’t. We think we are able to rule our own lives, but we aren’t. We set our hearts on things that we think will make us happy, but they won’t. We think that we can defend ourselves against temptation, but by ourselves we can’t. Every human being is in need of a king. All human beings need the rescue, forgiveness, justice, mercy, refuge, and protection that they are unable to give themselves.

The beauty of the work of Christ is not only that in his life, death, and resurrection we are offered forgiveness forever, but that with it we are welcomed into the kingdom of the universe’s most powerful and only perfect king. He blesses us with what no human kingdom can ever give. He showers us with forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, and hope. He protects us when we don’t have the sense to protect ourselves. He rules over all the moments that seem to us to be out of control. He sets up his kingdom in our hearts, rescuing us from all the other things that would rule us. And he patiently teaches us that we weren’t created to live as kings, anxiously working to set up our own little kingdoms. He teaches us what it means to rest in his kingship and to live for his glory. And he encourages us with the truth that his kingdom will never, ever end.

Are you loading kingly burdens on your shoulders today, trying to build what you cannot build and forgetting what God has already built for you? Or are you resting in the peace that it is the good pleasure of your Lord to give you his kingdom?

*For further study and encouragement: Matthew 6:19–24*

# JANUARY 25

*Theology without love is simply very bad theology.*

It was one of those amazing moments teachers are given—moments that you can't plan for and don't know you are going to have. I was teaching the one seminary course that many of the future pastors didn't want to take. It was a course about pastoral care/counseling. My class was filled with prospective pastors who thought that if they preached theologically sound and exegetically accurate sermons, no one who heard them would need counseling. Since I knew that the students in my class didn't really want to be there and weren't really hungry for what I had to offer, I began each semester by telling stories of the messes that some people had made of their lives and how they had looked to me to help them through difficulty and disaster. I would tell these stories until someone in the class would say, "Okay, we get it, we really *will* need what this class has to offer."

In the middle of one of these stories, a student raised his hand and said, "All right, *Professor Tripp*, we know we're going to have these projects in our churches; tell us what to do with them so we can get back to the work of ministry." I was both stunned by what he said and thankful for what it allowed me to say. Here was a man heading for ministry who clearly loved ideas more than he loved people! My poor student was far from the biblical norm, "[Speak] the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). The call is to do theology in loving community with other people. Truth not spoken in love ceases to be true because it's bent and twisted by other human agendas. I cannot forsake truth for relationships, and I cannot forsake relationships for truth. They need to be held together, because we need to understand truth in community with one another to compensate for our blindness and bias, and we need truth to define for us what kind of community we should live in together.

Finally, we must understand that theology is never an end in itself, but a means to an end, the end that we would progressively become like the One who is the ultimate definition of what love is and what love does. In his grace, he provides everything we need to be a loving community and theologically pure at the same time. To forsake either is not only a failure to love, but bad theology as well. It both compromises God's truth and rejects his call. It is in a community of humble love that we are best positioned to understand all that God has said to us in his Word.

*For further study and encouragement: Ephesians 4:1–16*

# JANUARY 26

*Mercy for others will reveal your ongoing need for mercy, driving you to the end of yourself and into the arms of your merciful Savior.*

It's simply not natural for us. It's natural to make sure all your needs are met. It's natural to hoard what you have in the fear that at some point you won't have enough. It's natural to carry around with you a long catalog of things you want for yourself. It's natural to be more in tune with your feelings than with the feelings of others. It's natural to want mercy for yourself but justice for others. It's natural to be very aware of the sin of others, yet blind to your own. If we are ever going to be people of mercy, we need bountiful mercy ourselves, because what stands in the way of our being a community of mercy is *us!*

It's impossible for me to think about God's call to us to be his instruments of mercy and not reflect on Jesus's powerful parable in Matthew 18:21–35. Please stop and read it right now. Christ had two reasons for telling this story. The first was to reveal the heart behind Peter's question: "All right, Lord, how many times do I have to forgive?" This question evidenced a heart that lacked mercy. Christ's second reason for telling this story was to reveal our hearts. You see, we're all the unjust servant. We celebrate God's mercy but scream at our children when they mess up. We sing of amazing grace but punish our spouses with silence when they offend us. We praise God for his love but forsake a friendship because someone has been momentarily disloyal. We are thankful that we've been forgiven but say that a person who is suffering the result of his decisions is getting what he deserves. We bask in God's grace but throw the law at others. We're simply not that good at mercy because we tend to see ourselves as more deserving than the poor and needy.

But when God's call of mercy collides with your lack of mercy, you begin to see yourself with accuracy. You begin to confess that you don't have inside you what God requires. You begin to admit to yourself and others that you cannot live up to God's standard, so you begin to cry out for the very thing that you have refused to give to others. And as you begin to remember that God's mercy is your only hope and you meditate on the grandeur of the mercy that has been showered on you, you begin to want to help others experience that same mercy. You see, to the degree that you forget the mercy you've been given, it is easier for you to not give mercy to others. I daily need God's work of mercy in order to do his work of mercy.

*For further study and encouragement: Psalm 103*

# JANUARY 27

*God's call to obey is itself a grace. In this call,  
he is actively rescuing you from you.*

We're all slaves; the question is, to whom or to what? Everyone is willing to make sacrifices; the question is, to whom or for what? We all follow sets of rules; the question is, whose and for what? We all give our hearts to something; the question is, to whom or to what? We were never hardwired to be free, if by "freedom" we mean an independent, self-sufficient life. We were created by God to be connected to something vastly bigger than ourselves. We were designed to have our lives organized and directed by an agenda that is bigger than our truncated personal desires and goals. We were carefully built by God to have every aspect of our personhood connected to him and his plans for us, and when we reject him, we don't live autonomously; we replace him with something or someone.

So God in grace doesn't set you free, because he knows you wouldn't be free. You and I would quickly enslave ourselves once again. Because sin still lives in our hearts, we're all slaves going somewhere to happen. And the sad reality is that it doesn't take much to enslave us again to a person or a thing that begins to function as our replacement messiah. So what does grace offer you? The answer is the world's most wonderful, heart-satisfying, life-changing, and hope-producing slavery. The one who is the final definition of love, wisdom, mercy, and power makes us his slaves. He who alone is able to give us life enslaves our hearts to him. His absolute rulership over every area of our lives is not a deadening law but a life-giving grace. He is freeing us from our slavery to what is not true and cannot deliver. He is rescuing us from serving what will never give us life. He is protecting us from seeking hope where hope will never be found. It really is true—his call to obey is a tool of his rescuing grace.

He really does know how short-lived our resolve tends to be. He really understands our wandering eyes and our oft-disloyal hearts. So he commands our allegiance so that we will not serve other masters. Paul says it well in Romans 6:22: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." God's call to obey doesn't end your life; it is meant to protect the life that only he can give you.

*For further study and encouragement: Romans 5:1–11*



# JANUARY 28

*Prayer calls me to abandon the present as my only lens on life  
and commit to look at life from the perspective of reality.*

What is the most needed, yet the most dangerous, prayer you could ever pray? It is the one prayer that takes you beyond the small-picture hopes and dreams that kidnap so much of your prayer. It is all right to pray about your job, marriage, family, finances, house, children, retirement, vacation, investments, church, health, government, and the weather, but it is not enough. This kind of prayer follows the “right now-me” model of prayer. It is about life right here, right now and about what I have come to think that I need right here, right now. Yes, God cares about your present life. He gives you grace for this moment. Right now he is with, for, and in you. But he calls you to view yourself and your life from a perspective that goes far beyond this moment and extends far beyond your ability to diagnose what you truly need.

The one prayer Christ calls us all to pray requires us to let go of our momentary agendas and take up his eternal one. It requires us to surrender our distorted sense of need to his perfect sense of what is best. It is the “forever-you” model of prayer. It requires you to take the long view—to let go of your hold on your life and surrender to the kingship of another. It is captured by a few dangerous words. Why “dangerous”? Because they have the power to turn your life upside down, to make you a very different you than you have been. Here is what we have been called to pray: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, right here, right now in my life as it is in heaven” (see Matt. 6:10). It is only in the context of the surrender of these words that Jesus welcomes you to pray about your right-here, right-now needs.

Here is grace. I don’t have to work to be a king and I don’t have to carry the burdens of a king because I have been gifted with a King. In his kingdom, I am blessed with every good thing I will ever need, and in my welcome to his kingdom, I am included in something that will never, ever end. So pray that prayer because its dangerous grace is really what you (and I) need. Don’t hesitate. Do it now. Why live for what will pass away? Why give your searching heart to what can never satisfy? Why tell yourself that you know what you need, when the One who created you knows better and has promised to deliver?

*For further study and encouragement: Luke 22:39–48*

# JANUARY 29

*Today your heart will search for satisfaction. Will you look for it in the creation or in relationship to the Creator?*

It was obvious what was happening, but not to him. What he was trying to do would never work. I was his gardener, and I was at the base of his property, near the entrance, when he drove in with yet another new car. I had seen him do this same thing again and again. In fact, he was quickly running out of room. As he hopped out of his expensive new toy, he asked me what I thought. I said, "I don't think its working." He said, "I don't know what you're talking about, it's a brand-new car." I said, "I think what you're trying to do will never work." He said, "I have no idea what you're trying to say to me." I asked, "How many cars is it going to take before you realize that an automobile has no capacity whatsoever to satisfy your heart?" Disappointed, he said, "Boy, you're raining on my parade." I was, and it was a big gospel moment.

The sight-sound-smell-touch-taste created world is amazing and beautiful. There seems to be an endless display of glories for us to discover around each corner. The song of a bird, the smell of a grilling steak, the grandeur of a mountain, the power of the wind, the grace of a deer, the lapping waves of the sea, the beauty of the sunset, and the tenderness of a kiss are all amazing in their own way. But there is one thing you must always remember as you take in creation's multisensory display. Creation does not have the ability to satisfy your heart. Earth simply will never be your savior. When you ask the created thing to do what it was not designed to do, you get short-term fulfillment, so you have to go back again and again. Because you have to go back again and again, rather than leaving you full and satisfied, the created world leaves you fat, addicted, and in debt.

The glories of the created world are meant to be glorious, but they are not meant to be the thing that you look to for life. No, all the glories of the created world together are meant to be one big finger that points you to the God of glory, who made each one of them and is alone able to give you life. Worshiping the creation is never a pathway to life; it leads you in the opposite direction. Today you will give your life to something. Will it be the Creator, whose grace alone can satisfy and transform your heart, or the creation, which was designed to do neither?

*For further study and encouragement: Jeremiah 10*

# JANUARY 30

*Face it, your most brilliant act of righteousness wouldn't measure up to God's standard; that's why you've been given the grace of Jesus.*

The more you understand the magnitude of God's grace, the more accurate will be your view of the depth of your unrighteousness; and the more you understand the depth of your unrighteousness, the more you will appreciate the magnitude of God's gift of grace. The person who is comfortable in his own righteousness hasn't really understood grace, and the person who is unimpressed by God's grace hasn't really understood his sin. So let's talk about the essentiality of God's grace.

To talk about the essential nature of God's grace means first talking about the disaster of sin. Sin isn't primarily about acts of rebellion. Sin is, first of all, a condition of the heart that results in acts of rebellion. You and I commit sins because we are sinners. The condition of sin, into which every person who has ever lived was born, renders each of us unable to live up to God's standard. Sin leaves us without the desire, will, or ability to do perfectly what God declares is right. Whether it's a situation in which we try and fail or a moment when we rebel and don't care, the playing field is level—we all fall short of God's standard. Read Romans 3. It is a devastating analysis that shows us all to be in a dire and unalterable spiritual condition. We are all unable, we are all guilty, and there is not a thing we can do to help ourselves. None of us is good in God's eyes and none of us can satisfy his requirement. It is an inescapable, humbling, and sad reality.

But God didn't leave us in this sorry, helpless, and hopeless state. He sent his Son to do what we could not do, to die as we should have died, and to rise again, defeating sin and death. He did all this so that we could rest in a righteousness that is not our own, but a righteousness that fully satisfies God's requirement. So, unable as we are, we are not without hope. We can stand before a perfectly holy God, broken, weak, and failing, and be completely unafraid because we stand before him in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You no longer have to hope and pray that someday you will measure up, because Jesus has measured up on your behalf. How could you hear better news than that?

*For further study and encouragement: Galatians 3:15–29*

# JANUARY 31

*If you're God's child, it's no more you against the world than it was David, by himself, against the great warrior Goliath.*

I love the story of the Israelite army in the Valley of Elah as they faced the Philistine army (1 Samuel 17). On the first day of the face-off, out came that giant warrior, Goliath, and called for Israel to send out its best man to do battle with him. Remember, these Israelite soldiers were the army of the Most High God, the Lord almighty, who had promised that he would deliver these enemies into their hands. Yet what did the soldiers do in the face of Goliath's challenge? They were immediately filled with fear and withdrew to their tents to commiserate. You can imagine them saying, "What are we going to do; what are we going to do?" This was their response for forty days.

Why didn't these soldiers stand up to Goliath's challenge? Why didn't they fight in the name of the Lord? The answer is clear and unavoidable—they were an army of *identity amnesiacs*. Because they had forgotten who they were, they were filled with fear and drew a fallacious spiritual conclusion. They compared their puny selves to this massive warrior and concluded there was no path to victory.

David showed up to deliver a lunch to his brothers. He wondered why this Philistine was permitted to taunt God's army. He shockingly said that he would go; he would answer this man's challenge. Was he arrogant? Was David delusional? No, he knew who he was. He understood what it means to be a child of the living God. David drew the right spiritual conclusion. It was not little him against this huge warrior. No, it was this puny Philistine warrior against almighty God. Now, who do you think was going to win? David walked into that valley because he had his identity clear and won a victory because he knew what he had been given.

What identity will you assign to yourself today? Will you deal with life based on what you assess you bring to the table or based on who you now are as a child of the King of kings and Lord of lords—the Savior who is always with you in power and grace? Will you live in timidity and fear or in the courage of hope? Will you avoid challenges of faith in fear or move toward them, resting not in your own ability but in the presence, power, and grace of the One who rules all and has become your Father? May God give you grace to remember your identity as his child in those moments when remembering is essential.

*For further study and encouragement: Ephesians 1:3-14*