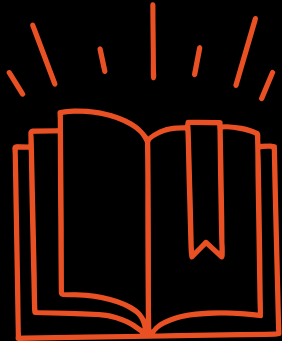


GRACE
DAILY DEVOTIONAL
BOMB

BY PATRICK LINNELL



WELCOME TO THE GRACE BOMB DEVOTIONAL!

Today there is a fierce competition for your time, attention, focus, and resources. So prevalent is the barrage of messages attempting to win the affections of your heart, that most of them get tuned out. The purpose of this 30-day devotional is not to add more sound to your life, but rather to help intentionally tune into the one voice that has the right to cut through all others with direct access to our hearts – the voice of Jesus.

While embarking on your Grace Bomb sermon series, you'll find in this booklet stories, ideas, and encouragements that expand on the themes of receiving and giving God's grace that we so richly enjoy in Christ. As you embrace and are challenged by these biblical truths, my prayer is that you not only deepen your walk with Jesus, but you'd also become His love to your neighbors, so they too would find the true satisfaction of their souls.

In a world where we can be devoted to some many lesser things, let us become a people devoted to the greatest One, Jesus, and in turn become His Agents of Grace in a love starved world.

Praying for you,

Pat Linnell,
Grace Bomb Founder



"IF YOU LOVE ME, YOU WILL KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, AND I WILL ASK THE FATHER, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER HELPER, TO BE WITH YOU FOREVER, EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, WHOM THE WORLD CANNOT RECEIVE, BECAUSE IT NEITHER SEES HIM NOR KNOWS HIM, YOU KNOW HIM, FOR HE DWELLS WITH YOU AND WILL BE IN YOU." JOHN 14:15-17

How do you tell God, "I Love you?" Well I suppose you could just say it, and you could really mean it - and He would know. But did God ever tell us specifically? I think so. As it turns out, God has a love language.

GOD'S LOVE LANGUAGE

DAY 1

When the book "The Five Love Languages" came out, it opened a lot of eyes to how we may have thought we were telling others we love them. Case in point: words. My wife is fueled by words. She feels loved by genuine words of encouragement. After 17 years of marriage, you'd think I'd be a pro at remembering this and making regular deposits in that love tank. But I still need help and constant reminders, because I tend to forget that she is less encouraged by my vacuuming the floor, and more by verbalizing my thoughts about her.

IN A SIMPLE STATEMENT, JESUS PAINTS A PICTURE OF HIS DESIRE. IN A WORD, IT'S OBEDIENCE.

Could it be that we have been telling God "thank you" and "I Love you" by vacuuming floors when He wants something else? In a simple statement, Jesus paints a picture of His desire. In a word, it's obedience. That is an ominous term these days, unless the person you are obeying is God Himself. We tell Jesus "I Love you" when we put into practice the commands He told us to exercise. This is faith activated. This is the doing after learning.

Thankfully, we are not left alone, but are given the help of another, who is able to remind us and guide us toward obedience - the Holy Spirit. He dwells in you to help bring about the obedience of faith, bringing to mind the life-giving commands of Jesus. He may help you give words of encouragement for some, and vacuum floors for another, all of which may be the way you are loving Jesus back.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BIGGEST COMMANDS OF JESUS?

HOW ARE YOU PUTTING THOSE INTO OBEDIENT PRACTICE TODAY?

THE FAITH STEP NEXT DOOR

DAY 2

THE FAITH
STEPS THAT
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When it comes to Grace Bombing, you usually don't have to look too far. The good works that God has prepared in advanced for you to walk in may be just outside your door. Yet we might be hesitant to walk in them, and instead walk around them.

My family lives next door to an empty-nesting couple. We have lived next to them for eight years now, and I'd say that we are friendly but not friends. In fact, over the years, with four energetic young children we may be a little annoying to them at times. Sometimes there is a stray bike left in the street, or hockey balls being shot into their yard. Oh, and then there was the "reaping."

A few springs ago, when our neighbors' lilac bushes were at full bloom, their yard was teeming with monarch butterflies. It was really quite beautiful and impressive. So much so, that our kids politely asked if they could use their nets and catch a few, to which our neighbors said, "You may, but please release the ones you catch."

That request was loosely interpreted as our kids proceeded to systematically harvest every one within reach with eerie precision,



FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND, THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM. EPHESIANS 2:10

and release them in containers, or in our house. Sadly, most did not get to see the great outdoors ever again, despite our best attempt to reverse the innocent reaping. Word must have got out to the butterfly community from the lucky ones that escaped, as our neighbors' yard has never recovered as a butterfly sanctuary.

After that I supposed that our next-door neighbors just didn't like us all that much, so most of our encounters are brief and superficial. But lately, I have been getting the prompting to break ice with a Grace Bomb. I know what you're thinking, something with butterflies? Oh, no way. But I have noticed that the husband has been riding his bike a lot - it seems like it is his favorite thing to do. Something along those lines might be a good way to surprise him in love and possibly invite a future conversation about grace.

The neighbors immediately around us can sometimes be the most intimidating people with whom to bring up Jesus. It may be because of a past butterfly reaping, or they have a bumper sticker on their car that you don't like, or maybe they have seen you when you're not at your best. But eight years in now with the folks next door, I am learning that the faith steps that are more difficult are the ones that might just help us grow the most.



DO YOU KNOW THE NAMES OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE NEXT DOOR?

DO YOU KNOW SOME OF THEIR INTERESTS OR FAVORITE THINGS, WHICH MIGHT BECOME THE SEED OF YOUR NEXT GRACE BOMBING ADVENTURE?

DAY 3



EVERY GOOD GIFT AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS, WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION OR SHADOW DUE TO CHANGE. JAMES 1:17

Kindness is trendy and trending. If you take a look around, you'll quickly find a website, a mobile app, a poster, a sticker, or literally a bag of chips that is encouraging you to be kind. For example, a big coffee chain recently had a poster up around Christmas that said:

When the holidays are here, good is in the air. Hold the door for someone, connect over coffee, say hi to a stranger, give perfect gifts to the ones you love. And once good starts, it keeps growing from one person to the next—simple acts of kindness that touch the lives of many. Because good is contagious and giving is too. GIVE GOOD.

There is nothing wrong with this; in fact, in many ways it is a celebration of our humanity the way God intended us to live. These signposts of kindness movements are a good thing. But when you look a little closer, you'll see that they can be even better. The culturally acceptable generic kindness movements today take kindness no further than kindness, or humanity itself.

Our souls need something more than kindness. We need the source of kindness, Jesus. Our souls will only be eternally satisfied when we are united to our Creator in unbroken fellowship. Kindness from another represents a sip of water compared to a living water that never dries up when we take ahold of the true source.

The church today has a personal relationship with the source of kindness, and it is our unique responsibility to not only let our kindness shine and be felt, but also allow it to point beyond the act, to the ultimate giver who is holding all things together. This takes intentionality, preparation, and faith to get uncomfortable. This will require us to push beyond the cultural expectations of giving and receiving, leveraging the element of surprise in revealing not only our gifts but also the Greater Giver.

HOW CAN YOU LEVERAGE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE TO INVEST IN A NEIGHBOR THIS WEEK?

HAVE YOU THOUGHT THROUGH HOW YOU CAN POINT TO JESUS AS THE SOURCE OF YOUR KINDNESS?

BEYOND #KINDNESS

EVERY ONE A MISSIONARY

DAY 4



JESUS SAID TO THEM AGAIN, "PEACE BE WITH YOU. AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, EVEN SO I AM SENDING YOU." - JOHN 20:21

Are you a missionary? Jesus thinks so. Can't see it? Maybe your definition of a missionary has become a little too narrow? What comes to mind when you read "missionary"? Do you envision that odd family who moved to Africa that would periodically return home for slide shows of building projects and tribal church gatherings? Do you envision the single friend who seems like she took a vow of poverty and only uses organic deodorant that never quite works, who now serves an orphanage in Eastern Europe?

What makes these people missionaries? Is it where they are on the planet - or perhaps what they are doing on the planet? Reaching the farthest parts of the earth is necessary, but is that the qualifier to be a true-blue, card-carrying missionary?

Jesus levels the playing field as He speaks to His first disciples, and all those who would follow in their footsteps.

Here at the end of John's gospel, the resurrected Jesus suddenly appears to the frightened disciples. They were behind locked doors for fear of those leaders who had recently conspired to have Jesus crucified. He meets them there, showing His resurrected yet scarred hands and side. Surely they were comforted by His greeting of peace; I mean, who wouldn't need some reassurance after seeing someone executed and buried, to then have them show up alive and talking inside your home?

In what had to be an exhilarating and exhausting spiritual moment, the disciples would hardly have time to get their bearings when Jesus drops His marching orders on them: I am sending you. It was as if Jesus was using this Holy moment to say, "Tag, you're it." Just as Jesus came to dwell among people full of grace and truth - proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God in word and deed - the baton has now been passed to us. Each of us is called to bear His message and carry it as humble servants to the world.

My mentor Greg impressed this idea upon me many years ago by using this phrase: "Every One A Missionary." Jesus looks all of us squarely in the eyes and calls us sent ones. We all have been commissioned, even commanded to no longer stay behind locked doors, but to move out to be among people, just as Jesus did. Some will travel far; others just need to walk across the street; all are sent, all are missionaries.

DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A MISSIONARY? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BE A GOOD MISSIONARY IN YOUR WORLD TODAY?



FOR WE DO NOT WRESTLE AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES, AGAINST THE COSMIC POWERS OVER THIS PRESENT DARKNESS, AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. EPHESIANS 6:12

WEAPON OF MASS CONSTRUCTION

DAY 5

THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS IS THE ONLY WEAPON OF MASS CONSTRUCTION IN THE WORLD TODAY.

The Church of Jesus, His body in the world, you and I together, are engaged in a cosmic spiritual battle with eternal implications for the souls of men and women. We are not fighting against those men and women, but for those men and women, who have largely been blinded and blindsided by the false promises and misplaced hope of a world system ruled by evil and supported by our own fleshly desires.

That is a lot to take in, in just two sentences!

Simply put, we are fighting for a broken world that cannot see the reason for its own brokenness. Our world treats superficial symptoms but cannot heal the underlying spiritual cause from which all of our other problems flow. It sees political problems and hopes in a new government, mental problems that can be solved by academia, evolutionary stunted-ness that needs better science, chemical problems that can be treated by more precise pills, or even the lack of personal satisfaction remedied by the pursuit of happiness.



While these symptoms do need to be addressed, the world's greatest problem is a spiritual one. We all suffer from a broken relationship with God that needs a divine repair. This is why the good news of Jesus, embodied and extended by the church, is the only weapon of mass construction in the world today. This message of truth is carried in grace. Our weapons are forged in love. And our targets are the people we see every day.

To join the fight you must engage with the body of Christ, as together we are led into a dark world to bring light, a sick world to bring healing. Each time you break the ice with your neighbor for Jesus, you are engaging in the mission of Jesus, to the end that their brokenness would be healed by Jesus. Grace Bombing is a starting point that is intended to press you deeper into the plans of God for your neighbors.

Let's remember who we are fighting for, and what we are fighting against. Because while the war has already been won, the battle rages on. Join the fight wielding your weapons of love!

HOW CAN YOU APPROACH YOUR NEIGHBORS DIFFERENTLY WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THEY CANNOT YET SEE THE REASON FOR THEIR OWN BROKENNESS?

ARE YOU ENGAGED PERSONALLY AND RELATIONALLY IN A LOCAL CHURCH, OR ARE YOU TRYING TO FIGHT ALONE?

HAVE THIS MIND AMONG YOURSELVES, WHICH IS YOURS IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO, THOUGH HE WAS IN THE FORM OF GOD, DID NOT COUNT EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED, BUT EMPTIED HIMSELF, BY TAKING THE FORM OF A SERVANT, BEING BORN IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN, AND BEING FOUND IN HUMAN FORM, HE HUMBLING HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS. THEREFORE GOD HAS HIGHLY EXALTED HIM AND BESTOWED ON HIM THE NAME THAT IS ABOVE EVERY NAME, SO THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH AND UNDER THE EARTH, AND EVERY TONGUE CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER. PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11



It is a humbling thing to raise the flag of surrender. Over the centuries, raising the white flag signaled that the fight was over, with the other party reigning victorious in battle. After hard-fought clinging to a former way of life, when you have exhausted all resources, depleted the war chest, and acknowledge defeat, raising the flag meant times were changing and a new future must begin.

Surrender leads to new beginnings. Jesus showed us this. His life walked a path of surrendering to the will of the Father. Jesus raised the white flag when leaving heaven through His incarnation. He did not cling to the privileges of His heavenly existence. He lifted it up again by serving the very mankind He created. The flag was raised as His body was raised, killed as if not innocent—surrendering His very life, instead of clinging to His safety and security.

THE SURRENDER SAIL

DAY 6



SURRENDER
LEADS TO NEW
BEGINNINGS.

What happened to all those flags? Were they tossed out, trampled on, forgotten? To the contrary, it is as if God collected each flag of surrender – one at a time, and slowly began to weave together a larger tapestry – you may even consider its size and strength to serve perfectly as a sail. The collection of those flags of surrender came together to catch the wind of God’s renewing grace. That sail propelled Jesus from the grave, into the resurrection that He now freely offers the world, and His exaltation that is still to come.

I believe God works this way in our lives too. He asks us to surrender daily – to seek His will above our own, to look out for our neighbors first, to cut against the grain of our cultures desire for fame, fortune, and the pursuit of happiness. Each time we raise the flag of surrender, He takes that flag and adds it to an ever-strengthening patchwork sail that can carry us to greater heights farther and faster than ever imagined.

If you want to sail those seas of adventure with God, it starts with the next white flag He asks you to raise. It is a humbling thing to raise the flag of surrender.

WHAT DIFFICULT THING HAS GOD REVEALED TO YOU ABOUT YOUR LIFE THAT DEEP DOWN YOU KNOW IT IS TIME TO SURRENDER?

IS HE ASKING YOU TO BREAK THE ICE WITH A PARTICULAR NEIGHBOR IN LOVE, BUT YOU HAVE NOT RAISED THE WHITE FLAG YET?



FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH, BUT THE FREE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. ROMANS 6:3

A looming and lingering question quietly lurks underneath the normal routines of everyday life as a human being. Some days float along without us paying any attention, while other days, the particularly trying ones, may force us to cast our attention upon it. It is a question that haunts some, compels others, and can be ignored all together. The question: *Why are we here?*

What is our purpose for being alive and conscious? Why are we unique beings on this planet capable of asking that question? What, ultimately, is our purpose?

DAY 7

THE NECESSITY OF GRACE

Some seek to answer this question through purely natural means. But while we can make astute observations about how our universe works, give definition to discoveries, and understand the “how” of nature (a work that we were commissioned to do from the beginning, by the way), we fall short of discovering our ultimate purpose by natural means. This is because we are here through supernatural means, and our purpose flows from a supernatural source, toward a supernatural end.

In other words, our purpose has everything to do with our Creator, as His Creation. The most satisfying answer to “why” are we here, is in a

THE MOST SATISFYING ANSWER TO “WHY” ARE WE HERE IS TO BE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RELATIONAL BEING WHO PUT US HERE.

word: relationship; to be in a relationship with the relational Being who put us here.

This is what the Bible tells us. But there is a problem. We cannot simply walk in our purpose without divine grace. No human being born under the sun is able to be rightly related to our Creator because of His holy nature, and our unholy nature. It wasn’t intended to be that way, but a freedom to love also gave way to our freedom to disobey – and the wages of those attitudes and actions caused a relational divide, irreparable by the offender, only mendable by the offended One.

Enter the rushing waters of grace, the supernatural action born from love that makes amends and extends that free gift to any human being willing to receive it. This grace is not theoretical, but historical, as God dwelt among us in Christ, in order to forgive our wayward hearts and empower us to walk in the newness of life.

Without grace, humanity cannot achieve her full potential. Without grace we cannot be restored to our purpose in life. Without grace, your neighbor cannot answer “why?”

Can you see the necessity of grace?

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO FIGURE OUT YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE WITHOUT GOD?

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS FOR YOU TO WALK IN YOUR PURPOSES OF GOOD WORKS, TO POINT YOUR NEIGHBORS TO THEIR ULTIMATE PURPOSE IN LIFE?

FRESH FRUIT

DAY 8



AFTER THESE THINGS GOD TESTED ABRAHAM AND SAID TO HIM, "ABRAHAM!" AND HE SAID, "HERE I AM." HE SAID, "TAKE YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON ISAAC, WHOM YOU LOVE, AND GO TO THE LAND OF MORIAH, AND OFFER HIM THERE AS A BURNT OFFERING ON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS OF WHICH I SHALL TELL YOU. - GENESIS 22:1-2

So, what was the last uncomfortable faith step you have taken? I figured I'd just get right down to it and put the cookie on the bottom shelf and lead out with this question. The thing is, the Christian life can become a cozy cul-de-sac of relationships and routines, which are all great gifts. But becoming a gift to a neighbor usually takes us out of these happy bubbles.

God has more opportunities for adventures with Him than we could wrap our arms around. He longs for us to extend ourselves for some of those within our reach right now. Staying stretched keeps us growing - and that is a sweet spot for the follower of Jesus. Bearing fresh fruit is being able to point to recent occasions of yielding to the Spirit inside of you, surrendering to Jesus who is with you.

The stories of Abraham the patriarch back in Genesis echo this theme of faith being expressed in stepping out into the uncomfortable unknown. Not the least of which was that time when God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his long-awaited heir. In what had to be a grueling step of faith, he proceeded to carry out God's request, trusting that God knew what He was doing.

Now if you know this story, you know God's will was not a human sacrifice, but rather a fully surrendered heart. God provided a substitute instead, and Abraham passed this test of faith with flying colors. Abraham stretched out his arm with a knife to his most prized relationship on earth - talk about getting uncomfortable.

While God may not be asking you for this level of sacrifice today, have you considered how He is leading you? Maybe it's needing to leave something behind? Perhaps a mindset, a habit, a grudge, a relationship? Maybe it's spending more time with Him in prayer and rest? Maybe it's needing to surrender something that has become a god to you? Or maybe it's time to break the ice with a neighbor to tell them they are loved.

These faith steps come in all shapes and sizes, but they all propel you into the unknown. But take heart: growth and Jesus are waiting for you there.

WHAT WAS YOUR LATEST STEP OF FAITH? WHAT IS YOUR "FRESH FRUIT" OF OBEDIENCE?

DAY 9



FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, NOT A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST. EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Way back in the day when "The Matrix" trilogy made its way to theatres, my mind was blown. That was over 20 years ago, so you could imagine my giddy anticipation as the reboot hit the big screen this year. Spoiler alert, it was a letdown of epic proportions. Don't take the red pill this time. Sorry Keanu.

If I haven't lost you yet by way of that sci-fi movie reference, chances are that you have at least seen the original and recall the scene where Neo, the character played by Keanu Reeves, meets a young boy sitting in a living room, bending spoons with his mind. "How did you do that?" quipped Neo. The boy's response: "Don't try and bend the spoon, that's impossible. Only try to remember the truth...there is no spoon."

This made sense as they were both inside of a computer program that could be manipulated by a free mind - one not plugged into the Matrix. Today real people in real life are trying to "bend a spoon" of sorts. Spiritually speaking, most religiously minded people today are actually trying to tip a scale, not bend a spoon. This is an imagined heavenly scale upon which God would weigh our good deeds against our bad ones. As the thinking goes, if our good outweighs our bad, then we're likely headed to the good place.

But like Neo was made aware: Don't try and tip the heavenly scale, that's impossible. Only try to remember the truth...there is no scale.

The Bible is very clear that the way we arrive at a morally right place before a Holy God is not by the good that we do, but rather the good that was done for us. Jesus did all of the heavy lifting by way of His sacrificial death on the cross. His resurrection verified that God's just wrath against all evil and sin was satisfied, and now that righteousness is offered as a gift to be received by faith.

Paul summarizes how salvation works in Ephesians 2:8-9. We are brought from death to life by way of a gift of grace. This gift allows us to no longer walk in old habits of self-gratification, but rather new habits of good works. Our good works are the result of a life transformed by grace, not the basis of how we got there.

WAS THERE A TIME WHEN YOU WERE WORKING TO TIP THE "HEAVENLY SCALE" TO MERIT GOD'S FAVOR? HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW THAT THE WORK REQUIRED FOR FORGIVENESS WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY CHRIST?

THERE IS NO SPOON

BURIED TREASURE

DAY 10

Once upon a time there lived a hard-working rural fisherman who provided for his family by spending all day out on the water to haul in a catch to sell in the nearby market. The work was grueling, competitive, and somedays, depending on the currents and fish patterns, left him coming home empty handed. While he regretted being away from home so much, he reconciled his dissonance by coming home with a few dollars most days.

Every morning he had to cross the beach to jump into his boat, rig his nets, and push out. He was fond of that beach, because of the stories he was told as child from his grandmother of epic pirate battles and nearby buried treasure. She even told him where to look for it. Those memories were now fairly-tales, and actually looking for that treasure bordered on absurdity.

The fisherman grew older and was now training his son to take over the humble family business. With a greater spirit of curiosity, the son would often enjoy hearing the second-hand pirate stories and would even speak of digging by the beach to unearth their truthfulness. This impulse was quickly dismissed as child's play and the son's imagination would be yanked back to reality and the work.

In time the father became bound to the house, as his son not only took over the business, but also indulged his curiosity to dig. Three feet underneath a tree adjacent to the beach, the same roots that his father would dash over every



"BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO HAS BLESSED US IN CHRIST WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES." EPHESIANS 1:3

IN THE
BUSYNESS OF
THE TASKS
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THE BURIED
TREASURE
RIGHT
UNDERNEATH
OUR FEET.

day, their laid a box, with greater riches inside than the stories even described. The son's life, and his young family, was now set on an entirely new course, with new-found freedom.

It can be easy to live like the father in this story. In fact, many people do. In the busyess of the tasks of daily life, even in the pursuit of a good, honest living, we can miss the buried treasure right underneath our feet. This treasure is not made of gold and jewels, left behind by pirates, but spiritual treasure given by the Creator, that can set us on a new course, with new freedom, just the same.

This treasure will not run out, but becomes a constant source of joy, satisfaction, peace, and contentment – those conditions of life that we think gold bricks will provide. This treasure *in Christ* becomes a supernatural fuel supply from which to draw as we walk into all the plans God has mapped out for us. This treasure is yours to enjoy, and we'll explore it together in the next few days ahead.

DO SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST SEEM AS EXCITING AS MATERIAL BLESSINGS YOU MIGHT RECEIVE?

HAVE YOU PAUSED RECENTLY TO CONSIDER THE DEPTHS OF THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES THAT ARE YOURS ALREADY?



... EVEN AS HE CHOSE US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS BEFORE HIM. EPHESIANS 1:4



THE ETERNAL, HOLY, TRIUNE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE WAS THINKING ABOUT YOU - BEFORE THE EARTH WAS SPINNING AROUND THE SUN.

If we were able to completely figure out God and His ways - His divine nature and eternal power, how all His plans fit together in the here and now on this side of heaven - something would be wrong. Certainly, we can see His power on display in nature, and His care on display on the cross. We can know for certain who He is, as He has taken the guesswork out of that mystery in revealing Jesus, the eternal Word.

But to understand everything about God, would raise our simple human minds to a height where we'd run short of oxygen. After all, as told from Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." And Paul would echo this later when he said "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

In other words, some truths about God are meant to blow our minds... The nature of an eternal spiritual Being - without beginning, without end. What!?! The formation of our brilliant and spectacular universe from

nothing. Dang! (Or as the scientific community puts it, "Bang!") God's trinitarian nature, while still being completely one. Huh? Holiness - complete moral perfection and purity. Woah! What about His ability to make bad things turn out to be good things? Hope so! If our minds opened up to the innerworkings of these mysteries right now we'd probably melt - we can know of them conceptually, but to understand them completely, for us, is for another time.

Being chosen by God is another one of those mind-bending treasures. This had become known as the "doctrine of election." Much ink has been spilled by theologians over this topic, wrestling with the question "Does God choose us, or do we choose Him?" This is debated because we see both concepts that seem contradictory playing out in Jesus' teachings. Even in John's gospel we see Jesus telling us that "no one comes to Him unless the Father draws him" while at the same time, He calls people to a personal belief, a real decision.

As we rest in the center of Biblical tension, let's not miss the great treasure to embrace here: that the eternal, holy, triune Creator of the Universe was thinking about you - before the earth was spinning around the sun. He has seen your life, He has seen your death, and He has orchestrated your life so that you'd come to the place of making a decision to step into a new life in Christ. If life was a giant kickball game at recess during school, the Creator pointed to you and declared, "This one is mine!" How do we react to that? Probably with what!?! dang! huh? woah! hope so! or simply just "thanks."

TAKE A MOMENT TO EXPRESS THANKS TO GOD FOR THE REALITY OF BEING CHOSEN.

HOW MIGHT GOD USE YOU IN THE STORY OF SOMEONE ELSE'S PATH OF REALIZING THEY ARE ALSO CHOSEN TO BE IN CHRIST?

BURIED TREASURE: CHOSEN DAY 11



IN LOVE HE PREDESTINED US FOR ADOPTION TO HIMSELF AS SONS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF HIS WILL, TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE, WITH WHICH HE HAS BLESSED US IN THE BELOVED. EPHESIANS 1:5-6

There is an endearing and enduring thought that is embraced in many cultures in their view of humanity as a whole. I'm sure you have heard it, used it, or even embraced it at some point. That is the idea that "we are all God's children." This is a warm and inclusive way to wrap your arms around the idea of being human. However, if the Bible is correct in the passage above, then it might be more accurate to say that "we are all God's creation."

To go from "creature" to "child," it seems God must intervene. A part of the richness of our identity as grace-built people is that we also have been adopted relationally into the family of God. By

BURIED TREASURE: ADOPTED

DAY 12

way of being In Christ, we have been moved to the inside of a unique relationship. Some scholars describe adoption as being brought in as an adult son, thus having immediate access to God as our Heavenly Father. This is not the default setting for humanity as a whole, but only for those whose relationships with God have been restored.

It's hard to fully grasp being a child of God, but think about the access and ownership that you now have. Think about it this way: Imagine you make friends with the world's richest person. I can only imagine the fun houses, cars, toys, and opportunities he has. Pretend for a moment that he

invites you over for a weekend to explore the compound and have some fun rolling in the lap of luxury. Then to your surprise, instead of going home, he hands you a set of keys, a deed to the mansion, and a partner share in his stock. He says, "you are in the family now and all this is yours." That's a game changer. God has done this for us in Christ.

More than what fades, we are given direct and immediate access to God, with a confidence to draw near to Him. He cares for us, protects us, and although He may allow hard seasons of life, and unexpected pain, He promises to work all those things together for our good. Now like Jesus, we have all the benefits of having a home in God's house - sleeping well at night with the security that "Dad" has is all under control. Even more, we have the joy of simply spending time with Him.

So what does that mean for the rest of the "creatures" out there? Are we superimposing some sort of "less-than" label on human beings? By no means! We have been given no right to do so, because God loves them too - and longs for them to take a step of faith into His family. Far from being superior "children," we become the agents of grace to invite them into the joy we have found, and we do so in love. God doesn't give us keys to the mansion to keep others out; to the contrary, He sends us out to bring others in.



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING GOD'S CREATION VERSUS GOD'S CHILDREN?

WHAT DO YOU TREASURE ABOUT BEING ABLE TO CALL THE CREATOR, "DAD?"



IN HIM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR TRESPASSES, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE...
EPHESIANS 1:7

BURIED TREASURE: REDEEMED & FORGIVEN

DAY 13

GOD'S LOVE
IS A HOLY
LOVE, HIS
PATIENCE
IS A HOLY
PATIENCE,
HIS WORD
IS A HOLY
WORD.

I am into my 40s now and am slowly watching my coolness slip away. It's not the minivan that I'm driving from one kid sport to the next, or the fact that I hardly pay attention to the clothes I wear while I'm said chauffeur. It's not the embarrassing dad jokes that I crack myself up with as the kids roll their eyes. But it's hearing about "well-known" artists and musicians that my kids reference that start to indicate that I might be ever so slightly becoming outdated.

In my kids' eyes the impact certain people are supposed to have on me is lost because I am out of touch. Now while I'll argue that celebrity types aren't really supposed to impact me all that much, there is a truth to what they are saying. When you grow out of touch with something, other related things also don't have the same effect. This is spiritually true of the amazing gifts of redemption and forgiveness in Christ. Why are those two words commonplace and expected in church circles - and not radical and life-changing? I suspect because we may be growing out of touch with something - that something being the holiness of God.

God's holiness is an attribute that infuses all the rest. God's love is a holy love, His patience is a holy patience, His word is a holy word. God's holiness speaks to the peerless perfection of His goodness and purity. God morally pure, a brilliant radiating light with no trace of darkness or discrepancy. He is the only eternal spiritual being to exist, matchless, and set apart - in a category all His own. No wonder when people in the Bible would encounter a mere angelic being, they

feared for their very lives. Perceiving God's holiness is a sacred and weighty thing; it is a fierce power that leaves us realizing just how powerless we are before Him.

Holiness is not often considered today in this way. We hear of holiness and it seems like a relic from the past, or a strange way of living for people who churn their own butter. But God's holiness is a spiritual fact - one that leaves us in a grave reality. WE ARE NOT HOLY. In fact, from the time we can express ourselves, our rebellion and selfish nature are put on display for all the world to see. As Paul makes it clear to the Romans: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

As we get more in touch with God's holiness, and just wrath against that which betrays His very nature - the buried treasure of redemption and forgiveness can be seen in a fresh light. Redemption carries the idea of being purchased back at a price. God paid the price to buy us out of slavery to our unholiness, at the cost of Jesus' life on the cross. Forgiveness gives us the idea that the guilt and shame of our unholy nature before God have not only been removed but also sent far away. God is not keeping an old record of our unholiness in a file somewhere to pull out later. What amazing gifts to behold, especially when we become more in touch with beholding His glorious holiness.

WHAT ATTRIBUTES OF GOD COME TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT HIS NATURE AND CHARACTER?

HOW CAN GOD BE PERFECTLY JUST IN THE FACE OF SO MANY OFFENSES TO HIS HOLINESS?

BURIED TREASURE: WISDOM DAY 14

Human beings have been in a pursuit of knowledge since we first arrived on the scene. As bearers of the image of God, we create, explore, define, pursue, learn, and grow in our understanding of the world and how it works.

Think about this: We were created to be gardeners and scientists. When everything was good in the garden at first, Adam was given a job as he lived off the fruitful land – to name the animals (Genesis 2:19). The first person was given the job to examine, understand, and put definition to the species in the animal kingdom. Adam was a gardener (Genesis 2:15) and a scientist! Even before the institution of marriage, there was the institution of a kind of science.

We are given the capacity and the charge to understand and give definition to the created order. What a beautiful job! Yet, there is a wisdom that was not intended to be defined by human beings, but one that could only be defined by God Himself. This knowledge is the “mystery of His will” that is understood from special revelation, not simply general revelation and the discoveries we make therein. This wisdom is a gift that opens the door to true spiritual life, something many are in search of today.

The buried treasure of God’s wisdom is yet another heavenly blessing of being *In Christ*. What science cannot tell us is why we are here; the greater

“MAKING KNOWN TO US THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL, ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE, WHICH HE SET FORTH IN CHRIST AS A PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF TIME, TO UNITE ALL THINGS IN HIM, THINGS IN HEAVEN AND THINGS ON EARTH.” EPHESIANS 1:9-10



THIS
WISDOM OF
GOD SETS US
FREE FROM
THE ONGOING
SEARCH
FOR LOVE
AND THE
EXHAUSTING
PURSUIT OF
HAPPINESS.

purposes for our existence, our origin, and our destiny. And it is these things that haunt the curious soul, and these things that are vitally important to know to experience life as it was intended to be.



Because we know Jesus in a real and personal way – we know the Creator – we understand why bad things may happen to good people, we can sort out the difference of man-made religion versus being rightly related to God, we know of God’s holy and merciful character, we see God’s triune nature, and so much more. Jesus has taken the guesswork out of who God is and what He is like. We can stare into the face of death with no fear or dread, as we have seen the first fruits of the resurrected life already.

Ultimate wisdom converges around a person: Jesus. This wisdom of God sets us free from the ongoing search for love and the exhausting pursuit of happiness. Today as you take up your responsibilities as a gardener and a scientist, you can do so with the peace and joy that come from a full heart. And when the world, in hot pursuit of knowledge to bring sense to their lives, sees this joy in you, they may also be drawn to a wisdom that can change their lives forever.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENERAL REVELATION AND SPECIAL REVELATION?

WHY WAS GOD’S WILL TO “UNITE ALL THINGS” A “MYSTERY” UNTIL JESUS ARRIVED ON THE SCENE?



IN HIM WE HAVE OBTAINED AN INHERITANCE, HAVING BEEN PREDESTINED ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF HIM WHO WORKS ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE COUNSEL OF HIS WILL. EPHESIANS 1:11

GETTING TO KNOW GOD WILL NEVER GET FADED, BECAUSE ENJOYING LIFE WITH GOD CAN NEVER GET OLD.

What comes to your mind when you think about the word “inheritance”? If you are like me it’s probably those valuable things that stand to be passed down to you from a family member’s estate when they pass. No one wishes that day for aging family members, but there is certainly interest in Granny’s last will and testament, especially when money is involved. In fact, inheritance can easily become a point of tension among loved ones.

In Christ, we have an inheritance already granted to us that does not come with a side of drama or sibling rivalry. It is also far deeper than money that is accumulated one day and gone the next. So what does it mean to be an heir in Christ?

Later in the New Testament, Peter writes about three characteristics of our heavenly inheritance. First, it is imperishable. This is a foreign concept for us because everything on Earth is subject to death and decay. Eventually, the new car loses that new car smell, the shoes you wanted to keep pristine get scuffed, new songs get played out, and the invincible feelings of our youth give way to weird aches and pains that you can’t even trace to an injury. Everything is winding down. But our life after death with Jesus is not subject to decay. It is life that never winds down, loses the new car smell, or gets scuffed, old, or achy because you haven’t stretched the hamstrings in a while.

Second, our inheritance is undefiled. Our heavenly inheritance is pure, perfect, and free of corruption.

DAY 15

BURIED TREASURE: HEIR

This makes me think about creation, when Adam and Eve had a perfect and pure relationship with God—after they met each other for the first time and before their free will led them to walk away from God. This was a time of simplicity and purity in the relationship between God and man—a time of direct and personal communication, sharing, and love. This was also a time when adults experienced pure childlike innocence. This was a picture of life as God intended, and our heavenly inheritance will be such a life.

And third, it is unfading. What a promise this is, since in this life we have only experienced fading. The excitement and rush of experiencing something new, whether a new book, a new song, or a new recipe, creates value in our lives for a while. But with every additional reading, hearing, or meal, the value that is added plateaus and begins to diminish. We get used to things, and there is a fade factor.

This is not the case in the life to come with God in heaven. Getting to know God will never get faded, because enjoying life with God can never get old, as His creativity, beauty, and knowledge are boundless. This characteristic of God’s nature is probably why our relationships with other people are the most fade-resistant experiences we can have today. People, created in the image of God, are intended for relationship, discovery, and growth. It may be that your relationship with your favorite person today is just a small example of the unfading joy you will have with Jesus, who embodies our heavenly inheritance.

WHAT CHARACTERISTIC OF YOUR HEAVENLY INHERITANCE IS MOST EXCITING FOR YOU?

HOW CAN YOUR INHERITANCE TOMORROW CHANGE THE WAY YOU LIVE TODAY?



IN HIM YOU ALSO, WHEN YOU HEARD THE WORD OF TRUTH, THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION, AND BELIEVED IN HIM, WERE SEALED WITH THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT, WHO IS THE GUARANTEE OF OUR INHERITANCE UNTIL WE ACQUIRE POSSESSION OF IT, TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY. - EPHESIANS 1:13-14

Back in that day, a seal would come as the official mark of the authoritative governing body marking an official declaration. In other words, the person in charge has said so, therefore it is, whatever the "it" happened to be. You can't mess with the seal, or what the seal represented. In grittier and more modern terms, consider the mafia - when a person is a "made" guy, you can't touch him. Well, according to the gangster movies I've seen over the years at least.

With that idea in your mind (the sealed idea, not the mob), now think about the Creator of the Universe who by default has all authority. This Being has made an official declaration over your life. He says you belong to Him and you are now and forever in a right relationship with Him. You've been "made."

The seal in our case is actually a person. The third member of the Triune Godhead to be specific. While the Bible clearly reveals that there is only one true and living God, this God is also revealed to have existed from eternity past as a community of three: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Different persons, yet having the same substance. God the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our very souls immediately upon our belief in Jesus. This is a great exchange. God takes our sin debt upon Himself, and in turn puts upon us the righteousness of Jesus, and the gift of the person of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 16

BURIED TREASURE: SEALED

GOD THE
HOLY SPIRIT
TAKES UP
RESIDENCE
IN OUR
VERY SOULS
IMMEDIATELY
UPON OUR
BELIEF IN
JESUS.

The Holy Spirit is described in the Bible as our comforter, guide, and helper. He illuminates the truth that He also inspired to be written and so much more. When we are sealed, we have 100 percent of the Holy Spirit. We often hear popular songs today about inviting the Holy Spirit to "fill this place" and that He is "welcome here," which might be a little confusing. There really is no need to put out a welcome mat; He is already living in us. We are in one sense already filled because we are sealed. Being "filled" in the New Testament sense carries more of the idea that we are being controlled by and are surrendered to the Holy Spirit.

In addition to this living dynamic of learning from and listening to the Holy Spirit, we are also encouraged because He is like a down payment for our future inheritance. On Day 15, we looked at the pure, imperishable, and unfading future that awaits us in heaven. Those promises can begin to be experienced here and now. Eternal life is not just about duration, but also quality - a quality of life in walking in our purposes as creatures made to dwell with our Creator in the most intimate of ways. Such a life can't help but to spill out in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control among our neighbors. All of this is possible by drawing from our heavenly deposits today.

HOW DOES BEING "SEALED" MAKE YOU FEEL IN LIGHT OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

ARE THERE ANY PARTS OF YOUR LIFE THAT ARE NOT SURRENDERED TO THE HOLY SPIRIT?

DAY 17



"YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AND HATE YOUR ENEMY.' BUT I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY BE SONS OF YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN, FOR HE MAKES HIS SUN RISE ON THE EVIL AND ON THE GOOD, AND SENDS RAIN ON THE JUST AND ON THE UNJUST." MATTHEW 5:43-45

This morning it's raining. I can't say that I prefer waking up to rain, but falling asleep to the blanketing sound of falling water sure is nice – especially when you're cozy and dry under shelter. I'd much rather wake up to a clear sky and bright sun that draws me out to play. All of those conditions are happening right now somewhere on planet Earth – and truth be told, we need the rain and the sun – they are both good gifts.

God gives good gifts to every human being every day, even to those who drive their neighbors from their shelter, steal their ability to play, and remove all sense of comfort. Just as God provides every day, human conflict prevails every day. There hasn't been much time here on planet Earth that human beings have not been engaged in some sort of fighting. It is the glaring result and reality of the web of sin that entangles us, creating unjust aggressors and innocent victims.

Yet, God's leading edge is His kind provision each morning. The sun rises, the rain falls. On the good guys and the bad guys. There is a reason for this. Paul poses the question: *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* (Romans 2:4) God longs for every human heart to repent of our selfish, self-reliant, self-exalting, evil ways that ultimately harm our neighbors – and to draw many in, He leads with kindness.

The pinnacle of God's revelation, Jesus himself, embodied this very posture when He surrendered His life for those at war with God – His enemies. If this is how Jesus rolled, and if this is the very heart of God, then what naturally follows is that we too get to become the tip of God's spear – His leading edge of kindness. And not just toward the innocent and victims, but also to the guilty and aggressors. Today you can be like the sun, and like the rain, for every kind of neighbor that crosses your path – with the hope that His grace through you would allow others to find true shelter for their souls.

HAVE YOU BEEN WITHHOLDING GRACE FROM SOMEONE BECAUSE THEY ARE "BAD"? HOW CAN YOU DROP A GRACE BOMB ON SOMEONE WHO HAS PERSONALLY HURT YOU?

GOD'S LEADING EDGE

THE UGLY TREES DAY 18

We live back in the woods with hundreds of trees competing for the best sunlight. Because of that, the more disadvantaged trees – the ones not intentionally planted and cared for – twist, bend, and contort in ways that, well, are just plain ugly. Maybe "spooky" would be a better way to look at them – like vampire bats could fly out and bite you at any moment. But in reality they are just struggling for survival – grasping for the light they so desperately need to live.

This past winter was punishing for these mangled monsters. A snowstorm leaving behind a foot of heavy wet snow pushed the angled trunks and horizontal branches to the limit – snapping many clear in half. One of these trees bends directly over our driveway, and now with spring upon us I had intended to break out the chainsaw and finish the job that the storm had started.

But before I could sharpen my saw, this little dogwood that lives in the shadows of towering oaks, bloomed brightly with white flowers – causing me to stop in my tracks and marvel at the beauty of God's creation. I was stunned by just how much potential could burst forth from a broken, bent, "ugly" tree. There was so much going on inside that I could not see. I figured the yard would be better off without it, but it's the only tree in bloom this early spring, calling attention from all the others around it.

I wonder how often we take that attitude with the neighbors around us? How often do we see the brokenness of a divorce, the bentness of following the world, or the ugliness of addiction, and perhaps think that our world would be better if those trees went away, and we only had tall, straight, and strong ones? How often do we look at a neighbor as spooky – and brace ourselves for the vampires inside?

Perhaps we could all learn a lesson from the little bent dogwood hanging over my driveway. The ugly trees are the ones fighting for survival to reach the light. They are the ones struggling to receive that life-giving warmth that they so desperately need. They are lost in a forest of well-established oaks. But once they find the light, they become stunning arrays of beauty that God created them for.

Jesus is the light of the world. With His gracious touch, we all come to life, and bloom into our good purposes. Jesus did not reserve this role exclusively. He calls us the light of the world, because HE lives IN us, and His light shines through us to touch others – especially the bent ones, because the world loses its beauty without them.

WHAT BENT, BROKEN, OR "UGLY" PEOPLE HAVE YOU BEEN AVOIDING IN YOUR LIFE? HOW COULD SHINING AMONG THEM HELP THEM TO FIND THE HOPE THEY ARE SEARCHING FOR?



AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM AND SAID TO HIM, "THE LORD IS WITH YOU, O MIGHTY MAN OF VALOR." JUDGES 6:12

It's recess on the blacktop in elementary school and you're lined up as the team captain's eyes scan back and forth. You don't need to be picked first, but please Lord, anything but last. While your self-esteem hangs in the balance, you wait to see just how desirable your possible contribution is to the kickball team. You are pointed to, a sudden wave of relief floats over you, and you join your new squad ahead of the other kids anxiously dodging bullets from this mental firing squad.

THE MIGHTY WEAKLINGS

DAY 19

Being the last pick is a humbling experience, unearthing all kinds of insecurities. But here is an encouraging thought: God usually picks the last, to be first. If you don't consider yourself a spiritual giant or doubt the significance of your contribution to expanding the Kingdom of God, you might want to reconsider, because that seems to be God's preference.

Take Gideon. We meet him threshing wheat in a winepress for fear of the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord meets with him, he admittedly acknowledges that he would be the last pick in the kickball lineup. Not only that, but his family would also be the most likely to lose every game that season. To make matters worse, Gideon proved to be afraid of the things God called him to do.

In light of all of this, God lovingly alleviates his fears while simultaneously removing any earthly reasons to have confidence in his success. Take a few moments to read Judges 6 and 7. You'll see drama unfold as



ALL
THROUGHOUT
THE BIBLE,
GOD CHOOSES
THE LEAST
LIKELY
CANDIDATES
TO BECOME
MIGHTY
TOOLS IN HIS
HAND.

God whittles a force of 32,000 men down to 300. These were impossible odds, and that is just how God wanted it. With the weakest guy, from the weakest clan, with the weakest militia, God would win a battle. When we are weak, He is strong.

Later in the New Testament, Paul wrote: "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

All throughout the Bible, God chooses the least likely candidates to become mighty tools in His hand. From Moses, to David, to Gideon, to Peter – we find out that giants of faith are those who show God to be the hero. We can all do that. So don't let the thinking of being the last pick interfere with the reality that you too are MIGHTY in the hand of God.

WHAT IS ONE STEP OF FAITH YOU WOULD TAKE IF AN ANGEL SHOWED UP AND CALLED YOU "MIGHTY"?

HAVE YOU BEEN PUTTING OFF SOMETHING IMPORTANT FOR THE LORD OUT OF FEAR?



NOW BY CHANCE A PRIEST WAS GOING DOWN THAT ROAD, AND WHEN HE SAW HIM HE PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE. SO LIKEWISE A LEVITE, WHEN HE CAME TO THE PLACE AND SAW HIM, PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE. - LUKE 10:31-32

SLOWING DOWN

DAY 20

Badges of honor come in many shapes and sizes today. A very common one in our culture is carrying the label of “busy.” Don’t get me wrong, we are put in gardens for good and meaningful work. So getting after the tasks, duties and good callings of working can keep us busy in a good way. If we are busy, we are also esteemed as important, valuable and a significant contributor to society at large. Many wear the badge with pride, and that’s okay.

But if being busy is our steady state of reality, then something might be broken. When being busy pushes us past the ability to have meaningful relationships and resting our weary souls, then running at the redline may be leading us into a crash. And it can certainly distract us from other meaningful opportunities in our paths. Being busy might be our greatest threat to the awareness of our neighbors and possible divine appointments with them.

Do you recall the parable of the Good Samaritan with the characters of the Priest and Levite? We aren’t given the backstory of these characters, but we do see that they had no time for the dying man in the street. We see that they kept on their way and missed the opportunity that was literally right in front of them. If Jesus told that parable today, I wonder if he would have said “then there was a Levite who also was on his phone checking emails, and avoided the man in the street?”

Were they too busy, or too self-righteous to help? Maybe a little of both? When you are considering Grace Bombing a neighbor, you must slow down. No matter what surprise you may bless them with, your time will always be required. Time to notice, time to pray, time to let ‘er go. Do you have the luxury of time?

AT THE HEART OF TRUE REST IS THE NOTION THAT GOD IS IN CONTROL, AND HE WILL PROVIDE FOR ME, EVEN WHEN I’M NOT WORKING.

Perhaps not only for your neighbor, but even for yourself? God wants this for you. He always has.

Over the years I have struggled with a particular area of obedience in my life: a Sabbath rest. The Sabbath day, based on God’s created order, is a life-giving command for human beings to take one day a week to slow down and recreate with God. Some people Sabbath on Sundays, as that became the natural day to worship after the resurrection of Jesus. But I’ve always served others on that day, so that didn’t work for me. Now I have other options, but the struggle is still real.

I can easily slip into the home office, scan the emails, work through the to-do lists in my mind, or even get caught up on chores on the “day off.” At the heart of it for me is a matter of faith. To take a real Sabbath rest, a whole day to connect with others and the Lord with no greater agenda, I have to stop driving and let God run the world. At the heart of true rest is the notion that God is in control, and He will provide for me, even when I’m not working.

Loving your neighbors in real ways will force you to slow down. But what if our souls already had this rhythm built in? How many more opportunities would we see each day?

DO YOU PRACTICE A REAL SABBATH DAY? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

WHEN YOU ARE OUT AND ABOUT, ARE YOU STAYING DISTRACTED AND BUSY?

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO RELEASE TODAY IN ORDER TO TAKE A WEEKLY SABBATH REST?

FULL ISAAC DAY 21

A few years ago the Lord dropped into my lap an opportunity to give a sacrificial Grace Bomb, and I blew it. At the heart of the thing was me lacking faith in God's provision. Some lessons are learned by fumbling the ball.

It was springtime, the weather was warming up, and so was the real estate market. This was good news for me and Kristen, as we recently listed a home we had the opportunity to renovate. After three long - no wait, very long - months of working around the clock on nights and weekends, by the grace of God and many good neighbors with handyman skills, we had turned around what could have been a knock down into a knock out. We stood to collect a wad of cash on this house-flipping project.

While showings were underway, Kristen had the prompting to "Grace Bomb" the house. Specifically, I was meeting with a pastor in the area that I had never met before, and she felt like we should offer him the house (if he happened to be in the market for one) essentially for zero mark-up. This Grace Bomb would have meant no profit on our first major investment of time and money. Through a series of not-so-random coincidences, I also reckoned that this was the next right step to take.

As you guessed it, my new friend happened to be looking around, and was interested. I told him we'd like to Grace Bomb them with this house, if it was a good fit for them and their growing family. Later on, he asked "What's the Grace Bomb?" Instead of staying fully surrendered to what I knew to be the

GOD CAN BE TRUSTED TO PROVIDE EXACTLY WHAT WE NEED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF A FAITH STEP



AND ABRAHAM LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND LOOKED, AND BEHOLD, BEHIND HIM WAS A RAM, CAUGHT IN A THICKET BY HIS HORNS. AND ABRAHAM WENT AND TOOK THE RAM AND OFFERED IT UP AS A BURNT OFFERING INSTEAD OF HIS SON. SO ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE, "THE LORD WILL PROVIDE"; AS IT IS SAID TO THIS DAY, "ON THE MOUNT OF THE LORD IT SHALL BE PROVIDED."
GENESIS 22:13-14

very best I could do, I calculated a little extra, held a little back. It was a half-hearted step of faith. In the end, the pastor did not end up buying the home. But the real story was my heart before the Lord.

Unlike me, there was a time in Abraham's life where he demonstrated a mature faith response to a sacrificial ask from the Lord. You probably know this story well, when Abraham was tested by God to offer his beloved son Isaac, his only heir, as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. Without delay, Abraham fully obeyed, to the very point of raising the knife over his child - until the Lord broke in to stop him.

More than just learning that God desires full surrender, a "full Isaac" if you will, we also learn what Abraham did: that the Lord will provide. God can be trusted to provide exactly what we need on the other side of a faith step, especially a sacrificial one. Abraham placed his full faith and confidence in the promises of God; namely that Isaac would have children one day, and that he could bring Isaac back from death.

When we are squarely faced with a faith step, and we are uncertain of how God will provide if we take it, we must remember that the Lord will provide. He promises that for those *in Christ* He is able to work all things together for our good. God will work things out for us on the other side of when we offer "full Isaacs" - laying everything on the altar, holding nothing back. I can only imagine the adventures that are lost, and the things we will never discover, when we are content with offering half-Isaacs, only giving part of our hearts to the One who is worthy of all of it.

WHAT HAS GOD PUT ON YOUR HEART LATELY THAT REQUIRES FULL SACRIFICE ON YOUR PART?

ARE YOU CURRENTLY HOLDING ANYTHING BACK FROM THE LORD IN FEAR?



BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU. BUT WHOEVER WOULD BE GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WOULD BE FIRST AMONG YOU MUST BE SLAVE OF ALL. FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY." MARK 10:43-45

THE REAL
REWARD
IS THE
STEADFAST
LOVE OF GOD.

In our world today the way up is up. We climb the ladders of education, success, and achievement. The view is better from the top – so many are working hard to get ahead. There is nothing wrong with working hard and striving to be the best. But the path to “success” can often leave behind a wake of bodies that got trampled by our ambitions of achievement. Yes, to get ahead of our neighbors, we sometimes need to step on their backs to advance.

You don't need to look far to see this play out. Just take my kids on just about every car ride. These days, the coveted position in the car is “shotgun,” otherwise known as the front passenger seat. Outside of driving, which, thank the Lord, is still a few years out, for my kids shotgun is the best view with the most controls. It is the greatest seat. This often leads to a flurry of self-ambitious physical dust-ups, emotional altercations, or sometimes literally getting stepped on – to win the prize of which of the four will be seated at the right hand of the driver.

RIDING SHOTGUN

DAY 22

Jesus didn't have kids, but he raised His disciples for several years and taught them new way of getting ahead. They needed the lesson. On one particular occasion, James and John, the “sons of thunder,” along with their mom, were jockeying for shotgun in Jesus' Kingdom. This was the ultimate version of success for them. They wanted the top spot on the ladder by Jesus. In this account, the feathers of the other disciples were obviously ruffled. Enter a teaching moment where Jesus redefines what being great is all about.



Take a moment to slowly read through Mark 10:35-45 yourself, and you'll see that Jesus makes a stark contrast between the world and the Kingdom of God. Jesus says that those who are great in the world exercise authority and control over others, using their power to keep themselves on top and in shotgun. This is not how God sees greatness. True greatness is expressed in the freedom to release shotgun, step down from the ladder, and push your neighbors ahead of yourself.

Helping others get ahead is a reflection of true greatness. After all, this is the very example that Jesus gave us as He left heaven in His incarnation and journey to the cross. Both in Mark 10 and later as Paul explains in Philippians 2, we are reminded that the way up is down – and that we too should follow in these Holy footsteps.

But why is that? Sure, you may have heard this Kingdom truth before – but have you stopped to consider why it is true? I think it is true because the real reward is the steadfast love of God, which is available no matter where you are seated in the car. To realize that because of Christ, we have already arrived at being perfectly loved, we can still pursue achievement while not needing to trample our neighbors to get there.

WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU TOOK A BACKSEAT SO A NEIGHBOR COULD HAVE THE “BETTER VIEW”?

WHAT IS ONE SMALL WAY TODAY THAT YOU CAN SHOW A NEIGHBOR THAT YOU ARE FOR THEM, AND WANT THEM TO GET AHEAD? TAKE ACTION, AND DROP THAT GRACE BOMB.



"DO NOT REPAY EVIL FOR EVIL, OR REVILING FOR REVILING, BUT ON THE CONTRARY, BLESS, FOR TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED, THAT YOU MAY OBTAIN A BLESSING." 1 PETER 3:9

When I was about 10 years old I can remember standing outside of my grandmother's house, minding my own business, when a car with older kids drove past and tossed a verbal hand grenade out of the car. It might sound silly, but this was my first experience I can remember being bullied. It wasn't a curse, but it felt like one. I remember the words today, some 30 years later: "Nice shoes."

... IT JUST MIGHT BE THE NEXT GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO SURPRISE A NEIGHBOR WITH LOVE.

Obviously the older teens in the car were not paying me a compliment as they whipped by laughing. "Nice shoes" was a commentary on my lack of style at the time, I suppose. I was usually the off-brand kid, largely out of touch with whatever the popular kids were wearing. I didn't fixate on my lack of fashion, content to wear whatever mom bought me, but I had the natural reaction to want to shout something back. I was hurt.

I wasn't too quick on my feet to have lobbed back a retaliation. So instead I just stood there, partially stunned, rehearsing what I would say. I starting talking out loud, as if they could hear me, because I was searching for some kind of justice. I was probably hoping they would get in a car accident. There is something in all of us that causes us to feel this need to make things right, especially when we are intentionally and unjustly hurt.

As human beings created in the image of God, we long for justice, especially when we are personally wronged, because God is just. Our moral compass, the ability to discern between good and bad, and the desire to set wrongs right, are also close to the heart of God. And as we grow up, "nice shoes" seems like child's play with the ways we experience hurt, betrayal, being taken advantage of, stolen from, abused, and host of other things that tear a neighbor down.

DAY 23

NICE SHOES



How easy is it, to simply strike back - and repay evil with evil? Revenge has become the default posture with so many people today, but Jesus calls us to a higher standard. A kind of crazy standard, actually. It is a posture of faith, that determines to "not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless..." (1 Peter 3:9)

Does this mean that we become blind and unemotional toward the evil that impacts us directly? I don't think so. And it doesn't mean that we allow abuse to continue. But it does mean that we can take that hurt and entrust it to God. This is just what Jesus Himself did. Peter tells us that "when (Jesus) was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 3:23)

Just like Jesus did, when we are hurt, we can remember that God is the just judge, and will have the final say against all evil and injustice in the world. Because of that, we are free to not swing back or rehearse our revenge, but instead to show our neighbors a different way of dealing with hurt and personal injustice. It's just a matter of time before someone lobs "nice shoes" at you, and it just might be the next great opportunity to surprise a neighbor with love.

ARE YOU WRESTLING WITH WANTING TO TAKE REVENGE IN SOME WAY WITH ANY OF YOUR NEIGHBORS?

WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU DROPPED A GRACE BOMB INSTEAD OF A REAL ONE, THE NEXT TIME YOU GET HURT?



"YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. A CITY SET ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN. NOR DO PEOPLE LIGHT A LAMP AND PUT IT UNDER A BASKET, BUT ON A STAND, AND IT GIVES LIGHT TO ALL IN THE HOUSE. IN THE SAME WAY, LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS, SO THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GIVE GLORY TO YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN." MATTHEW 5:14-16

Blue Crabs. Sea Nettles. Jet Skis. Sailboats. Oysters. Fishing. These are a few features of life on one of the world's largest estuaries, the Chesapeake Bay. Growing up in Maryland and Virginia, I'm pretty sure I have brackish water running through my veins, as I have spent many a day working and playing on the Bay. This massive body of water transitions from fresh water to the salty Atlantic Ocean - making for lots of fun smaller rivers and creeks in between.

There is one peculiar seasonal phenomenon that happens at the end of the summer that some health-conscious parents would frown upon. We are members of a community pool that overlooks the tail end of a smaller river. By the end of the summer, with the nights cooling off, the crystal-clear pool gets quite cold. The river is warm and toasty, but also has become brown, foamy, and slightly suspect with possible high bacteria counts. Given the option, 10 out of 10 times, my kids will run directly past the pool and jump to frolic in the river, no questions asked.

They will laugh and gurgle and play in the much more suspect option. Why? Because that water's warmth is like an invitation to roll around carefree - in contrast to the stinging cold of the pool at the top of the hill. Grace is like that, minus the flesh-eating bacteria part. The waters of God's grace are warm and inviting, enveloping you in a blanket that simply feels good.

DAY 24

THE WARMTH OF GRACE



THE WATERS OF
GOD'S GRACE
ARE WARM
AND INVITING,
ENVELOPING
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SIMPLY FEELS
GOOD.

Now let me implicate you in this picture of family disfunction. The water is warm because of the location and duration of the sun all summer long. The light has heated up the river, while the pool water is exchanged, preventing this from happening. Light gives warmth, and Jesus said something very personal and practical as He taught His disciples about the character of those who follow Him. Jesus says that YOU are the light of the world. You are the source of warmth, goodness, and love that draw people in!

In our world today, the Church doesn't always get that reputation. To the contrary, many looking in at the church see something sterile and cold, perhaps hypocritical or judgmental. But we must remember that we are called to be the light. Light does expose truth, but it also brings warmth. And we don't need to guess what Jesus meant by this metaphor, as He gives definition to our light as being our good works. These are good works that are seen and felt among our neighbors - good works that help our neighbors feel love and experience grace.

WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU MADE A NEIGHBOR FEEL EXTRAORDINARILY INVITED IN AND WARM?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT JESUS CALLING YOU THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD?

PLAYING OFFENSE

Getting older has its ups and downs. On the upside, I like to think that I have gained wisdom through lessons learned and not making the same mistakes twice. On the downside, I'm finding that I don't have as much energy as I used to, and injuries are taking a little longer to heal. Maybe I should consider a more gentle sport than ice hockey? But I'm drawn to the ice, so maybe I'm not growing in wisdom after all?

My most recent injury, a pulled groin, led me to consider a spiritual lesson. My team was short on players and despite not being at 100% at game time, I decided to play. To compensate for being slow and sore, and trying not to re-injure myself, I decided I would play defense. If you're not familiar with ice hockey, first, I'm sorry, and second, there are three offensive players and two defensemen.

Playing "D" means that you protect your territory and react to the pressure coming your way. You rely on your offense to drive the play down the ice, to take new ground in enemy territory. For me, this meant I was less likely to strain, and more likely to sit back and play a little more passive, and hopefully not get hurt.

We lost. I am terrible at defense. I realized that despite my position I kept falling into offense - trying to push the play and make things happen, leaving the place I was supposed to be. Reflecting on this after the game, painfully sore on the couch, with my bag of ice, I envisioned the Church. The Bride of Christ, the body of Christ in the world, my people - us! We have been put into the world to play offense for Jesus, but it seems like so many congregations are playing it safe, hanging back, protecting the past, and reacting to pressure instead of being a driving force in the world.

When did Jesus tell us to play it safe? Even if we have some bumps and bruises, from everything I can see, Jesus doesn't want us to cling to what was, but to go make what can be.

WE HAVE
BEEN PUT
INTO THE
WORLD
TO PLAY
OFFENSE
FOR JESUS.

DAY 25

Consider these pointed words from our head coach:

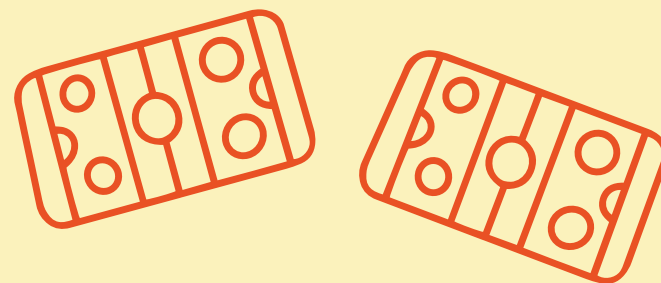
"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."
John 20:21

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18

We are sent. We're told to go. We are called out as witnesses in the world. And the last time I checked - gates stand still, and the church is the one crashing into them. Many of us are comfortable playing defense, but according to Jesus, there is a better way.



HAVE YOU FOUND IT EASY AS A CHURCH MEMBER TO PRESERVE THE PAST OR TO DRIVE THE FUTURE?

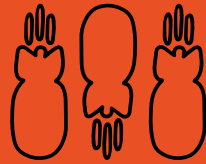
WHAT DOES PLAYING OFFENSE FOR JESUS LOOK LIKE IN YOUR DAY TO DAY LIFE?



"THEREFORE, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES, LET US ALSO LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT, AND SIN WHICH CLINGS SO CLOSELY, AND LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US, LOOKING TO JESUS, THE FOUNDER AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH, WHO FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD." HEBREWS 12:1-2

THE MASTER BOMBER

DAY 26



This little light of mine... Yeah, yeah, yeah... We've all heard this before in church - that God wants us to be the kind of people who step out of our comfort zone to love, engage, even befriend our neighbors and even be vocal at some point about our faith. We are supposed to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, people who bear witness to the "Good News." But honestly, when the buck gets passed to us, I gotta say, it can feel a little icky, a little weird, almost like getting thrown into the deep end without knowing how to swim, or even being a fan of swimming. Sure, it can be a thrill that turns out OK in the end, but you're also a little mad and scared when it all goes down. So many of us tip toe around those challenges of being "out there" - we sort of wait it out until the Sunday we hear about the more comfortable truths of following Jesus.

What can pull us out of this all-too-familiar rut of not practicing our faith? What truly motivates us to let those old ways die, and come alive to something new? It must be Jesus.

The instruction manual to Grace Bomb a neighbor, which for some might be the starting line for life outside of our comfort zones, is to Load, Listen, and Let 'er Go. Jesus modeled this for us, and as the recipients of His grace, becomes the fuel supply that creates in us the unnatural desire to jump into the deep end without being mad about it.

Being Loaded is to be prepared and aware. It is to be ready, to be close and understanding. Jesus loaded first by His incarnation. Remember that

the Son of God did not begin to exist that very first Christmas, but having been with the Father from eternity past, then put on flesh and dwelt among us. The author of DNA wrapped Himself in DNA to show up in our neighborhood. Jesus got in it with us. He loaded with a body that would become a needed sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. More than just being close, Jesus also was able to empathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted, bullied, intimidated, abandoned, and betrayed. He gets us.

Listening is chasing God's will and asking Him for the strength to carry it out. On the hardest night of His life, the night He was betrayed and arrested, Jesus listened. There in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus agonized over His execution and turned to the Father in reverent prayer. Jesus was strengthened to carry out His mission of the cross. It was there He reminded his friends how important meaningful prayer is when He said, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Jesus knew that there is a gap between knowing the right things, and doing the right things, and that gap is best filled with meaningful prayer.

Then Jesus Let 'er Go by dropping the ultimate Grace Bomb of the cross. It was the reason He came to dwell among us in the first place. With all the craziness of those last 12 hours of Jesus' life - being marched from the Garden, to the High Priest, to the Roman Rulers, and ultimately out of the city and up to the Hill we call Calvary - you'd think that Jesus was just a pawn being pushed around in some socio-political power play. But think again; Jesus was in control the entire time. Even though He was bound, each of those steps was an intentional step of love for you and for me. All of those steps were rightfully ours to take to incur the just penalty of falling short of God's holiness. Yet the wrath we deserved was placed upon the innocent one, and we were set free, restored, and made new.

Why jump into the deep end of living in such a way that we take our love for Jesus public? Because contrary to our knee-jerk reaction to stay safe, it is in those steps of faith that we draw closer to the Master Bomber, and find ourselves in the deep end with Him.

ENVISION THE ACTUAL FOOTPRINTS THAT JESUS LEFT BEHIND ON HIS WALK TO CALVARY - AND THEN CONSIDER THAT THOSE WERE YOURS TO TAKE.

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU ARE CHALLENGED TO LEAVE YOUR COMFORT ZONE AMONG YOUR NEIGHBORS?



"AND LET US CONSIDER HOW TO STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS..." HEBREWS 10:24

Sharing about our giving is a delicate matter. I often see videos online of someone capturing a good deed or an act of kindness happening in the moment, and I am automatically skeptical. Yes, the kind act for the recipient seemed genuine, but where does the camera man fall in all of this? What was the intention for then posting online? What, ultimately, was the motivation?

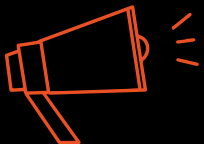
For example, I just watched social media "influencers" filming a "random act of kindness" in partnership with a major corporation, that was clearly an advertisement. You might not be filming yourself

SPURRING ON THE SAINTS

DAY 27

being an awesome human being, but when should we share, or just keep things to ourselves? Is it OK to share things publicly when they were personal and private matters between us and our neighbors? When we go public, do our good deeds then become another form of marketing?

For the Pharisees in Jesus' day, their giving had become a marketing tool for self-glorification. As did their fasting and prayer. It seemed to be a regular occurrence for those men to "go public" with all of these things, and in Matthew 6, Jesus calls them out and corrects this when He says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (6:1).



WE NEED TO STIR ONE ANOTHER UP, TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER, TO INSPIRE EACH OTHER TO LOVE PEOPLE BETTER.

It might be easy for us, then, to apply this text to all situations of sharing about our good works. But it is important to keep in mind that Jesus was calling out their motivation for putting their good works on display "in order to be seen." The Pharisees' hearts were not in the right place, and Jesus was teaching against their hypocrisy. They were using their good deeds to promote another bottom line that was not the glory of God.

So we hold this text (that is often cited by believers who feel a biblical restriction in sharing) in tension with Matthew 5, where Jesus implores us to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (5:16) and Hebrews 10:24 that encourages us to "consider how to stir one another up to love and good works."

So here is the delicate balance. The church today is in desperate need of creative, inspirational, and practical ways to love our neighbors every day. No one is declaring church people as the frontrunners in this area - but we should be. We need to stir one another up, to encourage one another, to inspire each other to love people better - and for this to happen, we must share the stories of how we are being led, prompted, and compelled to love people. If this is our motivation - the spurring on of the saints, to take new action for Jesus, so that God is glorified - then I believe we are on good biblical ground for putting our stories out into the world.

WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU SHARED WITH SOMEONE HOW YOU WERE ABLE TO BLESS A NEIGHBOR?

IN THE SPIRIT OF HEBREWS 10:24, LET US KNOW ABOUT THE LAST GRACE BOMB YOU DROPPED AT GRACEBOMB.ORG - AS YOUR STORY TODAY CAN INSPIRE SOMEONE ELSE'S STEP OF FAITH TOMORROW.



WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. IF ANYONE SAYS, "I LOVE GOD," AND HATES HIS BROTHER, HE IS A LIAR; FOR HE WHO DOES NOT LOVE HIS BROTHER WHOM HE HAS SEEN CANNOT LOVE GOD WHOM HE HAS NOT SEEN. AND THIS COMMANDMENT WE HAVE FROM HIM: WHOEVER LOVES GOD MUST ALSO LOVE HIS BROTHER. 1 JOHN 4:19-21

TO BE
RIGHTLY
RELATED
TO GOD, WE
MUST BE
PURE IN HIS
PRESENCE.

There is a very popular movement that at times is fired up in the culture known as "paying it forward." Sometimes it happens in real life, but most of the time it shows up in your social media feed as a feel-good story. It's a cool premise of doing something surprisingly awesome for someone that is based on the initiation of someone else first doing something like that for you. The idea is to pass along the kindness - to advance it, to pay it forward.

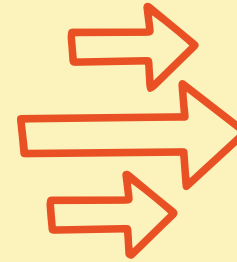
There is no pressure really to pay it forward unless you have been the recipient of that love first. It's a movement that reciprocates the love from the first person that started it. For the world, this is simply a cool thing for human beings to do. For the Christian, this should be a lifestyle of love that is always intentionally seeking its next unsuspecting target, because God started it.

THE REASON WE "PAY IT FORWARD"

DAY 28

Life itself is a surprising gift, and simply being on the planet - alive and well - is a reason to be thankful and filled up. It can be easy to take the sunrise and refreshing rains for granted, but the creation speaks to the power and majesty of the Being that put us here. And this Creator did not leave us in the dark to guess who He is or what He is like - a good and holy God.

His holiness demands ours. To be rightly related to God, we must be pure in His presence. Heaven knows we fall short of that tall order, setting the table for



the ultimate surprising gift - the very life of Jesus. The second member of the Triune Godhead was born into the world as a human, to solve a distinctly human problem. He lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death, and was raised bodily in resurrection to confirm that His atonement was acceptable to God to make us Holy before Him. We have been not only spared from the completely just wrath of God, but also given a place in the family of God as sons and daughters.

This makes us new creations, with fresh mercy and grace every day. We have been given the gift of the person of the Holy Spirit to indwell us as a down payment of our complete heavenly inheritance to come. We have been loved first. For the follower of Jesus, we always have a reason to surprisingly love any neighbor that crosses our paths. We have eternal reasons to "pay it forward." You are the difference between your neighbor feeling this love in real life, or just scrolling past it on their social media feeds.

IT CAN BE EASY TO TAKE GOD'S SUSTAINING LOVE FOR GRANTED - WHAT ARE FIVE THINGS THAT YOU ARE THANKFUL FOR RIGHT NOW?

HOW CAN YOU BECOME MORE PREPARED TO PAY JESUS' LOVE FORWARD TO OTHERS TODAY?



"YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH, BUT IF SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE, HOW SHALL ITS SALTINESS BE RESTORED? IT IS NO LONGER GOOD FOR ANYTHING EXCEPT TO BE THROWN OUT AND TRAMPLED UNDER PEOPLE'S FEET." MATTHEW 5:13

As a kid in the winters, I prayed for snow. Sure, it was fun to get out on a sled or attempt to make a snowman, but it was really all about skipping school. It seemed I always mis-timed it though. One day when there was a test or an assignment due, I'd roll the dice and usually lose, waking up to not a single snowflake. Other times when I was completely prepared for school, a big storm would hit, and we'd be off for days.



Now as a parent, I pray for abnormally warm winters. Sure, a little "white Christmas" would be nice, but beyond that, get these kids back to school already! As I write this, my state is in the middle of one of the coldest, snowiest winters we have had in a while. In fact, our area is bracing yet again for a possible 'Nor Easter that has the grocery stores booming and salt trucks treating the roads.

Yesterday I was stuck behind a large truck spraying liquid salt on the highways to prevent icing and other serious conditions. It is not uncommon either to see the trucks that spread large chunks of salty rock, the same kind you would use to help prevent ice forming in your own walkways. Every so often, I see a large mound of salt that has literally fallen off the back of the truck, and think to myself "what a waste - I could really use some of that for my driveway right now!" And yes, I have even helped myself to those wasted mounds. After all, if they didn't get spread around, they would be completely useless.

DAY 29

PASS THE SALT, PLEASE

Can you picture that mound of salt on the side of the road?

Ok, now recall the illustration that Jesus taught about the life of a disciple at the beginning of the "Sermon on the Mount:" "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet."

Just after explaining the inner character qualities of "Grace Built People," Jesus calls His followers the "salt of the earth." Salt flavors, salt stops corrosion, and in the dead of winter rock salt works wonders in melting ice, keeping us drivers safe.

The first connection that Jesus is making is that we must retain our character of being poor in spirit, meek, hungering for righteousness, among the other beatitudes. But the brilliance of Jesus' metaphor goes beyond our flavor, as salt only works when it is spread around.

Believers who largely stay in the comfortable confines of a salt mound are not really fulfilling their purpose as the salt of the earth. Spiritually speaking the 'Nor Easter is already here, and we need to spread the salt now! Healthy churches are those who take the posture of the salt trucks treating the roads - gather the salt, but then spread it out all over the world to prevent total chaos and disaster.

WHAT GOOD IS A MOUND OF SALT THAT IS NEVER SPREAD AROUND?

WHERE ARE YOU BEING SPREAD OUT AS SALT IN THE WORLD?

THE RIVER MONSTER

DAY 30

A SURPRISE,
ESPECIALLY
A LOVING
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HAS THE
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NEIGHBORS.

The bright moonlight bounced off the wavy river where a few children sat on the edge of a long dock. Stories and laughter filled the warm summer night as my younger siblings and cousins enjoyed the private expanse of the night sky. Observing this from afar, I felt the conditions were just about perfect for a good scare. How fun would it be (I thought) to leverage the element of surprise, and spring out of the water beneath them with a roar.

So I tip-toed down to the dock and gently slipped in the water. I must admit, this was a little sketchy, not being able to tell for myself what creature lurked beneath the river at night. Nevertheless, I went “full commit,” held my breath and swam out a few feet in front of their dangling toes. Under the water I paused, embraced the magical moment, and then sprang out with a shout. I was greeted by surprising screams and then laughter of my family who in the end appreciated my efforts playing the spooky River Monster.

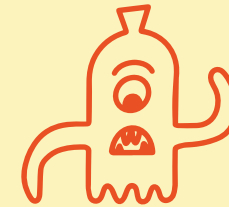
While the last thing you might want to do is get in any murky body of water at night, or even desire to prank your unsuspecting family members, for that matter, one lesson that we can all take away is the power of the element of surprise. A surprise, especially a loving surprise, has the ability to leave a lasting effect on our neighbors.

A gift is more potent when it is combined with the element of surprise. Take Monica for example, she said: “I was at the airport waiting for my flight, sitting at the gate with a terrible cold and suddenly a very

nice guy gave me a bag with tissue paper, a small box with cinnamon, ginger and honey, earplugs and an iced tea. He wished me to feel better!!! That was one of the best surprises I ever had in my life!”

Now if Monica was at home, sick in bed, and her best friend came over and dropped off the same exact gift, I am sure she would have appreciated it. But being “one of the best surprises I ever had in my life” had everything to do with the conditions surrounding that Grace Bomb. Although she was in public, she probably supposed she was not seen. And then a stranger delivered this very thoughtful gift. The element of surprise was activated and made that memory.

A Grace Bomb is a surprising act of love motivated by Jesus. Going above and beyond the cultural guardrails of giving (birthdays, holidays, etc.) is what we are shooting for – so that in the end a new memory will be made that shines the brightest light on the source of our giving, Jesus. This, after all, reflects the greatest surprising gift known to man: “that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”



SOMETIMES SURPRISING SOMEONE WILL PUT YOU INTO MURKY WATERS. WHY CAN IT BE DIFFICULT TAKING SOME RISK FOR JESUS?

GOOD SURPRISES TAKE TIME AND INTENTIONALITY. HOW CAN YOU BECOME BETTER PREPARED FOR THESE OPPORTUNITIES?



“...BUT GOD SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.”
ROMANS 5:8

NOTES

NOTES



IN THIS LAUNCH SERIES COMPANION GUIDE, YOU WILL BE INSPIRED BY BIBLICAL TRUTHS, STORIES AND IDEAS TO HELP SHINE YOUR LIGHT IN A DARK WORLD.



Your story matters.
Spur others on by sharing it at gracebomb.org.



Patrick Linnell is the founder of Grace Bomb and a teaching pastor with an MA in Theology from Columbia International University. With almost two decades in pastoral ministry, he has a passion for creative exposition and practical application of the Bible, which led to a sermon series that sparked a nationwide movement of loving our neighbors. Pat is married to his high school sweetheart and has four kids.

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