



CULTIVATING GRACE

By Chris Nelson

Prayerful Reflection

At Second Saturday we have always provided opportunity for prayerful reflection in response to a message we have shared. God has given us this ministry to introduce or emphasize the value of inviting the Lord to interact with us, in dialogue, in impartation of His heart and thoughts, and in communing with us as we simply sit quietly in His presence.

The fruit of this practice is the cultivation of the wisdom and power of His truth and love at the personal level, tailored to our individual nature, history, and God's current and long-range purposes in our lives. We're opening ourselves to the application of His great gifts.

What we call journaling—writing down our relevant thoughts and questions, and the relevant counsel God speaks to us, cultivates the habit of dialoguing with God in the daily course of our lives. Most significantly, it develops our ability to know and distinguish His voice above all other voices. We have invited Him into the issues of our lives and established the ground for ongoing counsel, rooted in the trust and transparency gained through journaling and listening in His presence.

This habit of journaling provides a place and time to deepen our friendship with Jesus while also maturing as God's children, nurtured in His love.

Where Grace Abounds

What we share about grace today is the result of asking the Lord to work in us individually. "Where do I have need of a deeper experience His grace?" As a team, we have asked the Lord what He wants to say to us all at Second Saturday as we explore what can happen *where grace abounds*.

We highly recommend that you enter into such a season, inviting Him to deepen, expand and enrich your experience of His grace. Out of this He will cultivate new growth—a tended plant in your soul's garden that you and others will experience, with fruits to be given away.

Testimonies of Grace Abounding

☛ For me, Chris, a greater weight of grace in my life has pushed out a habit, replacing an attitude and raising new awareness of what God values about His grace. It is becoming the first response in my thinking and enriching human interactions. Abounding is the opposite of stinginess, or feeling we deserve something. For me, grace operates like oil that facilitates the operation of machine parts, controlling friction. I have found it short-circuiting negative responses in a business dealing as thinking graciously quickly developed into a desire to extend grace and even pray for the person I was dealing with. I simply use "grace" more and am quickly finding that it's not so much a discipline as it is a natural, heart-felt response. Below are some specific ways God has worked in me.

☛ The healing power of grace toward ourselves

Going into this month of meditating on His grace God has shown me several things.

1) That being "conscientious" about many things was blocking out His grace.

2) That I was working hard to combat current inner responses—a good thing—but that I was experiencing defeat because there were hidden areas He needed to address. I was bypassing His grace without realizing it. But taking time to ask about grace gave Him opportunity to re-direct my quest, letting Him supply missing pieces to the puzzle.

3) New disciplines included saying "thank you" to the Lord, a lot, whether I recognized or didn't recognize why I should be grateful.

4) As part of this gratitude I was to honor the core person He made me to be. This meant that acting out of that core person's nature was part of calling her forth in ways that had gotten lost. *[The "prop" God used in this process was a picture of myself at age 4 or 5, revealing a vitality only a child can have, but affirming that that person was the true one.]*

☛ Some Fruits of Grace

~ I have experienced significantly more inner peace.

~ He has opened up in me ground for other areas He wants to cultivate, now that I'm not interfering.

~ I've had courage to act more out of my own convictions without second-guessing myself.

~ I am seeing a different aspect of Father's heart—how very often, His dealings are based on grace. I find this increases His access to me, and to all, on the basis of love, so that He can be close to us, and we to Him.

—Testimonies continued, shared by others on the planning core

☛ During Lent, the Lord has encouraged me through three sources: the image of a brooding duck, Dutch Sheets' book, Intercessory Prayer, and the phrase "I've got you covered." In His grace, I sensed the Lord inviting me to be as still and diligent as a *brooding duck, and to intercede over specific "eggs," i.e., prayer needs of others. In his book, Dutch Sheets says God needs our prayers, as said in Ezekiel 22: 30-31: I searched for someone to stand in the gap. **The incubation period for a mother duck to sit on her eggs is about 28 days and they sit 20-23 hours a day. I haven't been that diligent!*

As I have been sitting on these "eggs" I have sensed the Holy Spirit brooding over me, and that He has me covered. I've learned ducks pluck out their feathers not only to insulate their nests, but the bald spot (brood patch) on their abdomens yields more heat to the eggs! I've experienced His warmth and more of His heart for each prayer project! Dutch says that in many stories and in many ways, as we pray, the Holy Spirit releases His power into each situation He meets (p.128). We are co-laborers with the Lord!

In trying to "be diligent" I can get hooked into old patterns of thinking something like, "it's all up to me" to work harder, basing my identity on being a good intercessor! I, like David, am learning that my sins are covered (Psalm 32) and like Paul, I thank the Lord for counting me trustworthy in serving Him and that He pours out His grace abundantly (I Timothy 1:12-14). Diane

☛ It's difficult for me to change my "template" of exercising due diligence out of my own identity, on my terms rather than through His grace. But I've found that as I look for answers, what God often offers me is Himself. This is true in my history—it is God's way with me, and my confidence in His grace is renewed as I recall and acknowledge this history of His faithfulness. Paul

☛ In a relational situation I was quick to forgive, but later realized I didn't feel at peace. God helped me see how I rush to do the mature thing and tend to skip over grace—ending up with a "mess" inside. I realized that this issue was part of living in relationship with the Lord. He wanted me to recognize something He cared about which was that I learn to honor my own feelings and my own need for grace, even as He wanted me to experience His grace.

☛ I have a gladdened heart, a stronger heart and an enhanced view of the history and development of our orthodox faith. Without asking or seeking knowledge, I have instead been blessed with increased faith, wanting to bear witness to increased grace. Elm

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We deepen in our understanding of the passion of Father's love and the personal sacrifice of Jesus as we come to appreciate the cost of His grace, and the heart behind it. The "immersion" of our hearts in His presence softens hard, resistant or closed places, permeating our souls with the main purpose of the Cross: to make a way for us to become God's children in reality, not just theory. The meaning of our redemption goes from head to heart as we invite His revelation to us personally.

To give ourselves to a season of internal transformation, based on God's grace, is more vital to our ongoing lives with Him than we could "ask or imagine."

We can open the door to greater bounty with such questions as those below. It is important to form our own questions that pertain to what God is about in us at this time, and it is important to let God bring up what He wants to address in our lives that only He can see.

- ☛ At this time in my life:
 - ~ What do You want to teach me about grace?
 - ~ What needs to change in my perception of You?
 - ~ How do you want to change my perceptions of myself and my history in light of Your grace?
 - ~ How does my perception of grace influence what I will or won't do as Your servant? What are the roots of my perceptions?
 - ~ What is it that guides or governs my relationships, with myself, with others, and with You?
- ☛ Lord, show me what I cannot see that You want to speak to me about.
- ☛ Lord, show me what I already have within myself that You would expand on and multiply?

Beyond All Measure _____

As we scratch the surface of our 2018-19 theme, Beyond All Measure, our pursuit of God's heart of grace leaves us in a realm of mystery as earthen vessels, depending always on the immeasurable role of that grace and the love behind it. We come away more accepting of our humanity, more able to live in awe of our God.

The mystery of God's plan to unite all things—the mystery of the Cross, allows us to bow to what is beyond our minds to comprehend and accept His grace in our daily lives. Focusing on the role of His grace can leave us cleansed, renewed in our minds, and having room within for more love and less fear, more grace and less law, more faith and less unbelief and doubt. One of the best gifts of focusing on our relationship with our God is the security of being known—and the realization that God truly wants to be known by us.

⊕ GRACE CULTIVATED OVER TIME

- 5 Chris mentioned a key in her openness to God's grace related to her childhood and how grace was modeled in her family. Ask the Lord if there is a place in your life, rooted in your childhood, that He wants to work within order to release more grace into your heart and life.
- 6 The questions below relate to ways that God cultivates grace in our lives. If none of these fit for you, talk to Him about another context where you desire to cultivate grace.
- ⊕ Consider the concept of grace, applied over time: ▪ when we are called to **brood** over concerns God has given us to keep in prayer ▪ when we realize He is brooding over or kneading into our lives an aspect of grace that calls for patience and faith. What is His counsel to you today?
- ⊕ In what ways do you need the Lord to help you feel or offer more grace toward others? (Are there particular people that this applies to?)
- ⊕ Paul's letters are full of devotion and passion, that those He ministers to would "get it" and grow up to live in the full reality of God's all-encompassing grace. If you desire such passion to be formed in you – for yourself or for people you love, what would you ask of the Lord?
- 7 Does the Lord have a particular message for you today?