

GRACE - God's Free Gift to Us"
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There's a story about a famous Pastor named John Todd. John Todd was born in Rutledge, Vermont into a family of several children. They later moved to the village of Killingsworth back in the early 1800s. And there, at a very early age, John's mother and father both died, and he was left without parents. The relatives wondered what they would do with the number of children, how they could parcel them out to friends and relatives. One dear and loving aunt said she would take little John. The aunt sent a horse and a slave to get John who was only six at the time. The slave, named Caesar, came and put the little boy on the back of the horse. On the way back an endearing conversation takes place:

John: Will she be there?

Caesar: Oh, yes, she'll be there waiting up for you.

John: Will I like living with her?

Caesar: My son, you fall into good hands.

John: Will she love me?

Caesar: Ah, she has a big heart.

John: Will I have my own room? Will she let me have a puppy?
got everything all set, son. I think she has too.

Caesar: She's some surprises

John: Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there?

Caesar: Oh no! She'll be sure to wait up for you. You'll see when we get out of these woods. You'll see her candle shining in the window." When they got to the clearing, sure enough, there she was standing in the doorway with a candle in the window. She reached down, kissed him and said, "**Son, Welcome home!**" She fed him supper, took him to his room and waited until he fell asleep.

John Todd experienced "GRACE" – A free gift from God.

John Todd grew up to be The Rev. Dr. John Todd, great minister of the Gospel. But it was there at his aunt's home, with her as his new mother, that he grew up. It was always a place of enchantment because of his aunt; it awed him that such a place of replacement and transformation existed. She had given him a glimpse of Grace, God's free and unmerited Grace.

Years later, long after John Todd had moved away, his Aunt wrote to say her own death was near. Her health was failing and she wondered what was to become of her. This is what John Todd wrote her: "**My Dear Aunt, Years ago I left a house of death not knowing where I was to go, whether anyone cared, whether it was the end of me. The ride was long but the slave encouraged me. Finally, he pointed out your candle to me and there we were in the yard, and there you stood embracing me and taking me by the hand into my own room that you had made up.**

After all these years I can't believe it, how you did all that for me; I was expected; I felt safe in that room, so welcomed. It was my room. Now it's your turn to go, and as

one who has tried it out, I'm writing to let you know, someone is waiting up, your room is all ready, the light is on, the door is open, and as you ride into the yard - don't worry, Auntie. You're expected! I know. I once saw God standing in your doorway - long ago!"

That is Grace, an eternally, active, unlimited, unconditional, unmerited, holy love experienced by a small boy – It changed his life. Grace has a way of doing this for us. Changing our lives. The gospel of **John chapter 1:14** says it so well. **“The word became flesh, and dwells within us, and we have seen God’s Glory full of grace and truth.”**

Grace is one of God’s greatest gifts to us. It is the great desire of God who loves us so much to pour out this boundless, over- flowing gift to each of us God’s children. It is something that is easier to experience than it is to define. Grace came to this little boy John through the actions of love by his Aunt, who welcomed him home. You see, **Grace is really God’s word in action.** John Todd experienced this Grace with no strings attached. His Aunt had no expectations of John.

A lifelong Bible Teacher SHARES THIS INSIGHT INTO GOD’S UNMERITED, AND FREE GRACE. HE FOUND his faith very troubled and challenging during his final years. It seems that a degenerative nerve disease confined him to bed, which impeded him from most of the activities that gave him pleasure. His thirty nine year old daughter battled a severe form of diabetes. Financial pressures began to mount for the family. During the most severe crisis, he composed a letter to send to all his close friends and family members. There were so many things he once taught and believed in his Bible Classes which now caused him great stress, and confusion as he suffered some severe blows in life. What is it that he could believe with all certainty. What was the most solid, Christian belief he could muster up in his old age??

He came up with three things: **“LIFE IS DIFFICULT. GOD GIVES US GRACE. HEAVEN IS SURE.”** When this man’s life became even more complicated, he held on to these anchor thoughts - even more fiercely.

Sometimes it is as if God lovingly pulls back the curtain on reality and gives us just a glimpse of some wonderful, strange reality that lies on the other side of that reality--- when we experience those moments, I believe we are experiencing Grace. It is almost as if we can taste, and touch, and feel that GRACE. Relish in such moments, because it is in those moments when God has touched your heart, and creates in you a true desire to seek this surprising, adventurous God.

And so, when your life becomes even more complicated, hold on these thoughts even more fiercely:

LIFE IS DIFFICULT.....GOD GIVES US GRACE....HEAVEN US SURE.

Life is indeed difficult. And to help us navigate this life, God sent us his son, who embodies Grace. **(John 3:16) “For God so love the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him my have eternal life.”** God’s Grace is a free gift to us, in this life, and in the next.

This Grace flows down from God, through each one of us. Grace is a part of the way God is. God is love, and it is God’s nature to pour out grace upon us. Why?? Because we are all made in the image of God. When we are able to take this in, God provides us strength and promises to walk with us, even when we become discouraged. You see, it is through God’s son, Jesus Christ, that we can come to know this GRACE.

When we understand this in both our hearts and minds, we know that we are justified by our Grace, and there is a peace that comes from within us.
Romans 16: 20.

A number of years ago, I went to a Senior citizen’s luncheon with many people I did not know. I found myself standing in line next to a member of another local Reformed Church. I recognized her. Her husband passed away in January of the previous year after a long bout with cancer. I was the pastor called upon to handle the funeral.

And so I said to her, “Gee, so good to see you. How are things going.?” “OK”, she said. “Life is difficult. Life is hard.” And then she shared with me, “Keith, there will always be a bit of sadness in me, especially during this time of year.” “After all, we were married 47 years.”

But then she looked me straight in the eyes, and said:
“**BUT I GRAB THE GRACE OF GOD WHEREEVER AND WHENEVER I CAN.**”
That is what helps me stay focused on the present moment of today.”

During her most darkest hour, and in the time of great pain and suffering she truly found the secret to living this life in spite of the hardships which batter us all.

The gospel of **Luke 4:18 -19,**

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free. And to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In Jesus Christ, God took our humanity and nature in order to rescue us and restore our broken relationship with God, and with each other. I once heard it put this way, God’s Grace works both horizontally, and vertically.

We receive God’s Grace from our God. This is a vertical Grace coming down from God to us, and God then calls us to share Grace horizontally with one another.

When we give Grace away freely, we receive Grace freely.

This moves us to become as Christ like as we can because we are empowered from within with God's love. We are all children of God, and wherever you are this day, you are right where you need to be.

The Tamlyn's are pet lovers. (Do we have pet lovers here?) Of course we do, we are all feelers. How many of you are thinkers, and how many feelers are out there. How many of you aren't sure.

This is a true story about God's unmerited free gift of Grace. Betsy, my dear wife, daughter, Suzanne and I remember the day like it was yesterday. 15 years ago, we had two dogs, a portugese water dog, and a little rat terrier. Well, our portugese water dog, appropriately named "Ebb Tide," or "Ebby" for short had some developmental problems, and after we had her four about 6 years, she developed cancer and after a number of months of treatment, we had to say good bye to her.

We are all feelers in our house, and so for about a week, we had used boxes of Kleenexes in every room in the house. We were a mess. It was so very hard.

About 2 months later, we had decided to go to one of those Sunday afternoon West Point outdoor concerts in the band shell on the property of West Point. (HOW MANY) We were still recovering from our sadness after saying our good byes to Ebby.

We are driving over the mountain, and Betsy turns to me and says, "Keith, I am praying that God will send us another dog – a dog that really needs a good home, is that OK?" I said, sure, Betsy, I am doing the same thing. Prayer is always a good thing. We like to arrive early and spread out our blanket, and enjoy the afternoon with a picnic over looking the Hudson.

A little while later, we see a young Mom come by with her two young children, and she has on a lease, two beautiful Golden retrievers. Betsy and Suzanne, are naturally drawn to see these two good looking goldens. And so they go and I watch them as they first speak for about 5 minutes with this women, then they are kneeing and petting the goldens, and soon, the two golden's are all over them. I am watching this from a distance, thinking to myself, "MMMMM" Well, Betsy and Suzanne come back in about 45 minutes, and say, "Keith, the two goldens in that family really don't get along well, so they must give one away." I think to myself, "Now why doesn't that surprise me."

WELL, low and behold, about three days later, sure enough, we have a new pet golden in the house. We had to come up with a new name. Her name just didn't suit her. We were sharing this story with our friend, Rhonda Paul, and Rhonda said without hesitation, "Well, that's easy, It sounds to me like you all received Grace from God, I think you should name her Gracie".

Grace can be transforming for our lives, renewing our spirits in the face of uncertainty, there is nothing wrong with HOPE.

The young woman sat alone behind the closed doors of the waiting room. It had been an anxious, sleepless night and the morning brought no relief from the fear that held her in its grasp. Her husband had disappeared behind operating room doors earlier that morning so that doctors could try

once more to remove a malignant tumor that threatened his life. The prognosis was poor, she had been told. Even if he survives the surgery and the treatment, the cancer may come back. She thought about the little curly-headed toddler she'd left home in a friend's care. Would she celebrate her second birthday with her daddy? Would her father see her graduate from high school? Would he be there for all the scrapes and scratches of her daughter's growing up? And she thought about her husband. How could she possibly comfort him when she was so greatly in need of comfort and assurance herself? Minutes ticked by in a slow, torturous way as she waited for news from the doctors to come to her through the closed doors.

Mind racing, hands wringing, heart pounding. She knew there was nothing she could do but wait. And pray. And so that is what she did. She sent a simple thought toward heaven. **“Dear God. This is bad. Please help.”**

Nearly 28 years later, she still shakes her head with grace, gratitude and amazement at what followed her prayer. Now, the doctor did not come through the doors with miraculous news. But what did come in through those doors made it possible for the young family to gather up their courage and continue on. What was it that came through those closed doors?

The same thing that makes it possible for us to be here this day and sing, Sing our hearts out to God, even though the world outside wants to intrude and rob us of our joy. For those of you who are wondering, the young woman in this story was my wife, Betsy. – A true story of my cancer battle.

What comes in through the closed doors of our lives, our hearts, our minds?

God's Free gift of unmerited GRACE. God's Grace and Hope opens our path to the future. It is a faith in God that we receive through the Grace that flows over us freely which will see us through this life. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 “For by Grace you have been saved through Faith, and this is not your own doing: it is a gift we receive from God.”

Our relationship to God, thank God, is not based on what we feel or believe, or even think. No, our faith is based upon the fact that the Living Christ comes to us, moves through whatever our situations are, and somehow, in some way through the miracle of God's son, Jesus Christ breathes new life into us, and we find the grace to continue.

I end with my favorite scripture passage. “May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy spirit.” (Romans chapter 15: verse 13)