

Grace and Gifts

Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you
(Deuteronomy 15:14).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:12-15

Song: “Grace Flows Down”

Blinking back tears, the weary teen loaded her paintbrush and turned again to the wall. She was working off a sizable phone bill by painting the garage for her dad. Finally the end was in sight. Yet she was so tired. She almost didn't notice that her father had slipped into the garage behind her and picked up his own paintbrush. He quietly dipped his brush into the paint can and worked alongside her.

“You're doing a fine job here. How about I help you finish up, and then we grab dinner at your favorite restaurant?”

Like our heavenly Father, this teen's dad extended grace and refreshment to the child who was in his debt. God commanded the Israelites not only to release their brothers from servitude in the seventh year but also to give them supplies to begin their lives anew.

Likewise, our loving heavenly Father does not merely release us from the chains of sin and shame. He also equips us with the gifts of His comfort, presence, and Holy Spirit. And as we embrace this beautiful gift of grace, we can pass it on to others.

Father, thank You for Your gifts of redemption, presence, and all Your provisions. Help me live in and share the grace You provide. In Jesus' name, amen.

April 18–24. **Kristen Grossman** enjoys hiking the California hills and soaking up time with family—as well as curling up with her Bible, journal, and a peppermint mocha.

Beloved Children of God

You, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise
(Galatians 4:28).

Scripture: Galatians 4:21-31

Song: “The Family of God”

I ran up the driveway and burst into the house, where I knew I would find my mom. She would have a snack laid out on the kitchen table and would be waiting to hear about my day. These precious minutes after school were my favorite of all. At school my worth was based on following rules, completing assignments, and achieving good grades. At home I found my worth in merely being a beloved child.

Paul reminded the church at Galatia that they did not need to earn God’s favor through religious rites and rituals, just as a cherished child does not need to earn a parent’s love and acceptance. God freely receives and blesses His own children.

Our faith in Christ places us among the many children God promised Abraham. God told him, “I will . . . make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore” (Genesis 22:17). In Christ we have the privilege of being called the children of God, and Romans 8:16 tells us that God’s Spirit living in us bears witness to our adoption into God’s family. Rather than being held to the burdensome standard of “making straight-A grades,” we can enjoy the rich blessings our Father bestows on us as His beloved children.

Father, thank You for adopting me as Your child. May I walk Your path in faith today, free in the love You bestow on me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

From Brokenness to Healing

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1).

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-3

Song: “He Gave Me Beauty for Ashes”

Snap! The sound of breaking bone accompanied sharp pain as little Claire landed on the ground beneath the monkey bars. At the hospital, Dr. Miller reset the fractured bone and applied a colorful cast. The cast encased Claire’s arm, holding the damaged pieces of bone together. A few months later, the doctor removed the cast. The binding had kept the bones immobile, allowing the broken pieces to heal and once again form a strong, healthy, fully functional arm bone.

The presence of sin means that this life holds heartache, brokenness, and despair. Yet we have the precious gift of hope in Jesus Christ, who overcomes the power of sin and its effects on our lives. Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that mourning would turn to joy, the imprisoned would be set free, and darkness would turn to light. Like the cast that holds broken bones firmly in place to allow them to mend, Jesus binds our broken hearts, holding them tightly in His loving embrace to produce healing.

In times of difficulty, we can turn to Jesus, the one who promises to hold us tightly. We can have faith that by His power, our sorrow will be replaced with delight. Our shackles will be exchanged for freedom. Our anguish will be turned to joy.

Father, thank You for the hope we have in Jesus. When we are hurting, please help us remember the promise of Your triumph over sin and suffering. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Darkness Dispelled

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Scripture: John 8:12-20

Song: “Light of the World”

As a child, I often begged my parents to set up a tent in our backyard for summer night sleepovers. Yet somehow, the haven of our backyard would transform as the sun went down. Shadowy shapes loomed ominously between my shelter and the house. I might dash for the safety of my bedroom. Or I might burrow into my sleeping bag, holding out until morning. Either way, morning would dawn, the sun would rise, and my surroundings would again be drenched in sunlight. The menacing shadows had disappeared.

The blessing of sunlight reveals the true identity of nighttime’s shadowy shapes. With the sun above, peace and confidence replace fear and uncertainty as we move about with clear vision. Yet the sun sheds its light only for a certain number of hours each day.

Jesus, however, is the light of the world, whose brilliance is never obscured. When we follow Him, we need never cower in the shadows. Knowing Jesus’ truth, we enjoy the everlasting light of our Savior. As we seek Him through Scripture and prayer, He illumines our way, dispelling all darkness.

Father, thank You for the beautiful light of truth we have in Jesus. Help me walk in the brilliance of His light today and every day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Messenger of Truth

“He who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world” (John 8:26).

Scripture: John 8:21-30

Song: “Voice of Truth”

You may recall playing the game of Telephone as a child. A group of giggling children sits in a circle, passing a whispered message from child to child. The more garbled the words have become when the last child speaks them aloud, the more hilarious the result.

A mixed-up message passed through many mouths may be funny as childhood entertainment. However, when we’re looking for truth, we prefer to receive clear information straight from a reliable source. God made certain His message would not get lost or garbled when He sent His own Son to deliver His words of truth and love to a hurting world. And Jesus is not only God’s messenger, but He is also the very means of our hope and salvation. In John 14:6 He declared, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Thankfully, we need not depend on the mixed-up chatter of the world to discern our way. Every word Jesus spoke came directly from the Father. His promises, instructions, encouragement, and love are messages of truth on which we can rely. We can turn to God’s Word and know that we are receiving authentic words of life and salvation.

Father, thank You for sending Your precious Son to deliver Your message of hope, love, and truth. Thank You that I can read Your Word for myself in the gift of Your holy Scriptures. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Rules That Render Reward

I will always obey your law, for ever and ever. I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts (Psalm 119:44-45).

Scripture: Psalm 119:41-56

Song: “Trust and Obey”

I gazed at the list of rules before signing the waiver. To enjoy a zip-line adventure, I must don a helmet, wear closed-toed shoes, and refrain from attempting to glide upside down. (Hey, no problem!) I would agree to trust the harness, cable, and instructions of my guide to keep me safe as I soared through a canopy of trees high above the ground. After reading, I understood that if I wanted the day to provide happy memories, I needed to do my part. It was critical that I hear, understand, and follow the rules and guidelines to ensure maximum enjoyment and minimal danger.

We humans tend to look at lists of rules and regulations as impediments to our happiness. The psalmist, however, understood that the laws and commands given in God’s Word are not there to deprive us of pleasure. They are given to us in love to provide protection and freedom so we might walk in safety and delight.

Our salvation does not come from obeying a list of rules—we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, our love for God inspires us to know Him better, love Him more, and obey His commands. Our obedience keeps us from dangers that lurk outside His loving will for us.

Father, thank You for the guidelines we find in Your Word that keep us walking in the safety and joy of Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Set Free

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Scripture: John 8:31-38

Song: “Free Indeed”

Growling and snarling, the wolf lunged at his would-be rescuers. He didn't understand that the humans in front of him were there to release him from the steel trap biting into his leg. He only understood that he was trapped and in pain. The men who gathered around him appeared to him to be a further threat to his safety and freedom. With careful maneuvering, however, the men were finally able to pin down the wild creature with a catch pole, enabling them to remove the trap. Once released, the wolf streaked off into the woods, free at last.

While still caught in the steely jaws of our sin and shame, our predicament is like that of the trapped wolf. But praise the Lord! He did not leave us alone to struggle and suffer in those impossible snares. He came to us while we were still sinners and provided what we so desperately needed: payment for our sin debt, forgiveness, and eternal life—freedom!

In God's Word, we learn the truth that our freedom comes from trusting in and calling on Jesus Christ for salvation. As ones who are now free, we can find strength and help in studying Scripture, offering up prayer, gathering with the saints, worshipping the Lord, and basking in His presence—the full enjoyment of all He has provided.

Father, thank You for the freedom we find in Your Son. Remind us to turn to You when we find ourselves feeling trapped by the weight of the world. In Jesus' name, amen.