

## Humility Invites Grace

**[God] gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble” (James 4:6).**

**Scripture:** James 4:1-10

**Song:** “Nearer, My God, to Thee”

The *Titanic*’s technology and luxury lulled people into a false sense of security. First-class passengers could indulge in fine cuisine, a game of squash, a massage, and a good read by the fireplace. Some people believed the ship was unsinkable. But when the *Titanic* struck an iceberg on its maiden voyage, passengers were summoned from their cabins to the ship’s deck, where crew members launched distress-signal rockets and began lowering the too-few lifeboats. As the ship tilted and began to sink, one story said that musicians played the hymn “Nearer, My God, to Thee” in an effort to soothe passengers’ rising panic.

In a false sense of security, a soul can be sinking in sin’s consequences and yet remain unaware of the danger (or unwilling to acknowledge it). Our human pride—in all its forms and facets—keeps us from grasping or acknowledging our need to draw near to God for spiritual rescue.

Each one of us must come with a humble heart to receive the saving grace God extends. But even after we’re saved, to know the grace of His abiding nearness, our hearts must remain humble before Him.

**Father,** I want to quiet my heart before You and, by Your grace, draw near to You today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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March 20–26. **Denise Scott** lives in Wentzville, Missouri. She serves in a caregiving ministry, helping folks who are going through a difficult time.

## “Mindfield”

**We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ** (2 Corinthians 10:5).

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

**Song:** “Sound the Battle Cry!”

I struggled with bitterness toward a family member. We both wanted a fresh start, but my attitude prevented us from moving forward. I was dragging baggage from our past, and while I knew that love does not keep a record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5), on my own I couldn't just flip a switch and change my thoughts and feelings. I poured out my heart to God about the whole tangled mess. As I looked to Him and His Word, He seemed to give me two simple instructions: Listen and Love (vv. 4-7). It didn't take long for me to see evidence of His help.

The apostle Paul experienced relationship issues of a different kind. False teachers tried to discredit him and shake the faith of Christians in Corinth. These faith disrupters were spreading doubt, warping thoughts, and dividing the fellowship. Paul called on the believers in Corinth to stand against this attack on truth and love by submitting their thoughts to Christ's control.

An unchecked thought life will lead us into distress and strife. However, as we look to Christ and the truth of God's Word, we can battle effectively—and prevail against anything that undermines our faith, love, and true unity in Christ.

**Father**, help me honestly assess where falsehood has a foothold in my thoughts so I can align my mind and heart with Your truth and love. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Freed to Praise Him

**Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever** (Psalm 106:1).

**Scripture:** Psalm 106:1-7, 36-41, 47-48

**Song:** “To God Be the Glory”

Within the maximum-security facility of Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola Prison), there are “lifers” charged with armed robbery, murder, and other violent crimes. However, in that unlikely place there are some who now praise God. These testify that they were once bitter and self-destructive, filled with hate and indifference. Transformed in Christ, however, their sense of humanity has been restored, and they now live with respect for others and themselves. Though still behind bars, their hearts are free. They’ve established a church, a community of believers ministering to other inmates. Some even go to other prisons to provide outreach and discipleship.

The Israelites had committed horrible acts of rebellion against God, repeatedly defying Him and stirring His righteous anger by their idolatry. As a result they were exiled to a foreign land and ruled by their enemies. Still, God continued to love and call them to himself and would once again fill their mouths with praise (Psalm 126).

Whether or not we have ever been imprisoned or exiled for wrongdoing, we *all* have sinned against God. In His love, He has reached out to us through His Son, Jesus, offering us the gift of salvation (John 3:16-17). As believers we can now respond to God in ways that honor His love—by humbly confessing sin, sincerely acknowledging God’s greatness, and gratefully praising Him.

**Father,** You are all-powerful yet patient with me. I will honor and praise You with a sincere heart today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Fear and Insanity

**I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. . . . Those who fear him lack nothing** (Psalm 34:4, 9).

**Scripture:** Psalm 34:1-15

**Song:** “A Shelter in the Time of Storm”

Rollercoasters can be terrifying! The Formula Rossa in Dubai accelerates from 0 to almost 150 mph in under five seconds. The Kingda Ka at Six Flags in New Jersey plummets 450 feet. The Yukon Striker in Ontario towers more than 17 stories. Still, the fears we encounter *outside* an amusement park can be even scarier. These emotional rollercoaster rides can make us queasy with anxiety, loop thoughts in our heads, and turn our sense of security upside down.

Psalm 34 refers to a time in David’s experience when he was afraid for his life (1 Samuel 21:10-15). Fleeing from King Saul’s murderous pursuit, David escaped to Gath, Goliath’s hometown. When the Philistines recognized him, David pretended to be insane, even drooling down his beard. David’s ruse convinced the king there, and David safely moved on, praising God for hearing his prayers and delivering him from his fears. David’s sense of awe and trust in God prompted him to seek the Lord in good times and bad.

We have no shortage of fears, whether related to past regrets, current events, or future concerns. No matter what we’re facing, we can turn to God and find help and refuge in Him.

**Father**, thank You that as out of control as life may feel at times, I can trust You to hold me safely in Your care. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## God's Precious Presence

**The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them . . . to find them a place to rest** (Numbers 10:33).

**Scripture:** Numbers 10:29-36

**Song:** “He Leadeth Me”

Claire was enjoying a special vacation in Florida. While visiting Cocoa Beach, however, she lost her diamond wedding ring. On the verge of tears, she frantically searched her belongings and dug around in the sand, but to no avail. A week later, unwilling to abandon all hope, she contacted Dave, a metal-detecting specialist in the area. For hours he searched until finally his device made the *ping* he'd been hoping for. Digging down about 10 inches, he located Claire's precious symbol of love and commitment and was able to return it to her.

The ark of the covenant, a gold-plated wooden chest, was precious to the Israelites. Built by craftsmen but designed by God, it was their most sacred symbol. It represented God's presence with them and contained three objects—the stone tablets of the covenant, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod that had budded (Hebrews 9:4)—all testifying to the Lord's faithfulness.

Today as believers in Christ, we receive the precious indwelling presence of God through the gift of His Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). God's Spirit is our promised seal of redemption (Ephesians 4:30) and the provision of God's strength and guidance for our daily lives (Galatians 5:16, 25). We can be confident that our God will always remain with us and lead us faithfully through life until we reach our place of rest with Him.

**Father,** thank You for Your precious presence with me by Your indwelling Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Jesus in Charge

**Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”** (Mark 5:8).

**Scripture:** Mark 5:1-13

**Song:** “The Savior Can Solve Every Problem”

While in France, my teens and I toured the Catacombs of Paris, a labyrinth of tunnels underneath the capital. In the 1700s the bones of millions of Parisians were transferred there because the city’s cemeteries were at capacity. At first the remains were haphazardly scattered, but at some point, femurs and skulls began being stacked as mosaic walls. It’s an interesting place to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live there.

Among the tombs in the region of the Gerasenes, a man lived isolated, away from family and community. Afflicted by demons, he was violent, self-harming, and uncontrollable. Yet when Jesus arrived there, He did not distance himself from the troubled man. Jesus was able and willing to help. The demons immediately recognized Jesus as the Son of God. (Satan is *not* all-powerful, and these unclean spirits clearly knew who was in charge.) Although they implored Jesus not to send them out of the country, they had to submit to His commands.

After his encounter with Jesus, the man who had for so long been tormented was free, and he boldly and faithfully told others how much the Lord had done for him. Has the Lord set you free from something? How has He demonstrated His power and compassion in your life? Is there someone you can tell today about what the Lord has done for you?

**Father**, thank You that You are both powerful and compassionate. I will tell someone today what You’ve done for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Where's Your Focus?

**The people [of Gerasa] began to plead with Jesus to leave their region** (Mark 5:17).

**Scripture:** Mark 5:14-20

**Song:** “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus”

Nine high school students accepted the challenge to unplug from social media for a week. Right away they felt the pang of being left out when friends discussed recent posts or videos. Even greater was the pull to post their own news when they had something to share. For some, the ultimate temptation to give up came on Friday when they feared exclusion from weekend plans. Depriving themselves of their devices highlighted their FOMO (fear of missing out).

It's too bad the Gerasenes didn't experience some FOMO—fear of missing out on something big that God was doing. After Jesus commanded evil spirits to leave a man and permitted them to enter some nearby pigs, the entire herd of about 2,000 stampeded over a cliff and drowned. When the people came to see what had happened, they saw that a madman had been miraculously healed and transformed, but that was not their focus. They were upset over the financial loss of their livestock. They asked Jesus to leave, so He did.

Like the people of Gerasa, we can be preoccupied by the things of this world and miss out on what's truly important. Or we can be like the healed man, fixing our eyes on Jesus and focusing on whatever He would have us do to further His kingdom of love and light.

**Father**, help me to look beyond my temporal agenda to see Your eternal priorities. In Jesus' name, amen.