

## ***AMAZING GRACE***

***“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in your weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)***

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## **AMAZING GRACE**

*To understand one's agony, to look beyond the walls of pride,  
To reach deep into the trenches that so many hide behind...  
To show them My Compassion, to lend a simple helping hand,  
Is to keep them from falling deeper in the pits of their quicksand*

*To look beyond their wounded spirit, to see their deeply shattered hearts;  
To look beyond the pain and anger that shines so brightly in the dark.  
To offer them My Love, in spite of whatever they portray...  
Is to touch My Face and feel My Tears...  
and know My Love's Amazing Grace.*

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Grace. What is it and why is it so powerful and amazing? Grace, according to the Hebrew definition simply means, *"to find favor in the eyes of someone; to be acceptable to him; to show pity toward someone, or to obtain mercy, especially from God"*.

As I tried to get to know God better and employ all that He'd told me do through His servant, I found this task more daunting and difficult than anything I had ever undertaken. On the one hand, God was telling me to *'forget the former things and not dwell on the past'*; on the other hand, He was telling me to *'be His witness to the world'*. They seemed contradictory to me from whatever angle I tried to view them. It was next to impossible to do either one effectively. In fact, every time I tried, I seemed to fail miserably at both.

I was still bound by memories, and when anger would try to surface, I'm sorry to say, sometimes it won the battle. Sometimes anger would pick up momentum along the way, and drag rage along at the end of its coat-tail. Sometimes bitterness took the reins because I would reflect back on my life through the wrong spiritual filter. Out of habit, I would pick up my old glasses, the ones that felt comfortable on my face, and I would see my circumstances through the old filter of unforgiveness, instead of taking the time to put in the new contact lenses of 'grace' that I was supposed to be wearing. Contacts are easy for some. For me, not so much. While I liked

the convenience of having them, it seemed my eyes never adjusted to the new prescription without causing a headache. I would inevitably go back to wearing what I'd worn for years; my old glasses. Two problems that would later cross over into spiritual implications are being identified here. One, I was acting out of what felt comfortable; and two, I was doing it out of habit. I was impatient. Instead of giving my eyes time to adjust, it was just easier to go back to what I'd always done in the past.

Anyone who wears glasses, even for a slight astigmatism like I have, knows that if you use an old prescription after you've worn a new one for awhile, you can get a killer headache. Things will be less clear and you won't be able to focus on the details in your line of sight. Your perception of depth, especially when you try to navigate after the sun goes down, will be skewed, and forget about peripheral vision. If you find yourself trying to get your bearings straight in the darkness of night, wearing the wrong glasses, makes you an accident waiting to happen. You might even injure innocent victims along the way; sometimes you end up hurting the people you love the most.

After my marriage ended in divorce, nearly 17 years of being with the same man, God would end up taking me through one of the hardest journeys of my life. I never thought I would go down that road. I was one who didn't believe in divorce. Circumstances beyond my control would later change my mind, and it would shake me to my core. I would end up treading through seemingly endless valleys in the shadows of darkness that were continually revealed by the glorious Light of His Word. God would take my hand, and help me to walk out to the other side - into a realm of heaven I'd never seen before - His Most Holy Place, hidden behind the veil. The Most Holy Place is the very heart of God. Satan hates The Most Holy Place, because he hates the very heart of God and he hates everything to do with God. Grace is the only thing that can help you enter in, and it is the driving force behind the mercy that will shield you from the land mines waiting to destroy you when you choose the path that will lead you there. Grace is the only thing that will help you reach the other side of your circumstances as the Mercy of God delivers you into victory.

My marriage ended as one having the form of godliness, but denying its power, (2 Timothy 3:6). Scripture is pretty clear in those situations. Grace

and Mercy were ever-present about me. I was married to a man who was highly educated in the area of theology, and I was not. I thought, for the first time in my life, I was safe. So much so, that when I got married, I let my guard down and relaxed. He knew more, he went to Bible College, and I felt inadequate and uneducated. I was decidedly too naïve. It wasn't that I was overtly lazy, I just trusted him implicitly, because of how I saw love; it was never supposed to bring me into harm's way. Experience would later teach me that my choice to "relax" on the frontlines of ministry was spiritual suicide. I took too much at face value and I didn't investigate as much as I should've when my gut told me something was amiss. On the few occasions I would question things, I was told that women were to be submissive to their husbands; that they were to be quiet, reserved and meek. I was none of those things. I had a brain and on occasion, I wasn't afraid to use it. Sometimes my mouth followed suit, if you know what I mean. I had a hard time with the whole square peg, round hole scenario. Still, I tried. My way of trying was to overlook what seemed minor, and pick my battles. That entailed submitting to the man I married and trusting him to feed me, spiritually. That would end up being my first crucial mistake. A care-giver can bring the spoon to your mouth, but it's up to you to chew

what comes into it. What is manna to one, could be toxic to another, depending on where you get the food.

I set myself up for a host of problems, simply because I didn't study the Word of God myself. I would read the Bible, but what I didn't have was what I needed the most, to develop a routine where I would spend time with the Lord, alone...on a daily basis. I had done that when I first got saved. I lived, ate and breathed in the Word, but when I got married, things changed. Life's circumstances caused my priorities to change, and suddenly, I had no extra time. When I tried to make time, God would speak to my heart. Inevitably, conversations with my husband sparked by my quiet time, led me to believe I shouldn't be so spiritually minded, lest I become no earthly good. So I limited the time I spent alone with God. That was my second - of many - crucial mistakes. By putting my relationship with the Lord on the back-burner, I not only limited my own level of understanding, I limited God and what He might be able to accomplish through me. Little by little, I allowed the enemy to ensnare me in a web of spiritual deception that would soon be based on a religion of emotionalism and experience, rather than hard-core Truth. I would find it easy to buy into all the feel-good,

quick-fix theologies, and I would gravitate - like a magnet - toward those who had mastered the art of manipulative spiritual eloquence. They soon led me further astray into diverse doctrines of demons, and I lapped up sand in the desert as if it were a spring of Living Water. It was only when I began to feel the weight of all that sand, sinking my soul deeper into a pit of quicksand, that I realized I'd embarked on a journey that would lead to a dead end...literally. The gospel I swallowed was laced with just enough Truth, that I couldn't see the flames that were about to consume me.

I rather enjoyed my new-found revelations where I had little personal accountability, because everything was indeed "under the Blood of Jesus". I had no need to worry about my eternal future because once I was saved by the simple confession of my mouth, the deal was sealed. It felt like somebody gave me a pre-paid Visa with unlimited credit. If I sinned, all I had to do was apologize and remind God of His promise; that I was merely flesh and blood, and because I accepted His Son, the only thing He was supposed to see when He looked at me was - not my sin, but the Righteousness of Jesus, Who I'd once confessed as my Lord and Savior. I didn't realize how contemptuous and manipulative I was being trained to

become. The enemy was setting me up for spiritual pride, and God is pretty clear on that subject. Pride always comes before destruction, (*Proverbs 16:18*). I was drowning in quick-sand, and I didn't even know it, until it was almost too late. I had, indeed, swallowed an entirely different gospel and it took me too many years to count, to discover that I was serving the wrong Jesus. I learned a valuable lesson: all that glitters is not necessarily gold.

When Amazing Grace first apprehended me, and gave me a clue to where I was headed if I continued learning about God through doctrines of demons, He would continually bring Matthew 7:26 to my mind. I had heard this verse before, but I was convinced that it didn't apply to me. It was only when I studied the verse in depth for myself, did My Father reveal hidden Truths. When I finally understood what He meant, it terrified me to the point of taking action.

***“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat***

***against that house, and it fell with a great crash. “ (Matthew 7:26-27).***

I am a person who has a scientific, logical mind. I need constant proof, a doubting Thomas if you will, who needs to actually feel the nail marks before I will believe something to be true. That's why I had a hard time understanding how I could be so easily deceived. I learned quickly that the smarter you think you are, the more you become open prey to Deception himself. The enemy knew that all he had to do was bombard me with the right “sign and wonder” and without knowledge of the Truth, I would be putty in his hands.

God doesn't get upset when we question Him. In fact, I think He rather enjoys it. Sometimes a little conversation is better than no conversation, no matter what the subject. When I asked the Lord about this verse in Matthew 7, and what it had to do with me, He painted a pretty clear picture of my reality within just a few minutes researching the properties of quicksand over the internet. What I learned is that quicksand is not the fearsome force that we might think. It is rarely deeper than a few feet, unless you're viewing it from the perspective of a horror film, in the middle

of a motion picture screen. A pool of quicksand can occur almost anywhere if the right conditions are present. Quicksand is basically just ordinary sand that has been so saturated with water, that the friction between sand particles is reduced. The resulting sand is a mushy mixture of sand and water that can no longer support any weight. The more you struggle in it, the faster you will sink. However, if you just relax, your body will float, because your body is less dense than the quicksand. So it is with doctrines of demons, and false gospels of men.

In the Bible, water is most always used in reference to troubles. A few examples would be the Red Sea (*Exodus 14:6*), the boat Jesus fell asleep in when the disciples panicked during the storm, (*Luke 8:24*); but it can also be used as a symbol of healing and restoration; the healing waters (balm) of Gilead (*Jeremiah 8:22*); water baptism by immersion, (*John 1:33*). Balm, resin and oil are metaphorically sometimes referred to as water because of their physical properties. Interestingly enough, when we endure the waters of affliction, we are best prepared to receive the waters of restoration.

False gospels immerse you in a pit of quicksand, by laying a foundation

made of sand that has been over saturated by Living Water that has been poisoned by a perverse spirit. In other words, when self-serving, self-righteous and self-centered individuals take verses from the Bible and translate for the purpose of their own selfish gain; when they promote a gospel that puts the focus on the righteousness of men, instead of the Holiness of God; when the emphasis is placed on get rich quick schemes under the guise of God's original intended abundance, the water that is *supposed* to be nourishing, becomes contaminated, and it serves to twist and pervert the true meaning of scripture. When perversion translates down to the souls of men, it becomes poison to our spirits, and slowly kills off our souls. The enemy knows how thirsty we can get when we're in the middle of our personal deserts of affliction. He causes all sorts of adversity, wreaking havoc in our lives on every level imaginable - usually by way of avalanche - until we are up to our eyeballs in hot water. He waits until the temperatures rise to weaken our resistance and when circumstances cause the heat index to become unbearable, he knows we'll eventually succumb to the climate he's created, and drink whatever liquid is within our reach, in order to quench that thirst.

Satan prefers Kool-Aid laced with microscopic drops of cyanide, only his brand is colorless and odorless; the poison is practically non-detectable to our taste buds. Only when we start showing signs of poisoning, do we realize what we've swallowed. It begins with weakness and confusion, headaches, nausea, then you have difficulty breathing, you finally lose consciousness, throw a seizure and succumb to cardiac arrest. This creates an interesting spiritual parallel. A perverse spirit works best on someone who is already in a weakened state, because it knows it will be easier to confuse by things that appear right, but aren't. Over time, it causes unsettling in your gut; prolonged exposure to a perverse spirit creates an atmosphere that is very difficult to breathe in. You might throw a spiritual "seizure" of sorts; you might have a mental breakdown, question your salvation, emotionally burn out, succumb to depression, or act out in rebellion against God. If you last beyond all that, spiritual cardiac arrest is certain. Apathy will stop your heart from beating in sync with God's,

It's no coincidence that, at least one major cult, has used cyanide-laced Kool-aide to kill off innocent children. The most famous one that I remember occurred back in November of 1978, in Jonestown, Guyana.

Blind devotion to a preacher bound by a legion of demons wrapped in a blanket of perversion, caused the death of over 900 men, women and children. Adolf Hitler used hydrogen cyanide gas to kill over six million Jews during the worst crimes against humanity that is historically recorded. And then Hitler committed suicide by biting into a glass vial of cyanide, right before he put a gun to his head.

And here we are, decades later, and Satan is still pushing the Kool-aid. He's just repackaged it. He knows that once we get a taste of the sugar Kool-aid has to offer, we'll naturally crave more, and continue to pour it down our throats. God designed our bodies to consume large amounts of water for good reason. Too much sugar causes chemical imbalances and makes way for the inevitable destruction of vital organs. Water cleanses out impurities and balances the body from the inside out. And the Living Water that flows from the written Word, if consumed in its purest form - that is, untainted by the doctrines of man - will restore, rebuild and redeem.

If we find ourselves drowning in quicksand, if we've swallowed poison, manufactured by twisted doctrines, there's only one thing we can do to

survive. We need to realize our environment is toxic and be determined to get out. And just like the reality of actual quicksand, we need to defeat our fears and stop our gut reaction to panic. Wrap your mind around what the revelation of fear actually is: **False Evidence Appearing Real**. Fear, by definition, can be summed up in this one simple statement: to predict the future without God. Fear screams from the rooftop that God has left us. Without security, we feel abandoned, and if we listen to that voice, we become fearful. Knowing there is Security available to us, whether it be in the form of financial or emotional security, somehow makes life more tolerable. If we can learn to do as scripture dictates, ***“to cast our cares on the Lord”***, (1 Peter 5:7), we can stop sinking in our respective quicksand pits.

Fear is just an illusion that distracts us from victory. We are much more buoyant when we find ourselves in positions of fear, than we might think. We just need to stop, relax, and reassess our environment to get a clear picture of our circumstances. If we can do that, God will show us ways out with great clarity. The road to freedom may not be easy, but at least there is a road. One of the most difficult things we have to remember, during

times of fear, especially during a crisis, is that God is not moved by our time-table. When we can't see His Hand, we must learn to trust His Heart. Think about it. A loving, responsible father would not sit back and watch his own child drown without making every heroic effort to save him, so how much more will our Heavenly Father respond when we cry out to Him? We need to stop struggling in our own strength and master the art of remaining quiet, so that we can put ourselves into a position to listen to instruction. And the only way we will come to recognize His voice is by understanding the very nature of Who God actually is.

So who is God, really, and what does He have to do with Grace? Seven of His many Hebrew Names speak volumes to Who God actually is.

- (1) *Jehovah-Shalom - **The Lord our PEACE;***
- (2) *Jehovah-Raha - **The Lord is my SHEPHERD;***
- (3) *Jehovah-Jireh - **The Lord will PROVIDE;***
- (4) *Jehovah-Nissi - **The Lord our BANNER or VICTOR;***
- (5) *Jehovah-Tsidkenu - **The Lord our RIGHTEOUSNESS;***
- (6) *Jehovah-Rapha - **The Lord who HEALS;***

(7) *Jehovah-Shammah - **The Lord Who is PRESENT WITH US.***

These seven names alone, are the epitome of Grace. It is so important for us to get to know Him by Name; to be as close to Him, as we are to our spouse, on the most intimate of levels. We need to be so close that we know how to finish a thought that the other one starts. We need to be so deeply in love that when He breathes in, we feel like we're breathing out. If we fail to recognize God's Names, or don't take the time to develop that level of intimacy, those names lose their potency to us. We begin to take Him for granted. Psalm 23 is a perfect picture of God.

***The Lord is my Shepherd*** (that's Relationship); ***I shall not want,*** (that's Supply); ***He makes me to lie down in green pastures,*** (that's Rest); ***He leads me beside the still waters,*** (that's Refreshment); ***He restores my soul,*** (that's Healing). ***He leads me in paths of righteousness,*** (that's Guidance), ***for His Names sake,*** (that's Purpose). ***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*** (that's Refinement), ***I will fear no evil,*** (that's Protection), ***for Thou art with me,*** (that's Faithfulness). ***Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me,*** (that's Instruction). ***Thou***

***prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies, (that's Hope); Thou anointest my head with oil, (that's Consecration); my cup runneth over, (that's Abundance). Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, (that's Blessing); and I will dwell in the house of The Lord, (that's Security), Forever ! (that's Eternity).***

It's important to know that, the "name" is not who He is, it is His Very Essence. When we call upon the Name of Jehovah Rapha, for example, we are not calling on the "God Who Heals" or upon the "healing God". We are calling upon the One near Whom *nothing* is less than complete. As we become closer to Him, we become whole and healed, and complete in all that He is. And when that happens, John 8:34-36 becomes real for us, for ***"he who the Son sets free, is free indeed"***.

When I began to scratch the surface of who God really was, and understand His very Essence, my marriage turned volatile. I began to ask questions that my husband couldn't answer. I began to hear God's heartbeat, and I noticed that it was not beating in sync with the man I married. So I began to question, and by doing so, I "questioned authority".

Signs and wonders seemed to be flying everywhere, and things became increasingly uncomfortable to say the least. Understanding who God was helped me understand God's Grace. And understanding His Grace helped me to develop boundaries, where there were none. Through His Word, I began to see that my own ignorance was destroying me, and the lives of my children. I began to distinguish the difference between the enemy's counterfeit signs and wonders as compared to God's glorious signs and wonders. Where they were once hardly distinguishable, they were now like night and day. It was during that time, that I was reminded of a recurring dream I used to have, just after I got saved. It would help me to further understand the complexities of God's character, and Who I was to model myself after. Who I was supposed to help my children model after.

I remember falling asleep on my sofa after an utterly exhausting day at work. I was stressed to the max with commitments way over my head, and this dream would recur every time I felt like I would lose my mind from all the decisions I needed to make. Remembering the details of this dream, some 20 years after the fact, was significant. And this decision wasn't just another difficult one, it was a pivotal one that would change 4 lives. Mine,

my two children, and the course my ex-husband would choose to take. I couldn't control what the outcome of his life would be, nor did I want to; but I was in the driver's seat of my own fate, and I was transporting two precious and irreplaceable cargo in the passenger seats next to me. I was their sole support in this world. I had to learn what it meant to walk by faith, now more than ever.

In my dream, so long ago, I was walking along a pathway in the country, somewhere unfamiliar to me. It was very peaceful and serene, with wildflowers in full bloom. Talking my walk, I was compelled to stop and look in the distance, about ten yards ahead. There was a man in a white robe and sandals, carrying a crook-headed wooden shepherd's staff. He used it as he walked toward me, and although I never saw his face, he felt oddly familiar to me. When he got about three feet from where I was standing, as I faced him, he took the staff in both hands and presented it to me, as one would present a US Military Flag to a loved one at a funeral. I went to grab it with both hands, removing it from his, and the most amazing thing happened. The man spoke four words to me. ***"The Rod Of Jesse"***. As he spoke, the crook-headed wooden shepherd's staff became a solid,

straight - almost blinding white scepter. When I touched the white glow of what I can only describe as Glory, it turned to solid gold, gleaming in the sun. Instead of letting me have it after I had touched the staff where his hands had been, he took it back. And as a king would knight his subject, he motioned for me to get down on one knee, took the scepter, and proceeded to touch the top of my left shoulder, then my right shoulder, and finally, he touched the top of my head.

I remember tears streaming down my face as he “knighted” me, and the feeling of utter unworthiness. Taking the scepter in one hand, he put his right finger under my chin to raise my head that was now bowed in humility. He smiled at me and helped me to rise to my feet. He firmly placed the scepter into both of my hands. Once again, it turned into a crook-headed wooden shepherd’s staff. Overwhelmed by tears, I was dumb-founded at the amazing transformation the staff took before my eyes. I slowly looked up to the man standing before me, and just as I lifted my head, the man disappeared from my sight. I awoke from my dream, with tears streaming down my face. The word Isaiah 11:1-3 flashed into my mind. I quickly found my Bible, and looked it up.

***“... and a shoot will come up from the stump (rod) of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him, the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Power, and the Spirit of Knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. And he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears...”***  
***(Isaiah 11:1-3)***

This is a picture of Jesus Christ. In the first part of this verse, we see a shoot coming forth. In the second part, it has grown into a branch. But the two growths appear to come from two different places. The first appears from the visible stump of Jesse; the Royal line of David. The second appears from the roots, from underground, where no one knows it is coming, until it does. I believe this first part - the shoot from the stem of Jesse - is a clear picture of Jesus Christ when He was here the first time, because Jesus descended from a visible Jewish Royal line. As far as Judaism is concerned, Jesus didn't bear any fruit, they rejected Him. The

entire nation rejected Him. I believe the second part of this verse is talking about Jesus' second coming. He is going to come again, but this time, not from a *visible* Royal line. Instead, He is going to appear by surprise, and *this time*, the nation will look upon Him and repent.

I believe that, in my dream, God was showing me a picture of humility, and calling me to take on the likeness and character of Humility Himself, Jesus Christ. I was to put on His character in my dealings here on earth, whatever they might turn out to be. I was - like all of us are - to mirror His Image. I was to get in the habit of not judging things, or people, by what they looked like in the natural, but to see things from a deeper perspective. I believe, with that dream, God was preparing me for a battle of many difficult life choices; but one that He clearly had fully dressed me that I might endure. I believe that the transformation of the wooden staff represented the humility I would have to have to walk out my life on this earth. I would be one that would break all the proverbial rules; rules that demanded I prosper in this earth according to the doctrines of man, and yet God would cause me to endure diverse circumstances that I might prosper in my soul. He was telling me that, while the world would often times see me as one having to

lean upon a seemingly unstable, crook-headed wooden crutch that offered little support; reality was clear, it was the most powerful picture of stability one could hope for - all in a simple Shepherd's Staff.

Divorce was not a choice I wanted to make, but sometimes we are given two choices: to live or to die. I had children to consider, and I am commanded by scripture to choose life, (*Deuteronomy 30:19*), no matter the cost. I opted for life, out of simple obedience, to give them hope for their own futures. God hates divorce, yes, but He doesn't judge by what He sees with the natural eye. He looks beyond at the eternal consequences, and offers His Amazing Grace, (*1 Corinthians 4:5*).

I learned a very important lesson in humility the day I signed the final papers. God would use my divorce to help me be less judgmental and more compassionate toward people who had gone down that road before me. And He would remind me, every now and then, with Isaiah 11:1-3. In my own little self-righteous world, centered around the beliefs I swallowed for years with gallons of Kool-aide chasers, I used to think divorce fit into a tidy little pocket called Rebellion, knit together by the threads of Contempt.

That people only got divorced because they were too lazy to stick it out and work at it. I learned the hard way that it takes three willing participants to make a marriage work; him, her and the Grace of God Himself. I know I tried and I know God tried. Rarely did I ever outwardly express judgment, but I did hide it inside the depths of my heart where no one, but God, could see. God warns us in His Word not to judge, lest we ourselves become judged, (*Matthew 7:1*). Divorce was suddenly no longer a subject that held a black and white explanation. My circumstances now forced me to see divorce through the crimson color of Jesus' Blood.

Amazing Grace is all about boundaries and how we learn to develop them. If they are drawn in our own strength in the sand, they will inevitably be washed away by the first tide that washes up on our beach. If they are drawn by the Redeeming Blood of the Lamb, nothing can wash them away.

Ironically, this chapter was written during another crisis I faced. I don't believe in coincidence. I think God had a master plan. I was being hit on every end; physically, financially, socially and emotionally. I was suffering from a blood condition called Menorrhagia. It is excessive blood loss

during a woman's monthly cycle, and it can be life-threatening. The cause of my problems were benign uterine fibroids, but the condition had gotten so out of control, and the blood loss so excessive and consistent for weeks on end with no relief, that I needed to consider the possibility of a hysterectomy before I turned the age of 45. While I didn't want to have any more children, the thought of losing my uterus was just another crushing blow, and I didn't want the enemy to steal one more thing from me. Wombs are where babies are conceived, nurtured and eventually brought to fruition. To lose my womb, was to lose my ability to pro-create, even in a metaphoric sense. While the enemy tried his level best to make me feel like a failure as a woman, God was once again, planning to use a personal "sign and wonder" to drive home an important revelation about the Redeeming Blood of Jesus Christ. It was time for me to draw another boundary line, one the enemy could not cross, or wash away.

I was feeling so alone and scared the day the doctor called and told me the bad news. I had been scheduled for the hysterectomy and losing the most important vital organ (to me) was inevitable. Adding more stress to the pot, I couldn't afford to have the procedure done. I would need to believe God

for yet another miracle. When I got the news, I was so angry, I cried out to God, but I had no words of faith, only contempt. He had given me a job to do, I was in the middle of writing this book - in fact, this particular chapter - and here, out of nowhere, I get whammed with another left hook. It wasn't fair. I was being faithful, I was being obedient. I couldn't understand why He would allow the enemy to plow over me... again.

I bargained with God. I doubt it worked, but I gave it the old college try. I told Him it wasn't easy to drag up demons of the past and recount the victories for the world to see; to let the masses peer inside my prayer closet and see me for all I was. I was too afraid of rejection, or worse. The Lord reminded me that His grace was sufficient, and that in my weakness, His power would manifest perfect. He reminded me that we're living in the days where people are going to need to turn back to God - the Real One, not one of many cheap imitations being promoted out there. They are going to need to see a Savior Who is faithful... even when they don't think they can be. Witnesses to that fact are going to have to testify. I am a child of The Most High God, and that makes me one such person: a witness.

I reminded God that I wasn't some pillar of great faith as some that know me have suggested. I tend to bruise easily when I fall, so I have learned to stay off pedestals for my own good. Truth be known, I am frail and weak, and sometimes terrified to take another step of faith. God reminded me that, indeed, I am all those things, yet I have the privilege of a personal relationship with the Everlasting Father Who has made every provision available to me under Heaven. One Who walks alongside me, and takes my hand; Who carries me when I'm too tired to walk one step further. He reminded me of the fact that, even though I feel lonely – without a husband - I am never really alone.

Just at that moment, the phone rang. I haven't talked to my dear friend for months, and while we sent an occasional email, it was good to hear his voice. He called because I told him about my doctor's visit. I had overslept that day, because that whole night before I was simply exhausted. From so much blood loss, I had become anemic. Nevertheless, even with little strength that I had, I was bound and determined to get up and write after having another series of dreams. I was proof-reading this chapter called

Amazing Grace, and I hadn't even written it yet. The message was so profound, but there was so much content, and so many perspectives I could draw from. I was exhausted, yet excited. I had made the decision to press through and persevere. When I woke up, made a cup of coffee, and turned on my laptop, my mind went blank. I got so frustrated with all the jumbled thoughts in my head, it was like a pile of alphabets being thrown up in the air like puzzle pieces, and I was somehow supposed to collect them in mid-air and form them into intelligible sentences. An impossible task. I opted to cry as I sat there staring at a blank screen.

It wasn't but a few minutes before Amazing Grace showed up, through Mark's phone call to me. God never fails. When the enemy comes in to dissuade, distract and discourage you, God makes a way. Mark and I began to catch up on old times, and then as his usual style, he suddenly says "I'm not this smart, this must be God". Unbenounced to him, Mark began to pick up that jumbled pile of alphabets hanging over my head, and he proceeded to speak one "thus saith the Lord" after the other. One by one, the sentences started to form. It was like the Lord was speaking to me with little crib notes to jog my memory.

I was telling him how alone I felt, and felt like God wasn't listening to my prayers. He told me that God was dealing similarly with him in his life, and encouraged me by translating what God spoke to his heart just a few days prior. He was made to realize that when people or things are taken out of our lives and it causes us to feel lonely and isolated, the Lord doesn't do it to punish us, but to protect us. When God calls us to be alone, even when we, or others think we should be somewhere else, God always wins. God will never leave us, or forsake us. He promises that. But sometimes or logic gets in the way, even the best intended people get in the way, and poor choices are made. If God didn't intervene during those times, Kingdom work would never get done.

We are human, with human desires and we are sometimes easily distracted. When there is a job to do that carries eternal consequence, God expects His kids to be single-minded. The price is too high to allow for distraction. And when we cannot say no, God removes everything and anyone who gets in the way, until the job is done. I find these times to be excruciatingly painful for me. It's like sitting under the Thumb of God. I am

a people person, and when I know God is controlling the ebb and flow of my social life, it makes me very uncomfortable. It tells me that I'm about to embark on a higher level of accountability, when I'd really rather not rise higher. I've learned over the years, that when I feel isolated – even though I do everything in my own power to fellowship - it is prep time for another assignment. Finishing this book is quite an assignment. A great deal of personal fears needed to be defeated and I had to constantly remind myself that I was just a vessel, born to testify to Love. With that revelation, the boundary line was drawn.

Mark made an important point I think is worth reiterating here. And that is this: the times we feel God is silent, chances are we are in the stages of spiritual growth. It is the time that God takes us from glory to glory. ***“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s Glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit,”*** (2 Corinthians 3:18). While God is always available, sometimes He seems silent, to allow us to make choices that will inevitably hone our character and help us reach higher toward that next level of glory. Silence and the feeling of loneliness can be

a good thing. We can reflect better in silence and it helps us with self-assessment. Self-assessment is important for personal accountability. It helps us discover who we are, and what we're made of. When we feel pain, whether it stem from emotions or physical pain, that also can be a good thing, because it means we can still feel. God would rather have us feel the pain, than have us feel nothing at all. It is when we are weak, we have to remember that God is strong, and His Grace is sufficient. Indeed, His Power is manifest perfect in our weakness.

Mark's words reminded me of how Jesus must've felt. God's plan was to cause Jesus to experience every emotion we could ever feel, so that we would never feel alone. We would know that Someone had gone before us, and survived. Jesus is close to the broken in heart, because His heart beating in sync with The Fathers, broke. He understands anger, because He experienced the fullness of God's Righteous anger. He was made to endure all that we could ever suffer, yet experienced it, without succumbing to sin by allowing His flesh to control the circumstances or their inevitable outcome. Jesus could've run to hide, but He didn't. He chose to do exactly what He heard His Father Him to do, and He did it by faith. It would cost

Him humiliation in front of the world, and eventually, it would cost Him His life, but He would be rewarded for His obedience in the end. When we do what our Father asks us to do, not leaning to our own understanding but being obedient by simple faith, trusting that He knows what's best for us, we are rewarded. Sometimes God rewards in secret, sometimes He rewards us openly.

I know Jesus felt alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. I imagine He felt utter rejection from those whom He loved and trusted to stay by His side. On the most important, pivotal time in His spiritual and natural life, those that were supposed to care, didn't seem to care, because they had they had their own agendas while pretending to carry His. Jesus had asked His disciples to spend an hour praying for Him, and they fell asleep. Jesus even felt abandoned by His Own Father, God Himself, when He was hanging on the cross. And when the nails were driven through His wrists and His feet; when he was being beaten and He most certainly felt the pain. As I pondered how I would finish this chapter on Amazing Grace, I was reminded of another conversation I had with another friend a few months back. He and I were talking about Jesus, specifically as he walked

the road to Calvary, where he was beaten and spit upon, all because He chose to listen to His Father, and testify to His love. We both wondered why and how human beings could do such heinous crimes on one solitary individual who did nothing to warrant such pain and suffering. Larry said if he had been there, he would've tried to stop it. Our conversation brought me immediately back to Isaiah 11:1-3. The epiphany my friend had ties in perfectly with how we tend to judge one another by what we see with our natural eyes, or by what we hear with our natural ears. God began to reveal something so profound; it's barely describable in words.

What if the only way for God to fulfill prophecy, was to give people the powerful delusion that Jesus was actual sin, instead of what He was in reality, a *substitute* for our sin? What if people were so brutal to him, because they were made to think that Jesus was the epitome of evil, instead of unconditional love? What if they were really just decent human beings who were lashing out at the evil they saw in their minds, instead of the Man, Jesus? How else can one justify what they did to mar this wonderful Savior beyond human recognition? What if God, allowed Satan to deceive the minds of Jesus' persecutors, and allowed him to plant such

rage in their minds, such infuriating sadistic cruelty, all to make it *look like* the enemy won? I believe that is the reason Jesus could remain silent. He was holding unswervingly to the Hope of Glory in His heart, and He trusted His Father to be faithful to His Word. How else could Amazing Grace help Him get through those last hours?

I am so grateful to the Lord for having endured what I will never have to endure. Because Jesus defeated hell and death, He has paved the way for us to become joint heirs with Him and all that is His, (*Romans 8:17*). He not only suffered, died, rose again from the grave, but He gave us something precious for us to hold, until we meet Him again. He gave us His Peace housed in the heart in the Holy Spirit, the One Who would come to educate and counsel us; the One Who would walk alongside and help us in our weakness that we might be a strong testimony of God's faithfulness.

Jesus promised in John 14:18, ***“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. I do not to you as the world gives. Do not let***

***your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”***

To fully understand Jesus Gift to us, we need to define the word peace. The word “peace”, and words directly related to it, appears over 400 times in scripture. It is one of the most precious and fundamentally essential ingredients for a believer; to be at peace with God, and know intimately the peace of God. It relates to a harmonious relationship obtained through reconciliation of a debt paid in full. The word “peace”, or “shalom” is often translated as welfare, good health, prosperity, favor, rest, to be whole, to be finished, restitution or repay, and perfect.

I always felt that it went deeper than that. One day, I mentioned my thoughts to a dear friend and Jewish sister in the Lord. She explained how the word “peace” was translated, according to the language of Hebrew. The word “shalom” refers to *a shattering of all chaos in your midst*. That simply put, it is the destruction of all powers and principalities, of anything that would hinder the intimacy, the fellowship and the worship of your Heavenly Father. This spoke volumes to my heart, and I recalled other Jewish friends who would use the word “shalom” as a greeting or

salutation. I discovered that it is Jewish custom that dictates this particular greeting, and that it is based on the language of Hebrew, a hidden meaning that most Christians are not taught. God gave me an epiphany of my own. When one speaks the word “shalom” over another, what they are basically saying is: *“I desire that all hindrances and chaos be shattered in your life, so that you may come to the full knowledge of God and His perfect plan and purpose for your life.”*

When we have trouble comprehending things, making sense of the circumstances in our lives, we are to go to our Counselor for comfort. When we don't know how to pray, or have no strength to pray of our own accord, God promises that He will help us. ***“In the same way, The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He Who searches our hearts knows the mind of The Spirit, because the Spirit interceded for the saints in accordance with God's will.”*** (Romans 8: 26-27).

So, to answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, “grace”

isn't so much a thing, as it is a Person who longs to fellowship with us, to provide us with every favor; and when we fall short of His favor, He lovingly shows mercy toward us... all in hopes of us understanding Who He is.

Amazing Grace is a loving Father, a devoted Son and brother, and a Wonderful Counselor. He does not judge according to what He sees, or what He hears, but looks upon our hearts through His Unconditional and Righteous Love and wants us anyway, no matter what condition we are in, or no matter how many times we've rejected His love. If you're reading this, He's talking to you. And He's making an official invitation to make your acquaintance. ***He wants you to be rooted and grounded in love, so that you may have power together, with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know His Love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the fullness of God, (Ephesians 3:17-19).***

Amazing Grace *IS* Almighty God.... and He is, indeed – most sufficient.

