



# GRACE

*The Great Good News!  
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*

**NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2004**

*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9).*

God tenderly calls us, not to DO anything, but to BE in a love RELATIONSHIP (fellowship) with Him through Jesus. All that we do will have the fingerprints of God when our DOING comes out of our BEING in relationship with Jesus...resurrected with Him. God can literally touch others through each of us. The most fulfilling things I do are not those things I do TO BE LOVED AND ACCEPTED by others, but those things I freely do for, and with, others *because* I AM ALREADY LOVED AND ACCEPTED in my relationship with Jesus! ☺

## THE ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP

*John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word is Jesus Himself, the exact expression and explanation of God. Notice the eternal relationship between the God the Father and God the Son: "The Word was WITH God" in eternity past ("in the beginning"). Notice the intimacy of this relationship in the oneness of the Father and the Son: "The Word WAS God." The reason Jesus came to be with us was to reveal His eternal and intimate relationship with God the Father, and to invite us into that same relationship! Ponder that for a while! ☺*

I recently helped teach boys at the Boys Home about the heavenly Father. Many of these boys do not have a close relationship with an earthly father. It was so amazing to count 114 times Jesus referring to His "Father" in the Gospel of John, which has just 21 chapters! So, Jesus did not live on earth focusing on DOING the right things; He lived with a fervent focus on BEING in relationship with His Father. His doing came from that relationship, from the Father Himself. Jesus said in *John 5:19, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does."* And the Father loves you and me, too, and will show us the miracles of life through a relationship with His dear Son Jesus.

## BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

Man broke his first relationship with God. The primary reason for the break was not that the serpent (Satan) subtly twisted the words God had spoken to Adam and Eve. The primary problem was that Adam and Eve received God's word second-hand, which took their focus off of their relationship with God. They could have chosen to reply to the serpent, "Let us check what you are saying with our Creator who loves us." But they didn't, and so they became separated from holy God, and their hearts became enslaved to sin.

Everyone is condemned to inherit this sinful heart condition from Adam (*Romans 5:12, 15, 18, 19*), while still having the God-given needs of love and acceptance. However, because everyone is born separated from the true love and acceptance of God, everyone seeks to have these needs fulfilled the best ways they can figure out through relationships with other people and things and accomplishments.

## RENEWED RELATIONSHIP

The great good news of the gospel is that anyone can be completely renewed by receiving the gift of a vibrant relationship with Life Himself - Jesus. Because of this wonderful freedom, I believe Satan tempts Christians to receive God's WRITTEN WORD second-hand in order to steal the experience of our real relationship with the LIVING WORD JESUS. Satan's goal is always to steal the glory of God in our lives...to distract us from experiencing Jesus shining through our lives (*see Hebrews 1:3*).

One personal example is *Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."* When I received this verse second-hand (i.e., isolating this verse and trying to figure it out based on other people's commentaries), I was afraid to freely follow my heart because I believed my heart was still not completely right. I was more comfortable living by biblical guidelines...you know, to keep my heart in check. ☹ I was never completely free to experience the fullness of my relationship with God. Until...

...until by God's grace I was led to a desperate point where I knew I needed to know truth first-hand from God if life ever was to have any real and joyful purpose. Today when I sense God personally speaking to me through the Scriptures, it is always with a focus on the glory of Christ in my life and God's total acceptance of me in His dear Son. I have never heard God single out *Jeremiah 17:9* to my heart, the heart of His child. To isolate this verse is to take it out of context of the life of Christ...and the Father never does that.

*Jeremiah 17:9* is of God's old covenant (testament). In the full context of God's heart, He promises a new covenant (testament) just a few verses later in *Jeremiah 31:33-34, "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They all shall know Me [Notice the relationship God desires with us]. I will remember their sin no more [Notice that God has removed all barriers for relationship]."* Likewise God promises in *Ezekiel 36:26-27, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My ways."* About 600 years later, this promise of a glorious new covenant was completely fulfilled in Christ through the cross. The Father always speaks to His children in the context of the new covenant that was "cut" in His dear Son on the cross. That's how deep and precious the new covenant is. (*continued on the back*) ⇒

So, yes, I can freely follow my heart, for it is a precious gift of God! At the cross, God took away ALL barriers of my relationship with Him. The greatest truth I know is that God loves ME! ME! God loves ME! Not by anything I ever could do or ever could figure out...only by His grace. So, there is nothing wrong with ME! My heart cannot be wicked, because God loves ME! I am free at last because God has made me totally acceptable in His dear Son. The foundational message of all ministries should be: God loves YOU!

### MINISTRY RELATIONSHIPS

I am growing to see that the ministry to which God called me is not about TEACHING GRACE, but is about me personally TESTIFYING OF GRACE. Grace is not a concept that can be taught...grace is God's full and first-hand revelation of the gospel of life!

I recently testified of grace to two people at a 10-hour GraceLife Conference. I have testified through this Conference 20 times the past 5 years, and it never gets old; in fact, it gets more and more new, which is a testimony of life in the truths. Jesus said in *John 6:63*, "*The words that I speak to you are spirit and life.*" Sometimes I am tempted to see Conference attendance as too small to make a difference. However, it is an increasing joy to share truths with one priceless person at a time. Ministry is always through relationships.

I recently heard about a pastor becoming frustrated when only 200 of the 2000 active members of the congregation came to hear a guest teacher proclaim the gospel of grace. I relate so much with how this teacher responded to the pastor, "Never fret my son, I was only looking for one. Don't you understand? If one person ever catches the revelation of grace, it will change thousands!" I am seeing this transformation of lives spread by grace through relationships...literally spreading around the world because life begets life.

Here are recent photographs of some relationships in my life.

			
<i>Thanksgiving hayride with nieces and nephew.</i>	<i>Joy with her two precious aunts in October.</i>	<i>Boys Home of the South Thanksgiving supper with my chapel friends.</i>	<i>GraceLife Conference in Simpsonville, SC in November.</i>

### UPDATE ON JOY

Joy is doing better overall. However, she had bladder and sinus infections (unrelated to the previous staph infections) in November, and she is having, yet again, adverse reactions to treatment. ☹️ As a result, Joy's stamina is still low, but it is better. My stamina has been low, too, as I feel so much for her watching her endure so much for so long. We both are so thankful for God making grace real in our lives these years through His Word and friends. Otherwise we would be stuck in hopeless self-reflection such as "We must not be living right...God is chastising us...We will never live a fulfilling life...We are trapped and will never be free to enjoy life...etc." That is looking into the BOOK OF LAW and seeing only our own reflection. However, when we look into FACE OF GRACE, we see the reflection of the precious Jesus and all of His hope! And although our bodies may be weak, we believe we are hearing first hand, "*Be strong, my children, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 2:1), and "*Behold as in a mirror the glory of My Son, and be transformed to His glory*" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

I am so thankful Joy was able to go to a family Thanksgiving gathering this year for the first time since 2001. And Joy is now able to drive errands. She was excited to tell me that on her recent drive on a toll road, she anonymously paid the tolls for the car behind her at each toll booth. And she was excited to take Halloween candy to the house of some special children who have become too old to trick-or-treat at our house. Beneath her physical weaknesses, that's the real Joy...testifying to me what it means to live from the heart...what it's like to be free to spontaneously live outside the world's box. Isn't that just like Jesus?! ☺️

### GRACE NOTES

Christianity is not another *religion*. Christianity is a *relationship*.

Evangelism is not trying to convert people to believe the tenets of Christianity.

Evangelism is genuinely relating to others through Christ, and witnessing God invite people into that special relationship.

Abiding by biblical principles alone results in partial *conformation to those principles*.

Abiding in relationship with Christ results in real *transformation to His image*.

Isaiah 9:6 says, "For UNTO US a Child is born, UNTO US a Son is given."

Jesus was given UNTO US in order to die FOR US in order to give His life TO US in order to relate His life THROUGH US!

*Merry Christmas!*