

# Grace

*Living testimonies from a pilgrim's journal.*

## SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2005

### *Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet (John 13:5).*

The theme of my previous newsletter was being a pulpit for Christ...and how we can stand tall in God's grace as Jesus preaches truth and hope through us. This beautiful truth has been further impressed into my heart through a pastor's testimony during disaster relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina. Frank Friedmann is pastor of Grace Life Fellowship in Baton Rouge, LA ([www.livinginGrace.com](http://www.livinginGrace.com) and [www.gracelifefellowship.org](http://www.gracelifefellowship.org)), and a member of the Association of Exchanged Life Ministries ([www.aelm.org](http://www.aelm.org)), as is Christ Life Ministries.

Frank testifies of going to New Orleans expecting to minister to masses of people as a pastoral counselor. Instead, he spent much time picking up trash. Then he was asked to help a physically impaired woman into the restroom when no females were available to escort the precious lady. He entered the restroom with the woman while apologizing to all of the other women...who assured him it was ok. As Frank was helping the woman, another woman looked up at him and said through sad tears, "I just watched my whole family float away!" Through his own tears, Frank told these women of the precious love of Jesus. Frank's pulpit was not a polished piece of furniture...his pulpit was his heart molded from an old rugged cross...the very heart of Christ. The glory of Christ unashamedly shone throughout a restroom full of sadness and confusion.

This testimony encourages me to hear God's heart in Philippians 2 and to accept the humble heart of Christ as my own. *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition...let each esteem others better than himself. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...who humbled Himself...even to the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Jesus as Lord...to the glory of God the Father.*

Frank was led by God to experience a death to his expectations of what ministry is. Out of that death came a resurrection of true hope in the glorious presence of Jesus! As a Christ-one, you, too, have been called to the full-time ministry of Christ's glorious life. A friend of mine says, "God wants a Jesus just like you, with your background and experiences, to minister to others like no one else."

#### KATRINA, MEANS OF JUDGMENT OR OPPORTUNITY FOR HOPE?

I recall an uneasiness in my heart when some people related the September 11 tragedy to God's judgment, which I wrote about in my September 2001 newsletter. I am experiencing that same check in my spirit in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. For sure, there are many sins that can be pointed out in New Orleans. But doesn't this limit sin to negative-looking behaviors? What about proud people with positive-looking behaviors but impure motives in many towns and cities? What about the people in New Orleans who have pure hearts from Christ and exemplary behaviors...why would they be punished, too? Did not the death of Christ deal with the root cause of sinful behavior: sinful hearts? For me, a pat answer of God's judgment merely raises many many more questions.

We are tempted to be deceived into believing that grace is too light on sin. However, my heart yearns to testify that it is true grace alone that exposes sin for the subtle dead lie that it is. Apart from grace, sin is limited to negative-looking behaviors. Apart from grace, we are tempted to see the need for more of God's judgment, in addition to the cross. It was God's grace that exposed my self-righteousness...and I must tell you that my self-righteousness can look really good! I, like Paul, can say there is no one who has ever sinned as greatly as I have...no one. Only true grace trusts 100% in the sufficiency of Christ and His finished work through His cross.

Here is an excerpt from a letter I from Dudley Hall ([www.sclm.org](http://www.sclm.org)) that ministers affirmation and hope to me:

*It's natural for us to want to know the "why's" of the tragedies of life. But far too many of the "prophetic answers" I've heard are obsessed with the judgment aspect of the storm (Katrina). That perspective treats sin too lightly and appreciates Jesus' death too little. Our sin deserves more devastation than a Category 5 storm can deliver. Jesus took the judgment of God on Himself, and it cost Him His life. Of course, life's tragedies can be instruments of repentance, but speculating about the issues that deserved devastation too easily puts us in the Judge's seat. Relief is coming! But it won't be by FEMA. God is hearing the cry of people who have been born of the imperishable seed of God's word, and they will no longer settle for substitutes. They want the life promised in the gospel...a life of joy and persecution...a life of victory and pain. They won't mind that long life may evade them, as long as full life is guaranteed. They will be focused on Christ, and not the cultural definition of Christianity.*

## *Announcing my first website!!!*

[www.christmyheart.org](http://www.christmyheart.org)

For a long time I have yearned to share the glorious gospel with people around the world through a website...I just have not had the time, energy, and know-how. However, I found a free website template I could use fairly well. All of my newsletters since July 2001 are now posted on this website, as well as encouraging articles, ministry updates, links to wonderful ministries and books, photos, etc. that I hope people will relate to. I hope you check it out and sign my guestbook!

Also, on the back is a parable I wrote 5 years ago...it is so personal, I have hesitated to share it with many people. However, as a result of Hurricane Katrina, I am venturing out to now openly share it. It is a powerful communication of the gospel that transforms our lives. The parable is entitled "The Sewage Pond."

## THE SEWAGE POND

*In 2001, my friend Mark Maulding (president of Grace Life International, [www.glionline.org](http://www.glionline.org)) shared an analogy of a sewage pond to communicate how Jesus did not reach down from heaven to pluck us out of our sinful condition, but how Jesus came directly into our sinful conditions to rescue and redeem us through the cross. That analogy... that courageous and compassionate love really resonated with me. I was truly ministered to as I personalized and expanded this analogy as I wrote the following article. It is so personal, that I have hesitated to share it. However, a particular scene from the Hurricane Katrina tragedy has compelled me to share now. The scene was TV news footage of a dead man floating face down in sewage in a flooded New Orleans street...he was all alone...and all of modern man's best technologies did not prevent this tragedy, nor for a long while could even rescue this man's dead body. This was a faceless man to those who saw the footage. However, he is not faceless to God. Grace is coming face to face with the living resurrected Christ, knowing deep down you were united with Christ in His death and burial in order to know Him now in His resurrection (Romans 6).*

I see Jesus standing in a majestic meekness on the side of a sewage pond. Imagine that...the Creator of the universe, the glorious Son of God, standing in such a place. Jesus has a commanding yet compassionate stature. A feeble human parallel is when the king of England removed his royal robes and came in street clothes to inspect the war-torn areas of England...many say the king displayed a glory like never before.

I see Jesus peering at a man floating prostrate, face down in the sewage pond...it is a precious penetrating gaze. Without taking His eyes off of the man, Jesus deliberately and without any hesitation steps into the pond...there is a holy hush among millions of angels who are entranced in heaven above on this unfolding scene of their holy Creator below. The stench in the pond is sickening. The humidity is oppressive. Floating sheens of oil and scum wick to the simple robe clothing on Jesus. A vast cloud of mosquitoes take incessant prey on His flesh. Jesus feels the muck of the sludge on the bottom of the pond. Yet...He never flinches. His gaze is perfectly fixed on the man in the pond.

As Jesus reaches the man, Jesus is waist-deep in the pond. Jesus gently reaches around the man to turn him face up. He secures the man in a cradle-like hold, with the man's head resting on the inside of His left arm. With tears in His eyes and a simple yet passionate smile, Jesus takes His right hand to tenderly wipe some of the sludge off of the man's cheeks, and says under His breath, "Oh, how I love you!" His eyes are still fixed on the man, piercing Him with a love I have never witnessed...and...and now I can make out the man's face...IT'S ME! Oh my goodness, I just cannot fathom such love! I can't take in anymore of this scene...but...but I know that I must.

Although my eyes are dead closed, Jesus eyes are fully open and His simple smile is fixed on me. And He repeats over and over, with a simple, yet profound passion, "Oh, how I love you, oh, how I love you, oh, how I love you." Pure tear drops from His eyes gently patter onto my dirty face.

I realize now that the sewage pond is a picture of all my sins. How filthy! How full, yet how lifeless! But Jesus seems nevermore majestic as His pure life intersects the sewage pond...where Hope meets despair...Friend meets foe...Light meets darkness...Life meets death...Savior meets sinner...and where justice and mercy meet grace. It is an awesome picture of the cross. Such amazing love.

Then with His strong, yet gentle, arms, Jesus turns me so that my face is pressed into His bosom, and His left hand supports the back of my head while His right arm and hand embrace and support the rest of my body. It is just like the father's strong embrace of his anxious child. In this case, I am lifeless in the arms of Jesus. Jesus then gingerly tightens His embrace of me, a tender hug, with periodic gentle pats and rubs on my head. He closes His eyes passionately and again repeats under His breath, "Oh, how I love you." He slightly twists His head while His cheek is gently pressed against the crown of my head, expressing the depth of His compassion. His weeping increases, and His whole body trembles in concert with His tears of love for me.

As Jesus continues to embrace me in the serenity of stillness and silence, He closes His eyes for a few minutes, as if to savor His time with me, His love for me, and His plans for me. Then, with tears now streaming down His face, He opens His eyes wide, and looks up to heaven. Oh, what beautiful eyes! They glisten through His overflowing tears. He cries out in a strongly passionate, yet weakly strained, voice: "Father!" I realize now He is on the verge of becoming separated from His Daddy for the first time ever...yet it is also a cry of a deep trust in His Father's purpose.

Then, Jesus slowly and deliberately begins to descend into the sewage pond, His eyes still fixed on heaven above... His loving embrace of me still sure. I now see the nail holes in His wrists that are embracing me as I descend with Him, firmly in His grip.

His tear-filled eyes remain fixed on heaven above, and His arms remain clutched around me. I see a passionate expression on His lips as a precursor to the most victorious words ever spoken...Jesus says with all the love in the world just before He is completely submerged, "It is finished!" And then, instead of taking in a deep breath, He lets out a deep breath, and becomes buried with me under the filthy sewage pond.

Immediately heaven closes and it is dark for several hours. But then heaven re-opens and a glorious light chases out the darkness. The pond has turned blood red! A truly awesome sight. The odors, oil, scum, sludge, diseases, mosquitoes...all of my filth...it's all gone! There is a climate of awe and peace for three days around the pond. Then, another transformation occurs...the blood red pond becomes a strikingly clear and intensely sparkling pond! The glorious light reflects though a fresh cool breeze from praising breaths of angels. The pond begins to overflow without ceasing. I realize this is a picture of rivers of living waters...a picture of Christ's pure eternal life in and through me!

The picture ends here, but somehow I sense that as Jesus beheld me through the cross, and as He continues to behold me in His resurrection, so now I, in grace, behold Him. It is as if I have been viewing the scene of this picture from the heavenly places above, where I am now forever in Christ (Colossians 3:1). As this picture ends, I sense a still, small voice in my heart: "You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." I hope you hear this same voice, too. Thank you, God, for Your grace, including the grace to receive it!