

WORDS
of
GRACE

A 100 DAY
DEVOTIONAL

SCOTT PATTY

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Introduction

God has graciously given us the Bible. The Bible is the collection of God's words, given to his chosen men who wrote them under the inspiration of his Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21). Sometimes the Bible is called the Scripture, which means sacred writings. We also call the Bible the Word of God, because the words in the Bible make up the message of God to us about his great plan of salvation for sinful people.

In the Bible, God is communicating to us. He is speaking words of *grace*. That means he is showing us our need of him and calling us to come to him in faith. As a Christian and a pastor, I want people to hear God's Word, see the grace of Christ in it, respond to him in faith, and come to know him personally. That's why I preach from the Bible every Sunday, talk to people about the Bible in conversation, and write to explain passages of the Bible and how they relate to us.

The devotional writings included in this book were originally written for the congregation I have served for twenty-five years. They have been edited so readers who are not members of our church can benefit from them without the specific details of our congregation and city.

I call these devotional writings *Words of Grace* because they are designed to open up the meaning, relevance, and application of God's Word of grace to people. As you read them you will notice several things.

First, these devotionals are based on Bible passages. When I write, it is God's message that I am trying to bring to the forefront of our thinking. Who cares what I think? God's Word matters. I hope you will grow in your desire to read the Bible by reading these devotionals.

Second, these devotionals are short. Thank God for the gifted teachers who have contributed to our understanding of the Bible by writing longer commentaries and works of theology. I read and benefit from many of these. I believe there is also a place for shorter writings that can shed light on God's Word to us. And I hope these devotionals will create an appetite in you for what those gifted teachers have given us in other books, and that you will read them, too.

Third, the devotionals refer often to the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christianity is based on the message of God's grace. The grace of God refers to the salvation from sin that he provides for us through the death of his Son Jesus on the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. As you read these devotionals, you will be reminded of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. And you will be called to respond to Jesus in repentance and faith.

Fourth, these devotionals make reference to the church. I am a pastor because I love the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In these devotionals, I will regularly encourage you to read and discuss the Bible with others, to go to church, and to pray for your congregation. One of my main goals as a pastor is to help people come to a greater appreciation for and engagement with a local congregation. In congregations, the words of grace flow freely and give encouragement to all.

The *Words of Grace* devotionals are organized into three broad sections: Our Great God, God's Work in Our Lives, and Responding to God in Faith. These sections represent what I believe to be a helpful way of understanding what it means to be a Christian and to live as one. Everything about being a Christian begins with God, what he tells us about himself and his plan of salvation, and what he has done to provide for our salvation and life with him. We call this "grace" because it is a gift to us from God. When we see and hear what God shows us about himself and the salvation he provides, we are called to respond to him by faith. Faith is turning to God by trusting in his Son Jesus Christ and following Jesus as his disciple. The ordering of these devotionals is designed to help you live by grace through faith.

My prayer is that this devotional book will help you press the Word of God into your everyday life. As you read the Bible, may your mind be shaped by God's truth, your heart be stirred by his love, and your response to his grace be faith in the Lord Jesus.

Section I

Our Great God

———— GENESIS 1:1 ————

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

God, the Author and Authority

The author has the authority. The writer of a book or a song stands over that work with complete freedom to edit and arrange it. The author can publish and perform the work or give permission for others to do so. He could decide to tuck the work away and keep it entirely for personal enjoyment. The creator is the owner and controller of the creation, and rightfully so.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God never released his copyright on the creation. He is the author and has authority over all things.

God did not create only the physical world—the earth and all its material inhabitants. He is the author of the way things are supposed to be, including the way his creatures are to relate to him. God is the one who ordained that his own sovereign lordship over all things is to be acknowledged, honored, obeyed, and even enjoyed by those he created. The authority of God extends to the relationship he has with us.

So, what went wrong? Shortly after the creation, the first man and woman usurped the authority of God and acted as if they, and the serpent who tempted them, were the authors of the way things are to be. Their way seemed right to them rather than the way God had established. Their way introduced the chaos that is in the world, replacing the goodness of God’s original design. Their way brought about the breach between the Creator and the created (Gen. 3).

The rebellion against the authority of God, and the breakdown that resulted, was so great that only God himself could restore creation to himself. So begins the biblical account of God’s redeeming grace from Genesis 3 all the way to the end of the Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

This account of redeeming grace takes us through centuries, lands and nations, with prophets, kings and people, until we finally come to the Savior sent for sinners. This Savior restores the authority of God over his redeemed people, and will restore it over all creation by making all things new. The final scene in the Bible, showing us the final and eternal reality, is of the redeemed, joyfully living in the light of God’s eternal rule over them (Rev. 21–22).

The biblical witness is that we have already shaken off God’s gracious authority over us and have instead demanded our independence from him. The biblical question is, have we repented of this mutiny and turned to Jesus Christ, the Savior sent to bring us back under the rightful and benevolent authority of God our Creator?

Today, ask yourself, *Am I submitting to God as the Author and Authority of my life?*

———— GENESIS 1:26–31 ————

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

So God created man
in his own image;
he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.” God also said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you, for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it—I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came and then morning: the sixth day.

God and the Human Life He Created

The first thing the Bible reveals to us about God is his role as Creator. “In the beginning God created . . .” Our understanding of him must start here. Because he is Creator, he has authority—authority that we must respect. We must also respect that which he has created, for everything he creates is “good indeed.”

Reverence for God as Creator and respect for the life he created form the foundation for every moral decision we face. We do not have one reason to abolish abortion and another to remove racism from our hearts; we do not have two different reasons for ending poverty and abhorring pornography. These, along with a multitude of other moral issues of our day, find their solution in one overriding truth: that God created all human life in his image and for his glory. When that truth grips our hearts, we will love so well that devaluing any life, at whatever stage and in whatever kind of skin, will no longer be an option.

Our nation is in constant conversation about race, abortion, poverty, violence, politics, and a host of other issues. How can Christians seek to offer a solution to any of these issues apart from reverence for God the Creator and respect for the human life he has created?

It seems that all moral roads lead back to Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image.”

Do you naturally revere God? Do you naturally respect the life he created *completely*? Does love of God and love of neighbor come easily for you? Certainly not. Sin resides in every human heart, rearing its ugly head in the form of disrespect for God and the devaluing of his image bearers. No one is morally perfect.

The gospel is the good news that God saves us in Christ from the sin that resides in our hearts, and that he works deeply in our souls to restore in us a reverence for himself and a respect for all human life.

The world around us is full of problems. It always will be, because it is full of sinful people. But Christians cannot be a worldly people who search for solutions in ourselves; we must rather be a kingdom people who search for answers in the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you have a healthy reverence of God as Creator of all? Do you love the human life he has created? If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit is restoring this reverence and love in you. Open yourself up to the exposure of God’s Word and Spirit. Cling to the gospel of God’s grace in Christ that cleanses you from all sin.

———— PSALM 8:1 ————

LORD, our Lord, how magnificent is your name
throughout the earth! You have covered the heavens
with your majesty.

God and His Glory

David declared that God's name is magnificent throughout the earth, and that he has covered the heavens with his majesty (Ps. 8:1). Another rendering of this verse is that God has set his glory over and above all creation. The heavens and earth are not to be glorified. Their chief end is to glorify God. All praise of creation is actually a song about the perfection and power of the Creator.

It is interesting that we are created to experience and express glory, but that we seek our own glory in our creative works. Certainly, we should engage in creative activity. We were made in the image of God, who made things, so we make things too. But sometimes we make things to glorify ourselves instead of revealing the image of God in us.

Take the Tower of Babel, for example. Genesis 11 tells us that the inhabitants of the earth decided to build a city with a tower that reached high into the sky. We might think they were simply being creative, using imaginative powers, engineering skills, and city planning methods to make life on earth work. But the purpose of this tower was to make a name for the people. The tower was made for their glory. This is especially troublesome because the people had an awareness of God's glory in creation, but God's glory wasn't enough; they wanted their own.

Seeing only fireworks displayed against the backdrop of the night sky with shining moon and stars, or hearing only the music of a concert when thunder is booming around us can be metaphors for seeking our glory in light of God's. Seeking glory in our works in light of God's glory in creation is like cropping out the red rocks of Sedona or the redwoods of California from our selfie.

Our glory fades against the backdrop of God's creation. Have you ever seen a brightly lit building fade under the rising sun? God's glory is over and above the creation. So why don't we, or won't we, see God's glory? The flickering light of self-glory is so close to our eyes that it blinds us to the glory of the Lord. But this is a temporary phenomenon. For, "the glory of the LORD will appear, and all humanity together will see it" (Isa. 40:5).

Do you see the glory of the Lord? This will only happen through repentance and faith, seeing in the face of Jesus Christ the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6). Look to Jesus, the only Son of God sent to save us from our sin. He is the glory of God, and he will restore us to that good purpose for which we were created, to reflect glory back to him.

—— ROMANS 3:21–26 ——

But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God presented him as an atoning sacrifice in his blood, received through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

God, the Just and Justifier

Romans 3:21–26 is considered by many to be the most important paragraph on salvation in the Bible. All the realities of human need and God's grace are present in these words. God's righteousness is said to be revealed to us. God's righteousness has for centuries been understood by readers of Romans as his right way of making sinners right with himself.

In this passage is the straightforward affirmation that all humans are sinners, fallen in their nature, coming up short of God's glory. We don't know or honor God's glory, nor do we reflect it as we were created to do. We dishonor God and seek self-glory (Rom. 1).

Then we see the way God dealt with our sin. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. As such, when Jesus died on the cross he took our sins to himself, bore the punishment of God against our sin in his body, and thereby freed us from condemnation for our sin. God sent Jesus to be our substitute. This is the definition of grace.

The application of Christ's substitutionary death to the individual person is also explained. It is by faith that what Jesus did on the cross is applied to a person. The righteousness of God—God making a person right with himself—is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

The paragraph closes with the declaration that God, by means of this plan of salvation, is righteous and declares righteous the one who has faith in Jesus. Another way to say this is that God is just and the justifier of those who trust in Jesus.

Something important to notice about the plan of salvation laid out in this passage is what it says about the nature of God. God is just. There is nothing about his plan of salvation that is unfair, unjust, or open to criticism. If God's plan is not received well by us, it is not the fault of the plan, but another bit of evidence that we are not just, as he is.

God is the justifier. To be the justifier, God must be the judge. "The LORD sits enthroned forever, he has established his throne for judgment. And he judges the world with righteousness; he executes judgment on the nations with fairness" (Ps. 9:7–8).

Before God's plan of salvation in the substitutionary death of Jesus was revealed, we were left wondering how anyone could stand before God who judges in righteousness. Now that the plan has been revealed, we are led to repentance of sin, faith in Christ, humility before the cross, peace before the throne of God, and freedom to live for his glory now.

God is just. Is he your justifier? Have you repented of your sin before him? Do you believe and receive his Son today?

———— **PSALM 62:11–12** ————

God has spoken once; I have heard this twice:
strength belongs to God, and faithful love belongs to
you, LORD. For you repay each according to his works.

God Is Great and Good

Strength belongs to the Lord. Power is his. King David was certain of this truth, for twice he heard it from the Lord.

The subject of God's power has been much discussed. Can God make a rock so big that even he can't move it? Maybe that's a silly question, but it raises a serious issue. Does God's power ever create a conflict within him? The short answer is, *No*. God is perfect, so he is never in a dilemma that leaves him trying to figuring out his next move.

A question a bit closer to home is, *Can we trust a God who possesses all power?* This raises the question, *Is God raw power?* Are there any other influences within the character of God that govern even the use of his power? Is there anything to comfort us in the knowledge of God's power?

David not only heard twice that strength belongs to the Lord, but also that faithful love is his. When God exercises his strength in the Bible, he is also expressing his love and goodness. The power to create was used to bring about a good world. After each day's work, God saw that it was good. The arm of the Lord against the Egyptians delivered the Israelites for his good purpose and their good future. The resurrection of Jesus from the grave by the exercise of God's power is the victory over death and the good gift of life to us.

God's greatness and goodness are inseparable. Whatever he chooses to do with his power can be trusted to be for good. As the psalm says, he is good and he does good (Ps. 119:68).

Nowhere is the greatness and goodness of God more evident than at the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is great because it is the place where the power of Christ's perfect life became the sacrifice for our sins to satisfy its penalty on our behalf. As the hymn says, "There is power in the blood of the Lamb."¹

The cross is good because the accomplishment of it is granted to us by grace through faith. The exercise of God's power was on our behalf. The satisfaction of the sentence of death for sin was counted as ours. Union with Christ is real. His death is ours—his life too. This is pure goodness and a gracious gift.

"God is great and God is good, let us thank him for our food," goes the children's prayer before the meal. The prayer of thanksgiving to our great and good God for the cross of Christ is prayed each day by the Christian, and each Lord's Day by the church gathered to worship him who has redeemed and restored us to himself.

Yes, the great God can be trusted because he is also good. He is shown to be so in his Son. Do you know this great and good God? Do you know his great and good salvation? Are you making his greatness and goodness known to others with a congregation of God's people? Think on these things.

———— ROMANS 11:36 ————

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

God Over All Things

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and after a long meditation on the righteous of God in the plan of salvation, the apostle Paul declared, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” Could there be a more succinct yet all-encompassing statement about the place of God in relation to all things that exist?

From him—God is the creator of all things. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). From God, through his Son, flows grace upon grace by which he redeems sinners and will restore all things for his purposes (John 1:16).

Through him—God keeps all things in existence through his power and for his purposes. “In him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17 *ESV*).

To him—All things were created for God’s glory and to him will be the glory forever. Amen.

If there is one great truth at the foundation of all truth, it is that God is over all things. And the truth that shapes how we live as Christians is that God is over and connected to all aspects of our lives.

In the realm of morality and money, family and friends, work and play, God has a will and a way for us to live. Working this truth out in real life is challenging and requires prayer and wisdom. The way is not always easy to discern, but we must exercise our spiritual mind muscle to do so. Creative and decisive obedience to God’s purposes in every area of life is called for. Jesus prayed this for us. “Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17 *ESV*).

Christians are not to divide our lives into spiritual and unspiritual categories, as if God applies to some parts and not to others. When we do this, we end up “putting God in his place” and setting ourselves up as lord of every other place. God then is relegated to church, ceremonies, and holidays, while in everything else we are on our own.

This is no way to live, nor will it lead to life. One reason Christians do not know much of the joy Jesus prayed we would know (John 17:13) is because we live as if God is over some things, not all things. We are still holding on to God and holding on to some things for ourselves. We are keeping God at a safe distance, so we think, by keeping him in the safe places of our lives.

The Bible shows us the God who is Lord over all, for all things are from, through, and to him. The way to joy in God is to know God as he is. Rivers of joy flood the soul and flow out in love to God when he is declared over all things in life and in our lives. Recognize today that God is over all things, and live in light of this great truth.

———— 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1–13 ————

If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—but the greatest of these is love.

The Love of God

English-speaking people have one word for many kinds of affection. The word *love* is used for food, sports, and spouses. It applies to marital fidelity and fornication. The only way to know what it means when it is used is to listen for the context or watch for the facial expression of the one speaking. In English, *love* covers a multitude of feelings.

The Greeks had different words to refer to different loves. Friendship love and sexual love had their own words. The New Testament (written in Greek) uses a special word that almost exclusively refers to God's love. That word is *agape*.

Agape is used to refer to the love that God has for us. This love was demonstrated when God sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins so that we would be forgiven and reconciled to him. God's love is in a category of its own. It gets its own word.

Agape refers to the nature of the God who loves, not to the loveliness of the ones who are loved. If I say I love a song, I am telling you as much about the song as I am about myself. But to speak of God's agape love is to say something only about God. Agape refers to the God who loves us in Christ.

First Corinthians 13 is all about agape. It's about God's love, so it's about God. The common assumption is that we are to show agape to others. But how can that be? How can we, sinful and flawed humans, express the kind of love that points to the goodness of God? How can we say or do anything that refers to our ability to love like God?

This mystery is great, and it is resolved in the love of God itself. God, who loved us in Christ by sending him to die for our sins on the cross, also loves us by saving us from our sins and giving us new life. He raised Jesus from the dead and gives new life to all who repent and believe. This new life includes the ongoing transformation of our minds and hearts—of our deepest affections. The transformation is not immediate; in fact, it is painfully slow. But it is real. It is happening in all who are born of God's Spirit.

As God in Christ by the Spirit transforms us more and more, we love with his love (agape) more and more. We are changed by his love, and we begin to express his love to others. As new people in Christ, when we love with the love of God, we are not putting the spotlight on our love but on the one who first loved us.

Drink deeply today from the love of God, and pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to empower you to love others with the love God has shown you.

———— ROMANS 5:1–11 ————

Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person — though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.