

40
DAYS
— *of* —
GRACE

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

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 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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40 Days of Grace

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INTRODUCTION

GRACE IS A THUNDEROUS, expansive, powerful, and life-altering word. Other than the word *God*, there is no more important word that the human mind could consider and the mouth could speak. Grace is the ultimate spiritual game changer. It is the one thing that has the power to change you and everything about you. It is what all human beings need, no matter who they are or where they are. Men and women need grace, the young and old need grace, the rich and poor need grace, the popular and forgotten need grace, and the weak and powerful need grace. You could dig into grace every day of your life and not reach the bottom of its power and glory. Grace is the bottomless, treasure-laden mine of divine help. There simply is nothing comparable to God's amazing grace.

Grace explodes into your life in a moment, but will occupy you for all of eternity. It is the most transformational word in the Bible that you hold dear. In fact, your Bible is the cover-to-cover story of God's grace. It is the best of stories, the story of the undeserved redemption of lost ones and rebels. God's word records for us how God reached into the muck and mire of our sin-broken world to rescue us, not because of what he saw in us but because of what was in him. Grace is why God sent his Son into this world to do for us what we could not do for

ourselves—to transform us from what we are (sinners separated from him) into what we are becoming (Christ-like and with him forever). John Newton, in his famous hymn, really did choose the best word ever to describe God’s grace: *amazing*.

Grace is a wonderful story and the best gift ever. Grace is a jewel of God’s character and the only reliable place to rest your hope. Grace is a tool that God uses to transform you, but it also defines the nature of his relationship to you. Because you are God’s child, grace is something you’ll never deserve but can always expect. Grace is a theology that you could study forever and the sweetest invitation you will ever receive. Grace will devastate you while giving you a peace of heart and a rest of soul you have never experienced before. Grace will require you to confess your unworthiness but will never, ever make you feel alone and unloved.

Grace will remind you again and again that you have no ability whatsoever to earn God’s favor, but it will dispel your fear of not measuring up. Grace will confront you with the reality that you are way less than you thought you were while it comforts you with the promise that you can be way more than you ever imagined. Grace will repeatedly put you in your place but will never harm you by putting you down.

Grace will call you to examine yourself with honesty and humility, but will free you from being paralyzed by fearful introspection. God will ask you to admit to your catalog of weaknesses while at the same time empowering you with newfound strength. Grace will keep reminding you of what you are not so

INTRODUCTION

you will receive God's welcome to what you can now be. Yes, grace will drive you to the end of yourself while it holds before you the promise of fresh starts and new beginnings. Grace will blow up your little kingdom of one while it introduces you to a much better, more glorious King. Grace will work to expose your blindness while it gives you eyes to see. Grace will make you sadder than you have ever been in your life and give you cause for a joy and celebration that nothing or no one can take away. Grace is more than just a story, it's more than just a theology, and it's more than just a powerful force—no, grace is a person, and his name is Jesus. Jesus *is* the grace of God.

So I invite you to invest the next forty days in digging into the mine of God's grace with me. As we dig, pray for eyes that can see and a heart ready to receive the most wonderful, rescuing, forgiving, and transforming gift that has ever been given—God's amazing grace in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

DAY 1

*Face it, your most brilliant act of righteousness
wouldn't measure up to God's standard; that's
why you've been given the grace of Jesus.*

THE MORE YOU UNDERSTAND THE magnitude of God's grace, the more accurate will be your view of the depth of your unrighteousness; and the more you understand the depth of your unrighteousness, the more you will appreciate the magnitude of God's gift of grace. The person who is comfortable in his own righteousness hasn't really understood grace, and the person who is unimpressed by God's grace hasn't really understood his sin. So let's talk about the essentiality of God's grace.

To talk about the essential nature of God's grace means first talking about the disaster of sin. Sin isn't primarily about acts of rebellion. Sin is, first of all, a condition of the heart that results in acts of rebellion. You and I commit sins because we are sinners. The condition of sin, into which every person who has ever lived was born, renders each of us unable to live up to God's standard. Sin leaves us without the desire, will, or ability to do perfectly what God declares is right. Whether it's a situation in which we try and fail or a moment when we rebel and don't care, the playing field is level—we all fall short of God's standard. Read Romans 3. It is a devastating analysis that shows us all to be in a dire and unalterable spiritual condition. We are all unable, we are all guilty, and there is not a thing we can do to help ourselves. None of us is good in God's eyes

and none of us can satisfy his requirement. It is an inescapable, humbling, and sad reality.

But God didn't leave us in this sorry, helpless, and hopeless state. He sent his Son to do what we could not do, to die as we should have died, and to rise again, defeating sin and death. He did all this so that we could rest in a righteousness that is not our own, but a righteousness that fully satisfies God's requirement. So, unable as we are, we are not without hope. We can stand before a perfectly holy God, broken, weak, and failing, and be completely unafraid because we stand before him in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You no longer have to hope and pray that someday you will measure up, because Jesus has measured up on your behalf. How could you hear better news than that?

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Galatians 3:15–29

DAY 2

Grace has the power to do what nothing else can do—rescue you from you, and in so doing, restore you to what you were created to be.

THEY'RE THE TWO ESSENTIAL PARTS of redemption, *rescue* and *restoration*, and you and I can't do either one for ourselves. But it's hard to admit that we have a problem that we cannot solve. We like to convince ourselves that our anger tells us more about the flawed people we live near than it tells us about ourselves. We like to think that our impatience is more about the poor planning or character of the people we have to deal with every day. We like to think that our sin can be blamed on the temptations of the fallen world around us. When we do or say what is wrong, we tend to point to a boss, a spouse, one of our children, a friend, a difficult situation, a busy day, the fact that we aren't feeling well, bad parents, some injustice, or a long catalog of other excuses. But the Bible is quite clear. We all suffer from the same terminal disease. None of us has escaped it. It's not caused by the people or situations around us. We brought this destroyer into the world with us. David says it this way: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5).

You and I can try as we might to fool ourselves. We can work as we might to shrink from responsibility. We can develop skill at pointing the finger of blame to things around us. But there is simply no denying the harsh reality of the Bible's hard-to-

accept message—we are our own biggest problem. We are the thing with which we need help. There is no greater danger than the danger we are to ourselves. We need help, help that we cannot give ourselves. We need help that is deeper than education, socialization, politics, or changes of relationship or location. If left on our own, we are doomed, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

But the hope-infused story of Scripture is that we have not been left on our own. God has controlled the events of the world as part of his unstoppable agenda of *rescue* and *restoration*. He sent his holy Son to enter the world and suffer because of sin’s mess. He sent him to live the perfect life that we would never live, to sacrifice himself on account of our sin, and to defeat the death that is sin’s doom. It is an agenda of awesome grace extended to lost, rebellious, and self-excusing people, who even need that grace to understand how much they need that grace. This grace had to include rescue because we could not escape ourselves, and it had to include restoration because we had no power to transform ourselves into what he created and redeemed us to be. So today, confess your need. Denying it never leads anywhere good. Thank God for the rescue and restoration that is your hope. And determine to look honestly into the mirror of God’s word so you will continue to remember how much you need what he has freely given.

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Jeremiah 17:5–8

DAY 3

I must remember that God didn't give me grace for my kingdom to work, but to capture me for a better kingdom.

IT WAS ONE OF THE SWEETEST, most precious things Jesus said to his disciples. Remember, they were all really focused on “the kingdom.” Not that they were concerned about the honor of the King or the success of his kingdom; no, what obsessed them was their place in that kingdom. For them, the kingdom was about personal power, prominence, and position. Do you remember the incident recorded in Mark 9:30–37?

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

Right after Jesus told them that he was going to be captured and killed, they didn't say: "Lord, no, no, you can't let this happen. What will we do without you?" They weren't filled with remorse. No, they began fighting with one another about which one of them was the greatest. This is what sin does to all of us. It causes us all to be little self-sovereigns and self-appointed mini-kings. What we really want is for *our* kingdoms to come and our will to be done right here, right now in our jobs and families. We love being in control. We love getting our own way. We love being indulged and served. We live for being right. We have a wonderful plan for the people in our lives. It is humbling to admit, but we are more like the disciples than unlike them.

So it was a moment of beautiful grace when Jesus looked at these self-oriented disciples and said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). He was saying: "Don't you understand? I didn't come to exercise my power to make your little kingdoms work, but to welcome you, by grace, to a much better kingdom than you could ever quest for on your own." No matter how counterintuitive it is, it really is true that real life is found only when his kingdom comes and his will is done, and that is exactly what grace welcomes you to.

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Matthew 13:44–50

DAY 4

*God's grace will expose what you want to hide,
not to shame you, but to forgive and deliver you.*

"IT'S A SAD WAY TO LIVE," I thought as I listened to him recount the events of the night before. He worked next to me on the long packing table that kept our hands busy eight hours a day. But our mouths were free to talk, and talk we did. He was being unfaithful to his wife. He thought he was in charge, he thought he was free, but he wasn't. He told of taking his girlfriend to a certain restaurant in the small community where he lived, only to see his wife's car parked outside. He told of going to another place but having to make sure the coast was clear before they left so they wouldn't get caught. I said to him: "You think you're free, but you're not free. You have to hide. You have to worry about being caught. You have to lurk around in the darkness." I then said: "You think I'm bound, but I'm the one who's free. When I go out with my wife, I never have to worry about where we're going. I never have to fear being caught. I can boldly live in the light."

Sin turns all of us into citizens of the night. Sin causes all of us to be committed to low-light living. We hide, we deny, we cover, we lie, we excuse, we shift the blame, we rationalize, we defend, and we explain away. These are all acts of darkness by people who fear exposure.

What is the movement of grace? It is to shine light on what once lived in darkness. "And this is the judgment: the light

has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:19–20). Grace shatters our darkness. Grace explodes on us with penetrating, heart-exposing light. Grace illumines our dank hallways and our dark corners. The Son of grace shines the light of his grace into the darkest recesses of our hearts, not as an act of vengeance or punishment, but as a move of forgiving, transforming, and delivering grace. He dispels our self-inflicted darkness because he knows that we cannot grieve what we do not see, we cannot confess what we have not grieved, and we cannot turn from what we haven’t confessed.

The light has come. Run to the light; it is not to be feared. Yes, it is the light of exposure, but what will be exposed has already been covered by the blood of the one who exposes it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

John 1:1–18

DAY 5

Quit being paralyzed by your past. Grace offers you life in the present and the guarantee of a future.

IT IS A SIMPLE FACT OF NATURE that once the leaves are off the tree, you cannot put them back again. Once you have uttered words, you cannot rip them out of another's hearing. Once you have acted on a choice, you cannot relive that moment again. Once you have behaved in a certain way at a certain time, you cannot ask for a redo. You and I just don't have the option of reliving our past to try to do better any more than we have the power to glue the leaves back on the tree and make them live once again. What's done is done and cannot be redone.

But we all wish we could live certain moments and certain decisions over again. If you're at all humble and able to look back on your past with a degree of accuracy, you experience regret. None of us has always desired the right thing. None of us has always made the best decision. None of us has always been humble, kind, and loving. We haven't always jumped to serve and forgive. None of us has always spoken the truth. None of us has been free of anger, envy, or vengeance. None of us has walked through life with unblemished nobility. None of us. So all of us have reason for remorse and regret. All of us are left with the sadness of what has been done and can't be undone.

That's why all of us should daily celebrate the grace that frees us from the regret of the past. This freedom is not the freedom of retraction or denial. It's not the freedom of rewriting our

history. No, it's the freedom of forgiving and transforming grace. This grace welcomes me to live with hope in the present because it frees me to leave my past behind. All of what I look back on and would like to redo has been fully covered by the blood of Jesus. I no longer need to carry the burden of the past on my shoulders, so I am free to fully give myself to what God has called me to in the here and now. "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13–14).

Are you paralyzed by your past? Are you living under the dark shroud of the "if-onlys"? Does your past influence your present more than God's past, present, and future grace? Have you received and are you living out of the forgiveness that is yours because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Jeremiah 29:1–14

“Grace is more than just a story, it’s more than just a theology, and it’s more than just a powerful force—no, grace is a person, and his name is Jesus. Jesus is the grace of God.”

There is nothing we can do to earn God’s grace—it is a gift. Through 40 daily meditations from his best-selling devotional *New Morning Mercies*, popular author and speaker Paul David Tripp explores the role grace plays in the everyday life of a Christian. He reminds us that God, in his infinite mercy, can radically transform even the weakest people by the life-changing power of his grace through his Son, Jesus Christ.

PAUL DAVID TRIPP (DMin, Westminster Theological Seminary) is a pastor, award-winning author, and international conference speaker. He has written numerous books, including *Parenting; What Did You Expect?*; and *Suffering*. His nonprofit ministry exists to connect the transforming power of Jesus Christ to everyday life. Tripp lives in Philadelphia with his wife, Luella, and they have four grown children.

DEVOTIONAL