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CHAPTER 1

Roro

Did you have a lovey growing up?
Can't believe I'm starting this book with a story about a lovey.

Yes, I'm talking about that blanket or stuffed animal that went everywhere with you and brought comfort no matter where you were.

Did you have a name for your lovey?

In our family, it was always a big deal picking out just the right one. All three of our kids basically have the same style lovey. They are these really soft, somewhat small blankets, but what makes them unique is that they are themed differently.

Kaden's lovey is a dog named Roro.

Oliver's is an elephant named Snuffy.

And Carson has a cow named Lulu.

Most days end leaving Lolly and me exhausted. Especially on the weekends. As I write this, Kaden is eight, Oliver is six, and Carson is fifteen months old. Each weekend is filled with a basketball, football, or baseball game. Could be a golf tournament. Sometimes a birthday party. Perhaps dinner with friends or an event at school. Whoever came up with that expression "The days are long, but the years are short" is right. But we wouldn't have it any other way.

However, at the end of each day, there is still one last thing to do: put

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the boys to bed. This enterprise is something to behold. From downstairs it sounds more like a stampede of wild animals rushing back and forth than it does of anyone going to sleep. Lolly has this theory that the kids refuse to stop moving because they know they will pass out if they sit still for just a moment.

One of the most important events in our bedtime routine is trying to find each child's lovey. Good luck finding them, though—they could be anywhere. Lying on the chair at the kitchen table. On the floor in the bathroom. In one of the cars. Outside lying in the grass. Hidden in a golf bag. We have found lovies in the fridge. In the pantry. In between the couch cushions. Often, they are wrapped within another blanket or under the sheets. Throughout the day the kids could have gone anywhere, which means that lovey could have been left anywhere.

When it came time to pick out Oliver's and Carson's lovies, we had learned it was wise to buy two of the exact same one. This backup lovey is priceless when one goes missing. With the backup you can easily shout, "Look, here's Snuffy!" and resume looking for the real one later.

The Bedtime Score:

Parents = 1

Kids = 0

Bwahahaha (exhausted parent triumphant laugh)!

Another thing about lovies is that they wear out over the years. We noticed this first with Kaden because Roro was the oldest. As a result, Roro was tearing and beginning to unravel from all the abuse he had withstood over the years. On top of that, Roro's edges were significantly frayed. In some places Roro had holes, and as you could imagine Kaden wasn't helping keep the holes small either. On several occasions, Lolly has had to perform emergency surgery in order to sew Roro's head back on. Who knew being a parent meant you were signing up to be part surgeon?

Once we realized how nice it would be if Kaden had two lovies, Lolly went online to buy another one. But they didn't sell the same Roro anymore.

They had one that looked pretty close but wasn't exact. However, Lolly and I were desperate, so we bought the imposter and gave it a shot.

Then one night, after Kaden fell asleep, Lolly went in and kidnapped the "real" Roro so that she could wash him. I'll never forget the next morning. Kaden came out of his room with tears in his eyes.

"What happened to Roro?!"

He knew right away. He knew the feel. The smell. The touch. It wasn't the same. He knew it was different. It was as though the things that would cause you and me to question Roro's value were the very things that gave meaning to his relationship with Kaden.

At this point, you're probably thinking, what could a lovey possibly have to do with God's grace?

I'm not sure.

Just kidding.

What if Roro captured a glimpse of what grace was supposed to be like?

Not exactly, but close.

What if God's grace was not meant to be kept new or spotless? What if grace was meant to look as though it's barely holding it together?

And yet, grace will always hold everything together.

What if grace is what keeps the Lord near to us at all times and nourishes us with confidence that God will never leave us nor forsake us? What if grace assures us that we are His and nothing can change that?

What if grace is meant to be bruised, filled with holes, frayed, and looking like it has been dragged through the mud of life? Yet unlike anything the world might offer, grace brings comfort and security and the durability to endure all that life might offer.

What if grace is never meant to be replaced with something else? What if there is no new and improved version of grace? Rather, it is the same grace



**What if grace is meant
to be bruised, filled
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yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Grace doesn't need to become anything different in order to meet us right where we are.

That's what this book is about. We are going to unravel the story of God's grace. The story as God revealed it to us through His Word. That from the beginning, God has never stopped or wavered in His desire to have a relationship with us.

For many, grace is understood almost exclusively as the means to our salvation. Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “*For by grace you have been saved* through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Which is true and amazing and beautiful!

But grace is more tangled and messy and complex than that.

What we are going to discover is that grace is so much more than merely something that saves you. And as this book unfolds, we are going to witness a magnificent story about God's design and plan to dwell with us. A story that spans all of human history.

But this isn't just any kind of relationship.

We are talking about a relationship with God. Which means He is the one who determines what the relationship looks like. Not us. And for God, a relationship with Him looks like rest.

Rest?

Yes.

To some, rest is understood as a great night's sleep. Or it's having a slow weekend, maybe even a Sabbath day. Yet for others, rest is understood within the context of absence. The absence of pain and suffering and drama and trials and hardship in life.

However, for Christians, rest is different. Rest is not defined by the absence of those things; instead, rest is found as we are dwelling with God in the midst of the pain and suffering.

This reminds me of Psalm 23, when King David proclaimed, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake” (Ps. 23:1–3).

Right away we find restful language. In fact, the Hebrew word for “still” (*menuchah*, Ps. 23:2) can also be translated as “rest” or “resting place.” Thus, the shepherd leads David, “beside restful waters.”

But notice why David finds rest. It doesn’t come from being in the green pastures; rather it comes from being with the shepherd.

Much later in the Bible, Jesus describes Himself as our good shepherd. He says, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:10–11).

But back to Psalm 23, which takes a turn. It is no longer green pastures and restful waters. Now David describes enduring “the valley of the shadow of death.” Yet even in the valley, David declares, “I will fear no evil” (v. 4).

This begs the question, “Why does he fear no evil?”

The answer is, “For you are with me” (Ps. 23:4).

In other words, we are restless until we find God.

David finds comfort because he is dwelling with the shepherd.

Even in the valley, he finds rest because he has found the Lord.

As a result, David declares, “I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (v. 6).

Having a relationship with God means that whether beside the green pastures or in the middle of the valley, God is with you.

Notice how God in Psalm 23 never promises that He will remove the hardship; instead, He promises to dwell with David throughout it. And where God is, rest is to be found. This is why a relationship with God is unlike any other relationship we could possibly have.

And it is grace that provides the sacred space for us to dwell with God at every moment of our lives.

As the story of God’s grace is progressively revealed throughout this book, we’ll discover a truth concerning grace that is going to provide the



**Where God is,
rest is to be found.**

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theological framework for our journey. That is, *God's grace was never intended to condone sin, but He did intend grace to endure our sinfulness, and triumph over it.*

Often, I wonder if there is some hesitation with exploring grace beyond our salvation due to a fear of what grace could potentially do left in the hands of sinners. For example, what if grace provided a Christian with an excuse that they can live however they'd like because there is grace and forgiveness to fall back on? One might even reference 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."



God's grace was never intended to condone sin, but He did design grace to endure our sinfulness.

And yet, grace was never intended to condone sin.

In fact, right after John promises that God will forgive us, he says, "I am writing these things to you so that *you may not sin*" (1 John 2:1). For John, there was hope that confessing our sins would motivate us to not sin. That's why it's important we establish right from the beginning that

God never intended grace for that purpose.

See, God's grace was never intended to condone sin, but He did design grace to endure our sinfulness. This confronts humanity with the unfortunate reality that we are sinful. Which means, even when we don't sin, we are still totally and completely depraved. Thus, we need grace not only to begin, but also to sustain our relationship with God long after we are saved.

For some (even many biblical characters!), grace enduring one's sinfulness bothers them. If I'm honest, writing this book has revealed how much it disturbs me too. But what if, once we honestly embrace how sin and our sin nature has affected our relationship with God, the more beautiful and amazing and humbling the grace of God becomes?

Moreover, there is no greater example of God's grace enduring our

sinfulness than the passion of Christ. When Jesus willingly underwent His gruesome death on the cross to save us. It was at the hands of sinners where Jesus was abused in order to save sinners and provide an everlasting, eternal, forever, never-ceasing relationship with God.

God's purpose for His grace is that it would withstand our sinfulness so that we might dwell with God. And here's the thing: This is how *God* intended grace.

Not us.

In fact, God has never asked us how or when we would like to receive grace. He has never asked us about who He should extend grace to.

This is His sovereign decision. His providential plan.

That's why it is important that you hang in there with me, because it's going to take our entire journey to awaken to what this phrase actually means. That said, don't feel any pressure to understand it all now. Or maybe, try to resist any urge to fill in what you think it *might* mean. Instead, let's walk through this together as the Lord patiently reveals the grace of the Lord Jesus to us.

Part One—Grace Before the Fall

This section looks to Adam and Eve and their life with God prior to the Fall and the way things were supposed to be. What we learn is going to reveal a side of grace that has not been affected by any of the events to follow after Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In this light, grace can be hard to envision because we live in a world still totally and completely affected by the Fall. But before everything changes, we will do our best to enjoy what grace reveals about humanity's relationship with God.

Part Two—Grace After the Fall

Everything changes after Genesis 3:6. One way to think about this time period is that things are now not the way they were supposed to be. Grace doesn't encourage sin, but in light of the Fall, in order to have a relationship with God we will discover that grace has this supernatural ability to endure our sinfulness. Not to promote or celebrate, but rather to withstand for the purpose that we might dwell with God. This ministry of grace cascades

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throughout almost the entire Bible. Through it all, it is grace that enables, fosters, and sustains how we dwell with God.

Part Three—Grace in the New Heaven and New Earth

In the end, it's the grace of the Lord Jesus that restores all things to the way they were meant to be. This section considers life with Jesus in the new heaven and new earth. A time when death and sin are finished. It is done. When grace triumphs over sin. This is the period of time in which we will receive our glorified bodies and when, once again, we will be at rest with God, but now for an uninterrupted eternity. These will be sacred and holy moments shared with Jesus, a relationship that only grace can create.

If you are up for it, I would like to invite you along with me as we travel through many amazing stories in the Bible. We will meet the first man and woman to ever live. We will spend time with God's beloved prophet. We will step into some interesting family drama. And meet Jesus in His most vulnerable moments. We will also peer into the future and what things will be like then—things like the new heaven and new earth, and the resurrection and what it all means for us.

Here is what's so astonishing: For our relationship with God to exist, we are going to discover that it must be rooted and grounded in His grace. And there has never been a time when this wasn't true.

One more thing. I'm not writing from a place of completion as it relates to grace.

No.

My relationship with God needs grace today just as much as anyone. My soul longs to rest with its Shepherd. That said, even though I am providing the direction for us on this journey, please know I am taking you somewhere I'm familiar with. And it's a safe and loving and hopeful place. It's a place where God is. And where God can be found. It's where a relationship with God exists.

I still can't believe I started this book with a story about a lovey.