

amazing
GRACE

Our Daily Bread
Devotional Collection

amazing
GRACE

Our Daily Bread
Devotional Collection



Our Daily Bread
Publishing.

Amazing Grace: Our Daily Bread Devotional Collection
© 2024 by Our Daily Bread Ministries

All rights reserved.

This book was compiled and composed by Dave Branon. All the hymns shared in the book are public domain. The devotional readings collected in this book were first published over a span of years in the *Our Daily Bread* devotional booklets that are distributed around the world in more than fifty languages.

Requests for permission to quote from this book should be directed to: Permissions Department, Our Daily Bread Publishing, PO Box 3566, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, or contact us by email at permissionsdept@odb.org.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. zondervan.com.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Interior design by Michael J. Williams

ISBN: 978-1-64070-341-4

Printed in China

24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 / 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

INTRODUCTION

Grace. What a beautiful word.

G Like *mercy*, its partner word in Scripture, *grace* has the feel of a tender, unexpected hug or a whispered “I love you.” It’s a warm blanket, a strong shield, and a safe shelter—unfathomable and unforgettable.

Grace is such a warm and inviting word that parents often use it to name their daughters. My beautiful granddaughters, Kaitlyn and Mollie, both have Grace as their middle name. I love the sound of it.

The New International Version of the New Testament uses the word *grace* 114 times. A quick look at what it means in a few of these passages reveals some exciting insights.

- The “grace of God” was on Jesus (Luke 2:40). God was pouring out His divine favor on this perfect, flawless, growing child as His parents took Him home to Nazareth. Imagine the effect of God the Father cascading His grace into the life of His “only begotten Son” as Jesus prepared to face the next thirty or so years on earth.
- Jesus was “full of grace,” according to John 1:14. So full of graciousness and compassion that He willingly left heaven’s glories and entered earth’s troubled realm as a human—expressly to die on our behalf. This grace is impossible for us to fully understand, but something for which we are unspeakably grateful.
- This grace is not only reserved for the divine. Acts 6:8 tells us that Stephen, one of the chosen seven who served the early

church, was “a man full of God’s grace.” In him, people saw the God-given goodness, humility, and virtue of a person who would be dedicated to God’s service.

When we continue this kind of study throughout the New Testament, we come away with a growing appreciation for the value and importance of grace.

We reflect on that grand passage in Ephesians which reminds us that it is “by grace you have been saved” (2:8). Because of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross, grace can bestow on us the greatest of all gifts—salvation from the penalty of our sin. Grace makes it possible to experience Jesus’s promised “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10) and to anticipate eternal existence with God.

Grace is indeed amazing!

We can never grow tired of reveling in its benefits in our daily lives and looking forward to its forever reward when we see Jesus.

In this book, I’ve dug deep into the archives of *Our Daily Bread* articles from past decades to discover a treasure trove of readings to lift our hearts in praise at the grace God has bestowed on believers. From our legacy writers who founded the devotional all the way to our present-day array of authors, the message remains the same.

We’ll be challenged daily to take advantage of the plentiful opportunities for service and worship that come to us as recipients of God’s grace. We’ll be moved with gratitude and challenged to action as we read about how this beautiful gift intersects our life.

And, as always in *Our Daily Bread*, this volume covers a variety of biblical teachings to help us grow closer to Jesus and live as shining lights in the world.

As a bonus for those who enjoy the great songs of the faith and to help you reflect on God’s goodness, grace, and mercy to us, I’ve included twelve song stories—one for each month. These stories will help you appreciate the grand hymns of our faith. Whether these songs are new to you or are old favorites, you’ll be encouraged by the background blessings these stories provide.

You’ll also notice several references to the glorious song that shares its title with this book: *Amazing Grace*. Woven throughout the pages you’ll read vignettes that reveal greater depth to the story of John Newton and his great hymn. It’s a story that reminds us of the great gulf

between our sinfulness and God's amazing grace—unveiling again the reality that only Jesus can bridge this gap.

Grace. What an amazing gift! As you read, my prayer is that God's grace will flow more and more into your life as you seek to know Him better and serve Him more.

Dave Branon

SONGS OF GRACE

JANUARY

“Amazing Grace”

John Newton and William Walker

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved.*

God's Amazing Grace Transforms a Slave-Trader

Out of one of the most wretched activities mankind has ever engaged in came one of the most beautiful hymns of faith and grace ever written.

John Newton spent much of his adult life captaining ships that transported hundreds of captured Africans to lives of slavery. Even after Newton confessed to faith in Christ, a decision he made while aboard a storm-ravaged ship, he continued to captain slave ships.

It's hard for us to fathom how the culture of his time accepted slavery as a legitimate activity—and why he let that culture convince

Sources: “Amazing Grace,” Wikipedia, <http://tinyurl.com/b3wy67kj>; “John Newton” PBS.org, <http://tinyurl.com/2ss4kfmn>; “The Creation of ‘Amazing Grace,’” Library of Congress, <http://tinyurl.com/4h3smhhr>; Johnson, Daniel, “We’ve Sung ‘Amazing Grace’ for 250 Years. We’ve Only Just Begun,” *Christianity Today Online*, <http://tinyurl.com/mr27uem9>; “21 Renditions of ‘Amazing Grace’ So Good You’ll Get Goosebumps,” *Church Pops*, <http://tinyurl.com/2s4zbaka>; all accessed November 6, 2023.

him to continue contributing to it. After coming to faith, Newton treated his captive passengers with some concern and kindness, but he continued to ply his despicable trade for several years.

An illness forced him ashore when he was twenty-eight years old, and he took a job with the customs office in Liverpool. His faith was new and mysterious, so he began to study his beliefs more thoroughly. By the time he was nearly forty years old, he had become a minister.

In 1772, at the age of forty-seven, Newton worked with poet William Cowper on the words of what would become perhaps the greatest hymn of the faith. Newton wrote the song to accompany a sermon he was preparing for New Year's Day. *The Dictionary of American Hymnology* describes the song as Newton's "autobiography in verse."

The words for "Amazing Grace" were first published in a book Newton and Cowper produced in 1779 under the title *Olney Hymns*. (Olney was the town where Newton pastored.) In 1835, American composer William Walker added the music we know so well to Newton's words. He chose a melody called "New Britain," which immediately became popular and has stood the test of time.

Nineteenth-century evangelist Dwight L. Moody and his song leader-singer Ira Sankey helped popularize the song further as they presented the song in churches around the United States. And the Sacred Harp Choir made the song's first recording in 1922.

Ironically, given Newton's career before he became a minister, the song became a spiritual sung by Black Christians. Singers such as Mahalia Jackson used it as an anthem of the American Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

Newton eventually came to recognize the atrocity of human slavery, especially under the influence of British statesman William Wilberforce, the driving force behind the abolition of slave trade among the English. In 1788, Newton published an essay titled "Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade" in which he condemned the practice. In one essay, Newton wrote, "I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."

Amazing grace. How sweet the sound. It saved a wretch like John Newton. Like you. Like me. Like all who trust in Jesus. Grace relieves our fears and sets us free.

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead in your transgressions and sins. —Ephesians 2:1

Not everyone who knows the hymn “Amazing Grace” knows what *grace* means.

One day, when evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899) was studying the meaning of God’s grace, he dashed into the street and shouted to the first man he saw, “Do you know grace?” Mystified, the man replied, “Grace who?” One can imagine that Moody eagerly explained grace—that God has compassion on sinful people and freely offers forgiveness and new life to all who put their faith in Christ.

I heard of a man who had lived a troubled life and died without understanding the message of God’s grace. A minister had talked to him and encouraged him to consider putting his faith in Jesus, but his response was, “I’m too undeserving.” He didn’t know that God’s grace is *for* the undeserving.

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he bluntly described their lives before Jesus as being “dead in your transgressions and sins” (2:1). Then he used two hope-filled words: “But God” (v. 4 ΝΚΙΥ). This contrast helped Paul introduce God’s grace to the people—a grace that provides forgiveness and new life through Christ. Salvation, he explained, is through faith, not works, so no one can boast (vv. 8–9).

Let’s help others understand that God’s salvation is for sinners only—and this includes all of us. This is what makes God’s grace so amazing!

Joanie Yoder



God’s grace is reserved for the undeserving.

IN THE BEGINNING

Genesis 1:1–15

In the beginning God created the heavens
and the earth. —Genesis 1:1

Talk about great opening lines! You can't do better than the Bible does. In just ten words, Genesis 1:1 answers the age-old question of the origin of the universe. But what's even more important, that opening verse introduces us to the majestic One who is behind it all.

As another new year commences, it seems appropriate to turn to the beginning of the Bible and read the account of how the eternal God spoke the world into existence.

Of course, God as Creator is just one of many descriptions of the Almighty the Bible reveals to us. This is why it might be a good idea to use the new year to study God—to find out more about who He is.

For instance, in this great beginning chapter, we are awestruck by His power as He moves across the face of the earth, fashioning it as He wants, and furnishing it with plants, animals, and humans.

As the year moves along, why not make a special effort to know God more intimately? The best way to do this is to read the Bible every day and ask, "What does this tell me about God?" You know Him as the majestic, almighty Creator through Genesis 1, but He is so much more.

Use this year to get to know God as never before. *Dave Branon*



**It might be a good idea to use the new year to study
God—to find out more about who He is.**

A WIDE, SWEEPING GRACE

Isaiah 44:21–23

I have swept away your offenses. —Isaiah 44:22

Alexa, Amazon’s voice-controlled device, has an interesting feature: it can erase everything you say. Whatever you’ve asked Alexa to do, whatever information you’ve asked Alexa to retrieve, one simple sentence (“Delete everything I said today”) sweeps it all clean, as if it never happened. It’s too bad that the rest of our life doesn’t have this capability. Every misspoken word, every disgraceful act, every moment we wish we could erase—we’d just speak the command, and the entire mess would disappear.

There’s good news, though. God does offer each of us a clean start. Only, He goes far deeper than merely deleting our mistakes or bad behavior. God provides redemption, a deep healing that transforms us and makes us new. “Return to me,” He says, “I have redeemed you” (Isaiah 44:22). Even though Israel rebelled and disobeyed, God reached out to them with lavish mercy. He “swept away [their] offenses like a cloud, [their] sins like the morning mist” (v. 22). He gathered all their shame and failures and washed them away with His wide, sweeping grace.

God will do the same with our sin and blunders. There’s no mistake He can’t mend, no wound He can’t heal. God’s mercy heals and redeems the most painful places in our soul—even the ones we’ve hidden for so very long. His mercy sweeps away all our guilt and washes away every regret.

Winn Collier



**God’s mercy heals and redeems the most
painful places in our soul.**

HOW TO STAND FIRM

Jude 1:24–25

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling. —Jude 1:24

It was a cold, icy winter's day, and my mind was focused on getting from my warm vehicle to a warm building. The next thing I knew, I was on the ground with my knees turned inward and my lower legs turned outward. Nothing was broken, but I was in pain. The pain would get worse as time went by, and it would be weeks before I was whole again.

Who among us hasn't taken a spill of some sort? Wouldn't it be nice to have something or someone to keep us on our feet all the time? While there are no guarantees of surefootedness in the physical sense, there is One who stands ready to assist us in our quest to honor Christ in this life and prepare us to stand joyfully before Him in the next.

Every day we face temptations (and even false teachings) that seek to divert us, confuse us, and entangle us. Yet, it's not ultimately through our own efforts that we remain on our feet as we walk in this world. How assuring to know that when we hold our peace if tempted to speak angrily, or opt for honesty over deceit, or choose love over hate, or select truth over error—we experience God's power to keep us standing (Jude 1:24). And when we appear approved before God when Christ returns, the praise that we offer now for His sustaining grace will echo throughout eternity (v. 25).

Arthur Jackson



**There is One who stands ready to assist
us in our quest to honor Christ.**

GRACE FOR TRIALS

Deuteronomy 31:1–8

[The Lord] will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. —Deuteronomy 31:8

Annie Johnson Flint (1866–1932) was crippled by severe arthritis just a few years after high school. She never walked again and relied on others to help care for her needs. Because she became rather well-known for her poetry and hymns, she received many visitors, including a deaconess who felt discouraged about her own ministry. When the visitor returned home, she wrote to Annie, wondering why God allowed such hard things in her life.

In response, Annie sent a poem that began: “God hath not promised skies always blue, flower-strewn pathways all our lives through. . . .” Annie knew from experience that suffering often occurred but that God would never abandon those He loves. Instead, He promised to give “grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love.” You may recognize this poem as the hymn “What God Hath Promised.”

Moses also suffered and faced strife, but he knew God’s presence was with him. When he passed his leadership of the Israelites to Joshua, he told the younger man to be strong and courageous, because “the LORD your God goes with you” (Deuteronomy 31:6). Moses, knowing that the people of Israel would face formidable enemies as they entered and took the promised land, said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (v. 8).

Followers of Jesus will face hardship and strife in this fallen world, but we have God’s Spirit to encourage us. He’ll never leave us.

Amy Boucher Pye



Moses said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid.”

A GOOD WORK

Psalm 139:13–24

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. —Philippians 1:6

As a teenager, Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) wrestled with God. He'd grown up going to church, but what was preached seemed bland and meaningless. It was a struggle for him to believe in God, and Charles, in his own words, “rebelled and revolted.” One night a fierce snowstorm forced the sixteen-year-old Spurgeon to seek shelter in a tiny Methodist church. The preacher’s sermon seemed directed at him personally. In that moment, God won the wrestling match, and Charles gave his heart to Jesus.

Spurgeon later wrote, “Long before I began with Christ, He began with me.” In fact, our life with God doesn’t begin with the moment of salvation. The psalmist notes that God “created [our] inmost being,” knitting us together in our mother’s womb (Psalm 139:13). The apostle Paul writes, “Even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace” (Galatians 1:15 NLT). And God doesn’t stop working with us when we’re saved: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Philippians 1:6).

We’re all works in progress in the hands of a loving God. He leads us through our rebellious wrestling and into His warm embrace. But His purpose with us then is only beginning. “For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him” (Philippians 2:13 NLT). Rest assured, we’re His good work regardless of how old we are or what stage of life we’re in.

Kenneth Petersen



We’re all works in progress in the hands of a loving God.

CELEBRATING CREATIVITY

Genesis 1:16–21

God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures.” —Genesis 1:20

A rarely seen jellyfish waltzed with the currents, four thousand feet deep in the ocean near Baja California. Its body shone with fluorescent shades of blue, purple, and pink—bright against the backdrop of black water. Elegant tentacles waved gracefully with each pulsing of its bell-shaped hood. As I watched the amazing footage of the *Halitrephes maasi* jellyfish on a *National Geographic* video, I reflected on how God chose the specific design of this beautiful, gelatinous creature. He also fashioned the more than 2,000 other types of jellyfish scientists have identified.

Though we acknowledge God as Creator, do we slow down long enough to truly consider the profound truth revealed in the first chapter of the Bible? Our amazing God brought forth light and life into the creatively diverse world He crafted with the power of His word. He designed “the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems” (Genesis 1:21). Scientists have discovered only a fraction of the wondrous creatures the Lord created in the beginning.

God also intentionally sculpted each person in the world, giving purpose to every day of our lives before we drew our first breaths (Psalm 139:13–16). As we celebrate the Lord’s creativity, we can also rejoice over the many ways He helps us use our imagination and creativity for His glory.

Xochitl Dixon



God intentionally sculpted each person in the world, giving purpose to every day of our lives.

SINKING INTO GRACE

Psalm 127:1–2

[God] grants sleep to those he loves. —Psalm 127:2

Finally, on January 8, 1964, seventeen-year-old Randy Gardner did something he hadn't done for eleven days and twenty-five minutes: he nodded off to sleep. He wanted to beat the *Guinness Book of World Records* standard for how long a human could stay awake. By drinking soft drinks and hitting the basketball court and bowling alley, Gardner rebuffed sleep for a week and a half. Before finally collapsing, his sense of taste, smell, and hearing went haywire. Decades later, Gardner suffered from severe bouts of insomnia. He set the record but also confirmed the obvious: sleep is essential.

Many of us struggle to get a decent night's rest. Unlike Gardner, who deprived himself intentionally, we might suffer sleeplessness for several reasons, including a mountain of anxieties: the fear of what we need to accomplish, the dread of others' expectations, or the distress of living at a frantic pace. Sometimes it's hard for us to turn off the fear and relax.

The psalmist tells us that “unless the LORD builds the house,” we labor in vain (Psalm 127:1). Our toiling and relentless efforts are useless unless God provides what we need. Thankfully, God does provide what we need. He “grants sleep to those he loves” (v. 2). And God's love extends to all of us. He invites us to release our anxieties to Him and sink into His rest, into His grace.

Winn Collier



God invites us to release our anxieties to Him.

HE FIRST LOVED US

1 John 4:10–19

We love because he first loved us. —1 John 4:19

It's easy to be fond of nice people. It's natural to see virtue in our own family. However, to love a rebellious, obnoxious outsider is not easy. To have genuine, unselfish regard for unlovable people is rare. In fact, it's impossible apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In light of this, God's love for mankind is amazing beyond our imagination. Knowing exactly how wicked human beings would become—how they would lie, steal, act immorally, and manifest hateful and unkind attitudes—God still loved us so much that He gave His only Son for our salvation. He loved us from before the foundation of the world, and He loves us still—even though there's nothing in us to attract His favor.

A young mother was sewing while her little girl was playing with her dolls. After some time, the youngster came to her mom and asked for a hug. "Why do you want me to hold you?" Mom asked. "Because I love you!" she replied.

"What about your dolls?" her mother teased. "Don't you love them too?"

"Yes," she responded. "But I love you more! Know why? 'Cause you loved me when I was too little to love you back!"

Doesn't this sound like God's love for us? The apostle John summarized this truth in that brief but wonderful sentence: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). If God hadn't taken the initiative, we'd have no inclination to seek Him. We would all perish eternally.

What gratitude pours into our hearts when we contemplate God's love for us!

Herb Vander Lugt



God loved us from before the foundation of the world.

ETCH A SKETCH FORGIVENESS

Psalm 103:7–13

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed
our transgressions from us. —Psalm 103:12

The little red rectangular box was magical. As a kid, I could play with it for hours. When I turned one knob on the box, I could create a horizontal line on its screen. Turn the other knob . . . and voila!—a vertical line. When I turned the knobs together, I could make diagonal lines, circles, and creative designs. But the real magic came when I turned my Etch A Sketch toy upside down, shook it a little, and turned it right side up. A blank screen appeared, offering me the opportunity to create a new design.

God's forgiveness works much like that Etch A Sketch. He wipes away our sins, creating a clean canvas for us. Even if we remember wrongs we committed, God chooses to forgive and forget. He's wiped them out and doesn't hold our sins against us. He doesn't treat us according to our sinful actions (Psalm 103:10) but extends grace through forgiveness. We have a clean slate—a new life awaiting us when we seek God's forgiveness. We can be rid of guilt and shame because of His amazing gift to us.

The psalmist reminds us that our sins have been separated from us as far as the east is separated from the west (v. 12). That's as far away as you can get! In God's eyes, our sins no longer cling to us like a scarlet letter or a bad drawing. This is reason to rejoice and to thank God for His amazing grace and mercy. *Katara Patton*



**We have a clean slate—a new life awaiting
us when we seek God's forgiveness.**