

Striving for Something We Already Have

Grace slips through our fingers like water, not because it's elusive, but because we keep clenching our fists. There's something almost maddening about the concept of grace—how it defies every instinct we have about earning our place in this world. We live in a universe of transactions, of cause and effect, of merit and reward. So when we encounter love that asks for nothing in return, acceptance that comes without prerequisites, forgiveness that arrives before we even ask for it, our minds revolt. *This cannot be! There must be a catch.* And so we bargain for things we already possess.

We spend our days climbing mountains, thinking God waits at the summit with a checklist and a stopwatch. We catalog our good deeds like currency, counting up our prayers like coins in a jar, convinced that somewhere there's a cosmic ledger where our efforts will finally tip the scales toward worthiness. All the while, He stands in the valley below, arms open, calling us home.

"There is always room for one more," echoes through the chambers of our striving hearts. One more son. One more daughter. One more opportunity to simply receive what has already been given. But we've forgotten how to have open hands. We've trained ourselves to grasp, to work, to prove.

We know grace like the back of our hand—that familiar territory we've mapped with our minds—and yet we cannot seem to turn that hand palm-up in surrender.

The truth is devastating in its simplicity: the work has already been done. Every prayer we think we need to earn, every moment of acceptance we believe we must achieve, every drop of love we imagine we must prove ourselves worthy of—it's

already ours. Not because we're perfect, but because we're His.

We don't need perfection. We need direction. Not toward some distant goal of worthiness, but toward the radical act of receiving. There's something achingly familiar in the way we catalog our spiritual efforts, isn't there? Like that haunting refrain that asks if we've got soul—we keep taking inventory of all the things we've done, as if the ledger itself might save us. But grace doesn't keep score.

Still, we climb. We strive uphill, bloodied knees and calloused hands, trying to improve our spiritual résumé while Love itself waits in the mess of our valley. In our woundedness. In our spiritual chaos. The invitation isn't to clean ourselves up first—it's to come as we are, broken and beautiful and bewildered by grace.

"Come home," He whispers, while we shout up the mountain asking to be accepted.

"Help me," we cry, not realizing we're already held.

"Redeem me," we plead, blind to the fact that redemption happened long before we knew we needed it.

What He wants isn't our perfection—it's our passion. Not our achievements, but our attention. Not our worthiness, but our willingness to be loved without earning it. He's waiting for that moment when we finally exhale the words that change everything: *"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."*

Broken, bloodied, and feeling utterly useless as we may be, this is the movement from chaos to serene—not through our striving, but through our surrender. Not by climbing higher, but by coming home.

Grace remains maddening because it asks us to accept what we cannot earn, receive what we did not work for, and trust in

love that makes no sense by the world's standards.

Perhaps that's exactly the point.

In a world obsessed with merit and achievement, grace stands as a quiet revolution—a love that simply is, without condition or clause, waiting for us to stop climbing long enough to be embraced.

Red Beans and Rice, Cher!

My son, Jacob, asked me for my Red Beans and Rice Recipe. I didn't give him the recipe like it was given to me. Otherwise it would sound something like this:

Lemme tell you how we do it way down da bayou, bébé.

First t'ing, you take dem red kidney beans, put 'em in a big ol' bowl. Cover dem beans wit' water – 'bout an inch or so over da top, yeah – an' let 'em soak good overnight, let dem swell up nice an' fat.

Come da nex' day, you dump dem beans in da colander, rinse all dat dirt an' bad mojo off. Den you slap 'em in a big ol' pot, pour you a coupla cans dat red tomato sauce, maybe a lil' splash water too, just to keep her from dryin' out.

Now, when you runnin' roun' dat store, you peek in da frozen box – you gonna find dat Cajun seasonin' mix, got da peppers an' da onions all chopped nice. Dat's easy, easy. But if dey ain't got it, no sweat, cher – you just cut you up some big ol' onions, some fat bell peppers, an' don' forget dat garlic, non! Dat garlic, she make da pot sing, yeah.

You track you down some good andouille sausage – not dat city

stuff, get da good smokey kind, make your nose dance soon as it hit da pot. Throw it all in dere wit' dem beans, turn dat fire down low, let it bubble, let it talk to you real slow, like a fiddle playin' in da night.

When you t'ink maybe she ready, you take one dem beans, mash 'em 'gainst da side o' dat pot – if she smash all soft an' creamy, dat's da Holy Ghost tellin' you it's time, cher.

Some folk round here, dey don't use no tomato sauce, mais I tell you straight – dat sauce, she give it da little extra somethin' to make you slap ya mama, it's so good.

When dem beans be ready, you heap you a big ol' spoonful right on some fluffy white rice, yeah. An' don' be shy now – you splash a good bit o' dat Tabasco sauce on top, spice it up real nice, make it dance on your tongue like a fais do-do on Saturday night, sha!

Dat's how we cook it, true true. Now come pass a good time, yeah!

The Christ Figure in The Brothers Karamazov

So far, for me, it's been the character I can't escape. Perhaps because there are shadows of the great divine in this part of the story.

God Approaching

You'll know Him when you see Him.

He carries the likeness of no mortal man.

He will turn you upside down and shake you until your pockets no longer jingle.

He will turn the heat up until meltdown occurs.

He can swallow galaxies.

He can stand on the hairs of your thumb.

He will take your personal certainties and make them uncertain.

He will take the earthly securities and make them insecure.

He will do all this for His own reasons

They are His and He won't tell.

Not today.

Fearing Him is glorious.

He smells the fear as worthy sacrifice.

When He comes, don't hide or run.

Die and He will roll the stone from your lifeless resting place.

Your Own Private Qumran

If you're not into metaphors, nothing to see here. If you love it like I do, come along!

In the arid Judean wilderness, perched on the edge of the Dead Sea, lies Qumran, a site steeped in history and mystery. It's here that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, unlocking ancient truths and revealing a hidden treasure trove of Scripture. For me, Qumran serves as a metaphor of the spiritual pilgrimage. Like the shepherd boy, I'm throwing rocks into the dark caves of my own story and questions.

If you want to find God, you must go into the wilderness.



Like the hidden scrolls, God's truth often lies buried deep within us, waiting to be uncovered. This discovery requires intentionality, humility, and a willingness to venture into the wilderness of self-examination.

When we surrender to Christ, He becomes our guide through the wilderness, teaching us to confront the brokenness of our old lives and to search the Scriptures for eternal truth. As the

psalmist writes, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts” (Psalm 139:23). This act of surrender and self-examination mirrors the process of uncovering the scrolls—peeling back layers to reveal the treasures God has hidden within us.

The Dead Sea of Our Old Lives

The Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, is a stark image of desolation. Its waters are lifeless, incapable of sustaining fish or plants. Yet, in its depths lies a story of transformation. Just as the Dead Sea encircles Qumran, our old lives often feel like lifeless wastelands—marked by sin, emptiness, and self-reliance. But in Christ, the desolation of our past becomes the fertile ground where God’s truth is revealed.

Vera Nezarian, a Russian writer shares an observation that resonates with me: *“The desert and the ocean are realms of desolation on the surface. Both, seething with hidden life. The only veil that stands between perception of what is underneath the desolate surface is your courage.”*

If we sit in the space of desolation long enough, we can observe that there’s something more going on there.

Christ as the Living Word

The Qumran scrolls remind us of the enduring power of God’s Word. Just as those ancient texts were preserved against all odds, so the Word of God speaks into the brokenness of our lives with timeless relevance. Jesus, the Living Word, illuminates the Scriptures, helping us grow in the knowledge of God and in our surrender to Him.

As we draw closer to Christ, we learn that truth is not a distant or abstract concept but a person. Jesus declared, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus beckons us to come into the hard places to find the answers to

the Mystery.

A Call to Unearth the Scrolls Within



God calls you into desolations and dark nights, a land like Qumran, because it's there when you might stumble into the greatest discovery of your life. While your desolation might look like barren wildernesses, he might, just might, be leading you into a sacred space where you can experience God more fully.

Frequent Caves of the Qumran soul:

Depression

Job loss

Disaster

Betrayal

Prodigals

Chronic Illnesses

Loss

Disapproval

Rejection

Aging

Cancer

It is in this wilderness, through the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, that we confront the Dead Sea of our old lives and embrace the living waters of Christ. But we will never make sense of the wilderness, if we aren't searching. I found the truth of Christ, but my search continues for the fragments I've yet to discover in Him. I don't have all the answers. Neither do you. We're all still looking and revelation is in real time.

As believers, we are called to unearth the "scrolls" of God's truth in our lives. These scrolls are not hidden in distant caves but within our own hearts, waiting for us to dive into the Word of God, to pray, to listen, and to surrender. In doing so, we allow Christ to rewrite the story of our lives, transforming our desolation into abundance and our wilderness into a garden.

As I've pondered this metaphor, I'm reminded of Paul's words: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). This verse beautifully took me back to Qumran, emphasizing the fragility of my humanity and the divine treasure within us.



Like the ancient scrolls preserved in simple clay jars, God's truth resides in the humble vessels of our lives. The jars of clay, fragile and unremarkable, symbolize our weakness and dependence on God. Yet, it is through these fragile vessels that His power is displayed. In the context of Qumran, the clay jars that protected the scrolls echo the transformative work of Christ in us—His truth and glory shine through our imperfections, revealing that the source of life and redemption is not in us but in Him. As we surrender to Christ, our brokenness becomes the means through which His light and truth are made known to the world.

Robert Frost's poem "**A Servant to Servants**," he reflects on the inner turmoil and the weight of circumstances, yet also hints at a search for deeper understanding and purpose. He concludes: *"The best way out is always through."* This line captures the essence of spiritual surrender and transformation—moving through the wilderness of our struggles to discover the treasure of God's truth. It aligns with the

idea that Christ meets us in our brokenness (our “jars of clay”) and leads us through it, revealing His glory in the process.

Qumran stands as a powerful reminder of God’s faithfulness to preserve His truth and reveal it to those who seek Him. It is a metaphor for the transformative journey every believer takes—a journey that leads us from the desolation of our old lives to the life-giving truth found in Christ.

A Blessing

So may you be inspired, my brothers and sisters, continue to search deeply within yourself, trusting Christ to guide you. In the quiet wilderness of your heart, may you find not only ancient truth but also the living presence of the Savior, who invites you to grow in the knowledge of God and experience the fullness of His grace.

How I Learn Best

The greatest lessons I learn about the gospel are found in relationship with other people. Not just believers but in every relationship. The lepers, the Pharisees, the prostitutes, the wasted and the weary— they’re all right here today.

I learn best about the gospel when I am under oppression, when I realize my own failures and when I am angry enough to turn over a few tables... as well as when I am so grateful that I feel rocks will join me in praise.

I learn best about the gospel when I identify with the despair and the joy and the anger and the celebration of everything

this life entails. And when I join Christ in the mission, despite all the spiritual darkness in this country of glitz and grit.

I rarely ever learn when I get my way.

I learn best when my back is against the wall.

I learn best when I pray and only silence replies.

I learn best when answers are elusive.

I learn best about the gospel when I see the broken as well as the proud and I realize that I am both.

Jesus becomes my tour guide and I am amazed by the places He takes me... Sometimes He takes me- kicking and screaming into the darkness of the world and the darkness in my own heart. I riffle through the ashes and rust for the smallest wisp of glory.

I learn best about the gospel when I am wrapped up in the story and I choose the right role.

Truth be told, I am a wreck when life is predictable and safe.

The Baptist Futurist

Here's a great conversation with Chris Forbes on churches, cooperation, and the future.

I am Clay

My life is on the wheel...Earthbound clay

Spinning. Wondering. Why are His hands changing me?

With purpose

What is He creating in me?

What does He see?

Is there a purpose in the pain?

Stretching, sensing, swirling, struggling

I'm smaller than I used to be, it seems

The Mosaic of broken dreams

I'm dizzy with change

The wheel slows as his eyes scan my shell

And he sees it.

I was hoping that he'd over look it.

Halfway hoping he would cast me aside and move on to a more fitting lump of clay.

He pauses-

Divine rejection is what I feel. Rejection that He sees who I really am-

A catastrophic mess

Deeply wounded- Brokenness

He picks me up again and throws me back on the wheel.

This is not the way it's supposed to be.

Still working- it hurts because I'm still me

Can I ever be what He wants me to be?

He's creating in my catastrophe.

I'm spinning again- Oh God what do you see?

The heat of the oven- birthplace of sanctity.

Above and beyond all treachery

That separated my soul from Thee

Burning, glazing, waiting, straining

I stand before the Master of the clay

I didn't know it then but I know it now.

He recognizes me.

And- He SMILES. He smiles at me.

My creator

Who walked me through the fire of earth

And now I see him

The all-things-new Messiah

King of Castaways

The Potter

Victor

Creator

Jesus

In awestruck wonder we will stand
His masterpiece of grace.

cloud of witnesses

some plan
their own phantasmagorical funeral
preacher boys with stories that'd make everyone cry.
even mother-in-laws and accountants
I have different plans on that day.
when i die
I'll watch my father sling jawbones
with samson
both made it in the door by the grace of God
same as noah
he found grace
he discovered it
or it discovered him
before he clanked the first nail into gopher wood
or shoveled the first cart of kangaroo caca
the story began in grace and splinter

the mercy of limping jacob and stumbling bartimaeus
they sidebar and tell stories
smiling and wondering about weak eyes
discussing it with the miracle boy of Jesus' mud pies
look(!) there's paul—the lasik surgery is divine
big letters not necessary.
he can read the fine print
he's catching up with a big stack by his side
& checking out the far flung analysis of his work
from n/t/wright to barnes to hal lindsay
(the later, just for fun)
The speech therapy is complete for stuttering moises.
he can wax eloquent for millennia
AND Jesus is smiling
His children—the whole great cloud is back home
The aroma of the spread catered by angels
and feasting on the vision He's been waiting to see.
and in gobsmacked wonder, there's a whisper
under the breath of all the saints—
“it's all true”
me?
i'm the guy way over in the back of the family portrait

on the 12,857,009th row

next to a man named bart wrankle (of whom i have not met)

You must wait.

You're in a pit and wondering if this is the place you'll die.
You must wait.

They accuse and convict you. They slam the door. Nothing seems to be happening. You lost your last appeal and the lawyer wants his money. You must wait.

You are scrubbing the floors in a corrupt palace where money changes hands under the table. It's all a sham. They paint their walls with the blood of the innocent. Nothing has changed. You must wait.

You make a mad dash out of the city where you were once a prince and now you're stepping in sheep dung on the backside of the desert. You must wait.

You are in the belly of the beast, the den of the lions and the fire of the furnace. You must wait.

He took his share. He wished you nothing but death. But you love him still with an eye on the horizon. But first you must wait.

40 days in the desert.

40 years in the wilderness.

Perilous hours in the storm.

3 days in the tomb

9 months in the womb

You must wait.

But you move in the waiting. Your lungs have breath. Your pulse continues. The music is there. Hope is the stuff that keeps you alive.

Never-ending nights and arduous days.

Most have given up. They've packed it in. They tapped out on the mat of the threshing floor.

But you, ample servant of the Most High, you must wait.