

We live in a world that is largely divided, a world that seems to revel in division and promote it. Stirring controversy is the pathway to clicks, attention, fame, and money. The way to fame and fortune is rarely through winning your adversary to your position with grace and good cheer, to argue in good faith, seeking the best for those who disagree, to pursue the truth dispassionately above all else. It's hard to believe there was a different way not too long ago. G.K. Chesterton was a champion of the truth who lived in the early 1900's and was a forceful debater who regularly took his debate opponents to the pub after the debate because he genuinely liked them and wanted to establish friendship with them, which is hard to imagine in our modern world, but perhaps shouldn't be. Graciousness and love are the foundations of how God made the world, which can be seen from the flowers that provide pollen to bees as a reward for pollination of the flower, to fruit trees bearing fruit in return for spreading seed. Everywhere we look we see that grace and beauty provide a reward for those who operate in love. How do we escape the hostile way of the world into God's grace? Let's practice graciousness this week.

## Day 1

### Remember God's Grace to You

In order to truly remember God's grace toward us it is important not to lose the memory of our sinfulness. Because it is difficult and painful to look at, we develop defense mechanisms that block from our view the true nature of ourselves. We tend to overlook those things that are ugly and sinful, and instead we paint a rosy picture of our current state. While this may seem like a good idea at first, the result is that we miss out on the true nature of the gift that is handed to us in forgiveness. It seems odd to think that our ultimate joy and happiness hinge on seeing the true state of sin and depravity in our hearts, but that is genuinely the case. Not only our joy and happiness, but our connection to those around us depends on a true assessment of our sin, because we begin to see that we are no better than them, but are helpless in our sins just as they are. We are met in the depth of our sin by an abundance of grace that is beyond our ability to comprehend, not because we deserve it but because that is the nature of God. Nothing of our glory comes from our own works, but is only an unearned gift from God. Spend some time today in prayer and meditation about the gift of grace that you have received. If it does not astound you, perhaps some time uncovering the darkness of your heart is in order.

Verses: Hebrews 4:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, James 4:6

Prayer Topics: Forgiveness, Kindness, Blessing

## Day 2

### Attitude Check

I find it necessary to check my attitude on a regular basis, because I find it embarrassingly easy to develop a bad, uncharitable, ungracious attitude toward others. I wish this were not the case. I wish I could say truthfully that I am always full of love and light, that the love of God radiates effortlessly from my heart as visible light emanates from my being, but this just isn't the case. I find it is all too easy to hate the sinner as well as the sin (not me, you understand...sinners!). In fact I probably find it easier to hate the sinner than the sin. I find that while it is easy to give myself the benefit of the doubt, it is harder to extend it to others, and that it seems far simpler and more efficient to use punishment to motivate than grace, love, and enticement to goodness. In short, I can easily have a bad attitude, and maybe you're like me. The question is, what do we do when that happens? Do we feed that bad attitude, or do we put it in check the moment we become aware of it? It sometimes feels good to our sinful nature to indulge it, but we have the power through God's spirit to put it to death and to practice graciousness towards others instead. As you go through your day today, pay attention to your attitude

and give it a timeout if you find it drifting toward a lack of grace for others. Think about the glory of God's grace toward those you are tempted to look at ungraciously, and prayerfully align your attitude with His.

Verses: Philippians 2:14-15, Philippians 4:8, Proverbs 17:22

Prayer Topics: Demeanor, Spirit, Compassion

Day 3

Let Go of Anger

I find anger to be one of the most dangerous emotions. The problem with anger is not just found in its inappropriateness to the situation or in its destructive tendencies, but in its origins in pride and its ability to amplify pride. When life doesn't produce the results we seek, we can respond to it with disappointment or sadness, which can be unproductive and lead to giving up. This is a mistake to be sure, but anger can lead us to destroy what has already been created, can create rifts in our relationships, and can fortify us on our pedestal of pride in a way that sadness or disappointment does not. There is a humility in sadness that does not exist in anger, and so anger becomes much harder to turn toward grace than sadness. Do you find yourself angry a lot? When you are angry, is it because of a wrong that has been committed against you? Do you find yourself plotting ways to get even, how to turn the system toward your benefit? Do you nurse grievances in your anger and hold grudges? Is it hard or impossible for someone who has wronged you to get back into your good graces? Take a look at your life today and see where pride and anger might have a foothold, and resolve to meet that anger with a turn toward being gracious to those who have wronged you. Think about all the grace you have received from God and others, and resolve to pass that grace to the people in your life.

Verses: Ephesians 4:26-27, Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 29:11, James 1:19-20, James 3:2-10

Prayer Topics: Indignation, Wrath, Irritability, Pride, Humility, Forgiveness

Day 4

Be Gracious in Speech

How gracious is your speech? Is the bulk of your speech used to tear down or to build up? When you talk to others, do you look for ways to encourage them and build them up? When you talk about others, are you pointing out their good qualities and drawing attention to their glory, or are you complaining about them? Our speech is one of the most important aspects of being human. Just as God had Adam name the animals, our lives are built around looking at what God has created and putting the proper word to it, so that our words might reflect the reality of grace all around us. Do we use our words to excuse and forgive others when they have wronged us? When we talk to ourselves, do we minimize the offenses of others and create narratives that draw us into covenants of grace with them? Is our speech encouraging others and driving them to the grace of Jesus, helping them to enter into covenant relationship with Him? Is there a particular place or scenario where you find it hard to be gracious in your speech? Mine is while driving, so I am making it my goal to rectify that, because although no one can hear me, it affects my heart and so the graciousness of other speech that people can hear. If you have a place or scenario like that, spend some time today planning how you will become more gracious in your speech.

Verses: Proverbs 16:24, Ephesians 4:29, Psalm 141:3

Prayer Topics: Mindset, Words, Kindness

## Day 5

### Join the Celebration

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus leaves the story with a brother who cannot celebrate the grace shown to his wayward sibling. While it might be easy in some ways to celebrate God's grace to us, how are we at celebrating God's grace to others? When others receive grace, are we leading the parade for them? Are we front and center at the celebration of their good fortune? How about when one of our enemies receives grace? Can we celebrate with them and experience true, heartfelt joy with them? Spend some time today joining the celebration of grace for those around you. Maybe there is someone in your life that you can write an uplifting message to, celebrating some grace that has found its way into their life. Perhaps making a habit of celebrating the grace of others might even have the reward of helping us to be more joyful people.

Verses: Luke 15:11-32, Romans 12:15, Philippians 4:4

Prayer Topics: Jubilee, Glory, Joy, Generosity