



~ Thought For The Day ~

~gathering from the 4 winds~

"come just as you are"

Refresh, Restore, Rebuild = Healing



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Worship Music

Prayer

Lord, help me to see any area of my life that is dominated by rational or irrational strongholds. Forgive me for allowing the devil to sink his lies into my mind, and help me now to uproot and cast down every one of his lies. I know that Your Word will renew my mind to think in accordance with You, so I am asking You today to help me make Your Word a priority in my life. Lord lead me to exactly the right Word, for each situation I face today. I know that I am only required to live one day at a time, and I ask for Your will for me today and plans, in Jesus' name.Amen.

[I Worship You-](#)
[John Edwards](#)

[Energy-John Edwards](#)

[Any Road, At Any Cost-](#)
[Point Of Grace](#)

[Cover Me-Bebe Norman](#)

[Whatever Your Doing-](#)
[Sanctus Real](#)

Video's / New Information/ Prayer Requests

Deut. 25:26

J. Vernon McGee

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If you have a prayer request...please e-mail it to us so we can pray for you...or a person.....

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1 AND THE Lord said to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, 2 Command the Israelites that they give to the Levites from the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and [suburb] pasturelands round about the cities' walls you shall give to the Levites also. 3 They shall have the cities to dwell in and their [suburb] pasturelands shall be for their cattle, for their wealth [in flocks], and for all their beasts. 4 And the pasturelands of the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall reach from the wall of the city and outward 1,000 cubits round about. 5 You shall measure from the wall of the city outward on the east, south, west, and north sides 2,000 cubits, the city being in the center. This shall belong to [the Levites] as [suburb] pasturelands for their cities. 6 Of the cities which you shall give to the Levites there shall be the six cities of refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee into; and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities. 7 So all the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be forty-eight; you shall give them with their adjacent [suburb] pasturelands. 8 As for the cities, you shall give from the possession of the Israelites, from the larger tribes you shall take many and from the smaller tribes few; each tribe shall give of its cities to the Levites in proportion to its inheritance. 9 And the Lord said to Moses, 10 Say to the Israelites, When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 11 Then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the slayer who kills any person unintentionally and unawares may flee there. 12 And the cities shall be to you for refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he has had a fair trial before the congregation. 13 And of the cities which you give there shall be your six cities for refuge. 14 You shall give three cities on this [east] side of the Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan, to be cities of refuge. 15 These six cities shall be a refuge for the Israelites and for the stranger and the temporary resident among them; that anyone who kills any person unintentionally and unawares may flee there. 16 But if he struck him down with an instrument of iron so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 17 And if he struck him down by throwing a stone, by which a person may die, and he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 18 Or if he struck him down with a weapon of wood in his hand, by which one may die, and he died, the offender is a murderer; he shall surely be put to death. 19 The avenger of blood shall himself slay the murderer; when he meets him, he shall slay him. 20 But if he stabbed him through hatred or hurled at him by lying in wait so that he died 21 Or in enmity struck him down with his hand so that he died, he that smote him shall surely be put to death; he is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall slay the murderer when he meets him. 22 But if he stabbed him suddenly without enmity or threw anything at or upon him without lying in wait 23 Or with any stone with which a man may be killed, not seeing him, and threw it at him so that he died, and was not his enemy nor sought to harm him, 24 Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood according to these ordinances. 25 And the congregation shall rescue the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood and restore him to his city of refuge to which he had fled; and he shall live in it until the high priest dies, who was anointed with the sacred oil. 26 But if the slayer shall at any time come outside the limits of his city of refuge to which he had fled 27 And the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge and kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood 28 Because the manslayer should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the high priest's death the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession. 29 And these things shall be for a statute and ordinance to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 30 Whoever kills any person [intentionally], the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. 31 Moreover, you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer guilty of death; but he shall surely be put to death. 32 And you shall accept no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, so that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the high priest. 33 So you shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood shed in it, but by the blood of him who shed it. 34 And you shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I, the Lord, dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.

Chapter 35: As we get into chapter thirty-five, it describes the cities of refuge that they were to establish, verse two, Command the children of Israel, that they give to the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and you shall give unto them also suburbs of the cities round about them. And the cities that they shall have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and their goods, and for their beasts. (Num 35:2-3) So the city itself and then extending out from the city a thousand cubits for their farm area and then out another two thousand cubits for their cattle. These were the suburbs of the city, and forty-eight of these cities were to be given to the Levites. They were not to get any huge chunks of land nor were the families given portions of land. The Levites received no inheritance. God said, "I am their inheritance". They got the best deal. The rest of the people got property; the Levites got the Lord as their inheritance. And so they were given these forty-two cities to live in and the suburbs around the city to graze their cattle and to grow their crops and so forth, forty-two cities given to the Levites. Now among the forty-two cities there were to be six cities that were appointed as cities of refuge. Three on either side of the Jordan River placed strategically through the land so that no matter where you were living in the land you were never more than a half day's run from the city of refuge. Now the purpose of the city of refuge was to take care of a cultural practice that was deeply ingrained within the people. You know one of the hardest things to become free of is tradition. There are certain cultural things that are so deeply embedded in our whole thinking processes that they are the hardest things in the world to root out. And I can give you one offensive illustration. Christmas is a pagan holiday. It has nothing to do with the birthday of Jesus Christ in its original forms. They celebrated Christmas long before Jesus ever came along. They called it by a different name. The Romans called it Saturnalia, but it is—you can trace its origin clear on back to Nimrod shortly after the time of Noah. The decking of trees, all of the customs are not Christian in origin at all. And yet to suggest that we abandon the celebration of this pagan holiday would bring great incense and censure from the church. "You mean you're not gonna celebrate Christmas?" Because it's so deeply imbedded in our whole traditional patterns, we hold on to it though we recognize that it is becoming more paganized all the time. How many people really honor Jesus Christ on Christmas? If it was His birthday, it wasn't, but if it was His birthday how many are truly honoring Christ? As we look at the celebration the police department have to put on extra duty. All of the reserves are called in. Why? Because there are gonna be so many drunks on the road. People going home from the Christmas party "We've been celebrating Jesus is Born. Ha ha ha". And yet we find extreme difficulty in trying to divorce ourselves from it because it's so much a part of our culture. Tradition, the hardest things in the world to root out. And so God, rather than seeking to root out totally the tradition, though he wasn't in favor of it, placed restrictions upon it. And to these people, a part of their cultural process was revenge killing. That was just a part of their whole culture. If a member of your family was killed by someone else, you were honor-bound to kill him. You owed it to your dead relative; the honor of the family is at stake and you must

pursue him until you find him and put him to death. And the family honor cannot be maintained until his blood has been spilt. And if you're the oldest son in the house then you become the avenger of blood and it's your duty, your family duty, to avenge the blood of your dead brother or sister or mother or father. And this idea of revenge killing was deeply embedded in their whole cultural process. Now, in some cases the killing was totally accidental. There was no malice, there was no anger, there was no premeditation; it was just an accident. But this idea of revenge killing was so deep that even though it was an accident, the avenger of blood was prone to catch the guy and kill him anyhow. "I didn't mean to do it. It was just an accident, friend. I didn't—" You know you had it anyhow, they had no mercy. It's honor, it's duty, I've gotta kill you. So in order to modify this deeply ingrained practice, God established the cities of refuge so that if you, by accident, should kill someone you could flee to the city of refuge. And if you could get to the city of refuge before the avenger caught up with you, if you could come within the borders of the city you were safe. He could not come into the city to take your life. And the Levites, it was the city of the Levites, the Levites would shelter you and protect you and they would guarantee your opportunity to have a free trial and a fair trial. Now unless you got to the city, you didn't have a fair trial at all. It was the law of vengeance and revenge and they would catch you and kill you. So you had to flee to the city of refuge. There, you would have a fair trial. Now if it could be proved that it was not an accident, that you have been planning it, that you had hatred and animosity and it was a—and it could be proved that it was an action and it was done in anger, malice on your part, then you were delivered from the city of refuge and the avenger put you to death. But if you could show that it was purely an accident, you had no intention of doing it, it was just an accident, then you could remain in the city of refuge and they could not touch you. You would then live in the city of refuge. And as long you stayed in the city of refuge you were protected, but if you should leave the city of refuge, then if the avenger would catch you he would put you to death. You were only safe as long you stayed within the borders of that city of refuge. There was another provision because man needs hope and living in a city can feel like living in a prison and you can soon despair "I'm away from my family. I want to be home and all. And I'm never gonna go home again." So there was another provision to give hope for that person; and that is, if the high priest should die then you were freed and you could go home. God was making these options and all because really he was opposed to the whole practice of revenge killing but it was so deeply ingrained in their culture he then created the limitations and loopholes for the innocent parties. That became then a part of the tradition and the culture of the people. I believe that God is not incensed or angry if you celebrate Christmas, if you have a Christmas tree. I thank God that I have great liberty in Jesus Christ. And when we celebrate Christmas we are not thinking of Tammuz or Nimrod or Summeramus??? or the pagan gods that are usually celebrated this time of the year, nor Saturn nor the sun. I think that it is good to remember that "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son" and as much as we don't know when Jesus was born, it really doesn't matter which day you might set aside to celebrate his birth. The date itself isn't important. But I thank God that I have that freedom to celebrate with a family a day of giving, a day of expressions of love. But I'm also thankful that I have the freedom not to enter into certain pagan aspects of the holiday, if I don't want to. It's great to have freedom in Christ. I'm free to have a tree or I'm free not to have a tree, and it doesn't condemn me if I have one and it doesn't make me more righteous if I don't have one. But these things are tradition, they become deeply embedded in our whole family culture processes and God understands how deeply embedded they're in and so he just, you know, makes the rules whereby oftentimes He modifies some of the poorer aspects of those practices. So where traditionally Christmas is a time for getting drunk, the Lord modifies that and he says, "Be not drunk with wine wherein excess, be filled with the spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). It teaches us moderation in all things. So, here God deals with a cultural practice, modifying it, bringing it within borders, within limitations, providing for the innocent. And yet the murderer was in no way to be set free. They were not to actually put to death a man with one witness. There had to be at least two witnesses. They could not take the testimony of one witness and put to a man to death; in the mouth of two witnesses, at least, it had to be established. Then if it was established they were not to take any ransom for the guilty. In other words, he was not to be able to buy his way out. Thus, the guilty were to be put to death and the land would be free from pollution. Now, we've got a lot of sociologists today that say that the death penalty is no deterrent against crime; it's a horrible thing to put men to death and all this kind of stuff. And so what has happened? We say the law of God really isn't valid, it really isn't good. With our social sciences we know much better than the law of God and we're able to establish law that is superior to the law of God. How would you describe our land today? Pretty polluted; isn't it? That's what God said, He established a force so the land wouldn't be polluted. And we have found out that rather than knowing better than God, he knew best but we've gone so deep into it there seems to be now no way out. (Through The Bible; C 2000 Series; Chuck Smith; 1979-1986)

Have you noticed how oftentimes the very people we have classified as impossible to save have been marked by God as the next converts? It's not uncommon at Calvary Chapel for long-lost friends to meet unexpectedly in a hallway, look quizzically at each other, and say in unison, "What are you doing here?" Seeing each other in church with a Bible in hand and a smile on their face just wipes them out. Neither thought the other could be saved. I don't suppose very many people in the early church were praying for Saul's salvation. They were probably saying, "Lord, wipe that guy out. He is going to kill the church. Stop him, Lord!" They were probably hoping God would lower the boom in judgment. But God had another way of stopping him, unlike anything they anticipated. God brought Saul's life to a halt as he was on the road to Damascus and there turned him around 180 degrees. Saul was reborn as Paul and became the greatest proclaimer in history of the gospel of grace. God is a specialist at taking the unlikeliest of candidates and turning them into trophies of His grace. He is able to make a beautiful change in each of us. He can change our value systems and make us new creatures in Christ. He calls us to be examples of what His grace can do.

No One Too Small: Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking God uses only "special" people - the strong, the intelligent, the beautiful. We don't think He has a place for the rest of us. We are so wrong! God doesn't have "important" people. God uses ordinary people and works through plain people. That is why Paul wrote, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (I Corinthians 1:26,27). God loves us ordinary folk and endows us with gifts so that we might fill our place in the body of Christ. Any ability we have is a gift from His hand. Everything we have was given to us. As Paul said in I Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive?" How can I glory in my ministry as though I didn't receive it, as though what I am able to share is something of my genius or brilliance? Anything done

Worthwhile, I have, came from God. There is no way I can be proud and boastful, as though I were somebody independent of Him. Apart from Him, I am nothing. Apart from Him, I can do nothing. Men often develop an inflated view of their own importance and greatness and gloat over their place in the work of God. But the truth is, God doesn't need any of us. I'm sorry if that makes you feel unimportant, but it's true. He has chosen to use us, but He doesn't have to. He could just as easily use someone else. To me, that is thrilling. I haven't been chosen to serve because I am so wonderful. God doesn't choose us because of our greatness or abilities or potential. He chooses us because He decides to choose us. Important, proud people do not like that. They are "above" being chosen... so usually they are not. God chooses by His grace. He chose me. He chose you. Heaven is going to be full of surprises. As we look around, the first surprise will be all the people who we thought would never make it. The next surprise will be those sitting in the front row in the places of honor. We will say, "Who are these people? I never saw them before." "Some of them went to Calvary Chapel," someone will say, "but where is Chuck?" And somewhere way out in the back of the crowd, in the peanut gallery, I will yell, "Here I am! Thank God, through His grace, I made it."

All Are Equal in the Kingdom: Prior to meeting Jesus face to face on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul spent the majority of his life as a Pharisee. The Pharisees, you remember, were members of the strict, legalistic Jewish sect that so strongly opposed Jesus. You get a flavor for who they were by considering their prayers, a few of which have been preserved for us. Every morning the rabbis prayed, I thank you, Father, that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." No doubt this was a part of Paul's devotional life for many years. How interesting it is, then, that in Galatians 3:28 the apostle turns all three components of this traditional prayer on their heads. He writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Jesus has made equal access to God available to all people. God receives us as His dearly loved children - this is the beauty of the gospel. Jesus is the great equalizer. His grace refuses to elevate one person over another. We all are one because in Christ, God accepts one sinner just as readily as He accepts another. God places tremendous value on each individual. This gospel has made a tremendous impact wherever in the world it has gone. Consider women's rights. Prior to the arrival of Christianity in New Guinea, women were considered unworthy to worship God. A woman had only to touch a place of worship to be put to death. Such second-class citizenship created a climate of fear and shame and led to an extremely high suicide rate among women. They had very little to live for and oppression was heavy. Imagine the impact on this culture when the gospel of grace appeared on the scene. Suddenly men and women discovered that in Christ there is no distinction between male and female. Jesus has made equal access to God available to all people regardless of their demographic group. God does not receive us as justified strangers or distant acquaintances, but as His dearly loved children. John tells us that "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). This is the beauty of the gospel. No matter what we have been like or what wrong we have done, if we will place our faith in Christ, we will be pardoned for all our sins. Even beyond this almost incomprehensible blessing, God also receives us as His sons. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). The word "children" in this passage literally means "placed as a son." God doesn't have any important people. The objects of His grace are not only the strong, or the beautiful, or the intelligent. He calls us ordinary folk to His side and wraps His strong arms around us in a gentle embrace of love. This is the gospel of grace.

Chosen by Grace: Paul saw his whole life as the result of God's gracious choice. As he put it, "It pleased God... to reveal his Son in me" (Galatians 1:15,16). That is what God wants to do in every one of our lives. That is what God wants to do in you now. God desires to reveal His Son to the world through you. In fact, God has been working in your life since the moment you were conceived to make you the perfect instrument to reveal His Son. That is why Paul wrote, "God... separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace" (Galatians 1:15). It is remarkable to see how God prepared Paul for his ministry long before he had one. God knew He was going to need a special person to bring the gospel of grace to the Gentiles. This man would have to break with the ingrained tradition of the Jews, who tended to be a clannish people. They would not mix with Gentiles, even refusing to eat with them or enter their houses. In fact, when a Pharisee walked down the street, he would hold his robes very tightly around him for fear that his garment might touch a Gentile. Should a Pharisee accidentally touch a non-Jew, he would go home, take a bath, wash his robes, and stay away from the temple that day. He considered himself unclean. Yet the man God needed to proclaim the good news would have to go out and live with the Gentiles and become one with them. How interesting it is that God chose for this special task the Jew who was most zealous for the traditions of his fathers! As Paul looked back, he could see how God's hand had been on his life from the very beginning. Since Greek culture had saturated the world, the man God chose had to be steeped in its customs and philosophy. Because he was going to be traveling extensively throughout the Roman empire and facing all kinds of perils, he needed to have Roman citizenship. Therefore God arranged that Saul should be born a Roman citizen. How his citizenship was attained is not known, but it would definitely serve as a big advantage to Paul, saving him from some difficult and even life-threatening circumstances (see Acts 22 and 25). Tarsus also enjoyed a strong Greek culture. Paul had more than just a small exposure to Hellenistic custom and thought; he was part of it. This made it possible for him to deal effectively with the Gentiles and to know the nuances of Greek thought. His background allowed him to communicate the truths of Jesus Christ to the Greeks. At the same time, God needed a person who was thoroughly Jewish. When Paul was about 12 years old, his parents sent him to Jerusalem to study at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the great Jewish scholars of the day. There Paul became absorbed in Hebrew culture and tradition, mastering the Talmud and the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul grew extremely zealous for the law and sought to become righteous by keeping it to the best of his ability. He excelled among his contemporaries. To the Philippians he wrote, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more" (Philippians 3:4). Peter and the other disciples, with their backgrounds as fishermen or tax collectors, weren't prepared to understand the law as thoroughly as did Paul. When the day finally came for God to reveal His grace to Paul on the Damascus Road, the apostle could instantly fit together the Scriptures of the Old Testament with the recent appearance of Jesus Christ. He began to look at the Messiah from a new point of view. Paul was the perfect choice to preach the gospel of grace, for if anyone had sought to be righteous by the law, it was Paul. Here was a man who could say, "Concerning... the righteousness which is in the law, [I was] blameless" (Philippians 3:6). He knew the futility of trying to be righteous by the law, so when he came to the glorious knowledge of Jesus Christ, he gladly embraced the new righteousness imputed to him through his faith in Jesus Christ.

Nothing Has Changed: Paul's story is dramatic, but don't imagine for a moment that this kind of divine preparation is unique to him or other New Testament saints. I can examine my own life, for example, and see that God separated me from my mother's womb for the

see work He had for me to do. I look back and see momentous events that didn't seem so momentous at the time. Now I realize these incidents were the crossroads in my life that helped to shape and determine my destiny. Looking back, I can see the hand of God in each of these situations, although at those times I didn't realize God's hand was anywhere nearby. I thought God had deserted me. But now I how God was working in every difficult circumstance of my life to prepare me for the work He had ordained for me. It is an exciting thing to recall some of the decisions I made at critical moments and realize that God's hand was leading me all along. We sing, "All the way my Savior leads me." In hindsight, I can testify that God's hand was upon my life from the beginning. Sometimes God supernaturally intervened to protect me. He had a special work for me to do and He was fitting me for that work. A few weeks before I was born my cousin died of spinal meningitis. My sister also was infected with this terrible disease. One day she went into convulsions so severe that my family thought she was dead. My mother rushed out of our apartment and up the street to the parsonage of a local church, where she laid my sister's lifeless body on the carpet. The pastor and my mother began to pray that God would bring my sister back to life. Her eyes had rolled back, her jaw had set, and there was no apparent pulse. When my dad returned home from the pool hall a while later, a nurse was waiting for him. "You had better go find your wife," she said. "Your daughter is dying. She may even be dead by now." My father raced up the street to the parsonage to beat up the minister and take my sister to the hospital. He thought it was ridiculous to pray when you needed a doctor. But when he entered the home and saw my sister's condition, he realized it was too late. He fell on his knees, broken before God. The minister told my mother, "Now, get your eyes off of your little girl. Just get your eyes upon Jesus and begin to look to the Lord." My mother - pregnant with me - lifted her face to God and said, "Lord, if You will restore to me my daughter, I will commit my life to You. I will serve You in whatever capacity You want." My sister was healed instantly. She began to cry, sat up, looked around, and wanted to go home. They took her home, completely healed. A few weeks later I was born and the doctor announced, "You have a baby boy." My dad floated down the hall of the hospital shouting, "Praise the Lord, it's a boy!" At that time my mother prayed, "Thank You, Lord, for giving my daughter back to me. And the vow that I made to serve You, I will fulfill through my son." From my earliest days, my mother planted the Word of God in my heart. As I was swinging out in the yard, she would help me memorize Scripture verses. When I was four years old she taught me how to read using the Bible. I spelled out the words I couldn't pronounce. She would later recount times when I didn't know all the letters and would do my best to describe them. She laughed as she remembered how I would call a "v" a "tent upside down." With patience and love, she nurtured and taught me the fear of God. By the time I was seven years old I could name all of the books of the Bible and spell them. At bedtime, I never heard fairy tales, only Bible stories. Rather than Goldilocks and the three bears, I grew up with David and Moses. My mother taught me that when God was with you, you didn't have to fear anything or anybody. No giant could stand against you when God is with you. I can't remember a time when I didn't know and love God. I have no kind of conversion testimony. There was a time when I made my public profession of faith and was baptized, but it seems that from my mother's womb I was separated unto God and unto the Word of God. As I grew older, I decided on a career as a neurosurgeon and so began taking courses that would prepare me for that profession. Whenever I described my ambitions, my mother would just smile and encourage me. She never told me of the commitment she made for my life at the time of my birth. During my teen years God changed my life at a summer camp where I made a commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ. God impressed upon my heart that men had needs far greater than the physical. Ministering to physical needs provides temporary help, but ministering to spiritual needs helps people eternally. God called me to minister His healing to the spirit of man. I thought my mom would be greatly disappointed when she learned her son was not going to be a doctor. I expected slumped shoulders and long faces when I announced to my family the change of direction for my life. But when I told my mother that I felt God calling me to the ministry and to Bible college, she just smiled and said, "That's fine, son." It amazed me that she didn't cry or get upset. I went to Bible college, received my training, married Kay, and together we began our ministry. A short while before my mother died, she told me the story of my sister's apparent death and her promise to God which she vowed to keep through me. She was one of the most beautiful, godly persons I have ever known, a deeply spiritual woman and a tremendous example. I can now look back and see that even from my mother's womb I was separated unto God for the ministry He had in mind for me. Did you know the same is true of you? If through faith you have placed your eternal destiny in the loving hands of Jesus Christ, you can be sure that God is at work shaping the events and circumstances of your life into a beautiful mosaic that will reveal His Son to the men and women around you. His hand is on you, as it has been since before you were born.

Called by Grace: It is so important to remember that God's hand is on us by grace. All of us were called by grace. As Paul said, "It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace" (Galatians 1:15, emphasis added). I don't deserve to be called to serve God. I don't deserve to be saved. I don't deserve to be in heaven. I deserve the hottest spot in hell. Yet that is not what God has given me or the rest of us. God has graciously planned our lives and given each of us a special work to do. Some people are able to fulfill the plan of God for their life in just an hour's time; others of us are slow and plodding and it will take us a lifetime to fulfill God's ultimate purpose for us. God has a special work for each of us to do and it is necessary that all of us be prepared for that work. Remember Mordecai's question to Esther: "How do you know but that God brought you to the kingdom for such an hour as this?" (see Esther 4:14). The major purpose of God for Esther's existence was fulfilled in just a few days. God raised her up, brought her into the Persian court, and made her the wife of King Ahasuerus in order that He, through her intercession, might spare the Jews. God has a special work for each of us to do and it is necessary that all of us be prepared for that work. Many of us will spend the majority of our lives in preparation before our day will come. We will fulfill the purpose of God for our life and then we will pass on. God's purposes for us will have been accomplished. Wherever we find ourselves, God has a reason for placing us there. He has His hand upon our lives and upon each circumstance in our lives. We may be going through difficult trials, but hardships are necessary. God wants to develop in us the characteristics that will enable us to fulfill His plan for us. God is working in each of us. We are His workmanship, His poiema or masterpiece (see Ephesians 2:10). God will work in each of us according to His grace so that we might accomplish the work He has ordained for us in His kingdom and for His glory.

Beware the Snare: Satan knows that God's hand is on us and he will try to use our weaknesses and inabilities to discourage us. The devil often puts unreasonable demands upon us, making us think God is behind them and prompting us to strive and struggle to achieve a level of perfection beyond our capacity. As Satan harasses and burdens us, many times we fall into despair. We become extremely

discouraged and we want to quit. But whenever we try to fulfill a standard that God has not set for us, our hearts grow heavy. And the results can be tragic.

A young boy with a physical handicap had been attending our church. After every service he made an effort to come up and talk to me. He had great difficulty speaking, yet I always admired his ability to express himself. I also admired his intelligence; his questions were good and insightful.

He was also extremely troubled, however, and one day he tried to throw himself in front of a car on a busy road in front of the church. He was brought into the office and we prayed with him and called the authorities. We felt for his own safety he needed to be examined by doctors. He was taken to a hospital, where he was examined and released.

It was clear he was suffering under a load of condemnation. "Chuck," he cried, "I just can't quit smoking." I tried to tell him not to worry about it - that his smoking did not make him a second-class Christian. The following Sunday he was back at church and told me God had dealt with him. He said he had come to a place of real commitment, yet I could tell he was troubled. Clearly, Satan was accusing him about a weakness in his flesh and tormenting him about his physical handicap.

One day this burden of discouragement and condemnation cost this young man his life. He jumped to his death off a balcony at a local high-rise hotel all because he allowed the enemy to use his weaknesses to discourage him.

If only that young man had learned that we can't be more than the person God enables us to be! None of us ever achieves any value apart from the work of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. Thus, we are not to fret. We are not to condemn ourselves. We are not to berate ourselves constantly for our failures. We are only to acknowledge and recognize our weakness, to humbly say, "Lord, I know that I am weak. I need Your help. I turn this over to You and I ask You, Lord, to do for me what I can't do for myself." And He will.

All Are Welcome Here

The body of Christ is a beautiful thing. Every part of the body is vital and important. What a helpless and weird body it would be if it were all a mouth! God has made me a mouth in the body, but surely the whole body isn't a mouth. Many parts of the body are much more important than the mouth. How beautiful it is to see the body of Christ functioning as intended, with people from every walk of life and demographic group and background working together to serve God in unity!

God wants to reveal His Son in you, wherever you came from and wherever you are and in whatever you are doing. Let Jesus Christ shine forth through your life, your attitudes, your reactions, and your responses.

We used to sing a chorus in church, "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me, all His wonderful passion and purity. Oh, Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine, till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me." This is more than just a beautiful chorus and a marvelous prayer. It should be the desire of each of our hearts: "Oh Lord, let Your beauty be seen in me." As David prayed, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

By the Spirit, all of us - the lovely and the plain, the strong and the weak, the brilliant and the slow - are being changed into the likeness of Jesus. Together we are the objects of His grace. And together we shall all be satisfied on that glorious day when we awake in His likeness.

How could it be otherwise?

"Why Grace Changes Everything" Chuck Smith; Chapter 3 "No Favorites In The Kingdom"

(AMP Bible; The Everyday Life Bible; Joyce Meyers; Scripture; Commentaries; Past Pastor Sermons; Dictionary; 2006; pg 262-263)
(Word 9 Bible Software; 2010; Concordance, Dictionary, Scripture, Sermons of Saints past, Devos; Sparkling Gems From The Greek)