



NightLight

A NEWSLETTER OF McLEAN MINISTRIES

"take heed...as to a light that shines in a dark place." II Peter 1:19

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Dear Friends,

For the lovers of God may suffer adversity and stumble seven times, but they will continue to rise over and over again...

Proverbs 24:16

(The Passion translation)



I received a letter not long ago from a man I have known for over thirty years. We were boys together, though I was several years older. He was thankfully unaware of the dark secrets of my soul which I was fighting all during the years we were seeing each other off and on. I have not seen him face to face for nearly eight years, so I was happily surprised to get his letter.

I had mixed emotions as I read these words: "Clay, I just wanted to let you know how thankful I am for you. I know you are far from perfect. And I know at least some of the struggles you were facing when we were younger. None of the negative matters to me at all. All I think of when I think of you is that after all these years, you are still out there, seeking to live for Jesus. You are one of the few people I know from our past, who is still walking with the Lord. And it gives me great comfort to know that if you can do it, I can too..."

On the one hand, I was deeply moved and very grateful for his expression of confidence in me and for his thanks. On the other hand, I thought of all my worst elements, and wondered how anybody could want to follow my example. These were not irrational self-rejecting thoughts, but the product of some sober inventory within my soul. I wrote my friend back and thanked him. I then told him that whatever good I may have manifested in my life over the years was certainly God's grace. But as I was writing those words, it was as if the Holy Spirit broke in and said, "Yes. It is by My grace. But that grace has to be appropriated by those to whom it is given. Grace is not passive; neither is the object of that grace. There is a righteous response needed if grace is to be effective."

So I went on to try to describe to my friend what I am trying to describe here to you. There is never any room for patting ourselves on the back for our progress in the Christian life. We live in His love for us as His beloved, and live loving others from that place. That is grace. It is the unmerited love and power of God set in motion in our lives for our good, not because we earned it, but because God is gracious!

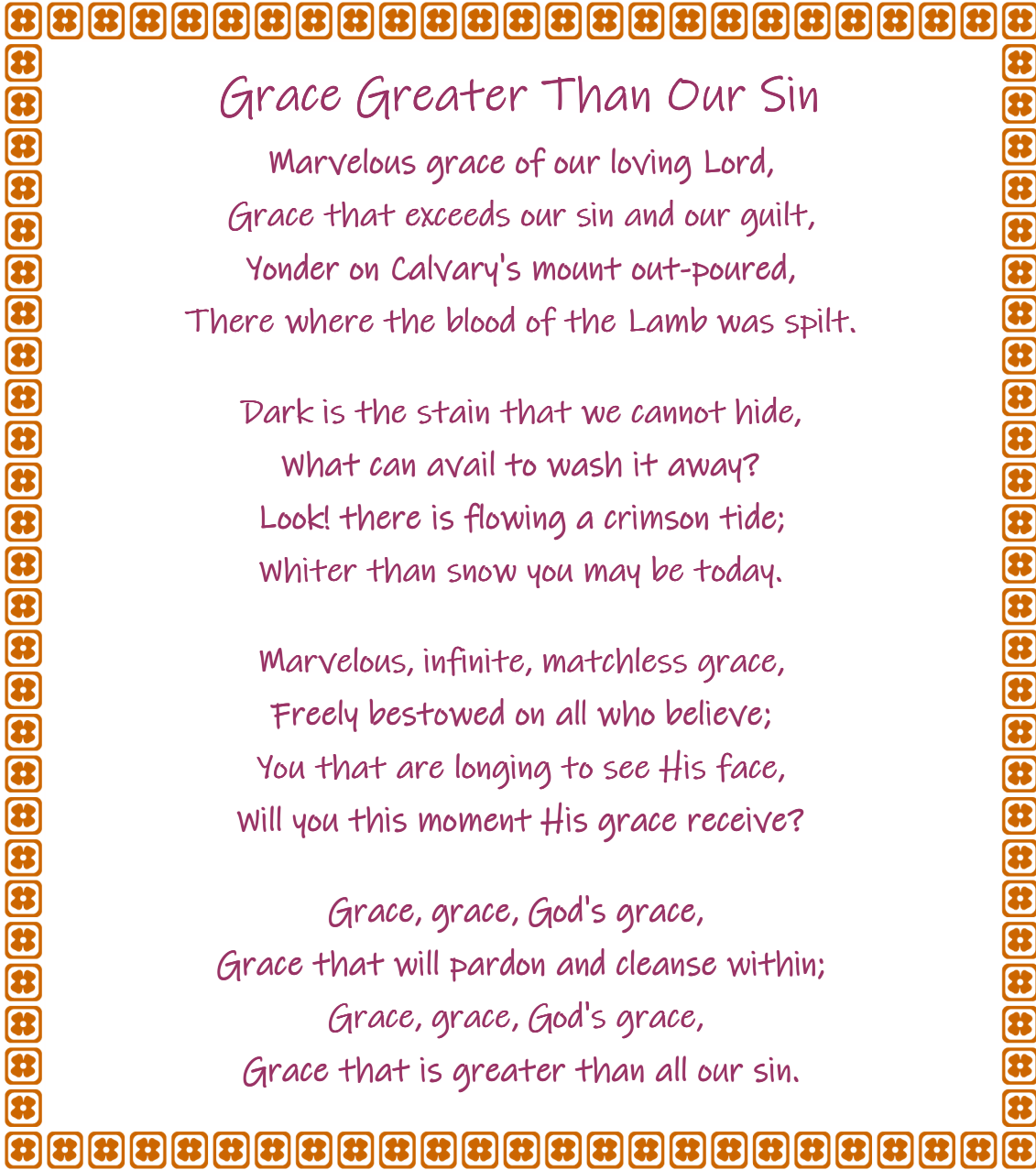
Yet, if we are not careful, we give others the impression that we are merely passive robots who are taken over by some power beyond ourselves that carries us through life towards a favorable end. Not at all! That is NOT grace. Our response to grace is an invitation to embark on **a long obedience in the same direction**, as Eugene Peterson states. Mary has a saying that she loves to repeat and I love to hear: "We are all fallen. And we all sin. It is not about gritting our teeth and trying to get it right. It is about dependence and relationship with Jesus. So WHEN you fall, fall towards Jesus. We cannot do life on our own." Our walk with God is certainly at first, more of a stumble. Even after we have walked many years, there are still times of tripping, and sadly, still even falling. But as Mary says, when you do fall, **fall towards Jesus**. Don't beat yourself up for blowing it. Don't hide yourself from Jesus because you are ashamed that you failed. Fall towards Him. Run to Him. You don't come to Him because you got yourself clean and you are proud of your own performance. You come to the One who loves and forgives you. You come to Him covered in muck, and fall into His arms of grace.

Only God knows the many times I have failed to live according to the light I had. It was always costly, and I learned painful lessons from my selfishness and disobedience. God did not punish me. Life does that when we act a fool! I am only alive by His grace and mercy. And yet I must say that I am no robot, nor would God want me to be. I have often stumbled, but I have stumbled towards Jesus. And He has always been there to restore my soul and renew my strength in Him. **The righteous man falls seven times, but the Lord is there to raise Him up again. (see Proverbs 24:16)**. Who is a righteous man or woman? Is it one who never falls? No! It is one who falls towards Jesus. It is one who as he is falling, on the very way down, is calling on the Name of the Lord for rescue. This is what Peter did when he was sinking in a sea of unbelief and fear. It is one who does not stay down, but rather gets up and runs back to Jesus.

Is this making too much room for failure? Well, maybe. But I found I needed a lot of room for that. Did I ever willfully sin? Of course I did, I'm sorry to say. Did I ever get away with it? No. To this day, my soul is bruised by the very memory of it, and the closer I draw to Jesus, the more clearly I see in retrospect how evil my willful sin was, as well as the terrible ramifications of my wrong choices. What do I do? I fall helpless and weak on the breast of Jesus. I look at the One on the cross who shed His life blood for me. There is no other place to go with my pain. I am lost and hopeless without His redeeming love. That has always been so. I am just more aware of it now than ever. And as I get older and see my past more clearly from the vantage point of age, I am more and more grateful for that grace.

Whatever success I may seem to be in the eyes of those who have watched me over the years, has come through great weakness. I continue on the journey with Jesus only because I have learned over and over to place my total dependence on His love and grace. It is about relationship with Him, not on my performance for Him. Yet because of that, I continue to seek and do His will the best I can. I choose **a long obedience in the same direction**...toward Home.





Grace Greater Than Our Sin

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,
Yonder on Calvary's mount out-poured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide,
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! there is flowing a crimson tide;
Whiter than snow you may be today.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe;
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin.



Closing Thoughts...



From Mary: Please remember Clay in your prayers for healing as he recovers from surgery on one kidney, and faces surgery on the other for numerous kidney stones and their removal. Amazingly - a great blessing! - that he did not experience any pain at all; that is, until now with the 'good' pain of healing. We so much appreciate you all! Thank you! May your celebration of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ be filled with joy!

In His Hands, Mary & Clay



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