LEADINGGRACE

SPRING, 2023

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FREE GRACE ALLIANCE



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Published by:

Free Grace Alliance

P. O. Box 2439

Burleson, TX 76097

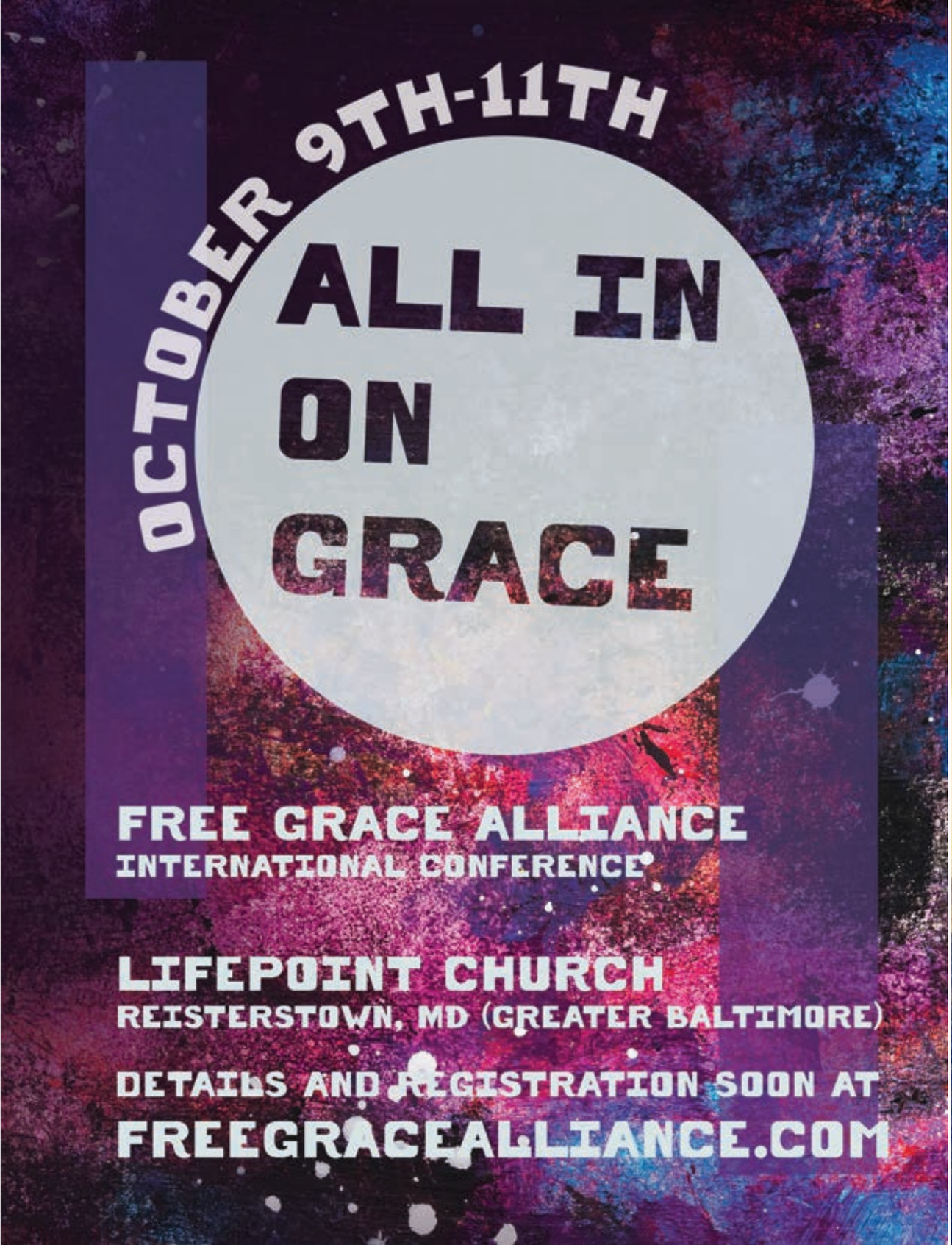
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Free Grace Alliance



My earliest debate that I had on the subject of assurance of salvation was with an elder of the church I was pastoring over twenty years ago. He held to an Arminian position in which a person could lose his salvation if he didn't persevere in his faith.

I remember telling him, "There is no way you can have assurance with your view."

He said, "You don't know my heart. I have assurance that I am saved."

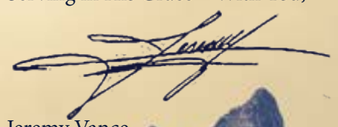
Then I tried to give the knockout punch, "You are basing your assurance on you! How much faith do you need to have to be sure you have enough to feel secure in your salvation? I base my assurance on the finished work of Jesus, not on my faith."

He wouldn't budge, "I base my assurance on the finished work of Jesus too, but you have to have faith." Then he brought clarity to his cloudiness, "As long as I believe, I can have confidence that I am saved."

That is one snapshot on why I'm so passionate about the Free Grace Alliance: I know a key component of why I've been called into ministry is to help people understand eternal security (i.e., once saved—always saved; or as I like to say: once adopted—always adopted) and the resulting assurance of salvation. I'm not one to go looking for a debate, like I did with that elder so many years ago, but I feel the doctrine of assurance is so important that we must not stay silent about it. And when we speak up, we must communicate with a positive and gracious tone. This truth about assurance is so central to the pure gospel of God's grace, and it is rooted deeply in the Free Grace Alliance.

Along with other interesting articles, this edition of Leading Grace leans toward helping encourage us on the subject of assurance of salvation. I hope you enjoy!

Serving in His Grace – With You,



Jeremy Vance
President



PROBATION OR ACCEPTANCE?

A TALE OF TWO BASEBALL CAREERS

BOB NYBERG

Years ago, my dad was a pitcher for a semi-pro baseball team in North Dakota. For as long as I could remember, he ate, drank, and slept baseball. His ultimate dream for me was that one day I would play for a Major League Baseball team. Considering my skill set, that was not meant to be.

My career as a baseball player began poorly. My earliest recollection of learning the game was the first-time dad took me out into the yard to play catch. I was excited about the prospect of playing catch with my brand new glove and softball. Dad tossed the ball toward me which missed my glove and hit me in the eye. I ran into the house crying to find comfort in the arms of my sympathetic mother. Soon dad came into the house uttering a string of profanity laced with a few disparaging words about my lack of skills for catching a baseball. And so, it began. Things only seemed to go downhill from there for my career as a baseball player. From then on, anytime I wanted to play catch it was with mom and never with my dad.

In little league baseball, I was probably the worst hitter on the team. But the highlight of my little league career was when I made solid contact with the ball and hit a screaming line drive into center field. The ball got past the glove of the centerfielder and I found myself standing on third base with a triple. After scoring a run that inning, I was greeted by the welcoming cheers of my teammates. But that is not what stands out in my mind about that glorious day. Even though that event took place over 50 years ago, I still remember the stinging rebuke of my father like it was yesterday. He grumbled, "Any other kid on the team could have stretched that triple into a homerun. Your problem is that you run too long in one spot."

That incident pretty much sums up my dad's view of me regarding not only baseball but for all my pursuits in life. There was absolutely nothing that I could do to please him.

Sadly, when I accepted God's free gift of salvation, I projected my dad's parenting skills upon my Heavenly Father. I was continually on probation and I knew that there was nothing that I could do to please either my earthly father or my Heavenly Father.

Unlike myself, Keith Hernandez was an amazing Major League Baseball player. He played first base for the St. Louis Cardinals and New York Mets. Keith was a five-time All-Star who shared the 1979 National League Most Valuable Player award. He had a lifetime batting average of .296. He received 11 consecutive Gold Glove awards, which was the most by any first baseman in baseball history. He won the American League batting championship for having the highest average. He won the American League Most Valuable Player award. He won the World Series Most Valuable Player award.

Yet with all his accomplishments, Keith missed out on something that was crucially important to him—his father's acceptance. In a candid interview about his relationship with his father, Keith revealed a major disappointment in his illustrious baseball career.

One day Keith asked his father, "Dad, I have a lifetime batting average of .296. What more do you want?"

His father replied, "But someday you're going to look back and say, 'I could have done more.'"

Keith Hernandez never felt accepted by his earthly father. That is one thing that Keith and I have in common. It seems that nothing we could do in the world of baseball could ever please our dads.

Miles Stanford once wrote: "There are two questions that every believer must settle as soon as possible. The one is, does God fully accept me? And the second, If so, upon what basis does He do so? This is crucial. What devastation often permeates the life of one, young or old, rich or poor, saved or unsaved, who is not sure of being accepted, even on the human level." (Principles of Spiritual Growth)



For the child of God, a key issue that affects our Christian growth is the question: "Are we accepted by our Heavenly Father or are we on probation?" For years I felt like I was on probation, always wondering what more I could do to make myself acceptable in the eyes of my Heavenly Father.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul wrote that "He made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6).

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer elaborated on this concept of acceptance: "The child of God under grace has been delivered from the burden of … works. He is not striving to be accepted, but rather is free to live as one who is accepted in Christ (Eph. 1:6). The child of God is not now called upon to live by the energy of his own flesh. He lives in the power of the indwelling Spirit. The child of God is not under law as a rule of life, but he is under the counsels of grace. What he does under grace is not done to secure the favor of God, but it is done because he is already accepted in the Beloved. It is not undertaken in the energy of the flesh, but it is the outliving and manifestation of the power of the indwelling Spirit. It is a life which is lived on the principle that: 'The just shall live by faith.'" (Major Bible Themes; Ch. XXVII)

Likewise, A. J. Gordon wrote: "So far as the question of the Christian's acceptance and standing before a righteous law is concerned, God sees nothing from His throne but Christ Jesus alone and altogether. And since the believer is in Him and one with Him, he shares His place in the Father's heart, and unworthy as he is in himself, yet he may know without a doubt that he is 'accepted in the Beloved.'" (In Christ)

As believers in Christ, we are totally accepted by our Heavenly Father! As God the Father views us according to our position "in Christ," He sees us clothed in the righteousness of His Son. While we do not always live up to our position in our daily walk, yet we are "accepted in the Beloved." But how many of us really believe that?

Think for a moment about the contents of the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament. It contained 1) the broken law which Israel could not keep; 2) Aaron's rod that budded which spoke of Israel's rejection of God's leadership and 3) the pot of manna which spoke of Israel's rejection of God's provision. The contents of the ark spoke loudly of Israel's sin.

The ark was covered by the mercy seat which had two cherubim that faced each other. In Exodus 25:20, we are told that "the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat." In other words, their faces were looking down. Without the covering of the mercy seat, they would have been gazing upon the items that would remind them of Israel's sin.

Without the covering of the mercy seat which was sprinkled with blood, the cherubim could see nothing but Israel's sin and failure. But instead, they saw the mercy seat sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

That is a beautiful picture of the child of God covered with the righteousness of Christ. As God the Father looks at us, He sees us in the righteousness of His Son and accepts us in the Beloved. You cannot be condemned if you are in Christ. Christ is without sin. For us to be in Christ means to be accepted in the Beloved. Jesus Christ presents us to the Father, clothed in His own righteousness.

On what basis are you accepted? By His grace. It is not by your attainment. It is not by your works or self-effort. It is not by your striving. It is only by His free grace and grace is completely contrary to human nature.

One day I happened to hear a song by Dolly Parton called "Hello God." The song ends with these words:

Hello, God, we really need you we can't make it without you.
Hello, God, we beseech you in the name of all that's true.
Hello God, please forgive us for we know not what we do.

Although I am not a huge fan of country music, those lyrics did not sound too bad. But this was the line that hit me between the eyes.

Hello, God, give us one more chance to prove ourselves to you.

How many times had I fallen into sin as a believer and prayed that exact prayer? Countless times I failed in my walk with the Lord. Then I would pick myself up out of the dust, ask forgiveness and ask for another chance to prove myself to God. But do we really have to prove ourselves to God? Doesn't He already know how deceitful and desperately wicked my heart is? The real question is: "Do I myself know how wicked my own heart really is?"

The apostle Paul discovered the reality of his own wicked heart in the 7th chapter of Romans. As a believer who had been justified by God, Paul wrote:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells … (Rom 7:18)

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (Rom 7:24)

In response to that question, Paul gives us the answer in the next verse:

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:25a)

It was Jesus Christ who freed us from the body of this death when we died positionally on the cross with Him.

And for that reason, Paul was able to say:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:1 NASB)

The bottom line is that though we may struggle in our daily walk as Paul did in Romans 7, we can confidently say that there is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. Paul concludes Romans 8 by writing:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (Rom 8:31-33)

The fact is that there is no condemnation because we are in Christ Jesus. If God does not condemn us then why should we wallow in self-condemnation? God is for us. He is not the one bringing a charge against us. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, is the one who brings charges against us. But we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). As prosecutor, Satan throws all kinds of accusations against us. But Jesus, our Advocate, died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.

Are we on probation? No! Have we been accepted in the Beloved? Certainly! There is absolutely nothing in and of myself that will make me more acceptable to God—even as a Christian!

Andrew Murray wrote about the necessity of grace for our walk with the Lord:

There are earnest Christians who are jealous for a free Gospel, with acceptance of Christ, and justification by faith alone. But after this they think everything depends on their diligence and faithfulness. While they firmly grasp the truth, "justified by faith," they have hardly noticed the larger truth, "the just shall live by faith." They have not yet understood what a perfect Saviour the Lord Jesus is, and how He will each day do for the sinner just as much as He did the first day when they came to Him. They know not that the life of grace is always and only a life of faith, and that in the relationship to the Lord Jesus the one daily and unceasing duty of the disciple is to believe, because believing is the one channel through which Divine grace and strength can flow into the heart of man. The old nature of the believer remains evil and sinful to the last; it is only as he daily comes, all empty and helpless, to his Saviour to receive of His life and strength, that he can bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God." (Abide in Christ; Ch. 5)

C.H. Spurgeon noted the true source of our assurance:

It is ever the Holy Spirit's work to turn our eyes away from self to Jesus; but Satan's work is just the opposite of this, for he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ. He insinuates, "Your sins are too great for pardon; you have no faith; you do not repent enough; you will never be able to continue to the end; you have not the joy of His children; you have such a wavering hold on Jesus." All these are thoughts about self, and we will never find comfort or assurance by looking within. Keep your eye simply on Him. (Morning and Evening; June 28th)

Although my skills as a baseball player left much to be desired, my dad's parenting skills were equally lacking. Unfortunately, I projected my dad's shortcomings onto my Heavenly Father.

What a blessing it was to find out that my Heavenly Father loves me and accepts me because of my standing in Christ. No longer do I see myself on probation. No longer do I live in fear that I'm not doing enough to please Him. I can rest assured in the fact that I am accepted in the Beloved, and that I am secure in my relationship with Him.

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GOD'S PROMISES



GRANT HAWLEY

I once had the pleasure of staying with two missionaries to Papua New Guinea, Rob and his dad, Wade Ebersole. We were attending a conference at Resurgence Church in Evansville, IN in February of 2016. I loved listening to their stories about their life with the tribes of PNG. They were missionaries with Ethnos360 (then New Tribes), so they would live with the people of a remote tribe for years at a time. While there, they would learn the language and the culture before teaching them the Bible, starting with Genesis. The tribes they have stayed with were animists who believed in many gods who work through deception. Because of this, the people's interactions with each other are often based on their trying to deceive one another. Because of this cultural trait, the crux statement as they taught through the story of Scripture is, "God is not a man, that He should lie" from Num 23:19.

As they would teach through Scripture, they would be careful to point out God's promises. When they came to passages that talk about the conflict between circumstances and God's promises, they would ask the people, "What is God going to do?" After they discussed it a bit, they would always come back to that key phrase, "God is not a man, that He should lie." And as the people saw God keep His promises over and over, even when the Patriarchs or the Israelites don't deserve His doing so, these beloved people begin to see that God is always faithful.

One of the great themes of the Bible is God's promise to Abram in Gen 12:1-3. He said to Abram:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:1-3)

This promise is straightforward, but many years later, circumstances seemed to make it impossible for these promises to be fulfilled. Abraham was getting old and his wife, Sarai, was past natural child-bearing years. So it is understandable that Abraham doubted:

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" (Gen 15:1-3)

The LORD tells Abram that not only will He keep His promises, but it will be much better than he could imagine. "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6).

But even in this faith, Abram wanted confirmation: "Then He said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.' And he said, 'Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?'" (Gen 15:7-8). In the following verses, we see God ask Abraham to cut "a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram" (Gen 15:9) in two and to set them on opposite sides of a pathway along with a turtledove and a young pigeon. The gore of this scene has a purpose. In these types of covenants, all parties of the covenant would walk between the pieces of the slain animals. This says that if they don't fulfill their end of the covenant, let it be to them as it was to these animals. But in this case, only God passes between the animal pieces. God alone takes the responsibility to see this covenant to fruition. Abram's descendants will inherit the land God promised to give to them. It is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2), but if He lied to Abram, He was saying that He Himself would be cut in two and killed, just as these animals were.

The next 3,500 plus years have unfolded the drama of God working to keep His promise, even though the people proved over and over again that they were not worthy of His favor. When Christ returns, we will see God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David fulfilled with unimaginable glory (Revelation 21:9-22:5).

Throughout the Bible, God labors to communicate that we can fully trust Him to keep His promises. So, when He says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24), we can be sure that He will keep that promise, too.

We are always safe in Christ because God always keeps His promises.

YouTube

youtube.com/@FreeGraceAlliance

HAPPENING NOW WITH FGA

April 29th - FGA Regional Conference, Allenwood, NJ

April 30th - Grant Hawley Preaching in London

May 2nd-12th - Grant, Charlie Bing, and Asare Kyei-Baffour at FGA Regional Conferences in South Africa

May 13th-14th - Grant Preaching in Geneva

May 16th-18th - Grant visits Louisiana Baptist University for the 2023 graduation events

May 26th-28th - Grant, Jody Dillow, and Jeremy Vance at the FGA Regional Conference in Portage, WI

June 19th-30th - Grant, Asare, and Mark Haywood at the FGA Regional Conferences in Ghana

September 9th - Grant and Ed Underwood at the FGA Regional Conference in Burleson, TX

Flowers

a poem by

Thani Abuhamad

I had **hemlock** for breakfast...
or so it feels
Many a morning, I'm mourning the tyranny of inner me
Each thought a thread in a tapestry of self-blasphemy
or the normal kind for that matter
See, my legacy: inadequate—I'm a cavity, cancerous,
a factory fashioned to miscarry every good thing
"It's all my fault"
A crackpot hitting every pothole and pitfall on this blacktop that I call my scattered brain
"Thani, hypocrite! How unchristian it is to partake in the masquerade."
I seek rescue from this shrapnel in my mind,
see, I've always stunk at Minesweeper
Who else thinks like me?
With misplaced hopes, victim to their trickery
Subject to the vacuum of anxiety, addiction, apathy: that hellish trilogy
Casualty of the maggoty blackness: the pathogen so known as shame—
endlessly enslaved to its refrain
Wearing emptiness like a necklace smelted from the embers of abandonment
I need a new song

And what more eloquent lyric existed than "God so loved"?
Love of a Father who sent His boy on trek divine
This loyal lover's greatest garden handwoven by complex design
His soil covering clay once dry, **honeysuckle** of heaven's guide
spread for miles by bloody struggle to beckon life
for us, His prize, reconciled:
made alive in Him
Making way for love of Breath assigning new birthstones
Clothing bride in lush silk
The vine abiding in eternal tryst
A kiss, a seal, a fingerprint, He fills—
a flame enabling us to remain in Him
And in that love of One whose veins painted over our plague
Nails broke our chains,
This bronze snake high, splayed wide,
O, great white wolf!
Fangs bite, burn, bane my curse!
Grace died to bear striped birthmarks of a new household
A **sunflower,** Love's power just towered;
ages of estrangement undone in one hour
Proving master, He, at calvary, handcrafted the victory of victories
His wrists bridged rifts no other acts could stitch
This crucifixion cataclysmic for sin and each of its children
so we could be in Him
Our birthright is a new hearth
Childlike, we, in its warmth
with joyous voices, sing,
"God so loves you."
This sunrise gifted us **daffodils**
Hope's petals engraved on every page
A mantra for dawns bright, lullaby for anxious nights
That cross and cave reiterate that He repaved our way to His chamber
The taste of His presence: pleasant—
a nectar endlessly quenching
Faith: its entrance
Take a gamble
I swear this love won't fail you

when grace derails our plans

A Story of Urban Evangelism from a Free Grace Perspective

JEFF WELCH

He was sobbing profusely. His tears dripped from his cheeks onto the dirty subway platform. You've now entered into the story of a man who had no hope, no future, and no concept of God's free grace. It was the end of the line.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

I woke to my dreaded alarm, having slept that night on an old camp mattress on the church floor. My classmates at Word of Life Bible Institute and I were in NYC for a mission trip. Little did I know that this was the day that my life would change forever.

Normally, I'm a morning person. This day, however, began quite differently for me. Of course, I did my usual morning routine. I had quiet time with the Lord, ate breakfast, and brushed my teeth; but all with a shadow of apprehension for what I knew was coming. I love evangelism, and I love serving the Lord, but this would be new. It was my first evangelism trip to the Big Apple with this fearless team of open-air evangelists. My stomach was tied in knots. So, I prayed. I prayed a lot. I prayed that God would use me. I prayed for His grace to break through!

Our team was out the door. We were going to Brooklyn to hand out tracts and tell people about the grace of God on the subway platforms. Don't get me wrong. Though I was totally nerve wracked, I was also excited. I wanted to tell others about the gift of grace I had received.

As we approached the subway station, I began to pray this prayer: "Lord, if someone needs you today, please lead them to me to hear the Gospel." As we entered the station, our team spread out and began to do what we came to do. I distributed many pamphlets, but thought to myself, "Am I just handing these to people so I don't have to talk with anyone?" I leaned up against the wall adjacent to the train tracks and prayed again, "Lord, if someone desperately needs you today, please bring them to me now."

Then I opened my eyes and saw a man swiftly walking with his face buried into the nook of his elbow. It was obvious he was crying and very distressed. I decided to enter his path and proceeded to say to him, "Sir! Some good news to cheer up your morning!" as I presented the gospel tract in my hand. "I don't want that!" he shouted, and with tears still in his eyes, he proceeded to strike the entire stack of flyers from my other hand. If you've ever been in the NYC subway station, you know that the trains push a lot of air through the tunnels. It was in that mechanically produced wind that I desperately flapped my arms around to grab the flyers that were fluttering everywhere.

Full of the Spirit of God, I stood up, and words came out of my mouth that I never would have uttered apart from the boldness of Christ. I sternly bellowed, "STOP NOW! GET BACK HERE!" Chills went up my spine as the man who just slapped all the tracts out of my hand stopped in his tracks. We in open air evangelism call this the "Holy Spirit Halt." Turning around, he came back to me, apologizing. "Never mind," I said, still noticing the tears in his eyes.

"What's your name?"

"My name is Ralph" (name changed for privacy). Then came my next question, "Ralph, if today is your last day to live, where will you go?" He starts panicking. "What do you mean? Why are you asking me that?" I responded, "If today is your last day to live, where will you spend eternity?" An unforgettable response ensued.

"Today is my last day to live. I'm going to kill myself by jumping in front of the next train. You have 30 seconds to impress me."

I grabbed his jacket and sat him down on a bench, asking him this question: "Ralph, why do you want to die?" He responded, "Because I keep sinning against God and can't stop, so, I'd better stop embarrassing Him and send myself to hell." This man knew of the holiness of God, the sinfulness of humanity, and the punishment for sin, but nothing about the free grace of Jesus Christ in the gospel or how to receive it. Therefore, with the Scriptures in hand, we went to the cross. He began to tell me of all the despicable things he had done, even that very morning, but grace. "I've done such evil things you can't even imagine them!" But grace. "But I did this (something I cannot repeat). How can God forgive me!?" Grace! Grace! Grace!

Then, as we read through the Scriptures, his eyes were opened, and he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ to save him. This man heard the gospel in a clear way. He knew Jesus had paid the penalty for his sins and had risen again. He was set free! The grace of God derailed His plans! We wept together as countless tears of joy for the grace of God dripped onto the platform while we kneeled there together.

Ralph then told me something. He said, "You won't believe this, but when I was coming into the station, I sent up one last prayer to God: 'God, if you love me, save me from death.'" That prayer was answered with God's free gift of eternal life. Ralph was snatched out of the fire by the grace of the Lord Jesus.

A PERSONAL NOTE

This was the day that I decided to serve the Lord in open-air evangelism for the rest of my life. My mentor showed me a bible verse right after these events took place: "And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 22-23a).

ABOUT JEFF

Jeff and Phoebe Welch and their 6-month-old daughter are currently living and serving the Lord in evangelism on the European continent. They serve as missionaries with Fellowship International Mission and seek to raise up an army of believers who are actively engaging others with the Free Grace gospel.

If you would like to get to know the Welch family, you can find out more at welchfamilyministry.com.

Thank you

Every day, I wake up thankful for the opportunity to work toward the advancement of the gospel alongside all of you, the Free Grace Alliance members.

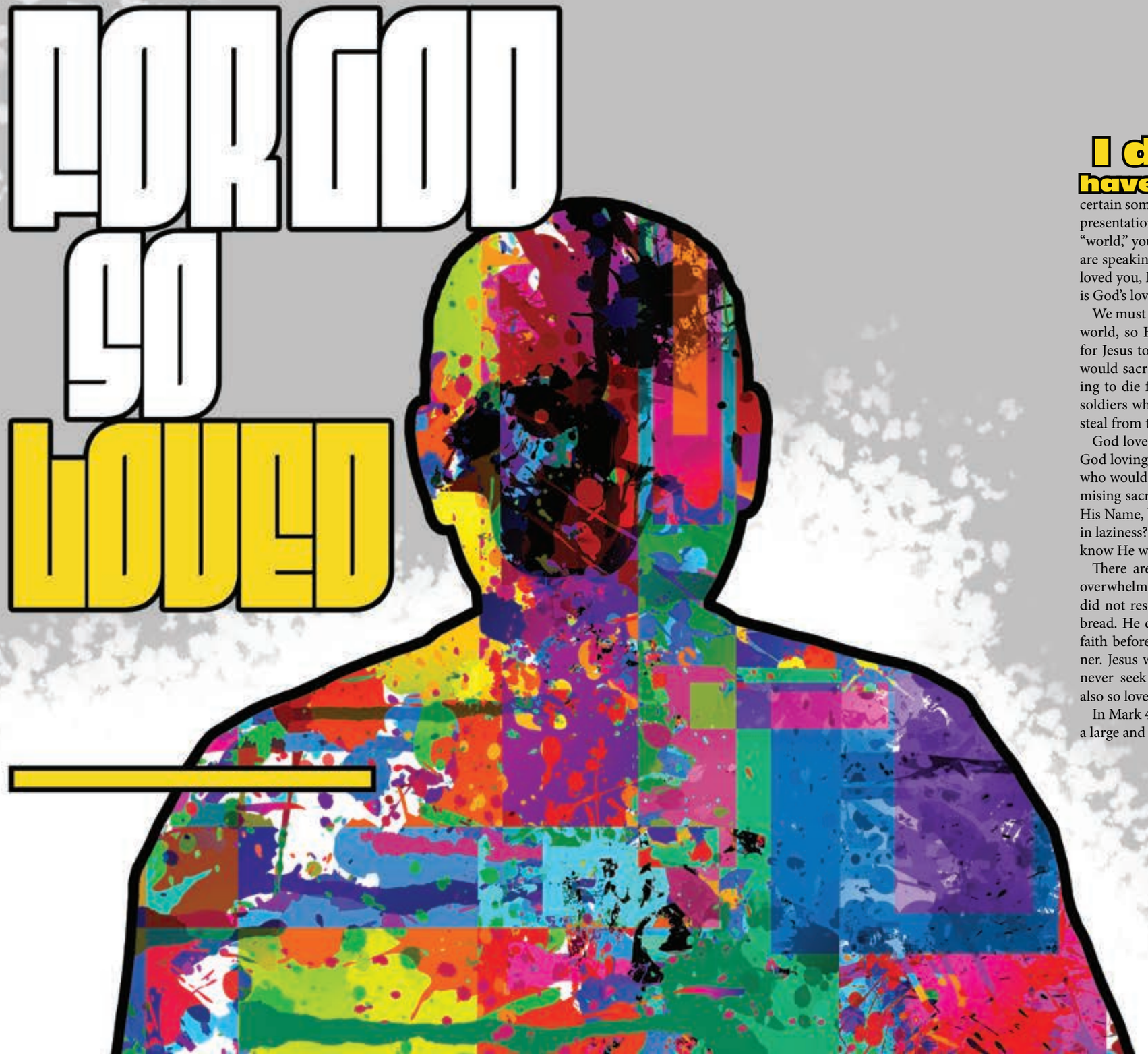
Thank you for your support, your work in volunterring, your help in spreading the word about the Free Grace Alliance, and for your friendship.

You're a blessing to me and the work of sharing grace graciously is so much better when you're doing it with so many wonderful co-laborers.

I pray for you often, and I hope that FGA is a blessing to you, as you are to FGA.

Grant Hawley
Executive Director
Free Grace Alliance

FOR GOD SO LOVED



I don't know if you have done this before, but I am almost certain someone has suggested it to you. Use John 3:16 in your evangelistic presentation and while reading this beloved verse, when you read the word "world," you can leave a blank to be filled with the name of the person you are speaking to. It's not just that God so loved the world, but God also so loved you, Emily, Jacob, Emma, Christopher, Isabella, or Ethan. John 3:16 is God's love for each individual person in the world.

We must all readily admit that it is one thing for Jesus to love the entire world, so He would offer them His eternal life, but it is another thing for Jesus to love and offer His life to you as an individual. Many people would sacrifice their lives to save thousands, but they would be unwilling to die for the angry neighbor who lives across the street. There are soldiers who would die for their country, but might come home only to steal from their fellow citizens.

God loves the world, but does this mean He loves me? I could imagine God loving the world enough to offer His love to an elect group of people who would profess unshakeable faith in Him and live a life of uncompromising sacrifice. Would He do the same for the person who has mocked His Name, belittled those made in His image, or just slept their lives away in laziness? Jesus loves the world enough to die for the them, but how do I know He would die for me?

There are a series of events in the Gospel of Mark that present the overwhelming grace and love of Christ for unlovable individuals. Jesus did not reserve His mercy for the crowds of 5,000 who ate His fish and bread. He didn't wait around for the military leaders to show incredible faith before He unveiled His grace. Jesus sought out the one lonely sinner. Jesus went out of His way to be merciful to the outcast who would never seek Him. Jesus shows us how God so loved the one, and He also so loves you.

In Mark 4, Jesus tells a series ofparables to a very large crowd. Jesus built a large and passionate following through His miracles and teachings.



The crowds pushed on Him to such a degree that Jesus taught from a boat off the shore. As the crowds clamored for more, at the end of the day's teaching, Jesus left. He called the disciples and made for the opposite side of the lake away from the crowd.

During the overnight journey across the Sea of Galilee, a fierce storm passed over and threatened to send a ship crewed by experienced fishermen to their doom at the bottom of the lake. Somehow, Jesus slept in the middle of the chaos. When hope seemed lost, the disciples woke their teacher and pleaded for His compassion in the storm. Compassion was delivered in the most unexpected and brilliant of commands. Jesus commanded the sea to calm down, and the sea obeyed. A raging storm fell before the voice of its Master and transformed into a silent seascape.

Jesus commanded the sea to calm down, and the sea obeyed. A raging storm fell before the voice of its Master

The following morning, Jesus and the disciples arrived on the other side of the lake in the region of Gadarenes. There was no crowd to meet them. No one was carrying lame friends to Jesus. The blind weren't being led to His hands. Lepers weren't calling for mercy. There was only one in Mark 5:2. "And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit," (NKJV). The verb used by Mark for this meeting is a generic word meaning "to meet up with someone." It could refer to intentionally approaching someone, running into someone by chance, or even two hostile armies meeting to go to war. Therefore, it is doubtful that this man of the tombs met Jesus to listen to His teaching or watch miracles in wonder. He appears to be an insane, spiritually afflicted man who simply ran into an encounter with Jesus.

Now, if Jesus loved the world and the crowds instead of the lost and even hostile individual, this would be a perfect chance to skip past this guy and go to the population center of Gadarenes. If Jesus loved the world and not each person, Mark 5:1-20 probably would never be counted as a noteworthy story to include in the miraculous stories of Jesus. Since God so loved you, the events to follow are more than worth the price of admission.

The unclean man falls before Jesus, seeking to be left alone. Jesus has other plans as He seeks to restore this afflicted one. Mark 5:8-13 records the supernatural conversion by Jesus as He deals with a host of demons who have afflicted this one man and together go by the name Legion. The Legion is cast out of the man they have abused and misused, and they are sent into a herd of pigs feeding on the mountainside. The demons now drive the pigs, rushing them off the bank of the cliff and into the Sea of Galilee. The unclean man is lovingly healed through this act, but Jesus has a new problem.

The herdsmen of the pigs run into the populated town center of Gadarenes and inform the town of Jesus' actions on the countryside. They return to find the local maniac healed, but 2,000 pigs gone. No one asked the townsmen if they were willing to sacrifice the wealth of 2,000 pigs to heal a single man, and it appears that they were not prepared to make that deal. They beg Jesus to leave, and Mark 5:20 tells us "He went away." One man is healed, and Jesus goes back to the opposite shore where our story began.

Notice what happens from Mark 4:35-5:20. Jesus journeyed across the Sea of Galilee overnight. The disciples cower in fear over a storm, and Jesus completes a miracle never to be equaled or duplicated by any other person in all of history. He stops a storm by divine command. Jesus arrives in Gadarenes, and He casts an entire legion of demons out of a man. He sends those demons into a herd of pigs causing a massive financial loss on the people in Gadarenes, and He leaves with one man left to tell the story.

Jesus does all of this to heal one person—one person who didn't seek Him, didn't desire Him, who only asked Jesus to go away and stop tormenting Him. For God so loved the unnamed maniac of Gadarenes that He sent His only begotten Son to heal his mind and bring freedom to his life. God loved the world, but His world includes the unnamed, the overburdened, the mentally unstable, and the social outcast.

Mark 4:35-5:20 highlights the depth of God's love to go along with the breadth of God's love. God isn't just loving to crowds of thousands, nations of millions, and a world of billions. God is loving to the social outcast. God loves the person who would be traded for a fresh herd of pigs if his neighbors had any say. God sent Jesus to the sick, hurting, lost, and fearful men and women whose names aren't even significant enough to be recorded in the Gospels. Jesus loved them all, and Jesus loves deep enough to love you too.

How can you know, "For God so loves me, even me?" You can look at the lengths Jesus went for one unnamed man in Gadarenes, so you can be confident in God's love for the individual sinner. Jesus crossed the lake, calmed the storm, sent the demons packing, not to put on a show for His fans or to gain a new collection of followers. He did it all to love one man, and He offers the same love to each person to this very day.

Have confidence in Christ's love for every person in the world. Have confidence in Christ's love for you even if you have struggled with the most shameful of sins since the day when you first believed. Have confidence in Christ's love for your neighbor who displays the hardest of hearts that you have ever seen. Continue to show grace to that one, because the moment they believe in Christ—in love God will give them Christ's eternal life and protect their eternal souls from ever perishing.

Next time the devil tempts you to doubt the depth of God's love for a sinner like you or God's love for the sinner you would prefer to cast aside in your life, remember how far Jesus went to save the maniac in Gadarenes. Remember how Jesus calmed the storm to make it to the tombs where so much violence and shame had been found. Remember how Jesus went to battle against a legion of the devil's own troops. Then you tell the devil, **"If Jesus so loved the maniac of Gadarenes like this, I know He loves me too."**



IN A LETTER TO A FRENCH POLITICAL HISTORIAN, Benjamin Franklin commented on the new constitution of the United States: "Our constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said certain, except death and taxes."

This is exactly what I'd expect from a great man with the worldview of Benjamin Franklin. Though ole Ben liked the idea of God and the teachings of Jesus, he wasn't buying into the idea that the Bible was God's Word or that Jesus was God's Son. It was this world which mattered most to Franklin because it was all he was sure of.

And if all you know for certain is this world and what you see in it and what you think about it in your own mind, then Franklin's maxim is absolutely true: In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.

We Christians claim that this world isn't all there is. We claim to believe that what we see and hear and think isn't the final reality. We claim to embrace Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Bible as His Word.

Really?

THEN WHY?

Then why is it that every time I turn on my computer some Christian is forwarding me a "chicken-little" email from a high-profile Christian leader that tells me the sky is falling because the President or another elected official is raising our taxes?

Then why does the most listened to Christian drive-time talk radio host rant day after day about the evils of big government instead of the evils of Satan's strongholds in our neighborhoods and the church's failure to make a significant difference?

Then why do so many Christians worry more about the day they file their taxes than they worry about the day of Christ when they will stand before Him and give an account of their lives to Him?

We're supposed to be the ones who live above the cares and challenges of this world because our eye is on another Kingdom in the world to come.

LAST TIME I CHECKED...

The last time I checked, we serve another King Who is coming soon…very soon. And when He shows up and I stand before Him, suddenly every concern I ever had about this world, my comfort, my rights, and yes even taxes, will seem small, petty, and selfish.

Because they are! In fact, according to Paul, they're just "rubbish." So what are you most concerned about? Your bank account after taxes, or your ledger of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Your accountant's, "I think we saved you a lot of money?" or your Lord's, "Well done?"

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." –Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:17

RECENTERED
GROUP



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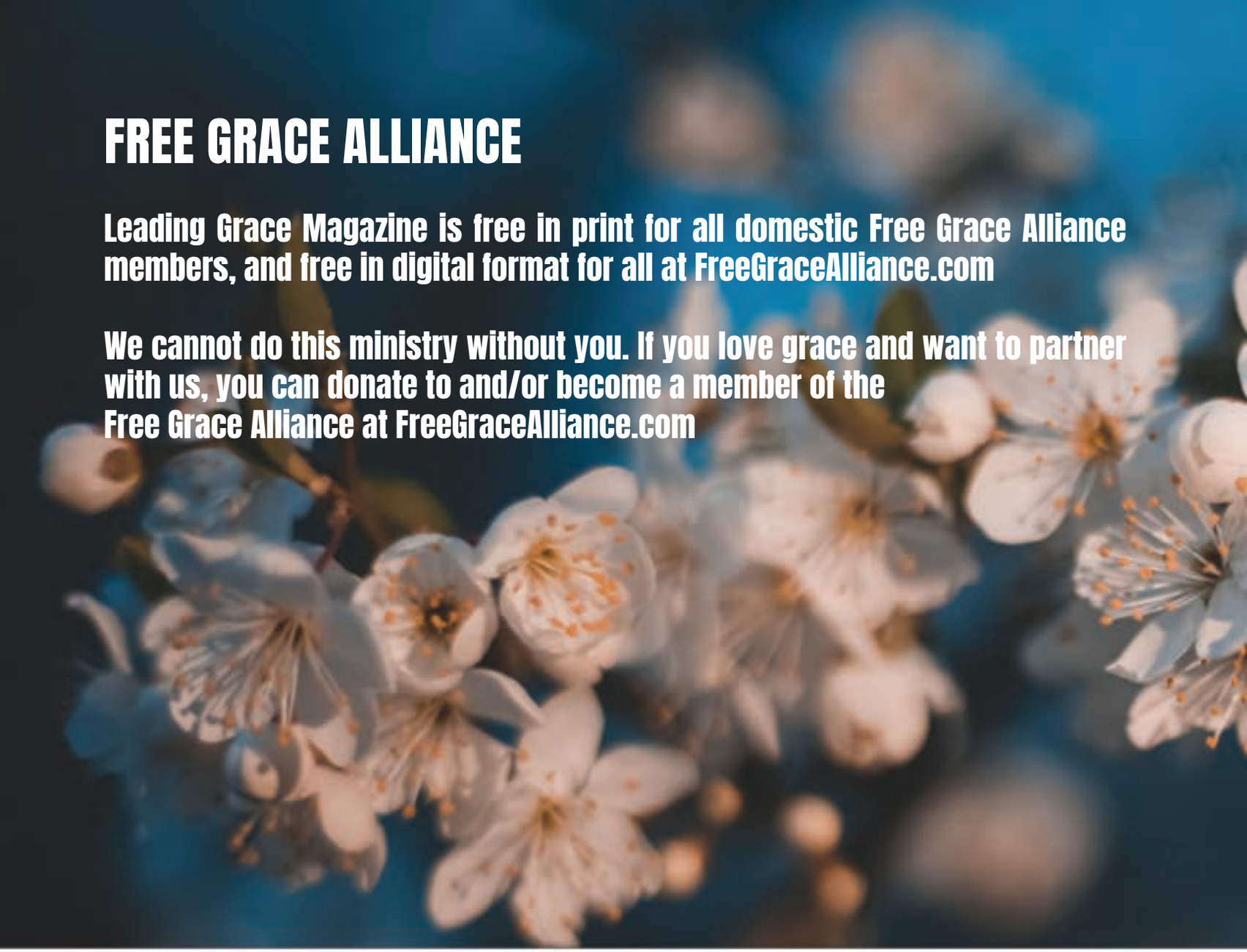
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