

My Heart Cries Out: Gospel Meditations for Everyday Life

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TO JESUS

You have done what nothing or no one has been able to do.

You have turned my life into verse

and my journey into song.

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Preface

I am not a poet; I am a pilgrim.

I am not attracted to formal, overly romantic Christian verse, but I think that we do not train our eyes to see enough, our hearts to consider enough, and our emotions to celebrate enough the glories of the grace that is showered down on us in a thousand ways every day. What you are about to read are notes from my journey through the struggle of God's amazing grace. These are my meditations on the intersection between God's ever-present grace and my ever-present battle to live out of the resources of that grace while I walk my way through this sadly broken and dysfunctional world.

You may be wondering why I used both the words "glories" and "struggle" to describe a life of grace. Well, God's grace is glorious. It is the single stellar glory of the life of God's children. There is no glory in this created world, no matter how beautiful, that can compete with the beauty of God's rescuing, forgiving, transforming, empowering, and delivering grace. There is no human achievement, no personal accomplishment, and no community victory that can do for us what God's grace can do. There is nothing that we can be given that can accomplish in us and for us what God's grace can. The love of no one in our lives has the power to do what the amazing grace of God's boundless love can do for us. This grace really is so counterintuitive and mind-blowing that we will spend all of eternity performing exegesis on it, celebrating it, and worshiping the Giver for it.

Yet, between the "already" of our conversion and the "not yet" of our home-going, God's grace doesn't always look like grace. Instinctively we think that God's grace will be a warm hug, a cool drink, an encouraging word, or a motivating insight. We look

for grace to relieve and release us, and sometimes it does, but God's grace regularly comes to us in uncomfortable forms. God's grace causes us to face things in ourselves that are hard to see, consider, accept, and confess. Often God's grace takes us into things we would like to avoid, things that are hard, discouraging, and sad. God's grace will not only give us wonderful gifts, but it will also take precious things away from us. It will not only tell us the best news ever, it will also force us to accept the worst news we could ever be told. It will not only tell us that God is strong, but it will remind us of how weak we are without him. It will not only gift us with incredible wisdom, it will require us to face the fact that sin reduces all of us to fools. God's grace will not only introduce us to the only one in the entire universe that is truly worthy of our worship, but will also expose the catalog of God's replacements that regularly capture the affections of our hearts.

One of the primary struggles of the Christian life is this; grace doesn't always seem attractive to us. You see, there is often a difference between what we think we need and what our God of grace knows that we need. And even if we are right in knowing what we need, we fail to understand what is necessary to produce that needed thing in us. So, often we'd rather have a season when life is easy, predictable, and the people around us are drama-free, then we would like to have a season where transforming grace takes us to new depths of humility, understanding, maturity, and worship. So in each of our lives grace is both a glory and a struggle.

What you are about to read are my honest meditations on that struggle. They are my spontaneous responses to my journey through glory and struggle. They are:

celebratory hymns
disappointing cries
pleas for help
groans of confusion
shouts of joy
theological mediations
desperate requests
heartfelt confessions
hope for help in temptation
quiet contemplations
honest notes along the journey

They were not written as I sat looking out the window of my country cottage (I don't have one of those) over a pastoral scene on a poet's retreat. They were written:

early in the morning
late at night
in physical suffering
waiting for tea at Starbucks
on the plane
in the car
in the middle of a meal
when my heart was broken
when my heart was filled with joy
when I was at the end of my rope
when what was around me was hard
when what I saw in me caused grief
when God seemed distant

when I saw my sin clearly
when I basked in God's forgiveness
when weakness seemed in me and all around me
when I knew God was near
when resting in grace was a struggle
when I knew I'd have strength for the battle
when grace seemed glorious after all

These meditations have been generating and marinating for years. They are the transparent interactions of one man with the Savior of grace. My hope is that this volume will help you to see the Savior more clearly, to understand his grace more deeply, to confess your struggle more honestly, to worship him more fully, and to find in these meditations the motivation to continue to follow the Savior even when he's leading you into unexpected and hard places. My prayer is that these mediations will stimulate a worship, rest, and celebration in you that the difficulties of life, this side of eternity, will not have the power to end.

My Heart Cries Out

My heart cries out,
but I am not
afraid,
discouraged,
panicked,
forgotten,
alone,
dismayed,
or doubtful
because in the din
of a million voices
from every place
in every situation
young and old
crying day and night
in weakness,
in alienation,
in fear,
and in distress,
you are not
overwhelmed,
you are not
distracted,
you are not
disgusted,
you are not
discouraged,
you are not
exhausted.
But you listen,
you hear,
you attend to
my cry
in tenderness of

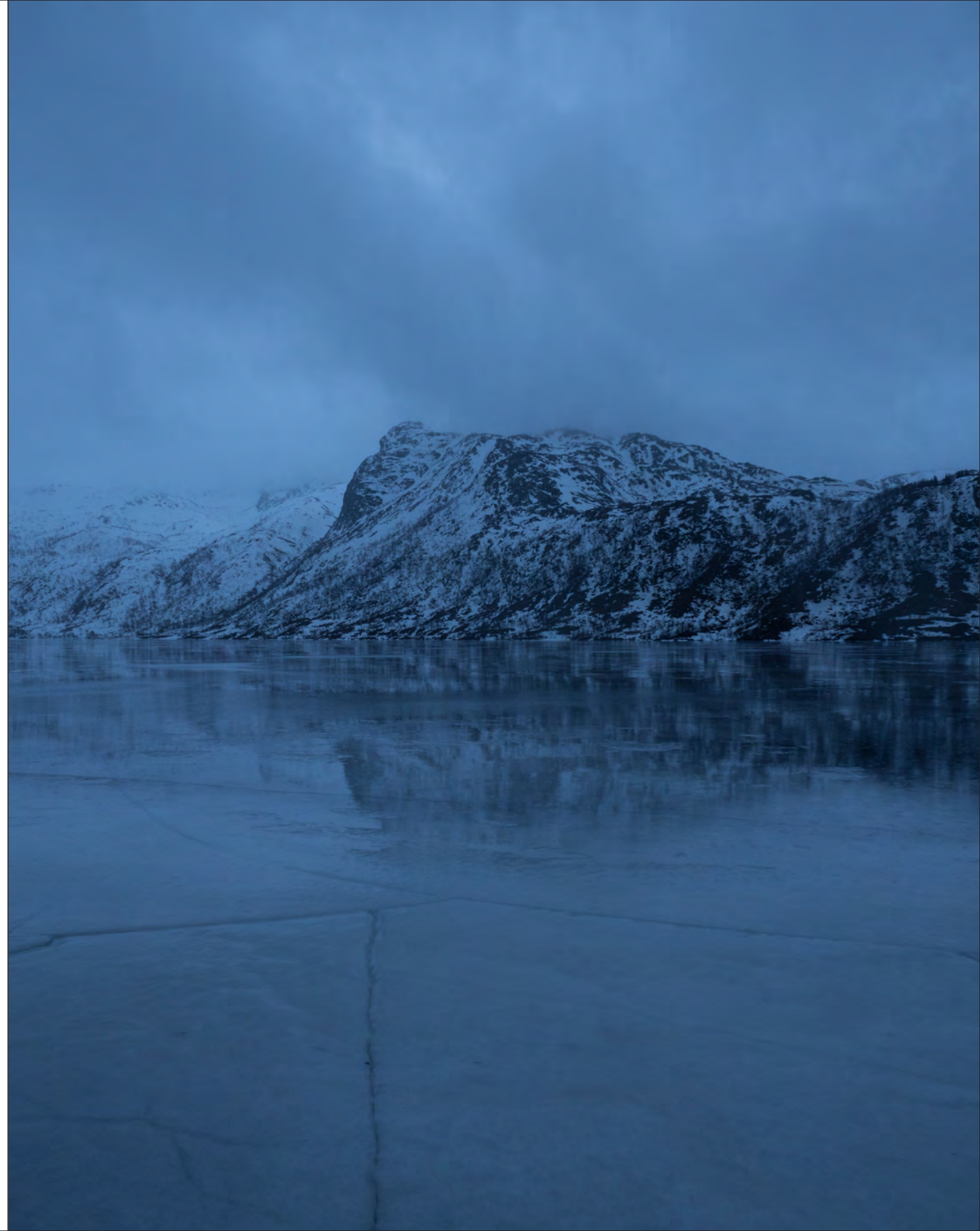
mercy,
in patience of
spirit,
and with generosity of
love
you listen to my
plea
and you never
turn
away.
But with power and wisdom
and the tender heart of a
Savior,
you do this amazing thing—
you answer.

*For the eyes of the Lord are on the
righteous,
and his ears are open to their
prayer. (1 Pet. 3:12)*

When do you cry out to the Lord?

Do you ever slip into thinking that
the Lord might be “overwhelmed,”
“distracted,” “discouraged,” or
“exhausted” by your situation?

For further study and encouragement,
read Genesis 16.



Hope

The only hope,
the only help,
the only rescue,
the only healing,
the only solace,
the only balm,
the only redemption,
the only restoration
for a broken,
dysfunctional,
sin-scared,
evil-infected,
morally fallen,
dark, and dangerous
world
isn't found in
information,
socialization,
education,
political solution,
psychological insight,
or personal reformation,
but in the willing
birth,
righteousness,
humiliation,
suffering,
sacrifice,
and resurrection
of a God-man Redeemer.
No idea can liberate,

no power can save,
no institution can redeem,
restore,
resuscitate,
or recreate
what sin has destroyed.
So a son had to come.
Son of God.
Son of Man.
The Creator
came to recreate.
The Savior came to be
the sacrifice.
The blessed one
came to suffer
and in suffering
to bless the world with hope,
help,
rescue,
healing,
solace,
balm,
redemption,
and restoration.
The cost of it all was
his life.
It was his birth mission,
his resurrection victory.
History marched toward his coming;
there was no other way.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.
(Rom. 15:13)*

What are common things you turn to as a source of hope, that ultimately fall short when compared to the hope Christ offers you?

Think through or journal about the ways Christ has brought you hope.

For further study and encouragement, read 1 Corinthians 15.



First

It's not first about my
religious acts,
my spiritual duty, or the
degree of my obedience.
It's not first about what
I believe,
the precision of my theology,
or the truthfulness of the creed
I embrace.
It's not first about what
I give,
the regularity of my charity,
or the amount of my benevolence.
It's not first about
my teaching, my preaching,
or the truths that I have shared with
others.
It's not first about
my humility, my faithfulness,
or the extent of my obedience.
It's first about you—
your righteousness,
your wisdom,
your power,
your authority,
your grace—and how
you have unleashed all of them for
my forgiveness,
my rescue,
my redemption.
My life is no longer about
me,
it is first and foremost about
you.

*For by grace you have been saved
through faith. And this is not your
own doing; it is the gift of God, not
a result of works, so that no one may
boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)*

What elements of your spiritual and
religious life are you most likely to
pride yourself in?

How can you go about today making
sure Jesus is first in your life?

For further study and encouragement,
read John 13:1-20.