

# Grace & Peace (February 26 – March 1)

Lenten Devotions 2024

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*Note: Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the English Standard Version.*

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## Second Week of Lent—Monday, February 26

*You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked ... and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*

Ephesians 2:1-5

### The Innocent One

Do you know anyone who has been made alive? Perhaps that question brings to mind stories of people who have had near-death experiences and come back to tell about them. Books and movies dramatize some of these remarkable accounts. They sound so amazing that we wonder if they can really be true.

Did you ever consider that you have a “made alive” story to tell? St. Paul says that all of us who are believers in Jesus had been dead until God made us alive. This death-to-life miracle doesn’t refer to physical death and life but to spiritual death and life. We are born into this world physically alive but spiritually dead, bearing the legacy of Adam’s fall. *“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”* (Romans 5:12).

If a dead being is going to be made alive, it is obvious that life must come from an outside source. And that is exactly what happened. *“God showed his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). His sinless life, His perfect sacrifice on Calvary, His victory on Easter morning brought us from death to life.

And why did God do this? Because He is rich in mercy. Because He loves us with a very great love. Because He was willing to let His Son die so that we might live with Him forever. Indeed, we have a marvelous, miraculous “made alive” story to tell!

**Dear Savior, Help me not to take lightly the price by which You made me alive and made me Your own. Amen.**

## Tuesday, February 27

*God made us alive together with Christ ... so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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.*

Ephesians 2:5b, 7-9

### **Kindness Forever**

Yesterday we considered the miracle that we have been made alive spiritually through the death of Christ. It is a miracle, a wonder! Today's Scripture reading asks us to consider another wonder. Our salvation by grace will tell of God's kindness forever. Listen to how the New Living Translation expresses Ephesians 2:7— *"God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus."*

Somehow, through all eternity, our ransomed souls will testify that God is kind, loving and rich in grace. But we don't have to wait until eternity to proclaim this; it is a wonder that God wants made known to all people everywhere.

Perhaps there is someone in your life who needs to hear about God's love and kindness, about the riches of His grace, about the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. There are many ways to share this good news. You can proclaim God's love when you help a neighbor in need, when you share an encouraging Scripture with a coworker who is going through a rough time, or when you invite a friend to worship with you. You can also proclaim the good news when you simply tell who Jesus is in your life and what He has done for you.

Our God is rich in kindness! Let's tell others!

**Thank You, gracious Lord, for showing kindness to me in so many ways. Help me to proclaim Your love to someone today. Amen.**

## Wednesday, February 28

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Ephesians 2:10

### **God's Workmanship**

Lucy didn't like her confirmation verse. What did Ephesians 2:10 have to do with a 13-year-old? She had been raised poor, on a farm in South Dakota during the Great Depression. Later the family moved to a city, living in one- or two-room apartments to make ends meet. Times were hard, but what the family lacked in material wealth was more than made up for in simple pleasures, in family togetherness, and in a shared faith in Christ.

Fast forward many years. Lucy sat at a Christian conference listening to a pastor speak on Ephesians 2:10. To help the group understand the Scripture verse, he suggested various synonyms for workmanship, such as handiwork, masterpiece, and work of art. "Could this be true?" Lucy thought. "Could I be God's masterpiece?"

Yes, it is true—for Lucy, for you, and for me. God has fashioned each of us uniquely and with intentionality. He has a purpose for each of our lives. He has even prepared in advance at least some of the good works He wants us to do. This may mean He has a very specific call on your life, to serve Him in a specific place or to be passionate about a particular cause. It may mean He will use your gifts as a teacher or carpenter or public servant to help and bless other people. It may mean He is using you even when you have no idea it is happening.

Whether you feel your purpose is ordinary or extraordinary, you can walk in it by faith. Wherever you find yourself, look for the good works God has for you today.

**Dear Jesus, Make me a blessing to someone today. Amen.**

## Thursday, February 29

*Remember that at one time you Gentiles...were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*

Ephesians 2:11-14

### **He Is Our Peace**

We don't have to look far to find people groups who are at odds with one another. Ethnic or racial strife. Political or cultural extremes. Actual violence and war. They are all around us.

The enmity Paul describes was between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, between Jews and Gentiles. The people of Paul's time certainly understood that. But Paul wanted to communicate something they may have found harder to understand. Those who are at odds can be at peace. Those who have been divided can be as one. Paul declares that Christ himself makes peace between the hostile parties by reconciling both to God through the cross—peace with God *for those who were far* (the Gentiles) and peace with God *for those who were near* (the Jews).

We know it wasn't easy for Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ to unite in the early church. The book of Acts highlights some of the challenges that arose. But the differences they had to work through didn't alter the reality of their unity. They were children of the same heavenly Father. They belonged to the same spiritual family. They were headed to the same eternal home.

Perhaps there is a brother or sister in the Lord with whom you disagree on some topics. Perhaps there is someone in your church you find hard to love or someone who (unaccountably!) finds you hard to love. Please don't build up a wall of defensiveness or wait for a chance to get even. God has a better way: Let the bond you share in Christ be the peace between you.

**Dear Lord, You know it is hard to be at peace with certain people. Help me to adopt an attitude of humility and grace. Amen.**

## Friday, March 1

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:19-21

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### **A Dwelling Place**

What is your home made of? Wood or brick or concrete? If we lived in another part of the world, we might include tin or mud or even ice as home-building options!

But today's reading talks about a dwelling made of people, or "living stones" as the apostle Peter put it. Peter and Paul use the same language about this dwelling place. Jesus is the cornerstone. The apostles and prophets are the foundation. And all believers are part of the structure that is being built.

Paul describes the believers as fellow citizens and members of God's household, as those who are being joined together. In other words, we aren't isolated, and we aren't independent. We need each other. We are being built together. We each have a place where we belong. We each have something to contribute. That is God's design for His dwelling place.

Paul also makes clear the purpose God has for this dwelling place. He intends to live there! In fact, He already does. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. This is true individually and also corporately when we gather as the body of Christ. God, through His Spirit, is as close to us as He could possibly be! No wonder Paul reminds us so often of God's grace and peace, since the Holy Spirit, the giver of these gifts, dwells within us.

**Holy Spirit, Thank You for dwelling within me and bringing me grace and peace. May our church also be a place where grace and peace flow and where it is evident that You live among us. Amen.**