

# “God’s Relentless Love”

*Luke 19:1-10*

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October 16, 2022

God’s love is relentless. God’s grace is infinite. God’s forgiveness, healing, and mending will make dynamic every relationship. God is transforming each one of us and the cosmos to weave us all together in vibrant harmony.

Even the most despised, outcast, the most notorious sinner, will feast with Jesus, be transformed, and one day have an equal place in the heavenly kingdom. Experiencing God’s grace fills one with great excitement and joy. So, no matter what you have done, no matter what you have failed to do, no matter who you are, no matter who you wished you were, but are not, you are accepted and belong to God’s family. You will be washed cleaned, raised to abundant life, and welcomed into invigorating community.

If you feel like Zacchaeus, grace will lead you home. If you feel like a grumbler, that objects, “God, why by gracious to them?,” “Why seat them beside me as an equal?” You also are desperately in need of God’s relentless love and infinite grace to wash away your comparisons, judgment and justifications. No matter who you are, you will be saved. Amen

## “All Made Possible by Grace”

*2 Thessalonians 1:1-4 & 11-12*

We are grateful for every way someone is growing in love. We are grateful for these confirmands who are confirming the baptism promise. God’s promise is ever sure and eternal. We all will be cleansed by the grace of baptism and rise to glorious life. Our side of the promise is often broken and needs renewal. We continually fail to love, so we gather to worship, to support and encourage each other, to share our gratitude for the ways we are loving, to receive God’s perfecting grace and to give all praise, honor, and glory to God. We pray for each other. Soon each confirmand will make a banner that will be displayed in our churches. A reminder for us to pray for the confirmands, pray for each other, and pray for all people. Maybe our prayers will echo aspects of the Apostle Paul’s prayer for us. God chose you. We pray for God to help you do all the good things you hope to do and your faith makes you want to do. Grace is behind and through all of this, our God giving Godself freely. We are grateful and praise God as we come to realize that all is made possible by grace. Amen

## “The Joy of Thrilling to God’s Word”

*Psalms 1*

The first psalm explains two ways to live life. The fork in the road seems small and subtle at first yet over a lifetime often leads to ways of living that are polar opposite. One becomes either windblown dust or a tree rooted by a nourishing stream producing abundant fruit.

One becomes a fruitful tree that withstands every windstorm by thrilling to God’s Word, by daily taking in the nourishment of scripture. The world is messy full of hardship, setbacks, difficult situations, disasters, and damaged relationships. Everyone’s life gets blasted with a variety of violent windstorms. Without the nourishment of God’s Word, one is rootless, tossed about by the wind, leading to a miserable life.

Without God’s word assuring us that love will ultimately triumph and that every form of goodness and love endures forever, worry can overwhelm. Without God’s word assuring us that God is always with us, that God will never leave or abandon us, anxiety can imprison. Without God’s word teaching us how to forgive, to let go and live each moment as a fresh start, resentment can diminish joy. Without God’s word assuring us that we are forgiven, that we belong to God’s family, guilt can crush. Without God’s word explaining God’s delight in creating each person uniquely, with a different personality, different perceptions, different dreams and equal, comparisons can cause one to try to be like another, untrue to their unique goodness. Without God’s word explaining that the image of God, goodness, is in every person, distrust can lead to division, judgements, exclusion, and wall building. Without God’s word proclaiming that every person will be perfected by God’s grace, grumbling can grow with despising of some.

Without God's word declaring that every good work you do expands the goodness of the cosmos, discouragement can sap energy. Without God's word describing how every disease will be healed, every imperfection perfected, every tear wiped away, suffering can diminish life. Without God's word promising that Jesus is your friend, partner, and helper in carrying every burden, weight can crush. Without God's word declaring that every good dream will be fulfilled and that every loss will be enjoyed again, sadness can cripple. Without God's word proclaiming Easter, that every form of death will be resurrected, that every person will be resurrected by God's redeeming grace, and enjoy eternity in heaven, grief can overwhelm. Without God's word declaring God's desire to shower us with blessing, delight can be fleeting. Without God's word declaring God's steadfast eternal love, loneliness can isolate. Without God's word declaring the cosmos is full of "love you" notes that God delights in us savoring God's gifts and that God desires that we live abundantly, joy can be fleeting. Without God's word declaring abundance, that there is more than enough if we share, hoarding can bury. Without God's word declaring that you are a beloved, cherished, wonderful, magnificent child of God, self-esteem can plummet. Without God's word declaring that we are all one family, who will come together to complete each other, fear can lead to hate and hate can lead to violence. Without God's word urging us to love our self, we can beat ourselves up. Without God's word urging us to love all people, community can be elusive. Without God's word urging us to love God, life can lose meaning. These are merely a few ways thrilling to God's word enhances life. There are many more. The Bible is living word, made relevant to your life by the Holy Spirit. Often a section of scripture will have evolving insights and invitations from God when you read it at another time. Reading the entire Bible gives context, enabling one to see the theme of God's redeeming grace freely offered to all people and not get bogged down in the messiness of particular accounts. God's word has an infinite array of grace insights for you and for all.

Usually, one more fully perceives the abundant life in God's word when they pray. Perhaps, this is why these insights are in the first psalm. All 150 psalms are prayers, poetry, most rhyme in Hebrew, most were sung repeatedly, memorized, and utilized to pray throughout the day. Prayer is talking and listening to God. The psalms show us that prayer includes anger and frustration with God, ranting and raving, weeping and confessing, dancing and laugh. All emotions are expressed to God in the psalms. When one vents to God, laughs with God, loves with God, often one perceives life-giving answers from God.

Pastor Riz, David, and I believe reading God's word and praying daily are so vital to abundant life that we urge each confirmand to read at least one verse of scripture every day and pray. If a confirmand does nothing else, if a confirmand only is motivated to read and pray every day, even if a confirmand decides to not be confirmed yet reads the bible and prays every day, I will consider a time together to be a success, that they have discovered a key to abundant life.

When one thrills to God's word the brain disengages from stress. Life quiets down to the unforced rhythms of grace. Problems seem to evaporate. One discovers new layers of their self, new bursts of energy, new aspects of love. God's word is a fire that incinerates toxins, stresses, burdens, and a fire that gives passion, guidance, and purpose. Thrilling to God's Word corals the negative thoughts and enables us to let them go so our mind is receptive to positive thoughts. Thrilling to God's word changes the lens through which we perceive, enabling us to let go of all that diminishes life so we can enjoy all that enhances life. Thrilling to God's word enables one to shift from doing what one does not want to do to doing the good they desire.

When one ignores God's Word, they are rootless, their thoughts can become more and more negative, fear can grow into hate, hate into violence. Psalm 1 uses harsh labels for people who choose this path, blind as bats, sinners, know-it-alls, wicked, mere windblown dust, without defense in court, unfit company for innocent people and on the road that leads to nowhere. They live a miserable life. And I believe that everyone who chooses this path will still be welcomed home by God's grace at some point.

Thrilling to God's word does not diminish the droughts, the dark nights of the soul of life, it replants us along a river that always provides living water. Thrilling to God's word does not diminish violent, terrifying windstorms, it replants us with Jesus in a woods of Bible readers who will weather every storm with us. Thrilling to God's word does not diminish the struggle of life, it transforms us to ever growing hope, peace, joy, and love that enables us to produce fruit in every season, to fulfill every goodness God has instilled in us. Happy, blessed, joyful are those who thrill to God's word. Amen