



FRIENDSHIP UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

22 W. Friendship Rd., Friendship, MD 20758

— SEPTEMBER SERMON SERIES —

The Way of *Grace*

Where Jesus Leads, We Follow



WALKING THE WAY OF GRACE

30 DAYS OF FOLLOWING JESUS



A 30-DAY DEVOTIONAL

SEPTEMBER 1-30, 2026

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Before We Begin the Journey

Grace and peace,

Throughout September, I invite you to join me in **Walking the Way of Grace: 30 Days of Following Jesus**.

Jesus never simply invited people to believe certain things about him. Again and again, Jesus offered a deeply personal invitation: **“Follow me.”** Following Jesus leads us into the places where faith becomes real: our relationships, our hurts, our willingness to forgive, the way we respond to the blessings of others, and the choices we make each day.

Our journey is rooted in Scripture. The Sunday Gospel readings come from the Revised Common Lectionary appointed for September, and each week’s daily Scriptures have been selected to help us explore more deeply the Gospel lesson and its invitation for our lives. In this way, our devotional journey throughout the week will prepare us for Sunday worship and then help us continue living with the Word in the days that follow.

During these thirty days, we will discover together that **grace goes toward, grace lets go, grace gives generously, and grace says yes**. Each day offers Scripture, a brief reflection, a practical step, prayer, and a question to carry with you throughout the day.

My prayer is not simply that we complete thirty devotionals. My prayer is that we draw closer to Jesus and allow the grace we have received to become increasingly visible in the lives we live.

That journey also reflects who we are called to be at Friendship:

“Grow as Disciples, Serve as Friends. Love All; Serve All; Follow One!”

Our mission is more than words we share. It is a way of living out our faith together. As we grow as disciples, may we learn more deeply what it means to follow Jesus. As we serve as friends, may the grace we have received become grace that we freely extend to others.

We may not always know where the road will lead, but we know the One we are following.

So, church family, let us begin this journey together.

Where Jesus leads, we follow.

Blessings,

Pastor Rudy

Rev. Dr. Rudolph H. White, Jr.

Friendship United Methodist Church

DAY 1 • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

Come, Follow Me

Matthew 4:18–22 (NRSVUE)

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.’”
— Matthew 4:19

Along the Way

Before taking a trip, most of us want to know where we are going. We enter the destination into the GPS, look at the route, estimate how long the journey will take, and perhaps check where we will stop along the way.

Imagine being asked to begin a journey without being given the destination.

No map. No itinerary. No explanation of every turn ahead.

Only someone saying, “**Follow me.**”

That is what happened one ordinary day beside the Sea of Galilee.

The Word for the Way

Peter and Andrew were casting their nets when Jesus approached them. Fishing was their livelihood. Their nets represented work, security, routine, and the life they knew.

Then Jesus said, “**Follow me.**”

Jesus did not give them a detailed plan or explain everything that awaited them. Matthew simply tells us, “**Immediately they left their nets and followed him.**”

That may be one of the most challenging parts of discipleship. We often want God to show us the outcome before we take the first step. We want to know whether the other person will respond before we seek reconciliation. We want assurance that forgiveness will make the hurt disappear. We want to know if there will be enough before we become generous. We want to know what obedience will cost before we say yes.

But following Jesus has never depended upon seeing the entire road.

It depends upon trusting the One who leads us.

During these next thirty days, Jesus will lead us into the way of grace. We will encounter difficult relationships, wrestle with forgiveness, confront comparison, practice generosity, and ask whether the yes we speak with our lips is visible in the lives we live.

We do not need to know everything that lies ahead.

We begin with the same invitation Jesus gave beside the sea:

“Follow me.”

Faith does not always mean knowing where the road leads. Sometimes faith means knowing whom we are following.

Walking the Way

Take a quiet moment today and open your hands before God as a simple sign of willingness.

Ask:

“Jesus, where are you asking me to follow you today?”

You do not need to figure out the whole journey. Listen for the next faithful step, and ask for the courage to take it.

Prayer

Gracious Jesus, thank you for meeting me where I am and inviting me to follow. When I want to see the whole road before taking the next step, teach me to trust you. Give me courage to follow wherever your grace leads. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Where might Jesus be asking me to take the next faithful step, even though I cannot yet see the whole road?

DAY 2 • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

Grace Found You First

Ephesians 2:8–10 (NRSVUE)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

— Ephesians 2:8

Along the Way

A woman arrived at the checkout counter and discovered that she had left her wallet at home. Embarrassed, she began apologizing and gathering her groceries to put back on the shelves.

Then the person standing behind her said, “I’ve got it.”

She protested. “You don’t have to do that.”

“I know,” the stranger replied.

Sometimes the most difficult gift to receive is the one we know we did nothing to earn.

The Word for the Way

Paul reminds the Ephesians that grace is precisely that kind of gift.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith.”

Grace begins not with what we have done for God, but with what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We cannot earn it, purchase it, or place God in our debt.

We received it.

That matters as we begin walking the way of grace because it is easy to turn grace into another assignment: *I need to forgive more. I need to become more generous. I need to repair this relationship. I need to do better.*

Those things matter, but they are not where grace begins.

Grace found you first.

Before we extend mercy, we receive mercy. Before we welcome someone else, Christ has welcomed us. Before we take a step toward another person, God has already moved toward us in Jesus Christ.

Paul continues by saying that we are “**created in Christ Jesus for good works.**” Grace is free, but grace is never idle. The gift we receive begins reshaping the life we live.

So today, before asking what you need to do, remember what God has already done.

You are not walking toward grace hoping to earn it.

You are learning to walk because grace has already come to you.

Walking the Way

Before doing anything for God today, spend a few moments simply receiving.

Name one expression of God's grace in your life for which you are grateful. Resist the urge to explain why you deserve it.

Simply say:

“Thank you, God, for grace I could never earn.”

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for loving me before I could earn your love and for meeting me with mercy through Jesus Christ. Keep me from treating grace as something I must achieve. Help me receive your gift with gratitude and allow that grace to shape the way I live. Amen.

Question for the Journey

How might I remember the grace I have received change the grace I offer to someone else?

DAY 3 • THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

Learning the Way of Jesus

Matthew 11:28–30 (NRSVUE)

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”
— Matthew 11:29

Along the Way

Anyone learning a new skill eventually discovers that instructions can only take you so far.

A child learning to cook watches how someone kneads the dough. A beginner swimmer studies how an experienced swimmer moves through the water. An apprentice watches the hands of someone who has practiced the craft for years.

There are some things we learn best by staying close enough to watch.

The Word for the Way

Jesus does not simply say, “Listen to my teaching.”

Jesus says, “**Learn from me.**”

That is an invitation to more than information. It is an invitation to relationship.

To follow Jesus is to stay close enough that the way Jesus loves begins shaping the way we love. We watch Jesus welcome those others overlook. We see Jesus speak truth without surrendering compassion. We see Jesus forgive, serve, touch, listen, challenge, and restore.

Then Jesus says, in effect, *Learn this way from me.*

This matters because the way of grace does not always come naturally. Our instincts may tell us to retaliate when we are hurt, withdraw when relationships become difficult, compare ourselves with others, or say the right words without taking the difficult step of obedience.

Jesus offers another way.

And notice how Jesus describes himself: “**gentle and humble in heart.**” The One teaching us the way does not crush us beneath another burden. Jesus invites tired people to walk beside him and discover a different way to carry life.

We will not learn the way of grace in a single day.

We learn it by staying near Jesus.

Listening.

Watching.

Following.

And, little by little, becoming more like the One who leads us.

Walking the Way

As you move through today, pause before one conversation or decision and ask:

“What would it look like to learn from Jesus in this moment?”

Pay attention not only to what you do, but to the spirit in which you do it.

Prayer

Jesus, keep me close enough to learn from you. Shape my words, reactions, choices, and relationships by your gentleness and grace. When my instincts pull me in another direction, teach me your way and give me courage to follow. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What part of Jesus' way do I most need to learn in this season of my life?

DAY 4 • FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

People Are Not Problems

Luke 6:31–36 (NRSVUE)

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”
— Luke 6:36

Along the Way

You see the name appear on your phone, and before answering, you already feel the tension.

Maybe the person complains constantly. Maybe every conversation becomes difficult. Maybe there is history between you that makes even simple exchange exhausting.

Without realizing it, we can begin thinking, *Here comes the problem again.*

But a name on a screen is never merely a problem.

There is a person on the other end.

The Word for the Way

Jesus speaks some of his most challenging words in Luke 6. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you.

Jesus does not pretend that difficult people are not difficult. Nor does Jesus ask us to call harmful behavior good.

Jesus asks us to see differently.

The person who frustrates us remains a person created in the image of God. The person with whom we disagree remains a person of sacred worth. Even the person who has hurt us cannot be reduced to the worst thing that person has done.

That does not mean ignoring wrongdoing or abandoning healthy boundaries. Grace and wisdom belong together.

But something happens to us when we stop seeing people and start seeing only problems. Compassion shrinks. Listening becomes harder. And eventually we may begin believing that the easiest solution would be for the troublesome person simply to disappear from our lives.

Jesus leads us another way.

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Before grace changes a relationship, sometimes grace must first change the way we see the person standing on the other side of it.

Walking the Way

Think of one person you find difficult.

Before thinking about what needs to change in that person, pray:

“God, help me see this person as you see them.”

You do not have to excuse anything harmful. Simply resist reducing a human being to a problem.

Prayer

Merciful God, forgive me for the times I have allowed frustration to keep me from seeing the person before me. Give me wisdom where boundaries are needed and compassion where my heart has hardened. Teach me to see others through the grace you have shown me in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Is there someone I have begun treating more like a problem to solve than a person to love?

DAY 5 • SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

Before You Go to Them

Psalm 139:23–24 (NRSVUE)

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.”
— Psalm 139:23

Along the Way

Before leaving home one morning, a man noticed a smudge on the bathroom mirror. He reached for a towel and began rubbing, but the mark would not disappear.

Then he changed his angle and realized the mirror was clean.

The smudge was on his glasses.

Sometimes what we are certain is wrong “out there” requires us first to look a little closer at what we are carrying ourselves.

The Word for the Way

Tomorrow's Gospel will lead us into one of Jesus' most practical teachings about relationships. Jesus will speak about what to do when another person sins against us.

But before we go to someone else, today's psalm gives us an important prayer:

“Search me, O God.”

That is not an easy prayer.

It is much easier to ask God to show another person where *they* are wrong. We can rehearse what was said, gather evidence, remember previous offenses, and prepare the speech we believe the other person needs to hear.

Grace asks us first to stand before God.

What is happening in my heart?

Am I seeking restoration or simply trying to prove that I am right?

Have I listened?

Is pride shaping the way I remember what happened?

Is there something for which I also need to ask forgiveness?

Self-examination does not mean taking responsibility for someone else's harmful behavior. Sometimes we have been genuinely wronged, and naming that truth is necessary.

But humility allows us to approach another person without assuming that we have nothing to learn.

Tomorrow Jesus will tell us to go.

Today the psalmist teaches us what to do **before we go**:

“Search me, O God.”

Grace goes toward others, but first grace allows God to work within us.

Walking the Way

Before addressing a difficult relationship, spend a few quiet minutes with Psalm 139:23–24.

Ask God to reveal not only what the other person has done, but anything within your own heart that needs attention.

Listen without defending yourself.

Prayer

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Show me where hurt, pride, anger, or fear may be shaping the way I see another person. Give me humility to receive what you reveal and prepare my heart to walk in the way of reconciliation. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Before I ask someone else to change, what might God want to change in me?

DAY 6 • SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

Grace Goes Toward

Matthew 18:15–20 (NRSVUE)

“If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.”
— Matthew 18:15

Today’s Sermon:

When Relationships Get Hard: The Courage to Seek Reconciliation

Along the Way

Two friends had allowed a disagreement to become months of silence. Both missed the friendship. Both told others they wished things could be different. Yet each was waiting for the same thing:

The other person should call first.

Finally, one picked up the phone.

The conversation did not solve everything. But the silence was broken.

Sometimes reconciliation begins not with having all the right words, but with someone being willing to take the first step.

The Word for the Way

Jesus knows that relationships can become difficult, even among people of faith.

In Matthew 18, Jesus does not tell us to pretend nothing happened. Nor does Jesus encourage gossip, retaliation, or quietly collecting resentment. Jesus says, “**Go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.**”

Notice the direction of grace.

Grace goes toward.

The purpose is not humiliation. Jesus says, **“If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.”** The goal is restoration.

That does not mean every relationship will be repaired. Reconciliation requires willingness from more than one person, and situations involving abuse or danger require wise boundaries and appropriate help. Jesus does not ask us to remain unsafe.

But where it is possible and appropriate, grace refuses to let pride make every decision.

Sometimes we wait for the other person to apologize first. Sometimes we rehearse why we are right. Sometimes silence feels easier than vulnerability.

Jesus shows us another way.

Grace can speak truth without cruelty. Grace can listen without surrendering conviction. Grace can take a step toward another person without knowing how that person will respond.

The first step may be a conversation.

It may be an apology.

It may simply be a prayer asking God to soften a heart that has grown hard.

But grace does not always wait for someone else to move first.

Grace goes toward.

Before Worship

As you prepare for worship today, pray:

Jesus, help me hear your Word with an open heart. Show me where pride, hurt, or fear has kept me at a distance, and give me wisdom to recognize the next faithful step. Amen.

Walking the Way

Think of one relationship in which distance has developed.

Do not begin by deciding what the other person should do. Ask instead:

“What faithful step is mine to take?”

If a conversation is appropriate and safe, consider taking one small step toward it.

Prayer

God of reconciliation, thank you for coming toward us in Jesus Christ. Give me courage to speak truth with love, humility to listen, and wisdom to know when and how to take the first step. Where restoration is possible, make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Where might grace be asking me to go toward rather than walk away?

DAY 7 • MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

Take the First Step

Romans 12:18 (NRSVUE)

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Along the Way

After a disagreement, two coworkers began communicating only when absolutely necessary. Each morning, they passed one another with little more than a nod.

Then one day, one of them stopped and said, “I don’t like how things have been between us. Could we talk?”

Nothing dramatic happened. No music played. No instant resolution followed.

But someone had taken the first step, and suddenly peace had a place to begin.

The Word for the Way

Paul’s words are both hopeful and realistic:

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Those phrases matter.

Paul does not say that every relationship can be repaired by our effort alone. We cannot control another person’s willingness to listen, forgive, change, or reconcile.

But we can take responsibility for what **depends on us**.

That may mean making the call we have been postponing. It may mean apologizing without adding, “but you also...” It may mean refusing to participate in gossip. It may mean listening instead of preparing our defense.

Grace does not give us control over another person's response.

Grace gives us responsibility for ourselves.

Jesus took the initiative toward us long before we knew how to respond. As we follow Jesus, we become people willing to take faithful steps toward peace.

The first step may feel small.

But small steps can change the direction of a relationship.

Walking the Way

Identify one action toward peace that depends on you today.

Make it specific and small enough to do, send the message, make the call, offer the apology, stop repeating the story, or begin praying differently.

Then take the step.

Prayer

God of peace, show me what depends on me. Keep me from trying to control another person's response, but do not allow fear or pride to keep me from doing what is mine to do. Lead me in the way of peace. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What step toward peace is within my power to take today?

DAY 8 • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

Listen Before You Answer

James 1:19–20 (NRSVUE)

“Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

Along the Way

Have you ever been listening to someone while silently preparing your response?

The other person is still speaking, but in your mind, you are already correcting the facts, defending your intentions, or deciding what you will say next.

Technically, you hear every word.

But you may not have listened at all.

The Word for the Way

James gives us three simple instructions:

Quick to listen.

Slow to speak.

Slow to anger.

Most of us find at least one of those difficult.

Listening is especially challenging when we feel misunderstood. We want to explain ourselves. We want the other person to understand what really happened.

But reconciliation requires more than waiting for our turn to speak.

To listen is to make room for another person's experience, even when we remember the situation differently. Listening does not require agreement. It does require enough humility to consider that there may be something we have not seen.

Jesus repeatedly listened to people others dismissed. Questions, grief, fear, anger, and doubt were not interruptions to his ministry. People mattered.

Following Jesus means learning that same attentiveness.

Sometimes the most gracious sentence we can offer is not an explanation.

It is:

“Help me understand.”

Grace goes toward, and when grace arrives, grace listens.

Walking the Way

In one conversation today, practice listening without preparing your response.

Ask one sincere follow-up question before offering your own perspective.

Try:

“Can you help me understand what that was like for you?”

Prayer

Listening God, quiet the voice within me that always wants to answer, defend, or correct. Give me patience to hear what another person is truly saying. Teach me to listen with the attentiveness and compassion of Jesus. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Who in my life needs to be heard rather than immediately answered?

DAY 9 • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

Truth Spoken in Love

Ephesians 4:15, 25–32 (NRSVUE)

“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

Along the Way

A friend once asked, “Do you want me to tell you what you want to hear, or do you want me to tell you the truth?”

It was an uncomfortable question because genuine friendship sometimes requires honest words.

But truth can be delivered in very different ways.

The same words can become a weapon in one person's hands and an instrument of healing in another's.

The difference is often love.

The Word for the Way

Paul does not tell the Ephesians merely to speak truth.

He tells them to speak **“the truth in love.”**

We need both.

Truth without love can become harshness. Love without truth can become avoidance. The way of Jesus refuses both extremes.

Jesus could speak difficult truth, but the purpose was never cruelty. Jesus' words called people toward healing, freedom, repentance, and life.

Before a difficult conversation, then, we might ask more than, *is what I am about to say true?*

We should also ask:

Why am I saying it?

Do I want restoration, or do I want to wound?

Would I say this the same way if Jesus were visibly sitting beside us?

Paul later says, **“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up.”**

Not every true thought needs to be spoken. And necessary truth does not need to be spoken carelessly.

Grace does not hide from truth.

Grace gives truth a loving voice.

Walking the Way

Before saying something difficult today, pause.

Ask:

Is it true? Is it necessary? Can I say it in a way that seeks the good of the person hearing it?

Then choose your words accordingly.

Prayer

God of truth and grace, guard my words. Keep me from using truth as a weapon or love as an excuse for silence. Give me courage to speak what needs to be spoken and compassion to speak it in the spirit of Christ.
Amen.

Question for the Journey

Does the way I speak difficult truth reveal that restoration is my goal?

DAY 10 • THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

The Courage to Say, “I Was Wrong”

Matthew 5:23–24 (NRSVUE)

“First be reconciled to your brother or sister and then come and offer your gift.”

Along the Way

Three words can be surprisingly difficult to say:

“I was wrong.”

We often surround them with explanations.

“I was wrong, but...”

“I shouldn't have said that, but you made me angry.”

“I'm sorry you took it that way.”

The words sound like an apology, but somehow responsibility slips quietly out the back door.

A genuine apology does something harder.

It stays in the room.

The Word for the Way

Jesus places reconciliation so close to worship that it should make us uncomfortable.

If we remember that someone has something against us, Jesus says to take reconciliation seriously.

In other words, discipleship is not only about noticing how others have hurt us. Grace also gives us courage to recognize the hurt we have caused.

That requires humility.

An apology does not need to explain everything. Sometimes the most healing words are simple:

“I was wrong.”

“I hurt you.”

“I am sorry.”

“Will you forgive me?”

We may fear that admitting wrongness makes us weak. The Gospel teaches something different. Because our identity rests in God's grace rather than our perfection, we do not have to defend ourselves at every turn.

Grace frees us to tell the truth about ourselves.

Sometimes reconciliation begins when we stop preparing our defense and simply acknowledge the wound.

Walking the Way

Is there an apology you owe?

If so, resist the temptation to explain your intentions before acknowledging the impact of your actions.

Practice saying plainly:

“I was wrong. I am sorry.”

Prayer

Merciful God, give me humility to recognize the ways I have hurt others. Free me from the need always to defend myself. Where I owe an apology, give me courage to offer it sincerely and without excuses. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Is there someone who needs an apology from me without an explanation attached to it?

DAY 11 • FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

Peace Without Pretending

Colossians 3:12–15 (NRSVUE)

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Along the Way

A family gathers for dinner after an argument earlier in the day.

Everyone smiles. The food is passed. Conversation stays safe on the weather, work, and weekend plans.

No one raises a voice.

From the outside, everything looks peaceful.

But everyone at the table knows the room is carrying something no one is willing to name.

Silence and peace are not always the same thing.

The Word for the Way

Paul tells the Colossians to clothe themselves with “**compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.**” Then he says, “**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.**”

Biblical peace is not pretending everything is fine.

Jesus never confused peace with avoidance. The peace of Christ can make room for honest conversations, repentance, forgiveness, boundaries, tears, and sometimes difficult decisions.

That means peacemaking may initially feel less peaceful than silence.

A conversation may be uncomfortable. Naming a wound may create tension. Establishing a necessary boundary may disappoint someone.

But avoiding every difficult conversation does not necessarily preserve peace. Sometimes it simply preserves distance.

Grace seeks something deeper than appearances.

The peace of Christ is not the absence of every disagreement. It is the presence of Christ shaping how we move through disagreement.

We can be truthful without becoming cruel.

We can disagree without denying another person's sacred worth.

We can seek peace without pretending.

Walking the Way

Consider whether there is a situation in which you have confused avoiding conflict with creating peace.

Ask God for wisdom about whether a loving conversation, a clear boundary, or simply a more honest prayer is needed.

Prayer

Prince of Peace, teach me the difference between your peace and mere avoidance. Give me courage to face what needs to be faced, compassion in the way I face it, and wisdom to know what genuine peace requires. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Am I pursuing the peace of Christ, or simply trying to keep everything looking peaceful?

DAY 12 • SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

Leave Room for God

Romans 12:19–21 (NRSVUE)

“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”

Along the Way

A gardener can prepare the soil, plant the seed, provide water, and pull the weeds.

But the gardener cannot reach into the earth and force the seed to grow.

Some things require faithful work.

Other things must finally be entrusted to God.

Relationships can be like that.

The Word for the Way

All week we have considered what grace asks of us in difficult relationships.

Go toward.

Take the first step.

Listen.

Speak truth in love.

Apologize when necessary.

Seek genuine peace.

But there comes a point when we must recognize what grace **does not** ask of us.

Grace does not ask us to control another person's response.

Paul writes, **“Do not avenge yourselves.”** Instead of taking judgment into our own hands, we leave room for God.

You can apologize sincerely and the other person may not accept it. You can offer a conversation, and the invitation may be declined. You can seek reconciliation and discover that trust cannot yet be restored.

That can hurt.

But faithfulness is not measured by whether we can produce the outcome we wanted.

We do what love requires of us and entrust what we cannot do to God.

Tomorrow Jesus will speak about forgiveness, and we will discover another dimension of grace.

But before we move there, remember this:

You are responsible for faithfulness. God is responsible for what you cannot control.

Sometimes the final step toward peace is opening our hands and leaving the outcome with God.

Walking the Way

Think of a relationship or situation you have been trying to control.

Open your hands and pray:

“God, I give you what I cannot change. Show me what is mine to do, and help me release what is not.”

Prayer

Faithful God, I confess that I sometimes try to control people, outcomes, and situations that are beyond my power. Help me do what love requires and entrust the rest to you. Keep resentment from ruling my heart, and teach me to overcome evil with good. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What outcome am I trying to control that I need to place back into God's hands?

DAY 13 • SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

Grace Lets Go

Matthew 18:21–35 (NRSVUE)

“Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive?
As many as seven times?”

— Matthew 18:21

Today’s Sermon:

More Than Seven Times: The Freedom of Forgiveness

Along the Way

Imagine keeping a small notebook in your pocket and recording every wrong someone committed against you.

One insensitive comment. One broken promise. One forgotten birthday.
One betrayal.

Eventually, you might not even need the notebook. You would know the list by heart.

Some of us carry lists no one else can see.

We remember the date, the words, the expression on the person's face,
and exactly how it made us feel.

Peter wants to know how long the list should be.

The Word for the Way

Peter asks Jesus a question most of us understand:

How many times?

There must be a limit.

Peter even suggests seven, a number that probably sounded remarkably generous.

Jesus responds by taking Peter beyond counting.

Then Jesus tells a troubling parable about a servant who receives extraordinary mercy but refuses to extend mercy to someone else.

The point is not that hurt does not matter. It does.

The point is that those who have received mercy are called to become people through whom mercy continues to flow.

Forgiveness does not mean saying the offense was acceptable. It does not automatically restore trust. It does not require returning to an unsafe relationship.

Forgiveness means refusing to allow the wrong done to us to possess our hearts forever.

That can take time.

Sometimes we forgive and discover tomorrow that the pain is still there. Then grace invites us to release it again.

Peter wants a number because numbers allow us to know when our obligation has ended.

Jesus offers a way of life instead.

Grace, let's go.

Not because what happened was insignificant, but because God's mercy is greater than what we refuse to release.

Before Worship

As you prepare for worship, pray:

Merciful Jesus, open my heart to your Word today. Help me receive again the mercy you have given me and show me what I am still carrying that you desire to help me release. Amen.

Walking the Way

Do not begin today by forcing yourself to feel differently about someone who hurt you.

Instead, name before God, one hurt you are still carrying and pray:

“Jesus, I am willing to begin releasing this into your hands.”

Sometimes willingness is the first step toward forgiveness.

Prayer

Merciful God, thank you for the forgiveness I have received through Jesus Christ. You know the wounds I carry and the memories that still hurt. Give me grace to release what I cannot change and freedom from the resentment that keeps the past alive within me. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What am I still keeping on the ledger that Jesus may be asking me to release?

DAY 14 • MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

More Than Seven Times

Matthew 18:21–22 (NRSVUE)

“Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times.’”

Along the Way

A child learning to ride a bicycle falls, gets up, pedals a few feet, and falls again.

No caring parent says, “That was your seventh fall. You have used them all.”

Growth rarely happens according to a neat schedule.

Neither does forgiveness.

There are hurts we release once.

Others seem to return whenever a memory, anniversary, conversation, or familiar place brings them back.

The Word for the Way

Peter wants forgiveness to be measurable.

Jesus refuses to give him a convenient stopping point.

Whether we translate Jesus' answer as seventy-seven or seventy times seven, the meaning is clear: **stop counting**.

Forgiveness is not a mathematical achievement.

Sometimes we sincerely forgive someone and later discover anger rising again. That does not necessarily mean the earlier forgiveness was false.

It may mean healing is still taking place.

When the memory returns, we can bring it back to God.

When resentment begins rebuilding its home in us, we can release it again.

Forgiveness may therefore be both a decision and continuing practice.

Jesus is not asking us to deny pain. Jesus is freeing us from organizing our lives around the offense.

Peter asks, **“How many times?”**

Jesus points toward a better question:

How deeply can God's mercy reshape my heart?

Grace stops counting.

And when necessary, grace releases again.

Walking the Way

If an old hurt returns today, do not condemn yourself for remembering it.

Pause and pray:

“God, I have given this to you before, and I give it to you again.”

Prayer

Patient God, when old wounds return, meet me there with your grace. Keep me from measuring forgiveness by a number or condemning myself when healing takes time. Teach me to release again what I have placed in your hands before. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Am I willing to keep choosing forgiveness even when healing takes longer than I expected?

DAY 15 • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

Remember What You Have Received

Psalm 103:8–12 (NRSVUE)

“As far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.”

— Psalm 103:12

Along the Way

Someone once received a bill marked with a word everyone likes to see:

PAID.

There was nothing left to add. Nothing remaining to collect.

The balance was gone.

Yet imagine continuing to mail payments every month because you could not believe the debt had really been cleared.

Sometimes we find it easier to believe that God forgives other people than to believe God's mercy truly includes us.

The Word for the Way

Psalm 103 gives us one of Scripture's most beautiful pictures of mercy.

God is **“merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”**

Then the psalmist reaches for distance itself:

“As far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.”

Before we can become people, who extend forgiveness, we need to remember that we are people who have received it.

Some of us carry guilt long after we have confessed it. We believe in grace theologically but continue punishing ourselves emotionally.

Yet the Gospel does not announce that Christ forgives everyone except the person looking back at you in the mirror.

God's grace includes you.

Receiving forgiveness does not mean our choices have no consequences. It means our failures do not have the authority to define us forever.

The mercy we extend to others grows from the mercy we continually receive.

So today, before thinking about whom you need to forgive, remember:

You are forgiven.

Grace has reached you too.

Walking the Way

Name one failure you have confessed to God but continue using against yourself.

Read Psalm 103:12 slowly.

Then say aloud:

“By the grace of God, my failure does not have the final word.”

Prayer

Merciful God, thank you that your grace reaches even the places in my life I would rather hide. Help me receive the forgiveness you freely give through Jesus Christ. Free me from carrying guilt you have already invited me to release. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Am I withholding from myself the mercy I believe God offers to everyone else?

DAY 16 • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

Forgiveness Is Not Forgetting

Romans 12:17–18 (NRSVUE)

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Along the Way

A broken bone can heal completely and still appear on an X-ray years later.

Healing does not erase the history of the injury.

The bone may be strong again. Life may move forward. Yet evidence remains that something happened there.

Our hearts can be like that.

Forgiveness can be genuine even when memory remains.

The Word for the Way

“Forgive and forget” is a familiar expression.

It is not; however, a command Jesus gives us.

Forgiveness does not require pretending something never happened. In fact, remembering wisely can sometimes protect us from repeating harmful patterns.

Paul's words are realistic: **“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”**

Sometimes peace includes restored closeness.

Sometimes it includes appropriate distance.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are related, but they are not identical. Forgiveness can begin within one heart. Reconciliation requires the participation of those involved. Trust, once broken, may need to be rebuilt slowly through truth, repentance, and changed behavior.

And where there has been abuse, violence, manipulation, or danger, forgiveness never requires remaining in an unsafe situation.

Grace does not ask us to erase wisdom.

Forgiveness means we surrender vengeance and refuse to allow hatred to become our master. We place judgment into God's hands and seek freedom from the power of the wound.

You can remember and still heal.

You can forgive and still have boundaries.

You can release bitterness without reopening every door.

That too can be grace.

Walking the Way

Consider whether you have confused forgiveness with the removal of every boundary.

Ask God for wisdom to distinguish between resentment that needs releasing and a boundary that may still be necessary.

Prayer

God of wisdom and mercy, teach me to forgive without pretending that wounds are unreal. Free me from bitterness while giving me wisdom to establish healthy boundaries where they are needed. Lead me toward healing, truth, and peace. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What would forgiveness look like if I stopped assuming it requires me to forget?

DAY 17 • THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

Put Down the Ledger

1 Corinthians 13:4–5 (NRSVUE)

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.”

Along the Way

In the days before everything was stored electronically, shopkeepers often kept ledgers.

Every charge went on one side. Every payment went on the other.

Nothing was forgotten because the book preserved the account.

Relationships can develop invisible ledgers too.

I called last time.

I apologized first.

I helped you when you needed me.

You forgot what I did for you.

The book may exist only in our minds, but we know every entry.

The Word for the Way

Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 includes a phrase often translated, **love “keeps no record of wrongs.”**

The image is powerful.

Love does not spend its life maintaining an account so that old offenses can be withdrawn whenever a new disagreement occurs.

That does not mean healthy relationships have no accountability. Love can confront wrong, require change, and establish boundaries.

But there is a difference between remembering wisely and keeping ammunition.

We know the difference when an argument about today suddenly becomes a trial involving everything that happened five years ago.

Grace invites us to put down the ledger.

Why?

Because God does not call us to relationships built upon perpetual debt.

Through Jesus Christ, we know a mercy that does not reduce us to the sum of our failures. As recipients of that mercy, we learn another way of living with one another.

Not denial.

Not amnesia.

But freedom from keeping score.

Walking the Way

Pay attention today to any mental sentence that begins:

“After everything I've done...”

or

“You always...”

Ask whether you are addressing the present or reopening the ledger.

Choose to deal with today's issue without unnecessarily adding yesterday's debts.

Prayer

God of grace, show me the ledgers I carry in my heart. Help me address what needs to be addressed without using the past as a weapon. Teach me the patient, truthful, freeing love revealed in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Whose account am I still keeping when grace is inviting me to put down the ledger?

DAY 18 • FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

When Forgiveness Takes Time

Philippians 1:6 (NRSVUE)

“The one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

Along the Way

After heavy snowfall, the sun may come out while the ground is still covered.

The temperature rises. Water begins dripping from the roof. Small patches of grass appear.

But the snow does not disappear all at once.

The thaw has begun even though winter is still visible.

Healing often happens that way.

The Word for the Way

We sometimes speak about forgiveness as though it happens in one dramatic moment.

Occasionally it does.

Often it does not.

A deep wound may take time to heal. We may decide that we do not want resentment to control us and still wake up tomorrow feeling angry.

That does not necessarily mean nothing has changed.

Paul writes confidently that the God who **began** a good work will continue bringing it toward completion.

Grace is at work in processes as well as moments.

Forgiveness may begin with willingness:

God, I don't know how to forgive this yet, but I do not want bitterness to own me.

That prayer matters.

Tomorrow, we pray again.

Eventually we may discover that the memory still exists, but its grip has weakened. We can tell the story without reliving every emotion. We can hear the person's name without losing our peace.

The thaw has been happening.

Do not confuse slow healing with failed faith.

Some wounds require time, prayer, wise support, and perhaps professional help.

God is not impatient with the healing process.

Grace can work slowly and still work deeply.

Walking the Way

Notice one place where healing has begun, even if it is incomplete.

Thank God for the small evidence of grace rather than focusing only on how far you still have to go.

Prayer

Patient God, thank you for continuing the work you have begun in me. When healing seems slow, keep me from becoming discouraged. Give me grace for today's step and confidence that you are present even in unfinished places. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Where might I be overlooking evidence that God's healing work has already begun?

DAY 19 • SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

Free to Move Forward

Isaiah 43:18–19 (NRSVUE)

“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”

Along the Way

The rearview mirror in a car is important.

It helps us understand what is behind us.

But imagine trying to drive forward while staring only into that mirror.

Eventually, what was meant to help us would prevent us from safely reaching what lies ahead.

We need the rearview mirror.

We also need windshields.

The Word for the Way

Isaiah speaks to people who knew what it meant to carry a painful past.

Yet God announces:

“I am about to do a new thing.”

This does not mean Israel's history no longer mattered. It means the past would not be permitted to imprison God's future.

Forgiveness offers a similar freedom.

We do not erase what happened. We refuse to let what happen become the only thing that can happen.

Sometimes we become so accustomed to telling the story of our hurt that we struggle to imagine ourselves without it.

But you are more than what someone did to you.

You are more than the relationship that failed.

You are more than the mistake you made.

You are more than the chapter you wish had been written differently.

In Jesus Christ, grace keeps opening a future.

Tomorrow we will hear workers in Jesus' parable grumble because generosity has reached people they believe received too much.

Before we enter that vineyard, perhaps we need to loosen our grip on yesterday.

Grace lets go not because the past was meaningless.

Grace lets go because God is still writing the future.

Walking the Way

Take a sheet of paper and complete this sentence:

“By God's grace, my past will not prevent me from...”

Write whatever comes honestly.

Then ask God for courage to take one step toward that future.

Prayer

God of new beginnings, thank you that my past does not have authority over everything that comes next. Help me remember with wisdom, release with grace, and move forward with hope. Open my eyes to the new thing you are doing. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What future possibility might I begin to see if I stopped looking only through the rearview mirror?

DAY 20 • SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

Grace Gives Generously

Matthew 20:1–16 (NRSVUE)

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

— Matthew 20:15

Today’s Sermon:

Grace Is Not Fair: Thank God

Along the Way

Two children are given dessert.

The first receives a generous slice and smiles until the second child receives a slice that looks slightly larger.

Suddenly, the first slice no longer seems generous.

Nothing was taken away. The dessert did not become smaller. The only thing that changed was where the child was looking.

Comparison has a way of turning gratitude into dissatisfaction.

The Word for the Way

Jesus tells of laborers hired at different times throughout the day. Some work from morning until evening. Others arrive near the end.

Then payday comes.

Those who worked all day watch the latecomers receive a full day's wage. Surely, they think *we will receive more*.

But they receive exactly what was promised.

And they grumble.

The landowner asks the piercing question:

“Are you envious because I am generous?”

The issue is not that the first workers received too little. Their anger rises because someone else received more generosity than they believed was deserved.

Grace unsettles our calculations.

We naturally understand earning, deserving, measuring, and comparing. But God's grace is not a wage paid because we accumulated enough spiritual hours.

Grace is a gift.

That does not mean God is unjust. It means God's generosity exceeds the transactional system we often bring to God: *I did this, therefore I deserve that.*

The good news is that none of us stands before God merely on the strength of what we have earned.

We stand by grace.

So, when grace reaches someone late, someone unexpected, or someone we believe has received more than deserved, Jesus invites us to stop looking sideways.

Another person's blessing does not diminish ours.

There is enough grace in the heart of God for them.

And there is enough for us.

Before Worship

As you prepare for worship today, pray:

Generous God, free me from comparing your goodness toward me with your goodness toward someone else. Give me grateful eyes to recognize grace and a generous heart that rejoices when grace reaches others. Amen.

Walking the Way

Notice when comparison appears today.

Instead of asking, **“Why did they get that?”** pause and name one gift God has already placed in your life.

Then thank God for it without comparison.

Prayer

Generous God, thank you for giving me more grace than I could ever earn. Forgive me when comparison makes me resent another person's blessing. Teach me to receive your goodness with gratitude and celebrate your goodness wherever I see it. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Can I celebrate God's generosity toward someone else without measuring their blessing against mine?

DAY 21 • MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

Looking Sideways

John 21:20–22 (NRSVUE)

“Jesus said to him, ‘If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!’”

— John 21:22

Along the Way

At an awards ceremony, a young woman received an honor she had worked hard to earn. She returned to her seat smiling.

Then another person's name was called for a larger award.

Her expression changed.

Her father leaned toward her and quietly said, “Don't let somebody else's blessing take yours away.”

Nothing had been taken from her.

But comparison was already stealing her joy.

The Word for the Way

Peter has just experienced an extraordinary moment with the risen Jesus.

After Peter's painful denial, Jesus restores him, entrusts him with responsibility, and once again says, “**Follow me.**”

Then Peter notices another disciple.

Immediately the question becomes:

“**Lord, what about him?**”

It is one of the most human questions in Scripture.

What about them?

Why did their opportunity come first?

Why is their family thriving?

Why did their prayer seem to receive the answer I wanted?

Why are they being recognized?

Jesus does not answer Peter's comparison.

Jesus redirects his attention:

“What is that to you? Follow me!”

Comparison makes us look sideways when Jesus is calling us forward.

It can make a genuine blessing feel insufficient simply because someone else received something different.

Your journey does not need to look like someone else's journey for God's grace to be present in it.

Jesus' words to Peter are still liberating:

Stop measuring your path against theirs.

You follow me.

Walking the Way

Name three gifts of grace already present in your life.

Thank God for each one without comparing it to what anyone else has.

If someone else's blessing comes to mind, thank God for that too.

Prayer

Jesus, forgive me when I look sideways and lose sight of you. Free me from comparison that steals gratitude and joy. Help me trust the path on which you are leading me and celebrate your goodness in the lives of others. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Where has looking sideways kept me from seeing the grace already in front of me?

DAY 22 • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

Enough for Today

Exodus 16:13–18 (NRSVUE)

“Those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage.”

— Exodus 16:18

Along the Way

A person checks the gas gauge and sees half a tank.

For today's trip, it is more than enough.

Yet the mind can immediately travel farther than the car:

What about tomorrow? What about next week? What if prices rise? What if something happens?

We can have enough for today and still become anxious about a tomorrow that has not arrived.

The Word for the Way

Israel is in the wilderness.

Egypt is behind them, but the promised land is not yet beneath their feet.

They are hungry, uncertain, and afraid.

Then God provides manna.

But there is a lesson within the provision: gather what is needed.

God is teaching former slaves how to live by trust rather than fear.

Some gather much. Some gather little. Yet Scripture says, **“those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage.”**

Yesterday's vineyard workers also struggled with God's provision. They looked at what others received and allowed comparisons to reshape their understanding of what was enough.

We do something similar.

Sometimes our problem is not that God has failed to provide. It is that fear and comparison have made **enough** difficult to recognize.

Jesus later teaches us to pray for **daily bread**.

Daily.

Grace invites us to receive today's provision without demanding that God place tomorrow entirely within our control.

This does not mean we should never plan or save wisely.

It means our security finally rests not in how tightly we can hold everything together, but in the faithfulness of the God who meets us again and again.

There is grace for today.

Tomorrow, God will still be God.

Walking the Way

Identify one thing that is enough for today: enough strength, enough provision, enough time, enough help, enough grace.

Thank God specifically for today's portion.

Prayer

Providing God, thank you for meeting me in today's needs. When fear pulls me into tomorrow, bring me back to your presence now. Give me wisdom to plan faithfully without allowing anxiety to rule me and teach me to recognize enough. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What provision from God am I overlooking because I am already worrying about tomorrow?

DAY 23 • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

What Do I Deserve?

Luke 15:25–32 (NRSVUE)

“But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

— Luke 15:32

Along the Way

A longtime employee watches a newer coworker receive public recognition.

The first thought may not be, *Good for them*.

It may be:

What about everything I've done?

The recognition given to another person can suddenly feel like an insult to our own faithfulness.

Sometimes resentment is disappointment wearing the language of fairness.

The Word for the Way

We often call Luke 15 the parable of the prodigal son.

But there are two lost sons in the story.

The younger son becomes lost far from home.

The older son becomes lost while standing in the field of his father's estate.

When music begins and he discovers that his father is celebrating his brother's return, he becomes angry.

Listen to his accounting:

“For all these years I have been working like a slave for you...”

He has kept the ledger.

His brother wasted everything and got a party.

He stayed and received no celebration, at least as he sees it.

But the father answers tenderly:

“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”

The younger son's restoration has taken nothing from him.

Grace toward one child has not reduced the father's love for the other.

The question is whether the older brother can enter a celebration he did not believe his brother deserved.

We face that question too.

Grace is easiest to celebrate when we are receiving it.

The deeper test comes when grace reaches someone we would have made wait outside.

Walking the Way

Think of someone whose success, restoration, or opportunity has been difficult for you to celebrate.

Ask God to replace resentment with the ability to say sincerely:

“Thank you, God, for the grace at work in their life.”

Prayer

Loving God, forgive me when I measure your generosity by what I think others deserve. Remind me that another person's restoration does not diminish your love for me. Give me a heart capable of joining the celebration when grace brings someone home. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Whose blessing is difficult for me to celebrate because I am still asking what they deserve?

DAY 24 • THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Celebrating Their Blessing

Romans 12:15–16 (NRSVUE)

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”
— Romans 12:15

Along the Way

A friend calls with wonderful news.

The promotion came through.

The test results were good.

The offer on the house was accepted.

The child got into the school.

You are genuinely happy for them.

And then, almost unnoticed, another feeling arrives:

I wish something like that would happen for me.

Joy and longing can occupy the same heart.

The Word for the Way

Paul gives remarkably simple instructions:

“Rejoice with those who rejoice.”

Simple does not always mean easy.

Weeping with someone can sometimes feel more natural than rejoicing with them, especially when their blessing touches an area where we are still waiting.

Their engagement reminds us of our loneliness.

Their pregnancy touches our grief.

Their promotion awakens our disappointment.

Their answered prayer brings our unanswered prayer back into view.

Grace does not require us to deny those feelings.

We can bring our longing honestly to God.

But grace also teaches us that another person's joy is not our enemy.

There is a holy generosity in being able to enter another person's celebration without making the moment about us.

We say:

“I am glad for you.”

And we mean it.

That kind of rejoicing loosens comparison's grip.

It reminds us that God's goodness is not a limited supply that must be divided carefully among us.

Someone else's blessing can become an occasion for praise rather than evidence that we have been forgotten.

Walking the Way

Celebrate someone today.

Send a note, make a call, offer a sincere compliment, or simply tell someone:

“I am grateful for what God is doing in your life.”

Let their joy be theirs without redirecting the conversation toward yourself.

Prayer

Generous God, teach me to rejoice freely with others. When their blessings touch places where I am still waiting, hold both my joy and my longing. Keep comparison from stealing my ability to celebrate your goodness. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Can I make room for someone else's joy while trusting God with the places where I am still waiting?

DAY 25 • FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

Open Hands

2 Corinthians 9:6–8 (NRSVUE)

“God loves a cheerful giver.”
— 2 Corinthians 9:7

Along the Way

Try holding your hands tightly closed for a moment.

Nothing can be taken from them.

But nothing can easily be placed into them either.

Now open them.

Open hands can receive.

Open hands can also give.

Generosity requires that kind of openness.

The Word for the Way

Paul encourages the Corinthians toward generosity but notices what he does not say.

He does not tell them to give reluctantly, resentfully, or because someone pressured them.

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion.”

Christian generosity grows from grace.

God gives, and God's giving begins reshaping our relationship with what we possess.

Money certainly belongs in that conversation, but generosity is larger than money.

We can be generous with time.

Generous with encouragement.

Generous with attention.

Generous with patience.

Generous with forgiveness.

Generous in making room for someone who has been overlooked.

Closed hands are often shaped by fear: *What if there aren't enough? What if I give and regret it?*

Open hands are shaped by trust.

Paul says that **“God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance.”**

Generosity does not mean ignoring wisdom or giving what we do not have.

It means refusing to let fear become the only voice determining what we do with what God has entrusted to us.

We received from open hands.

We learn to live with open hands too.

Walking the Way

Give something intentionally today.

It may be financial, but it does not have to be.

Give your time, attention, encouragement, assistance, hospitality, or resources to someone without expecting repayment.

Prayer

Generous God, everything I have ultimately comes from you. Loosen my grip where fear has made me hold too tightly. Give me wisdom in what I give and joy in giving it. Shape my life by the generosity I have received through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What might become possible if I approached today with open hands rather than a clenched grip?

DAY 26 • SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

The Goodness of God

Psalm 145:8–9 (NRSVUE)

“The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

— Psalm 145:8

Along the Way

A child once asked why the sun shines on houses where good people live and houses where difficult people live.

It was the kind of question adults can easily overcomplicate.

The sun simply rises.

Its light spills across fences, rooftops, sidewalks, gardens, and streets without first asking who deserves the morning.

Creation itself sometimes whispers something about generosity.

The Word for the Way

Psalm 145 declares:

“The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”

God's goodness is larger than the small circles we sometimes draw.

Throughout this week, we have considered comparison, provision, entitlement, celebration, and generosity. Beneath all of them lies a deeper question:

Do we trust the goodness of God?

If we believe God's goodness is scarce, another person's blessing can feel threatening.

If we believe grace must be earned, generosity toward the undeserving can feel offensive.

But Scripture continually introduces us to a God who is **“gracious and merciful.”**

Jesus embodies that generosity.

Jesus eats with people others exclude. Jesus touches those others avoid. Jesus offers mercy to sinners and welcomes people who arrive late.

Tomorrow's Gospel will move us from receiving and celebrating grace to responding to God's call.

Before we arrive there, rest for a moment in this truth:

God is good.

Not because every circumstance is easy.

Not because every prayer has been answered as we hoped.

God is good because generosity, mercy, and steadfast love belong to God's very character.

And the more deeply we trust God's goodness, the more freely we can become generous ourselves.

Walking the Way

Look for one visible sign of goodness today: kindness, a meal, sunlight, laughter, friendship, strength for another day.

Pause long enough to receive it.

Then say:

“God, thank you for being good.”

Prayer

Gracious God, your goodness is greater than my calculations and your compassion reaches farther than the boundaries I draw. Teach me to trust your generous heart. Let the goodness I receive from you overflow through the way I treat others. Amen.

Question for the Journey

How would I live differently if I truly trusted that God's goodness is not running out?

DAY 27 • SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

Grace Says Yes

Matthew 21:23–32 (NRSVUE)

“Which of the two did the will of his father?”
— Matthew 21:31

Today’s Sermon:

More Than Words: The Faith That Says Yes

Along the Way

Someone promises, “I’ll take care of it.”

The words sound reassuring.

But a day passes. Then another. Eventually someone else has to do what was promised.

Another person initially says, “I don’t think I can.”

Later, without making an announcement, that person shows up and does what needs to be done.

If you had to choose, which response mattered most?

Sometimes the truest yes is not the one we speak.

It is the one we live in.

The Word for the Way

Jesus tells a simple story about a father and two sons.

The father asks both sons to work in the vineyard.

The first refuses but later changes his mind and goes.

The second says, “**I go, sir,**” but never goes.

Then Jesus asks:

“Which of the two did the will of his father?”

The answer is obvious.

Jesus is speaking to religious leaders who know how to say the right things. Yet people they considered sinful responded to God's call while they remained unmoved.

The parable exposes the distance that can develop between profession and practice.

We can say we believe in forgiveness while continuing to nurture resentment.

We can speak about generosity while keeping our hands closed.

We can pray for reconciliation while refusing every opportunity to take a faithful step.

We can sing about following Jesus without actually moving when Jesus leads.

Grace does more than give us better words.

Grace says yes with a life.

The first son reminds us of something else important: our first response does not have to become our final response.

Perhaps you have resisted God.

Perhaps you have delayed.

Perhaps you know there is something you should have done.

Grace still gives us room to turn around.

A faithful yes can begin today.

Before Worship

As you prepare for worship, pray:

Jesus, let your Word move beyond my ears and into my life. Show me where my actions have not matched my words and give me courage to say yes by following where you lead. Amen.

Walking the Way

Ask God one direct question today:

“Where have I said yes with my words but not yet with my actions?”

When something specific comes to mind, identify one action that can turn your spoken yes into a lived yes.

Prayer

Gracious Jesus, forgive me when my words promise more than my life reflects. Thank you for the grace that allows me to turn around and begin again. Give me courage to obey, not only with what I say, but with the life I live. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Where is God waiting for my actions to catch up with my words?

DAY 28 • MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

More Than Good Intentions

James 1:22–25 (NRSVUE)

“But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”

— James 1:22

Along the Way

A person buys a book about exercise.

The chapters are highlighted. The important pages are marked. Several helpful ideas are shared with friends.

Months later, the book was thoroughly studied.

But the running shoes remain in the closet.

Knowing what produces change is not the same as doing it.

Good intentions can point us in the right direction.

Only action moves our feet.

The Word for the Way

James does not criticize hearing God's Word.

We must hear before we can respond.

His concern is what happens **after** we hear.

“Be doers of the word and not merely hearers.”

Throughout this month, we have heard a great deal.

Grace goes toward.

Grace, let's go.

Grace gives generously.

Grace says yes.

But these truths were never intended merely to become phrases we remember.

The Word asks something of us.

Perhaps you have recognized a relationship that needs attention. Maybe resentment needs releasing. Perhaps comparison has been stealing your joy. Maybe God has been prompting you toward greater generosity or an act of service.

Insight matters.

But insight without response can leave us standing exactly where we began.

James compares hearing without doing to look into a mirror and immediately forgetting what we saw.

Scripture is not simply information about God.

Through Scripture, God shows us who we are and invites us toward who we are becoming in Christ.

Yesterday Jesus asked which son actually did the father's will.

Today James asked whether the Word we hear will become the life we live.

Grace says yes.

Then grace takes the next step.

Walking the Way

Look back over the previous twenty-seven days.

Choose **one** insight that has stayed with you.

Do not choose five things to improve.

Choose one.

Then turn that insight into one specific action you can take today.

Prayer

God of the living Word, thank you for speaking into my life. Keep me from confusing hearing with following or good intentions with obedience. Give me courage to put your Word into practice, one faithful step at a time. Amen.

Question for the Journey

What truth have I heard from God that now needs to become something I do?

DAY 29 • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

A Yes You Can See

Matthew 5:14–16 (NRSVUE)

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:16

Along the Way

A porch light does not make an announcement.

It simply shines.

On a dark evening, its presence says something without words:

Someone is here.

There is light in this place.

You can find the way.

Some of the most convincing things we say about our faith are never spoken.

They are seen.

The Word for the Way

Jesus tells his disciples:

“You are the light of the world.”

Then Jesus speaks about good works that others can **see**.

Not good works performed for applause.

Not religious activity designed to impress.

Lives shaped so visibly by God's grace that someone looking at us catches a glimpse of the One we follow.

That brings our month into focus.

What does grace look like when someone can see it?

Grace looks like a person choosing a difficult conversation over gossip.

Grace looks like forgiveness, refusing to become revenge.

Grace looks like celebrating someone else's blessing.

Grace looks like generosity offered without needing recognition.

Grace looks like admitting, "I was wrong."

Grace looks like showing up after saying yes.

None of these actions earns God's love.

They reveal what God's love is doing within us.

The world does not only need Christians who can explain grace.

The world needs to encounter people whose lives make grace believable.

Jesus does not say, "Tell everyone how bright you are."

Jesus says:

"Let your light shine."

A grace-shaped life can speak before we ever open our mouths.

Walking the Way

Choose one quiet act of grace today that no one needs to applaud.

Encourage someone.

Serve someone.

Forgive.

Give.

Listen.

Make peace.

Let your yes to Jesus become something another person can see.

Prayer

Jesus, Light of the world, let your grace become visible through me. Keep me from seeking recognition for what I do. May my words, choices, relationships, and acts of love point beyond me to the goodness of God. Amen.

Question for the Journey

If someone watched the way I live today, where might that person see the grace of Jesus?

DAY 30 • WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

Keep Walking

Colossians 2:6–7 (NRSVUE)

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him.”

— Colossians 2:6

Along the Way

Reaching the end of a marked trail can bring a sense of accomplishment.

You look back at the distance traveled and remember the hills, turns, difficult stretches, and beautiful places along the way.

But sometimes the end of one trail is simply where another begins.

You do not stop being a traveler because one set of trail markers has ended.

You keep walking.

The Word for the Way

Thirty days ago, we began beside the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus said:

“Follow me.”

We did not know every place this journey would take us.

Along the way, we discovered that following Jesus leads directly into the relationships, wounds, comparisons, choices, and opportunities of everyday life.

We learned that **grace goes toward** when walking away would be easier.

We learned that **grace lets go** when keeping the ledger would be easier.

We learned that **grace gives generously** when comparison tells us to hold tightly.

And we learned that **grace says yes** when good intentions would be easier than faithful action.

Now Paul gives us an appropriate word for the final day:

“Continue to walk in him.”

Continue.

The devotional ends today.

The way of grace does not.

There will still be difficult relationships in October.

There will still be people to forgive.

There will still be moments when someone else's blessing tempts us to look sideways.

There will still be invitations from Jesus that require more than words.

And there will still be grace.

Grace for the step you take well.

Grace for the step you stumble through.

Grace when you need to begin again.

The goal of these thirty days was never perfection.

The goal was to stay close to Jesus.

On September 1, the invitation was:

Follow me.

Today, the invitation is:

Keep walking.

Because faith does not always mean knowing where the road leads.

Sometimes faith means knowing whom we are following.

And wherever Jesus leads, we follow.

Walking the Way

Look back over these thirty days.

Choose one practice of grace that God has impressed upon you:

reconciliation, listening, forgiveness, gratitude, generosity, obedience, or another practice that has become important along the way.

Write it down.

Then complete this sentence:

“With God's grace, I will continue walking by...”

Carry that commitment with you beyond September.

Prayer

Gracious Jesus, thank you for walking with me through these thirty days. Thank you for grace that finds me, forgives me, changes me, and leads me forward. Keep me close to you when the road is clear and when I cannot see what comes next. Let the grace I have received become visible in the life I live. Wherever you lead, give me faith to follow. Amen.

Question for the Journey

Where is Jesus leading me now, and what will it mean for me to follow?

The Journey Continues

Grace goes toward.

Grace, let's go.

Grace gives generously.

Grace says yes.

The thirty days are complete.

The journey is not.

Where Jesus leads, we follow.