

PLAIN TRUTH®

inside

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

I Will Give You Rest



By Greg Albrecht

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.—Matthew 11:28-30

The promise of spiritual rest comes from Jesus alone. No institution or religious authority is authorized to provide the rest that is solely and uniquely given by Jesus. Priests, prescriptions or programs deserve no credit for provision of rest in Christ.

We pray, study the Bible and serve others in Jesus' name. We may or may not attend a brick-and-mortar building for church "services"—but those and other activities do not produce rest in Christ. Neither our "spiritual disciplines" nor our morality guarantee access and entry into the rest of Christ.

Jesus boldly employs the personal pronoun seven times in these three verses in Matthew 11:28-30: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Jesus dogmatically insists the faith of those who follow him must be absolutely Christ-centered. All other religious mandates, pursuits, performances, activities and "disciplines" are, at best, peripheral window dressing.

Consider seven core elements of resting in Christ, from a Christ-centered focus, as Jesus mentions them in Matthew 11:28-30:

Elements #1-4 of Resting in Christ

1) *Come* 2) *to me*, 3) *all you who are* 4) *weary* and 5) *burdened*, and 6) *I*

will give you rest. Take 7) my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

— Matthew 11:28-30

1) Jesus says "**Come...**" Jesus' invitation carries a feeling of urgency, but it is still a summons and a request, rather than a stipulated, enforced mandate.

The sense behind this word is "come right now!" "Come"

is not an invitation to observe Jesus from afar. "Come" is an invitation to leave behind what one is doing and come... to Jesus. Leave religion, leave superstitions, leave false gods, leave spiritual bondage—"come."

2) Jesus declares "**Come to me.**" The invitation from God the Son is to come to him, not to religion. Come to Jesus, not to regulations and programs and activities and deeds and demands. Focus on Jesus. He is our aim.

This invitation from Jesus Christ is direct, intimate and personal—"come to ME!" No middle men or women—no laws or regulations or promises or guarantees or rituals or ceremonies. No one owns Jesus. No one has an exclusive franchise to represent him on earth. No religious denomination is authorized to purchase the grace of God and then repackage it and place its price on the freely given

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Religious Games

Way back in the late 1960s Joe South composed and performed a hit record called “The Games People Play.” Here’s a sample of its lyrics:

*Oh the games people play now,
Every night and every day now
Never meaning what they say now
Never saying what they mean...
People walking up to ya
Singing glory hallelujah
And they’re trying to sock it to ya
In the name of the Lord...*

When I first heard this song I had little idea about how profoundly true these lyrics were—by God’s grace I discovered those deeper meanings a little later in life.

Here’s a little bit about what I now know about **Religious Games**:

Performance-based religion can easily become a game when the followers/captives of a religious institution assemble like lemmings, being moved around like pawns on a chess board, following the dictates of the institution and its traditions.

Religious games can describe the routines or protocols of followers and captives who habitually gather in a place that an earthly and finite spiritual authority has declared to be holy, at a specific “holy” time that particular spiritual authority insists upon. Such followers arrive, dressed in clothing the religious authority mandates and demands, fastidiously obeying customs the religious authority has innovated and stipulated, while automatically saying repetitive prayers and singing songs, robot-like, that the religious institution itself has devised.

As Christ-followers we know that virtuous and good things we do and perform and participate in have no power to change our imperfections and flaws so that we become righteous and holy by doing those things—on the other hand we know our lack of participation in commonly accepted wrong, sinful activities has no power to make us righteous and holy either.

Here are four toxic products of playing religious games and the contrasting fruit of the grace of our Lord he produces in our lives:

1) Religious games keep records to remember wrong-doing. Christ-less religion attempts to count and calculate both what it considers as progress and sin—so that its followers are always in need of working harder, doing more and running faster in a vain attempt to earn the righteousness that religion pretends it can bestow.

God, who is quite capable of remembering everything, chooses not to remember our sins and failures. God does not count our sins against us.

Christianity is not *ipso facto, quid pro quo*, you do such and such and then God will respond in such a way. Christ-less religion is predictable and dogmatically insists when one does or does not engage in thus and such a behavior, then a certain outcome will follow.

Authentic Christianity is person-driven—and that person is Jesus. Christ-followers do not put their faith in programs and self-help books or seminars, but in the living, dynamic risen Lord who lives within them.

2) Religious games are about fear and oppression. Religion threatens those who fail to please its rigid

teachings with eternal torture in a fictitious hell it has fabricated to keep its followers in line.

Sometimes hell can be the experience we endure as slaves to physical and spiritual addictions. Hell can ironically be the hell we suffer at the hands of bad news religion. Jesus does not send anyone to a fictitious, fabricated eternal torture in hell.

3) Religious games are the sworn enemies of God’s grace. Christ-less religion teaches that one can gain a standing with God one never had on the basis of good deeds and works, or, if one already enjoys a relationship with God, then that relationship can be enhanced and improved by their deeds and works.

The grace of our Lord says that God loves us right now as much as he ever has or ever will because of his righteousness and goodness, not because of anything we have ever done or anything we promise that we will do.

4) Religion insists on its dogmas, its doctrines, its teachings, its customs and traditions. A religious fanatic is someone who won’t change his/her mind, won’t stop condemning people who do not agree with him/her and will never change any of their cherished traditions and customs. Religious fanaticism leads to oppression, violence, torture and executions... in the name of God.

The grace of our Lord leads to the peace of God and to rest in Christ. □

Join us for “Playing Religious Games” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of August 9, 2020.

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grace of God in order to get their “cut” of the action.

Grace—direct from Jesus to you. No credit card transactions. No merchants, retailers or wholesalers. No shipping and handling charges. No federal, state or denominational taxes. “Rivers of living water” (John 7:38) flow from the holy, pristine and pure artesian well of Jesus.

3) Jesus invites “...all...” Some actually teach that the gospel of Jesus Christ is limited—some teach and believe that many humans are not now nor will they ever be invited to enjoy a grace-based relationship with God.

Some presumptuously believe God has determined and predestined some humans to be lost—that is, never to be invited to enjoy an intimate and personal relationship with God, on the basis of his grace.

Jesus says “all”—he doesn’t mean “some”—he doesn’t mean just those of a particular denomination or group or only those who keep some list of requirements or pay homage to a particular creed or obey a particular dogma. He says “all” may come to him.

4) Jesus calls to the “...weary...” those who are beaten down, worn out and burned out.

The Authorized King James Version of 1611 translated this Greek word as “labor”—it’s the kind of effort we consider from a blue collar, working man or woman. “Weary” defines those who are beaten down, worn out and burned out.

In its literal sense, in the physical dimension, “weary” is about hard, manual labor that causes sweat. This labor causes muscles to tire and the back to ache. This word in the Greek describes severe physical exhaustion, but Jesus uses it to describe a spiritual condition of being weak, enervated, debilitated and feeble.

The word “weary” is used to describe the spiritual condition which results from human beings

“Come” is not an invitation to observe Jesus from afar. “Come” is an invitation to leave behind what one is doing and come...to Jesus.



attempting to please God on the basis of their work. The rest of Jesus is not just a momentary reprieve before we return to meaningless work and striving. His rest is healing and transformative. His rest is a new spiritual identity, as we transform from slave to son, from shame to the grace and favor of our loving heavenly Father.

Sometimes people are weary because of the religion that holds them captive. Many do not realize it but they serve religious taskmasters—they are *prisoners of the law, locked up until faith should be revealed* (Galatians 3:23). Locked up spiritually they are blind to the fact that as they rely on observing the law they are under a curse (Galatians 3:10).

A French author once observed:
God loved the birds, so he invented trees.

Man loved the birds, so he invented cages.

The rest that Jesus gives us, by God’s grace, is freedom in Christ (Galatians 5:1). Jesus didn’t come to trap or ensnare us, so that we could be confined to religious cages.

The Fifth Element—Lifting the Old Covenant Burden

5) Jesus welcomes those who are “burdened.” The word “burdened”

describes the spiritual condition suffered by those who are deceived by religious propaganda that God will bless them if they just work harder, try harder, do more, pray more and give more. “Burdened” describes a person who is loaded down and overwhelmed with a great weight.

Those who were under the old covenant worked first and then they were paid. That’s the first and basic spiritual economic principle by which humans then attempted to relate to God. For that matter, this basic spiritual economic principle of the old covenant, still, 2000 years after Jesus’ earthly life, remains the primary way in which human religions teach their followers to relate to God.

A works-based relationship is simply this: *First*, I do something for you, and then I can expect something from you. Religion insists that *first* you and I do something for God and then God will do something for us.

Defining our relationship with God in terms of our performance is comfortable to us because it seems to leave us in control. We can determine how and when we work. We can determine how much we will earn, and when we will receive payment.

Well, at least that's how this theory is supposed to work. But it's all an illusion isn't it?

God's grace turns this whole performance-based premise upside down, doesn't it? God's grace means God gives his love and provides his favor to us without any strings—without any contractual obligation that we must fulfill first.

God's grace troubles us, because we don't like to feel obligated to anyone. The idea that God gives us his love without us first earning it is so fiercely resisted that many, if not most, reject his grace. God's grace makes workers who want to earn their own way uncomfortable.

Christ-less religion recognizes this human desire. Religion knows that humans much prefer to think that they are in charge of their lives. Religion knows if it can convince its followers that their eternal destiny is in its hands, then religion can make its followers

believe almost anything, and behave in almost any way it desires.

The old covenant was pre-Christian—it was religious, rather than Christ-centered. God started to reveal himself in a pre-Christian, elemental religious setting, but by design that old covenant religion leads to the cross of Christ and his glorious resurrection.

In the old covenant one worked first and then came payday. One works hard all week long and then comes the seventh day Sabbath. First one works six days and then one gets to rest—physical efforts earn the rest of the seventh day.

But the new covenant came along and Jesus, God in the flesh, proclaimed, "I AM God and I AM changing what I originally gave you. I AM revealing myself to you now in ways I never have. I have come in the flesh. I AM the new covenant." Jesus insists that he, the Alpha and the Omega, is the foundation of our relationship with God—not the Sabbath nor any old covenant law nor any religious stipulation.

When some read that Jesus promises to give us "rest" they immediately translate this word "rest" into what many religious authorities have taught them to think. They think rest in Christ is one and the same as a required weekly Sabbath. But the rest Jesus invites us to is not a day on the calendar.

Jesus is not inviting or requiring us to "come to the Ten Commandments." Jesus urges us to come to him, not to Moses. *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (John 1:17).

Any prerequisite or

proviso that requires we first perform and then God will respond is eclipsed and upended by the new covenant, including an obligatory first or seventh-day sabbath. **The new covenant reverses the order of work.** To be sure, humans still work and produce under the new covenant, but how and when and why one works are bedrock issues for Christ followers. Some say that the seventh day is the sign that sets apart those who obey God from those who do not. No. Jesus is the sign. **The cross of Jesus is our sign—not Sinai.**

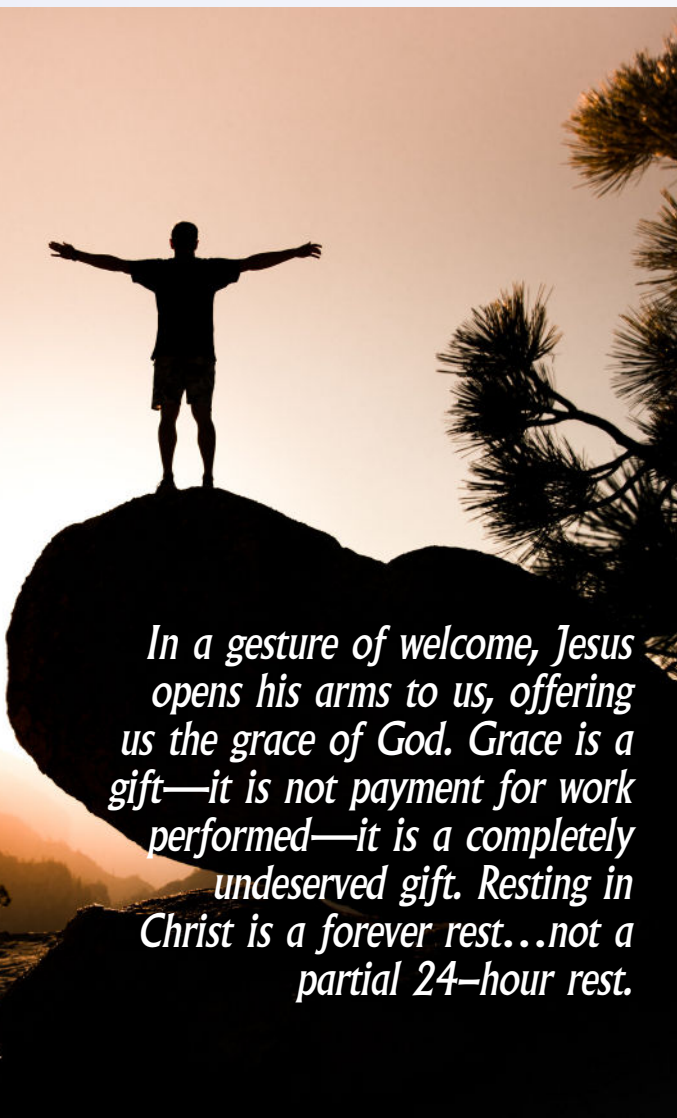
In the new covenant, early Christians started to worship on the first day of the week—they believed in resting in Christ first, and then after they rested Jesus empowered them to work the remaining six days of the week. While the **first** day of the week is no more a required observance than the seventh day the principle behind the first day was and is this: **First**, we yield and surrender to Jesus and accept the basic premise that all our righteousness is but rags. We are unable to earn anything from God. We throw ourselves on his mercies. We say "Yes" to God's grace.

Elements #6-7 – A Reiteration of the Centrality of Jesus Christ

Jesus announces "...I will give you rest."

Giving is the grace of God. In a gesture of welcome Jesus opens his arms to us, offering us the grace of God. Grace is a gift—it is not payment for work performed—it is a completely undeserved gift. Jesus invites all to a spiritual, eternal and abiding rest freely given, not a physical, here today and gone tomorrow rest earned. Resting in Christ is a forever rest, a complete rest—not a partial 24-hour rest.

Jesus says "I will **give** you rest"—not "I will reward you for your hard work and give you some time off to rest." Jesus says "I will **give** you rest"—not "OK, you worked six days, now you get one day off, but tomorrow, it's back to the salt mine."



In a gesture of welcome, Jesus opens his arms to us, offering us the grace of God. Grace is a gift—it is not payment for work performed—it is a completely undeserved gift. Resting in Christ is a forever rest...not a partial 24-hour rest.

7) Finally, Jesus urges us to take his “yoke.” “Yoke” appears in both verses 29 and 30.

“Yoke” is an archaic agricultural term used to describe the implement that is used, somewhat like a harness, keeping two oxen together as they work together, pulling a load. A yoke directs activity.

So Jesus invites us to be yoked with him, in him—for what purpose? So that we may, as we live in his rest, work!

First we rest, then we work! Some lampoon the grace of God by suggesting it is “easy-believism” and “couch potato Christianity.” Some make light of God’s grace by calling it “hot-tub religion.”

Some blasphemously attach derogatory labels to the grace of God while they demand allegiance to law rather than the gospel.

By Jesus’ own words we know his yoke is easy when contrasted with slavery to the law. The yoke of Jesus is easy but it does involve work—his work.

Work exists and is central to both the old and new covenant.

Work is not the issue. All Christ-followers work. How and why and by what power we work is the issue.

Once we trust in and accept God’s grace, once we yield to Jesus, Jesus takes up residence in our lives (Galatians 2:20) and empowers us to

A French author once observed:

*God loved the birds,
so he invented trees.
Man loved the birds
so he invented cages.*

work and produce (Ephesians 2:10). Resting in Christ isn’t about a lounge chair, your favorite beverage and Sunday night football.

You better believe Christians work—but in the new covenant our production is dictated by God. He makes of us what he desires.

He is the Master Potter—we are the work of his hands. We are his handiwork, and he has fashioned us to be masterpieces of his creation.

First, we accept Jesus’ invitation to enter into his rest, and then he puts

us to work—his work—and he empowers us to do and perform his work.

The choice is ours. Will we surrender to Jesus or fight against him?

Will we insist on our religious memberships and doctrines and rituals and performances are the way in which we pay our own way or will we embrace the Jesus Way?

Will it be Christ-less religion or the rest which Jesus Christ alone may give and live in us, by the grace of God? ☐

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

WITH GREG ALBRECHT
& BRAD JERSAK

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Faith is a Choice

By Jim Fowler

A Christian leader was explaining how difficult it was for him to have faith. He seemed to view Christian faith as the necessity of mustering up sufficient human trust or reliance on God so that he could experience personal peace and confidence in his dependence upon God. Faith, in the mind of this dear brother, had become a work of human effort to bring sufficient assurance to his own mind and emotions that he was exerting the necessary commitment and dedication that would qualify him as a faithful believer.

The process never let up, for he could never quite convince himself his faith was sufficient. Christians have some strange ideas about faith! Some think that faith is the acquisition of enough *doctrinal knowledge* of the gospel, so that their rational belief and mental assent self-justifies a certainty of accurate acceptance of the gospel. For others, faith is regarded as more experiential. For them faith is an *inner feeling*, an inner tickle, a “burning bosom,” an existential “know-so” whereby their emotions provide testimony that convinces them of their connection with God.

Then there are others who pay no attention to the evaluation of their faith because they were told, “faith is the gift of God.” It is God’s

responsibility. I remember the look of shock on the aforementioned fellow’s face when I told him, “You are making faith too difficult. ***Faith is a simple human choice to be receptive to whatever God has for you.***”

Faith is not a human effort. Faith is the human response that God intended when he self-limited himself to allow human freedom of choice whereby a human individual can consent to God’s grace action as sufficient for his human need. *Faith is a choice* to be receptive to God’s grace activity in his Son, Jesus Christ, both in redemption and in the continuing restoration of humanity in the Christian life.

Faith is a choice of human receptivity of the divine activity of grace. Scottish preacher, William Barclay, pointed out, “the first element in faith is what we can only call receptivity...not receptivity of facts or the significance of the facts, ...but the receptivity of the Person of Jesus Christ (“The Mind of Saint Paul” page 112).

The reception of the gift of God is faith; ***faith DOES NOT MEAN doing something, but receiving something; faith DOES NOT MEAN earning a reward, but the acceptance of a gift.***

Christian faith is our receptivity to God’s activity in Jesus Christ. Initially we receive the presence of the risen and living Lord Jesus into

our spirit in regeneration. “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

The apostle Paul wrote of “receiving the Spirit...by hearing through faith” (Galatians 3:2). The Christian life is subsequently the continuous receiving of the life and character of Jesus in our behavior. “As you received Christ Jesus, so walk in him ...established in your faith” (Colossians 2:6,7). Such a dynamic definition of Christian faith, “our receptivity of God’s activity,” disallows any charge of passivism, for inherent in the definition is the necessary consequence of God’s grace activity.

That is why the apostle James states, “Faith without works (without the consequential outworking of God’s activity) is useless...it is dead” (James 2:17, 20,26).

There is no Christian faith if the divine activity of Jesus Christ is not flowing forth in our lives by our faithful receptivity of his character. Faith is our privileged response-ability of receptivity to God’s grace activity in Jesus Christ. □

Jim Fowler is a theologian and author of several books, including The Issue Is Jesus, from which this article was excerpted.



Forwarding “Stuff” to the Future

Scanning and digitizing—I’ve been doing quite a bit of it recently. Reducing bulky and deteriorating physical stuff, where possible, to data which can easily be stored and shared. I have a lot of stuff—and I’m not alone. A friend since junior high school is trying to unload his accumulated stuff. He offered me some. I declined (except for a few tools!).

In the past (especially at moving time) friends have commented that I have way too much stuff, and I should get rid of it. Yeah, yeah, some stuff should be trashed or donated to the used stuff people. I’ve been doing that.

But then there’s other stuff—stuff that’s been handed down from parents, grandparents, great grandparents and great-great grandparents—a few antiques and keepsakes, but more importantly gobs of photo albums, letters and artifacts of family and professional history.

On top of that, my father was a cartoonist of some note, and he left behind business records and correspondence of his work dating back to the 1920s. His biographer and other researchers over the years have relied on me to find and scan journals, correspondence, photos and artwork that would have been completely lost if my mother and I hadn’t preserved and semi-organized them. A fellow cartoonist visited my studio recently. As he surveyed the loaded shelves, he commented, “Gosh! This is like a museum!” This is to say nothing of thousands of my own photos, artworks, books and memorabilia, in addition to those of my wife.

When I was young and thought I was too busy, it seemed like there would be plenty of time later to get all this stuff in order—making it accessible to future generations. Suddenly, I’m not so young and I’m busier than ever. Stuff is sitting in our living room, as I tackle it a little at a time. Beyond that, a major university is interested in taking my father’s archives—but I need to catalog them first! Other materials I will pass on to family members.

Gloomily, one biblically literate friend commented that it’s all going to burn—so why

even bother? She quoted 2 Peter 3:10—“*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.*”

Point taken. Everything we see, touch and hear lasts only a short time when compared with eternity. That helps keep physical things in perspective, doesn’t it? But can we really use this passage as a proof-text that we should flippantly disregard the gifts that have been handed down to us?

Yet a common theme of modern Evangelical Christianity has been that the end is just around the corner, and therefore stewardship and preservation of historical artifacts (and even the planet!) for future generations is a pointless pursuit. That’s just a shame.

No one knows exactly how or when such an end and the return of Christ will occur—and Christian interpretations vary widely. Yet Christians of other traditions take a longer view and have been involved in the preservation of art, literature and culture for millennia. We can thank tens of thousands of dedicated ancient scribes, medieval monks, copyists, printers and librarians for the preservation of Scripture over the millennia, as well as myriad other works of literature, history and art.

You might say that responsible Christ-followers live fully in the present while conserving the past and contributing to the future.

I have a collector friend who realized a few years ago that he and his wife don’t really “own” their art. They are just temporary custodians of the works—which reminded me of 1 Corinthians 7:31. I like the Berean Literal Bible’s rendering of this passage “...and those using the world, as not using it as their own. For the present form of this world is passing away.”

Since at any given time the “form of the world” (including our physical selves) is always passing away, we ought to take care to see to it that our stuff of value gets forwarded to the future. Those in the future will thank you! □

—Monte Wolverton



Quotes & Connections



“‘Do-nothing Christianity’ contradicts the gospel of Christ. Resting in Jesus and hard work are not activities that oppose one another. *God’s grace is not opposed* to human effort. *God’s grace is opposed* to a religious paycheck. God loves our efforts and participation as we follow Christ. However, God insists that our faith and hope rest fully in Christ. Jesus alone can and will give us what we can never earn or deserve.”—Greg Albrecht

“Faith is better understood as a verb than as a noun, as a process than as a possession.”—Frederick Buechner

“Perhaps the challenge of the gospel lies precisely in the invitation to accept a gift for which we can give nothing in return.”—Henri Nouwen

“We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.”—Jonathan Swift

“I have read in Plato and Cicero sayings that are wise and very beautiful, but I have never read in either of them: ‘Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.’” —Augustine

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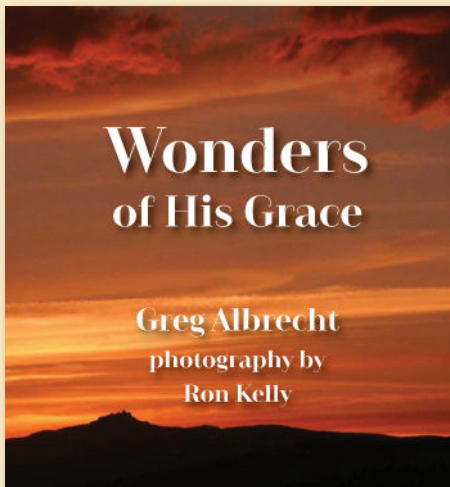
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Wonders of His Grace



God’s grace is a gift, not an achievement—we cannot earn or acquire his grace any more than we can look at the beauty of his creation and claim credit for designing or sustaining it.

To follow Christ and trust in him is to float in the river of God’s grace—it surrounds, envelops and holds us together. Look and see God’s grace in mountains, lakes and rivers as well as in dry and desolate deserts. Rest in the peace and serenity of his grace as displayed in the indescribable, stunning and jaw-dropping beauty of the flora and fauna of planet earth. Come luxuriate in God’s grace in the pages of **Wonders of His Grace**.

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