



**FREE
Sampler**



Walking *in* Grace

2024 Daily devotions
to draw you
closer to God

MAY



Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

—2 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV)



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 (ESV)

It's perfect weed-growing weather, and I should be out battling weeds in the prairie. But I went golfing instead. While I was walking up one of the fairways, the thought occurred to me that I may care more about weeds than God does.

My feelings come from remembering a joke about a man who bought a farm overgrown with bushes and weeds. With a lot of work, the man turned the farm into a showplace—weed-free and verdant. One day, his minister came to visit and observed, “Well, friend, you and God have done a marvelous job on this garden.”

The farmer replied, “You should have seen it when God had it by himself.”

If I stop my weed wars, then in a few years, my farm would be bushy and weedy again. And God would not seem to care. Birds would still nest, coyotes would make their dens, deer would tramp down the tall grass for their beds, bees would zoom around the pokeberry, and life would go on. It would still be good.

And I wonder—do I worry too much about weeding in my life? Weeding the teeny-tiny sins out? The fact is, sometimes weed seeds blow in. And God does not seem to be overly upset with it. From my reading of Scripture, that's what grace is all about. It's not by our works (weeding) but by His work that we are saved. And by saved, I mean become a beautiful garden for God.

O Lord, sometimes there are weeds in my soul. Work with me to clean them out and help me not to obsess about them. Instead, lead me to deeper trust in You. Amen.

—J. Brent Bill

Digging Deeper: Titus 2:11–14

Thursday, May 2

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

—John 15:12 (NIV)

When Gary, a senior citizen friend who lived alone, stopped responding to phone calls from myself and others from our church, we all became very concerned. Several members of his church family stepped in: We searched the Internet to try to locate his daughter, who lived in another state. We called all the neighbors we knew. Finally, we were able to get local officials to go in and check on Gary.

Whispered prayers remained on our lips as we made calls, scoured sites, and tracked down neighbors. And most of all, we were resourceful! Our pure love for our church brother helped us uncover a variety of methods to help deal with this challenge. Without knowing what the outcome would be, we knew we had to try every available way to get someone into Gary's apartment to help him.

Within hours, authorities entered Gary's apartment. He had fallen, and unable to get up, he had spent four days on the floor. Praise God, he was alert, awake, and alive. It is only by God's grace that Gary was found in time. Our "rescue team" did a little praise dance upon receiving word that Gary was found safe.

Certainly, life will throw us trials and hardships to overcome. But using our God-given resourcefulness—and banding together with our brothers and sisters in Christ—will always help us to push through.

*Father, I thank You for our church family and for
their dedication to our brothers and sisters at all times.*

—Gayle T. Williams

Digging Deeper: Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 2:10

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. . . . —John 15:1–2 (NIV)

It's a lovely day to be outside in my garden. I delight in the springtime sunshine on my face and shoulders and in the scent of warm, damp earth rising up to greet me.

Crouching next to one of the beds, I prepare a spot for a tomato plant that needs to be transplanted. It's gotten leggy and overgrown in its now-too-small pot, so I dig its hole extra deep.

Next, I pick the plant up, and—after giving it an appraising look—I use my fingernails to pinch off its middle and bottom branches. Now I'll be able to nestle most of the plant's height into the hole I've prepared. Roots will grow along the length of the buried stem, stabilizing it and helping the plant take up more of the water and nutrients it needs.

Pausing, I suddenly register the weeping wounds left by the missing branches. It occurs to me that, while what I've done is positive and helpful, the plant's experience at the moment is one only of injury.

So often, periods of transformative growth seem to begin with wounding. It's only later that it becomes possible to look back and understand why the cuts were necessary.

I look again at the small plant in front of me, freshly situated for its next stage of life, and I know the plans I have for it are good. As God's are for my life too. Even when His pruning hurts.

I'd avoid pruning it if I had a choice, God. But You are a wise gardener. Thank You for making the cuts You must, so I can continue to grow.

—Erin Janoso

Digging Deeper: Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28

Saturday, May 4

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. —Matthew 3:8 (NIV)

As a tenth-generation Southerner, I thought myself an expert on down-home sayings. But recently an elder at our church taught me a new one.

Growing up, when Rick and his siblings got caught doing wrong and would apologize, their mother would often reply, “Sorry don’t feed the bulldog.” She wanted her kids to understand that, while it’s right to admit mistakes, the apology doesn’t magically wash away whatever damage the transgression has done.

As I turned the words over in my mind, I wondered why this saying linked repentance to the satiety of a bulldog. And why a bulldog and not another breed?

I thought back to Fudge, the bulldog my uncle had when I was a child. Fudge, a watchdog, was fantastic at his job. I was terrified of his bark and his snarl—at times I wondered whether I might be his next meal! Thinking on Rick’s mother’s words, I imagined that Fudge with an empty stomach would’ve probably been even fiercer than Fudge with a full belly. The aftermath of foolish decisions can be fierce too—I’ve been bitten enough to know. The consequences of our sin don’t suddenly disappear in this life; we still have to face the often formidable messes we’ve made.

Sorry may not feed the bulldog, but how incredibly blessed we are that “godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:10, NIV). God is quick to forgive. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, He is always rushing to welcome us home no matter what we’ve done wrong.

Lord, thank You for Your amazing grace. Help me to live wisely.

—Ginger Rue

Digging Deeper: 2 Chronicles 7:14; Proverbs 12:21

May

YOU WERE CALLED TO PEACE

- 1 *Great message on kindness.*
- 2 *Lord, I will trust in You.*
- 3 *Look into Digging Deeper, Titus 2:11-14*
- 4
- 5 *Share today's scripture with Gina.*
- 6
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on each day's
devotion at the end
of every month.

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