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The
G I F T
for
All People



THOUGHTS ON GOD'S GREAT GRACE

The
G I F T
for
All People

BOOKS BY MAX LUCADO

NONFICTION

3:16

A Gentle Thunder

A Love Worth Giving

And the Angels Were Silent

Before Amen

Come Thirsty

Cure for the Common Life

Facing Your Giants

Fearless

God Came Near

God's Story, Your Story

Grace

Great Day Every Day

He Chose the Nails

He Still Moves Stones

In the Eye of the Storm

In the Grip of Grace

It's Not About Me

Just Like Jesus

Max on Life

Next Door Savior

No Wonder They Call

Him the Savior

On the Anvil

Outlive Your Life

Six Hours One Friday

The Applause of Heaven

The Great House of God

Traveling Light

When Christ Comes

When God Whispers Your Name

You'll Get Through This

FICTION

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The Oak Inside the Acorn

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You Are Mine

You Are Special

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THOUGHTS ON GOD'S GREAT GRACE



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Dedicated to all missionaries around the world.



How beautiful are the feet
of those who bring good news.

ROMANS 10:15

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PROLOGUE

“Bright future” said it all. Single, good looking, recent college grad. His family loved him, girls noticed him, career opportunities invited him.

And yet, while Eric appeared confident without, he was tormented within. Tormented by inner voices he could not quiet. Tortured by mental images he could not avoid and by thoughts he could not understand. So, desperate to escape the torment, Eric decided to escape from life. On a gray, rainy February day, Eric walked out the back door of his home. He never returned.

When Eric walked away, someone was watching. His sister Debbie saw her brother leave, his tall frame ambling down the street. She assumed he would return. He didn’t. She hoped he would call. He didn’t. She thought she could find him. She couldn’t. Hours became years. Years of wandering and wondering. As Eric wandered, Debbie wondered. Where could he be? What could have happened? Is he all right? Is he alive?

Where Eric journeyed, only God and Eric know. But we know that he ended up thousands of miles from his home. And

somewhere along his path, somehow, Eric began to believe he had been given an assignment. Someone noticed Eric going through a dumpster, looking for food. And that someone suggested Eric sweep up in exchange for the garbage. Eric interpreted this comment as an assignment: he believed he had been given a permanent commission to clean up a roadside in San Antonio, Texas.

To the local residents, Eric's lanky form and bearded face became a familiar feature as he walked up and down his "assigned" section of Interstate 10, gathering trash. Through the years many tried to assist him, but Eric resisted. He was content to survive on what he collected. He created a home out of a hole in a vacant lot. He designed a wardrobe out of split trousers and a torn sweatshirt. Summer sun was deflected by an old hat, winter chill softened by a plastic bag covering his shoulders.

His weathered skin and stooped shoulders made him look twice his forty-four years. But then, sixteen years living on the side of the road would do that to you.

It had been sixteen years since Debbie had seen her brother. And she might never have seen him again, had it not been for two events. The first was the construction of a car lot on top of Eric's hovel. The second was a pain in Eric's abdomen. The car lot took Eric's shelter. The pain took Eric's health.

When EMS found Eric curled in a ball on the roadside, he was already dying of cancer. Another few months

and Eric would be gone. And with no known family or relatives, he would die as he'd lived—alone.

Eric's court-appointed temporary guardian couldn't handle this thought. *Surely someone is looking for this man*, reasoned the attorney. So the attorney searched the Internet for anyone missing a brown-haired adult male with Eric's last name.

A reply came from a New Hampshire woman. Could this homeless man in Texas be the brother she'd been seeking for so long? The description seemed to match, but she had to know for sure. So Debbie, her husband, and two children headed for Texas.

By the time Debbie arrived, Eric had been released from the hospital. Debbie found him near his old home, resting against the side of a building. One look was all it took to convince her—the search was over. She saw beyond the sun-dried skin, beneath the unkempt hair and beard. She saw her brother.

Eric, however, didn't recognize his sister. The years had ravaged his mind. Debbie longed to embrace this long-lost sibling, but her instincts told her she must await his cue.

And then something small led the way. Eric noticed an angel pin Debbie was wearing. He was intrigued by it. When Debbie offered the pin to Eric, he said yes. He even allowed her to pin the angel on his shirt. And with that one gesture, she, at long last, touched her brother.

Debbie came to Texas planning to spend a week. But a week passed and she couldn't leave. She rented an apartment, began homeschooling her children and reaching out to her brother. It wasn't easy. He didn't always recognize her. He wouldn't call her by name. One day he cursed her. He refused to sleep in her apartment. He didn't want her food. He didn't want to talk. He just wanted his vacant lot. He wanted his "job."

But Debbie didn't give up on Eric. Weeks became months, and still the sister stayed. She understood that he didn't understand. So she stayed. I came to know her as she began to attend our church. After hearing her story, I asked what you would have asked. Why? Why didn't she give up? "Simple," she told me. "He's my brother."

Her pursuit reminds us of another, doesn't it? Another kind heart who left home in search of the confused. Another compassionate soul who couldn't bear the thought of a brother in pain. So, like Debbie, he left home. Like Debbie, he found his sibling.

And when God found us, we acted like Eric. We didn't recognize the one who came to help us. When he told us we were part of his family, we didn't believe him. When he offered a safe place to stay, we didn't follow him. We ignored him. Some even cursed him and told him to leave.

But he didn't leave. He lingered. And still he lingers. He understands that we don't understand. He knows

that we are torn by many voices and infected by a cancerous sin. He knows we are near death. But he doesn't want us to die alone.

Like Debbie, he wants to give us something before it's too late. He wants to give us a place in his family. And he wants to hold our hand when we die.

So God follows us. He pursues us along every roadside; he follows us down every highway. He follows us all the days of our lives. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

What a surprising way to describe God. A God who pursues us.

Dare we envision a mobile, active God who chases us, tracks us, following us with goodness and mercy all the days of our lives? He's not hard to find. He's there in Scripture, looking for Adam and Eve. They're hiding in the bushes, partly to cover their bodies, partly to cover their sin. Does God wait for them to come to him? No, the words ring in the garden. "Where are you?" God asks (Genesis 3:9), beginning his quest to redeem the heart of man. A quest to follow his children until his children follow him.

Moses can tell you about it. After forty years in the desert, he looked over his shoulder and saw a bush blazing. God had followed him into the wilderness.

Jonah can tell you about it. He was a fugitive on a

boat when he looked over his shoulder and saw clouds brewing. God had followed him onto the ocean.

The disciples of Jesus knew the feeling of being followed by God. They were rain-soaked and shivering when they looked over their shoulders and saw Jesus walking. God had followed them into the storm.

An unnamed Samaritan woman knew the same feeling. Alone in life and alone at the well, she looked over her shoulder and saw a Messiah speaking. God had followed her through her pain.

The apostle John, banished on Patmos, looked over his shoulder and saw the skies begin to open. God had followed him into his exile.

Lazarus had been dead for three days in a sealed tomb when a voice awakened him. He lifted his head and looked over his shoulder to see Jesus. God had followed him into death.

Peter the Apostle had denied his Lord and gone back to fishing when he heard his name and looked over his shoulder and saw Jesus cooking breakfast. God had followed him in spite of his failure.

Sin, wilderness, ocean, storm, pain, exile, death—our God is the God who follows. Have you sensed him following you? He is the one who came to seek and save the lost. Have you sensed him seeking you?

Have you felt his presence through the kindness of a stranger? Through the majesty of a sunset or the mystery

of romance? Through the question of a child or the commitment of a spouse? Through a word well spoken or a touch well timed, have you sensed him?

Like Eric, we have left home. But, like Debbie, God has followed us. Like Eric, we are quick to turn away. But, like Debbie, God is slow to anger and determined to stay. We don't accept God's gifts. Yet God still gives them.

God gives us himself. Even when we choose our hovel over his house and our trash over his grace, still he follows. Never forcing us. Never leaving us. Patiently persistent. Faithfully present. He uses all his power to convince us that he is who he is and he can be trusted to lead us home.

By the way, Debbie's faithful persistence moved Eric's heart. Before his life ended, he acknowledged her as his sister. In doing so, he found his way home.

And that's what God wants for you. He simply wants you home with him. And to bring you home, he offers you a gift.

My prayer is that through these pages you'll see his gift like you've never seen it.

If you've already accepted it, you'll thank him again.

And if you've never accepted it, you will. For it's the gift of a lifetime, a gift for all people.

THE GIFT OF A SAVIOR

*The Word became a human and lived among
us. . . . The Word was in the world, and the world
was made by him, but the world did not know
him. . . . But to all who did accept him and believe
in him he gave the right to become children of
God. . . . Because he was full of grace and truth,
from him we all received one gift after another.*

JOHN 1:14, 10, 12, 16

It was about to begin—God’s plan for humanity, crafted in the halls of heaven and carried out on the plains of earth. Only holiness could have imagined it. Only divinity could have enacted it. Only righteousness could have endured it. And once the plan began, there would be no turning back. The Creator knew it. The Son knew it. And soon, earth itself would witness heaven’s majesty alighting on the planet.



It Began in a Manger

*I*t all happened in a most remarkable moment . . . a moment like no other. For through that segment of time a spectacular thing occurred.

God became a man. Divinity arrived. Heaven opened herself and placed her most precious one in a human womb.

The omnipotent, in one instant, became flesh and blood. The one who was larger than the universe became a microscopic embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl.

God had come near.

He came, not as a flash of light or as an unapproachable conqueror, but as one whose first cries were heard by a peasant girl and a sleepy carpenter. Mary and Joseph were anything but royal. Yet heaven entrusted its greatest treasure to these simple parents. It began in a manger,

this momentous moment in time. He looked anything but a king. His face, prunish and red. His cry, still the helpless and piercing cry of a dependent baby.

Majesty in the midst of the mundane. Holiness in the filth of sheep manure and sweat. This baby had overseen the universe. These rags keeping him warm were the robes of eternity. His golden throne room had been abandoned in favor of a dirty sheep pen. And worshiping angels had been replaced with kind but bewildered shepherds.

Curious, this royal throne room. No tapestries covering the windows. No velvet garments on the courtiers. No golden scepter or glittering crown. Curious, the sounds in the court. Cows munching, hooves crunching, a mother humming, a babe nursing.

It could have begun anywhere, the story of the king. But, curiously, it began in a manger. Step into the doorway, peek through the window.

He is here!

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