

A watercolor illustration featuring various flowers and a butterfly. The flowers are in shades of pink, peach, and light blue, with some showing detailed stamens and pistils. The butterfly is small and colorful, with green, orange, and black markings. The background is white, and the overall style is soft and artistic.

# PILGRIM

RUTH CHOU SIMONS



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
EUGENE, OREGON

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Published in association with William K. Jensen Literary Agency, 119 Bampton Court, Eugene, OR 97404

Original artwork by Ruth Chou Simons; design work by Sarah Alexander Schools

Cover and interior design by Janelle Coury

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## PILGRIM

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8292-4 (hardcover)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022945987

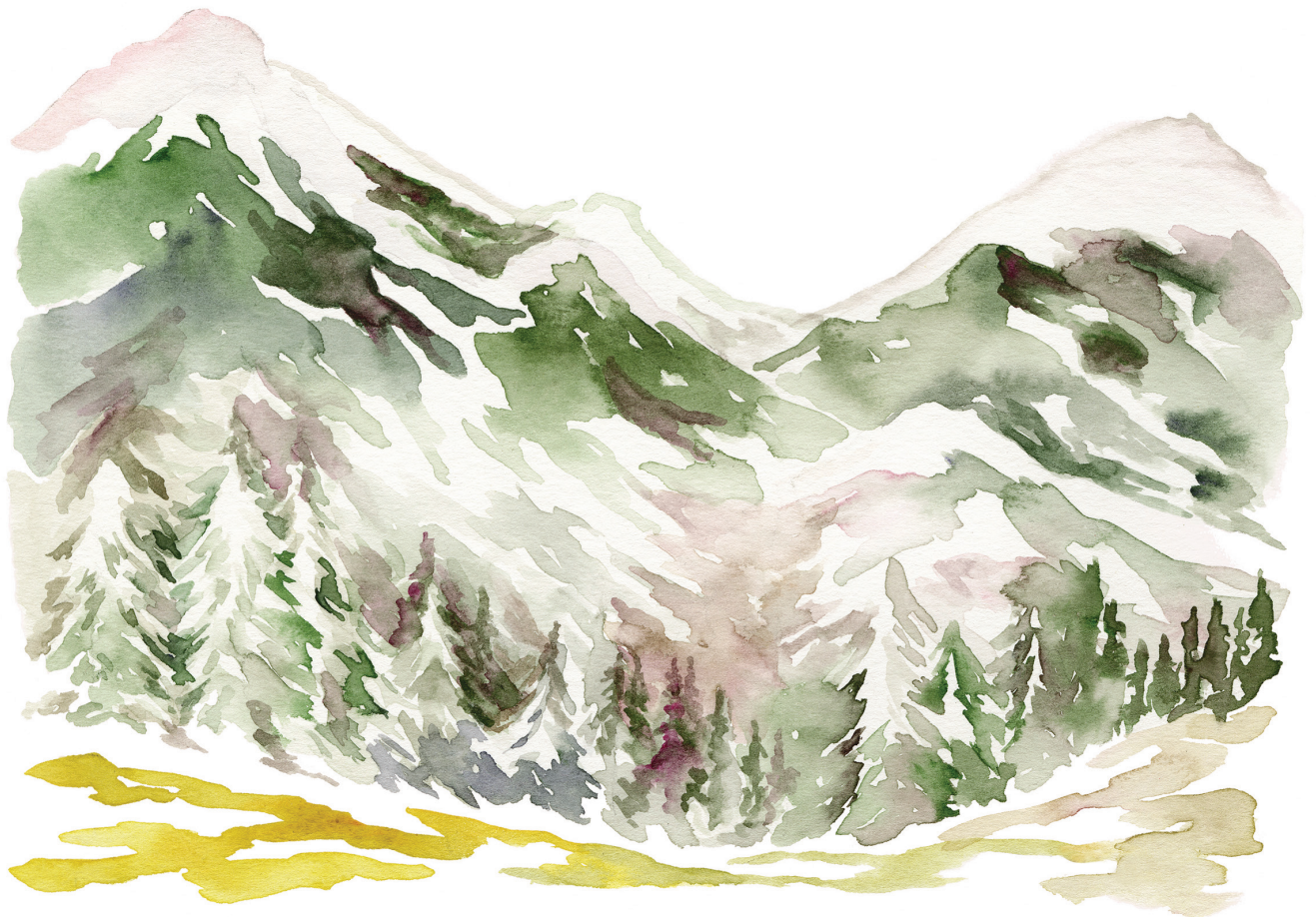
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**Printed in China**

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 / RDS / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



TO MY FELLOW PILGRIMS:  
HIS GRACE HAS BROUGHT US  
SAFE THUS FAR,  
AND HIS GRACE WILL  
LEAD US HOME.







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# OUR PILGRIM JOURNEY

I don't know about you, but sometimes I find myself in such a hurry or so focused on where I'm going that I miss the street signs meant to point the way and help me discern where I am. I get lost, miss the turn, or think I'm somewhere I'm not—all because I'm not paying attention to the very guideposts meant to inform my journey.

A guidepost, by definition, points the way on a path that may be difficult or hard to navigate. Sometimes the way of the Christian life seems unclear or complex. Sometimes our walk with Christ feels like an unsure road to understand. But the Bible, God's Word, is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path, as we read in Psalm 119:105. We've not been left to wander aimlessly on this journey heavenward. No, our Savior shows us the way, by being the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

I wrote this *Pilgrim* journey so that we might walk this road, courageously and confidently, together as Christ-followers. Through the guideposts of grace that appear in this book—guideposts that affirm key truths in the Bible—we will find that we are not alone, not abandoned, and no longer need to strive to secure our own footing or define our own paths. Instead, we






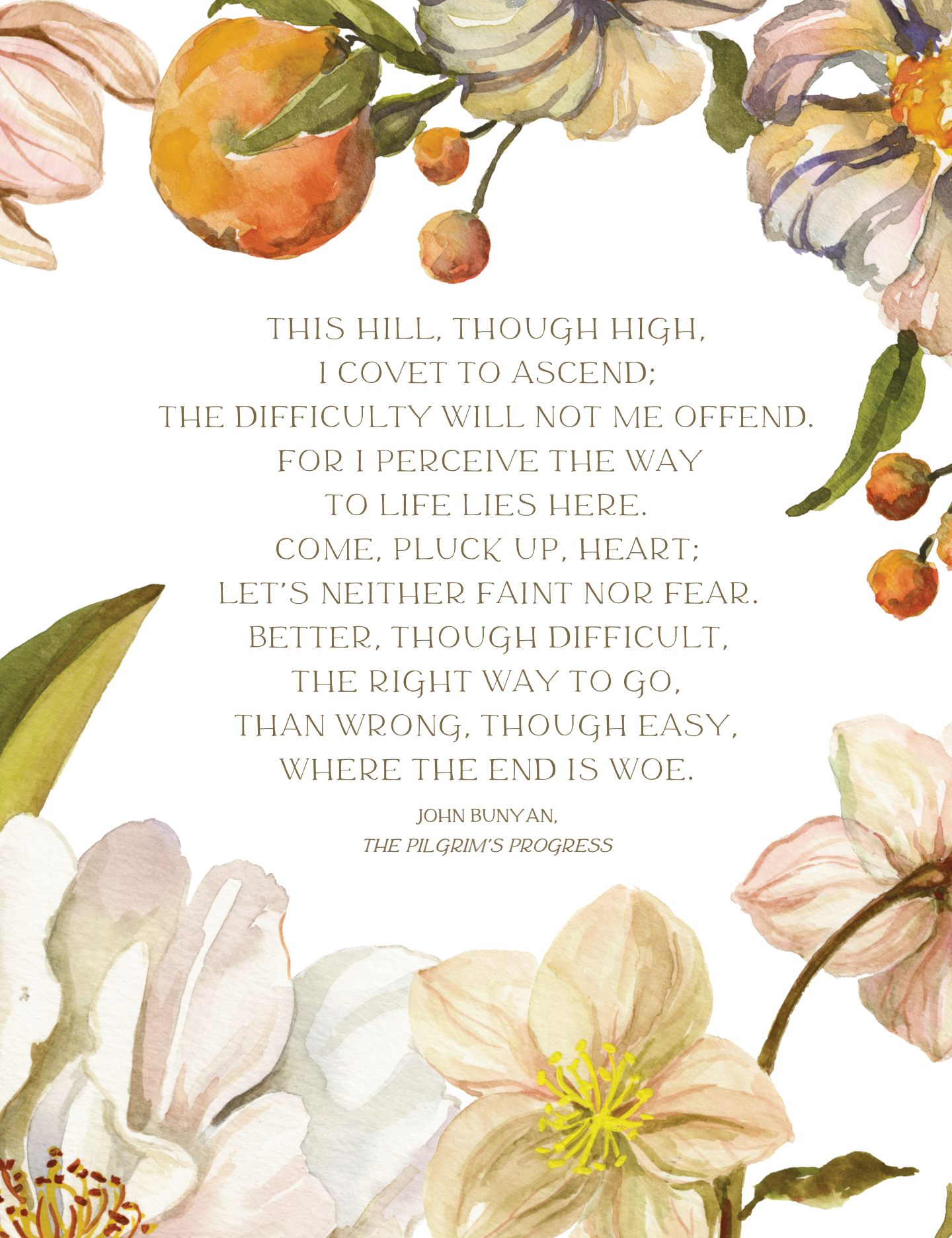
discover that God writes our stories, paves our paths, leads the way, never leaves us nor forsakes us, and goes with us wherever this earthly journey takes us.

Here, we'll explore reminders from Scripture that point us forward on our journey with Christ—guideposts that direct our hearts and minds to the truths of the gospel, the attributes of God, and the core foundations of our faith. We'll encounter reminders of God's character and how He leads us onward as pilgrims—the same reminders that have shaped believers who've gone before us in ages past. Some of these faithful pilgrims penned hymns that elucidate these truths in ways that stick with us long after the melodies fade; these accompany us on this journey as well.

My prayer is that through this exploration, you'll discover the themes of grace that punctuate not only the moment of salvation in a believer's life, but all the twists and turns, hills and valleys that shape our journeys—before, behind, ahead, and along the way. These truths are reminders of *God's* way, not yours or mine. They are indicators of God's story, not our own. Lord willing, these guideposts of grace will serve to remind us, again and again, season after season, that God is at work right where we are.

If you're weary, fellow traveler, I'm here to tell you you're not alone, and there is great hope for the road ahead. I'm here to remind you that you can lay down the heavy burden you've been carrying for miles and miles, and—if you're willing—let your Savior carry it for you instead. He is at work more than you know. There are guideposts of grace everywhere we look, friend, and they accompany our *Pilgrim* journey, even now. We just have to cultivate eyes that see and hearts that believe these guideposts are ours—for me and for you. Will you join me—as God leads us onward in this *Pilgrim* journey, together?

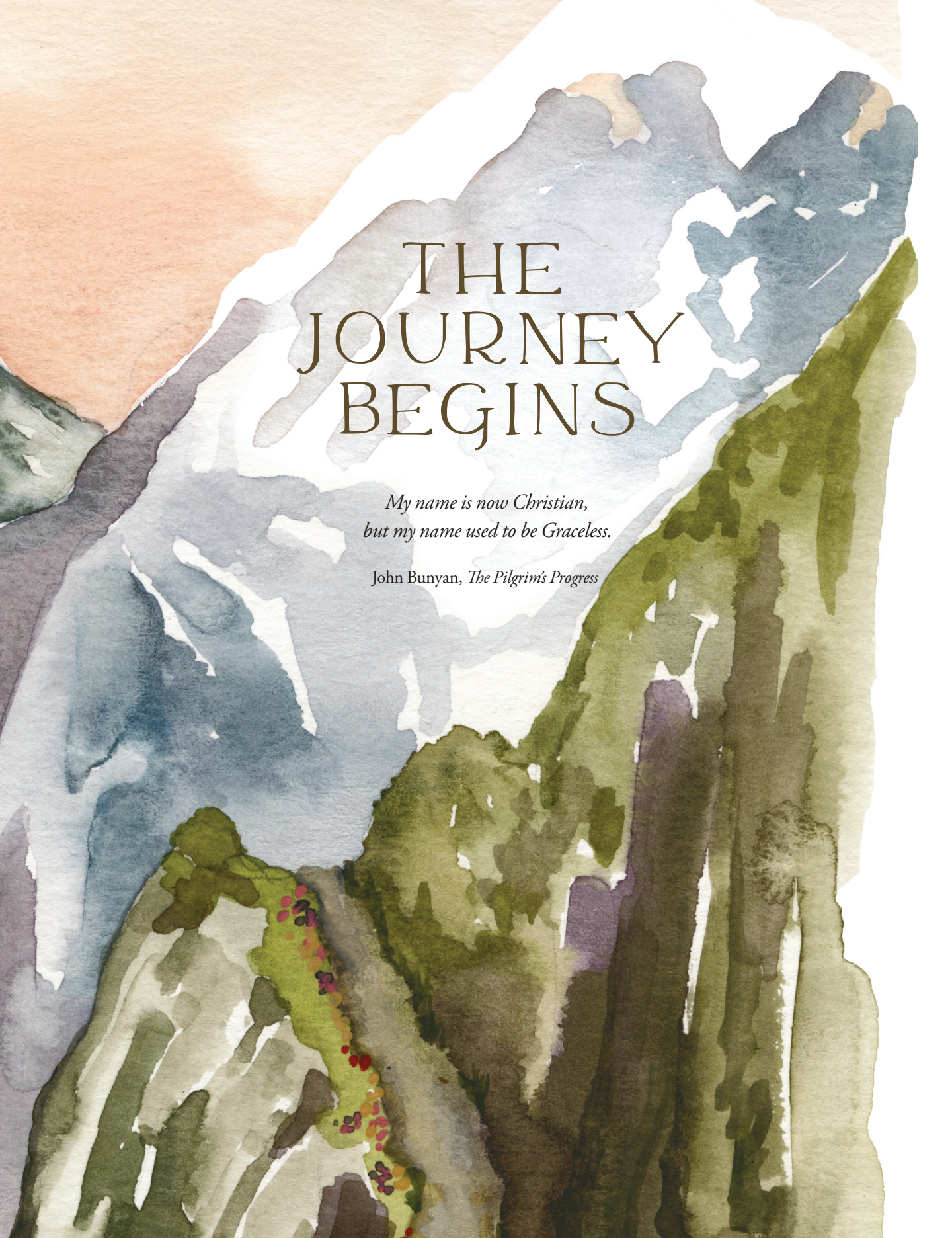


A watercolor illustration featuring various flowers and fruit. At the top, there are pink and purple flowers, a large orange fruit, and several small round fruits on a stem. At the bottom, there are large, light-colored flowers with yellow centers and green leaves. The background is white.

THIS HILL, THOUGH HIGH,  
I COVET TO ASCEND;  
THE DIFFICULTY WILL NOT ME OFFEND.  
FOR I PERCEIVE THE WAY  
TO LIFE LIES HERE.  
COME, PLUCK UP, HEART;  
LET'S NEITHER FAINT NOR FEAR.  
BETTER, THOUGH DIFFICULT,  
THE RIGHT WAY TO GO,  
THAN WRONG, THOUGH EASY,  
WHERE THE END IS WOE.

JOHN BUNYAN,  
*THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*



A watercolor illustration of a mountain landscape. The sky is a soft, warm orange. The mountains are rendered in various shades of blue, green, and brown, with a path leading up a hill. The path is decorated with small, colorful dots in red, purple, and yellow. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and a layered, textured appearance.

# THE JOURNEY BEGINS

*My name is now Christian,  
but my name used to be Graceless.*

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*



O love  
of God,  
how rich  
and pure!  
How measureless  
and strong!

# 1

## A LOVE THAT WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU

**M**y firstborn spent a semester abroad in his junior year of college. Like any mom who's separated from her child, I knew the exact distance between him and me those months he was away. It felt like a million miles, but it was actually only 4,533, including one very large body of water. While he was away, we weren't even on the same continent, and truthfully, I hadn't expected the ache to be so overwhelming. Thankfully, our weekly chats on video eased the sadness and served to remind me that, in spite of miles and time zones, there was no distance between our hearts.

Every journey is marked by distance and terrain. Distance tells you how far you have yet to go, and terrain indicates how much effort it'll take to get to your destination. When traveling, we know we will be separated from comforts and the people we know and love, and we plan accordingly. In preparation for a journey, we pack survival kits, emergency contact cards, and try to minimize the unsettledness we inevitably experience when we're far from home.

It's not so different with our spiritual journeys. Whether we feel distant from or in close proximity to the things that give us assurance can be the difference between journeying in fear and anxious striving, or journeying from a position of courage and confidence.

We were made for the latter in our walks with God—a journey that traverses seasons of life and the difficult terrain of our hearts. It's a journey that



finds its purpose when we receive the gift of salvation through Christ and live as a new creation the rest of our days until we see our Savior face to face. The promises recorded for us in the Bible testify that while the journey is not easy, we do not walk alone.

So why do so many of us feel distant and alone? Why do we so often allow ourselves to believe that the distance between the God who rescues us and our sinful hearts is vast, when Christ erased the miles, the distance, and the eternal separation sin causes...and brought us near?

Maybe that's why the apostle Paul so clearly addresses the true state of a Christ-follower's nearness to God, and wrote in Romans 8:38-39, "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul wouldn't have spelled out all the ways we cannot be separated from God's love if it wasn't so easy to forget. As if death, angels, and rulers were not enough, Paul says "nor anything else in all creation" (read: nothing in all the world) is capable of removing us from the active love of God in our lives as believers.

Let that sink in for just a moment...

You are loved.

You are welcomed.

Nothing can get in the way of God's love for you.

Not even you.

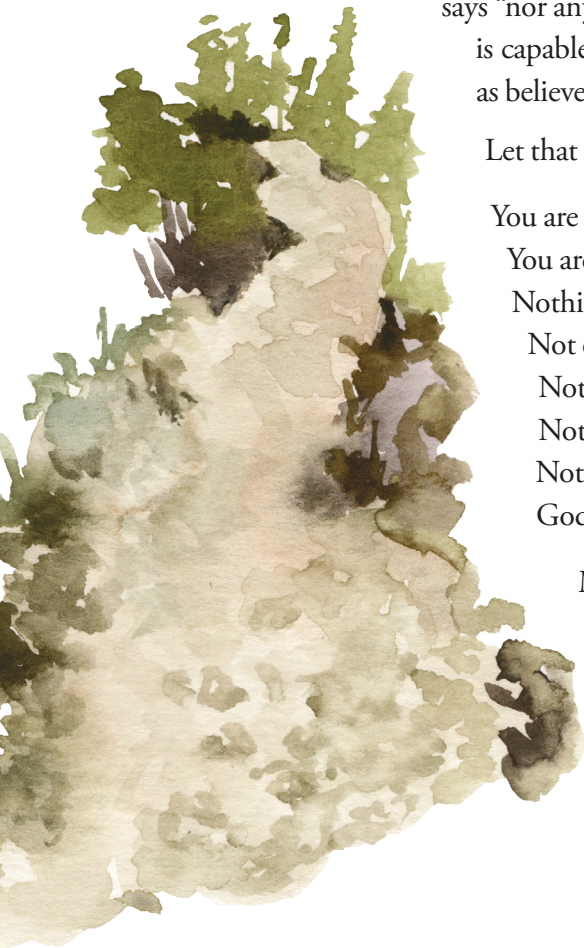
Not the government.

Not evil.

Not even your own mistakes.

God's love is so limitless that no one can stop it.

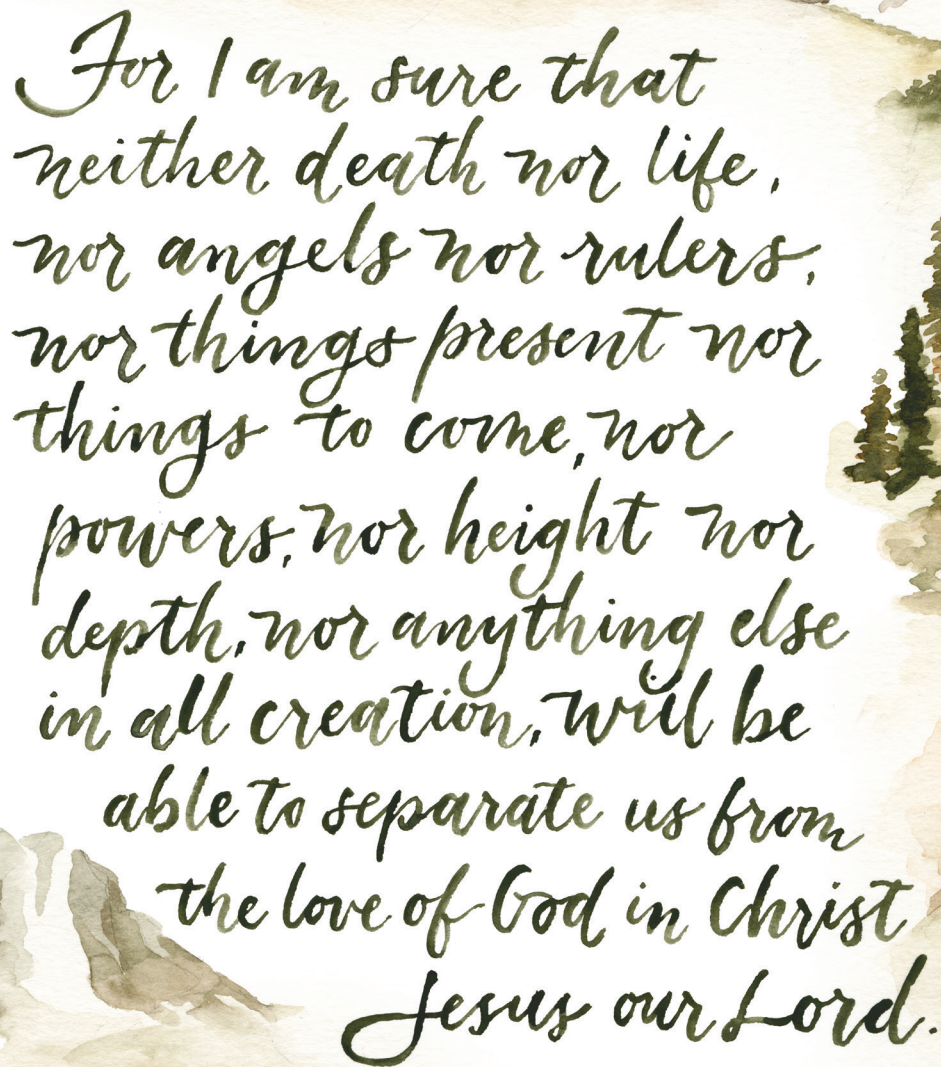
My guess is that, like me, it's much easier for you to remember the ways you've caused distance with God than to remember the ways God has bridged the impossible chasm with His love. That's why Paul makes such a dramatic point about the inability for anything to remove you from God's love.







THE LOVE OF GOD IS GREATER FAR  
THAN TONGUE OR PEN CAN EVER TELL;  
IT GOES BEYOND THE HIGHEST STAR,  
AND REACHES TO THE LOWEST HELL.  
THE WAND'RING CHILD IS RECONCILED  
BY GOD'S BELOVED SON.  
THE ACHING SOUL AGAIN MADE WHOLE,  
AND PRICELESS PARDON WON.

A watercolor illustration of a landscape. In the background, there are dark, jagged mountains under a pale sky. The middle ground shows a rolling hillside with several tall, dark green evergreen trees. In the foreground, a light blue river flows across the scene. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette.

For I am sure that  
neither death nor life,  
nor angels nor rulers,  
nor things present nor  
things to come, nor  
powers, nor height nor  
depth, nor anything else  
in all creation, will be  
able to separate us from  
the love of God in Christ  
Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8 : 38-39

## THE LOVE OF GOD

God's love is a core aspect of His character—so much so that the Bible says God is love. His love is perfect, steadfast, and not based on feelings or emotions. God exhibits His love in ways that are in harmony with His holiness, justice, omnipotence, and other attributes. One special quality of God's love is that it's self-sacrificing. He was willing to send His Son to die on the cross for us so that we could be brought back into relationship with Him.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul teaches that God secured our salvation by grace, and not because of our righteousness or religious acts. He shows that it was God's love that fulfilled the law we are unable to keep. It was God's love that rescued us, and it is God's love that sustains us. As Christ-followers, we can't walk, follow, or go anywhere with Jesus if we don't first surrender to the love of God that makes our journey with Him possible in the first place.

How might you think differently about your relationship with God this day if you took to heart the words of this hymn writer?

*The love of God is greater far  
than tongue or pen can ever tell;  
it goes beyond the highest star,  
and reaches to the lowest hell.  
The wand'ring child is reconciled  
by God's beloved Son.  
The aching soul again made whole,  
and priceless pardon won.*

Does God still seem distant when you consider the distance He traversed to rescue you?

Without wonder and amazement for God's love for us, we will continue to live as if we're separated from our Father by millions of miles. Without



recognizing the nature of God's love, we'll believe we've stayed away from church too long to darken the doors and take part in Sunday worship. We'll assume we're too far off His radar to even know His care. We'll act as though we walk alone, far from home. Don't believe these lies, friend. Instead, be amazed by the limitless love of God. As Samuel Rutherford so wisely said, "Believe God's love and power more than you believe your own feelings and experiences. Your rock is Christ, and it is not the rock that ebbs and flows but the sea."


Nothing can separate us from God's love because His love doesn't depend on us or our feelings. It's limitless and unending, and is in perfect harmony with His goodness, mercy, and justice. It's not fickle. He's not holding out on us. We don't have to worry for the other shoe to drop. Because God's love for us is infinite, our security in Him is infinite. Let that truth usher total assurance and peace into your worry-torn heart. You and I get to choose right now to realign our hearts with the truth of His love for us. It's deeper, wider, more extravagant than we know. God's love has eradicated the distance between our hearts and His; we have a forever companion who will stay at our side through every step of life's journey.

When we could not be home with God, Christ became *God with us* on this journey. God with us...*home* with us. The very gift of salvation is that we might walk with God, forever.

GUIDEPOST:

NOTHING CAN  
SEPARATE US FROM  
GOD'S LOVE.



A watercolor illustration of a forest scene. In the center, a white rectangular piece of paper is layered over the background, containing text. The background features two tall, slender trees with brown trunks and green foliage. The ground is depicted with various shades of green and brown, suggesting grass and earth. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and a slightly textured appearance.

NEVER did  
HIS love

BEGIN AND NEVER  
CAN IT CEASE.

*It is from eternity  
and shall be to  
eternity.*

C.H. SPURGEON

Amazing grace!

how sweet the sound  
that saved a wretch  
like me! I once was  
lost but now am  
found, was blind,  
but now I see.



# 2

## GRACE FOR EVERY STEP OF THE JOURNEY

**I** magine yourself on a steep and narrow mountain trail, with precarious cliffs and drop-offs along the path. The trail is rocky and difficult to navigate. At times, loose rock and dirt crumble along the edge and roll downward, and you suddenly realize just how far the chasm is below. Gusts of wind come along and you reach for something secure—a branch, a tree trunk, more solid ground. You ask yourself, *Will I make it?*

But what if there was a sturdy rope securely fastened along every point of this trail from beginning to end? What if the course was mapped out at the start, and regardless of difficulty, the secure and steady rope guided the course all the way to your destination? This tether of rescue is the grace of God.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I forget why God's grace is all that amazing. I forget that it's the lifeline that holds me fast to my eternal welcome with my heavenly Father. How quickly I forget...

when I hide my sin and attempt to clean up my life before drawing near to the Lord.

when I try to prove I'm worthy of God's love by doing and serving more.

when I'm fearful and try to control my life circumstances for my own good.

when I don't rest, believing my trying a little harder will somehow fix my life.





## THE GRACE OF GOD

God's grace is the expression of His goodness toward those who deserve punishment. He freely extends His favor to people by offering them salvation from their sins. This grace is generously bestowed on the undeserving and cannot be earned. God's grace is also endless—the gift of salvation is eternal and cannot be lost, which means our future arrival in heaven is guaranteed.

These attempts to save myself are but a frantic weaving of a rope with straw and weeds when God offers a lifeline so strong and securely tethered to Himself that we need nothing but to walk with Him.

The apostle Paul never minced words; he always told it like it was, and I so appreciate that about him. You know he chose his words carefully, and because all Scripture is inspired by God, we can also trust that those words were carefully chosen by Him. So when Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast,” he was making this point to the believers reading his letter: God did not rescue you on account of your good deeds.

Do you know what that means, friend? It means that you can never be holy enough, strong enough, religious enough, or self-disciplined enough to not need the grace of God. We can stop trying to clean up or fix up our lives first before surrendering to Jesus.

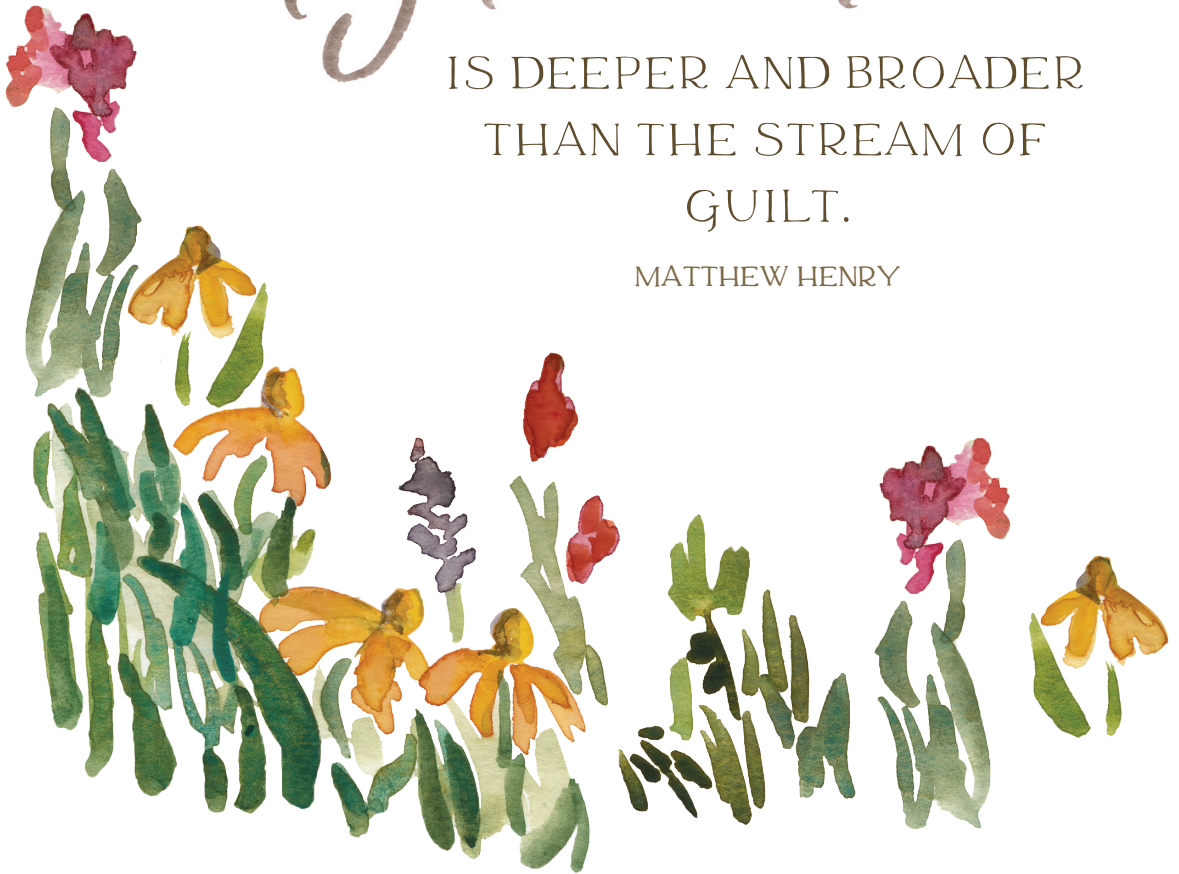




The stream  
of grace  
and  
righteousness

IS DEEPER AND BROADER  
THAN THE STREAM OF  
GUILT.

MATTHEW HENRY





Perhaps the idea of trying harder and the false promises that lead to striving have left you weary and exhausted. Trying harder through personal achievement and religious effort was the continual ball and chain of the ancient world before the cross of Christ. In many ways, it still is today. What was so amazing about the coming of Christ? Why would the Messiah mean freedom to an enslaved people? The Jews expected a Deliverer who would right every wrong and free them from political tyranny. But God's plan was to offer so much more. God's plan was to send a Deliverer who would right every wrong for eternity and free all who believe so they no longer remain under the tyranny of sin and death.

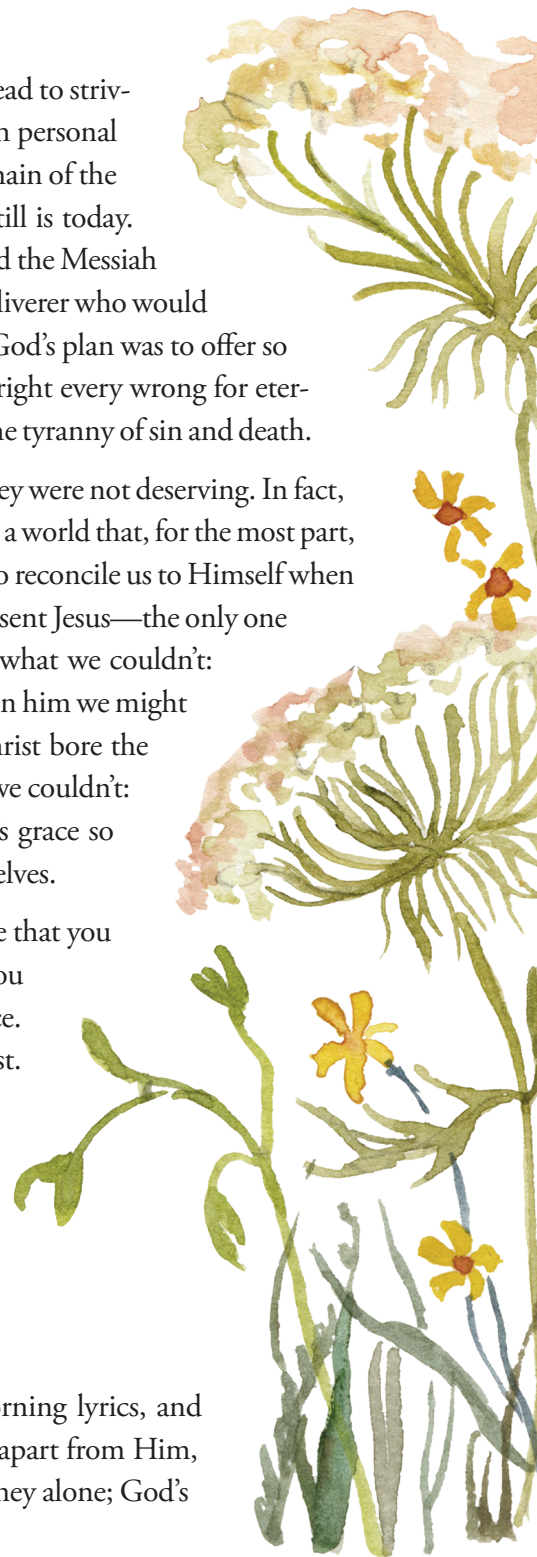
Christ did not come to worthy, loyal, faith-focused people; they were not deserving. In fact, Jesus came in the midst of self-righteous religiosity. He came to a world that, for the most part, didn't even want what He was offering. But God sent Christ to reconcile us to Himself when we lacked the ability to truly reconcile with one another. God sent Jesus—the only one who was undeserving of God's justice toward sin—to bear what we couldn't:

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ bore the punishment we deserved so that He could accomplish what we couldn't: righteousness and favor with God. That's what makes God's grace so amazing, and we will miss it if we still think we can save ourselves.

Listen, friend. That feeling that you're not enough? That sense that you may not have what it takes? It's a good place to start if it leads you to discover all that God desires to produce in you through grace. Lack and inability describe our condition apart from Christ. Abundance and equipped are the marks of a life tethered to the grace of God.

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.*

When these words become more than familiar Sunday morning lyrics, and instead become our declaration of God's rescue in a lost life apart from Him, we finally begin to discover that we were never meant to journey alone; God's desire has been to walk with us ever since the Garden.



Because of God's grace, we have access to sure footing, access to nearness, access to full confidence that we do not walk this journey alone.

The tether of God's grace, which reaches into eternity past when God knew you before the foundation of the world, and extends all the way to eternity future, when you will dwell with God in heaven, runs all along that trail from start to finish. God's gift of grace—the eternal welcome secured for us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—replaces our attempts to hold on with a strong grip with God's ability to hold us with His steady hand. No wonder Carl Trueman said it this way: "It is because we are saved by grace that grace then works in our lives to accomplish God's purposes for us. The Christian life originates in God's grace and is lived by God's grace."<sup>1</sup> God's grace not only saves us *from* destruction, it saves us *for* redemptive purposes. Grace doesn't just transfer us from lost to found; it ensures that we never lose our way or eternal footing again.

Friend, there is not one moment of your life that is not held fast by the strong and mighty assurance of God's grace. No matter how bumpy, how treacherous, or how unknown, you will ascend from the valleys to the peaks not according to your own ability or strength, but because the rope of God's grace holds and guides you every step of the way to His presence.

GUIDEPOST:

GOD'S GRACE HOLDS AND  
GUIDES US EVERY STEP OF  
THE WAY TO HIS PRESENCE.



The Lord has  
promised good to  
me, His word  
my hope secures;  
He will my shield  
and portion be  
as long as life  
endures.