

7-Day Acts of Grace Challenge

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. – 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

I'm so excited you've decided to join the Families with Grace 7-Day Acts of Grace Challenge! Our world from the outside in to our homes is in such need of love and grace. People need encouragement. And this 7-Day Acts of Grace Challenge is designed to spread grace, love and encouragement.

Each day you'll have a short Bible reading and focus on one area of your life followed by a couple of paragraphs about it. At the bottom you'll find a "Acting in Grace" box, which gives you an idea (or two) on how to easily live out the challenge. While the challenge is designed to last for seven days, the days don't have to be done in order or even consecutively. If it takes you more than one day to complete an item, that's OK, too.

All of the actions are simple ways that we can start living out grace and making a difference in the world around us. Give them a try. Challenge yourself to even get out of your comfort zone and have fun with it! I encourage you to keep it going after you complete the challenge or go back and do the challenge over and over. This world can ALWAYS use more grace, love and encouragement!

(I'd love to hear how the Families with Grace 7-Day Acts of Grace Challenge went for you. Feel free to connect with me on Facebook at [Facebook.com/FamiliesWithGrace](https://www.facebook.com/FamiliesWithGrace) or send me an email to stacey@writtencreations.com.)

Day 1: Focus on God

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. – 1 Peter 4:8-11 (NIV)

You can't find a better example of grace than God. He is the giver of grace to all of humanity, and our challenge starts with a focus on Him, the ultimate grace-giver. In picking a Bible verse to go along with focusing on God for day one, I started with just 1 Peter 4:10, but then I just couldn't keep it that narrow. Even though Peter is talking to early Christians in these verses, the words still very much apply to us. They tell us how God wants us to live out our life. Can you imagine if we spent every day loving deeply, not grumbly, using our gifts, speaking the words of God and serving others? We'd be such great examples of God's grace for all of those around us, including our family!

But we can't do that on our own. It's not humanly possible. We don't act out of deep love. We grumble. We are too tired to use our gifts. We speak words without considering God. We put off serving others for our own comfort. Yes, some days we rock it. Some days we are on point, but

many days we're not. And that's why any challenge about grace has to start with the One Who continues to give us grace for all the days and times that we mess up and fall short.

Acting in Grace:

Today, spend some time praising and thanking God for His grace. Pray that He helps you on a journey to be filled with more grace as you serve your family and those you come in contact with. Ask Him to direct your path always. Pray that God's power rests on you as His grace is sufficient for you and His power is made perfect in your weakness (1 Corinthians 12:9).

Day 2: Focus on your Spouse

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. – Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)

After God, our next most important relationship is with our spouses. Yet, sometimes we don't act that way. Sometimes we are the worst version of ourselves with our spouses because they continue to love us in spite of who we are at our worst. In truth, they deserve the best of us. They deserve someone who is humble, gentle, patient and loving. Sometimes we are some or all of those things. Sometimes we are not.

Living as a person of grace means that you are humble enough to admit you are wrong sometimes and need help. Living as a person of grace means that you reply with gentle words when your spouse cuts you off after having a bad day. Living as a person of grace means being patient when you are waiting on your spouse to finish a task you know you could do better or faster. Living as a person of grace means that every action toward your spouse is done out of love – the real love as defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." (NIV)

Acting in Grace:

Today, spend a few minutes praising God and thanking Him for the blessing of your spouse in your life. Then refrain from complaining about or to your spouse for 24 hours. Give him or her five sincere compliments or specific thanks during the same timeframe.

Day 3: Focus on your Children

² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. – 1 Peter 5:2-3 (NIV)

Raising children is hard work! No matter what stage of parenthood you're in, it's filled with challenges. From the sleepless nights with infants to the worries about adult children, it's a tough gig. And we can get so caught up in the daily grind of parenthood that we forget our purpose.

When my daughter was a baby, a friend shared with me that she felt her ministry was motherhood. She had a few children already at that point, and I didn't quite understand what she meant. As my daughter grew and we added a son into the mix as well, I began to really

understand what she said. While parenthood may not be your only ministry, if you are a parent, it is part of your ministry, especially those whose children aren't yet grown.

You've been entrusted to take care of your children and meet their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. They are the flock under your care that you have chosen to watch over. God has entrusted you to be an example to your flock of what the Christian walk really looks like. We are our children's first example of love, grace and faith. Since we know these things, you'd think we would find it easy to not lose our temper, speak kind words and cherish each moment. But life happens and our tempers run short, our words take on an edge of bitterness and we can't wait until it's time to tuck them into bed.

Instead, let us work to keep our tempers in check, use words that encourage and build up and make time to actually enjoy the little people in our care.

Acting in Grace:

Today, spend a few minutes praising God and thanking Him for the blessing of your child(ren) in your life. Thank Him for specific qualities you see in them that make them such a blessing to your life and to the world. Find a way to share that praise with your child(ren) today. Praise them for what they are doing well. Commit to spending a certain timeframe (15 minutes, 45 minutes, whatever works for you) that you are just focusing on your children and enjoying time with them.

Day 4: Focus on Yourself

³¹ *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."*

³² *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. – Mark 6:31-32 (NIV)*

How many times have you started to do something for yourself and gotten interrupted? It happens to everyone, but it especially happens when you have children in the mix. I remember when my children were younger, I wondered if I'd ever get to eat warm food again. Here's what I like about these verses in Mark: Jesus saw that His disciples had a need that was physical. They were hungry and hadn't been able to eat. And He didn't tell them to suck it up because there was ministry to be done. He met their need. He took them away to a quiet place so they could rest and refuel.

The Bible is filled with times that Jesus Himself goes off alone to commune with God and refocus. How much more do we need that time?! It can sometimes seem impossible to get time alone or time to focus on yourself, but you must do that. We need downtime to recharge and refocus. It is hard to focus on God and hear His voice when we are too busy and the world around us (and in our heads) is too noisy.

Finally, taking care of yourself is important because you can't keep pouring into your family from an empty jar. It's not being selfish to take even just 15 minutes of alone time and let everyone else fend for themselves (in a safe and age-appropriate manner, of course) so you can regroup. You will feel better and your family will benefit from that as well.

Acting in Grace:

Find a way to have some quiet time today. It may be 15 minutes here and 5 minutes there, but find time. Use it to talk to God. Have real conversations with Him instead of just going through a list of prayer requests. Spend time praising Him and asking Him for refreshment and encouragement. Then come up with something that refreshes you and make it happen within

the next 24 hours. It could be 30 minutes spent reading a book, 10 minutes spent polishing your toenails, two hours spent alone at the movie theater or an hour spent wandering through your favorite store.

Bonus Acting in Grace:

Just like with your spouse, commit to spending 24 hours without complaining about yourself both in your head and with your voice. Praise yourself for what you're doing well. Focus on the good attributes and successes you have. Turn off the mean voice inside your head that tells you all your faults. God made you and He doesn't make junk, so don't treat yourself like junk!

Day 5: Focus on Extended Family

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you. – Deuteronomy 5:16 (NIV)

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. – Colossians 3:12-14 (NIV)

We often think of the command to honor our father and mother to be something that applies to children, but I think it applies in adulthood as well, because you father and mother are always your father and mother! This command referenced in the New Testament a couple of times as well, including by Jesus in Matthew 15:4. So, it's an important one.

While our relationships with our parents change as we become adults, get married and have our own children, we still have a duty to our parents and our extended family as well. I have watched my own parents live out an example to me of what it looks like to continue honoring our parents as they age. Both of them have given up their own comfort so many times to meet the needs of their parents.

The verses from Colossians remind us that as God's people we are to act with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. We are to forgive. Family relationships need all of that, because family relationships can be complicated.

We need to focus on our spouses and children, of course, but let us not forget the other family members God has blessed us with. Whether they live nearby or far away, they can be part of our community and part of our lives.

And I say all of that to say that I do also know there are some situations and circumstances when family members are not part of your life for various and legitimate reasons. In those situations, prayer is the best answer. You may not be in contact with someone for whatever reason, but you can always pray for them.

Acting in Grace:

Spend time thanking God and praising Him for the blessing of extended family in your life. Pray for healing in difficult relationships, even if it's healing in your heart because the relationship can't be mended. Find a way to reach out to extended family and let them know how much you love and appreciate them. Give someone a call. Send them a card. Send a text message or

email. Take someone out to lunch. Be purposeful about enjoying and appreciating the extended family relationships you have!

Day 6: Focus on Friends

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. – Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

Friendships can be challenging to maintain as adults. Life gets busy. We have work, children, home and so many other obligations and things going on that adding in time for friends can be nearly impossible. But it's necessary and needed! These verses from Hebrews are a reminder that not only are friendships enjoyable, but they are good for us and we should make time for them. Good friends encourage us to continue walking in our faith and staying on track. They love on us and laugh with us. They cry with us. They are there for us.

The thing about true friends is you don't have to physically be together all the time to stay in touch. Thankfully with the technology of today, we can stay close in so many ways from phone calls to texts to emails to social media. Our friends need us. We need them.

As an introvert, I sometimes struggle with getting together with people. I have had times where I didn't have any extra energy to give to being with other people. But usually when I force myself to do something with a good friend I am rewarded. My soul is replenished. I have a network of friends, which is something I never thought I'd say, but I realize it's true. I have friends who are geographically close who I can meet up with every couple of months (or longer) and enjoy good conversations. I have friends also who I can meet up much more regularly online.

The other good thing about friends is they help us get outside of ourselves and our own world. During some of the hardest times in my life, I've been able to get a respite by spending time with friends or meeting a need they have. It sounds cliché, but I have been more blessed by giving them they have been by receiving.

Acting in Grace:

Think about what friends you really have in your life. Consider the people you connect with in person, online, at work, at church, at your kids' school or wherever you are. Some friends are close and personal while others are a bit more distant. Thank God for all your friends. Thank Him for the lessons you've learned from friends who haven't treated you well in the past. Find a way in the next 24 hours to reach out to a friend. Make plans to meet for a meal, have a play date with your kids or just simply send a message to let them know they're in your thoughts.

Day 7: Focus on Strangers

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. – Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)

I have often said that we can give more grace to strangers than we do to our own families. While that's true, there are other times we may be showing grace on the outside while seething on the inside – like when that driver cuts you off in traffic or that person at the grocery store keeps blocking the aisle you need. We may look like we are patient and filled with grace while

inside we are huffing and rolling our eyes. (Been there, done that! Actually, still working on NOT doing that!)

But if I stop to really think about the people sharing the waiting room in the doctor's office, the aisles at the grocery store or the traffic on 5 p.m. on a Friday, I realize that every single one of those people is struggling with something. Every single one of them has a story. Every single one has a need. And every single one is loved by God.

God has commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31), second only to loving Him. Sometimes all we have to do is open our eyes and suddenly we'll notice the people around us who need help. It may be something as small as holding a door for someone or offering to carry something for someone struggling. Or it may be something bigger like paying for someone's meal or groceries. People everywhere around us desperately need grace and love.

Acting in Grace:

Pray and ask God to show you how to reach out to people you come across today. Then really pay attention to opportunities to show grace and love. Let someone merge into traffic and go ahead of you, even though you're running late. Or pay for the order of the car behind you at the drive-thru. Or give a smile and stop to chat with someone at the grocery store. Find a way to reach out to strangers and show love and grace over the next 24 hours.