

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Grace Community Church's Thanksgiving Eve Service (1984)

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-6

Well, I know your heart's blessed tonight, as we've enjoyed this fellowship in music and sharing together. I trust it set your thoughts toward the Lord...that you'll be especially thankful for the things you've been reminded of tonight. And we want to give you the opportunity...you hear me all the time, and I don't get to hear you very often...but I love to hear what the Lord is doing in the lives of our family here, and even of our friends and guests. And so we want you to have that opportunity tonight. Don't be shy or bashful. There's three microphones: one there, one in the middle, and one over here. All you have to do is just line up behind them. Probably be good if there were no more than three or four people in each line, and then when the line gets down past that, you can come up so that you don't stand there for a long, long time. But if you'd like to share your thanks for what the Lord has done in your life, express some personal thanks, we'd love to hear that tonight, and I think you might, in sharing your own heart of thanks, sort of gather up the thanks of an awful lot of folks, and maybe verbalize it for them. So, if you will, go right to those microphones and...that's great. Take a moment to...to get there, and we'll let you express your thanks to the Lord. Great...well, that's good. Okay, we'll...we'll wait till we go through these, and then we'll...we don't wanna get too long a line, so you're not standing there very long. Okay, why don't we start over here on the right. Give us your name and then just share what you're thankful for.

NICK: My name is...Nick Franklin, and I'm very nervous.

JOHN: Oh, you don't need to be nervous. We're all friends.

NICK: Because I get to hear you most every week...and you're never nervous.

JOHN: What'd he say? I'm never nervous, okay.

NICK: You...you're never nervous. There are many things which I am thankful for. I am thankful for my disability...because, in my disability, I have found...found much to be thankful for...and one thing I'm thankful for is my wife...who's also disabled, too. But I'm also thankful, because she helps me and keeps me on my road to Jesus...Jesus. And I'm also thankful for special ministry for people, too...who've been helping me in my time of struggle. Who've always been there...when the door was shut in my own heart. ...I thank the Lord...for Debbie Stone...and for what the church has come to mean to me...and for the freedom to worship the Lord in America. Thank you, Pastor.

JOHN: Hey, man, ah, that's a great way to start, isn't it? Boy, God bless you. Beautiful testimony. Thank you so much. Right here in the middle.

SANDRA: Good evening. My name is Sandra Morelli, and I would like to thank you, John, for your wonderful guidance in this church. And I'd also like to thank...thank Grace Community Church for providing so many wonderful services so that many of us can be leaded...led closer to God. And I would especially like to thank Bob and Earlene Procter for so lovingly and knowledgeably...leading us in our weekly Fundamentals of Faith classes. Thank you.

JOHN: Oh, that's great. We are so thankful for folks who come to those Fundamentals of the Faith classes. Marvelous. Just glorious to see new people come in and get fed the Word of God, nourished. Many of them come to Christ. That's great. That's great. Okay, right over here.

LEONARD: Pastor, my name is Leonard Granson, and I was born and raised in Washington, D.C., and I came to the state of California in 1973, and I've been in the state of California now for approximately 12 years. What I would like to express to you and the congregation here is that I would like to express an opportunity to be saved. I've never had the chance, and nobody brought me, so I had to kinda come on my own to express it. I've been hearing about it a lot. I've been hearing about the...the Christian life. I've been hearing, you know, a long time, so I had 12 years in this state to make a decision for myself. I'm 29 years old now. In January, I'll be 30, so I've been thinking...

JOHN: You gotta get saved soon. That's right.

LEONARD: Well, see, that's what a...a lot of people been telling me about Jesus and about the, you know, things I wrote down here. Lemme see, my name is Leonard Granson. And I wrote down here on the blue card here, "I would like to get saved and to receive the Holy Spirit and get into the water baptism classes you were talking about, and possible, you know, make out some other arrangements." Really, I've been really wanting to...to live this Christian life a long time, but nobody, you know, I haven't had the chance to get it. I've been out in the world.

JOHN: Well, we're here, Larry. We're...

LEONARD: So I just...

JOHN: We got ya.

LEONARD: My name is...

JOHN: We're reading you loud and clear.

LEONARD: Okay, is Leonard, yes. I just want you to understand that I'm coming out of a life of sin. You know, a lot of people look at me, and they say, "Well, wow, you look like you're saved." Well, just like you, just because you look like that doesn't mean you're saved. And they think just because, you know, really, people just look at me for face value, and they just think, you know, "Well, wow, he's holy." But, you know, I haven't even got, you know, I haven't got it. And people think because, you know, I, you know a few verses and you read the Bible that you really got saved. But, see, I just wanna express to you, I would like to have the opportunity to really, really, really be saved. I don't wanna play with God. I don't wanna play church. I don't wanna come here to be trying to, you know, play around and doing things I don't have to be doing. And I don't wanna lie to this congregation. I'm really, really, really seeking the Lord. I have 12 years in this state to decide this, and I've looked around, and I've wandered from place to place.

JOHN: Well, lemme...lemme tell you this, Larry, you don't need to look any further. Okay? And here's what I want you to do. John, I see you sitting there. Why don't you take Larry, go in the Prayer Room, and get him saved. Will you do that, John? I mean I have...I have lived a long time, but that is the most wonderful testimony I have ever heard someone...that's great. Fine. That's what I call a hungry heart, folks. Boy, oh, boy, that's amazing, really, man, oh, man. And, you know, we didn't talk about it, but we'll probably hear his testimony later. It's...it's really wonderful that he found his way here tonight, isn't it? I mean if you're gonna ask the question, you better be in the right place, or you might get the wrong answer. Wow. Great.

QUESTIONER: I can't follow big laughter, but I will say this. First off, I wanna...I'm just so thankful for my own personal salvation.

JOHN: Yeah.

QUESTIONER: And the fact that when I could not and maybe would not reach down...or reach up, rather...may God reach down and touch Steve and me. So that's...that's the first thing...and definitely the most important. And I'd like to...I just praise God for this country, where we have a freedom to...to worship, and where we can be here tonight in this...this place. There's a lot of countries around this world that that's not true. And I just wanna praise God and thank for that. And also for this church, and the love that so many people have shown...people that week in and week out just give their time and their love to this church, and for the...the people that have especially showed love to myself and my family during the last three years. We've had many trials, as some of you know. We lost a son three...almost three years ago, and this last summer, we had two floods in our house, but God has been faithful, and He brought us through 'em, and I could go on and on. But I just wanna praise God again for what he's done in my life, for the country I'm in, and for this church, and the wife that He's given me.

JOHN: Yeah, and we're thankful for the Ball family, too. God bless you. Thank you. Okay, right in the middle. We gotta keep going, so everybody can share. So...

HERBERT: My name is Herbert Beasley, and I'm really grateful to be in Grace...I'm an Elder, and it's a blessing to really hear the Word. A lot of people, they come to Grace. I don't know if they're really aware of what's really taught in some churches. And I'm grateful to have the privilege to be in the church and working with the special ministries.

JOHN: Great.

HERBERT: And one area I'm really grateful for...I really wanted to serve when I got here. And one Sunday, you were preaching, and you said, "This church needs some easement, and we have a parking problem." Says he got it, because I am a guy...I work in the area. I make for sure people get easements, and so we've been working. And a brother called me up and says, "We have a parking problem at Grace, and we can't get any information from the city." So the Lord just worked on...He really worked a miracle. I called everyone I knew. We got all the plans we need, all the maps we need, and...we are going to fix this easement out here where Grace will have parking on Sunday mornings.

JOHN: Amen.

HERBERT: Really great for us, and we just thank the Lord for the privilege to be in this kind of work to help out. I was gonna meet the brother one Sunday, but I couldn't meet him, because I was trying to find a parking spot. So I'm...I'm very grateful to be here and to serve, and we really need wisdom. It's not easy to put up a parking structure, so I talked to one of the brothers today, and we figured out a way to save the church about a half million dollars on parking. So we're just really grateful for the Lord for what He's doing and how He's just given us all the information we need. And the last thing I'll say is, the city has done something for Grace I don't think she's aware of. We...we were concerned about how we're gonna control the traffic. Well, a good friend of mine works in the Department of Transportation. The city is gonna build us two left lane pockets directing into Grace, and we're gonna eliminate all the turning problems, and they've done it on their own, so it won't cost us one dime for all this additional parking.

JOHN: Hey, that's...well, thank you, my brother. I...this is amazing. Boy, the Lord is at work. Great. Okay, Terry, I think Steve wants to say something right?

TERRY: Not fair, 'cause I've got the dry mouth.

JOHN: Ohhhhh. This is Steve Kelly.

STEVE/TERRY: Excuse me, my heart is pounding, and I've got butterflies. He's got butterflies. My name is Steven. This is my wife, Terry, who interprets for me. I just wanna share a little bit very quickly of my background. My parents, my second...my stepmother's Jehovah Witness who tried to encourage me to get involved in it when I was 13 years old...and to become a Jehovah Witness, and I wouldn't. I didn't wanna accept it. I didn't wanna believe it. I knew that Jesus was in heaven. I wasn't ready to receive any of the information, no matter how they tried to force me. I was growing in like hippie days and getting involved in some real terrible things. I wanted to change my ways and become a good guy...get involved in sports and activities. I was on the wrestling team for four years during high school and college. I wasn't happy in college...I tried to find...I met a girl that we went out with who is a Christian...and I was real convicted. I didn't feel comfortable at all just talking to her. She wanted to bring me to a...a...a group, maybe a Bible study, and I didn't feel comfortable at all. I was perspiring and felt real guilty. I wanted to get outta there...get involved in the world in...in...in sex and things like that. I was just very unsatisfied, but I knew that God had a plan, but I didn't...I didn't wanna believe it at the time. Then I met a fellow who's name was Joe who was deaf, and he shared with me the Gospel...told me I needed to be saved. And, as I listened, I said, "No, I don't wanna hear this. I love the world more."

And he said, "Well, what are you gonna do when your time comes to die? You gonna go to heaven or are you gonna go to hell?"

...He asked me that decision, and...asked me what I was doing on Sunday. Invited me to his church, and I said, "Ahhhhh, no, I'm busy. I'm gonna be with friends." And then, as I stayed home, I was bored, and I thought...I thought about this, and I thought about the church, and I...I went, and I heard about Jesus dying on the cross and...at...eventually, after that, I became saved, but it wasn't a real commitment. I was still in the world doing worldly things, and...and feeling convicted the whole time that Christ was looking down and seeing all these things I was doing. Drinking and just doing worldly things...not feeling happy. I...I just felt I couldn't...I couldn't...I didn't have joy. Living with my parents, and I felt that God was leading me to here. I...I ended up coming to Grace. I now work here on the maintenance staff. It's been four years...and God's great Wisdom, how He moved me here...and...and my wife and my family, my children, as I reflect, I look at my children as they're learning...learning about how to say I love you and just learning sign and learning from...learning from the Bible and...and just things that's happening in my life. And I...even today...oh, sometimes there are children who sign I love you to me, and it just...there are moments where I just break down and cry when I look at all the children in school here that just raise their hands to me and sign I love you. Constantly, day after day after day. Even yesterday morning. Year after year, they constantly are running up with their little hands and saying I love you, and I can see just the teacher's face wanting to share Christ with them and...

And working here and setting up the activities for Talbot, and sometimes it can be real pressured time. And I just know that God has a purpose in that, in teaching me to grow and...and maturing me even through those things when it can be tedious. And John Zimmer and I trying to just communicate in setting up our activities and the busyness behind all that and just trying to struggle with self-control and my own attitude and feeling convicted when I stumble in that area. And God help me to have a better attitude and...and to show these children a good attitude and just being humble consistently in my life. And then seeing improvement. I thank God for Pam, who is able to be an interpreter here, and for Debbie Stone and the people involved in special ministries...and just that I can open the door for Debbie Stone when she wheels by me, and I just thank you...thank God for her.

And when John MacArthur can walk by sometimes and I...I just look at him, and I feel...my heart even flutters when I see him, and I still love him so much. And...and a few days ago when I saw him driving, and he looked over at me, and...and I was opening the gate, and I felt kind of almost like, "Gee, he's...he's almost famous, and yet I know he's not famous, and yet he...he...we look eye to eye, and I just...I can't even get...give him eye contact sometimes." And I feel like I can't help it. I'm sorry, I have to...I just have to tell you, you know, he's the pastor here, and I just...I just want you to know I feel happy that God has...has brought me here. That I'm thankful for Grace and the new building, for Logoss, for Talbot, for being able to serve here, for my brothers and sisters in Christ, for the family that I belong to...and to try and be able to communicate with all of you, whether it's on paper, whatever, I love you all. And I...and I cherish John MacArthur and his personality. His facial expression. And that Christ...just that Jesus loves you all. Thank you.

JOHN: You know, there...there...it's very easy to love Steve and Terry. They're just an absolutely beautiful couple, and Steve is...he's a shining light of the joy of the Lord around here. And for a fellow who doesn't talk, he's longwinded...a man after my own heart. No wonder we get along so well, right? We love you both very much.

JAMIE: My name is Jamie Ward, and...I was really depressed today about something that happened and...and I decided that I would sit down and do something that I really don't do enough, and just look to God's Word and...and see...what it would say to me. And I was reading, and I found out that God will always be there, and He'll always be...be there for me to run to when I'm really hurting. And I...I was reading in Psalms 46, and I just wanna read one verse from there. Psalms 46:1. Says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very pleasant...a...a very present help in trouble." I'm glad that He is a strength, and He's just always there for me to...just to run to and to comfort me.

JOHN: Thank you, Jamie. Great. Yes. Oh, we're gonna to hold that so...and...and you folks, we've only got about a few minutes, so if you can just get...make it a little short so everybody can share. Okay?

MARTY: Why...okay. I just wanna thank the Lord and it's personal, just thankfulness for everything. Like...yesterday, I started reading Psalm 107, and it says, "Thank Him for His loving kindness." And then He says for the children of Israel...you know how they failed and everything...and just episodes during history, and it...and it...it just feels so good that, when I do fail, He still loves me. You know, when everybody else just says, "Oh, you know, let's give up on that one," He doesn't. You know, He really, really cares, and...and I just wanna thank Him so much. And I just wanna tell Him how much I love Him and I adore Him. And...that I just want so much to do His Will bit by bit. But I know that my flesh, you know, fights me so much. But He's there, and it's been, what, since '78, and then in 1981 was the actual commitment, starting commitment. And it's been hard. You know, I tell so many people that I witness to, "Believe me, being a Christian is not, you know, we're gonna have a great time with the Lord. You know, we just, it's not. It's hard. But it's worth every bit of it, because I know that if, number one, if I die right now, I'm going straight into His arms."

You know, I...I see a lot of people, they worry about their health, and they worry about their cars, money, everything. But yet when I say, "Lord," you know, sometimes I tell Him, "Take me. If You wanna take me, take me. I'm ready." You know, and...and yet I know I'm not, you know, 'cause He wants to keep working. But it's like, ohhhhh...He just...my heart sometimes just wants to burst, you know, to tell these people, "Stop, stop, you know, stop and just give it over. What are you afraid of?" You know, why are people so afraid of the Lord? You know, they say, "No, oh, no...I'll...I'll...I'll accept Him in a week," or "Let me think about it." Do it right now. Stop...stop waiting. And what if something happens right now? What's gonna happen? Then you're before Him, and say, "Hey, you had the opportunity...Get away from Me. You had the chance." And just...I read this book on hell. Ooooh. I mean the description, you know. And it's not because of the hell. It's just because the Lord is just wonderful. I mean He is Creator of all. He created Lucifer, hell, everything else, so why won't we turn to Him? Why won't we just give it all to Him? It's hard. Our flesh stops us a lotta times, you know, it's...it...it just...but He's faithful to just pick us up again. Let's go again. Let's start again. Let's do it again...and every time you get picked up, you become stronger, 'cause you start knowing God. It was like I was talking to someone before. I say, you know, "It's not just all these things about...about God and...and, you know, "Oh, let's read that book on God, and let's go in this service, and let's do this. Let's go to this mission field." No, it's actually telling God, "God, I want to know you." Once you start knowing His characteristic, His personality, everything about Him, He starts revealing Himself. Nothing else matters, 'cause that's when you start really how to falling in love with Him.

And even if you fail, like I said, you...you love Him so much, you say, "You pick me up again, please?" You know...I just wanna thank you, and I personally wanna thank you also for your faithfulness. You have been...I...I...I just thank the Lord. Sometimes I say, "Oh, I'm gonna go check out another church." You know? There's a missionary church down here on Van Nuys. I'm gonna check them out. And then I said, "No, I'd rather stay home and go in the evening service back to Grace." You know, it's just like I...I went to...well, I went to Granada Hills the other day. Beautiful, you know, a beautiful

service and everything. But I started...while I was there, I was thinking about here.

JOHN: Good. Good. Now, Marty.

MARTY: Yes.

JOHN: Three points is all you're allowed in a sermon. Okay?

MARTY: Goodnight.

JOHN: All right. Okay.

KYLE: My name is Kyle Henderson. I'm a new resident in California, and I'd like to thank God for, first, saving my marriage before we moved out here. Secondly, for changing my priorities so that now my interest is in a God-centered life, rather than a self-centered life. Thank you.

JOHN: Amen. God bless you. Okay, we're gonna have to keep 'em brief now, so we can get all these folks a...an opportunity, okay?

FRANK: Hi, John. My name's Frank, and I'd just to say that Thanksgiving's a great time to be with your family, and this year is the first year that I won't be with my family. But my parents told me when I left not to worry, because I've got a great family here. And...I'd just like to say thanks to the junior high staff people, the college department people, friends of my parents. You've been great. And now I have tons of families. It's great.

JOHN: Oh, that's good. Yeah, that's right. Okay. Peter?

PETER: My name is Peter, and I...four years ago, we came out from North Carolina to finish school and seminary, I thought, here in California. And...four years later, today, we are getting ready to go back to North Carolina, not having finished school and seminary. But the reason I'm standing up here tonight is to express my thanks to God for you, because being here in this fellowship and sitting under the ministry of John MacArthur and seeing the Lord work in your lives, God has used you to teach me some things that seminary would never be able to do. I've learned the importance of budgeting and being able to work my own finances as the head of the family. And that financial struggles usually are not a result of not having enough money, but rather living above our income. And I've learned in the area of salvation, the importance of...of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I know that sounds sort of weird to you, but it isn't weird. It's...it's a rather strange phenomenon in the Christian circles today that people can...can commit their lives to Jesus Christ as Savior, but think that it doesn't mean a life commitment to Him. And that's absolutely essential. And God has taught me that, and I am very grateful for that.

I have also learned the importance of...of not compromising, not only within my family, but within the church. A man cannot lift a church nor a family to a level that is higher than he, himself, is standing with God. And that's absolutely essential, very important. It's foundational. And, yet, I didn't...I really didn't know that. It really didn't dawn on me. And then I've learned the importance of sin in preaching...and popular preaching doesn't talk about sin much today. Even evangelical preaching...but it's absolutely important. And Christ, by the way, died to put away sin, so we should preach against sin. And then I've learned the importance of a high view of God, and that God is holy. God is holy. And then also the importance of the pulpit in God's Work. It's more than just another attraction. It is the central hub in God's Proclamation for this world today until He comes. And it's very important. And we have a...a real obligation, those that stand behind the pulpit, to preach the Word. So I haven't been to seminary yet. God may yet put me in seminary. I don't know. But you can see how I've gained so much by being here in that area. So such essentials, areas of basic truths that are foundational to the Christian ministry. And you are...are a very, very large part of God's teaching program in my life, and I really thank God for you. Thank you.

JOHN: Peter, that's a...that's a marvelous statement. I...I met with Peter today. We had a wonderful time together in prayer and talking and...he didn't tell me all those things. But that's...that's really very profound. You know, there are people all over the place who've come out of seminary and learned none of that. Because that's not something you necessarily learn in seminary. Peter shared with me that he really wants to do one thing in life, and that's preach. And I identify, excuse me, with that. And...so we share a lot of commonness. He has a tremendous desire in his heart to preach and is going back east and believes God is opening some doors for him to begin to do that. And I have often shared...seminary's a wonderful thing and Bible college training is a wonderful thing. It is not an absolute necessity.

What is an absolute necessity is an understanding of the Word of God and the love of the Savior. And when your heart is right, and you commit yourself to the Word, it'll spill out. And it doesn't matter whether you're skilled in homiletics or whatever. It's the passion of your heart that people catch. So...you know, you've had training that maybe others would wish to have in...in the wonderful fellowship here. So...we don't want you to go, and...there's a deep feeling in me that you're out of God's Will if you leave...but...but because I love Peter and Elaine, are great listeners, you know. They make little noises at the right points, you know, and that spurs me on. And they have a great ap...appetite for the Word of God, and that is so essential. And we just cherish you both and with you God's best. I told Peter, "Keep in touch, so we can know what God's doing in that new ministry." Yes.

LINDA: Hi, John, my name is Linda Demargin, and...I'm really thankful for women's ministries here at Grace Church. I have the privilege of being a leader under the leadership of Lorene Shannon, who is a wonderful, godly woman. And this past semester, we've had 400 women sign up for Every Woman's Grace, and we were able to study the book of Ephesians and really learn who we are as

women in Christ. And...I just wanna encourage all these Titus Two ladies that are staying home, not working, to come out to Every Woman's Grace. Plus I also serve in the women's juvenile hall group. And there's a group of ladies that go down to the women's juvenile hall and deal with the young girls between the ages of 12 and 18, and we have seen so many tremendous blessing through that jail ministry. And I just wanna encourage any woman out here that doesn't have anything to do and wants to get involved, that there's a lot of areas of in this church to get involved in, and I'm really thankful for every one of 'em.

JOHN: Don't go anywhere for a minute. Every Woman's Grace is...is every Wednesday, but you're not meeting right now, right? It's...

LINDA: No, we start up the first of January.

JOHN: Okay, and it is...it's just marvelous, tremendous, tremendous ministry.

LINDA: In fact, Terry Kelly's gonna be teaching sign language, aren't you? Yeah, so...

JOHN: Oh, really?

LINDA: Yeah.

JOHN: Teaching sign language in the next one? Great.

LINDA: At...at Every Woman's Grace.

JOHN: They have a lot of electives for all different things. The other thing is when do you go to the juvenile hall?

LINDA: The second and fourth Monday of every month.

JOHN: And you go right in there. You take some food for the girls?

LINDA: We take a little luncheon and...and dress up their...little...pits of a dayroom, and...and we have one-on-one with the girls. And only the Lord can make that possible, because I've been involved in other jail ministries where you can't get close to them.

JOHN: Right.

LINDA: But we get to hug 'em and talk to 'em and lead 'em to the Lord. And...and one girl was just released that was a murderer, and we do have the hardcore girls that are in there for bad things...really serious crimes. And one of the girls was just released, and it was a real blessing, 'cause

she's released to the Lord, too. And she's just real excited to be out and home.

JOHN: That's so great. You know, we...we received some kind of an award from somebody for some of our ministry, and...the Lord has given us an open door in those areas. Really great. Yes.

CAROL: Hi, my name is Carol Thomason. I've been going to Grace for almost nine years. I am so thankful the Lord saved me...so near...nine years ago. And that's He's guiding me wherever I go and make the right decisions. And I'm thankful that my coworkers...I give 'em your tapes for their birthday or for Christmas, and they listen to it.

JOHN: Good. That's great. Thank you.

CAROL: And I'm thankful for you, too.

JOHN: Well, thank you. I'm thankful for you. You've been a real blessing, too. Thank you. Yes, sir.

SAM: Hi, John.

JOHN: Hi.

SAM: My name is Sam Stansil, and I am thankful that I was saved from a lot of things, and...I mean a lot. My...my life started as a...when I wasn't a Christian, really. I just heard about 'em and just thought it was another story from a book. And my mom wouldn't really let me read the Bible, and so I didn't know a lot. But when I was soon with my foster mom, it was a little different. I used to go to another...or our neighbors, and she would preach to us, and tell me about the Lord. And I asked Him in my heart, but I didn't know if I was really sure that I had Him in my heart when I learned that you are supposed to ask Him with all your heart. And so I just thought like, "Okay, I'll ask Him in my heart," so I could have this reward. And so I was thankful that I am saved now, and I am also thankful that I've been through some very close calls, and that I am now living in a foster home and, hopefully, a permanent one. And I am just real thankful for your preaching. And even for the bad times of my life, I am still thankful for...

JOHN: Yeah.

SAM: Both of them, good and bad, and I thank the Lord and you for your preaching.

JOHN: I thank the Lord for you, Sam. I hope we get better acquainted in the future. Isn't that wonderful? What a heart...great.

BRIANNA: Hi, I'm Brianna, and...like, okay, when I was in junior high, it's like I was the...I was...I had my own little group. I didn't have much of a group, and I was just kind of myself. And when I went to

church, it's like I...I really didn't listen or anything, and I...you know, I went to a different church before I came here, and it's like it was so...there was not a lot of junior high people that I could associate with and have, you know, a good time with. And when I started coming to Grace on Wednesday nights, it was...it was neat, 'cause like there were so many people that I could meet and, you know, share my life with. And it was really neat, 'cause when I went into high school, I was kinda shaky going into high school, because like there would be seniors there, and they'd be older than I was and everything. But it's like it's a real blessing to me that so many people care. It's really neat. And I just wanted to thank the high school staff and the junior high staff, and for you, John. It's really neat. It's...it's great.

JOHN: Listen, I thank the Lord for our...our high school/junior high leaders, and for all the kids, and I...I think we don't realize...yeah...that's good. Yeah. You know, we don't always realize that...we don't realize the anxieties that teenage kids go through, and they're...that the need they have for an anchor, for solid relationships, for core people that are committed to care for them. Thank you. That's great. Yes.

BARBARA: Hello, John, my name is Barbara. I wish to thank God for Grace Community Church and for all of its staff, for the pastors, the elders, the teachers, and for each and every ministry here at church. I've been coming to Grace for the last eight years, and so many on your staff have reached out and shown the love of God to me and to my family. I wanna thank God that you reach out to the community, and that you have tapes that go all over the world, and that you're on the radio, and that we're there for those that need us. I wanna thank God that I have recently become a member of Grace Church, and that I'm now part of the special ministries, and I encourage each and every one of you to become part of something here, because there's hundreds and hundreds of opportunities to have fellowship with one another and to grow in Christ. I'm just very, very grateful for what this church is doing in our community and for the world. And we must keep others in mind to bring them to know Him. Thank you.

JOHN: Thank you, Barbara, that's what...you know, I wanna mention one thing right there. Starting in the first of the year, we're gonna open a new...a department in our church. We just were kinda working on it today. A new office called...the volunteer office. And we're gonna have coordination of all the volunteer needs with all the people who'd like to serve. So you can just call up a...a number and get an office, and they'll tell you what all the volunteer possibilities and needs are for any given period of time in any skill or any talent or anything you wanna do. We're gonna coordinate all that, so everybody can find a place to serve. And we'll be letting you know more about that. I'm real excited about it. Okay?

DARCY: Hi, my name is Darcy Goode, and this is my brother, Dallas, my tall brother, Dallas Goode. And we just wanna really thank God for our parents. Careful there. Lynn and Jeanette Goode. That's our parents. And...and I mean 'cause I'm in college, and I really don't know what a college student would...would do without parents. I mean my mom is always there, and she really wants to know

exactly what I'm going through. My father would just give anything to help me, and I just really praise God for them.

DALLAS: I just wanted to thank my parents for like ev...always...there's always things you're going through in high school, and they're always there to help, and no matter what, and pull you through it.

JOHN: Yeah, that's great, kids. And it was wonderful to see Dallas baptized last night, too. God bless you. I might just say at this point that Lynn Goode, who's been an elder at Grace Church for many years and has been a real blessing to us in the last few weeks, has left his position with Security Pacific Bank and come as our administrative pastor. And he's the only person, really, on the face of the earth who could make that transition...because of the fact that he had been the treasurer on the Board of Elders, and he had worked in that area. He knew everything, and we're just so excited to have him on our team. He's really God's man for us, and we're very, very grateful. Yes, honey.

BRANDY: Hi, my bra...my name is Brandy Heffner, and I'm just thankful for our church. Last summer, we not...we went up to Florida, and my aunt, she had a really small chur...church. And I'm just thankful for our church that you've provided in Jesus. And I'm just really thankful for you.

JOHN: Well, thank you. Okay, you know, it's...it's...it's really amazing when kids grow up in Grace Church and they go to somewhere else and visit their aunt in Florida or whatever. And they go into a little thing that's got 35 people in it, and they really don't understand how it could possibly work, and there's nobody their age, and there's no Awana, and there's no...you know, so...that's good. That's real practical.

NANCY: Hi, my name is Nancy, and I wanna thank the Lord for His Word, 'cause last Sunday I was sitting here in church. I was looking around, and every single person had a Bible in their hands, and then there was Bibles in the pews, and I've been...getting bulletins from Russia for Christ, and always talking about needed Bibles and stories of people that just don't have any Bibles, and they'd do anything for just even a page of a Bible. The church just had a page of a Bible, and they'd read it over and over, every Sunday. And I just wanna say we take so...so much for granted, our Bible, you know. It sits on our shelf or it gets old, so we want a new one. So just remember to read your Bible, 'cause it's there for you, and it helps you.

JOHN: Yeah, somebody once said, "A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't." Okay. Igor.

IGOR: Good evening.

JOHN: Good evening.

IGOR: I just wanna thank the Lord and thank Jesus Christ with all my heart. I'm just...I'm in awe that I'm even stand here in the church, because only three years ago, I wouldn't even...I would never believe that I would be standing here. And I believe that I'm the least person that's supposed to be standing here, but the Lord saved me, and some people don't know. I'm a...I'm a Russian Jew...and I've been saved two-and-a-half years ago. I'm very thankful for that. But here I would like to say very quickly, if I can...and give thanks to the Lord for what happened to me for the past two weeks. And I'll bring you a little back prior to that. I'm...I just hear...said it. I'm a Russian immigrant...and those who've been immigrants here, they know what it is to come to a new country and not having speak...speaking language and...not knowing the customs. Well, I came here, and a family in America adopted me here, literally, American family. They began to teach me English language, and...by profession, I'm an acrobat. And I began to work with their daughter. And...later on we became champions. So especially a woman, a mother was teaching me English language. And explaining me every custom she...of America. She explained to me how to sign checks, where to sign them, what to sign them. She was the first one who took me to the church in my entire life. And later on I got saved, and when I call her and I said that, "I know now what you were talking about." I realize she doesn't know what I was talking about. I realized she does not know Jesus Christ. And I always thought...that moment, I thought, "How can it be that someone could bring me to church, explain to me about all communion, how to take communion, and what's gonna be after what." And it was an Episcopalian church, and being even a minister's daughter and not know what Jesus Christ...it...it blow my heart apart completely.

I...from that moment on, I began to pray and...and to Jesus Christ that he might save that woman and the whole family. And...I have tremendous burden. I've never had any more burden than that, because I call that woman my America. She taught me everything I could, because I was working with her daughter, and because I was friends with her family. And...three...I ask many, many time that she would come to know Jesus Christ, but she always would say, "I know Him, because I was baptized by water as a child." And I know she doesn't know. She has...she does not know Jesus Christ. She does not have Holy Spirit. And...three...for two years, every single day I pray for her as I would pray for my own family. And two weeks ago, they call me, and she, in fact, call me from the hospital, and she has bone cancer. And she has multiple myeloma. And it's been very, very hard for me, though. I've never experienced...I will never experience sorrow in my life. I didn't know that I didn't experience sorrow. It was always easy. Everyone...someone else would experience sorrow, I would come and say, "Hey, you have to be strong," and I give him a word, and...and a...and a verse and everything.

But this is an...an alien feeling to me. I just...was hit with the sorrow. And a feeling that I was hit with is...was so important to me to have. It draw me closer to the Lord, and I was overwhelmed with the sorrow to a point of death. I can express myself any...I was...for the first time in my life, with complete freedom, I felt that I could give my life for that life. And I openly say, "Well, I wish I would be in your

place." But this time I would give anything to be in her place, 'cause I felt that I...that I know the Lord. And she's very close to the Lord, and I'm praising God for that opportunity that He provided for her. Praising God, and I just pray...her name is Kay Todden, and I would thank you very much to pray for her salvation and...and physical healing, as well. Complete person, to be a witness for Jesus Christ, to Whom did the glory, Whom I love and Who we all thank in our hearts. Thank you very much.

JOHN: Thank you, Igor. God bless you. Yes. Well, we're gonna...these folks came up after you...this line was already there, so we'll go through this line first.

RAY: Okay, my name's Ray Vandenvio, and I just wanna be thankful for God's continuous love for me, even though I do wrong things. And I just wanna also thank my friends that, if I didn't have any friends, I don't know where I would be. And I just wanna thank my friend, Gwen Chaloffa, who led me to the Lord, and for my other friends that I have that help me when I go too wrong.

JOHN: God bless you, friend. It is a friend, indeed, who brings you Christ. Yes.

BETSY: My name is Betsy Kline, and I guess this Thanksgiving, one of the things I'm most thankful for is a hard situation that I've been going through the past couple of months...it's really taught me a lot, though, and, especially, it's taught me the power of prayer. I'm a student at Viola, and I live in Michigan. And the day after I left home, I got a phone call saying that my brother-in-law was in a car accident, and that he had 10 to 20 percent chance of living. Well, I kept in touch with...with my family every day, and through all the prayers, it wasn't a question anymore of his life or his death, but possibility that he could be a vegetable. So it was a real struggle, but we just kept praying, and I know a lot of my friends kept praying, and a lot of people were praying for him. Slowly, but surely, he's getting better, and now he can talk again, and he's walking, too. And...

JOHN: Oh, great.

BETSY: He's not the same. We're...we're still praying, and we're still hopeful. And I know that God's gonna do really good things through it, because I know He wouldn't have put a hard situation like this in our lives if He wasn't gonna make something better from it. But I just wanna encourage you all, too, to realize how important prayer is. 'Cause before, I was brought up in a Christian home, and was just always something I did. But it didn't really mean as much to me. And it's a neat thing that we can be thankful for this Thanksgiving.

JOHN: Thank you, Betsy. I remember when Betsy shared with me some time back that her brother-in-law was in such a condition that it looked like there would be no way that he could ever come back and be anything but a vegetable. And...we talked about the fact that all you can do is pray. And little by little, she has seen God faithfully answer those prayers until each new step has occurred. And that's where you learn, isn't it? The...the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth

much. God bless you, Betsy. We'll keep praying, too.

JOHN AXON: Hi, my name is John Axon, and I'm really thankful for what the Lord's done in my life. I'm thankful for you and your demos in teaching. I'm thankful for this church family, who's...just overwhelms me with their continual supportiveness. Who I'm really thankful for is their...their career department. Yes, we are single, but we have a great desire to serve the Lord, and there are many, many needs being served there. And we're thankful for the elders who oversee career department, and for the guidance we get through Gordon Middleton. Thank you.

JOHN: Listen, the career department is a great blessing, and God bless single people. You know, the...those unattached people who don't have the encumbrances of marriage, Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, "Are free to devote themselves to Christ." And we have so many of those kind of people in our career department. It's just really marvelous. I think we'll go to the middle, take these two right here that have been waiting. Thank you, Ron.

RHONDA: Hi, my name's Rhonda Vossen, and for the past two months, I've been going through hard trials, because I feel that I haven't had any friends at school. And I haven't had...anybody that wanted me or cared about me. And I talked to my teacher and my mom, and they've really encouraged me through the past week or so to just hang around the girls and get to know 'em. Like even if they don't talk to me, just to listen to what they're saying. And I never thought that I'd need somebody as much as my mom and my teacher, Ms. Gooden. And I thank them very much for being there when I needed 'em.

JOHN: Well, bless your heart. What a...listen, that's...that's a real cry right out of the bottom of her heart. She stood there a long time to say she needs a friend. And we all need that, don't we?

RHONDA: Hi.

JOHN: None of us is meant to...to live alone, not to have that kind of thing. I'm gonna pray that the Lord's gonna give you the best friend in the whole wide world. That'll...that friend'll smother you with love. That's...that's essential to all of us. Yes.

SUSAN: Hi, my name is Susan, and I really wanna praise the Lord for being here, but also for my oldest daughter. I'm a parent of...I'm a mother of three, and I really believe that times we need to, as we go through trials with our husbands, but to also encourage our own children, and I just wanna praise the Lord for my daughter, who has put up and gone through a lot. And I haven't told her how much I love her...and I realize, as a parent, we really need to encourage our own children.

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: Especially junior high.

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: And I just, like I said, praise the Lord for my oldest daughter, Tina.

JOHN: Oh, that's wonderful. And...there's a daughter who thanks the Lord for her mother, and a mother who thanks the Lord for her daughter. Why, it's great. I counseled some folks today, and spent some time with them in prayer and talking, and...a marriage just disintegrating, and the casualty of the kids and all that, and losing sight of the meaningfulness of that union, that relationship and how that family can be so fulfilling to every member. It's really sad to see that. Yes.

SHELLY: My name is Shelly Nome. I'm in seventh grade. I'm thankful for so many things, but I'd just like to name two. First one, I'm thankful for the...the junior high ministry and just for all the people on the staff and for their...for their hard work. And I'm thankful for my salvation. Just knowing that the Lord is there when I need Him, and that I'll...when He comes to take us, that I'll go to...got to heaven with Him for all of eternity.

JOHN: Well, thank you, honey. God bless you, Shelly. Shelly's my niece. She's a...a part of our family. And speaking of relatives...Yes, Melinda.

MELINDA: Hi.

JOHN: Hi. Go ahead.

MELINDA: Okay, I'm just really thankful for...that God has given me such a good family that I have, you know. Like my dad and all my family. My dad has a really neat ministry, and my...my mom and all my brothers and sisters, and just my whole family, I'm really thankful that God has put me into that family for a purpose, and I just thank God.

JOHN: Oh, Melinda, I love you. You know that. You're a...you're a real joy. I'll tell you. We have some good talks, don't we, honey? See, I bring her to school, and I take her home and practice my sermons on her. She asks me theological questions I can't answer. God bless you, sweetheart. We're just thankful to God that you're in our family, too. Yes.

TERRY: Hi, my name is Terry, and I'm seven years old. I'm just thankful that I have some parents that love me, and...and I asked God into my heart and...when I was little, I did that. And...and I thought I was a little...a story, but now I...a few days ago, I...I started to really know that about it, and I asked Him into my heart. And He came in. Thank you.

JOHN: Oh, Amen. Oh, okay, we'll take one here, and then we'll let these two gentlemen finish.

TERRY: Hi...I'm Terry. I'm just thankful for the...for letting...for memuh...for letting myself be in America and to be in this church, because I think of all the people in the Communist countries who only have a page of a Bible, and who are always threatened of being...getting caught by the KGB or any Secret Service people in the...in the Communist countries. And just feel sorry for those people. And maybe one day they may do a 360 degree turns and think...and think about what...what they've done wrong, and maybe they can change their minds, because I know I'm looking forward to a seven-year party, and I really wanted to go there.

JOHN: That's it.

TERRY: Yeah.

JOHN: God bless you. Thank you so much. Okay, we have time for two more I think.

NORM: All right. My name is Norm Odell. This is only the second time I've been in this church. I came with a friend. I've had some traumatic times lately. And, last week, when I was in Hawaii, I thank God for finally reaching out and getting hold of me again. I've lost God for...and Jesus...for the last six years. Six years ago, I went through a very traumatic divorce...the end of a 30-year marriage, and I couldn't hardly handle it. And I got away from the Lord completely. And I started thinking about success, you know, and success is not a measurement of material things, as I have since found out. I thought I would be very important in my job, which I was. I had money. Material things, and now I find they don't mean a thing to me. And that's quite a rude awakening to someone like me. When I was in Hawaii, talking to Jesus, at that point in time, my house could've burned down. My car could've blown, and I wouldn't have cared. And a year ago, I couldn't have said that. I was very materialistic, and I...I realize that now. It could've been why I lost my wife.

Another thing, I had the bitterness in my heart for six years, not even wanting to see her and talk to her. And, finally, this time, I made up my mind I had to, and after I talked to Jesus and cleared my heart of the bitterness, I called and asked if I could talk to her. So we met last Sunday in Ala Moana Park, and I spent about an hour and a half talking to her and asking for forgiveness. And...the burden has lifted. I still have some feeling there, of course, but it was very difficult for me. I have always been a proud person...domineering to some extent, materialistic and so forth, and when you bring yourself down to this level, it's not easy. It's not easy to tell you people this, quite frankly. But it had to happen, and, like I said, the Lord brought me back to my senses again.

And during that six years, I had a vision, and I've asked many preachers what it has meant. And I think the Lord has something in store for me. After...after the vision, I had a heart attack, and since

then, I've had another one. But now, at this point in my life, I am strong again. I'm feeling good, and I think that the Lord has something in store for me. I'm not sure what it is. I've just asked Him to teach me, show me, and let me know what He wants me to do, because I wanna be a whole person again. Thank you.

JOHN: Listen, God bless you for sharing that with us. Really. Let me suggest to him that it would be really good...you might share this with him, Lee, you're sitting over there. FOF class would be great on Sunday to just get rolling...get started. Yes.

ERNIE: My name's Ernie Welch. I'm a...I've been going to this church for a little over two years now. About four years ago, God took me and my family to Arabia. And there we found that you don't appreciate things that you have until you don't have 'em.

JOHN: Yeah.

ERNIE: I'd like to thank God tonight for our mothers and our fathers and our children. You see, for 34 years I had a prayer, and it wasn't answered...When I got back from Arabia, I listed my...my phone number in the phonebook, and I turned it over to God, and I said, "If this prayer is to be answered, it's Yours. It's Your problem now. It's not mine. I cannot do it. I cannot make it happen by myself. Only You can make it happen." About 11 months after that, I got a phone call from my mother that I hadn't seen in 36 years...I tell you, be happy for having your mother and your father here. Being able to look at 'em, being able to...for them to help you and for you to help them, don't overlook these things. And...because when you don't have, it's...it's like not having an arm and having it returned to you after all these years. I'm so thankful for this Thanksgiving, because last Thanksgiving, I was able to spend a Thanksgiving with a family that I've never seen. Three brothers and a sister I'd never seen. A mother I hadn't seen in 36 years. And thank God that...that we can be thankful for our wives, our children, because we overlook so many things. And before we know, they're gone, and you can't go back and redo these things...Only God can do some things, and, you know, you...you pray all your life for things, and you think, "Well, God's not gonna answer that prayer." But only when you give up and you say, "Hey, I can't do it. You've gotta do it." And He does it, only in His time. And that's where it's at. Thank you.

JOHN: Thank you. You know, we're...we're learning something tonight, I think. Boy, this is a...this has been quite an amazing time. There...there are a lot of lonely people in the world. A lot of people looking for a meaningful relationship. Some of us who have all of that in abundance lose sight of how it is for some folks, even kids who long for a friend. A single parent who longs for a lost spouse. A divorced man who longs for a wife. A guy who longs for a mother he's never met. A lot of us have all that stuff all around us, and...and, as he was saying, we don't have any sense of appreciation, because we're almost smothered with it all.

That's a good exhortation, isn't it, to be thankful for? Some of those very best things in life, which are the people we love and our family. And they aren't perfect, but then they're thinking the same about you. So I mean you gotta be fair about it. And make this time a time of real thanksgiving for those that are close to you. Reach out and love and share with them. I think we have one more.

QUESTIONER: John, I appreciate you giving me a second here, because I know you said there was only two more. But...I'm basically standing up here to...to express my appreciation for you. My wife and I...have applied for membership here in the church, and I've heard here a lot tonight about how the various ministries here in the church have helped so many people. And I feel...or I should admit, I had a tear in my eye here when I saw this gentleman here in front of me give his testimony, at first.

I work for the state of California, for the Department of Rehabilitation. More specifically, for the program for the industrially injured. And I've been trying to think what I could do to contribute here in the future. And, basically, what I'd like to say is if there's anybody out here who is depressed over not having a job, more specifically, maybe being...being depressed because they lost a job due to an injury, I'd like to make a offer that, in the future, I'd like to be a resource for any person that might need advice or information on what they can do. And...I've wondered here, as I've come, if there are many state employees who work here. But...I just felt like maybe that's a ministry I could partake in in the future to try and help people here. Because I know that can create a lot of anxiety, sometimes to the point of feeling everything's hopeless. So...if anyone has a need in that respect, I would be glad to assist wherever I can.

JOHN: God bless you for that. And I...I...I'll tell you what. The best thing you can do is to call the church office, give a name and a phone number to Bill Rogers, because Pat Rogers is kinda coordinating connecting up our volunteers and our needs and things. And if we have that information, we'll...we'll use that as a resource. That's really great, isn't it? You know, that...that...there...there are many of us who have ways to serve. We don't...if we think creatively about it. And that's exciting.

Well, we were supposed to finish at 9 o'clock, but this time it wasn't my fault. So...for a change. Why don't we stand for a word of closing prayer?

Father, what a wonderful evening. We...even now, we remember to pray for the young man who...who wanted to be saved. And we pray that he'll be born into Your family tonight. For all these who feel hurt in their heart over loneliness or who need a friend or who...who need to see a marriage put back together or need to have some bitterness removed or...or who need to see the light at the end of a dark tunnel, or who are struggling in any way. We pray, oh, God, Your Grace and Peace to rain upon them. And for those of us who have a ministry responsibility, may we be thankful for that privilege. And may we, Lord, learn to reach out to each other. We've learned some things about each other tonight. We've learned that...that there's a great need for each of us to reach out to each other

and care and share and open our hearts and our lives. We thank You for the example of those who've said, "Well, in my job, or in my place, I'm able to help the church in this way or that way." What a wonderful and thrilling thing that is. And we just thank You for the family that's Grace Church. Help us to be even more family, reaching out in love to do Your Work in Your Way for Your Glory, and give us a great day tomorrow. And remind us to be thankful to the source of all things, our good and gracious God. We pray in Christ's name. And everyone say it. Amen. Good night.

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