



LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *Bad Girls of the Bible*

*Embrace*  
GRACE

*Welcome*  
TO THE  
FORGIVEN  
LIFE

*Embrace*  
GRACE

*Welcome*  
TO THE  
FORGIVEN  
LIFE

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS



WATERBROOK  
PRESS

EMBRACE GRACE  
PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS  
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200  
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921  
*A division of Random House Inc.*

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

10-Digit ISBN: 1-4000-7218-2  
13-Digit ISBN: 978-1-4000-7218-7

Copyright © 2006 by Liz Curtis Higgs

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

WATERBROOK and its deer design logo are registered trademarks of WaterBrook Press, a division of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
Higgs, Liz Curtis.

Embrace grace : welcome to the forgiven life / Liz Curtis Higgs. — 1st ed.  
p. cm.

ISBN 1-4000-7218-2

1. Christian women—Religious life. 2. Forgiveness of sin. 3. Grace (Theology)

I. Title.

BV4527.H538 2006

248.8'43—dc22

2006013147

Printed in the United States of America  
2006—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## CONTENTS

<b>An Open Door</b> .....	1
<i>"I don't feel like I belong anywhere."</i>	
<b>Embrace Doubt</b> .....	19
<i>"The whole thing seems a little hard to believe."</i>	
<b>Embrace Faith</b> .....	35
<i>"How do I find the faith to touch him?"</i>	
<b>Embrace Truth</b> .....	49
<i>"I always felt like I was missing something."</i>	
<b>Embrace Sin</b> .....	65
<i>"How could he love me after all I've done?"</i>	
<b>Embrace Forgiveness</b> .....	87
<i>"Can I know for sure that God has forgiven me?"</i>	
<b>Embrace Repentance</b> .....	113
<i>"Striving for perfection can be exhausting."</i>	
<b>Embrace Grace</b> .....	133
<i>"What a freeing experience!"</i>	
<b>A Last Word from Liz</b> .....	147

We have peace with God  
through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through whom we have gained  
access by faith  
into this grace  
in which we now stand.


**ROMANS 5:1-2**





AN  
OPEN  
DOOR



A grayscale photograph of a rustic wooden cabin. The cabin has horizontal log walls and a dark, solid door. To the right of the door is a window with a wooden frame. In the foreground, a woven basket filled with white eggs sits on a wooden surface. The entire image is semi-transparent, allowing text to be overlaid.

See, I have placed  
before you  
an open door  
that no one can shut.

REVELATION 3:8



*I*'ve been waiting for you. Holding this good news close to my heart, longing to share it.

And now here you are, standing on the threshold.

To say that I'm glad to see you is a major understatement. *Thrilled* is more like it. Curb my enthusiasm? No way. Not when it's *you*.

There are a few things about you that I don't know: your age, your appearance, your occupation. Facts that describe you but don't define you and have little bearing here.

There are also things about you that I do know because we share them: the need to be loved unconditionally, the desire to live a life that truly matters, the longing to shed a tightly woven mantle of guilt.

Or am I the only woman who wears past failures and present mistakes like an old wool coat, scratchy and uncomfortable, chafing the skin around my neck?

Ah. You too.

Sadly, heavy overcoats get in the way of a good hug. Our arms are too stiff, our bodies too padded. No one can sense our warmth through the thick fabric.

In the same way, remorse and shame insulate us. And isolate us.

If only we could toss those miserable garments into some dark closet and tiptoe away. If only the ratty things didn't feel so cozy and familiar. If only we could shake off the conviction that we *need* to wear our guilt—deserve to wear it, must wear it—whatever the season.

Maybe it's time to release that burden and lift our arms toward the One who loves us most.

That's what this visit is all about: slipping off the old and putting on the new. Letting go of the past and embracing freedom with our whole hearts.

Come inside where it's warm, beloved.

Let me help you with your coat.

Take hold of the life  
that is truly life.

*1 Timothy 6:19*

The forgiven life. The grace-filled life.

It begins with an embrace, which is more than an elegant word for *hug*.

Hugs are short-lived and friendly, handed out like after-dinner mints to acquaintances and strangers alike.

*Here, have one.*

An embrace is more intentional. Longer. Warmer. Far more personal.

We gather someone close—a spouse, a child, a friend, a sibling—and murmur words of comfort and affection. Or we simply let the strength of our embrace express the depth of our thoughts and feelings.

*I believe in you.*

*I support you.*

*I treasure you.*

*I love you.*

Wherever you are spiritually, whatever you have been through emotionally, you are already wrapped in the Lord's embrace. Held close by nail-scarred hands. Enfolded in the arms of One who believes in you, supports you, treasures you, and loves you.

He is waiting for you to embrace him in return. To accept the gift he's offering you. To listen for the whispered words you've longed a lifetime to hear:

*You are loved. All is forgiven.*

When the kindness  
and love  
of God our Savior  
appeared,  
he saved us,  
not because of  
righteous things  
we had done,  
but because of  
his mercy.  
*Titus 3:4–5*

“Mercy.” An old-fashioned word, fraught with meaning.  
 “Mercy!” my friend Sara says, her hand pressed to her heart. *Mercy*, God says, yet it’s our hearts he touches.

And God is able to make  
 all grace abound to you.  
*2 Corinthians 9:8*

A single syllable, *grace* is God’s word for *love*, expressed through divine forgiveness.

Sometimes we respond with an even shorter word. *No*.

We persuade ourselves we have good reason to shrug off the Lord’s touch and refuse his gift of grace. Consider the heartfelt words of one of my readers:

“I don’t feel I am worthy  
 of having God  
 forgive me of my  
 sins and weaknesses.  
 I feel like a failure.”

How poignantly she states what we often feel! Unworthy? Me too. A failure? Oh yes. We get it.

“I feel like I have let God down,  
and I can't seem to find the forgiveness I seek.  
Even on Sundays I don't feel  
his presence or direction,  
and I long for it.”

We understand that longing: to sense the realness of God, to know that he is with us, no matter what we've done. For all our good days, we've stumbled through bad ones too.

“I am struggling not to lead two separate lives—  
the Good Girl versus the Bad Girl.”

We're with you, sis. The battle is genuine, yet the grace of God prevails.

I cherish such words from our sisters because they remind us we're not alone. You'll hear dozens of women's voices echoing throughout *Embrace Grace*. Honest women. Hurting women. Hopeful women.

I carefully omitted any identifying details—no names or initials, no locations or occupations—and included only brief comments that speak to our shared experience of yearning for freedom, yet feeling encumbered by previous mistakes and current challenges.

“Even though I belong to God,  
I sometimes feel  
so unworthy  
because of my past.”

“I still get that heavy feeling in my chest  
over who I used to be.”

We feel it too—that woolly overcoat sensation—making our shoulders sag in defeat. Whether our “past” refers to some crucial mistake we made a decade ago or a poor decision last week, regret can weigh us down.

“I often carry the guilt of  
'if only they knew who I used to be,  
they would not like me  
as much as they do.'”

I cannot speak for what “they” think, but I am certain of what God thinks. He *does* know who you used to be. And he not only likes you, he loves you. Completely.

Always has.

Always will.

For the LORD is good  
and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues  
through all generations.

*Psalm 100:5*

Incredible, isn't it? To imagine God's love reaching across the boundaries of time, encircling us in his ceaseless embrace. Do you yearn to feel his heavenly arms around you? Holding you, comforting you, cherishing you?

“I *want* to want  
a relationship with God.  
I also want somebody  
to tell me that they love me  
and to know they mean it.”

Be assured, no one—man, woman, or child—says “I love you” with more certainty than the Lord. His regard for us goes far beyond kind words and warm feelings; his is a show-and-tell love, held up for the whole world to see.



This is how  
God showed his love  
among us:  
He sent his one and only Son  
into the world  
that we might  
live through him.  
*1 John 4:9*

At times living through him seems too daunting; just living is hard enough.

“I’ll never be perfect,  
and God is never going to  
forgive me for this,  
so what’s the point?”

“I have no strength left,  
and I don’t feel like I belong  
anywhere.”

You belong right here, dear one.  
Looking for answers. Seeking encouragement.

“I know God has forgiven me.  
Most days I believe that,  
but there are some days  
it is so hard to imagine.”

*Embrace Grace* is for those hard-to-imagine days when the gospel seems too good to be true.

Forgiveness free for the asking? Not just one time but again and again, every day of our lives? No matter how often we've tried to be good and failed? No matter how hard we've tried to be bad and succeeded?

*Impossible.*

But that's not the word Jesus used. He called such things *possible*.

With man  
this is impossible,  
but not with God;  
all things are possible  
with God.

*Mark 10:27*

I know, I know. You've heard that line before, tossed at you by some well-meaning soul. It sounds good—"all things are possible"—but how does that work exactly?

Can we be sure God forgives us when we stumble? Must we say or do something specific in order to be forgiven? And what does forgiveness feel like?

“I know the Lord  
can do all things,  
but I, on the other hand,  
need a road map.”

May our conversation here serve, if not as a map, then at least as a field guide, tracing a well-worn footpath from doubt to belief, pointing us away from shame and toward hope.

Not a false hope spun from well-meaning wishes but a trustworthy hope based on the reality of countless lives changed by a leap called faith into the arms of a hero called Faithful and True.

“God has major plans in store for me.  
I just need to follow him.”

Oh, does he have plans for you! Big plans. Exciting plans. Plans that will thrust your past well behind you and place your future within your grasp.

“For I know the plans I have for you,”  
declares the LORD,  
“plans to prosper you  
and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope  
and a future.”

*Jeremiah 29:11*

Following him is the key. Your sisters who've traveled a similar path can point you in the right direction. But only God can lead the way.

When your friends and loved ones fail you, God remains by your side, steadfast and true. Waiting for you to turn around when you're headed in the wrong direction. Waiting for you to look up each time you feel pressed down with fear, sorrow, or regret. Waiting for you to listen to what he has to say—not with trepidation but with expectation.

God is our refuge  
and strength,  
an ever-present help  
in trouble.

*Psalm 46:1*

“Ever-present” is the Bible’s way of saying, “24/7.”  
God will be there for you, however dark the hour, however  
tenuous your faith.

“I really love the Lord,  
I have repented  
of my sin,  
but I have big-time  
guilt.  
Do you think God  
can still use me,  
or is it too late?”

Are you still alive, my sister? Still drawing breath?  
Then it’s not too late to serve the Lord you love. And never  
too late to find the assurance and comfort you seek.

Praise be  
to the God and Father  
of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Father of compassion  
and the God of all comfort.

*2 Corinthians 1:3*

Speaking of comfort, that itchy, old coat of yours is still in the back of the closet, should you miss it. Meanwhile, I'll do my best to keep you warm as we move from the darkness of doubt to the light of grace.

Whether you never traveled this road before, got lost somewhere along the way, or are circling back to begin again, you are welcome here.

Make yourself at home, dear woman.

Prepare your minds for action...

set your hope fully  
on the grace  
to be given you  
when Jesus Christ  
is revealed.

*1 Peter 1:13*

**BEFORE YOU TURN THE PAGE...**

☞ When, if ever, have you been aware of God's tender embrace?

☞ What words do you wish God would whisper in your ear?

☞ *Are* all things possible with God? How can you be sure of your answer?