



COMPLETELY  
*Forgiven*

Responding to God's Transforming Grace

SHANNON ETHRIDGE

Best-selling author of the Every Woman's Battle series



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Italics in Scripture quotations indicate the author's added emphasis.

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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# CONTENTS

An Invitation into the Grace of God . . . . .	1
Day 1 ☼ The Wisdom of Remaining Ignorant . . . . .	5
Day 2 ☼ A Tower of Trouble . . . . .	10
Day 3 ☼ The Deceiver and the Despiser . . . . .	14
Day 4 ☼ The Great Baby Race . . . . .	18
Day 5 ☼ A Brother's Keeper—or Killer? . . . . .	22
Day 6 ☼ Pride and Prejudice . . . . .	26
Day 7 ☼ Lasting Impressions . . . . .	30
Day 8 ☼ When Tempers Flare . . . . .	34
Day 9 ☼ Noah's Big No-No . . . . .	38
Day 10 ☼ Who's Laughing Now? . . . . .	42
Day 11 ☼ Will the Real Deceiver Please Stand Up? . . . . .	46
Day 12 ☼ Ties That Bind . . . . .	50
Day 13 ☼ I Did It My Way . . . . .	54
Day 14 ☼ Someone's in the Bedroom with Dinah . . . . .	58
Day 15 ☼ Israel's Golden Boy . . . . .	63
Day 16 ☼ R-E-S-P-E-C-T . . . . .	68

Day 17	☞ A Well Woman . . . . .	72
Day 18	☞ A Selfish Climb up the Corporate Ladder . . . . .	76
Day 19	☞ Expecting the Extraordinary . . . . .	80
Day 20	☞ The Queen of Control . . . . .	84
Day 21	☞ Casting Pearls Before Swine . . . . .	88
Day 22	☞ Caught in the Act . . . . .	93
Day 23	☞ David's Unthinkable Deeds . . . . .	97
Day 24	☞ The Root of All Evil . . . . .	102
Day 25	☞ Committed Friend or Crafty Foe? . . . . .	106
Day 26	☞ The Ultimate Bad-Hair Day . . . . .	110
Day 27	☞ From Riches to Rags . . . . .	114
Day 28	☞ In-Law or Outlaw? . . . . .	118
Day 29	☞ Driven to Distraction . . . . .	123
Day 30	☞ When the Cock Crows . . . . .	127
	Are You Ready to Take Another Step Closer? . . . . .	131
	A Note from Shannon . . . . .	132
	Notes . . . . .	133
	Topical Index . . . . .	135
	Scripture Index . . . . .	136

## AN INVITATION INTO THE GRACE OF GOD

Have you ever wondered how God could possibly love you after all you've done? Me too. Especially since He knows everything about us—even the shortcomings we fail to see ourselves. As scary as that thought may seem, we have absolutely no reason to fear. Why? Because God says the same thing to us today as He did to Paul two thousand years ago:

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV)

Sufficient. God said His grace was sufficient for the likes of the radical, prejudiced, persecuting, Christ-hating, terroristic murderer we now know as the apostle Paul—the man through whom God wrote the majority of the New Testament. But is it possible that God's grace is sufficient for the likes of me and you as well? Absolutely, because God's magnificent power is made all the more perfect in (not in spite of) our weakness.

Since you are holding this book in your hands, I hope it means what I think it means—that you have found the study of God's Word to be as addictive as I warned it would be in the first devotional, *Completely Loved*. However, if this is the first book you've picked up in the Loving Jesus Without Limits series, let me explain how it works. This devotional is the second in a series of four that accompany the lead book, *Completely His*. If you've not read it yet, I encourage you to do so for a look at how God is wooing and pursuing you as His spiritual bride. But if you choose to read this book first, you'll

still be enriched by it—and the three other devotionals in the series. That’s because each one is designed to help you dive into God’s Word for yourself, taking you into a deeper level of commitment to your heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

Imagine how different life could be when you experience thirty days of heart-to-heart time with God through this book, and then thirty more days through another devotional in the series, and so on, all the while learning more and more about:

- how far God has gone to reveal Himself to us and draw us closer (the message in *Completely Loved: Recognizing God’s Passionate Pursuit of Us*)
- how God can use us mightily in spite of our shortcomings (the message of the devotional you are holding)
- how God lavishes both His presence and His presents on us (explored in *Completely Blessed: Discovering God’s Extraordinary Gifts*)
- how our love for God cannot be contained but can be shared naturally (examined in *Completely Irresistible: Drawing Others to God’s Extravagant Love*).

The first devotional focuses on God’s interactions with people in the Bible to give you a clearer glimpse into His character and His pursuit of us. This one takes a closer look at some of those saints and sinners, as well as God’s reaction to them. In their stories we’ll find answers to some of our deepest questions about how we are to live, questions such as:

- Does anyone else have the kinds of struggles and temptations I have?
- Is God going to give up on me someday? After all, my spiritual life seems to be two steps forward, three steps back!
- How can I avoid some of the more subtle yet destructive sins so common to people?
- Is it possible to live out the righteousness that Christ offers?

It's only natural that, as human beings, we have questions like these. The good news is that God has answers in His Word, and He's not just willing to reveal them to you—He's eager to do so!

As you read this devotional, I hope you'll come to understand that Christ's death on the cross has thoroughly cleansed you. In His eyes, you are as pure as you can possibly be. There's nothing more you can add to Christ's sacrifice and nothing more you can do to earn higher standing with God. You are completely forgiven. No loopholes. No disclosures. No fine print on the contract. God's grace is simply all you need. I call this *positional purity*.

In addition to the positional purity God has already bestowed on you, I hope you'll be inspired to pursue what I call *experiential purity* as well. I pray you'll want to respond to His lavish love and grace by living out your righteousness, not so you can achieve a legalistically pure life, but in order to experience the freedom and joy that comes from living according to His desires for His people. When you are committed to living a lifestyle pleasing to God, you will be transformed, both inside (with your heart and mind) and outside (with your actions). This transformation will not only bring God great glory, but it will also bring you great pleasure, satisfaction, peace, and happiness as you live the abundant life you were meant to live.

Over the next thirty days, you'll read about squabbling siblings, great patriarchs and matriarchs, royalty and royal failures, conquerors and concubines, builders of God's kingdom, and builders of their own kingdoms. We'll focus on what their actions and choices tell us about how to live a life that is more holy and pure and that genuinely reflects God Himself. Then by answering the introspective questions at the end of each reading called "Holding His Hand," you'll gain a clearer picture of how you can respond to God's transforming grace and live out the righteousness that you have already received.

Imagine the freedom that will come as a result of recognizing that you are completely forgiven. You won't have to worry about God's disapproval



anymore. You won't have to wear yourself out trying to make up for past failures. You won't have to obsess over earning spiritual brownie points. You can know God's favor is on your life and even learn to love yourself simply because God loves you and because His grace is sufficient—even for the likes of you and me.

So if you are ready to respond to your invitation into the grace of God, let's get started.



# THE WISDOM OF REMAINING IGNORANT

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**Daily reading:** Genesis 2:4–3:24

**Key passage:** The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it. But the LORD God gave him this warning: “You may freely eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die.”  
(Genesis 2:15–17)

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*O*ur family was driving from Texas to Alabama during the month of August, and we decided to take a break at a rest stop somewhere in Arkansas. Fifteen-month-old Erin had been incredibly fussy while strapped in her car seat, so we stopped to let her run around for a while, even though it was almost one hundred degrees outside. Kids must have a built-in radar for cool water on a hot day, as Erin toddled directly toward a candy cane-shaped waterspout several yards away. Knowing what she was thinking,

I ran after her, hoping to keep her from getting her clothes soaked, but she cried hysterically when I swept her up in my arms. My daughter didn't want Mommy to rescue her. She had her heart set on getting wet.

There weren't many people near, so I just did what any merciful mother would do for her baby on a sweltering day. I stripped Erin naked and let her run wild underneath that flowing waterspout. My daughter frolicked unashamedly for half an hour while I laughed and snapped all the pictures I could—what a Kodak moment! I thought, *Oh, how wonderful it would be if I could turn back the clock and feel that innocent and uninhibited again!*

I couldn't help but wonder if Adam and Eve felt something similar as they were banished from their idyllic paradise, wearing their new clothes and knowing they could never again return to the days of unashamed nakedness and innocence. God had placed them in a perfect environment, without a need or concern in the world. All they had to do was enjoy the lush garden and its wildlife, each other, and God. They had nothing to worry about, nothing to fear. God wanted it that way. The only restriction He had put on them pertained to one particular tree: "You may freely eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" (Genesis 2:16–17). God didn't want Adam and Eve to have knowledge of both good and evil. He only wanted them to have knowledge of good.

However, their curiosity got the best of them. One minute they were thinking, *Hmm... I wonder what would happen if I took a bite of that forbidden fruit?* A short time later, they were wishing they didn't know the answer to that question. If only they could rewind the tape and have a "do over," but the damage was done, and the ripple effect of their sin would rock every one of our boats from that time forward.

Adam and Eve's sin was that they wanted to know *more* than God wanted them to know, and they searched for that knowledge apart from God. This is the essence of much of our sin as well. Sometimes we want to know things that we'd be much better off not knowing. For example:

- Susan heard a rumor that Cheryl's husband had divorced her over a decade ago because she had cheated on him. Susan asked around, and word got back to Cheryl about it. "If you really felt you needed to know, why didn't you come and ask me directly, instead of asking other people?" Cheryl asked.

Devastated by how she had hurt her friend, Susan wished she'd never heard the rumor in the first place, or that she would have just ignored it and not inquired about it further. Whether it was true or not didn't matter as much as the loss of her friend's trust.

- In her early sixties, Belinda is dying of lung cancer. She had her first cigarette at age fourteen, simply because she was curious as to what smoking would be like. One smoke led to another, and soon she was hooked. She now says, "If only I had never smoked that first cigarette. I wish I had known they were so addictive, but it's too late for that now."
- When Marla's boyfriend, Tom, admitted he was not a virgin, Marla said she was okay with that (because she wasn't either). However, she pressed him for more information—how many partners he'd been with, who they were, and where they had their encounters. Tom thought he was doing the right thing by answering all her questions, but too much information caused Marla to become jealous and insecure since she knew many of his past lovers. Their relationship crumbled as a result.

Bruised friendships... enslaving addictions... jealousy and insecurity. Sometimes our curiosity can lead us where we don't really want to go. But it doesn't have to, especially if we remember that peace and happiness don't come from knowing everything, as God does, but from simply obeying God and trusting Him to reveal information on a need-to-know basis. His goal is not to keep things *from* us, but to hold certain information *for* us so it doesn't cause unnecessary pain and suffering in our lives.

### HOLDING HIS HAND

Am I the kind of person who feels she has to know everything about everyone? If so, what have I learned from today's reading?

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Do I believe there is wisdom in remaining unaware of certain situations, especially when I am powerless to help the person involved or make any real difference? Am I content not to know things I don't necessarily need to know? Why or why not?

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How might I be guarding myself and my loved ones by not pressing for information they don't want to share with me?

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Can I trust God to reveal information to me on a need-to-know basis? Why or why not?

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*Dearest God,*

*How Your heart must have broken when Adam and Eve sought the knowledge that You wanted to protect them from. Reveal to us the ways in which we are guilty of the same thing. Keep us from sinning against You and against others with our unnecessary curiosities and hurtful gossip. Show us the wisdom in remaining ignorant, helping us guard our minds from gathering “too much information.” We trust that You will reveal to us things that we truly need to know.  
Amen.*



# A TOWER OF TROUBLE

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**Daily reading:** Genesis 9:1; 11:1–9

**Key passage:** Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies—a monument to our greatness! This will bring us together and keep us from scattering all over the world. (Genesis 11:4)

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I fondly recall my visits to my paternal grandmother's home every summer because she always spoiled me rotten. The summer before my fourth-grade year, however, I learned that Mawmaw wasn't always about spoiling, but also about strict discipline when necessary.

One day I asked her if I could walk over to the clubhouse before dinner so I could get some exercise (something I needed as a pudgy, prepubescent girl). Mawmaw responded, "You may go, but you are not allowed to buy candy out of the vending machine." *Is she a mind reader?* I wondered. *How does she know that's why I want to go for a walk?*

"Yes, ma'am," I responded. Then I walked over to the clubhouse, dug thirty-five cents out of my pocket, and plugged the coins into that vending

machine without a second thought. My favorite candy bar was Bit-O-Honey, but I wouldn't have time to chew it all before getting back to the house, so I pressed B-5, and down dropped a bright yellow bag of peanut M&M's. I ripped open the package, put it to my lips, and scarfed down the bite-sized pieces of candy. On the way home I disposed of the evidence in a trash can and brushed my teeth upon arrival to make sure there was no chocolate on my breath. As soon as I came out of the bathroom, my grandmother asked, "Did you go to the candy machine?"

"No, ma'am," I lied. That's when I found out she had spies all over that housing complex.

"I called my friend who works at the reception desk, and she told me that you walked out of the clubhouse eating candy," she said. Busted. But I figured all I'd get was a wink, a grin, and a "Don't do that again." After all, she was my sweet Mawmaw, and I was her "precious little grand-dor-ter," as she frequently called me. I was shocked to find out, however, that Mawmaw would not tolerate my lying.

She sternly explained my sentence. "You will not get any of my chocolate pie tonight since you've already had your dessert. And do you know that special picnic we were going on tomorrow with your friends to Dennis the Menace Park? We won't be going. You'll stay in your room instead." I cried for at least an hour over how Mawmaw had confounded my fun plans, thinking she'd perhaps give in. She never budged, however, and I never disobeyed or lied to her again.

Rather than respecting my grandmother's authority over me and obeying her rules, I assumed that I could get away with my actions without her knowledge, or that there would be no consequences to pay even if she did find out. I was wrong—and so were the people who, in spite of God's commandment to "multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1), insisted on doing their own thing.

The descendants of Noah wanted to stay together and resisted being scattered all over the world. They wanted to build a cultural hub with a



magnificent tower reaching to the heavens. But God stepped in and confounded their plans to build such a city. Why? Because they were supposed to spread out all over the earth and make a name for God in every part of the world, not stay together and make a name for themselves with an extravagant piece of architecture.

If we think pride like this doesn't exist anymore, we'd better think again. People in just about every field—science, medicine, law, politics, education, and even religion—believe they can make a name for themselves by ignoring God's sovereign existence and doing their own thing. For example, Darwinists confidently claim that we naturally evolved from apelike creatures. Scientists claim with confidence that the world was created by a big, random cosmic bang. Liberal lawmakers use “separation of church and state” as an excuse to try to make it illegal for students to pray in public schools or for judges to publicly display the Ten Commandments in their courthouses. Researchers are harvesting human fetuses and experimenting with cloning, all in the name of science, disregarding the sanctity of human life. Legislators recently allowed the removal of a feeding tube from a vegetative human because they (in the place of God) deemed that her life was subpar. Where is our fear of God? Surely, He will once again confound those who seek to steal His glory and undermine His sovereignty.

How about you? Do you respect God's sovereignty over everything, including you? Living out your righteousness includes obeying His commands. He knows what's best for you—after all, He made you and knows you better than you know yourself! Of course, you'll stumble and fall into sin on occasion, but when you do, do you quickly acknowledge that you are outside of God's will? Do you wholeheartedly seek restoration? Do you make a conscious effort to choose humility over humiliation?

May it always be so for you and for me, lest we, like the architects of Babel, find ourselves in a tower of trouble with our plans and aspirations confounded.

## HOLDING HIS HAND

When I look at how I spend my time each day (working at home, in an office, in a classroom, and so on), what are two or three reasons why I do the things I do?

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Do these reasons line up with my purpose in life of being a clear reflection of the God who made me? Am I trying to make His name great or my own name great?

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What adjustments might I need to make in order to ensure that the motives behind my daily missions are positive, God-honoring ones?

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*Precious Jesus,*

*Your name and Your works are truly matchless! There is no way we can compare even one aspect of our lives with Your infinite importance and greatness. Thank You for showing us true humility and submission, Lord. Keep pride far away from our hearts and minds. Amen.*



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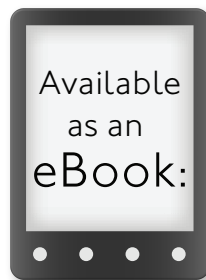
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