

Women's Ministries Emphasis Day 2003

June 7, 2003

RESOURCE PACKET

*“United by the Wonder of His
Unlikely Grace”*

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North American Division

“United in the Wonder of His Unlikely Grace”

Optional Worship Outline

- Opening Song** #111 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* “It Took a Miracle”
Choose one #75 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* “The Wonder of It All”
- Call to Worship** #711 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* “Praise the Lord, O My Soul”
 Or “By the Grace of God” reading (enclosed)
- Offertory Reading** You choose, bearing the theme in mind
- Special Music** You choose. Bearing the theme in mind
- Personal Testimonies** For 2003 we want to feature the needs and women of the:
1. Northern Asia-Pacific Division
 2. Euro-Africa Division
 3. Trans-European Division
 4. General Conference department
- We want to emphasize
1. Women in leadership
 2. The work in China
 3. Women's work loads (the amount and circumstances of her work.)
- Could follow this with a time of prayer – praying for the women around the world and for those specifically being emphasized – (The Women's Ministries Director or Pastor or several women could have this prayer time.)*
- Children's story** Choose a story that shows an example of a child experiencing grace – from a parent, teacher, friend. Explain that it is an example of God's grace and love for us.
- Scripture Reading** Ephesians 2:4-10
Choose one: “By the Grace of God” reading (enclosed)
- Special Music** You choose ~ a song emphasizing God's love or grace would go well.
- Sermon** “United by the Wonder of His Unlikely Grace” (enclosed)
- Closing Hymn** #108 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* “Amazing Grace”
Choose one: #109 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* “Marvelous Grace”
- Closing Prayer**

Reading for either Call to Worship or Scripture Reading

This reading can be done several ways:

1. One person reading the “By the grace of God...” line and one other person reading the scriptures. This would use two people.
2. One person reading the “By the grace of God...” line and have the congregation read the scriptures as a responsive reading. This would mean that the Bible reading would need to be copied for all members.
3. If you’d like to use a number of women for this reading, use one person to read the “By the grace of God...” line, then use a different person for each of the scriptures. This would use twelve people.

“By the Grace of God”

By the grace of God, you are not condemned.

Romans 8:1 ~ “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

By the grace of God, you are delivered from the law.

Romans 7:6 ~ “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”

By the grace of God, you are near God.

Ephesians 2:13 ~ “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.”

By the grace of God, you are delivered from the power of evil and are a member of His kingdom.

Colossians 1:13 ~ “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

By the grace of God, you are justified.

Romans 5:1 ~ “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....”

By the grace of God, you are perfect.

Hebrews 10:14 ~ “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”

By the grace of God, you have been adopted by the Heavenly Father.

Romans 8:15 ~ “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

By the grace of God, you have access to God any second.

Ephesians 2:18 ~ “For through Him, we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

By the grace of God, you will never be abandoned.

Hebrews 13:5 ~ “Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

By the grace of God, He will always help you.

Hebrews 13:6 ~ “So we may boldly say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”

By the grace of God, our inheritance will never fade away.

1 Peter 1:4 ~ “...to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”

Women's Ministries Emphasis Day 2003 Sermon

"United by the Wonder of His Unlikely Grace"

(Speaker: The sections in **bold type** are the sections of the outline and not part of the sermon.)

I. Introduction ~ An Unlikely Group

They were an unlikely group.

A. Few things would have brought them together.

Few things would have ever brought them together. Their social standings would have prevented them from ever sharing a meal, a glance, or a word of kindness. Yet here they stood. Comforting one another. Possibly clinging to one another, their tears mingling. Their hearts breaking together – everything they had hoped for and dreamed for seemed to be ending right before their very eyes.

B. Who were they and what brought them together?

Who were they? What brought them together on this dark day? What broke down the social barriers, the prejudices, the fears?

Unlikely grace.

II. John

A. His personality and family background

He was young. And many may have thought a little rough. His life had been spent in boats and on the lake. He was a fisherman. It was the family business. One he had thought he would do all his life. Working along side his father and brother, John was known as one of the "Sons of Thunder." John and James had reputations for having bad tempers. For seeking revenge against those who crossed them. They were ambitious

young men, full of pride and criticism. Yet there was a soft side to John. There was an earnestness about him; an ardent, yet contemplative spirit about him.

B. He knew the work of a fisherman

He knew what hard work was. To work all night, casting out the heavy nets. Dragging them back into the boat. Then working at separating the good fish from the rubbish pulled in with the fish as they dragged the net through the shallows to shore. But even then the work wasn't finished. Nets had be to laid out to dry and any holes needed to be mended. The fish cleaned and taken to market. It was work. Good work. The business was prosperous. The brothers and their father were in partnership with the brothers, Andrew and Simon. They were able to hire servants to help. It was work he knew well. It was his life.

Until that morning. A morning like most others.

C. Luke 5:1-11 ~ It had been a difficult night.

It had been a difficult night. They had fished all night to no avail. Nothing. It was like the waters were empty. As the morning light became warmer, he was anxious to get away from the lake. To go home and eat and sleep. Try again later. The nets had been emptied of rubbish. They had been laid out to dry. He and James were mending the tears and holes. Minding their own business.

1. The arrival of the itinerant preacher.

That's when He came. He looked like an ordinary Jew. An itinerant preacher, John assumed. His hands weren't calloused like John's. His skin not the sun toughened brown of the sons of Zebedee and crew. There was something about Him. Something that caught John's attention. He watched as this Man approached Simon, stepped into

the small fishing boat anchored at shore, and asked to be pushed out a little ways. Sitting in the boat rocking gently on the shallow waters, the Man began to talk to the crowd that had gathered. They had followed Him. His teaching – His words, they were like none John had heard before. There was an authority about His teaching. A confidence. A peace. John's hands kept working, but his heart was listening, being drawn to this simple man.

2. Cast out your nets.

When He had finished teaching, He told Simon to launch his boat into the deep waters and cast out his nets. Cast out his nets! But it was morning. Fishing was done. It had been a difficult, unproductive night. John wondered how Simon would respond. He knew Simon's temper and the way he spoke and acted without thinking. Would he do something so absurd? Yet, having listened to this Man's words, could it be possible?

3. Overflowing nets.

Before John could think much more about the ridiculousness of the requests, Simon and Andrew were shouting. Fish! Their nets were overflowing with fish! Their boat was sinking and the nets were breaking. John and James jumped into their boat, leaving behind the nets and paddling quickly to their aid. There were so many fish that both boats began to sink. As they worked quickly to pull in the nets and get to shore, John stole quick glances at the Man. Who was He? How did He know? He saw a warm smile on the Man's face. There was just something about Him....

4. Come, follow Me.

Standing on the shore, amazed at the huge catch of fish, dripping with lake water and sweat, John couldn't take it all in. And then the man spoke to him, "Do not be afraid.

From now on you will catch men.” (Luke 5:10) Leaving his father behind with the flopping fish on shore, John made the decision in an instant to follow this Man, Jesus.

5. So much had taken place in the three years since then.

That had been three years ago. John couldn't believe all that had taken place since then. The miracles witnessed. The things Jesus had taught him and the others who traveled with them. The youngest of the group, John had opened his heart to Jesus with the confiding trust of a child. How he had loved Jesus! He kept close to Him always. Pushing closer and closer. Always wanting to be with Him, to know Him more. Drawn by Jesus' love for him.

6. Jesus loved John even though He knew all about Him.

He couldn't believe that Jesus loved him. Him – John! John knew himself. He knew his bad temper. He had seen his own pride. His desire to be the best. The most important. The richest. He knew how he had pushed others aside in his quest for power and importance. He knew how society had treated him – a fisherman. Ignoring him. Thinking him uneducated. A smelly fisherman. Love? He hadn't felt it much. Fishermen were a rough group. Hard workers. Calloused by not only the ropes and sun and work, but by the rejection they often experienced.

7. The disciple whom Jesus loved.

But Jesus hadn't rejected him. Jesus had loved him. Had treated him with value and respect. Had taught him. Through not only His words and teachings, but by his example. Had shown him what it meant to love God and your neighbor. John was amazed by His love. So amazed that later he would define himself by it – “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). He saw himself, not as an

apostle, not as a teacher, not as an author of one of the books of the Bible, but as the one Jesus loved.

9. The unlikely grace of love.

It was the unlikely grace of love that changed John's heart and life. That had brought him to this spot. To this moment of time. Standing in the small grieving group. It had been a long night. But he had not left Jesus. He followed Him to the judgment hall. Held His mother, Mary, as she wept and grieved with a grief so deep she could barely stand. The others had fled, but John stood there. He would stay till the end. Drawn by a love that forever changed his life. A love he knew he didn't deserve. An unconditional love. Grace.

III. Mary Magdalene

A. She had just anointed His feet with the oil of spikenard. And now this?

Mary couldn't leave His side either. Her grief so intense she couldn't speak. She could barely believe that this was happening. It had only been a few days since she had knelt before Him, had anointed His feet with the oil of spikenard. She had heard Him talk of His death and she longed to show Him honor. But then there had been the talk of Him being crowned king. King! Her heart had rejoiced. "She was eager to be first in honoring her Lord" (DA p 559). Oh, how she loved Him. She couldn't believe how He had changed her life. Accepted her. Loved her.

B. She was an outcast; a great sinner.

Her life had been difficult. Too young, she had been introduced to sin in all of its ugliness. She had fallen. Her mind became a habitation of demons. To the world, her life looked hopeless. She was a great sinner. And an outcast. Mary remembered those

moments of her life. People avoided her. They talked—whispered about her as she passed. Pointed to her. Kept their children from coming near her. Men came near in secret, only to get what they desired. And she gave. The beauty that had once attracted men to her, that had been her greatest asset, had lost its softness. Her face had become etched with the lines of a hard life. It had been a long time since she had smiled and laughed. Since her eyes had reflected anything except anger and numbness. She didn't like her life, but what else could she do? Where could she go? Who would accept her?

C. John 8:1-12 ~ Caught in adultery

Then she met Jesus. Not that she had planned to meet Him. She had been thrown at His feet. Accused of adultery. The crowd standing around shouting, hands full of stones. She had lain in the dust, attempting to cover her nakedness and shame with what little material she could pull over her. The hurt, the tears, the anger. She knew she deserved to be stoned. And maybe it would be relief. How could she continue on like this?

1. Woman, where are your accusers?

Then she heard the thuds. Stones dropping. The sound of footsteps walking away. When she found the courage to look up, they were gone. All of her accusers. The hands of un-grace gone. And the gentle voice of Jesus asking, "Woman, where are your accusers?"

2. Would Jesus accuse her?

Accusers? They were gone. But what of Jesus. Would He accuse her? Would He condemn her? He had every right. She knew enough of Him, had heard the stories, had

seen Him in the streets, to know that He was different. Some even said a prophet. Or the Messiah.

3. Neither do I condemn you....

Then His words broke through the confusion of her mind, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:10).

No condemnation? No accusations? Forgiveness. She had never experienced that before. But Christ forgave her. Knew all about her – her past, her present, her sins, and forgiven her with a grace she had never known before.

D. Desire of Ages quote, p. 568.

The book, *Desire of Ages* says, “Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf. She knew how offensive is sin to His unsullied purity, and in His strength she had overcome” (p 568).

E. Seven times Jesus had rebuked the demons.

Seven times she had come to Him. Seven times she needed His forgiveness. Seven times she had needed Him to rebuke the demons who controlled her thoughts. She heard Him pray for her. For her! He never condemned her. Never told her she was hopeless. Never treated her with disgust. He had lifted her from despair and ruin. Had changed her life.

F. She was a new person – inside and out.

She was like a new person. You wouldn't even recognize her as the same person she had once been. Not only because she dressed differently, but there was a softness about her face. Her eyes, once full of pain and anger, reflect joy. There was a

glow about her that could only come from grace. A grace that changed not only her heart, but also her appearance. Jesus had seen the possibilities. He knew what lay inside of her. And His forgiveness had changed her life.

G. The unlikely grace of forgiveness.

It was the unlikely grace of forgiveness. A forgiveness despite what she had done. Who she had been. And it had transformed her life. Caused her to lavish her love on Him through the costly oil of spikenard. Caused her to risk what others thought of her to pour out her worship to Him. That compelled her to stay at the cross. To stay with Him until the end. She was forgiven!

IV. Nicodemus

A. A man of great honor, riches and reputation. But was it enough?

Nicodemus stood there now, but he had not stood by Jesus publicly before. He wished that he could've been like Mary—caring more about worshipping Christ than what others thought, but he had too much at stake. He was a man of great honor and reputation in the Jewish community. Highly educated. Talented. Honored. A member of the Nation Council. A member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus had earned favor and honor by what he did and what he knew. His great wealth and position were all based on his works. He was used to *doing*. To obeying the law. He had lived a life of striving—striving to appear righteous and holy. He worked and worked. He was respected by the people and by his peers. But there was a nagging doubt in his heart. Had he earned favor with God? Had he been good enough? Smart enough? Had he done enough?

B. John 3:1-21 ~ He had heard of Jesus and came to Him secretly.

He heard of Jesus. Heard his teachings. He longed to know more. Jesus taught about a life not based on works, but on God. On a holiness of heart, not a holiness of works. He visited Jesus secretly at night to ask him more. He longed to know more. He longed to find peace. To know for sure that he was accepted by God. In his life of works, something seemed to be missing. Had he missed out?

1. You must be born again.

Jesus taught about a rebirth. A birth not of flesh, but of the Spirit. “How can it be?” Nicodemus asks Jesus (John 3:9). He struggled to understand. He walked into the darkness of night hungry to study the scriptures—but this time he would search them, not looking for theories and rules, but looking for this new life Jesus talked about.

C. At the cross, Nicodemus finally understood all that Jesus and the scriptures taught.

Standing at the cross it had all come together. Nicodemus finally understands. He had searched the scriptures. Meditated on them. Watched Jesus – from a distance. As he watched Jesus breathe his last breaths; he finally understood. “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). As Nicodemus sees Jesus’ body lifted up on the cross, he finally understands the sacrifice. Finally understands what he needed to do. A freedom rushes through his spirit. It’s not about his works. It’s not about what he knows. It’s not about his obedience. Or his wealth, his power, or position. It’s all about Jesus. About this moment. About Christ’s sacrifice.

D. The unlikely grace of salvation by faith and not works.

Nicodemus finds the unlikely grace of salvation by faith and not works. He finds freedom. A freedom that brings him courage to step in when the disciples have rushed

out. And with Joseph of Arimathea, they would use their power and influence to bury Jesus' body before the Sabbath. A freedom that caused him to use his great wealth to take care of the infant church in the days and months ahead. A freedom to not worry about what others would think. To give up his power and position, to become poor in the world's eyes, yet rich in God's grace.

E. Tears fall fast as He prepares His savior's body for burial.

His tears fall fast as he helped Joseph prepare Jesus' bruised and lacerated body for burial. Tears of regret and repentance. Tears of joy in salvation by faith. Tears of freedom.

V. The Centurion

A. The centurion is far from home and unwanted.

The centurion knows freedom. He is Roman. He is part of the governing body. He is at the cross only because he has to be. This is his job. A job that has brought him far from home. Far from friends and family to a strange land and a strange people. A people who resented him. Who didn't want him to be there. They treated him with disgust and contempt. He missed his family. Missed getting together with friends and family. Longed to sit at a table where he could laugh and talk with friends. People who cared about him.

B. He is overseeing the crucifixion.

Yet here he was. Commanding a Roman guard. Overseeing the crucifixion of three men. The city was full of people. A religious holiday with many people coming from everywhere to be a part of the celebration. People who wished that he wasn't there. Who saw his presence as an intrusion.

C. There is a lot of talk about the man, Jesus.

There was a lot of commotion and talk about one of the men they were crucifying. A sign had been posted on the cross heralding Him the king of the Jews. They said His name was Jesus.

D. The centurion didn't know Jesus.

The centurion had never had a conversation with Jesus. Never walked with Him or followed Him. He may never have witnessed a miracle or sat and listened to His teaching. He had heard the rumors and stories. And now he was here to watch him die.

E. Surely this Man was the Son of God.

The darkness was strange. Eerie. It had enveloped the area for hours. The cross barely visible. The ground shook as Jesus cried out with a loud voice and then died. The centurion, shaken by the movement of the ground, the darkness, and the events of the day, watching in awe, cried out, "Surely this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54).

F. *Desire of Ages* quote (page 770).

Desire of Ages says, "The divine patience of the Savior, and His sudden death, with the cry of victory on His lips, had impressed this heathen. In the bruised, broken body hanging upon the cross, the centurion recognized the form of the Son of God. He could not refrain from confessing his faith."

G. The unlikely grace of acceptance.

The centurion found the unlikely grace of acceptance. It didn't matter that he was Roman. It didn't matter that he was far from home and family. God accepted him. God revealed Himself to this centurion. And accepted him. Offered him the opportunity to know Him.

IV. Closing

A. An unlikely group brought together by grace.

An unlikely group. Brought together by the cross. Brought together by grace.

B. John found the grace of love.

John found the grace of love. He was loved. With an unconditional love.

C. Mary found the grace of forgiveness.

Mary found the grace of forgiveness. It didn't matter what she had done or where she had been. Christ forgave her. Over and over. Everytime she came to Him.

D. Nicodemus found the grace of freedom.

Nicodemus found the grace of freedom. Freedom from works and rules. Freedom found in the working of the Spirit in his life.

E. The centurion found the grace of acceptance.

The centurion found the grace of acceptance. Even if he was an unwanted outsider by the Jews, God wanted him. God accepted him and revealed Himself to this Roman.

F. The unlikely grace of a cross brought them together.

It was the unlikely grace of a cross that brought them together. Bound them together. Their social standing, their education, their past, their position didn't matter. They each came with a need – sinners in need of grace. Grace they found in the cross. Grace they found in Jesus. They were united in the wonder of this grace and sacrifice.

G. Grace still has that power today.

Today, grace still has that power.

H. We may be like John in need of God's love.

Like John, we may just be an ordinary person. Working at our jobs. Raising our families. Battling our selves – our tempers; our pride; our critical attitudes. Longing to be loved and to know Jesus more. God's grace offers us love. We are the ones that Jesus loves.

I. We may be like Mary in need of forgiveness.

Like Mary, we are great sinners. Some of us may feel like greater sinners than others, but it doesn't matter how "big" or "small" our sin, we are each sinners in need of forgiveness. Over and over again. And like Mary, we can come to Jesus and find the grace of forgiveness. No matter what we've done. No matter what others think. Jesus forgives.

J. We may be like Nicodemus in need of freedom from works.

Like Nicodemus, we may be relying on our obedience, our works, our knowledge to make us right. But no matter how "good" we become, it will never be good enough. We will always be lacking. In Jesus, we find the grace of freedom. Freedom from striving and working, from trying to earn a salvation we can never earn. It's a free gift from God. And just like with Nicodemus, we will find a freedom to give all we have for Him when we find His grace.

K. We may be like the centurion in need of acceptance.

And like the centurion, it doesn't matter where we've come from or who we are. It doesn't matter if others accept us or reject us, God's grace accepts us. Just as we are. He is willing to – not just willing to, but longs to – reveal Himself to us. He wants us to know Him. Has given His Son so we can know Him.

L. We are united in the wonder of His unlikely grace.

We are all in need. Everyone of us. We all have the need of a Savior and the grace that only He can give.

We are united by our need for grace. A grace He willingly and freely gives. To each of us. A grace that leaves us standing in awe and amazement. An unlikely grace.

We are united in the wonder of His unlikely grace.

“United by the Wonder of His Unlikely Grace”

Sermon Outline

(For those who would rather preach from an outline than a written out sermon.)

I. Introduction ~ An Unlikely Group

- A. Few things would have brought them together.**
- B. Who were they and what brought them together?**

II. John

- A. His personality and family background**
- B. He knew the work of a fisherman**
- C. Luke 5:1-11 ~ It had been a difficult night.**
 - 1. The arrival of the itinerant preacher.**
 - 2. Cast out your nets.**
 - 3. Overflowing nets.**
 - 4. Come, follow Me.**
 - 5. So much had taken place in the three years since then.**
 - 6. Jesus loved John even though He knew all about Him.**
 - 7. The disciple whom Jesus loved.**
 - 9. The unlikely grace of love.**

III. Mary Magdalene

- A. She had just anointed His feet with the oil of spikenard. And now this?**
- B. She was an outcast; a great sinner.**

C. John 8:1-12 ~ Caught in adultery

1. Woman, where are your accusers?
2. Would Jesus accuse her?
3. Neither do I condemn you...

D. Desire of Ages quote, p. 568**E. Seven times Jesus had rebuked the demons.****F. She was a new person – inside and out.****G. The unlikely grace of forgiveness.****IV. Nicodemus****A. A man of great honor, riches and reputation. But was it enough?****B. John 3:1-21 ~ He had heard of Jesus and came to Him secretly.**

1. You must be born again.

C. At the cross, Nicodemus finally understood all that Jesus and the scriptures taught.**D. The unlikely grace of salvation by faith and not works.****E. Tears fall fast as He prepares His savior's body for burial.****V. The Centurion****A. The centurion is far from home and unwanted.****B. He is overseeing the crucifixion.****C. There is a lot of talk about the man, Jesus.****D. The centurion didn't know Jesus.****E. Surely this Man was the Son of God.****F. Desire of Ages quote, p. 770.**

G. The unlikely grace of acceptance.

IV. Closing

A. An unlikely group brought together by grace.

B. John found the grace of love.

C. Mary found the grace of forgiveness.

D. Nicodemus found the grace of freedom.

E. The centurion found the grace of acceptance.

F. The unlikely grace of a cross brought them together.

G. Grace still has that power today.

H. We may be like John in need of God's love.

I. We may be like Mary in need of forgiveness.

J. We may be like Nicodemus in need of freedom from works.

K. We may be like the centurion in need of acceptance.

L. We are united in the wonder of His unlikely grace.