

TRANSFORMING GRACE
Good News About Grace - Part 8 of 10
Craig Jutila

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 2:5 (NCV)

How To Be Transformed By Grace

1. Change _____

"Do not change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to Him and what is perfect." Romans 12:2 (NCV)

P

R

O

B

L

E

M

S

2. Choose _____

"Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others."
Philippians 2:4 (NCV)

3. Charge _____

"I am still not all I should be, but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us." Philippians 3:13-14 (TLB)

4. Chart _____

"I have thought much about Your words and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin." Psalm 119:11 (TLB)

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Monday

Why should I be concerned about my future when the Bible says, *"I say this because I know what I am planning for you," says the Lord, "I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future."* Jeremiah 29:11 (NCV)

Tuesday

Why should I be afraid when the Bible says, *"God did not give us a spirit that make us afraid but a Spirit of power and love and self-control."* 2 Timothy 1:7 (NCV)

Wednesday

Why should I worry when the Bible says, *"Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you."* 1 Peter 5:7 (TLB)

Thursday

Why should I feel worthless when the Bible says, *"For God has bought you with a great price. So use every part of your body to give glory back to God because He owns it."* 1 Corinthians 6:20 (TLB)

Friday

Why should I say "I can't" when the Bible says, *"I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power."* Philippians 4:13 (TLB)

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The gifted concert violist, Nicolo Paganini, was playing before a packed house one night, surrounded by a full orchestra. He was playing a number of difficult pieces and then he came to one which was his favorite -- a violin concerto. He started to play the concerto with the orchestra accompanying him. A few moments into the piece one of the strings on his instrument snapped and hung gloriously down from his instrument. Relying on his genius, he continued to play the piece with the remaining three strings. A few moments later into the piece, a second string snapped. But again relying on his genius, he continued to play the piece on the remaining two strings. Then the third string snapped. Three strings dangling from his instrument and he continued to play on one string. At the end of this magnificent concerto, the audience stood and applauded until their hands were numb, so incredible was the playing of this genius. Never thinking to ask for an encore, the Italian audience sat down. Paganini stepped to the front of the stage and held his instrument high and announced. "Paganini and one string." And he continued to play a full encore with the orchestra accompanying him. Incredible playing. He made more music that day out of one string, than most people ever could out of four. Along with the attitude of persistence.

Christopher Reeve was born September 25, 1959. He loved a sport called eventing. Eventing is a sport which combines the gracefulness of cross country horseback riding with the difficulty of show jumping. It was an event like this in May where Reeves horse, Eastern Express, approached a jump and balked at the jump. You know the rest of the story. His hands were tangled in the bridle. He was thrown over the front of the horse, landing on his head, cracking the upper most vertebrae in his spine, paralyzing him instantly. Prompt medical attention saved his life that day. A reporter caught up to him at his home in Massachusetts and Reeve said, "This accident has been difficult for all of us. But it hasn't frightened anybody away. We all miss the activities. My daughter, Alexandra, and I used to love to ride together. My son, Will, and I would play the piano together. Matthew and I loved to play tennis. We all used to sail together. I'd be kidding you if I said I didn't miss that. Ultimately, you have to accept that being together is much more important than doing together." One thing we know for sure, Christopher Reeve did not lose his attitude. He's shown the world he has the attitude of perseverance and an attitude to continue. I guess you could say, Christopher Reeve and one string.

All of us may remember the evening of August 3, 1992. The setting was Barcelona, Spain -- the Olympics. Eight men lined up for the 400 meter semi final race. The starter gun went off and all eight men were going to run into history, but one man that day didn't make it. Officially his race was recorded as "Race Abandoned" -- quit, gave up. But to Derrick Redmond and to us and to millions of tv viewers that's the most ironic misnomer in the history of the Olympic games because Redmond's race stands today as one of the epitomes of Olympic perseverance.

"With 100 meters to go, his father came out of the stands to help him the rest of the way home. He came over and was going to put his arm around me I shucked him off. I remember his breaking down. He said to me, "You don't have to put yourself through this." I said, "I've got to finish. He said, "We started together. Let's finish together." We just slowed down and went through it together. It didn't hit me how great my dad was. My aim

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was just to finish the race. It was only after, reflecting back on it, I was glad he was there. He was possibly the only person who could really understand what I'd been through.'

Derrick Redmond didn't set a world record last Monday. He didn't win any medals. But he completed his race and in doing so he showed us what the Olympics mean."

Derrick recalls, "I told him I had to finish. I have to finish the race." And Redmond's refusal to quit stands as a symbol for Olympic ideals.

Derrick Redmond had the attitude for persistence. I guess you could say that Derrick Redmond and one string.

I think sometimes we focus too many times on the strings that dangle in our life. What are the strings that dangle in our life? I call them the inevitables. The inevitables that happen to us. It's the car not starting when you're late for an appointment. It's something happening at work that causes you to be late. It's taking your kids to soccer practice when you're sick. It's your teenager coming home late. Maybe it's worse. Maybe it's a divorce that you don't want to happen. Maybe it's someone you've lost in your life. I call them the inevitables. We don't have a choice over them. We can't control them. But we do have one string left.

So how do we play a symphony on one string like Paganini, like Reeve, like Redmond.

1. Philippians 2:5 says *"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."* How can we have an attitude that is that of Christ? To be transformed by God's grace. **Change the way you think.** That's the first step in being transformed by God's grace. Romans 12:2 says *"Do not change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but be changed [circle "changed"] within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to Him and what is perfect."* The word "changed" means "transformed". To really get the meaning of that word we have to go back to our high school biology days, the experiment with the glass case and the caterpillars inside of it. Then in a few days they spun a cocoon and then a few days later a butterfly came out. That's called metamorphosis.

That's what the word "change" means -- metamorphosized by God's grace. Kind of like stepping into God's cocoon of God's grace and being changed, transformed. It's like the father and son that were over here from a third world country that were experiencing all we had to offer here in South Orange County. They were at South Coast Plaza at Macy's. They're excited, enthralled with everything they saw. On this one particular day they were standing in front of these walls that would open and close. They couldn't believe it. They didn't know what it was. The walls would open, people would get inside and then the walls would close. They never saw anything like that. The son turns to his dad and says, "What is that?" His dad said, "I don't know, I've never seen it before." They observed an elderly lady slowly walking up to these walls and she pushed a button. The walls opened up and she slowly stepped inside. Then the walls closed. Then they observed for the first time above the doors there was numbers: one, two, three. It stopped for a moment then came back down: three, two, one. The doors opened and out steps a

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beautiful 24 year old girl. Without hesitation, the father turns to his son and says, "Go get your mother."

A very shallow man but his thought processes were right on. He thought if he could put something very unappealing into this room, in a few short moments, six or seven seconds, something potentially appealing could come out.

That is what that word means in Romans 12:2. It means changed, transformed, and to our biology teacher, a metamorphosis. Transformed by God's grace.

When we are changed, when we are transformed, it has to do with our attitude. Our attitude has a great deal with what we put in. Our attitude is an inward feeling expressed in a behavior. That's why an attitude can be seen without being heard. If you don't believe that, drive the 405 freeway at 5:00 Monday through Friday and you will not hear a word but you'll see a lot of attitudes. It's an inward feeling expressed by a behavior attitude. It's like the guy who complains about the sex and violence on his VCR. It can be a problem, but you do have a choice.

You may say, I like my bad attitude. I enjoy having a bad attitude." A bad attitude will get you some things in life. A bad attitude will get you something extra in your burrito in the local fast food restaurant. I asked a friend of mine who was a manager of such an establishment, "They don't really put anything extra in your burrito?" He never answered me that day. He never said yes or no. But he said "It's amazing what you can hide in sour cream."

Other people don't create your spirit; they only reveal it. I find if you're in a bad attitude right now, you've probably been in one of what I call three attitude accidents.

The first one is the thoughts we think.
The second is the company we keep.
The third is the problems we possess.

The thoughts we think. Proverbs 4:23 says "*Be careful what you think because thoughts run your life.*" It's like putting cheap gas in a high performance engine. You can do it but you won't get the potential out of it the way the engine was built. It requires high performance gas.

Our body is the same way. God created us intricately. He created us to be high performance. Sometimes we put things in our life that are cheap gas -- the thoughts we think. A few years ago, I had two ladies in my office and they were going at it -- like an episode of Jerry Springer. Finally I brought them to a calm and said, "I need to step out for a moment." I returned with a glass and a can of coke. I sat the glass on my desk and poured the can of coke right to the top where it was going to spill over. I turned to the ladies and said, "If I was to bump that glass, what would happen?" It would spill. "That's right. What would come out?" Coke would come out. You mean orange juice, water, milk wouldn't come out? No, if I bump the glass with coke in it, coke's going to come out. What happens when you get bumped? What happens when I get bumped? What happens when I'm sitting in traffic on the freeway when I need to be somewhere and the inevitable happens in my life and the strings dangle from my life, when I get bumped, what comes

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out? The answer is, What went in? The thoughts we think. *"Be careful what you think because thoughts run your life."*

The company we keep. 1 Corinthians 15:33, *"Do not be fooled, bad friends will ruin good habits."* There's a business principle that says people around you will determine the level of your success or failure. The people you're surrounding yourself with right now are either making you or breaking you. That's a fact. According to this verse it says our friends have an affect on our character. That's a great verse for parents. You say, "My kids are in third or fourth grade. They chose their own friends." You chose them. It will impact their life for eternity by the friends they choose.

Have you ever seen the geese fly south for the winter? They fly in that V formation. They don't do that because it looks neat. They do it because each goose, directly behind the other, when they flap their wings, they create a 71% greater lift for the bird directly behind them. So the whole flock can fly 71% further by staying with the right people.

So it is with the friends you choose. Are you getting a 71% greater lift? Or are you walking with the turkeys? It's a choice.

The problems we possess. Acrostic:

P - All problems are a predictor. Problems have the ability to predict our success or failure based on how we respond to them, how we are transformed or changed by them.

R - Reminder. Problems are a reminder that life is tough. We need God's grace to help us through.

O - Opportunity. Problems are an opportunity. When I have problems come into my life I often will refer to them as an opportunity. The car doesn't start and I'll say, "Honey, we have an opportunity with the car." Just trying to maintain a right attitude.

B - Blessing. Problems are blessings. The Bible says we grow more through trials and difficulty than anything else. James 1:2 *"When you have many kinds of troubles you should be full of joy."* When the car doesn't start or I'm late or one of these inevitables hit my life, I get kind of a bad attitude. (I don't go to the fast restaurant then.) Adversity promotes spiritual maturity. Someone once said rubber bands and people have one thing in common -- they have to be stretched to be affective. That's not bad. That's a good point.

L - Lesson. Every problem we have is a lesson. Every problem has something to teach us. When I was walking through this I thought about a gentleman in the Old Testament. His name was Samson. Samson had incredible potential, incredible strength in God. This was a guy who really had it all going for him. But through some bad choices and not learning a lesson from his problems, he ended up in a state of disarray. This guy had constant conflict with the Philistine. He had illicit relationships with Philistine women. He had poor, poor choices. His ultimate poor

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choice was his relationship with Delilah that eventually brought him down. All the twists and turns, the improper relationship...

This guy's life was like a first century soap opera with all of its twists and turns -- "As the World Turns". Samson was one of the "Young and Restless", "On the Edge of Night", with only "One Life to Live". Having "All My Children" at Hebron's "General Hospital". But in his "Search For Tomorrow", he ended up "On the Edge of Night" because he rejected "The Guiding Light".

If you read to the end of the chapter, he was an incredible actor -- he'd been up for an academy award for the best actor award because at the end he brought the house down.

E - Everywhere. Problems are everywhere. You have problems. I have problems. All God's children have problems. They're inevitable.

M - Messages. Problems send us messages of where God wants to grow us. Remember adversity promotes spiritual maturity. God is more interested in our character than our comfort.

S - Solvable. All problems are solvable. In light of transforming grace. What God has done to us, He wants to do through us. Jesus does not care where your problems have taken you. But He does care where you are going. He wants to be involved in our lives.

2. Choose to focus on others.

Philippians 2:4 says "*Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.*" Our society, our world tells us something different. Our world tells us to focus on me. My problems, my opportunities. I was at Barnes and Noble and found magazines I thought would epitomize our life in general. *Life*. Several years when they published this magazine they talked about everything -- life in general, the problems, the difficulties, the successes, the failures of life. Bigger than life. I looked a little further and came across another magazine. If life was too large for us we had to start focusing on *People*. Life was too big; we want a little more focus on us. We want to just talk about people and specifically our people. A little further, even more specific, I came across a magazine called *Us*. We don't want to talk about life, we don't even want to talk about people, we want to talk about us. Our attitude, our problems, our intricacies of our life. We want to talk about us. I looked all over but could not find the magazine *I*. But I did find *Self*. We can't talk about life -- that's too generic. We want to focus on people. If that's not enough, I just want to focus on *Us*. And I really don't want to focus on *Us*. I really want to talk about *Self*. I looked through the magazine. It was 38 pages longer than *Life*. I don't understand how you can do that.

I found out as I went through an article. I don't know how many guys pick this up, based on some of the things that are in here but as I was looking through this I found out for the first time that your hair has five enemies. I did not know my hair has enemies. The first one is sun, and blow drying, hard water, pollution and hair stress! If your life is in such turmoil that your hair has stress, you cannot be helped! *Life, People, Us, Self* -- we narrow the focus but God says to look to others, to focus on others to make the choice to do that.

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Story of a school teacher -- Miss Thompson. She started the school year with looking at all her students and specifically one of them in the wrong life. But you'll see how she was transformed.

I know a school teacher named Miss Thompson. Every year when she met her students she would say, 'Boys and girls, I love you all the same. I have no favorites.' Of course she wasn't being completely truthful. Teachers have students that they like more than others. In fact, some teachers have students they just don't like.

Teddy was a boy Miss Thompson just didn't like. His hair was unkept. His clothes had a musty smell. He certainly wasn't an attractive boy. He wasn't likable. When she got his papers she got a certain pleasure of putting X's next to the wrong answers. Whenever she put an "F" at the top of the page, she always do it with flair. She had Teddy's records. She knew more about him than she wanted to know. The records read: 'First grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude but he has a poor home situation. Second grade: 'Teddy could do better. His mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home.' Third grade: 'Teddy is a good boy but he's too serious. He's a slow learner. His mother died this year.' Fourth grade: 'Teddy is very slow, but well behaved. His father shows no interest.' Christmas came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's class brought her Christmas presents. They piled them high on her desk and among them was one from Teddy. His was the gift that was wrapped in a brown paper bag held together with some scotch tape. On the package was written the simple words, 'For Miss Thompson from Teddy'. When she opened Teddy's present out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet with half the stones missing and half a bottle of cheap perfume. The other boys and girls in Miss Thompson's class began to laugh over Teddy's gift, but she quickly put on the bracelet and put some perfume on her wrist and held it up for the boys and girls to smell. They took their cues from Miss Thompson's and they responded with the oohhs and aaahhs. 'Doesn't it smell lovely?' said Miss Thompson. The children agreed.

At the end of the day when school was over and all the children were leaving, Teddy lingered behind he finally came over to her desk and said softly, 'Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you like my present.' When Teddy left that day, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and she asked God to forgive her. The next day when the children came they were welcomed by a new teacher. This Thompson had become a different person. She was changed. She was transformed. There was a metamorphosis that happened. She was no longer just a teacher. She had become an agent of God. She was now a person committed to loving children and doing things for them that will live on after her. She helped all the children, especially Teddy and by the end of the school year all the children in her class showed improvement especially Teddy. He had caught up with most and was ahead of some.

She didn't hear from Teddy for a longtime. Then she received a note that read, 'Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know I'm going to be graduating second in my class. Love Teddy.' Four years later she received another note, 'Dear Miss Thompson. They just told me I'd be graduating first in my class. The university has not been easy. I wanted you to be the first to know. Love, Teddy.' Four years later: 'Dear Miss Thompson, as of today I am Theodore Stollard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I'm getting

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married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would have sat if she were alive. Dad died last year. You're the only family I have now. Love, Teddy.' Miss Thompson went to that wedding and she sat where Teddy's mother would have sat. She deserved to sit there because of the time and the effort and allowing God's transforming grace to metamorphosize her, to transform her." I guess you could say it came down to Miss Thompson and one string.

I think sometimes we focus too many hours on the strings that dangle from our lives when we have one string left. We need to play it with all our heart. The Bible says we need to invest in others. We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give. We need to choose to focus on others.

3. Charge through your quitting points.

What is the quitting point? if you're a runner and you're on the twentieth lap and your legs feel like rubber, you can't take another step -- you're at a physical quitting point. Maybe you're at the job, things are overwhelming you. You are dizzy from all the work and your boss comes and tells you you're preaching this week end, gives you another assignment -- you're at a vocational quitting point. Maybe you're in an argument with your wife or your husband for the ninth time over the same issue. One of you says the magic words that sends the other one bolting from the room -- you're at a marital quitting point. Maybe you're up to 12:00 a.m.. Your teenager was supposed to be home at 10:30 and when they walk in the door you ask them where they've been for the last hour and a half and they announce to you that it's none of your business. You're at a parental hitting/quitting point.

A friend of mine, Mike, runs an event for us in the children's ministry called Junior Jam. We get 150 of our 3rd and 4th grade friends together and we have fun from 6:30 - 8:30. Mike had run this event before and he had planned in the past from 6:30 - 8:30 but this particular night he planned from 6:30 - 8:20. When you have ten minutes left with 150 3rd and 4th graders you are in trouble! There is an event that is called chumming. It's on the Discovery Channel. You take a boat into the harbor and they have a bunch of fish guts and blood in a pail and they throw that over the side and the sharks come. They work themselves into a frenzy. They go nuts. They bite each other, they thrash, their eyes roll back. It's the same response a third or fourth grader will give you if you throw candy to them. Mike was done about 8:20. He looked over, searching the stage. I knew he was about to go chumming. He saw the red box of candy. He took it, cocked his arms and threw it. At that point Mike was at what I call a ministry quitting point.

Maybe you have had a great relationship, a great week with God this week. You feel He's in control of your life. Then these inevitables hit us. The strings that dangle from our instruments, the strings that dangle from our lives. We feel like God has abandoned us, He's not near us. We are at a spiritual quitting point.

It's much easier to quit something than continue. It's easier to walk out of a room than to stay and resolve a conflict. It's easier to skip church and enjoy a nice day at the beach or the mountains. It's easier to play than to practice. It's easier to watch tv after a long day of work

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than to spend some time with your family, your kids. It's easier to do what we want rather than what God wants.

The Bible says in Philippians 3:13 *"I am still not all I should be, but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing. Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead. I strain [Can you see Derrick Redmond's face on the video?] I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us."*

Adversity helps promote endurance. When problems and difficulties come into our life, through enduring them, we can take a step further into our maturity walk.

John Scott knows a little bit about what it's like to not know what's going on with his life. He found himself in a 480 foot mine elevator in England. On his way up the elevator stopped for a brief moment. What he didn't know was the engineers were going to begin to test the emergency braking system of the elevator. How do they do that? They raise the elevator all the way to the top and then they send it into a free fall, 480 foot free fall. Right before it hits the ground they would slam on the brakes, then all the way back up again. Then they would send it into another virtual free fall all the way to the bottom and slam on the brakes. Can you imagine what was going through his mind? For two hours!

Those are the inevitables in our life. There are things that come to us and you know what they are in your life. You're coming up and all of a sudden the bottom drops out of your life. You're sent into a free fall.

That's how God gets our attention. But I would tell you He always has His hand on the brake. He will never let you go 481 feet. He's got His hand on the brake. And although we can't see it sometimes, He is there applying the brake at the right time. He is testing the braking system of your life.

If I had to chose a way to do it, I would not do it that way. I would not put someone through pressure to get something out that was right, true, honorable. But that is the way God has chosen to deal with us.

The Bible says *"We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials for we know they are good for us. They help us to learn to be patient and patience develops strength of character."*

4. Chart a course for growth.

Psalm 119:11 says *"I have thought much about Your words and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin."* Memorize, personalize, analyze.

The first thing to do this week is **memorize** God's word so we can see our life and our problems in light of what God says. Memorizing God's word. Putting it in our heart.

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For example, on Monday. When you roll out of bed and you have to start your work week and your feet hit the ground, grab these notes or have them in your car or on the mirror wherever you're going to see them. Memorize one verse for each day. Begin to put those thoughts in your heart. Remember what goes in comes out when you get bumped.

The first verse. Why should I be concerned about my future when the Bible says, "*I say this because I know what I am planning for you,' says the Lord. 'I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future.'*" God knows what's going on in your marriage or your lack of marriage. He knows the future. We need to give it to Him.

The second is **personalized**. I look at Scripture and change the pronouns a little bit. Tuesday: Why would I be afraid when the Bible says, "*God did not give us a spirit that makes us afraid but a Spirit of power and love and self-control.*" I'd say it something like this to personalize it: "Why should I be afraid when the Bible says God did not give me a spirit that makes me afraid but a Spirit of power and love and self control." God's given me that power and that's personalizing it.

Then the last is **analyzing**. Analyzing life's situations as they come in light of what God's word says. God's word says that His word is a light unto our feet that lights the path in front of us. By putting God's word in our hearts, when we get bumped, when problems arise we have a clear focus.

The choir is going to sing a song called "The Great Adventure". Some of you are thinking "All my life right now is a great adventure! I've got a lot of things going on, the inevitables in my life are all over the place right now." The chorus to this song says this, "Saddle up your horses [it's a western theme] we have a trail to blaze into the wild blue yonder of God's amazing grace. Let's follow our leader into the glorious unknown. This is life like no other. This is a great adventure." I think you'd agree that with all the things that come into our life that we have choices to make.

The word "enthusiasm" really means "within God". We should be excited about what's going on. Even when we're down to one string, we should be excited like Paganini and play it to all our potential. Today you may find yourself down to one string. That's ok. Play it. It's your choice.

Prayer:

Lord, the inevitables hit us sometimes. They hit us hard. Sometimes they drizzle down on us. Sometimes they come like a torrent and we can't seem to find ourselves in the wake of the storm. God, I pray that those of us who have come down to one string we'd be able to focus on that one string and not the inevitables that dangle from our life realizing that You are in control, realizing that You're much more interested in our character than our comfort, realizing that we have some string and we ought to play it to the best of our ability through your transforming grace. As we step out today in this thing we call the great adventure we pray that You would impact our lives, touch our lives, be with us as we walk through these verses this week, being changed, transformed, a metamorphosis taking place in our lives. Thanks for the day. We pray that You will bless us as we leave today. We ask this in Your name. Amen.