Graceful Living TODAY

A devotional journal for enjoying the life God has planned for you

Melanie Newton
We extend our heartfelt thanks to Tim Stevenson who created the original T.E.A.M. Training course on which the core of this devotional is based. We also extend an extra special thank you to Michelle Burns for serving as an editor for this devotional.

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Melanie Newton is the author of “Graceful Beginnings” books for anyone new to the Bible and “Joyful Walk Bible Studies” for established Christians. Her mission is to help women learn to study the Bible for themselves and to grow their Bible-teaching skills to lead others.

We pray that you will find Graceful Living Today a resource that God will use to strengthen you in your faith walk with God.

Grace-based Bible Studies • Always Relevant • Never Fluff

JOYFUL WALK PRESS
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Melanie Newton

Melanie Newton is a Louisiana girl who made the choice to follow Jesus while attending LSU. She and her husband Ron married and moved to Texas for him to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. They stayed in Texas where Ron led a wilderness camping ministry for troubled youth for many years. Ron now helps corporations with their challenging employees and is the author of the top-rated business book, *No Jerks on the Job*.

Melanie jumped into raising three Texas-born children and serving in ministry to women at her church. Through the years, the Lord has given her opportunity to do Bible teaching and to write grace-based Bible studies for women that are now available from her website (melanienewton.com) and on Bible.org. *Graceful Beginnings* books are for anyone new to the Bible. *Joyful Walk Bible Studies* are for maturing Christians.

Melanie Newton loves to help women learn how to study the Bible for themselves. She also teaches online courses for women to grow their Bible-teaching skills to help others—all with the goal of getting to know Jesus more along the way. Her heart’s desire is to encourage you to have a joyful relationship with Jesus Christ so you are willing to share that experience with others around you.

“Jesus took hold of me in 1972, and I’ve been on this great adventure ever since. My life is a gift of God, full of blessings in the midst of difficult challenges. The more I’ve learned and experienced God’s absolutely amazing grace, the more I’ve discovered my faith walk to be a joyful one. I’m still seeking that joyful walk every day...”

Melanie
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- Graceful Living Today: A 150-day devotional

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Introduction to Graceful Living

Jesus Christ presented Himself as the answer to every need of the human heart. The New Testament writers unanimously taught the same. Multitudes of people throughout the centuries since have witnessed that He does indeed do what He promised for those who trust and follow Him.

I have been a Jesus follower for more than 40 years now. Not once have I regretted that decision. I am a lifelong learner, a student of God’s Word and my Lord’s life. He teaches me in many ways.

Recently, someone asked me, “How has Jesus discipled you? What has made the most impact on my life?” When it comes to knowing who I am and where I stand with my God, without a doubt, the best teaching I have had was that which effectively covered the foundational principles of Christianity—who Christ is, what He accomplished on the cross for us, what the resurrection means for us, and our identity in Him.

That wonderful teaching communicated clearly and succinctly to me what I needed to know to live dependently on Christ and rest in my assurance of life in Him and through Him. I learned more about the purpose for the cross and the resurrection than I had ever heard before. I learned how to recognize the poison of legalism in a Christian’s life. It was through this teaching that I became aware that my flesh is not getting better the longer I know Christ. I need to depend 100% on Him now as I ever did as a young believer in the 1970s.

These timeless truths are essential for every believer to enjoy the life God has planned for them. So, I’ve adapted the original teaching I received (given as a series of lectures) into a Bible study called Graceful Living. This devotional Graceful Living Today teaches the same content but in small daily portions.

It is critically important for those who know Christ to have sound theology (rational, systematic understanding of God). Theology is inescapable. Any thoughts you have about God or information you receive about God is theology.

We live according to our theology. Our theology can be based on truth or error. Truth and error lead to dramatically different results. Jesus promised to anyone who believes in Him that if you hold to His teaching, you will know the truth, which will set you free (John 8:31-32). If truth sets you free, then the opposite is also true: it is error that binds you.

Jesus Christ invites you to follow Him in discipleship—not to imprison you, but to give you abundant life and rest for your soul. What Jesus offers to His followers is life full of His grace. What is God’s grace? Grace is commonly defined as unmerited favor...an undeserved gift. It is God’s gift to an undeserving mankind. God gives His grace because of His great love and mercy. Understanding God’s grace given to you is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you.

The heart of Graceful Living Today is the message of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ and the reality of Christ alive and living in you. This devotional will help you build a foundation for successful, enjoyable Christian living based on God’s grace to you and for you. As you apply these truths in your life, you will experience graceful living—a life overflowing with His grace. This is the kind of life God has planned for you—a life of freedom and joy!

May our grace-giving God fill your heart and mind with His grace so that you will enjoy the life that He has planned for you.
How to Use This Devotional Journal

Have you ever wondered why books such as this one are called “devotionals?” The word devotional comes from “devotion.” The word devotion means profound dedication, commitment, and earnest attachment to a cause or person. For a devotional such as Graceful Living Today, its purpose is to increase your devotion, commitment, and attachment to God. Devotion to God means you are dedicated to Him. You are firmly attached to Him. Whatever He wants, you want. It is a loyal love for God.

A devotional is not a daily “to do” that you can check off your list because Christians are supposed to do them. A devotional is not supposed to make you feel better about yourself or learn a way to fix a problem in your life. A devotional is an intentional act on your part to express and build upon your devotion to God, your love for Him, and your loyalty to Him. Out of this devotion to God should come a desire to live the life He has planned for you. That will always be a life that is pleasing to Him. We hope that Graceful Living Today will not only grow your devotion to God but also result in a life that reflects your love for Him in every way.

What to Expect

This book is divided into 150 days covering 11 main aspects of God’s amazing grace toward you as you live your Christian life. These are what God in His great love has done for you. They are part of God’s plan for you to experience His love, His freedom, and His joy every day as you live in His grace.

Each daily topic builds upon the one before it. Unlike typical devotionals which are mostly commentary, this devotional journal invites you to participate in reading the truth of God’s Word and responding to it. That is why it is not only a daily devotional but is also a guided journal for you to grow in your faith.

Give yourself 10-15 minutes to work through each daily devotional, which includes 4 sections:

1. Read the Truth
   You read specifically chosen Bible verses related to the focus of the day. You can read the verses in any translation you choose. We’ve included the verses (NIV) in this journal so you can readily see them without having to go between two sources such as an app or website and this journal.

2. Confirm the Truth
   After you’ve read the Scriptures, you can answer simple questions based on what the biblical text actually says. It is very important to see what the Bible actually says and not just go by what you may have heard about it. This “Observation” step is the most important step in the process of Bible Study. Reading the verse and answering the question based upon that verse will confirm that truth in your mind.

3. Understand the Truth
   The wording in this section continues to confirm what you just read for yourself and expands the teaching to help you understand what it means. That’s the “Interpretation” step in the process of Bible Study. Further explanation, if needed, is given in this section so that you can truly understand the truth of what the Bible says. The focus is always what the Scripture says more than anyone’s commentary on it.

4. Reflect and Respond
   This is the journal part. There is space for you to add your own personal reflection on the day’s teaching. You get to reflect on what you just learned about your life as a believer in Christ and respond to God through whatever means you choose—writing, speaking to God (prayer), or any creative means. You also get to decide how you should apply what you learned in your own life. This is the “Application” step in the process of Bible Study. On some days, I offer up some prompting questions for you to consider. God reveals truth in His Word. You are to respond to Him and what He has revealed to you. This increases your devotion to Him.

May your love for God grow by leaps and bounds as you learn how to live in His amazing grace today, tomorrow, and every day of the rest of your earthly life.
part 1

God’s Invitation to A Life of Freedom and Joy

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)
DAY 1

God’s Invitation to the Life He Has Planned for You

Read the Truth

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they [His followers] may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Confirm the Truth

What does Jesus promise to you in John 10:10?

What does Jesus promise to you in Matthew 11:28-30?

Understand the Truth

Jesus Christ presented Himself as the answer to every need of the human heart. The New Testament writers confirmed that truth in their teaching. Multitudes of people throughout the centuries since have witnessed that Jesus does indeed do what He promised for those who trust and follow Him. He will do this for you.

Jesus offers us “full” life (John 10:10). Full is not empty. Full means to have purpose and meaning. Full does not mean easy, though. Fullness means that even when we are weary and burdened (Matthew 11:28-30), we can go to Him with open hands and receive the rest and guidance that He readily gives. Jesus’s invitation says, “Come to me. Connect to me. Learn from me. Rest with me.” That sounds pretty wonderful.

Jesus Christ invites you to a life of fullness, freedom and joy. This is the kind of life God has planned for you. Are you interested?

Reflect and Respond
DAY 2

God’s Invitation to the Life He Has Planned for You

Read the Truth

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

Confirm the Truth

What does Jesus promise to you in John 8:31-32?

Understand the Truth

It is critically important for anyone who knows Christ to have sound theology (rational, systematic understanding of God). Theology is inescapable. Any thoughts you have about God or information you receive about God is theology. We live according to our theology.

Our theology can be based on truth or error. Truth and error lead to dramatically different results. If truth sets you free, then the opposite is also true. It is error that binds you. When you know the truth that is revealed to you in the Bible, you will experience freedom. With freedom comes a life of joy. this is the kind of life God has planned for you. Do you want a life of joy? Stand firmly on God’s truth revealed to you in His Word, the Bible.

Reflect and Respond
DAY 3

God’s Invitation to the Life He Has Planned for You

Read the Truth

From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)

Confirm the Truth

What have you received from God?

Understand the Truth

Jesus Christ invites you to follow Him in discipleship—not to imprison you but to give you abundant life and rest for your soul. What Jesus offers to his followers is life full of grace. What is grace? In particular, what is God’s grace?

Grace is commonly defined as unmerited favor…an undeserved gift. It is God’s gift to an undeserving mankind. Understanding God’s grace given to you is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you.

May our “Grace-giving” God completely fill your heart with His grace so that you become a “Grace-giver” in your life. “Graceful living” is life overflowing with His grace—a life of freedom and joy!

Reflect and Respond
part 2

Christ, the Grace-Gift

From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)
The New Testament opens with the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance. It was also used when a non-Jew (usually called Gentile) converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Jesus is God’s Son, fully God and fully man. Jesus publicly showed the world what God is like and taught God’s perfect ways for 3–3½ years. After preparing 12 disciples to continue His earthly work, He died voluntarily on a cross for human sin, rose from the dead, and returned to Heaven. The account of His earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels, the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account.

Each Gospel presents Jesus as “the Christ.” This title is from the Greek word christos, a translation of the Hebrew term “Messiah” meaning “anointed one.” The Old Testament prophets promised that the Messiah, as the anointed one of God, would come and do many wonderful things for God’s people, including restoring God’s Kingdom on earth. Christians are followers of Jesus, who is the Christ.

Read the Truth

That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:19b-23)

Confirm the Truth

Where is Christ now?

What authority does He have?

What is His relationship to the Church?

Understand the Truth

If you have heard the good news of the gospel and believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who gave Himself for your sins, you have eternal life just by believing in Him as the Savior. But more than salvation, Jesus Christ calls you into a relationship with Himself. Christianity is Christ! It is not a lifestyle, rules of conduct, or a society whose members were initiated by the sprinkling or covering of water. Christ calls us into a close relationship with Him as brothers, sisters, and friends. Yet, He is also our Lord, the one who sits at the right hand of His Father God as head over everything else in heaven and on earth. As Lord, Jesus Christ is our master—the one to whom we should willingly give our obedience. He is our model of how to live as humans in a dependent relationship with God, and He is our mentor in walking with us in that dependent relationship.

Jesus’ disciples 2000 years ago were no different than we are except they physically beheld the risen Christ. We must see Him through eyes of faith and allow the Gospels to leap off the page revealing our Lord so that we may know this God-man who changed our lives as we received the Good News. We need to frequently read the Gospels, watch movies based on them, and tell the stories about Jesus as often as needed to know His life well because … Christianity is Christ! Christ is the ultimate grace-gift to us.

Reflect and Respond
DAY 5

Who Is Jesus?

Read the Truth

"Hear, 0 Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one! Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.” (Isaiah 43:10-11)

Confirm the Truth

What does God declare about Himself in Deuteronomy 6:4-5?

What does God declare about Himself in Isaiah 43:10-11?

Understand the Truth

According to the Bible, God chose to reveal Himself to the nation of Israel and, through Israel, to the world. Many truths about God (His "attributes") are taught in the Bible. From both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we discover these truths about God. He is...

Creator Unchangeable Gracious Good Just Love
Faithful Omniscient All-knowing Patient Righteous Holy
Forgiving Compassionate All-powerful Merciful Sovereign Wise

But, the one thing that is clearly and relentlessly asserted about God in the Old Testament is that there is only one true and living God. God desires man to worship Him alone.

Jesus of Nazareth appeared and issued His challenge to the people living in a very religious culture. When He came on the scene, Jesus called people to a spiritual relationship with Himself and God the Father (John 17:3; Matthew 11:28-30). He claimed to be the answer to the needs of the human heart. Of all the world’s religions, Jesus is the only “founder” who claimed to be equal with God. For the next few days, we will see what the Scripture says about who Jesus Christ is.

Reflect and Respond
DAY 6

What Jesus Claimed about Himself

Read the Truth

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute Him. In His defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working.” For this reason, they tried all the more to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. (John 5:16-18)

Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does. Yes, and He will show Him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him. (John 5:19-23)

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself. And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man. (John 5:24-27)

Confirm the Truth

What does Jesus claim about Himself in John 5:16-18?

What does Jesus claim about Himself in John 5:19-23?

What does Jesus claim about Himself in John 5:24-27?

Understand the Truth

John chapter 5 is a long dialogue between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. In it, Jesus states many truths about Himself that are clues to His being not only the promised Messiah, but also God in the flesh (human body). Did you notice that Jesus called God His Father, claiming He was equal with God as God’s Son? He also claims to give life to whomever He is pleased to give it. Only God gives life. All judgment has been entrusted to Him. Only God is the judge of human destiny. And, Jesus says that He deserves the honor that belongs to God, including worship, which He accepted without restraint.

Reflect and Respond
What Jesus Claimed about Himself

Read the Truth

“I have testimony weightier than that of John [the Baptist]. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has Himself testified concerning me. You have never heard His voice nor seen His form, nor does His word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one He sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” (John 5:36-40)

“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” (John 5:45-46)

Confirm the Truth

What does Jesus claim about Himself in John 5:36-40?

What does Jesus claim about Himself in John 5:45-46?

Understand the Truth

In this part of John chapter 5, Jesus continues His dialogue with the Jewish leaders and everyone else who was listening to this “sermon.” He has called God His Father, equates Himself with someone who can give life, declares His right to judge, and accepts worship and honor. Now, He appeals to the audience to view the work He’s been doing as evidence that He has been sent by the Father. The Scriptures testify about Him, and Moses Himself wrote about Him. Like a lawyer trying a case, Jesus presents undeniable evidence that He is Messiah and the Son of God.

Reflect and Respond
DAY 8

What Jesus Claimed about Himself

Read the Truth

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and He preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and He said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So He said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” (Mark 2:1-12)

Confirm the Truth

What right or authority does Jesus claim in Mark 2:1-12?

Understand the Truth

In Mark 2, Jesus forgave the paralyzed man’s sins. By doing so, He made claim to the divine right and authority to forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins. The teachers of the Law knew that only God could forgive sins. They recognized Jesus’ claim to the authority of God. He declared to them and to us, “I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Jesus was not just a good teacher. He claimed and demonstrated that He was God in human flesh.

Reflect and Respond
DAY 9
What Jesus Claimed about Himself

Read the Truth

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, He was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at His feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and He gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. (Luke 8:26-33)

Confirm the Truth

What right or authority does Jesus demonstrate in Luke 8:26-33?

Understand the Truth

In Luke 8, Jesus demonstrates authority over demons and can determine their destiny. He commanded the impure spirits to come out of the man. He has the ability to choose where they will go. Jesus could send them to the Abyss, a place where God has imprisoned many demons. Only God can send demons to the Abyss. But, after they asked Him not to do that, Jesus chose to send them into the pigs. Notice that they were not given permission by Jesus to go back into the man.

Reflect and Respond
DAY 10

What Jesus Claimed about Himself

Read the Truth

Now on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When He saw them, He said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then He said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:12-14)

Confirm the Truth

What right or authority does Jesus demonstrate in Luke 17:11-19?

What right or authority does Jesus demonstrate in John 14:12-14?

Understand the Truth

In Luke 17, Jesus not only displayed authority over leprosy, an incurable disease, but He also accepted worship from one of those who was healed. The healed man, who was not Jewish, threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him. Jesus did not tell him to stop but accepted the worship. He then asked why the rest of the healed didn’t recognize the work of God on their behalf and likewise offer their thanks. In John 14, Jesus claimed the authority to answer prayer. Only God can promise to answer anyone’s prayer. And, prayer can be asked in Jesus’ name, stating He has that authority as well. Yet, His purpose in doing this is so that His Father can be glorified (praised) and made known for the work that He does. Prayer is very personal. Jesus is a personal Savior offering to meet personal needs of those who love Him. What a joy!

Reflect and Respond