



G is for Grace

by James Henderson

In her beautifully worded bestseller, *H is for Hawk*¹, Helen Macdonald writes, “Looking for goshawks is like looking for grace: it comes, but not often, and you don’t get to say when or how”.

Being a bit of a birder, I know what she means. The goshawk is a splendid bird to see. I remember, when we lived in South Africa, coming across African Goshawks unexpectedly as they sat imperiously on wooden telephone poles and there “rehearse perfect kills and eat” (as Ted Hughes imagined²), or being startled and mesmerised by their sudden, effortless soaring above the dense valley forests of the Drakensburg mountains. We have these magnificent birds of prey also in the British Isles. You may have been lucky enough to catch a glimpse of one. They look like sparrowhawks but they are much larger and more dramatic in their hunting moves and in their acrobatic flights of fancy. In this part of the world it’s commonplace to see a sparrowhawk but it’s rare to see a goshawk.

Isn’t Helen Macdonald’s comparison about grace spot on? Just like the sighting of a goshawk, so with the sighting of grace, it’s “not often, and you don’t get to say when and how”.

Gracious behaviour among humans is typically hard to find. God’s grace, however, is different. We witness or experience God’s grace as a constant in our lives. You know what I mean by grace — unmerited favour. In biblical terms grace is the idea that God favours us, not because of anything we have said or done or felt or thought or believed, but because he loves us unconditionally irrespective of our sinful state. Various well-known scriptures come to mind. For example, while we were still in sin, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Who would have expected the appearance of this surpassing grace?

The consequence of our sin was not grace — it was condemnation leading to death. The consequence of God’s grace is the forgiveness of those sins and our

life-enhancing reconciliation with God in Christ Jesus. This divine grace began before the beginning of time and continues now and into eternity. We didn't get to say how and when this favour was shown to us by our decision to change: it was granted to us without our repentance and without any strings attached. Whether we like it or not, whether we believe it or not, the redemptive act of grace occurred — Jesus died once and for all the sins of the whole world.

As I look back on 2015, I can see expressions of God's grace time after time. Unexpected little and not so little good things occurred, and I interpret these as God

handing out grace upon grace. I did nothing to deserve them, and usually I didn't see them coming.

But I wonder, how often did others discover God's grace through me? And through you? Is it the "not often" answer? In fact, so "not often" is it that people are taken by surprise. They don't know how and when our next gracious act might come! When the biblical writer Paul described grace he said it was something that reaches others. He put it this way, "the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 4:15 NIVUK). In my Christian life, do I allow God's grace to be so powerfully at work in me that others thank God with all their heart?

It's never too late to express more of God's abundant grace wherever we go. It may stop those close to us in their tracks. To them our acts of grace may seem like tales of the unexpected. But that's ok, and perhaps as we grow in grace it will always seem like God's newness of life is within us.

In 2016 let's surprise others (and ourselves!) by being gracious when people least expect it. Do something gracious every day. Not just one thing, of course, but at least it's a start. Turn the sighting of God's grace in you from "not often" to "most of the time", if not "always".

Make 2016 a year of grace.

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1 Published in 2014 by Jonathan Cape, UK. ISBN 0-224-09700-8

2 Quotation from the poem, *Hawk Roosting*, by Ted Hughes (1930-1998).



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Love Story

by Stephen de Jager

Isometimes think it is the privilege of a father to Embarrass the family.

So why should I be an exception to the rule? My face leaks involuntarily when I watch certain films, particularly a Dreamworks or Pixar Animation.

“Daaad! It’s a cartoon?!” But I get emotional, especially when there is an expression of love in stories. I knew a Croatian man whose wife was Chinese, which I think made him more “Cro-Asian.” He used to say that if a film didn’t have a LOVE Story it wasn’t worth seeing. I think he’s right. Certainly if there isn’t LOVE in the world, what use is life?

It got me thinking. If your children asked you what the Greatest Love Story is, what would your answer be? What would you pull out of your treasure chest?

For me, I would probably start by telling them how I met their mother. I would tell them that after our brief encounter at a church in England 20 years ago, we spent the next five years writing letters to each other before we finally got together. So think about that, Mister instant messenger. Five years of wooing each other with our creative writings and cassette exchange. Absence did make our hearts grow fonder, but more than that, we got to know each other deeply without physical distractions or clutter. It was an ideal beginning

because it gave me an opportunity to build my business and for Jenni to heal after a tumour operation on her spine. I didn’t think I could love anyone more than Jenni... until... she gave birth to beautiful Noa. What was a guy to do but divide his love in half, so there was an equal portion for both? But again she weaved her magic and - along came delightful little Jai. That really messed things up. Now I had to carve my LOVE into three smaller, but at least equal, parts. The stress of it was unbearable until I realized that’s not how LOVE actually works. LOVE doesn’t divide but duplicates and multiplies, and does so infinitely and beautifully. Isn’t that why we love LOVE? As long as it’s warm, fuzzy, happy and positive?

I love our family and the love that we surround each other with, but was that the greatest LOVE Story I owned?

Love in return for abuse

Growing up, I remember our neighbours - a woman and her alcoholic husband. I remember the shouting, the times he locked her and the kids out of the house when they returned home from church. For many years I wondered why she stayed with him. Nowadays throwing in the towel at the drop of a hat is encouraged if not justified, but she stuck with him. From all appearances she gave him only love in return for his

abuse. My mom, still in touch with this neighbour, tells me that after 30 years, her husband is free from alcoholism and a regular church going man. His relationship with his Creator and also his children, whom he spent years alienating, completely healed. I feel hugely for the man, because I can imagine he must have some weighty regrets. But I marvel especially at that woman's tenacity, commitment and LOVE. For me it reinforces that LOVE indeed is the ultimate act of defiance and paradoxically thrives in the face of some horrific opposition. This memory is certainly one in my treasure chest I will pass onto my children, but is it the greatest Love Story ever told?

I recently read this excerpt from William Havlicek's book, Van Gogh's untold journey. "Sadly, a church committee overseeing Vincent thought he suffered from

words might impact them more than they do now. They will not be disappointed; their journey is not yet done. And then there are the broken-hearted, like the man who once was a heavy drinker who experiences this salvation daily - continuous tense.

Paying it forward

"No greater love has a man than to lay down his life for his friends." There are many ways to lay down one's life. We often refer to Christ when we read this, but keep in mind that he offended many people first, before submitting to death, so that he had very few friends in the world when he died. And that right there is what makes this type of LOVE amazing.

He saw something others didn't. He saw your future.

He saw your potential, what you would become, your destiny. He saw you as a friend, a friend of God no less!

He paid it forward. He invested and sowed into the future. Just like that woman sowed into her alcoholic husband, just like Jenni and I sowed in each other to form our relationship and our subsequent family, just like Dorothy did with Jerry Maguire, in the 1996 film *Jerry Maguire*, when she said to her friend, "I love him for the man he

wants to be, and I love him for the man he almost is."

But what makes this type of paying-forward LOVE nothing less than revolutionary, is that we ourselves can, and do practice this perspective of speaking to the future, potential person. LOVE is the reason we embrace our children at the beginning of their young lives, and confidently say; "You are my son/daughter, in whom I am well pleased," just like it was said about Christ at the START, not the end, of his ministry.

How we live up to that expectation, how grateful we are because of it, is largely up to us, and could very well be, the greatest LOVE Story ever told.

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'excessive zeal' and fired him because he did not dress or preach eloquently." Can you believe that? 'Excessive Zeal?' I am so grateful there are Evangelical Churches like Hillsong, where 'excessive zeal' can be freely expressed. For this too is a demonstration of LOVE and who are we to dictate how that LOVE should be expressed? It also struck me how 'supernatural' excessive zeal is. But is the 'excessive zeal' of millions around the world, the greatest LOVE Story ever told?

My brothers and sisters will tell you the greatest Love Story is a Creator laying down His life so His creation would have the potential to live forever. To some this doesn't make any sense whatsoever, which is fine, this age is not yet done. Some habitually repeat this phrase over and over in the hope that one day their



God's Gifts of Science and Technology

by Joseph Tkach

I've always been delighted by the cool gadgets displayed in *Star Trek* since it began in 1966. Today, some of those gadgets are part of our everyday lives—things like cell phones, voice recognition software, translators, medical sensors, wireless door openers, video conferencing, holograms, 3-D printers, and hydro-spray injectors.

Many of us “trekkers” wish someone would invent a transporter to beam us from one location to another. That would do away with the need for long airplane and automobile rides!

The *Guinness Book of Answers* notes that the vast majority of scientific inventions originated in Europe, the UK and the USA. Many of these have been listed on the Eupedia website. Though some people view technology as “a tool of the devil,” the truth is that many of the advances in technology resulted from the work of scientists holding a Christian worldview—men like Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton and Pasteur. These men dedicated their lives to studying what they considered to be God's handiwork and the fruit of their labors have assisted all humanity, including the work of the church in advancing its mission (think of such technologies as the printing press, rapid travel and mass media).

Despite the widely-held myth that Christianity and science are hopelessly at odds, the facts say otherwise. In his 1925 lectures, English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead pointed out that Christianity is “the mother of science because of the insistence on the rationality of God.” The basis of modern physics was established by such Christians as Newton, Gauss, Faraday, Maxwell, and Lord Kelvin, to name a few. God who created everything that science studies, gave humanity the ability to understand what he created.

Instead of a conflict between Christianity and science, what actually exists is a conflict between opposing worldviews. A prime example is the conflict between a biblical worldview and one known as “Greek philosophical dualism.” This form of dualism, which reaches as far back as Plato and Aristotle, posits two spheres of reality—a *transcendent sphere* that is impersonal, unreachable and unknowable; and a *human sphere* that is finite and temporary (and thus has no future). By New Testament times, this worldview posited the separation of mind from body, and the spiritual (which is good) from the material (which is evil). The human sphere of material things was seen as a “prison house” of the soul with human persons regarded ultimately as unreal. Temporary individual

souls would be released at death to be absorbed back into the impersonal transcendent sphere.

Within this dualistic worldview there is no place for a personal God, and if there were a God who “lives” in the transcendent realm, he certainly would have nothing directly to do with the human/material realm, much less becoming incarnate in that realm in order to provide salvation for humanity.

In the time of the New Testament and beyond, biblical Christianity directly challenged Greek philosophical dualism by pointing to the God revealed in Jesus Christ who is Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of the entire cosmos. Nevertheless, dualism flourishes in our day, positing a gap between God and creation that is assumed to be unbridgeable even by God himself. It asserts that God cannot be known, or that he could not come to us in person to reveal himself in human form, not even in the person of Jesus. Unfortunately, and especially since Darwin, some scientists, embracing the ungrounded philosophical assumptions of this dualism, have declared that only empirical truths of material things can be truly known. That is quite ironic, because in making that declaration they rely on philosophical assumptions that have no empirical proof.

Whether individual scientists believe it or not, the scientific method itself depends on God. Science and technology are based on a real, ordered, and amazingly stable, rational (knowable) cosmos. Science and technology wouldn't even be possible without these predictable realities. Said another way, scientific discovery and the technologies that result are possible only because scientists have faith that there are rational, reliable laws in operation that are constant and discoverable, and that the human mind is capable of actually knowing things that are external to that mind.

Scientists do not make the laws of nature—rather they are able to discover those laws because there is a real, rational, interactive dynamic at work in the universe. The Christian worldview can identify who made those laws of nature, and as Christians, we know there is more than just natural law. Our theology of nature gives us good reasons to study and learn about God's creation by honest experimentation. That theology explains why scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs discover new ways to do new things, resulting in the amazing technologies that intrigue and benefit us. The complex and dynamic laws of nature that scientists discover and depend upon for their methodical exploration are part of God's trinitarian, creative and sustaining plan: from the Father, spoken through the Son (the living Word), in

the power and breath of the Holy Spirit.

I'm reminded here of what the apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Rome: “[God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Romans 1:20 ESV). God is immaterial (spiritual, not physical), invisible, powerful and transcendent over his creation. Nevertheless, his fingerprints, so to speak, are all over that creation. We see this in the complex genetic code in DNA and the way the atomic structure behaves. It is from the created world that all technology is born. As Paul states, there simply is no justifiable reason to outright deny the existence of a creator God. To the contrary, there is every reason to consider the claims of Jesus preserved in Holy Scripture and declared by the Church that God is Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer.

While it certainly is true that science and technology have been used for horrific evil, it is also true that they have been used for great good. The behaviours and motives of the users are the deciding factor.

Some warn against the continued expansion of certain technologies. Atheist-leaning physicist and cosmologist, Stephen Hawking, warned that robots powered by artificial intelligence could overtake humans in the next 100 years, going so far as to say, “The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race.” Steve Wozniak who co-founded Apple, made a similar comment: “Computers are going to take over from humans, no question. If we build these devices to take care of everything for us, eventually they'll think faster than us and they'll get rid of the slow humans to run companies more efficiently.”

Personally, I think we're a long way away from inventing a robot that becomes self-aware enough to cast its human operators aside and take over the world!

I was gratified to see in a current sci-fi series an advanced robot that prays to God. That reminds me of the declaration in Psalm 148 that even inanimate objects like mountains and hills raise their voices in praise to God. Speaking of praising God, I recommend *The Joyful Christian*, a compilation of quotations from C.S. Lewis showing his deep appreciation for praising God for all things. I join him in that praise by thanking God for his gifts of science and technology—gifts that point to the wonderfully creative and inventive spirit that God has given humankind.

May we always use these gifts for God's glory.

Created for a Purpose!

by Cliff Neill

The Cutty Sark is a clipper ship—she was designed and built in 1869 in Dumbarton, Scotland (pictured below).

Her name comes from a poem by Rabbin Burns called *Tam o' Shanter* that tells of a Scottish farmer, who is chased by a witch called Nannie Dee. Nannie wore only her “Cutty Sark” or short shift, a kind of mini-skirt, if you wish. The ship’s figurehead is a representation of the witch, her arm outstretched to catch the tail of the Tam’s grey mare on which he was escaping. Portuguese seamen referred to her as “Pequena Camisola” or little shirt.

The Cutty Sark was designed and built for the tea trade; actually she was the last clipper to be built for that purpose. The tea trade was an intensely competitive race across the globe from China to London, with immense profits for the ship which arrived back with the first tea of the year.

Thus this famous little ship was designed for a specific purpose – purpose built for a special function, to win the race from China and gain a huge reward.

What about us? Were we made for a purpose?

As human beings we are all unique; our DNA, our fingerprints, our eye and voice prints are totally different. In fact, our hearts actually beat with a different rhythm from everyone else’s, out of all the billions of people that ever lived—no one has had a heartbeat like yours!

I believe that we have all been created for a special purpose and that purpose is to love and serve each other, to use our time wisely and productively in the service of others as we pass along the

way during our time here on earth. One ancient Danish proverb says; “*What you are is God’s gift to you. What you do with yourself is your gift to God!*”

Interestingly, author Jack London (1876-1916), well known for his adventure novels such as *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild*, wrote these words before his death:

I would rather be ashes than dust! I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not just to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time.

Now that’s a terrific motto for life, a life shared with others, a lifestyle that reflects the very purpose for which we were created because we all need each other on this beautiful blue jewel we call home.



Speaking of Life:



Feel the Beethoven

In February 1924, New Yorkers gathered around their radios to hear a live performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. But there was one listener who didn't hear a thing. And it wasn't because her radio wasn't tuned in. Instead, it was because she was born deaf. Her name was Hellen Keller. And even though she couldn't hear the broadcast, she managed to experience it in her own way. She turned the radio up and reached out to the speaker; literally feeling the cellos, brass and drums with her fingers.

The difference between Keller and the rest of the radio audience reminded me of the many unique ways that we can experience God's grace and mercy. Like the radio program, God's grace is always being "broadcast" to us through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. This grace is an outpouring of God's love for us – his sons and daughters. But so often, we can fall back into thinking that our access to this expression of divine love is limited. We sit back, away from the radio, just listening with our ears.

But I think we're called to be like Hellen Keller; we're called to draw near, turn the volume up and reach out to receive and interact with that grace with all that we are. We're meant to experience it first hand in every

dimension of our lives. We know that in Christ, God drew near to us. Recognizing our need, our sinful and broken humanity – he came to forgive, save and reconcile us. He did not come to bring condemnation. Rather, he joined himself to us, and in our place and on our behalf overcame temptation, triumphed over evil and death and brings us into the very presence of God our Father.

And it's because of that great sacrifice that we never have to fear that we've disqualified ourselves or put ourselves at such a distance that we can't receive God's free gift of grace and mercy. Instead, we can live in touch with his life-transforming grace so that our whole lives resonate with his heavenly music.

I'm Joseph Tkach,
Speaking of LIFE.



Speaking of Life is now on TV! It is used by UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) in between longer programmes and is aired on UCB on Thursdays and Fridays between 7.15 - 7.30 am and between 1.45 and 2.00pm, on Saturdays between 6.45 and 7.00 am., and on Sundays between 1.45 and 2.00 pm. These timings may vary.

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