

GIFTS OF GRACE

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Gifts of Grace
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Outskirts Press, Inc.
<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-9772-3938-9
Hardback ISBN: 978-1-9772-3514-5

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Bible source: NIV Life Application Study Bible Copyright 2011 by Zondervan

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

As I am riding down the east coast highway, life seems perfect; well almost. As I look out the passenger window, I can close my eyes and remember our wedding ceremony as if it were just yesterday. Has 7 years really passed us by? My mom is a stickler for details and etiquette, which can drive me utterly insane at times; but with every single detail of my wedding, her attention to details were perfect. The cake was beautiful in its simplicity with 4 tiers of white layers bordered in black ribbon and topped with a single red rose. Our wedding was performed in a simple, rustic chapel deep in the North Carolina mountains complete with surrounding cabins for our out of town visitors that came for our wedding. A small stream with a quiet trickle of water ran through the expanse of the cabins and provided the perfect peaceful background needed for those of us dealing with a case of the nerves. I chose October for the month of my wedding because all of the rich, lavish and vibrant green leaves of the trees from the Summer have now changed to a wonderful arrangement of yellow, gold, red and orange leaves that completely transform the entire landscape. It is in the month of October, that nature starts to settle in for a long winter nap; but oh how beautiful as nature gets ready for this transition. She (Nature) almost quietly changes her mood, from the thick, blanket of stifling heat (found in the South) to the quiet, peaceful and cool evenings, that I love so much about the Fall of the year. I can still remember standing with nervous trepidation and anticipation with my father at the end of

the aisle. I grasp my father's hand tightly and we share a moment only between the two of us; my dad doesn't give me the father-daughter speech, he only whispers "I love you" and with tears in both of our eyes, we start the walk into my new life. I purposefully avoid Adam's eyes because I know that our time will come; this walk is with and for me and my dad. And when I unclasp my dad's hand, it is then that I hold Adams hand and I look into his eyes and I know; this is completely right.

We had always wanted children and not surprisingly I found myself pregnant within our first year of marriage. By this time, we had purchased a house together and I began working on the nursery, little by little preparing myself for our baby's birth. As soon as it was possible, we found out the sex of the baby and we found out it would be a little boy. Of course, my dad thought that it should be a surprise because in his mind and as he so eloquently states, "There are not many surprises in this life." The nursery was painted in vanilla crème with a border of deeply rich blue elephants and hardwood floors complete with thick Victorian rich rugs. As we had a couple of false alarms, I woke up that January night with awful cramping and decided I would wait it out a bit; just to see if this were again a false alarm. I tossed and turned for an hour or so and rolled out of the bed to try and maneuver my way to the kitchen for a cold glass of water. Why am I so thirsty? It was then that I noticed the spotting on my gown and felt the water running down the insides of my legs. Had my water broken? Surely that must be it but why am I spotting? We telephoned our doctor to let him know that my water had broken and I was spotting and he told Adam that he would meet us at the hospital.

My labor was intense and unrelenting but all of this was forgotten as Abel Nathaniel Morese made his debut at just around 4:00 a.m. the next morning. I thought I knew what love was; but I had no idea until I held this blessing called Abel. I really don't think that Adam's feet touched the floor, he was a happy daddy. I said a silent prayer of thanks to God above for this blessing and felt totally complete. This blessing; this joy grew into a delightful, mischievous little boy who could drive you to the edge of insanity only to pull you back and warm your heart with an affectionate hug or a kiss! Very bright and inquisitive, he loved for me or his dad to read to him every day and this most often occurred at his bedtime. His favorite story in the Bible was of Noah's Ark and we had a huge storybook complete with pictures that we read to him quite often. My mom and dad introduced me at an early age to Jesus, and I was determined to follow that tradition with Abel. He loved the idea that God saved Noah, his family and the animals but grew quite sad and pensive whenever he thought of those that opted not to believe Noah or God and had perished in the flood.

Abel loved all of his grandparents, but had an especially strong bond with my mother and insisted that "Grammie come and stay with us" at least once or twice a month. My mom made the stories that Abel loved from the Bible storybook come alive and make complete and perfect sense to our 5 year old. He fought the battle with David against Goliath, the giant and listened with pure rapture as she told of Moses leading the Israelites to safety through the parting of the Red Sea only to have the Red Sea "crush" the bad guys.

Summertime for me always meant the summers off

but for this particular summer, I opted as a teacher to teach a collegiate honors class for 4 weeks during the summer. Summers off with Abel always meant playing outside in his playhouse which he had aptly renamed his “tool shed” as his father also had one, complete with a make-believe tool bench and all the “necessary” tools needed; children’s hammer, nails, screwdrivers and such. We had decided to purchase a pool when Abel was around 4 years and took every precaution with safety; even enrolling Abel in a swimmers classes at the local YMCA. Abel loved the pool and spent many happy hours in the pool; but it was always with an adult at the pool side, no exceptions to this rule. Abel was a gifted swimmer; and as I think back to those days, I can see just how very much he was the image of Adam. He had a stubborn curly mass of blonde locks, large liquid brown eyes and a very nice array of freckles that speckled his tanned chubby cheeks.

As I sit here, lost in my own thoughts, I study Adam as he drives. Gone are the easy readily visible laugh lines that surrounded his soft eyes; now they have been replaced by stern, deep lines that are surprisingly deeply etched into his handsome face. A feeble attempt at conversation between the two of us is only met with polite and vague responses. I continue; lost in my thoughts. Why did I take that job for the summer? I should have been home with my Abel; enjoying him, loving him. How could we have known that would be the last summer we had with our Abel.....And the last summer of us?

I can never truly recall all the details of that day after Abel’s accident. I can tell you what I was wearing that morning to class, I could tell you how the weather

was that morning; I could tell you details of my life on THAT day BEFORE the accident but not after...But I can still hear my mother's scream, the urgency and dread of that scream, "Noooooo! Oh God, no! Not my Abel!" I had just walked in the front door and had finished my class for the day and I dropped my book satchel on my arm, books in my hand, and an iced tea in the other and ran to the side door, only to find my mother waist deep in our swimming pool, turning Abel over on his back and pulling him over to the patio side of the pool. I couldn't speak and I felt frozen in time; frozen with fear. Until I heard my mother scream "Anna call 911 and get them on the phone NOW!" When someone you love dies, I firmly believe that it is truly so painful that your mind will completely block out certain aspects in order to protect its integrity. EMS arrived only to begin working on Abel immediately. And for 40 minutes of that time, I ceased to breathe, think or exist. My gift from God, one of my greatest joys in the world was now gone.

I vaguely remember Abel's visitation as my brain was still trying to understand that he was gone while trying to steady itself before it plummeted into the abyss of insanity. Insanity where my grief wraps around me such as a python only then to squeeze the very life from me. My doctor had ordered a prescription of Valium to help with coping, but it only left me numb and lifeless. Many of our friends and family came to the visitation and while their attempts at sympathy and understanding was so appreciated; it felt awkward and uncomfortable. How do you comfort a grieving mother? I truly think there are no words known in the English language that can assuage the feeling of loss; absolutely

none.

Adam did not attend his son's visitation and did not view his child's body. He absolutely refused and holed himself up in his den looking at photographs and watching videos and trying to numb himself with the very best bourbon in our cabinets. I stayed with Abel at the funeral home because in my peculiar reasoning, I assumed that he would be scared by himself at night! Scared!? My child was obviously not in this body any longer and I was worried that he might be scared!? How completely irrational is that? And so I stayed and slept on the couch where his body lay in respite for those 2 long nights sobbing with an occasional glimpse into the room by one of the attendants to check on me. "Why God? Why Abel? Why didn't you take one of those unworthy, hateful, sadistic pedophiles or those murderers; the murderers that take a precious life and in the process, ruin an entire family's life...? Why God?"

As we are now driving home from our vacation, I know in my heart that this was our last effort, our last attempt at patching the big hole that continues to grow, rip and separate us since Abel's death. Abel's death has changed both of us, leaving in its wake two very cynical, unhappy people that no longer believe in a loving God; a God that Abel loved so very much. My mother and Adam's mother have been wonderful, but I'm thinking that maybe they see the writing on the wall, just as we do. My mom, although heartbroken, takes comfort in knowing that Abel is in Heaven with my daddy and that she does have the promise of seeing them both again one day. I do feel guilty because it is my mom that I take my rage out on; my rage with God. I sometimes cringe inward at some of the comments that I've made

to her..."Mom, I've lost a child! A child that did nothing wrong, but be a child and God took him from me. What did I do to God to make him take my child away?? An innocent child!!"

As we pull into our driveway, I still feel the tinge of homesickness for our lives before the accident, before God decided he wanted to take my Abel from me. As we unpack from our trip, check our messages on our home phone, and get our house in order for our week to begin tomorrow, I admit I feel a twinge of nostalgia for what we had; what we've lost and what could have been.

Adam is working on emails in his office and I'm ready for bed. I sit on the edge of the bed exhausted; physically, emotionally and spiritually; totally exhausted. As I lie back on my pillow, the tears come and as hard as I try, they will not stop their flow. My mom frequents the local Christian bookstore and had picked up a couple of books for me before our vacation. Needless to say they were packed but were left in the suitcase the entire trip. One of the books is a devotional that is enclosed in a beautiful leather binding with the inscription; "Jesus". I am still mad at God/Jesus and want absolutely no part of knowing Him and understanding the scripture or man's interpretation of why bad things happen in life. I can feel the books at the edge of the bed; reminding me of just how mad I am with God. I have no interest in reading His Word or trying to procure any understanding of His Word and I sit up in the bed and pick up the books and fling them across the room where they land with a loud thud on the floor beneath the window. I then manage albeit fitfully to fall asleep; but it is a sleep filled with terrors; with my last images of Abel. But then I wake up; wide

awake and it's 2:30 a.m. Wait!? What is that light in the room? I attempt to cover my eyes at first from the pain of the glare, but then I slowly lower my hands to look at the light again. Am I dreaming? There is a figure at the end of my bed and the figure glows with a white almost tangible light! I stare in silence for several seconds only to have the silence broken with a soft, gentle voice calling my name..."Anna, it is I and I am here for you." "Excuse me, you are here for me? Who are you?" "I am the One that your Abel loves and I am the One that your Abel is with now. Your Abel asks that I take you to him." Is this real? Have I completely become unhinged? The scales of reason have finally toppled over the edge to the brink of insanity! Well, dreaming or not, I still would love to see Abel! I stood up at the side of the bed and this Being, full of light offers His hand to me and we are then outside of my bedroom and moving very fast upward through a dark tunnel filled with sporadically shooting light beams. "I'm afraid! Where are we going?" "Do not be afraid Anna. I am He and although you do not know this place, this place is where your Abel lives with Me." My mind was racing! What's going on? Admittedly while I was mad at God, I knew in an instant that because Abel was with this Being, He must be Jesus! "Are you Jesus?" "I AM."

In the next instant, we were standing in a field of beautifully green plush grass, sporadically covered with the richest most luxurious colors I have ever seen within flowers; bright and bold burgundy's, golden yellows, periwinkle blues, blue topaz, blood reds and rich deep purples. If this was "Heaven" and where Abel lived, I knew that he loved this place. Abel loved the outdoors; in fact anything that had to do with the outdoors was

his idea of a perfect and wonderful day. Nothing inside or he quickly became bored! As I looked at Jesus within the realms of Heaven, I could sense a feeling of love; of warmth and true kindness that permeated His entire being. Everything felt familiar to me in this place. I had always explicitly trusted my mother in all matters, in everything, so why should I not have trusted her when she told me that Abel was in Heaven with Jesus.

“Anna I love you and I have always been with you. I know that you have many questions for Me, but lets go and see Abel first. I then turned around and Abel was standing within 2 feet of me and we were alone. Abel looked as he always had, head full of curly hair, big brown eyes, but best of all; Abel was glowing with happiness. With a smile on his face, he exclaimed “Oh mom, I’m so glad that you could come. Have you met Jesus? He takes good care of me, please don’t worry about me.” I could feel the dam break and my eyes fill with tears and the sobbing began; sobbing because I missed my boy but also so grateful that he was well and okay and most of all; happy! I fell to my knees and Abel ran into my arms and stayed there for awhile, while I enjoyed the relief of shedding the anger, resentment and the bitterness that I had felt since he left us. And in its stead; happiness, peace, and serenity came to live and reside within me and I welcomed all of them. This didn’t feel like a dream.....not a dream at all! Abel’s sweet wide eyed grin belied a deep concern as he said “Mommy, how are you and daddy doing? I know that you miss me and I missed you when I first came here but Jesus talks to me an awful lot, mommy. He explains things to me. Hey mommy, did you know that Jesus is my Father too? He spends A LOT of time with all of the

children and he tells all of us that Heaven is our home now. Sometimes I talk with Jesus by myself and He told me that one day, you and daddy will live with me in Heaven too!" And with that he jumped into my arms again but this time sending both of us falling back into the grass laughing. Oh I had forgotten how good it felt to laugh; one of the simple joys of laughter. Sometimes Death himself can take your smile, joy or laugh away with him when he goes but never permanently....Death doesn't have that much power!

As I held my little boy, the pain, the hurt, the bitterness, and the grief of the last several months seemed to ebb away. I felt such tremendous love, serenity, happiness and peace in this Place; Heaven. Abel's sweet wide eyed grin, although he tried, did not hide concern as he said softly "Mommy, I am worried about you and daddy? I've missed you so much mommy but Jesus told me that we would be together again, and I totally trust Him." "Abel, I have missed you so...." And I couldn't finish the sentence and lost my ability to speak coherently. It took several attempts but I was finally able to swallow hard, the huge knot in my throat that competed with my attempt for any semblance of words, much less a full sentence. "Abel, me and your daddy have had such a hard time dealing with losing you and although we both know in our hearts that you are in Heaven, the loss, at times, is almost too great to bear." "Mommy talk to Jesus. He always helps me whenever I have a question or a problem." It was then that I felt the warmth of a gentle breeze and soft hand on my shoulder. I turned to look up into the face of Jesus and as I slowly stood to my feet, felt Him gently wipe a tear from my cheek. In His presence, I felt such warmth and love...almost as if