

*Exploring
Grace Together*

40 DEVOTIONALS FOR THE FAMILY

JESSICA THOMPSON

*Foreword by
Elyse Fitzpatrick*

“Confession time: it is scarier to lead my kids in devotions than to preach at my church. As much as I hate to admit it, I need help. And the truth is, there are few gospel-centered, accessible resources to help dads like me lead his kids devotionally. Jessica is a trusted guide to help moms and dads lead their kids to love Jesus.”

Darrin Patrick, Pastor, The Journey, St. Louis, Missouri; author, *For the City and Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission*

“I am constantly on the lookout for devotionals that are theologically rich, gospel centered, and family friendly. My good friend Jessica Thompson delivers big time. Jessica is concerned to ensure that we (and our children) read the Bible rightly, so we don’t end up treating it like a moralistic handbook. Jessica shows that the Bible is one long story of God’s meeting our rebellion with his rescue, our sin with his salvation, our guilt with his grace, and our badness with his goodness. In other words, it’s fundamentally about Jesus. Thanks to you, Jessica, fewer children will grow up thinking that the focal point of the Christian faith is the life of the Christian.”

Tullian Tchividjian, Pastor, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida; author, *One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World*

“I can’t think of a better subject to walk through with my family or a better person to walk through it with than Jessica Thompson. *Exploring Grace Together* has a treasure trove of grace reflections and questions at the end of each lesson so that the treasure may be found. Read each devotional, and you will love the Savior in greater ways.”

Trillia Newbell, author, *United: Captured by God’s Vision for Diversity*

“*Exploring Grace Together* brings the gospel to bear on real-life issues that kids face such as loneliness, jealousy, and failure. Along the way it also calls us as parents to believe that the gospel—not our rules or expectations or kids’ good behavior or accomplishments—is truly the power of God for salvation in our kids’ lives. That means this book is good news for the whole family.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament Bible study series*

“My wife and I have enjoyed journeying through *Exploring Grace Together* with our kids. These forty short, fun devotionals have been kid-tested and proven by the Montgomery boys and girls and by two grateful parents who have often lamented the shortage of books that teach the gospel of God’s grace rather than the ‘gospel of rules and behavior modification.’”

Daniel Montgomery, Pastor, Sojourn Community Church,
Louisville, Kentucky; co-author, *Faithmapping*

“This book is a special gift to children, parents, and caregivers of children. These brief devotions are packed full of the doctrines and message of the radical, compassionate, and comforting grace of God. They are also deeply practical and applicable to real-life experiences of six- to ten year olds. We wish this book had been available when we were children, but we are very thankful that we will have it for our daughters.”

Justin and Lindsey Holcomb, co-authors, *Rid of My Disgrace* and
Save Me from Violence

“Finally—a collection of family devotions centered on the only hope for joy and change that moms, dads, and children have: the gospel of Jesus Christ. In *Exploring Grace Together* Jessica Thompson shares engaging stories, explains key theological concepts, and asks revealing, heart-level questions, all to help your family get beyond therapeutic moralism and powerless application and right to the heart of the Christian faith: the finished work of God’s only Son.”

Jared C. Wilson, Pastor, Middletown Springs Community Church,
Middletown Springs, Vermont; author, *Gospel Wakefulness* and *The Pastor’s Justification*

“There’s nothing I long more to talk with my children about than the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ. But sometimes I just don’t know where to start! *Exploring Grace Together* is a resource for parents *and* kids—creatively and plainly presenting gospel truths. In these devotions Thompson holds up the multifaceted jewel of the gospel and turns it every which way to show off the brilliance of God’s grace to us in Jesus Christ. I’m so thankful for this book that leads parents to worship Jesus together with their kids.”

Gloria Furman, Pastor’s wife, Redeemer Church of Dubai; mother of four; author, *Glimpses of Grace* and *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*

“Jessica Thompson has written the children’s devotional I’ve been searching for! This is not a book of morality lessons that will leave your kids looking to themselves to do better. Instead, Jessica extends her heart for the freedom of the gospel to your kids as she points them away from themselves and to the lover of their souls. Parents can confidently use this grace-drenched resource with their children, knowing that as they wade through the challenges of the growing-up years they will daily be encouraged in the gospel.”

Kimm Crandall, author, *Christ in the Chaos: How the Gospel Changes Motherhood*; mother of four

“In this one-of-a-kind devotional, Jessica faithfully points parents and children alike to the good news that Jesus is bigger than all our mistakes, and his love covers all our sins. Through wise and wonderful storytelling, Jessica helps us discover the free grace available to us in *every* situation because of Jesus’s finished work on the cross. Find fresh mercy waiting for your family every day in Jessica’s consistent message that we love because he first loved us, and there is absolutely nothing we can do to change God’s love for us in Christ Jesus. Give your family the priceless gift of reading this liberating devotional. Our family will be reading it over and over again.”

Jeannie Cunnion, MSW; author, *Parenting the Wholehearted Child*

“Kids have problems too. We often try to ‘help’ our children by minimizing their problems, telling them that things will get better or that they will have bigger issues to deal with when they are older. The truth is that we need to help our children assess and address their hearts from the early years. Their problem may not be that significant, but their heart attitude in response to their problem is of vital importance. Jessica uses simple, real-life issues that adolescents can readily relate to, helps them to see any sinful responses that may exist in their heart, and unfolds gospel truth and the love of Christ in a nurturing way. This is a wonderful book to read as a family to explore together God’s amazing grace provided through Christ our Savior!”

Kristie Anyabwile, homemaker; mom; wife of Thabiti Anyabwile, First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman

“Start this devotional tomorrow with your children if you want their hearts comforted, challenged, and compelled to trust Jesus’s love to cover all their struggles. Each page leads the whole family to the cross of Jesus—where all of our needs are met.”

Trisha R. Wilkerson, author, *Everyday Worship*; biblical counselor; wife of Pastor Mike Wilkerson, Mars Hill, Seattle, Washington; mother of six

Exploring Grace Together: 40 Devotionals for the Family

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Foreword

In 2011 Crossway published *Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus*. That book was a collaboration between my daughter, Jessica Thompson, and me, and in it we sought to take the truths of the gospel that we have both come to love so dearly and apply them to parenting.

You see, both of us had been growing in our understanding of how the work that Jesus has already done should color and motivate how we think about ourselves and how that new identity *in Christ* should transform the way we live. But we weren't sure how it would transform parenting. The truth is that we were learning as we went—she more than I because she homeschools three kids. For her, it's where the rubber meets the road; it is life in the trenches.

So we began to write *Give Them Grace*. There were days when I would write something and send it to her to read and comment on. I didn't have little children around to be my guinea pigs, and although I knew that my thoughts were correct theologically, I wasn't sure how they would work practically. So I would send her a few pages and ask,

“Does this make sense? How would you do this with your kids?” After a while I’d get an answer, and the beauty of how the gospel invaded life around a swimming pool or in the classroom or on the baseball field became plain for me to see. Jessica was learning something I didn’t know: she was learning about the intersection of justification and fights over Optimus Prime (in case you don’t know, he’s the big boss Transformer), and she was learning it well enough to communicate it to her three kids.

Since that time, Jessica and I have had many opportunities to present the truths found in *Give Them Grace* to parents around the country. So many parents have thanked us for freeing them from the terrible burden of what we call the Parenting Covenant of Works—you know, *good parenting in, good kids out*. That paradigm is crushing Christian parents all over the country, and they’re so happy to hear that they can enjoy their children again and partner with them as they run to Jesus and fight sin and unbelief together. We’re so thankful for the work God is doing through that book.

But one request we’ve heard over and over again is, *How would you do this in family devotions? How would you tell your children about the gospel? How do we talk about the Bible and still remember the work Jesus has done?*

This book is the answer to those requests, and Jessica is the right person to write it. She knows how the gospel transforms sinners because it has transformed her, and she knows how to communicate those deep truths to children

because she's done it for years. I've watched her while I fumble for words and think, *Surely I should have something to say about the gospel here*. I've watched her lean into her children and—in weakness, humility, and faith—break the bread of life with them.

I'd like to say that Jessica learned this art from her dad and me, but that's not the truth. The truth is that she learned about this grace from the Lord of grace, who has gifted her with great love for children and an ability to communicate the gospel in words they can understand. And so it's my hope that thousands of parents around the world will pick up this book and the truth it represents. Like us, children need good news. They need to be freed from the moralistic, therapeutic deism that has colored our parenting for generations. Give your children the gospel—not just once but over and over again—and then trust the Savior to work in their hearts to grant them faith to believe and love to serve.

—Elyse Fitzpatrick

Treasure Hunt

What if I told you we were about to go on a treasure hunt? Would you think, *Wait a minute, I thought we were about to read a book about the Bible?* Well, that is true; you are going to read a book about the Bible. But in this book I am going to take you on an adventure—an adventure that could change the rest of your life, an adventure in which we are going to be looking for the greatest treasure we could ever have. This treasure isn't money, but it is worth more than money. This treasure is Jesus, the only treasure that will ever give you everything you need. We are going to look for Jesus at school, at home, in sports, in music—everywhere. You may think that Jesus and talk about God are only for church, but on our treasure hunt I am going to show you how he can be found in whatever you are doing.

On our treasure hunt I might use words that you don't understand. I also might talk about Jesus in ways that you just don't get. When you come to those places, be sure to ask those with whom you are reading this book to help you. Hopefully they will be able to make it clear for you.

I am going to tell you stories about kids just like you, kids your age, kids that like the same things you do, kids that get angry and sad just like you do. Then we are going to see how our treasure, Jesus, helps them and gives them everything they need.

The most important part of our quest is asking for God's help. I can give you the right map, but only he can make you see where the treasure is. So why not stop right now and ask God to open your eyes to see this treasure that we are talking about?

Okay, are you ready? I hope you are excited, because you are about to see that the most beautiful treasure can be yours if you just believe.

Dear Parents,

I am so excited that you have decided to take part in this treasure hunt with your child. I do have a couple of items I would like to discuss with you. First, this is not a cure-all for your kids' disobedience. Your children are real human beings with real hearts, and they need the work of the Holy Spirit to change them. You won't be able to read these devotions and then expect your children to be different people the next day. That's not how you work, and it is not how your kids respond. How often have you heard a wonderful, convicting sermon and then gone and returned to your sin on Monday? Change is a slow process for children, just like it is for you.

There are questions at the end of each devotional. I know from experience that asking kids spiritually minded questions can end up in anger and frustration. There are times, maybe even the majority of times, when they are unresponsive or not listening or just don't care. During those times, your work is not to convince them of the importance of what you are doing but rather to lean into the Holy Spirit. You won't be able to come up with the right words to make a hard heart soft. That is God's work, so ask him to do it. You don't want to take this devotional and beat your kids over the head with it. If you are depending on it to save your kids, you will end up being angry or full of despair when they don't respond the way you want. So if you are feeling angry or despairing because your children aren't where you want them to be, repent and remember that God is the author of all salvation.

One last thing: don't give up on your kids. You don't know how God may use this book. Your kids may be unresponsive initially, but God may choose to use it later. If they don't seem to want to answer the questions, maybe you could answer them from your own life.

My prayer is that you and your children will see the gloriousness of the gospel of grace, that you will together be equipped to push this gospel into every area of your lives, and that you will see his grace is truly sufficient in your weakness.

Grace and Peace,
Jessica

The Bad One

None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have
become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.

ROMANS 3:11-12

Shane can't understand why he always seems to do the wrong thing. He knows he isn't supposed to lie, but he did anyway. He knows he isn't supposed to cheat, but he just couldn't seem to keep his eyes off Lisa's paper. Sometimes he looks around at his other friends and thinks he is always the one being bad. He especially feels this way at home. His mom and dad love God and always talk about Jesus, and they read their Bibles. His older brother Jim is the good one. He is the one everybody seems to love because he always does the right thing. Shane feels that he is the only bad one. He feels that since he always does the wrong thing, he just isn't going to try to do the right thing anymore.

Exploring Grace Together

What Shane doesn't believe is what our passage, Romans 3:11–12, says. He doesn't believe that everyone is bad and that no one understands or looks for God. Maybe you feel the same way Shane does. Maybe you feel that you always do it wrong. The Bible agrees with you on that one, and that may feel like bad news. But that is not all the news the Bible gives. There is also some really good news. It's about our treasure, Jesus. The really good news is that Jesus loves sinners. Jesus loves people who aren't doing the right thing. Does that surprise you? It surprises me! The good news of the Bible is that Jesus came to love and rescue people who don't love him. I know when people don't like me, I want to stay away from them, but Jesus does the opposite of that. Don't let your badness keep you from joining us on our treasure hunt. Don't think you are the only one who does the wrong thing; we all do the wrong thing. Jesus loves you anyway. He will forgive you. He wants to be nice to you; he wants to be your treasure.

EXPLORATION TIME

- 1) Do you ever feel like Shane? When you do feel like him, what do you do?
- 2) When you do something wrong, do you want to hide from God and your parents?
- 3) What should you remember about Jesus when you think you are too bad to go to him?
- 4) What is the good news or treasure of our story today?

Take some time now to pray that you will understand and believe that Jesus wants to be your friend. Believe that he came to save you from the fact that you can't live right.

The Good One

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

ROMANS 3:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 6:23

Rita is the sweetest girl most people have ever met. At least, that is what she hears all the time. She is almost always polite, almost always nice, and almost always obeys her parents. Most adults notice these things, and they are sure to tell Rita and her parents what a great job they are doing. The only problem is that Rita knows something isn't right. Rita feels angry a lot of the time, especially when other people don't follow the rules or when her parents tell her she is doing something wrong. She feels that if she is trying so hard to be good, other people should try to be good too. She also can't understand why her parents always have to point out the few bad things she does, especially since she is so good most of the time.

Rita's problem is that she doesn't really believe Romans 3:23 and 6:23. There are two very important parts to our treasure map in those verses. Do you see them? First, all have sinned. That "all" includes whoever is reading this, whoever is listening; and it includes me. Rita knows that sometimes she does things that aren't exactly right, but she doesn't really think of herself as a sinner who deserves death.

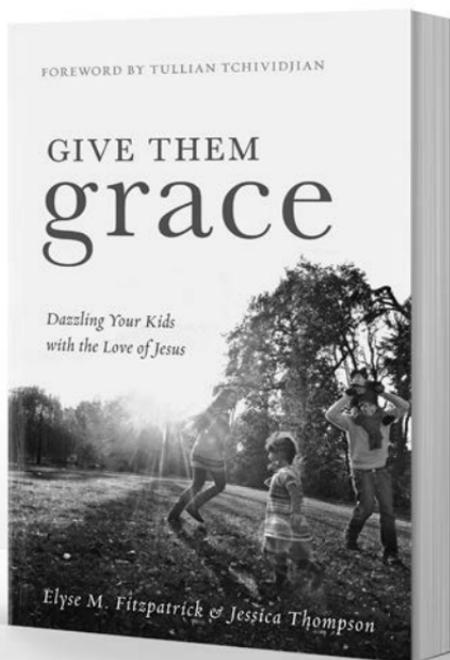
Rita also doesn't believe the second clue to our treasure. There is a free gift waiting for her (and for you) just to snatch. It doesn't cost one single penny; you don't have to do anything to earn it, and you can't do anything to buy it. All you have to do is believe. Rita has been trying to buy this free gift with all the good things she does. She has been thinking that if she is just good enough, then everybody will say nice things about her and God will love her and give her life forever with him. But God doesn't want her or you to try and earn his free gift; he just wants to give it. He loves giving, and he loves being generous.

God has a job, which is to give, and we have a job, which is to receive. Rita has been thinking her treasure is what other people think of her. Jesus wants Rita and you to know that the real treasure is what he thinks of you and how he loves you. He wants to give you himself and life forever with him, but you must believe that is true. You must believe that you sin and that your sin earns death. You also must believe that nothing you can do can earn the free gift. It's free! He loves to give to you. You must believe that he is as good and generous as he says he is.

EXPLORATION TIME

- 1) Do you ever feel like you have to earn God's love?
- 2) Do you believe the two parts of our verses?
- 3) Which part is harder for you to believe?
- 4) If you have a hard time believing all that's in today's verses, you can pray right now and ask God to help you believe.

Parenting Your Children with the Love of Jesus



"It is so encouraging to read a parenting book that points parents to the grace of the cross and shows them how to be instruments of that grace in the lives of their children."

PAUL DAVID TRIPP, President, Paul Tripp Ministries

"This is not just a book on parenting; this is deep training in the gospel."

J. D. GREAR, Lead Pastor, The Summit Church, Durham, North Carolina;
author, *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved*



Children need more than behavior modification. They need the gospel.

But every parent knows how hard it can be to communicate the truth of God's Word and the message of God's grace in a way that engages the hearts, minds, and affections of the little ones we love so much.

Assisting parents with this high calling, Jessica Thompson offers us an alternative to merely telling our kids what they must *do* to please God and be a "good Christian." Designed for the whole family, this collection of gospel-centered devotionals will help you teach your children to treasure and rely on Jesus more than anything else.



"*Exploring Grace Together* brings the gospel to bear on real-life issues that kids face, such as loneliness, jealousy, and failure. Along the way, it also calls parents to believe that the gospel—not our rules or expectations—is truly the power of God for salvation in our kids' lives."

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