

# SEARCHING FOR GRACE

## The Tired Supergirl's Leader's Guide to *All I Need Is Jesus and a Good Pair of Jeans*

When I began writing *All I Need Is Jesus and a Good Pair of Jeans* I couldn't help thinking, *Wow, I really have a lot of issues!* And by issues I mostly meant sins with some struggles on the side.

And then Wendy, my agent, called and said, "The publishing company would like the book to be longer. Can you write a few more chapters?"

And since each chapter was a different area that I struggled with or a different sin that I had come up against in my life, I pondered the question of writing an even longer book. A book that revealed even more of my issues. So I said to Wendy, "Do you mean that they want more chapters? Even more things that I have problems with?"

And Wendy said, "Cut your heart open and bleed a little bit more on the page."

And much to my dismay, it was quite easy to do so. To find even *more* things that I struggled with. A few more chapters to deal with the untended areas of my soul. A few more thousand words to describe all the messiness that my life was composed of. Which was precisely the reason I was on the search for grace in the first place. Because with all this mess and sin and trying on my part, I need more than a paltry measure of forgiveness parsed out to me. I needed a flood of never-ending graciousness on God's behalf toward me.

I need grace for what I have done in the past. I need grace for this day that I am in right now. I need grace for tomorrow and the day after that until my very last day. Because it seems to me that as soon as I get one area sorted out, something else tends to crop up, requiring even more grace than before.

D.L. Moody put it this way:

*A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week. We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day, as we need it.*

When I was little, one of my favorite hymns was "At Calvary." I'm not even sure I understood the words, but I loved them. I especially loved the chorus:

*Mercy there was great and Grace was free  
Pardon there was multiplied to me  
There my burdened soul found liberty  
At Calvary*

I'm not sure how burdened my soul felt at the age of six, but the words still appealed to me. Jesus was offering me grace and mercy and pardon and liberty. And all of that sounded like something I wanted in on. And I still do.

So as we ponder grace over these next few weeks and the inaccessibility of the perfect pair of jeans, it's important to view this not as a means to an end but as a path that we are following. A way of living that we are growing accustomed to. A process of soaking up God's good grace on a daily basis.

I keep wanting to come to the end of things. To be able to brush off my hands and breathe a deep sigh of satisfaction and say, "There. I have done it. I have found all the grace that needs to be found. I have completed the task. Thank God I'm done with finding all that grace I needed . . . now I can move on to personal development or peace or the seven most successful tips of self-grooming," or whatever it is that I am on the lookout for next. Grace is what keeps us connected to God. Its work is never finished. It is visited upon us with each deep intake of breath that we tired supergirls draw. Grace keeps us in the palm, the very center, of God's hand, addressing our daily need for who he is, what he has done for us, and what he offers with each new morning. New mercies. Fresh grace. Multiplied pardon. And sweet liberty. Let's take him up on it.

# WEEK 1

## Why Exactly Is It That I Am So Tired?

### Opening Prayer

### Tired Supergirl Starter Questions

1. Who was your favorite superhero when you were growing up?
2. Who was your real-life hero and why?

### Chapter Focus: I am oh so tired

It truly amazes me how tired I am almost all of the time. I am physically tired after chasing three little boys around all day. I would be lying if I didn't say that they run circles around me. But even more than that I am emotionally tired. There are so many things that I would like to get done each day, so many people that I would like to connect with, so much work that needs to be done. I often feel like I've been run over by a small locomotive. And then there is the tiredness of the soul, because if we are being honest with each other, and we are, there is a battle of sorts going on within us. The battle between the reality of who we are and who we long to be. And Tired Lady is trying to take us out. Sometimes it feels like she is winning the fight.

My friend Marie France claims that she appears right around 8:30 p.m. The children are in bed. A good two or three hours of free time looms before you. Time to clean. Time to think deep thoughts. Time to paint your toenails. Time to snuggle your husband. Tired Lady sneaks in, crazy gluing your rear to the sofa, leaving your dishes unwashed, your man unsnuggled, your Bible reading undone. It is by no small act of God that you are able to drag yourself off to bed, promising that tomorrow will be a different day. You will vanquish Tired Lady to her Hole of Doom. You'll be the woman God designed you to be. Or at least knock out a load of clean laundry so your husband doesn't have to turn his underwear inside out anymore. You've got great plans . . . for tomorrow.

I walk the fine line of living between these two identities. I live in the tension of who I want to be and who I really am. It's exhausting, lonely, and wild-eyed.

### ***Jumping In—Action***

Take out your journals. Draw a picture of your supergirl self, the way that you would like to be. Stick figures do just fine. I always give my supergirl superhuman abilities like the power to leap tall laundry piles in a single bound or extra energy to finish my to-do list. List all the fantastic attributes and special abilities you would like to have. Now, turn the page and draw a picture of how see yourself now. Your strengths and weaknesses, your good points and not-so-good points. This is the tension that we tired supergirls live in each day. Living in the space in between who we are and who we hope to become. Share these with each other.

### ***Searching the Word—The Story***

Peter found this tension equally disconcerting. He truly had visions of grandeur. But there was a rather large gap between who he wanted to be and who he actually was.

Despite the inconsistencies of Peter, Jesus saw the space in between who he was and who he could be. He changed his name from Simon to Peter, "The Rock." He was going to be solid.

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to hang out with him. He just wanted them to pray with him. Peter was ready to live up to his name. To hunker down and pray like crazy for this man who radically changed his life.

That's when Tired Lady, or maybe in this case, Sleepy Man, crept in between the fig trees and fern, filling Peter's head with swirly dreams and the complete inability to process just one tiny prayer. He barely settled into the Shema when the crumbles of wine-dipped bread began settling in his tummy.

Earlier, Peter had sworn he would never desert the Lord (Jesus had told him that before the rooster crowed twice, Peter would deny him three times). Peter would die for Jesus. Or maybe he'd have a nap first and then die for him. It is better to die for someone when you are well rested, after all. Peter's betrayal began long before the crowing of the bird. It began with the whiffling snores and tired lip-smackings of deep sleep that broke the stillness of Gethsemane.

"Simon," Jesus said to Peter. "Are you asleep? Couldn't you stay awake and watch with me even one hour? Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak" (Matt. 26:40–41).

I wonder if Jesus called him "Simon" because he just wasn't cutting it as "the Rock." Jesus woke him up three times. Poor Peter. I have to say that I love-love-love Peter. Like me, he just can't pull it together.

He has visions of being the Rock . . . which I imagine to be a fairly impressive Jewish superhero, comparable to my Supergirl. The Rock was going to rock Israel with his Jesus style, catch a ton of fish, lead a Torah study, bring a few pals to repentance, and squeeze in family time on the weekends, not to mention support Jesus (who simply asked him to stay awake), pray for him, and just be a good buddy the night before he dies a horrible death. And he can't do it. And it gets worse after the nap.

He awakens the third time to hear Jesus say, "Still sleeping? Still resting? Enough! The time has come. I, the son of Man, am betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let's be going. See, my betrayer is here!" (Matt. 26:45–46).

### ***Keeping It Real—Discussion***

In what part of your life do you struggle with Tired Lady? Physically? Emotionally? Spiritually?

Do you feel like life is pulling at you?

Do you identify with Peter and his struggles?

### ***Keep Looking Up—Reflection***

My grandma Opal always used to say, "Keep looking up!" No matter if it was a birthday card or note containing a little pocket money, at the bottom of every handwritten message, it always said, "Keep looking up." I always felt like there was a secret contained in those three words. They made me change my focus. Not heads down. Not looking to myself for answers. Just chin up and looking to Jesus. The psalmist says it best:

*I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there?  
My help comes from the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth!  
He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep.  
Indeed, he who watches over Israel never tires and never sleeps.  
The Lord himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade.  
The sun will not hurt you by day, nor the moon at night.  
The Lord keeps you from all evil and preserves your life.  
The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever*

*Psalm 121*

I love that even though we are tired, God is not! And it is not up to us to keep ourselves from stumbling and falling. He says that is his job. And that is the essence of grace. His hand upon our life. Working in us and through us. He does not leave us in our tiredness. God's grace is about transformation. He sees us for who we are, but he does not leave us there. He sees all the possibilities in us, and he is taking us daily, moving us forward, if we let him, toward the person he designed us to be. Peter found this to be true.

After falling asleep twice, Peter goes on to cut off a guard's ear, denies knowing Jesus three times, and deserts him as he hangs on the cross. That is a rough forty-eight-hour ride, from the euphoric heights of the triumphal entry to the crash and burn of Christ's crucifixion. Yep, it definitely got worse after the nap.

So where does that leave us supergirls? Because we, too, in our heart of hearts long to be all that God created us to be. We are just so darn tired. We are kicked sideways by life, grounded by our expectations, and haunted by our dreams. Will we ever be who we were meant to be?

Well, by the time Acts rolls around, Peter is doing it. He is preaching to multitudes with authority. He has gotten it together. Or maybe, just maybe, he has gotten over himself. Peter could be the Rock because he let God be God.

### ***Writing It Down—Journal***

Key question: how is grace at work in my life today?

What have I learned about God today?

What have I learned about myself today?

How do I incorporate this into my daily life?

### ***Offer It Up—Prayer***

Take prayer requests. Pray for each other. Encourage each other.

### ***Verse for the Week***

*I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there?*

*My help comes from the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth!*

*He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep.*

*Psalm 121:1–4*

### ***Quote for the Week***

*I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.*

*John Newton*

### ***Song for the Week***

“All That I Can Do”—Bethany Dillon, *Imagination*

# WEEK 2

## What Am I Supposed to Do with All These Sins?

### Opening Prayer Focus: Honesty

### Tired Supergirl Starter Questions

1. Who is the worst superhero nemesis that you can think of?
2. Tell a “I got caught doing this when I was a little kid” story.

### Chapter Focus: I sin a lot

I often wonder how it is that I have been following Jesus since I was a little girl and I still have a whole lot of churning around inside of me. I distinctly remember getting caught for doing a variety of wrong things when I was young. Stealing a bean bag from Sunday school (I was a pastor’s kid, after all). Lying to my mom. Tormenting my little brother. The crazy thing is that the older I get, the more my sins seem to stack up against me. But I am much better at camouflaging them. I don’t get caught as often. My natural inclination to hide my sin is aided and abetted by the In-sin-erator. I should preface this thought with the fact that I am only hiding my sin from myself. Those who live with me, my husband and children, my close friends and the occasional stranger passing by on the street, are very aware of my glaring sins. And then of course, there is God, who knows exactly what I am up to at all times, and he is not fooled by the fact that I like to pretend I am sinless. The more time I spend hanging out with him, the more aware I am of the things that need to change in my life.

But it is still difficult to own up to my stuff . . . even to God, who knows it anyway.

I take after my predecessors Adam and Eve on that fateful day in the garden of Eden. They polished off the apple and suddenly started looking for some way to cover up what they had just done. They tried wearing some leaves, but when God came strolling through the garden they realized, “Hey, these leaves are just not big enough to cover our shame! Where is that big juniper bush?”

And sadly enough, evergreen foliage does no better at hiding sin. God has X-ray vision and tends to see through whatever we are hiding behind, taking in the condition of our hearts. The funny thing is, while we know that Adam and Eve got caught, we supergirls think we can hide better. After all, they were pretty lame with their fig leaves. It is a time-honored tradition in the league of tired supergirls to do something wrong . . . hide it . . . pretend it’s not there . . . and hope that God doesn’t call us out from the bushes exposing us for who we are . . . sinners.

Duck and cover is the brilliant plan of the In-sin-erator. He wants to keep us on the run and in hiding. He knows that as long as there is sin in our hearts, we are separated from God. Of course, he doesn’t put it to us this way, because none of us wants to be separated from God. So he says things like, “Don’t worry. What you did isn’t a big deal. If you talk about it now, it will just mess everything up. Just bury it and move on.” Or, “Hey, who says that it’s a sin, anyway? It’s a personal choice. You did it to better yourself. Who can argue with that?”

## ***Jumping In—Action***

Take out your journals. Draw a picture of a tree. How far are you up in your tree? Are you at the base out in the open or fully hidden with just eyes peeking through the branches? Place a stick figure of yourself where you see yourself and your state of openness to your sins and struggles with God, with your friends, with your family.

## ***Searching the Word—The Story***

Living in a culture that thrives on being in the right, we usually find it hard to admit we have been wrong. We live in a world in which each person claims to have his or her own personal truth and set of guidelines, so it's hard to draw a bead on sin. Our society thrives on darkness and celebrates depravity, and it is hard to know how to step into the light. But if in the depths of our tired supergirl hearts, we want to walk in God's presence and taste the freedom he has to offer us, we have to quit hiding.

Zacchaeus realized this perching in a tree. His sin was hidden from no one but himself. In fact, as a tax collector, he was despised by most. He had swindled them, taken their cash, and was living off of the hard-earned, much-needed money of others. Zaccheus was a mess. He was rich but he was a mess. He wasn't happy and he wasn't free. Because if he was, he wouldn't keep needing to take more money or look for something or someone who meant more. He wouldn't be shimmying up a tree, surrounded by foliage (here we go with the foliage again), searching for answers.

Even though Zacchaeus was on the lookout for Jesus, he was still hiding. He wanted to catch a glimpse of the Messiah, to see what all the fuss was about, without giving up his day job. I know he was a small man, but if he really wanted to see Jesus close up, he could have pushed his way to the front of the crowd. Zacchaeus wasn't just short, he felt small inside. As far as sinning goes, he was a repeat offender, and everybody knew it. The weight of all he had done to his fellow men, the stealing, the lying, the conning, using his authority for evil, kept him in hiding. So there he was, high in his leafy vantage point, trying to catch a glimpse of God while not yet fully coming into the light. But Jesus didn't play like that.

The crowd swelled and pushed forward, massing around Jesus, moving him forward under and the canopy of trees. Jesus stopped and looked up and saw Zacchaeus peering at him between the branches.

"When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. 'Zacchaeus!' he said. 'Quick, come down! For I must be a guest in your home today.' Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the crowds were displeased. 'He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,' they grumbled" (Luke 19:5-7).

(The funny part of this Scripture is the crowd saying he in going to the house of a sinner when in fact any house he chose to go to would be a sinner's house. The other people just managed to keep their sin on the down low.)

## ***Keeping It Real—Discussion***

In what part of your life do you struggle with sin?

How do you hide it? Denial? Coverups? Renaming it?

Are you more like Adam and Eve or Zaccheus at this point? Hiding out or ready to come into the light?

## ***Keep Looking Up—Reflection***

It's at this point that two things have to happen. (1) We admit we have sin and (2) we recognize there is only one person who can do anything about this. Jesus. The whole point of God calling us out from behind bushes and trees is so that he can set our lives to rights. He is not calling us out to humiliate us. It is the same process we go through with our kids. When one of my kids lies I ask him, "I need you to tell me the truth. We can't fix this until you tell me the truth."

There is a positive chain reaction that begins when we are willing to own up to our junk. First, we can identify the problem and then we can begin to rectify it. I am not asking my little guy to bare his soul so that I can lord it over him or point out his stupidity or make him feel more lousy than he already does. I love him. More than likely, if he is lying about something, it is usually because he is doing something that is either going to hurt him or someone else, and it's my job as a mom to get him back on track. If he won't admit to the wrongdoing, he is still going to get in trouble, but he is also losing out on an opportunity for me to help him. The same thing happens in our relationship with Jesus. John talks about it like this:

*If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.*

*1 John 1:8-10*

Zacchaeus gets this. As soon as Jesus calls him out, he is scrambling right down the tree. Here is someone who can set his world to rights. The world he has so miserably failed at organizing. He realizes his life is about to change and he gets excited. His coming into the light sparks an immediate change of behavior.

*Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a son of Abraham. And I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those like him who are lost."*

*Luke 19:8-10*

This is the truly beautiful part of the story. Jesus has come to seek and save the lost. He is looking for sinners. Just like God came looking for Adam and Eve in the garden. He is looking for people stuck knee-deep in wrongdoing. For tired supergirls who miss the mark on a spectacularly regular basis. He knows there is this darkness, this chasm of sin that separates us from our Creator, from our destiny. And he is the only one who can set it straight. And he is on the lookout for people he can bring into the light.

## ***Writing It Down—Journal***

Key question: am I ready to let grace change my life?

What have I learned about God today?

What have I learned about myself today?

How do I incorporate this into my daily life?

## ***Offer It Up—Prayer***

Take prayer requests. Pray for each other. Encourage each other.

## ***Verse for the Week***

*But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*

*Romans 5:8*

## ***Quote for the Week***

*God's grace does not mean that God benignly accepts humans in all their fallenness, forgives them, and then leaves them in that fallenness. God is in the business not of white-washing sins but of transforming sinners*

*David Garland*

## ***Song for the Week***

“Something’s Changed”—Sara Groves, *Add to the Beauty*

# WEEK 3

## Why Can't I Get Past . . . My Past?

### Opening Prayer

### Tired Supergirl Starter Questions

1. If you could have any superpower in world, what would it be?
2. Tell your Jesus story . . . how and where he found you.

### Chapter Focus: I forget there is no more condemnation

I have a fantastic memory. Not so much my day-to-day memory. My short-term memory has taken a hit with the onset of motherhood. Just yesterday, I forgot that my son Jack was supposed to have a cookie exchange at school and that for extra credit he was supposed to measure out all of the ingredients. He arrived at school empty handed. He would say I don't have much memory to work with. But I think my long-term memory is pretty fantastic. I remember all the things I have ever done wrong. The mean things I have said to people. The various ways I have disappointed others. The temptations that got the best of me. Those I can recall with crystal clarity. Not exactly the type of memory that adds joy and goodness to one's thought life. A lot of supergirls have this type of memory. We are hyper-aware of our faults and past misdeeds. We don't need anyone to remind us of these things.

Who needs other people to point out your faults when you do such a good job of it yourself? It slaps you upside the head when you wake up in the morning and runs laps around you when you try to rest at night. You're not good enough. You failed. You sin . . . a lot. You won't ever be who you want to be. Just in case you were wondering, that slapping sensation comes from Condemno-boy, who is lobbing stones at you from the sidelines. His throwing power comes from his unbelievable ability to recall your every shortcoming. All of your less-than moments. Your failures. Your mishaps. Your tales of how you have wronged others. Your great mind-numbing gaffs. Your weak, embarrassing, can't-get-free stories. He throws them back in your face with fantastic speed. Just when you think you are out of his line of fire, just when you start to feel a little grace heading your way, a little mercy freeing up some space in your soul . . . WHAM!

"August 23, 1997 . . . remember how you lied to your boss?"

Then POW!

"November 14, 2004 . . . you went a little too far with boyfriend #3." Now you're down for the count and here comes his curveball with stunning accuracy . . . ZING!

"This morning, you yelled at your husband, ignored your kids, and ate five chocolate chip cookies for breakfast. Anger, apathy, and gluttony! What a terrific way to start your day. Some Christ follower you are."

And you are speechless. Because he is right.

Condemno Boy smirks, victorious once again. He always wins because he is always right. We supergirls are far from perfect. Even though we know Jesus saved us, we get stuck. Stuck in our sin, our past, our yuckiness.

The thing is, sometimes it's hard to get free. We know in our heads that there is absolute freedom in Christ. But really, what does free look like? And what does free feel like?

## **Jumping In—Action**

Take out your journals. Make a list of words that symbolize freedom to you. Opposite this list, make a list of words that symbolize captivity. Which list reminds you of yourself? Circle the words that describe the way you live your life.

## **Searching the Word—The Story**

There are two ways that we live our lives: in freedom or in condemnation. Most of us are caught somewhere in between. We know that Jesus has set us free but we can't seem to forget who we were or what we had done before we met Jesus. Sometimes it's hard to describe what free looks like.

I know what condemnation looks like. It looks like a broken woman, wrapped in a robe, being carried through the streets. She is sobbing and embarrassed. The Pharisees have found her, naked, amidst her sin, and she knows she is going to die. That's what happens when you are caught, midadultery, in Jesus's day. You get to die a painful, public death by stoning. Somehow, these men knew where she was and what she was doing and they were going to take her and Jesus out in one fell swoop. Shame contorts her face as they bring her to him. The Pharisees, good pals of our friend Condemno Boy, trapped her and now they want to see if they can trap Jesus. She is an adulteress—what is he going to do about it? It played out like this.

*They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to her, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"*

*"No, Lord," she said.*

*And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."*

*John 8:7-11*

## **Keeping It Real—Discussion**

What does Condemno-Boy use to keep you from feeling free?

What does it mean to know that Jesus doesn't hold that against you?

How would you live your life differently if you truly lived in the knowledge of God's amazing grace toward you each and every day?

## **Keep Looking Up—Reflection**

There is not one of us who lives a perfect life. We will always need God's grace and mercy and forgiveness. But if we truly believe what it says in the Word, we can live free. We can be free. From our past. From all that we once were. From the memories and guilt that keep us trapped and living a captive life. Because the power of God's life-giving spirit now lives in us. When we come in contact with a God who chooses to set us free, we are never the same. The woman caught in adultery lives this freedom first hand.

You see, the Pharisees left. They couldn't stone her because they weren't perfect either. Not one of us supergirls is perfect or ever will be. But he is. He is the one who knows our junk, all the ugly stuff. And Jesus, the perfect one, doesn't condemn us. He doesn't excuse our behavior either. In fact, he told the woman, "Go and sin no more." But I think that could only happen once she encountered Jesus. She could only leave behind who she was, the condemnation of what she had done, her sentence of death, after she came face to face with Jesus and he set her free. Free. Really free.

Paul puts it like this in Romans: "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death" (Rom. 8:1-2).

Paul should know. He met Jesus on a lonely road and was never the same again. He got free.

I think free feels like your first breath of air after being told you are not going to die. I think it feels like the morning after a really hard rain. It's a new start. A breaking free from what we were and running toward who we will be. I think free feels like waves of grace and mercy crashing over us and washing away the mud of the past that weighs down our hearts and buries our souls. I think free looks like a broken woman in a robe who has seen the Messiah and will never be the same again. She was dragged toward her death and met life on the way. Free looks like the smile that lit her face as she cut through the crowd, hurrying toward her new life. Free looks like the stones scattered in the dust, the ones that were never thrown. Free looks like the backs of the accusers as they slipped away, one by one.

I think free looks like Jesus, the compassion in his eyes and the stoop of his shoulders as he bent down to write in the dust. Because he doesn't condemn us. Even though we are sinful and the penalty for sin is death. He loves us too much. He couldn't stand for us to die. So he did it himself. And because of that, we get to feel and smell and hear and taste his freedom. The freedom that we supergirls long for. The freedom of fresh starts and new mercies every morning. The freedom that comes from knowing that when we are standing with Jesus, no one gets to throw any stones.

### ***Writing It Down—Journal***

Key question: am I living in a state of grace?

What have I learned about God today?

What have I learned about myself today?

How do I incorporate this into my daily life?

### ***Offer It Up—Prayer***

Take prayer requests. Pray for each other. Encourage each other.

### ***Verse for the Week***

*So Christ has really set us free. So make sure that you stay free and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.*

*Galatians 5:1*

### ***Quote for the Week***

*You called, You cried, You shattered my deafness, You sparkled, You blazed, You drove away my blindness, You shed Your fragrance, and I drew in my breath, and I pant for You.*

*Augustine*

### ***Song for the Week***

"Free"—Ginny Owens, *Without Condition*

# WEEK 4

## Why Is It So Hard to Pass Grace Along?

### Opening Prayer Focus: Forgiveness

### Tired Supergirl Starter Questions

1. If you were really Supergirl, how would you take down the bad guys?
2. Is there anyone that you have a hard time forgiving?

### Chapter Focus: I judge people

I have always admired people who are forgiving. I am amazed by their largeness of spirit. When I read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom, I remember being awestruck by the fact that she was able to live out forgiveness toward the Nazi soldiers who took her sister and father and wounded her so deeply. It is truly inspiring. Unfortunately, it seems it is much easier for me to judge and hold people accountable for their actions than it is for me to forgive and shower grace on them.

The funny thing is that even though God poured his grace out on me and doesn't judge me, it's hard for me to pass the grace along. I am, in fact, a terrific judge. It's almost a gifting. Let's call it an unspiritual gift. I have a lot of unspiritual gifts, but I am particularly spectacular in the judging department. Try me. Just at a glance I can size up a room.

Take the Starbucks I am sitting in. Woman on the left with white blonde hair and tattooed shoulders? Ex-rocker chick, probably divorced, could have a chance as Kid Rock's new lady. Man on the right with greasy hair and tube socks pulled up to his knees? Newly paroled sex offender—note to self: keep keys at the ready in case I need to stab at his eyes if he accosts me in the parking lot. Teeny bopper barista? Cute girl, maybe smart, why is she not in school? Does her mother know she is working at Starbucks in the middle of the day? Maybe she has half days at school, either way, her mocha is spot on, God bless her. Do you see what I mean? It's a gift. It comes naturally. I don't even try to judge people. It just flows from me.

And that is just judging by appearances. Don't even get me started on the people I actually know and interact with. Like my husband. After one of our very rare (weekly) discussions (fights) over how he has hurt me (I never hurt him) and how he needs to change (I am perfect the way I am), he said these words to me: "Susanna, I feel like you just don't have any grace for me."

Of all the terrible, truthful things to say to the woman who bore your unbelievably large children (all nine pounds and over). How could he say I have no grace? Maybe because he has lived with me for over ten years. That is a lot of years of towing the line. And I recognized in that instant what he has known all along. I don't have a whole lot of grace to pass around. Even for the ones I love best.

Why is it so hard for us supergirls to be grace givers? We want God's grace for ourselves, but we don't want to share it. We want the forgiveness, the pardon, the joy of living free. We want Jesus to pay the price for our sins, but we want others to pay the price for their own. We want to hang on to past hurts and point out other people's junk even though we want them to forgive the hurts we've caused them and excuse the junk that clutters our own lives.

Supergirls everywhere—beware of the Judge! He sits at the ready. Right within earshot, pounding his gavel and handing out judgments at will. Saying things like:

“Docket #43. Last week Sally snubbed you at playgroup. She’s no good. Don’t forgive her. Four weeks snubbing minimum sentence.”

“Case #71 being heard. Two years ago your boyfriend lied to you. Don’t ever trust him again. He’ll never change. Sentence? Bring up his shortcomings every chance you get.”

The Judge is ruthless. He never takes into account things like, maybe Sally was hurting and she didn’t mean to be rude but she is quite possibly at the end of her rope. Or that your boyfriend was scared to tell you the truth and was afraid of how you would respond. There is no give in the Judge. He is absolutely graceless.

## ***Jumping In—Action***

Take out your journals. Draw three circles. In one circle place the names of people that you feel judge you along with one word about how that makes you feel. In the other circle, place the names of the people that you judge and another word describing that emotion. In the third circle, place the name of the one who actually has the right to judge you and the people you judge and a final descriptive word.

## ***Searching the Word—The Story***

Jesus has a few things to say in Scripture about us judging each other. There is something that happens when we judge others. We open ourselves up to judgment. Now, that is not something I particularly enjoy. I think he wants to make it perfectly clear what will happen when we decide to take on the role of judge in the lives of people around us.

*Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying, “Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,” when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.*

*Matthew 7:1–5*

Personally, I prefer the verses before these, that say I don’t have to worry about what I wear or eat, that God will take care of me. I usually coast right by the judging verses, and read on to where Jesus says that if I ask, I will receive and that God gives good gifts to those who ask. But Jesus doesn’t fool around when it comes to judging others. Because he knows, firstly, that he is the only one qualified to do it, and secondly, we aren’t able to help others with their mess until we’ve dealt with our own.

## ***Keeping It Real—Discussion***

Why is it so important to Jesus that we recognize the power of judging others and what it does in our own lives?

In what situation do you allow yourself to become the Judge?

How do you feel when you realize that forgiving others allows God to forgive you?

## ***Keep Looking Up—Reflection***

I wear contacts. I love them. They are less cumbersome than glasses, and I have far better peripheral vision when I wear them. I tried to get lasik surgery, but they told me my corneas were too thin. Too thin. A phrase that could have been pleasurable to hear if in reference to my upper thighs, the backs of my arms, or my post-baby midriff, but I digress. I have skinny corneas so I wear contacts.

The only downside to wearing contacts is when I get something caught under one of them. God forbid that I get a piece of fuzz or a wayward eyelash trapped under one of them while I am driving, because I will go careening off of the road, clawing at my eye. It is excruciating. Everything stops. I can't move, I can't focus. I can't do a thing until I have ripped the contact out of my eye and gotten rid of the offending party. Supergirl or not, a strategically placed piece of sand has been known to incapacitate me for a good fifteen minutes. I'm not kidding. Don't get me started on the evils of fuzzy sweaters and airborne pollen. These microscopic terrors are a bane to contact wearers everywhere.

And according to Jesus, I am not dealing with a wee bit of fluff here. Apparently, I have a redwood sticking out of my eye. Not in the least bit microscopic. I have to agree it would be difficult to help someone else out with their piece of lint before I remove my tree. Jesus keeps bringing it back home. We have to take care of our own problems before pointing out other people's problems. We supergirls are incapacitated by a lovely forest of elms, poplars, and my favorite, maples, which are sprouting from our retinas. We can not see our way clear until we ask Jesus to help us with a little trimming. And let's be honest, who of us would actually have time to point out the sins of others if we were knee-deep in resolving our own issues?

When we sign on to be receivers of God's grace, we are also signing on to be givers of God's grace. The deal is all inclusive. We recognize that we need grace just as much as the person next to us. And just as Jesus doesn't condemn us in our sin, we don't get to condemn others in their sin. When we decide to withhold grace and forgiveness from those around us, we don't get to live free, either. Once Jesus has set us free, we get the joy, the choice, the chance to set those around us free too, by passing the grace along.

### ***Writing It Down—Journal***

Key question: how does judging others affect my ability to live in grace?

What have I learned about God today?

What have I learned about myself today?

How do I incorporate this into my daily life?

### ***Offer It Up—Prayer***

Take prayer requests. Pray for each other. Encourage each other.

### ***Verse for the Week***

*God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbor?*

*James 4:12*

### ***Quote for the Week***

*Grace isn't a little prayer you chant before receiving a meal. It's a way to live.*

*Jackie Windspear*

### ***Song for the Week***

"Make Me Over"—Natalie Grant, *Awaken*

# WEEK 5

## Why Is It So Hard to Tell People about Jesus?

### Opening Prayer Focus: Sharing Grace

### Tired Supergirl Starter Questions

1. If you were a reporter for the *Daily Planet*, who would be your favorite superhero to report on and why?
2. How often do you talk about Jesus to your friends?

### Chapter Focus: I'm not great at sharing my faith

I think the most disappointing instance I have had in sharing my faith is when I led my good friend to . . . Buddha. We worked together and I had been talking to her about Jesus, and she was so thankful and enlightened by our discussions that she decided to follow Buddha. I remember going home and telling Scott about it.

“I’m not sure what I did or how it happened, but I was trying to lead her to Jesus and instead I led her to Buddha.”

“Buddha?”

“Yes. Buddha.”

Scott just patted my back. He is a born evangelist who shares his faith regularly. He has led his friends to the Lord not to other religions. And I felt like a failure. I had failed me, and worse, I had failed Jesus. The Great Commission seemed impossible. How could I go into all the world, making disciples of the nations, when apparently my giftings seemed to lie elsewhere? Maybe some of us supergirls should go into all the world and maybe some of us should just stay at home and pray real hard.

Some of us supergirls are rock stars at sharing Jesus. Some of us grab our friends by the hand and walk them right onto the path of righteousness and have felt the glory of the Lord shining ’round about us. And some of us supergirls feel like we are terrible at sharing because we don’t relate to people who don’t follow Christ. Maybe we’ve grown up in the church and our story of faith isn’t exciting enough. Or we’ve grown up outside of the church and our story of faith is too gory. Or we are introverts and speaking up about our faith feels like something akin to dying. Or, tired supergirls that we are, even though we are following the Christ and would like to talk about him, we have messed up over and over and feel like we are the last ones who should be sharing anything. That maybe we could, quite by accident, lead someone to Buddha. (Who I’m sure was a nice guy and all, but definitely not the Creator of the universe and savior of the world.)

This is where Mr. Shut-Your-Mouth comes into play. He is the foul foe who mocks our faith and shames our souls and says, “Yes, of course, by all means, believe in Jesus. Just don’t talk about him. Because you really have no idea what you are talking about.” Or, “It’s amazing how much you say you love Jesus, but you just can’t seem to get it right. You better keep quiet. Praying for your friend is enough.” Or, “It’s nice that you want to tell your friends about Jesus, but you’ve never had any training. Maybe you should go to Bible college and then you can really know what you are talking about.”

## ***Jumping In—Action***

Take out your journals. Draw a picture using words or stick figures of what your life looked like before you knew Jesus. Before you knew how much he loves you.

## ***Searching the Word—The Story***

Mr. Shut-Your-Mouth would like us supergirls to think that sharing our faith and all that God has done for us is absolutely beyond us. And he is going to try to stymie us at every turn. Because this is God's grand plan. For us to tell people about him. That's it. He wants us to be his disciples and to tell others how to be his disciples. And that is going to involve some chatting on our part. So if Mr. SYM can keep us from talking, then God's grand plan will crash and burn. Jesus relayed this plan to the disciples in a portion of Scripture we like to call the Great Commission. Which quite frankly sounds so daunting that Mr. SYM won't have to work too hard to keep us from talking. Because I can't tell you the last time I was commissioned to do anything or undertook something great. But this is not how Jesus puts it to his disciples. The story goes like this:

*Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them still doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples,*

*“I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

*Matthew 28:16–20*

Here are his followers. They have recently seen their friend tortured and crucified. They are probably still reeling from his resurrection. They have eaten fish with him on the beach, seen him pop in and out of rooms like Houdini, and visited with him off and on for forty days. They've come to worship him, but some of them are still doubting him. (Which we can totally relate to because we supergirls can be great doubters.) Even after living life with him for three years, they still don't get it. And he breaks down his grand plan into terms they understand.

When Jesus told them to disciple the nations, I'm sure they were not thinking about poring over Scripture in the musty back room of a temple. He is talking to them about how they have lived together the last three years. He starts out telling them what is most important (Tired Supergirl Paraphrase):

Look here, I'm completely in charge. So now that you get that, go and do what I have done with you for the past three years. Just like I came to you, you have to go to them. Go live life with them. Tell them about me. They are not going to get half of what you say but keep at it. Go cook them fish on the beach and hang out under olive trees. Go to parties, celebrate and enjoy life. When things get hard, stick by them. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit just like you were baptized after you repented and believed in me. Teach them all the things I taught you. And you have to know, you're not in this alone, I am going to be with you forever.

This was something they could do. This was not beyond the realm of the possible. It was the passing of the torch, but he wasn't deserting them. Now, he knew all their stuff. And they knew that he knew all their stuff. He knew some of them were shy, some were goof-offs, some of them were still struggling with their own faith.

And he was still saying, “This is the plan, don't worry, you're the guys, you can do this, I am always going to be with you.”

## ***Keeping It Real—Discussion***

What is your worst fear about sharing the story of Jesus with your friends?

How does Mr. Shut-Your-Mouth use this to his advantage in your life?

What is your greatest hope about sharing the story of Jesus with your friends?

## ***Keep Looking Up—Reflection***

The disciples took Jesus at his word. They took to heart that he would never leave them and that he would help them spread the Good News. The really Good News. His message of grace and peace and love and healing. We know this because someone passed the word along.

We know about Jesus because some other imperfect Christ follower took Jesus's mountain talk to heart and told us about his love and grace and we listened. And as for Mr. Shut-Your-Mouth, well, he can just shut his mouth because there a lot of supergirls out there who still need to hear about Jesus. And if there is a group of people who know how to celebrate life, hang out, talk about important stuff, and eat good food, it is us supergirls. Some of our friends may get it and some of them may not, but we're going to keep on chatting because Jesus asked us to. And he promised he would never leave us. Even if you have accidentally led someone to Buddha.

## ***Writing It Down—Journal***

Key question: how can I share God's message of grace with others?

What have I learned about God today?

What have I learned about myself today?

How do I incorporate this into my daily life?

## ***Offer It Up—Prayer***

Take prayer requests. Pray for each other. Encourage each other.

## ***Verse for the Week***

*And everyday, in the temple and in their homes, they continued to preach this message,  
"The Messiah you are looking for is Jesus."*

*Acts 5:42*

## ***Quote for the Week***

*The gospel to me is simply irresistible.*

*Blaise Pascal*

## ***Song for the Week***

"Mercy Said No"—Cece Winans, *Throne Room*

# WEEK 6

## When Will I Arrive?

### Opening Prayer Focus: Perseverance

### Tired Supergirl Starter Questions

1. If you were a superhero and were to go out in a blaze of glory, how would it go down?
2. What goal or accomplishment have you been trying to reach for a long time?

### Chapter Focus: I've got a long way to go

It often seems like I spend my life waiting for the next big thing to happen. The next big accomplishment. The next weight loss goal. The next grand achievement in my spiritual life. It just seems to be the way I am built.

But, truth be told, those high moments are few and far between. There is a whole lot of regular living that goes on in between. Each time I think I have reached the pinnacle, I realize, nope, I'm not quite there. I'm missing something. I am not the person I need to be. I still have so much to learn. This amazing event has happened and yet I am still far from yelling out to the universe, "Take note, people! I have arrived!"

And let's not forget the fact that I struggle, for goodness sakes. On a fairly regular basis. Those three sweet boys can drive me to anger and madness. They really can. My husband and I discuss things. (We don't argue, we discuss.) I have yet to get a handle on the whole "Christian walk" thing. I get frustrated with the fact that I haven't conquered all my fears and overcome all of my weaknesses. I have lots of issues. (As if you didn't know that.) And just when I think *that moment* is around the corner, it's not. There is yet another hurdle to overcome. Another way in which I need to grow. There is that word. Grow. Growth. Growing. Let's just lay it out, supergirls. "You need to grow" is just another way of saying you simply are not where you need to be in a certain area of your life. You are lacking in maturity. You are little when you really need to be big. You need to be way up here, but no, you are way down in the depths somewhere and if you want to get way up here, you must grow. Change. Reshape yourself. Thrust yourself upward. And I must admit that most days I think I will never get to *that moment*.

You'll-Never-Get-There-in-a-Million-Years Guy loves it when I feel this way. He cheers. He rails. He shakes his finger at me.

"You are exactly right! You are never going to get there. Wherever 'there' is. You really gave it the old college try. But you just really stink when it comes to changing." Or, "Wow! I know you thought you were different than last week. But you're not. You have always had a hard time when it comes to forgiving people. You are lousy at it. Just give up." Or, "You will always be who you are. Don't fight it. It's really too hard to change your nature. You can keep trying, of course. I mean, really, you can if you want to. But honestly (in a low hissing whisper), you will never make it in a million years."

### ***Jumping In—Action***

Take out your journals. Draw a giant arrow. What is at the end of the arrow? The big transformation you are waiting for or the place you are trying to arrive at? Place that at the end of the arrow.

## ***Searching the Word—The Story***

Mr. Not-in-a-Million-Years Guy is a hope killer. He really doesn't want us to think that we will ever achieve what we want to achieve or become the person God created us to be. He is the grand discourager.

After all that loving Jesus and listening for his voice and longing to be the person he wants us to be, he wants to make sure that we think it is impossible to change. He wants us to see all that we will never be. And the thing is, if we are trying to hitch ourselves up by our bootstraps, put our best selves into making our own dreams come true, and pouring ourselves into self-betterment, Million Years Guy is probably right. Even with all that discipline and self-love and positive talk, it will take more than good thoughts and righteous intentions to grow us up into the supergirls we were meant to be. We need something more.

Jesus was always giving his disciples great word pictures of how they could view him. He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He was the Bread of Life. He was the Son of Man. He was the Light of the World. The Bright and Morning Star. And then he said this to them. He was the Vine. The True Vine. He used examples of everyday things to make them see him in a new, relevant way. I'm sure they had passed by hundreds of vineyards when they traveled with him. Grapes were a part of everyday life. The disciples knew about vines.

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me.*

*Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father.*

*John 15:1-8*

And this is where we find our hope, supergirls. This is where our faith lies and where our dreams live. In the Vine. This is when we look at Not-in-Million-Years Guy and say, "Ha!"

## ***Keeping It Real—Discussion***

What is the big lie that Mr. Not-in-a-Million-Years Guy has been telling you lately?

How does it change your view of your grace journey to know that it is up to God, not you, to bring about changes in your life?

What does yielding your life to the Master Gardener look like?

## ***Keep Looking Up—Reflection***

We have a long way to go. We are not perfect. We have struggles and temptations and heartache. But all is not lost. We will arrive. Because he loves us and he will not let us stay the way that we are. And when we choose to remain in Jesus, despite who we are, Not-in-a-Million-Years Guy does not have a chance. And as we traverse this narrow way, following after God, listening for his voice, submitting to his pruning, getting strength from his strength, we will have *that moment*. We will look into the face of all eternity, and we will hear these words: "Well done." And we will be tired no more. With those words, the vile foes of the years, the crazy nemeses, the mind-numbing struggles, and the various heartaches will fall away. So fight on, tired supergirl, wherever you are. Because you have heard the message. Remain in him. Don't let go. Even when it gets harder than hard. *He loves you..* No matter what. And that is something that, surely, we tired supergirls can stake our very lives on.

## ***Writing It Down—Journal***

Key question: where am I headed on my grace journey?

What have I learned about God today?

What have I learned about myself today?

How do I incorporate this into my daily life?

## ***Offer It Up—Prayer***

Take prayer requests. Pray for each other. Encourage each other.

## ***Verse for the Week***

*And that is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles that we see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.*

*2 Corinthians 4:16–18*

## ***Quote for the Week***

*Grace is but glory begun, and glory is but grace perfected.*

*Jonathan Edwards*

## ***Song for the Week***

“Shadowfeet”—Brooke Fraser, *Albertine*