

**“The Grace of God’s Power
Cindy Agoncillo
October 30, 2022**

I hope you are enjoying hearing the stories of our staff members as much as I have, and more importantly, that God has used our stories to encourage, convict and strengthen you in your own walk with Jesus.

As I thought about our desire for this series—that God would use the stories of how He has worked in our lives to gain glory for Himself—I was reminded of the lyrics to the song, “My Story,” by Big Daddy Weave.

"My Story" by Big Daddy Weave

If I told you my story, you would hear hope that wouldn't let go.
And if I told you my story, you would hear love that never gave up.
And if I told you my story, you would hear life, but it wasn't mine.

If I should speak, then let it be
Of the grace that is greater than all my sin,
Of when justice was served and where mercy wins,
Of the kindness of Jesus that draws me in
Oh, to tell you my story is to tell of Him.

If I told you my story, you would hear victory over the enemy.
And if I told you my story, you would hear freedom that was won for me.
And if I told you my story, you would hear Life overcome the grave.

This is my story, this is my song
Praising my savior all the day long.

For the grace that is greater than all my sin
Of when justice was served and where mercy wins.
Of the kindness of Jesus that draws me in.
Oh, to tell you my story is to tell

Of the grace that is greater than all my sin.
Of when justice was served and where mercy wins,
Of the kindness of Jesus that draws me in.
Oh, to tell you my story is to tell of Him.

As we've shared our stories, our hope is that ultimately you would hear the story of Jesus' hope, love, kindness, victory and life.

Each of us who have shared have highlighted God's grace in our lives. Grace is a fascinating and amazing concept. When I looked up the definition of grace, I found all kinds of descriptions: *approval, favor, mercy, pardon, privilege, kindness* and *courtesy* were words that were used, but the first statement in Webster's online dictionary was, "*Unmerited divine assistance.*" In other words, grace is undeserved, not something we earn or achieve. Grace is the starting point for everything related to God. Apart from God initiating and reaching out to us, none of us can approach Him, but Scripture also repeatedly emphasizes the importance of our response to grace. God initiates, but whether or not his grace takes root in our lives is dependent on our response. Listen to these words from 2 Peter, chapter 1:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

– 2 Peter 1:3-11 (NIV)

As you listen to Cindy's story this morning, I encourage you to note two things: First of all, the grace of God that has been active in her life. And secondly, Cindy's response to God's grace. As you hear her story, reflect on how God's grace has been active in your life, and how God is calling you to respond to his grace.

It's our privilege to hear from Pastor Cindy Agoncillo this morning. Cindy has attended McBIC for 10 years and for the past three years, she has served as our Pastor of Young Adults and First Impressions. In addition to those roles, Cindy's training and experience and expertise in graphic design and communications has been invaluable to us. Cindy doesn't preach often, but I'm glad we have the opportunity to hear from her this morning.

As our staff started planning this sermon series, I wasn't really sure what story I wanted to share with you all. Similar to what Sherry said a few weeks ago, I didn't have a testimony of dramatic or drastic life change, so it felt like I didn't have a story of how God has brought transformation to my spiritual life. But as I thought more about my spiritual journey, I think a significant moment was actually when I started attending McBIC and had the opportunity to discover more fully the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Lord.

For some context, I grew up in a Christian home, attended church with my family every Sunday, and ended up going to Messiah for college, so when I started attending McBIC just over 10 years ago, the general worship service experience was rather familiar. What I found somewhat new and different at McBIC, though, was prayer. Growing up, praying out loud during the church service was a role pretty much reserved for the pastor, who would read through a list of prayer requests submitted by the congregation. We would gently ask God for people to recover from injury or illness if it was His will, and then we would join together as a congregation to recite the Lord's Prayer.

Here at McBIC, prayer is not just for pastors. We have a team of people stationed around the room each week, available to pray for anyone who asks them for prayer. At youth group, it's not uncommon to see the volunteer leaders praying for the teens and the teens praying for each other. And when I hear prayers for healing, it's often bold prayers spoken with authority and expectancy.

I remember feeling a little intimidated by this. Like, how are the prayer team members able to pray out loud for people they might not even know? And how do they know what to pray right on the spot? I was the kind of person who would recite the same scripted prayer any time I was asked to say grace before a meal, so this sort of "holy improv" was out of my comfort zone. I also remember feeling a little skeptical about praying for healing or other miracles. I knew

Jesus and his disciples performed miracles in the Bible, but did they really still happen today? And could we actually pray for more than “positive vibes” or “well wishes” but for God to heal or provide in supernatural ways?

Fast forward a few years into my time at McBIC to when I attended one of my first McBIC women’s retreats. During the weekend, at least one woman shared a testimony of how she approached a prayer team member, who prayed exactly what she needed to hear at that moment. I thought to myself, “I don’t know how that works... but it sounds like something I’d like to experience.” Except, again, I was a bit intimidated. I didn’t really know many of the women on the prayer team and wasn’t sure if they would know me. How do I know who to ask? And what if I don’t have a specific prayer request? Do I just walk up and say, “Uh, one prayer, please”? Perhaps by this point in my journey, I was slightly less skeptical about what God could do, so I remained seated in my chair and silently asked God to gently nudge someone on the prayer team and direct them my way. Maybe if I don’t go up for prayer, He could send someone to me who felt like they were supposed to pray for me. So I waited. And waited. And then the evening ended.

The next night, I was telling my friend Sophie about the night before—how I wanted someone to pray for me but was too nervous to ask. She was feeling the same way. We thought, “Hey, let’s go up together and ask Kathy B. to pray for both of us. She seems like someone who would know what to pray for, even if we don’t have a specific request.” So that was our plan. Kathy was across the room already praying for another woman, so we waited for her to finish so that we could ask her to pray for us next. She said “Amen,” Sophie and I got up from our seats, and as we walked over to her corner of the room... Kathy fainted. She was taken aside to be cared for, the night ended, and we went home from the retreat the following day.

A few months after the women’s retreat, Sophie and I, along with a few other young adults, were invited to join Kathy and her husband John on a missions trip to Southeast Asia. Our young adult missions team would meet with John and Kathy every few weeks or so to learn about the language, food, or customs we would encounter on our trip as well as what we might expect from a day of ministry—how on one day, we might go to a park and ask random strangers—with the help of an interpreter—if we could pray for them.

As I anticipated going on this trip, once again, I felt intimidated. I felt a bit inadequate or ill-equipped. Our prayer teams, as well as John and Kathy, seemed like such professionals—people with a lifetime of experience or people who had been anointed by God with a gift for prayer. And that was not how I saw myself. But then John and Kathy told us

something that created a shift in my understanding. They were telling us about approaching people in the city, asking if we could pray for them, and they said, “If they say yes, then wait and listen for what the Holy Spirit wants to say.” Not rattle off a pre-rehearsed, perfectly worded and eloquent prayer. Wait and listen.

In Matthew 10, Jesus told the 12 Apostles that the Holy Spirit would speak through them. He said, “When you are arrested, don’t worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:19–20, NLT). Now while we hoped that we would not be arrested on our mission trip, we also had hope that God would give us the right words at the right time as we met and prayed for people. And then in Romans 8, Paul wrote that when we don’t know what to pray, the Holy Spirit prays for us. We wait and listen. The pressure was no longer on my ability to say the right words or know exactly what to pray for. Instead I just had to wait, listen, and be willing to follow where the Holy Spirit was leading.

This helped me become less intimidated about praying for people, but praying for healing and miracles still felt like a challenge. Around this time, I was serving as a small group leader for the high school youth, and we had watched a video of a man traveling to sites in the Holy Land and to various concerts in the United States, and he would pray for people to experience physical healing. He would find someone suffering from back pain, inform them that the pain was a result of one leg being longer than the other, and as he prayed, they would watch as the shorter leg began to grow.

Now, I wouldn’t say this made me any less skeptical about praying for healing. If anything, it might have made me more skeptical. Was this real or staged? Was it just for the camera? Were these people actually receiving healing from back pain, or was it a placebo effect from being told they had been healed? I wasn’t sure. But then one of the other youth leaders gave a testimony about how one of the teens in his small group had prayed for his vision to be healed, and the next day he no longer needed his glasses or contact lenses. So maybe God was still performing miracles and answering prayers for healing after all. I thought to myself, God can heal, but He uses other people—you know, people with a gift for healing, to do it.

Once we were on the trip, this theme of feeling intimidated and inadequate continued for me. Each morning, our group would start the day with worship and with prayer, and we’d ask the Holy Spirit to give us words or pictures that would help guide our ministry for the day. Someone received a vision of a blue baseball cap with red shirt, and later in the day they prayed for a stranger they saw wearing a blue baseball cap and a red shirt. Someone received a vision of an old man with glasses, bald on top with gray hair around his temples; they prayed for a man with

that exact description later that morning. And when I would pray for a word or a picture, my mind would go blank and I'd come up empty. I thought, "Maybe I'm doing this wrong" or "I'm not listening hard enough." Or maybe God can speak or provide visions, but He speaks to other people—not me. I was no longer skeptical about the wonders God could do, but I had a hard time believing He'd choose me to do it.

On one of the days, we attended a church service at a YWCA, and here's what I wrote in my trip journal about our morning:

The rest of our team began to spread out and pray for people in the congregation. I prayed some quick prayers for some young women in the back, but then an older woman a few rows ahead turned around and made eye contact with me. As soon as I began praying for her, I began to cry, unexplainably overcome by emotion for her. She, too, began crying. I had no translator, so I did not know what she was experiencing. It was clear, though, that God was doing something, so I continued praying. I noticed that her right hand was resting on her abdomen, so I laid my hand on hers and began praying for healing. I didn't know what needed to be healed, but as I prayed for a wholeness of body, her hand began to shake and she continued to cry. The pastor came over and explained that she had been experiencing pain from a recent kidney stone operation. Through him, I learned that she had pain when she got to church, but after I began praying for her, the pain was gone. This was a completely new experience for me. Healing was something God did through other people. Not me. And yet here I was in a YWCA in [Southeast Asia] praying over a woman who did not understand what I was saying and seeing God heal her from pain. God was powerfully at work.

I had been intimidated by people who seemed to have all the right words whenever they prayed, and yet God was stirring something in the heart of a woman who couldn't understand a single word that came out of my mouth. I had been skeptical about God's ability to heal and His willingness to work through me, and yet He healed this woman right before my eyes. Through this experience, I realized how much weight I had placed on my own ability to say or do the right things for God, and how small a box I had placed around what God could do and who God could work through. Can you imagine if the power of God were limited to what I believed was possible? What a small God that would be!

The main reason why I enjoy the story of Gideon from the book of Judges is because I see his story echoed in my own. He's intimidated. He's skeptical. He's as much of an underdog

as David facing Goliath but with none of the confidence. The Lord wanted to send Gideon to rescue Israel, even calling him a “mighty warrior,” and Gideon didn’t believe he was the wisest choice. Judges 6:15–16 (NLT) says,

“But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!” The Lord said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.”

“The Lord said to him, ‘I will be with you.’” Over the past few weeks, a main theme in our stories has been God’s presence in moments of struggle. But for Gideon, this promise of God’s presence wasn’t quite enough. He felt intimidated and inadequate, and maybe a bit skeptical, too. He asked for signs and confirmation through fleece and dew before agreeing to step into the role God was calling him to.

You can read Gideon’s complete story in Judges, chapters 6–8, but I want to skip ahead to the end of Gideon’s battle with the Midianites. Here’s what it says in Judges 7:19–22 (NLT):

It was just after midnight, after the changing of the guard, when Gideon and the 100 men with him reached the edge of the Midianite camp. Suddenly, they blew the rams’ horns and broke their clay jars. Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands, and they all shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!”

Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran to escape. When the 300 Israelites blew their rams’ horns, the Lord caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords...

Gideon had placed so much weight on his own strength and the size of Israel’s army. He placed such a small box around the power of God and failed to imagine that God would bring the Israelites victory without having to step foot into the enemy’s camp. It’s less a story of God working *through* Gideon and more about God working *in spite of* Gideon. How many times do we find ourselves in a similar position, where we think our flaws or inadequacies will get in the way of God’s power or limit His ability to work wonders.

A few weeks ago, Layne asked us to consider what is holding us back from stepping into everything God has for us. Maybe for those of you who resonated with Sherry or Evan’s stories, it was timidity or anxiety. Or maybe if you could relate to the stories I shared this morning, it’s feelings of intimidation or inadequacy. Feeling like the role God is calling you to fill is better

suiting for someone else—someone more qualified or more experienced. I'm up here as someone who became a pastor three years ago after working as a graphic designer for ten years—I definitely know what it's like to question if you're qualified or equipped enough. Is God inviting you to release the weight and pressure you've put on your own strengths and abilities?

Or maybe God's inviting you to tear down the box you've placed Him in—to remove the limits you've imposed on what He's capable of accomplishing in your life or in this world, to more fully believe, as it says in Ephesians, that He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

The worship team is going to come up and lead us in a time of response, and as they begin, here's my invitation to you: wait and listen. Not just this morning in response to what I've shared, but every time we gather together in worship. Wait and listen. How is the Lord leading you to respond? For many of us, that might be standing and singing. For some of you, the Lord may invite you to sit in quiet reflection, kneel at the prayer benches, or request prayer from one of the prayer team members. Maybe you have a need for physical, emotional, or relational healing that you'd like someone to pray boldly and expectantly for today. Or maybe you'd like to surrender whatever feelings or beliefs have held you back. Our prayer team is available to join with you in prayer. Or maybe the Holy Spirit is leading you to pray *for* someone, to walk over and share a word of blessing or encouragement that the Lord has laid on your heart. I invite us all to wait and listen, and then follow as the Lord leads.