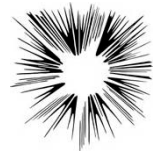




# Grace Snap Shot

*"Viewing life through the lens of God's grace!"*



## A Letter from John

Written by Art Henkel (for the many how are frustrated in their spiritual journey)

Dear Heavenly Father,

I find myself writing this letter to you with a certain level of frustration and caution. I write with frustration because after twenty seven years of knowing you I'm not quite sure what to make of this Christian life anymore. And I write with caution because I'm not quite sure how you're going to respond to what I have to say. But here goes nothing.

I think you know that I grew up going to church as a kid. I heard about you every Sunday and sometimes even during the week, if my parents brought up the topic. I was just nine years old when my Sunday school teacher talked to me about the problem of sin and importance of surrendering everything to you. It was right then and there that I decided to dedicate my life. Remember when I asked you to forgive me, and I promised to serve you with all my heart? I do. I meant it.

I remember as a kid trying so hard to memorize all those Bible verses. I think I scored perfect attendance three years in a row on Sunday mornings. Even though I often didn't know what the pastor was talking about I was there. If I got bored I would just count the number of tiles on the ceiling in the sanctuary and wait for the altar call. Those altar calls were something. They were times that I felt close to you. The music would start and the Pastor would invite people to come forward to rededicate their lives and I couldn't get down to the front fast enough. I'd ask you to forgive me for the stuff I had done wrong and even for the sins that I was unaware of. Soon the tears would be flowing and I'd be thanking you for your love and promising to do better with your help.

As a teenager I found myself busy with school, sports, friends and church. I really tried hard to keep you first place in my life but as you know quite often that wasn't the case. Thank goodness for youth group. Every week I'd get together with other church teenagers and we'd hang out and learn more about you. Our Youth Pastor was the coolest guy. He was crazy and fun, played great guitar and always challenged us to make a difference in the world by serving you. He kept us really busy with retreats, summer camps, mission trips and car washes. I even served on the youth worship team. It was awesome.

By the age of twenty three I was attending a brand new church called "Freedom House" that was geared for those who didn't like attending church. We were really progressive and non-churchy in the way we did things. I served on the leadership team of the young adult group and was in charge of sound and tech for our weekly meetings and any special events we'd host. I attended conventions, helped with planning outreach events and enjoyed some real good friendships with others who were committed to you.

Right now I'm a thirty six year old guy who is happily married and the father of two beautiful daughters. My wife Beth and I have been a part of "Freedom House" for the past thirteen years now. I currently serve as a board member (the youngest one) and Beth is helping out with the Sunday morning Kids Ministry which our girls usually enjoy. We are really active in our Christian walk, doing all the things we know we should be doing but lately we've

found ourselves questioning some things. Things such as: Why does being a Christian seem so tiring? Where's the abundant life? Why does "Freedom House" now seem to be like every other church? How come everything else but you seems to come up at our church board meetings? And why does there seem to be as many messed up lives in the church as out of the church?

I don't mean to complain and I hope this doesn't upset you but we've even been questioning you. We read in your Word that you'll never leave us but honestly, there are times that you seem so distant? We know that we must frustrate you with some of the stupid things we do at times but we are really trying to be faithful. There are a lot of times we don't feel like going to church but we do it anyways.

So Father, if I can ask, "What's going on?" Why after all these years of committing our lives to you in service, do we find ourselves so hollow? Could you make some sense out of this? Beth and I are at the place where we feel like just giving up. We've come to the end of ourselves!

Sincerely your servant!

John Hensmith

## **The Response**

Dear Johnny,

My child and friend, I was so thrilled to receive your letter. Thank you for taking the time to express what you and Beth have been thinking and sensing. I've known all about your frustrations and have waited for you to ask your questions.

Please know that I am in no way disappointed with you. There is nothing you could ever do that would change the love that I have towards you. You're my beloved children and friends, birthed into my family through Jesus my Son.

This might sound strange at first but coming to the end of yourself is the best thing that could ever happen to you.

Johnny, I know how busy you and Beth have been over the years, trying to live for me, but you need to know that I have never asked this of you. I've simply invited you to place your faith in the finished work of Jesus. Through His death, burial and resurrection you not only received total and final forgiveness of sin but you received a new life, His life. I don't ask people to try and live for me, rather I offer them life beyond themselves. This new life in the Spirit is not simply a life of doing but rather a life of being. Not one of simply producing and achieving but rather a life of abiding and receiving. It's a life of actively responding to the Spirit within rather than always trying to initiate the Spirit's activity.

This is not an issue of your hearts, for you received new and pure hearts when you came to faith in Jesus years ago. Your heart of stone was replaced with a heart of flesh and the Holy Spirit began to dwell within you. No, this is an issue of your mind. You, like so many other of my children have been misled by faulty teaching and untruths. You haven't truly grasped the fullness of the gospel of salvation. By grace you came to faith in Jesus and it's by grace not works that your new life is lived out. It was never my intention for you to try to live by the Law or even a mixture of Law and grace. My purpose for the Law was to bring people like you to the end of themselves so that

they might receive life giving salvation through Jesus and enter a new and living covenant of grace. You both did this, years ago. Begin to walk in my grace and you'll see that Jesus truly is everything in life.

In your letter you asked, "Why does being a Christian seem so tiring? Where's the abundant life?" The reason you're so tired is due to your long time attempt to live the Christian life. You think that it's hard to live the Christian life? I say it's impossible. You can't, only Jesus my Son can live it in and through you by the Spirit. The answers to the other questions you wrote down and to the many others you didn't include can only be found in Jesus. The abundant life is only found when resting in Him. It will never be experienced through religious systems and duty or well meaning works of the flesh (even grade A flesh). The life you have in Jesus is one of loving relationship and union. It's in this that you'll experience true life activity birthed and lived out.

Johnny, I have been misrepresented by so many people. Many of my own children view me as a demanding and accusing Master. Please know that I am love. I am not envious, boastful or proud. I am not self seeking or angry. My patience and kindness is towards you. I don't keep records of wrongs or right. I don't cause evil, instead I protect. I trust and my hope for you is founded on truth. I'll always persevere and will never fail you.

I find you and Beth both pleasing not because of your doing but because you are found in the pleasing One, Jesus. I invite you both to explore my grace towards you. It will be a journey of learning and unlearning many things. Come walk with me in freedom and discover who you already are in Jesus. Experience the beauty of true Spirit life.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Love Your Friend!

Daddy God

PS. To be continued.....