A Mother's Grace

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Preacher: Pastor Andrew

[0:00] Thanks, Caleb. Thank you, praise team.

It's great to be reminded again of why we exist.! We exist to be like Him. The purpose of this life, the Christian life, and why we come to church every Sunday isn't just to fill our heads with good information.
It's not just to enjoy the fellowship with God's people. It's not to enjoy the songs of those who are singing for us and families who are encouraging us.
To be comforted, to be encouraged. All those things are good things, but we exist to be like Jesus. We come because we want to know Him, so that when we leave this place, we can be more like Him, and I like the illustration, be imprinted, have His imprint on our life.
So that when we walk out of this place on a Sunday afternoon, and people see us in the community, wouldn't it be great for them to say, you look like somebody familiar?
[1:21] You look like Jesus. That's why we exist. So we can look like Him, so that He can get praise and glory, so that we can have an impact in this world, in this life, so we can lead people to the glory of God.

And that happens as people see Jesus show up in our life. I was reminded of a neat story. The story of Christine and Kyle.
They got married in the spring of 2007, and they held a wedding reception that was anything but traditional. They decided, what would it cost for us to invite all of our friends and family and all the people who are coming to this wedding?
What would it cost us to treat them to a reception? And let's use that money instead to treat the neighbors, the community, those who are poor and oppressed.
So in the weeks leading up to their wedding, they thought through this, and they decided, we're going to show Christ to the people in our community. We're going to show Christ in a tangible way by meeting a physical need.
[2:34] So, as soon as they said their I do's, and they kissed one another in an act of just helping to show the picture of this new relationship, they both dressed up in aprons, and one said groom, and one said bride, and they began to serve the people in their community.

Over a hundred neighbors and families came to participate in this celebration. And when asked about this charitable act, the happy couple simply said, we want to bless God for blessing us with each other.
We want to show Christ to our community. You know, there are a lot of ways that we can describe this. Maybe a lot of terms we could use to describe that act that they displayed, the things that they did.
Maybe you'd use the word kindness. Maybe you would use the word generosity. Maybe you would use the word extravagant goodness. But this morning I want to just concentrate on the word grace.
This morning we're going to talk about a mother's grace-filled ministry. A mother's grace-filled ministry. I love what the Bible does, and we saw an example of this this morning for our special music.
[3:53] The Bible often uses illustrations from nature and illustrations that are maybe a little unique to help drive home a point. The illustration of the aunt.

Go to the aunt, thou sluggard. Consider her ways and be wise. And this morning, what I'd like to do, I'd like to go to maybe a unique example of motherhood. We could go to Hannah.
We could go to a lot of mothers in the Old Testament. We could look at the mother of Christ. We could probably look at the mother and grandmother of Timothy. But this morning, I would like to look at the motherhood ministry of the Apostle Paul.

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A unique example of motherhood as he describes his ministry to the church of Thessalonica. This ministry, as he looks at moms and their tender care for their children, Paul describes his approach to ministry in a similar way.
So turn with me, if you would, to 1 Thessalonians 2. And we're going to look at this grace-filled ministry of moms. This morning, as we think about grace, I want to maybe provide a little different definition than maybe what you're used to.
[5:11] This morning, when we think about grace, and I would just encourage you to write this down. We'll keep coming back to it. But when I use the word grace, I want us to think about the favor of God on our lives that points to Christ.

Let me repeat that. The grace is the favor of God on our lives that points to Christ. I'd like to contend this morning that grace is more than just an attitude.
Grace is more than just a gift that you've received. I'd like to contend that grace is a divine working. An evidence of favor of God on your life.
That works its way out in power to the people around you. It points to the person of Christ. It points to him because it mimics his life.
That's why I appreciated the song this morning. It points to him because it's not natural, but supernatural. It's something that requires divine enablement to work itself out in our life.
[6:16] It points to him because it reflects his heart, his posture towards others, and his favor towards us. Grace is a spirit-enabled work that points to Christ, and it is the Spirit's job to produce grace in your life.

Like what Jesus says to his disciples in John 15. He says, That's what the Spirit does.
And so when the Spirit comes onto your life at conversion, the Spirit's grace produces a working out in your life. Just by way of continuing to help you with this definition, stay with me here.
In Acts chapter 4, 23. Don't have to turn there. Just listen. Acts 4, 32 and 33. Listen to this. This description of grace. Now that's an interesting use of that word.
That's not a common use of that word grace. Grace was upon them all. It was visible. It was noticeable. It showed up in a certain way. And Barnabas shows up to this church in Antioch, this fledgling church in Acts chapter 11, and it says the hand of the Lord was upon this church.
[8:01] And news got back to Jerusalem, and the church of Jerusalem sent leaders, sent Barnabas to help to encourage this church, and it says when he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all.

That's why I want to suggest this morning that grace is more than something that you experience. Grace really is the favor of God in your life, the divine favor of God in your life that points to Christ. Of course, grace points to the cross. We know that in Titus 2, 11, for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Certainly that is part of grace and experiencing God's grace. But I think that the favor of God in our lives that leads to spirit-empowered grace has something visible in mind. It's visible and transformational.
It's active in your life. It's God-exalting. It's spirit-activated and spirit-enabled. And so this morning, I think that moms have a way of showing grace, don't they?
[9:14] Especially moms who are believers. They have this spirit-activated and enabled grace that flows out of their life and flows into the hearts and lives of those in their family whom they love.

We looked at the first chapter a couple of weeks ago, and this morning I want to take a look at chapter 2, and I want to concentrate our attention on verses 7 and 8. But to kind of build this context and help catch us up to where we are, let me just read the first eight verses of chapter 2.
So 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 1 to 8. If you're visiting with us this morning and you need a pew Bible in front of you, it's on page 986.
It says this, For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and had been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.
For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God, who tests our hearts.
[10:34] For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed, God as witness. Nor did we see glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

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But we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.
So as we look at this ministry of the Apostle Paul to this church of Thessalonica, I want to take away from this, not only as moms today in this room, an encouragement for how to be a grace-filled mother, but each of us in this room can have a mom-like ministry to not only the people in your family, the people in this church, but also the people in your workplace, the people in your school, the people in your community.
Wherever God places you, in whatever context you're in, you are called to have a grace-filled ministry, a mom-like ministry. So there are some components, some qualities of this ministry I want to focus on this morning.
First, I want us to notice that this is a ministry of gentleness. A ministry of gentleness. If we want to have a grace-filled ministry, it will be characterized by gentleness.
[12:11] Notice here, right at the very beginning of verse 7, it says, but we were gentle among you. Gentle among you. Not abusive, not harsh, not self-serving.

It's actually the Greek word for infant. The Greek word for baby. It's only used in this couple times here throughout the scripture.
And Paul is trying to uphold the tenderness and the innocence of this kind of ministry. It was gentle in approach. And here at the very beginning of this verse, we were gentle among you.
Notice that first word, but is a contrastive which points you back to the previous verses to help describe more what gentleness means and how gentleness played out in Paul's ministry to them.
If you go back to verse 5, you'll see we didn't come with flattery. We didn't have ulterior motives. We weren't looking for your money. And then in verse 6, he says, nor did we seek glory from people.
[13:18] We weren't looking for any attention, fame or notoriety. We weren't interested in making a name for ourselves. Also in verse 6, nor did we make demands.

We didn't exercise our rightful authority. We didn't come to you with a posture of authority and control. We weren't trying to manipulate you in any way. We were authentic and sincere.
We were gentle, just like a little baby, innocent, like a little baby among you. Our aim was to emulate the good shepherd that we loved with care and sensitivity and tenderness to be true of him.
We also need to let this be true of ourselves. If we want to point to our Savior, we need to emulate his character. This is remarkable considering the fact of where the Apostle Paul came from.
When you think about how often or the specific seasons of life where your emotions are a little raw, you're maybe a little sharp with people around you.
[14:31] I know that none of you have ever experienced that. Where maybe someone pushes a button and there's a flash of emotion, this response from you.

When does that happen? Doesn't that happen when you're feeling under pressure? Doesn't that happen when you're feeling taken advantage of? Doesn't that happen when your emotions are a bit raw and you're experiencing something that's overwhelming and the pressure is on?
This is extraordinary ministry when you consider where Paul came from. Looking back to the earlier parts of this chapter, what do we know about the context of this ministry that Paul had to this church of Thessalonica?
Where did he come from? He came from Philippi. Do you remember what happened in Philippi? Do you remember the persecution that he experienced in Philippi?
Do you remember the abuse that was leveled on him in Philippi? The rods and the jail cell and the stocks?
[15:44] And yet, here he is immediately from Philippi showing gentleness. That is a mark of grace.

That is a mark of the favor of God, the power of God on his life to be able to help him to have this kind of ministry. This grace-filled, mother-like ministry to this church of Thessalonica that was tender and innocent and gentle with them.
When we're going through difficulties, that's when it's hardest to be gentle. And yet, here we find Paul as an example of gentleness to this group of individuals.
He was not only gentle, but we see he was like a mother in that he was nurturing and tender. It says, we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

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This is the word for nourish. And any of you with children know the challenges of the first several months. When you bring that baby home, you know, it's so sweet and it's so nice to have that little package that you kind of put to bed at night and you swaddle and you cuddle and for the first couple of nights, the waking up in the middle of the evening with those cries, you know, you can deal with that.
[17:11] But then when days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months, the ministry to that little bundle of joy isn't so joyful anymore.

And yet, the Apostle Paul, when talking about this, he's lifting up this example of this nurturing mother. Mothers have a way, unlike dads, at least unlike this dad, mothers have a way of building into their children.
My wife was particularly adept at this. The cries in the middle of the night and yet, getting up out of bed, taking care of whatever the issues were, whether it was a feeding issue, whether it was a diaper issue, whatever the issue was, just encouraging and helping that little package.
That's what Paul is talking about. It was the kind of mom-like ministry that expended self for the sake of the needs of this little one.
The Apostle Paul had a heart connection with this church. We'll see that more as we go. He was delicate with them. His words were soft to them. He poured himself out in terms of grace for this church.
[18:31] Now, we would expect that to be true for those who love God. We would expect it to be true for anyone who is enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness as a way to show Christ in your life. The favor of God on your life shows up through gentleness.
This grace-filled ministry that you can have with those around you as you are gentle with them, as you are tender with them, as your words, a soft answer, turns away wrath, as your words show Christ in His gentleness, in His forgiveness, in His compassion for those around you.
Is the fruit of the Spirit showing up, the favor of God on your life showing up through gentleness, through kindness, through concern for those around you?
It points to God when we act this way. those who do this are bearing forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit living in their life. And when that happens, God gets glory because it points to Christ.
[19:56] It points to something otherly, something that is not natural, something that comes from above, something that is fanning the flames in your own heart and life to do what you could not do without the Lord.

It is the kind of gentleness and graciousness that marks the life of a believer. But this kind of grace, grace, and this kind of gentleness cannot happen for the long term unless there's something substantial, something deeper, something motivating and helping to spur it on.
And that's where we find ourselves in verse 8. There was something that helped the Apostle Paul do this for the long haul, to overcome the adversity. We find that here in verse 8 where he says, so being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves.
I want to concentrate on the first part of that verse. Affectionately desirous of them, sharing with them the gospel of God. The power that upholds grace-giving and gentleness is gospel affection.
A ministry of gospel affection. The message of God was central to Paul's ministry. So affectionately longing for you.
[21:27] This is used often in the vernacular of the Greek to describe those who had just lost their children. those who had parted ways and for whatever reason their child had died and the grieving heart this affectionately longing for their child is expressed through this term.

This is how Apostle Paul felt towards this church. This deep affection and longing and care for this church. And he says, we gave you what was what would lead to ultimate joy.
We gave you the gospel. I've not yet personally known the loss of a child. Maybe some of you have. And so you know the aching in your heart when that takes place.
But several years ago when our youngest was a year and a half my wife and I were away and we came home to find out that our youngest son had decided he was going to go out on his own to find mommy and daddy.

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and fortunately he crossed the street somebody found him brought him back to the house knocked in the door and totally unaware that he would be missing.
[22:49] And letting the gravity of that situation land on my own heart I realized what could have been. A son that would have been no longer with the family maybe taken maybe killed in crossing that street and I felt a glimpse of maybe what Paul is trying to describe here.

This deep longing and affection for this church but it led him not just to caring for them it led him to giving them what was ultimate. And what was ultimate was Christ.
What was ultimate was the gospel. He gave to them what was best. He gave to them the gospel of God. All throughout this chapter we've already seen examples of him lifting up God for this church. In verse 2 he talks about boldness in God. In verse 2 he talks about the gospel of God. In verse 4 he talks about being approved of God. He also talks about being pleasing to God in verse 4.
A God who tests. And then in verse 5 a God as witness. And in verse 6 apostles of Christ. And in verse 8 gospel of God. Do you get the idea that Paul was concerned about God?
[23:59] God? And that he lifts up God in his conversation with this church? So even though they were a fledgling church, a new group of believers, he cared about them having what was best.

He cared about them having the gospel of God. Which is more than just the gospel of salvation. It's about the gospel of how Jesus rescues you and changes you and delivers you from every day. the brokenness, the sorrow, the sinfulness, the depravity of life. God came to rescue you from that. To redeem families, to redeem communities, to redeem churches for himself and people. He came to save, yes, for heaven, but he also came to redeem the things of this life.
And 15 times throughout this book, we see the apostle Paul talking about just as you know. Even though he had only been there for three Sabbaths, it was clear they knew the doctrines that he was teaching to them.
[25:05] It was nothing new. And this true affection for this people showed up in his gospel affection for them, teaching them what was ultimate, teaching them about Christ.

This gospel affection and gospel message must be accompanied by a gospel life. And that's where we go next. It says, we not only gave you the gospel of God, but also our own selves.
We gave you ourselves. It was a ministry of giving. We can give the gospel, but if it's not accompanied by expressions of love, if it's not accompanied by a look at the Savior, then it will be greatly lacking in substance.
We gave you, he says, our own souls. Literally, that's what it means. We gave you our own souls. Besides imparting the complete gospel, they shared their own lives.
Literally, they gave up their souls. They're real inner beings for the sake of the Thessalonians. there was nothing superficial about the sacrificial love that they showed to this church.
[26:27] Who knows how that showed up in terms of the actual ministry, maybe in terms of transparency, just being candid with where they were as people, how they felt, the Apostle Paul and Titus and Timothy who were there, and Silas who were there, just expressing their own hearts, their own struggles, the challenges of life.

Maybe there was that transparency, but also there's this self-sacrificing love that we see. Paul talks about becoming all things to all men that he might win some.
The Apostle Paul certainly was willing to set aside his own personal convictions, maybe setting aside his own preferences perhaps so that he could accommodate himself to this church, so he could love them truly and lead them to the place of knowing what was really important, leading them to Christ.
It's a risky love, risks being taken advantage of. It risks being used up. It risks never being the focus of conversation.
It risks being the servant and never the leader. It risks never getting the prominent role but filling roles where there is a need. The Apostle Paul was willing to give of himself to his people.
[27:50] Certainly he was willing in Philippi to give as much as his body for them, to be persecuted and broken and harmed in a physical way. And here he is again showing up in Thessalonica and he faces the same kind of opposition.

There was risk involved in him bringing the gospel and the Apostle Paul was willing to give himself for them. in verse 18 we see this affection that he has for this church.
It shows up and his concern for them, what will happen to this fledgling church? Will they fall away because of the opposition that they're experiencing? Find in verse 18 he says, we wanted to come

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to you again and again but Satan hindered us.
And notice this, but what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and our joy.
Chapter 3, verse 8, verse 7, for this reason brothers in all of our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.
[29:07] For now we live in if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what is our thanksgiving? For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you? For all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God.

This was a man who had gospel affection and gave himself for this church and he feels joy in the midst of affliction and persecution because he's seeing the progress of the gospel in their lives. we are experiencing hardship Paul says but we couldn't be happier. We couldn't be happier because we see what God is doing in your life and it makes us full of joy.
Let me say that is a grace filled ministry. Most of our ministry on the surface is a ministry that we tend to do is the ministry that brings attention to self.
We have to work and God has to work that out of us over time. But Paul certainly had a ministry that was willing to give. A ministry like his Savior who was expending self for others.
[30:23] How do we do this? How is this really achieved? It's achieved by understanding that our ministry isn't to people as much as our ministry is to God.

He says that here earlier in this chapter we read this as well. It says at the end of verse 4 so we speak not to please man but to please God who tests our hearts.
That's the key to having this kind of giving ministry. This kind of grace ministry is recognizing that your ministry is to the Lord and not to men.
That's a stabilizing force for us. I like what one commentator says. He says a gospel messenger who stands detached from his audience has not yet been touched by the very gospel he proclaims. Has the ministry of the gospel God's grace to you affected you personally? If it's affected you personally it will work its way out in grace filled ministry in giving to others.
[31:34] But even our self-giving however good it might be needs to be dominated by this next component this last component that we'll see this component of love.

It needs to be a ministry of genuine love. Like how Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 13 3 he says if I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love I gain nothing.
You can be gentle you can bring the gospel message you can give of yourself but if all of those things are not accompanied by love the apostle Paul says through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it amounts to nothing.
So grace-filled ministry will also be a ministry of genuine love. And quickly as we wrap this up I want to point your attention to a couple things.
First I want you to see this emotional connection. There was sincere emotion and care for this group of believers. He actually cared for them.
[32:51] He didn't just say I love you. There was this affection that comes out in his letter to them. He calls them very dear. He says that here at the end of verse 8 because you had become very dear to us.

Now I don't know if you follow the apostle Paul much but when I think and look at the ministry of Paul I don't think of somebody who's tender. I think of somebody who's a truth teller somebody who's bold somebody who's courageous who says it as it is but he was tender.
He had this emotional connection with the churches that he ministered to. He calls them very dear. It was also a ministry that pointed to Christ because it emulated his love.
This favor of God was on him as he emulates Christ's love for this church. for honest with ourselves the reason why so much of our ministry fails is because we miss this component.
I believe we need to pray for God's help. Make me help me love this people. Help me love my family.
[34:09] Help me love my co-workers my boss my community. Lord I'm praying for them by name. Specific individuals. Lord be with my neighbor Melvin next door.

Speak to his heart. Minister to him the grace of God. Work in his life to open his eyes to the wonder of the gospel.
And every neighbor that you have in your community I hope you're praying for them by name. God is building in you this gospel affection. This gospel care.

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This genuine love. Maybe you've heard it said I love him. I love her. But I don't like her. Ever heard that?
I don't believe this is consistent with the scripture. I don't believe this should be true of any believer. those who love Christ must love his church.
[35:18] Those who have experienced the love of God in their life need to be those who convey love. And not just show love but feel love.

Jesus is moved with compassion in his ministry. He is impelled to serve the people around him because he has a heart connection with them.
The apostle John puts it this way in 1 John 4 20 says if someone says I love God and hates his brother he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen how can he love God whom he has not seen?
And this commandment we have from him that he who loves God must love his brother also. You find that there are some people in the church that you spot them across the room and you find another way to go.
Pray that God helps work genuine love into your life to extend kindness to extend peace to overcome whatever conflict might be there so the love of God might flow through you and this mom-like grace-filled ministry might be the hallmark of your life.
[36:35] But notice too the endearing terms that Paul uses of this church. He uses words that express this emotion that he feels.

What I like about Paul is that these emotions were not just felt but they were expressed. It's, you know, you've heard of the example of a wife says, does your husband love you?
And she says, I think so. He's never told me. There's something about expressing and conveying love for the people around you. Telling them how you feel.
There's a measure of humility in that, isn't there? And Paul was willing to humble himself and express this emotional love, this emotional connection, this genuine affection he had for these people.
He uses the words brothers a number of times, 20 times throughout this letter. He talks about giving thanks for them. He talks about being affectionately desires for them.
[37:34] We just saw that. He says in 2.20, you are our joy and our glory. In 3.9, he says, what thanksgiving can we return to God for you? He expresses his heart in love for them and he expresses and conveys it in significant ways throughout this letter.

Why was this important? I think it was important for a couple of reasons. But I think one of those reasons is that when Paul had to leave Thessalonica, the critics came and said, see, where's your leader now?
He abandoned you. He doesn't care about your situation. So Paul, in reinforcing his love for this church, is putting it front and center so they can be secure in knowing not only his love for them but also God's love for them.
So I wonder this morning for us, as we draw this to a close, what can we learn this morning of about a mother's grace-filled ministry?
I think it needs to be representative of every one of us who call ourselves believers. It needs to be true of us because a grace-filled ministry is not only how we show the Spirit in our life but it's how we show Christ in our life.
[38:53] We've been studying through John. You go back to John chapter 1, 14 and talks about the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It talks about that he was full of what, church?

Grace and truth. Interestingly, a couple of verses later, in chapter 2 of Thessalonians, Paul talks about a truth-filled, father-like ministry.
They're both here. But do we have that first component down? Are we a grace-filled church?
I think it needs to play out in a couple of ways. First, it needs to play out in how we act, in modeling grace for those around us. It's not only a fruit of the Spirit, this gentleness that needs to come out in our life but it's a way for us to show Christ to our community.
Is this component of grace playing out in your life? Are you modeling grace for those around you? Maybe think about an experience this past week where perhaps a situation where you should have conveyed grace but your nerves were a little frazzled and grace didn't show up?
[40:16] praying that God would help you be a person of grace. Think about that co-worker. That person that you work with day after day after day and they continue to grind on you and here's an

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opportunity for you to show Christ by showing grace.

Or how about that neighbor? Nothing seems to be right with that neighbor. No matter how hard you try, get in your lawn mowed, get in your trees trimmed, whatever it is that that neighbor has a hard time with and just continues to grind on your relationship.
You can't have anything good to think about that individual. Model grace for that neighbor. An opportunity for you to model grace.
So modeling grace and secondly asking for grace. maybe this past week, maybe this last month, there have been situations where you know that grace hasn't been a part of your response.
And there's somebody, maybe in your family, somebody, wherever they might be, that even as I'm speaking right now, that situation just boom, flashes in your mind and you need to ask for their grace because of your lack of grace.
[41:41] use this opportunity to model grace by asking for forgiveness and letting grace flow in your relationships.

This last picture I'd like to show you, I'd like to introduce to you the Steins family. This is Graham, his wife Gladys, Esther, Philip who is 10, and Timothy who is 6.
Missionaries to Arissa, India. In January of 1999, Graham Steins and his two boys were harassed by Hindu extremists, their car was set on fire, and they were burned alive in the back of this car. They found the remains of a father holding his two boys, these charred remains. And the wonder was what will mom do?
How will daughter respond? What will Gladys and Esther, how will they respond to this situation? Gladys and her daughter showed a grace-filled ministry.
[42:58] Gladys says, I have only one message for the people of India. I'm not bitter, neither am I angry, but I have one great desire, that each citizen of this country should establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who gave his life for their sins.

Let us burn hatred and spread the flame of Christ's love. Daughter Esther says this, asked how she felt about her dad being murdered and her 13-year-old brother saying, I praise the Lord that he found my father worthy to die for him.
Are we modeling a grace-filled ministry? Are we showing Christ to the people around us? Is the favor of God marking your life and pointing to him?
That's the challenge. might Christ show up in you as he is showing grace through you this week. Let's pray. Let's pray.

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