

INTERLUDE – Brandi Holness

The Valley of Amazing Grace

I opened my eyes one morning to the beautiful, bright sun beaming through the balcony door of my bedroom. Trying to peer through the sun's rays with one eye open, I thought to myself *Where am I?* After driving nearly thirteen hours from New York with my husband and his family and falling fast asleep, I woke up not immediately realizing where I was. After overhearing a phone conversation between my husband and mother-in-law about our excursions for the day, I was reminded that I was in the beautiful, Smoky Mountains of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, for our yearly family vacation. Then it hit me: I had awakened on top of a mountain. I stepped onto the balcony to see a beautiful sight. As I took a deep breath and inhaled the fresh air, I closed my eyes and felt peace. Free is what I felt, almost as if it were possible to fly. I opened my eyes and stared in amazement at the breathtaking sight of mountain peaks touching an endless open sky.

As I reflect on my life, it has occurred to me that the beginning of my voyage was similar to being on top of a mountain. Before graduating, I gazed at what looked like a bright future with possibilities as endless as the sky. I was so happy that I felt like I could fly. Having both love and support from those closest to me, I had peace. I had everything I needed and some of what I wanted. However, as I continued on the journey, the future I had imagined no longer looked as bright. Instead, it grew dark as I experienced many forms of rejection and the disappointment of plans not going as I had hoped or expected. I went from the top of the mountain into a deep, dark valley. Nevertheless, it was in the valley, during some of the darkest moments of my life, that I discovered pure beauty and

the essence of God's character, known as **grace**. I believe this is what He will do for you, too. Yes, we're taking a grace break—right in the middle of the valley.

Paul states in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (*KJV*). When I think of grace, a song I grew up singing, "Amazing Grace," comes to mind. However, when I was young, I had no idea what grace really meant. It wasn't until God moved me to New York that I experienced my first valley and came to know what amazing grace truly looks like. First, let's take a look at what a valley is and what it has to do with grace.

A valley is land that is positioned between two mountains. There is a mountain on one side and another mountain on the other. When we are in the valley, we can have peace in knowing that we won't be there forever because there is a mountaintop that awaits us on either side. However, in order to get there, we must go through the valley, but we are never alone.

Remember what David wrote in his most famous Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4, *KJV*). Whom was David referring to when he said "thou art with me"? I believe you know. He is with us now, as He has always been, as we go through the valley. Yes, it's Jesus. In fact, **Jesus is grace** and the guiding light Who will lead us through the valley to the other side. Through His amazing grace, we will overcome and reach our mountaintop.

The Bible also says that Jesus is the Lily of the Valley. Just like a white lily, Jesus is pure. Lilies are considered one of the most beautiful flowers. Endowed with a low

drooping head, lilies represent humility, a characteristic of Jesus. Lilies also have medicinal, healing benefits. Through Jesus' finished work on the cross, we are able to be not only physically healed but also mentally and emotionally healed while going through the valley. What a great Companion to have with us, taking us from the valley of rejection to the mountaintop! However, God did not allow this Companion to accompany us without a well-stacked résumé.

God loved us so much that He allowed His Son to experience the ultimate form of rejection for our sake. Since Jesus experienced every possible form of rejection, He is truly able to understand, more than anyone, the pain we feel. Because He thoroughly understands us, He knows exactly what is needed in order for us to overcome the pain or the valley we are in. Jesus will hold your hand and walk with you through the valley. There is nothing more special than having a compassionate, understanding friend to help us through our trials. This is why we can find beauty in the valley. Just like the lily, He is absolutely beautiful.

Do yourself a favor; reflect on God's grace and its beauty in your life. It may look like many things:

His grace may look like the sunrise.

It may look like a newborn baby.

It may look like a wedding or an engagement ring.

It may look like comfort in a time of sorrow.

It may look like the answer to a long-awaited prayer.

It may look like help in a time of testing.

It may look like the test itself.

It may look like a broken family that has been mended.

It may look like healing from sickness.

It may even look like a stranger.

You can make it through whatever trial you are facing today, with His grace. If you are waiting to see a promise from God, by His grace, you will. You may feel like you have no more strength, but His grace is your strength. Ask Him for it today. As a matter of fact, ask Him to help you recognize His grace, because He's already freely given it to you. Remember that with Him it is possible to make it through no matter what it is you're facing because you don't have to do it alone. He will always be there with you, spreading His beauty all around.

Thank you, Jesus, for your grace. You are beautiful and absolutely amazing.