Garland of Grace

By Judith Bacon Connell
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garland of Grace</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Love</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Faith</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Hope</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Truth/Justice</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Peace</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Joy</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Meekness</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Patience</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Mercy</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Tenderness/Gentleness</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Generosity/Kindness</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blossoms of Praise</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Forward

This book is based on devotionals written by Judith before her marriage and published in various issues of God’s Word for Today, dated from the 1980s to the early 1990s. A quarterly booklet, God’s Word for Today is published by the Church School Literature Department of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, in Springfield, MO. They purchased first rights to Miss Bacon’s submissions.

In the past few years, Judith has revised and rewritten some of the devotionals, plus has written new copy for her book Garland of Grace. She dedicates this book to her wonderful husband, Howard Connell, who has allowed her the time needed to work on this devotional.

Scripture quotes are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted. NIV refers to the New International Version. NAS refers to New American Standard Bible.
The first time I discovered the biblical phrase "garland of grace," I immediately visualized a lei. My infatuation with garlands in the form of leis goes back further than I can remember. It seems as if I've always been intrigued with the custom of using leis to show welcome. That image of a "garland of grace" remained with me for years and grew into the concept for this devotional book. I found the expression twice in Proverbs. The giver of the garland is wisdom or a father's instruction and mother's teaching. These will adorn as a crown and a necklace.

"She [wisdom] will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor" (Proverbs 4:9, NIV).

"They [father's instruction and mother's teaching] will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck" (Proverbs 1:9, NIV).

The New American Standard version calls the crown one of beauty:

"She [wisdom] will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty" (Proverbs 4:9, NAS).

In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Apostle Paul writes that people strive in this life to receive a "perishable wreath," but believers strive for an imperishable one. The perishable wreath, placed upon a winner's head, was a garland of leaves from the sacred olive tree. It was a temporal reward that will crumble and decay.

The orchids in fresh Hawaiian leis will soon die. They are beautiful for a few days or hours; then they are gone. The euphoria they create will vanish just like so many other rewards received on earth. The blossoms in God's garland will not wilt and die. His garland will last forever. The blossoms of love, faith, hope, truth, peace, joy, meekness, patience, mercy, tenderness, generosity, and praise are qualities of eternal value.
A life adorned with God's garland of grace spreads a sweet fragrance of a Christ-like spirit. It all begins when one seeks out God's wisdom and follows the wise instructions and teachings of godly parents or mentors.

As you read the following devotionals, may you begin to discover the beauty of God's garland of grace for you. Picture yourself picking the various blossoms for the garland God will create for you as you learn to accept His wisdom and grace.
Blossoms
Of
Love
God’s Love

God’s love — I cannot comprehend
its depth, its width,
its victory over sin.
Where can I go to escape
such consuming love?
There is no place to hide.
His love encompasses everything
from mountain peak
to ocean tide.
It’s strong as steel,
yet gentle as can be —
This amazing, wonderful,
eternal love.
It reaches to the highest height;
it expands the widest sea,
reaching to its deepest depths
to save such a one as me.

— Judith Bacon Connell
Blossoms of Love

Love, Love, Love — the promise of physical love is used to sell everything from luxury vacations to deodorant soap. This type of love, however, springs up quickly only to shortly fade away. How does lasting love grow?

Lasting love grows in the heart of an expectant mother, who feels signs of new life within her womb. It grows in the heart of a father as his large hand swallows the tiny hand of a toddler, full of trust and wonder. Love grows in the heart of a young man tracing the delicate lines of his sweetheart's face in his mind's eye as he thinks about being with her again.

You can observe signs of love budding among young friends as arm-in-arm, hand-in-hand, they vow to be friends forever. You can see love's mature blooms in the exchanged glances of elderly couples. They have survived hostile elements that have destroyed the tender love of others.

Humanity longs for pure, lasting love — a love that can only come from God. The greatest blossom of love came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ, God's Son.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This well-known verse contains the essence of pure, unfailing love. A person can offer no greater love than that of laying down his life for a friend; but "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).
Although April represents a time of concentration on taxes, every day brings little annoying reminders of the government's insatiable thirst for revenue. The ordinary citizen wonders about government waste. Where does all the money go? Why can't the government balance its budget?

Twenty-First Century citizens are not the first to fret about the government. The Apostle Paul challenged the believers in Rome regarding their attitudes toward the government. Perhaps some of the Christians thought their allegiance belonged only to God, the higher power. Paul reminded the believers that God put the rulers in positions of power. Their God-given responsibility was to enforce local laws and protect the people.

There is a tendency for drivers to slow down when ever they noticed a police car behind them; however, law-abiding citizens should not fear if they are obeying traffic laws. The officers are instruments of God's grace. Law and order come from God. He established the Ten Commandments. God is still in the law and order business. Paul reminded the Roman believers that taxes are the vehicle used to support government. God expects His people to obey laws and pay their taxes. Paul did not stop there. He presented a nobler way of fulfilling God's law and man's laws.

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

Think about it. If you love someone you will not steal from that person or be unfaithful to your relationship or kill that person. Christ condensed the Ten Commandments into two principles: Love the Lord with everything you have inside you and love your neighbor with the same concern as you have for yourself. Christ broadened the concept of neighbor to any needing help.

Christ is our example of genuine love. He loved us beyond measure, giving up His life so that we might live. Christ is God's higher law of love.
Jonathan, the son of the reigning King Saul, had every reason to dislike David. As the anointed king of Israel, David would reign instead of Jonathan, the logical successor to the throne. Rather than becoming enemies, Jonathan and David became close friends.

David's choice of best friend saved his life. Even after jealousy caused King Saul to turn against David, Jonathan remained steadfast and loyal to his friend without turning against his own father. It must have torn him apart inside. Jonathan loved both Saul and David; however, Jonathan apparently recognized God's anointing on the life of David and accepted the fact that God had chosen David to be king instead of himself. The two young men made a pact between them. They would be loyal to each other no matter what. When David challenged his friend on his loyalty, Jonathan answered,

"Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee?" (1 Samuel 20:9).

When Saul sought to kill David, Jonathan informed his friend of the devilish plan. He was risking the wrath of his father if the kindness was ever discovered. David's closest friend thus saved David's life.

Friends with such a selfless spirit are difficult to find. The rewards of discovering a friend like Jonathan will last a lifetime. Do you ever seek out the friendship of certain people because they can help further your ambitions? Jonathan was a true friend who was more concerned with David's welfare than his own career.

People today can miss out on close relationships if they listen to a twisted society that forces a suspicious nature on them. Each of us needs close friendships: Friends who will listen to our ideas, dreams, and fears; special friends who accept us as we are, without question.
A favorite home decoration in the past and recent years is the decorative wreath. I've enjoyed gathering grapevines and making a variety of wreaths for myself and for gifts. One autumn while home for a long weekend, I joined my older sister and a few others at her son's home. Wild grapes grew along the edge of his country property. Several of us pulled the vines from their home among the tree branches. Slowly we began to bend the vines into wreaths of various sizes. Those branches too brittle for bending were cast aside. Others were woven into circles which we could decorate with flowers and ribbons. As we worked, we had to make sure we chose grapevines and not the vines of poison ivy that grew nearby.

Jesus used the grapevine to teach His disciples a lesson about love. He told them that the vine represented Himself and that the branches represented them. He reminded His followers that the branches could not bear fruit if they were not connected to the vine. The vine gives the branches life. Jesus said:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Jesus then told His disciples that He loved them with the same love that God the Father loved Him. The challenge to the disciples was that they should live in Christ's love. How were they to do that? The disciples were to keep Christ's commandments. To put it in simpler terms, they were to do only those things that pleased God. They were not to aggravate God with their disobedience.

One commandment Jesus gave His disciples was "love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). That means our love extends to the relatives and friends of the person loved. Those might not be our favorite people, but because our loved one cares about them, we also care.
Love Gone Crazy

2 Samuel 13:1-39

In 1994 it seemed as if an epidemic broke out of husbands facing trials for killing their wives. During a few weeks' time, reports featured professionals (a doctor), a sports celebrity, and a blue collar worker accused of killing their spouses. Along with the shock of a sports hero's arrest, came a greater focus on the problem of spousal abuse. How can marital relationships supposedly founded on mutual love, go so awry?

The story about Amnon, a son of King David, may give a little insight. Ammon could have asked his father for Tamar's hand in marriage, but he didn't. Maybe he was afraid the king wouldn't approve his thoughts towards his half-sister. Ammon wanted the love of Tamar. He sulked and lusted and made himself sick with misery. Tamar seemed to be out of his reach.

A friend noticed Amnon's despair. When the prince confided in him, the two devised a plan to gain the young woman's attention through deceit. Ammon, pretending to be deathly ill, requested that the king allow Tamar to nurse him back to health. When Tamar recognized the trap she had stepped into, she tried to reason with Amnon. No amount of pleading could calm him. His lust and desires took control. Amnon's passions had gone crazy. The king's son raped his half-sister. Then as strong as his desire had been a moment before, his emotions turned to rage.

"Ammon hated her exceedingly: so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her"
(2 Samuel 13:15).

Amnon is a reminder that we can never regulate another's love for us. Genuine love gives freely without being coerced. There is no satisfaction in forcing someone to say, "I love you." Because Amnon did not reign in his passion, he ruined the life of the person he thought he loved. True love would have sought to protect and cherish. Deceit kills love.
Ultimate Love

1 John 3:1-24

People today seem to expect the ultimate in all that they do and buy. They want the ultimate in thrills as they ride the newest amusement park rides. The merry-go-round is not enough to satisfy their appetite to be scared out of their wits. They crave the thrill of being turned upside down and around and around at faster and faster speeds.

For some a compact car is not sufficient for transportation needs. They want the ultimate in luxury and power. Adults, teenagers, and children alike demand the ultimate in fashion. Sports shoes must be endorsed by the current sports hero. Clothing must have designer labels. People seek out the ultimate politicians and managers to lead them. How disappointing when the old problems are not instantly solved.

In this world the seemingly ultimate fades with time. Fashions and styles and ideals are ever changing in the attempt to be bigger and better and more beautiful than ever. No matter how much a person accumulates of this world's goods, it is never quite enough. The high ideals of perfect relationships disintegrate as people seek the ultimate bond of intimacy. Such disappointment comes because people seek for the ultimate in the wrong places. There is only one ultimate person who can satisfy the emptiness of self-seeking people. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Giver of the ultimate in love. The Apostle John wrote in his first epistle:

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1).

Think about it. God the Father allowed His Son to suffer the humiliation of the cross so that we could become God's children. God loved us, His creation, that much. This ultimate love is what compels believers to love one another. This love is what should set believers apart from sinners.
Blossoms
Of
Faith

Garland of Grace
Faith for All Time

Faith sufficient for my day
   what more could I ask.
Faith for health, for sustenance —
   it is within my grasp.
The past provides a picture clear
   of all God's great provision.
It is faith in God and God alone
   that gives me greater vision.

— Judith Bacon Connell
Blossoms of Faith

What is your measure of faith? Everyone has one. It is built into the fabric of human nature. We cannot survive in this life without some measure of faith. What is true in the natural is also true in the spiritual. Faith is a lifeline to the throne of God. Where does faith come from? God provides each of us with the capacity to believe in things, ideas, people, but especially in Himself.

A good example of strong faith is that of David, Israel's second king. The Prophet Samuel anointed David, the young shepherd boy, as king to replace Saul. By faith, as a youth, David faced the giant Goliath and fought the Philistines. Although the music of David soothed the troubled Saul, this reigning king turned against David and pursued him relentlessly. David hid out in caves, mountains, and other countries. Later during David's reign as king, his own son plotted against him. David's faith was undaunted.

During these times, David could say:

"The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence" (2 Samuel 22:3).

David acknowledged his belief in the Provider of his salvation. He had reason to rejoice for God had proven Himself faithful during times of persecution. His faith was in something solid — rock solid.

"The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation" (2 Samuel 22:47).

David was not thinking of a small pebble. He was thinking of a large, unmovable boulder, like the Rock of Gibraltar. One would think that faith would blossom during times of blessing and prosperity. It usually does not. Strong, unyielding faith needs the hard times in order to develop strong roots into the vastness of God's supply of living Water.
Faith to Meet the Challenge

Exodus 14:5-31

Have you ever watched a trapezist somersault through the air to be caught by another swinging upside down? Great nerves, you might think, but that's not for me. You may enjoy the acrobatics of a gymnast on a balance beam. Imagine yourself leaping down the length of that four-inch wide board raised several feet above the ground. Does the thought panic you? Whatever activity most impresses you, all have a common element necessary to be successful. They need confidence and strong faith. Lion tamer or mountain climber also need this element. This faith lets them accomplish feats that the average person would not attempt.

Confidence and faith in self and others can result in amazing feats; however, they can also bring disappointments. People can fail and equipment can fail, but there is One who never fails. That is God.

Moses reminded the Children of Israel that they belonged to the Lord God. This great leader focused on the power of God rather than the present circumstances which seemed so impossible: The Egyptian army closing in on the camp, cliffs on both sides, and the Red Sea before the camp. The Children of Israel panicked. They blamed Moses for their plight. It took a special faith for Moses to face the people. He told them to stand still and see how God would bring about their salvation. What great faith God gave Moses. Moses exercised this faith when he held out his rod before the Red Sea to divide it. This same action returned the sea to normal. The Egyptian army perished in the waves that swept over them.

"Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).

God gives faith equal to the circumstances His children face. No matter your situation or station in life, you can come with faith to God knowing that He rewards those who believe in Him. Nothing is too difficult for God.
An Illuminating Light

John 3:1-21

Darkness has no weapon against light. How quickly darkness is dispelled when a single candle is lit. Candle lighting services at Christmas or during other special occasions demonstrate the effectiveness of shared light. First one candle then another is lit, until the whole room is illuminated. Christ, the Light of the World, commanded believers to let their light shine before unbelievers. Such light points to the Source of Light.

Light reveals while darkness hides. Walk into a semi dark room and all appears to be fine. Fine that is until you trip on something or run into some furniture. Turn on a flashlight or small lamp and the disorder is recognized. Turn on an overhead light and dust may be seen on tables and smudges and fingerprints on mirrors. Light stretches out over the room and reveals everything in its path. Darkness must flee. It cannot survive light.

Nicodemus approached Jesus during the night. He was a religious ruler, a member of the powerful Sanhedrin. Nicodemus had come to question Christ. He acknowledged that Jesus was sent from God and had performed miracles. This religious ruler did not realize that Christ, the Light of the World, could give him something even greater. The Light shone upon the heart of Nicodemus and revealed the ruler's sinfulness. At the same time, the Light revealed God's love and mercy. Salvation was available to Nicodemus just for the believing.

Everyone faces a choice between darkness and sin or light and righteousness. Darkness is all around; but, through faith in Christ, the light can shine and dispel the darkness. A part of Christ's message to Nicodemus was:

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).
Grafted into God's Family Tree

Romans 11:11-24

Many years ago I created family tree books for my parents and family. Although updated there are now new members to include in its pages. The artwork of a tree at the beginning of the book cannot contain new limbs that need to be grafted in among its branches. Unlike the branches I created in my family tree book, I witnessed a special tree when I visited a friend's family. The large orchards on this farm were in full bloom. An old gnarled apple tree grew near the house. My friend's father explained how during the past he grafted several types of fruit onto the old tree. Through his expert care, he added value to the old tree.

In his epistle to the Romans, Apostle Paul discussed a spiritual grafting process. Israel was like an old gnarled olive tree that God had planted and cultivated over the centuries. The Gentiles were like wild olives. Unbelief hindered Israel from producing acceptable fruit for God. In order to bring new life to the olive tree, His chosen people, God decided to break off some of the natural branches and graft in the wild olive branches. This was good news for the Gentiles. It still is.

In case the Roman believers became too cocky in their new position as a grafted branch, Paul cautioned them. Their strength did not come from themselves, it came from the roots of the original olive tree. They had no reason to boast that they were better than the natural branches.

"Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee (Romans 11:21).

God has made a place for us in His spiritual olive tree. We must recognize the danger of unbelief for it can sever us from our position in Christ. As the fragrant blooms of the old apple tree on the farm, our grafted place of faith should blossom into a fragrance that draws others to Christ.