

# Grace, Grumbling, and Gratitude

By Andy Smith

**T**he whole community was in an uproar, wailing all night long. All the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron...”

*Numbers 14:1 (The Message)*

The people of God throughout the Scriptures seem to have mastered the fine art of grumbling. God had just rescued the Israelites from the injustices of slavery in Egypt and the deadly tsunami waters of the Red Sea. By God’s grace, they had been saved from sure death. They were grateful...that is until their circumstances became challenging. The author of *Numbers* tells us, “*The entire community was in on it: Why didn’t we die in Egypt? Or in this wilderness? Why has God brought us to this country to kill us? Why don’t we just head back to Egypt? And right now!*” (*Numbers 14:2-3*).

How quickly the people forgot about God’s grace in their lives. How quickly their sense of gratitude turned into grumbling.

In the days of Moses, God’s chosen people longed to change their current surroundings for an imaginary place where utopia reigned. They convinced themselves that even slavery in Egypt was better than their current challenges!

Grumbling has become an everyday occurrence for many of us today as well. We grumble at the evening news, our elected politicians, the weather, long hours at work, our siblings, our parents and even our favorite sports teams. Grumblers are constantly looking for a place where the grass is always greener and pretend it doesn’t need to be mowed.

Much like the prodigal son in Luke 15, grumbling leaves us miserable and in desperate search of a “better” life. The younger son in Luke’s parable grumbles about his lot in life. Although he cannot readily admit it, he feels a sense of entitlement, as if he deserves a better life. The problem is the better life he sets off to discover turns out to be a mirage. Once the younger son comes to his senses and returns home to the open arms of his father, his older brother begins...to grumble!

Maybe I’m on to something. The people of God today find it much too easy to grumble in the midst of God’s grace. So, how can we reverse this trend? Recently, I was made aware of a group of men who call themselves, “*The Gratitudees*”. Every morning, each “dude” emails the group and identifies the top ten things he is grateful for that day. Maybe that’s the answer. Gratitude is the antidote for grumbling. The *Gratitudees* help these men rediscover grace, gratitude and contentment in their daily lives.

So, find your favorite chair, get a hot cup of tea, and enjoy this light-hearted story, *Pepper the Prodigal Cat* based on the parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15. Pepper had a nice life until...his circumstances became challenging. He has much to learn about grace, grumbling and gratitude. Don't we all?

Questions for Thought:

1. Read Luke 15:11-32. What is the point of this parable of Jesus?
2. List the top five things you are grateful for today...

# Pepper the Prodigal Cat

A Sew Powerful Parable by Dana Buck

Walking down a sidewalk  
On a bright suburban street  
An early rain has caused us  
To dodge puddles with our feet

The trees all brightly glisten  
Filled with captured drops and flecks  
We occasionally gasp when  
Random ones fall down our necks

We stroll past neighbor's houses  
And enjoy our pleasant walk  
When suddenly we see a sight  
That makes us pause and baulk

Across the street, two houses up  
There down upon all fours  
A little girl is crying  
In her half ajar front door

I recall her name is Grayce  
And she was dressed up like a queen  
When she shouted "trick or treat!"  
Outside our door last Halloween

But she's not looking very royal  
As she crouches there, poor Grayce  
For she's choking heavy sobs  
And shining tears run down her face

We move a little closer  
To see what she's starring at  
There in the middle of her lawn

Sits a bedraggled, skinny cat

Now before we tell the story  
Of this girl, and cat so gaunt  
Remember, this is fiction  
We can do anything we want

So settle down and lend an ear  
And hold on to your hat  
As this narrative is told to us  
By Pepper (He's the cat)

Hello, I go by Pepper  
Gotta say it's nice to meet cha'  
Incidentally, my name  
Is short for Pepperoni Pizza

I got that name from little Grayce  
But her parents are to blame  
"The first thing that she sees" they cried  
"Will be the kitty's name"

They sat down at the table  
To enjoy a family dinner  
Grayce hollered out her favorite food  
And that name was the winner

I had no say so in the matter  
Not a name I would have chose  
I guess it always could be worse  
They could have served her Sloppy Joes!

All in all, t'was not so bad  
Even with my funky name  
There were lots of nice amenities  
I sure could not complain

There was a window sill for napping  
Birds in the yard to catch  
A phony mouse to play with

Lots of furniture to scratch

I had a bowl of cat food  
Fresh water from the fixture  
A litter box for when I...  
Well, I think you get the picture

So I settled into life  
With this idyllic family unit  
Then they had to do something  
To absolutely ruin it

One day the door was opened  
And in a second, just like that  
It was worse than Armageddon  
For they brought home another cat

I suppose he was adorable  
He would purr and play with string  
And rub against your ankle  
If you like that sort of thing

He was friendly and obedient  
Could do cute tricks and stunts  
In every way the perfect cat  
I hated him at once

Grayce had named him Shadow  
And my temper got much shorter  
He gets a really cool name  
While I'm a take-out order?

I determined then and there  
And I vowed, I pledged, I swore  
That I wouldn't take this laying down  
Cry havoc! This is war!

So I formed a little scheme  
I would enact without delay  
A subtle black ops plan called

## Operation Bombs Away

Wherever Shadow went  
Seems he just wasn't to be trusted  
For in every room he occupied  
Something, somehow, just got busted

In the bathroom, it was aftershave  
In the den, a table lamp  
In the kitchen, maple syrup  
Got the floor sticky and damp

In the living room, a painting  
In the hall, it was a mirror  
In the library, the plaster busts  
Of Tolstoy and Shakespeare

There was glass found on the sofa  
Spots of perfume on the bedding  
Off the mantle fell each photo  
Shot at Uncle Larry's wedding

It was working to perfection  
Soon old Shadow would be gone  
Just when I thought I'd tasted victory  
Something suddenly went wrong

What caused my mission to unravel?  
What short circuited my plan?  
Well, unbeknownst to me  
They'd just installed a nanny cam

Now I'm the one in trouble  
With "naught kitty" I've been tarred  
While Shadow laps up bowls of milk  
I've been exiled to the yard

I think I've been mistreated  
Why they couldn't be much meaner  
Somewhere over the rainbow

I just know there's grass that's greener

I can find a better family  
I can find a better kid  
I can go and seek my fortune  
And that's exactly what I did

So with the sunshine on my shoulder  
And the sidewalk 'neath my feet  
Taking one last look behind  
I then set off right down the street

It didn't take me long  
To find a likely new abode  
Three kids were playing in the yard  
So I stepped in off the road

One cried out "look it's a kitty!"  
And they ran to where I stood  
But the closer they approached  
Showed me that this was just no good

They had sticky little fingers  
Sticky shirts and sticky britches  
Sticky knees and sticky faces  
From their sticky jam sandwiches

Before I could escape  
One picked me up and held me near  
Soon I had jam across my face  
My paws and in my ears

I sought relief from the embrace  
In which I was consumed  
When all at once they shouted "squirrel!"  
I was dropped, and off they zoomed

The next stop in my search  
Was with a family name of Tyler  
It was working out until I met

Their ninety pound Rottweiler

Then I came to hitch a car ride  
With a woman in a ford  
She really seemed to like me  
As she welcomed me aboard

We pulled into her driveway  
And I thought "this could be heaven"  
I had boldly rolled the dice  
And would they finally show seven?

She opened up the door  
And to my shock what do I find?  
Her house is full of cats  
I quickly counted seventy nine

I made a beeline for the street  
I've no desire to be cat eighty  
For the quintessential feline hoarding  
Neighborhood cat lady

After that I wandered aimlessly  
By tattoo shacks and bars  
I had to dodge a motorcycle  
I was splashed by passing cars

I spent a night curled in a drainpipe  
Then behind a place called Rocko's  
I ate breakfast from a dumpster  
Cast off fries and moldy tacos

When it was cold I shook and shivered  
When it was hot I'd pant and sweat  
When it was dark I'd hide and worry  
When it rained I got all wet

Till one day a farming couple  
Pulled up by me in their truck  
She opened up her door

And very kindly picked me up

We drove out to the country  
Till we reached their little farm  
Instead of going to the house  
They took me straight out to the barn

“Here’s your home now lucky kitty”  
“And you’ve got to earn your keep”  
“You can sleep up in the hay”  
“And there are lots of mice to eat”

Did she say go eat some mice?  
I fear I’ve fallen in with loons!  
The only cats that dine on rodents  
Are in the movies and cartoons

It’s becoming very clear  
I may have overplayed my hand  
All I’ve got to show are sleepless nights  
And sticky stains of jam

I so miss my little family  
Shedding on their shoes and sox  
I miss my water, miss my food  
I really miss my litter box

If I returned would they forgive?  
Would they be nice? Would they be hard?  
They could exile me outside  
And feed me scraps out in the yard

Setting out to seek my fortune  
Has really come to make me see  
That far from being mistreated  
Few were fortunate as me

And if they don’t embrace me  
If their greeting isn’t warm  
It’s still better there than here

And eating mice out in this barn

So, I made good my escaping  
From the farmer and his spouse  
To find the way back to my  
Little Grayce and little house

I will spare you all the details  
How my homeward journey runs  
Suffice it here to say  
It's hard to hitchhike without thumbs

But I eventually arrived  
And am now sitting on the lawn  
Little Grayce opens the door  
And quickly my concerns are gone

She falls down to her knees  
Tears of joy she cannot check  
She then rushes to the yard  
And throws her arms around my neck

With all the crying and the hugging  
I'm with her tears now fully doused  
Then gathered in her arms  
We happy dance into the house

"Oh my kitty, how I've missed you"  
"You're so skinny and so smelly"  
"Your fur is stiff and sticky"  
"What is that? Is that grape jelly?"

"Never mind, you must be starving"  
"I'll get you lots of food to eat"  
"How about some macaroni?"  
"Something salty? Something sweet?"

"Here, I found a bag of pretzels"

“And a jar of mayonnaise”  
“How about a piece of cheesecake”  
“With a caramel almond glaze?”

“We got doughnuts, we got crackers”  
“We got cereal and cheese”  
“We got broccoli, butter, biscuits”  
“Artichokes, meatloaf and peas”

But no matter what she offered  
Carbohydrates, soy or fat  
I just couldn't muster interest  
After all, I'm still a cat

Then she finally found an option  
That brought teardrops to my eyes  
She held out a can of tuna  
The monster, massive, mega size

When she put that in my bowl  
And set it down on my behalf  
She could not have pleased me more  
If she'd served up the fatted calf

When I finished all the tuna  
(And I didn't leave a speck)  
She had still one more surprise  
A brand new collar for my neck

“So now kitty, as you wear it”  
“May you always be reminded”  
“That when it comes to love”  
“It's here at home you'll always find it”

Well, it's nearly been two weeks”  
Since my odyssey was done  
Yet it really hasn't ended  
Seems it's only just begun

Now my mission's being thankful

Gratitude's my destination  
My companions are contentment  
Kindness and appreciation

As I nap here on the sofa  
Dreaming of my little Grayce  
The quiet's shattered by the breaking  
Of a cut lead crystal vase

As I shake myself awake  
And try to gather my dismay  
From the hall I hear a voice  
It's Shadow calling "bombs away!"