

GUARDED

Grace



LOVING WISELY IN A
BROKEN WORLD

A DIVINELY GUIDED MINI EBOOK

CRYSTALENE REYES

Guarded Grace

Loving Wisely In A Broken World

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A Mini eBook

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Scripture References:

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“Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

— ***Matthew 10:16***

Guarded Grace:

Loving Wisely In A Broken World



One of life's more painful realizations is that not everyone is good. Not everyone will return your kindness. Not everyone has good intentions. For many believers, this truth collides with our desire to reflect Christ's love in a world marked by brokenness. The tension arises when the kindness you extend is met with deceit, when the loyalty you offer is repaid with betrayal, and when the sincerity of your heart is trampled by someone else's indifference or manipulation.

It's a sobering reality that love alone doesn't always change people, and grace, while powerful, doesn't always prevent pain. We often walk into relationships, friendships, even ministry assignments with open hearts, believing the best, hoping our sincerity will be enough to sustain mutual respect and care, but real life teaches us otherwise. Sometimes, the people we help the most hurt us the deepest. Sometimes, the ones we defend are the ones who later turn their backs. These moments leave us questioning: Is it

possible to love like Christ and still protect your heart? Can you walk in grace without becoming a doormat? These are not just spiritual questions, they are deeply human ones, and the answer begins, as always, in Scripture.

Scripture offers us countless examples of this reality. One such account is in John 2:23-25. The passage reads, “Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.” These verses remind us that even Jesus, who embodied love itself, discerned motives, recognized deception, and maintained boundaries. This does not contradict love, but rather, it is a demonstration of wisdom.

While many people believed in Him because of the miraculous signs He performed, Jesus knew that their belief was shallow; rooted in fascination with His power rather than genuine faith or understanding of His mission. Jesus, fully divine, had complete knowledge of every person’s heart. He saw beyond appearances, beyond praise or excitement, into the true motives and conditions of people’s souls. He was never swayed by popularity or outward displays of devotion. Instead, He exercised wisdom and discernment in His relationships. He loved deeply and ministered freely, but He guarded His heart from misplaced trust. In this, Jesus perfectly modeled what it means to love wisely in a broken world, extending grace without naivety, offering compassion

without compromising truth, and engaging people with open hands but guarded discernment.

Another sobering example of this is the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, who had been one of Jesus' disciples. In John 13:18, Jesus reveals that His betrayal would come from someone within His inner circle, quoting Psalm 41:9: "He who shared my bread has turned against me." This moment highlights the depth of Judas's betrayal, not just as a political act, but as a personal wound. You see, in the culture of the time, sharing bread signified friendship, trust, and fellowship. Judas' decision to betray Jesus after such an intimate act therefore underscores the pain of being wounded by someone close. Jesus wasn't caught off guard though; He knew Judas's heart. Yet, He chose to still extend grace, still shared the table and still modeled a love that is wise and not naive, even though Judas' heart was not aligned with truth. We can definitely conclude that this betrayal clearly wasn't just about money; it was about misplaced allegiance and unresolved darkness.

As we peruse scripture further, we see a similar cry of King David. During that time, King David had been that leader who had united the tribes of Israel, established Jerusalem as the political and spiritual capital, and brought the Ark of the Covenant there. Though he is often remembered as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), and known for his deep faith, passionate worship, and heartfelt psalms, he was also deeply human and he too would have deeply betrayed others, sinning grievously in the process. His most notable sin had been in his affair with

Bathsheba and the arranged death of her husband, Uriah. Still, he repented sincerely and remained devoted to God throughout his life.

David's legacy though, reaches far beyond a united kingdom. It carries a divine promise, that his royal line would endure forever, a prophecy ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the "Son of David." Just as he had once betrayed, so too was he not spared the bitter pain of betrayal. In Psalm 41:9, David laments, "Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me." Remember what we spoke about earlier regarding the custom of sharing bread! David knew the sting of being wounded by someone within his circle of trust. His sorrow was not over enemies, but over companions, those who once broke bread with him. The pain deepened when his own son, Absalom, rose against him in a calculated attempt to seize the throne (2 Samuel 15–17). These moments remind us that betrayal comes not only from the outside, but also from those closest to our hearts. David's story prepares us for this truth: the Word of God is not blind to life's harsh realities; it prepares us for them.

So how should we, as followers of Christ, respond when others do not treat us the way we treat them? First, we guard our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." It is important to understand though that guarding your heart doesn't mean building walls of bitterness, but instead, it means walking with discernment. It means being wise, and not naive. Just like Jesus taught us in Matthew 10:16, we must be "wise as

serpents and harmless as doves”. That balance is crucial! Guarding your heart also means acknowledging that not everyone comes into your life with good intentions. Some come to take. Some come to watch. Some come to sabotage, and some come because they are genuinely sent by God. Your job is to stay close to the Holy Spirit so He can show you the difference.

Secondly, we must learn to withdraw wisely. Jesus often withdrew from crowds, not out of fear but out of obedience and wisdom (Luke 5:16). Just because someone wants your attention, your time, or your energy doesn't mean that they are entitled to it. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is to distance yourself from toxicity and spend time alone with God.

It is also important to remember that Jesus did not respond to every need with immediate action. Look at what happened in John 6. Jesus had just performed the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, leaving the crowd amazed and eager to follow Him, not out of true belief, but because He had satisfied their physical hunger. When Jesus withdrew from them, they searched for Him, crossing the Sea of Galilee to find where He had gone. Upon finding Him in Capernaum, they questioned him saying, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus, on the other hand, wasn't flattered, but knowing their hearts, called out their motives in verse 26. He said, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." He understood that they were not seeking Him because they understood the spiritual

significance of His miracles, but because they wanted more food. Jesus recognized the difference between genuine seekers and consumers. He loved them all, but He was not manipulated by any. This moment exposes the shallow nature of their faith and sets the stage for Jesus' deeper teaching that He Himself is the true Bread of Life.

In like fashion, in ministry, at work, in friendships, and even within families, you may be called to serve people who misunderstand you, use you, or speak against you. They may smile in your presence and mock you in your absence. When it happens and it will, remember that this is not new and you are not alone! Rather than becoming bitter about it, celebrate it and embrace it because Jesus experienced it, Paul experienced it, and every believer who carries light in a dark world will experience it! This alone should be evidence to you that you are blessed and chosen. We must understand too that sometimes, people's poor treatment of us has more to do with their own inner wounds than our actions. Hurting people hurt people. But that doesn't make it easier. The real challenge lies in continuing to reflect Christ without losing your own joy, identity, or values.

One of the most painful aspects to consider is when those placed in roles of service become the source of pain. Whether in the church, the corporate world, or public services, many of us have encountered people who treat others with disdain while holding positions meant to help. It is deeply disappointing when someone behind a counter, desk, or pulpit misuses their role to belittle, ignore, or humiliate others.

Moreover, it is not only in our personal relationships that we encounter this challenge. There are times when we interact with people placed in positions to serve, such as in banks, hospitals, government offices, and even ministry, and are met with disdain and coldness. It is disheartening when you do your best to extend patience, courtesy, and understanding, only to be met with rudeness or indifference. These encounters, even when brief, can be deeply frustrating. It leaves us to wonder how someone tasked with helping others could lack so much compassion.

Today in particular, there is an increasing lack of compassion in our society, especially toward the vulnerable: women with children, the elderly, and the poor. Too often, single mothers are judged rather than helped, and elderly individuals are dismissed as burdens rather than honored as carriers of wisdom. These patterns are not just social failings; they reflect a spiritual decline in empathy and godly love. I had an experience recently that tested both my patience and my heart. I went to a financial institution to handle a transaction, not realizing that though they closed their doors at 4 PM, they closed off their waiting lists at 2 PM. I had taken time off, made sacrifices, and spent my last to hire a taxi just to get there. With my 11-month-old baby in tow, I arrived at 1:55 PM—just in time, or so I thought! As I approached the counter to sign the waiting list, I paused for just a moment to make sure I was signing the correct form. Balancing a wriggling baby, a babybag and a pen isn't the easiest thing! In that brief pause, literally two minutes before 2 PM, a young woman walked up, saw me standing there, and without a word, took the list, drew a red line through it,

and announced that it was now closed. She refused to let me sign and told me that I would need to return the following morning. There was no compassion. No acknowledgment that I had been standing there first. No grace for the fact that I was clearly juggling a baby, a pen, and a desperate effort to stay composed. She had no idea the sacrifice it took just to show up, and, she was unmoved. In that moment, I had to fight so hard not to let bitterness take root! Everything in me wanted to respond with frustration, but I reminded myself: Jesus' love calls me to respond differently. Even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard. So I took a deep breath. I smiled. I said, "Thank you." Then, I walked away. That moment reminded me that while people may be unaware of our sacrifice, God always sees. He knew what it took for me to show up, and He knows what it takes for us to choose grace over offense. When we lay down our right to react and pick up His love instead, we don't walk away empty, we walk away stronger.

In like manner, Luke 10:30–32 tells us of a man beaten, stripped, and left for dead along a dangerous road. A priest came by—someone expected to embody mercy and holiness—but when he saw the man, he crossed to the other side and kept walking. Then came a Levite, another respected figure within the temple system. He too saw the wounded man and passed by without stopping. Their actions—or rather, their inaction—speak volumes. Their indifference was not neutral; it was as wounding as the robbers' attack. To ignore suffering when we have the power to respond is to participate in the pain. Jesus used this story to teach a piercing truth: the

absence of compassion is not a small oversight—it is a direct failure to love God and neighbor.

The hero of that story, surprisingly, is a Samaritan, an outsider, considered spiritually inferior by Jewish standards. Yet it was he who stopped, bound the man's wounds, and carried him to safety. In doing so, he didn't just help; he revealed the very heart of God. Jesus turns cultural and religious expectations upside down to show us that true righteousness is not in titles or temple roles, but in mercy. Compassion is not optional for us who follow Christ, it is the proof of our love for God made visible through love for others.

One of the most poignant moments in my life was witnessing this same contrast in real-time. A single mother stood across the road, holding her baby and begging for money for food. Her eyes were tired, her clothes worn, her dignity barely holding together. On the other side of the road, people prepared heartily for a gala—dressed in fine clothes, laughing, snapping photos, and sipping wine under glittering lights. The woman was ignored, as though invisible. I didn't have much to give at the time but my heart broke as I tried in whatever way I could to lend assistance to the woman.

This experience certainly gave me a richer understanding of the scripture that says to be a lover of the world is to make oneself an enemy of God. How can we call ourselves godly while ignoring the suffering around us? When we choose convenience over compassion, or pride over mercy, we align ourselves more with the world's values than

with God's heart. Real godliness isn't measured by appearances or words, but by the love we show, especially when it costs us something. Truly, this system of elevating the rich while ignoring the cries of the poor is not of God. Proverbs 14:31 says, "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." Our world often celebrates wealth, prestige, and power, yet God calls us to a different standard. James 2:1-7 warns believers not to show favoritism to the rich while dishonoring the poor. To be of the world's system is to turn a blind eye to suffering. To be of God's Kingdom is to serve, to see, and to respond.

We must be different. We must be people who serve with pride and humility. If your job is to help, do so with excellence. Whether you are a receptionist, a clerk, a waiter, or a minister, your attitude can either reflect heaven or magnify hell. Colossians 3:23 reminds us, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men." Serving others with joy and dignity is not beneath us—it is Christlike.

On the other hand, there **will** be times when you may walk away feeling small or angry. These feelings are valid, but we must guard against the slow creep of bitterness. It becomes easy to generalize and to harden our hearts against entire groups of people. However, Christ calls us to something higher! Even when others fail in their assignment to serve, we are to remain grounded in our identity and anchored in grace. Romans 12:21 reminds us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." This does not mean becoming passive doormats. It means refusing to

let others' disdain define our character. It means holding onto joy, maintaining peace, and extending kindness without becoming jaded.

As you walk through your own journey, though, remember this: being Christlike does not mean being everyone's savior! That role belongs to Jesus alone. Your responsibility is to love as He leads, to serve as He empowers, and to set boundaries as He directs. Not everyone will appreciate your love. Not everyone will reciprocate your kindness. However, your call remains. Romans 12:18 encourages, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." This verse acknowledges a reality: peace is a two-way street. You are not called to force it, only to pursue it sincerely.

There is an even deeper layer of spiritual awareness that we must walk in. Just as God can use people to be messengers of hope, truth, and encouragement, the enemy can also use people as agents of distraction, discouragement, and destruction. Look at Matthew 16:23, Jesus rebuked Peter—not because Peter was inherently evil—but because in that moment, Peter's words aligned with the enemy's agenda. Jesus responded, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." This sobering reality reminds us to remain vigilant. We must be careful not to fall into the traps set by those influenced by darkness. Bitterness, revenge, rage, and hatred may feel justified in the moment, but they are spiritual landmines that can damage our relationship with Christ. When we yield to them, we risk

grieving the Holy Spirit, opening doors to the enemy, and ultimately compromising our testimony. Ephesians 4:26-27 cautions, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

People may provoke, mislead, or harm you. Some may even be strategically placed to derail your faith, to drain your energy, and to tempt you into sin. This is why spiritual discernment is critical. 1 John 4:1 instructs, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." It is important to always remember that **everyone you encounter is not sent by God, and every word spoken to you is not truth.**

Yet, amidst these dangers, we are never left defenseless. The Holy Spirit is our guide, our comforter, and our revealer of truth. He will whisper when to stay silent, when to speak, when to walk away, and when to stand firm. Isaiah 30:21 beautifully declares, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" Glory to God!

Let us therefore guard our grace, not by withholding love, but by walking wisely. Extend kindness, but not at the cost of your peace. Be generous, but led by the Spirit. Set boundaries, not out of fear, but out of obedience. Forgive quickly, but do not forget what God taught you through the hurt.

In conclusion, navigating a world filled with broken people, impure intentions, and spiritual deception requires

more than just a good heart, it requires a guided heart. Let the Holy Spirit lead you. Let the Word of God shape your responses. Let Christ remain your compass, your shield, and your hope. Guard your grace not by hiding it, but by surrendering it daily to the One who gives it.

Your heart is a sacred vessel. Treat it as such. Love deeply. Forgive freely. Serve joyfully. But walk wisely.

May the blessings of the Lord be upon you and your loved ones, now and always!

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever struggled with bitterness after being mistreated despite your kindness? How did you handle it?
2. Are there relationships or environments where you need to establish healthy, God-led boundaries?
3. In what ways can you practice discernment to identify when someone may be misaligned with God's will for your life?
4. How can you guard your heart without closing yourself off from loving others?
5. Are there areas in your life where you may be treating others with indifference or withholding compassion?
6. Have you ever encountered someone placed in a role of service who lacked grace or dignity? How did that affect your heart toward service?
7. Do you recognize how your attitude in service can reflect the heart of Christ to others?
8. What practical steps can you take to ensure you are not being used as an agent of hurt in someone else's life?
9. How do you respond when you see the poor, elderly, or vulnerable being neglected or dishonored?

10. Have you ever been tempted to fall into a spiritual trap due to emotional pain or offense? How can you keep your relationship with Christ guarded in such times?

Closing Prayer

Father God,

Thank You for being our ever-present help and guide. In a world where hearts grow cold and compassion is scarce, teach us to remain anchored in Your grace. Help us to love wisely, to serve joyfully, and to walk in discernment. Strengthen us when we feel betrayed or overlooked, and restore our hearts where bitterness has tried to take root.

We ask for wisdom to know when to engage and when to step back, when to speak and when to be silent. Let Your Holy Spirit be our compass. Keep us from the snares of the enemy and from the temptation to repay evil for evil. Teach us to see people through Your eyes—even when it's hard—and to always reflect Your light in dark places.

May our service honor You, may our love be pure, and may our hearts remain guarded in You. We declare that no unkindness will break us, no betrayal will define us, and no trap of the enemy will derail us. We walk forward in grace, covered by Your truth.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.

Full Scripture List

1. John 2:23-25 – Jesus did not entrust Himself to everyone.
2. John 13:18 – Judas' betrayal foretold.
3. Psalm 41:9 – David laments betrayal by a close friend.
4. 2 Samuel 15–17 – Absalom conspires against King David.
5. Proverbs 4:23 – Guard your heart above all else.
6. Matthew 10:16 – Wise as serpents, harmless as doves.
7. Luke 5:16 – Jesus often withdrew to pray.
8. John 6:26 – Motives of those following Jesus.
9. Luke 10:30-32 – The parable of the Good Samaritan.
10. Proverbs 14:31 – Oppressing the poor insults God.
11. James 2:1-7 – Warnings against favoritism and honoring the rich over the poor.
12. Colossians 3:23 – Work heartily as unto the Lord.
13. Romans 12:21 – Overcome evil with good.
14. Romans 12:18 – Live peaceably with all if possible.

15. Matthew 16:23 – Jesus rebukes Peter.

16. Ephesians 4:26-27 – Do not let anger give the devil a foothold.

17. 1 John 4:1 – Test every spirit.

18. Isaiah 30:21 – God's voice will direct you in the right path.



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About the Author



Crystalene Reyes is a devoted Christian, wife, and mother of five—three biological and two bonus children whom God blessed her with through the sanctity of marriage. Her love for the Lord began at an early age when her grandmother took her to church, igniting a faith that, though tested, has remained steadfast. She holds a Diploma in Theology, a Bachelor of Education, and a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. As a teacher and entrepreneur, Crystalene is the co-owner and founder of Divinely Guided Learning (CS Reyes Learning) in Trinidad and the founder of Divinely Guided Books, an online Christian platform offering both paid and free content to help others grow in their faith. Her passion for God's Word drives her to share its truth with those willing to listen. She is the visionary behind the Through God's Voice series, which intertwines Biblical scripture with life lessons and self-development principles. Her ultimate mission is to positively impact lives and be the salt of the earth, just as God intended!

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