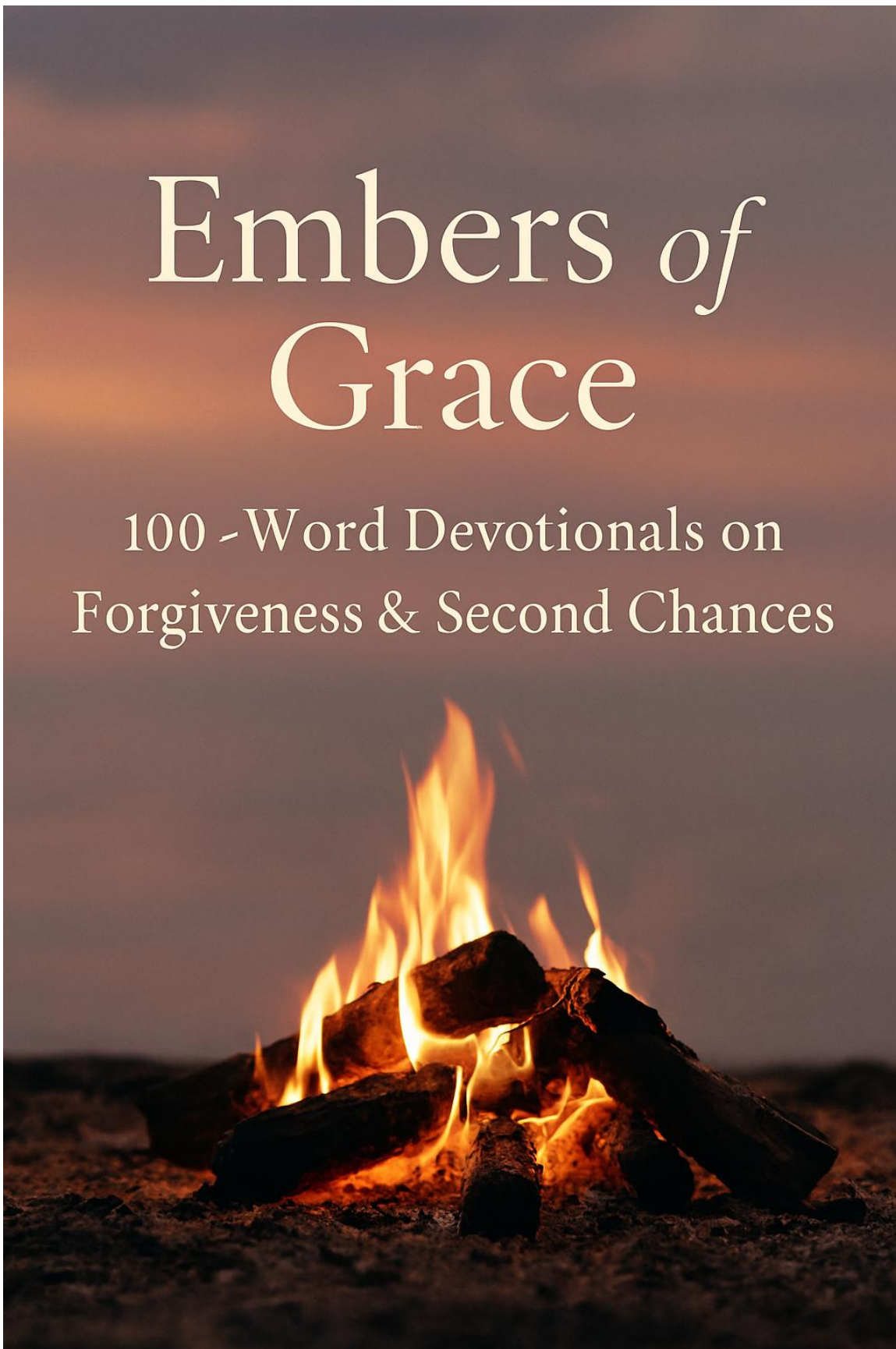


Embers *of* Grace

100 -Word Devotionals on
Forgiveness & Second Chances



Embers of Grace
7 Days of Reflections on
Forgiveness and Second Chances

Mishael Austin Witty

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The Ashes We Carry

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, . . . and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”

Sometimes the past clings like smoke—mistakes, regrets, words we wish we could unsay. But God doesn't just sweep away the ashes. He trades them for beauty. Forgiveness isn't forgetting. It's releasing our grip on the hurts we've experienced, and even the harm we've caused. Trusting that grace runs deeper than guilt. Today, let go of what you've been clutching. Let Him breathe life into the embers of your soul.

Prayer Response: Father, help me to let go of whatever isn't necessary in my relationship with You. Especially the hurts of the past. Fan the flames of love and life inside my heart. Help me shine the light of grace, so that others may see You through me. Amen.

Journal your thoughts here:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Kindling a New Start

Scripture: Lamentations 3:22–23 (NIV)

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Second chances aren't earned. They're gifted. Like a spark in the dark, they remind us that failure isn't final. The main characters in *Fireman's Lesson in Love* learn this along their journey.

Love doesn't demand perfection, only presence. What if the spark of your new beginning ignited today?

Prayer Response: Father God, thank You for grace. Thank You for second chances. I need one in my life right now in at least one area, and You know what that is. Thank You for already working behind the scenes to ensure all the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. Amen.

Journal your thoughts here:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

The Words We Regret

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

We've all said things we wish we hadn't, but grace can rewrite our story. Apologies open doors. Forgiveness builds bridges. Speak life to someone you meet today. Even if whatever you say must start with the words, "I'm sorry."

Prayer Response: Holy Spirit, help me guard my tongue, so that I'm careful to only speak words that are life-giving. Give me the strength to apologize when I need to. I want all my words to reflect Your grace. Amen.

Journal your thoughts here:

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Love That Stays

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:7 (NIV)

“[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

In *Fireman's Lesson in Love*, Max is the ultimate cinnamon roll hero. He shows great strength under pressure. And meekness. But he's one of the strongest people Audrey has ever met because meekness isn't weakness. It's strength wrapped in tenderness. It's choosing love when bitterness beckons.

The lesson Max and Audrey learn in *Fireman's Lesson in Love*? Love stays. Even when it's hard. Even when it hurts.

Prayer Response: Loving Father, You are the source of all life and love. Help me to love others, especially those who are hardest to love because they need it the most. Amen.

Journal your thoughts here:

[illegible]

The Garden of Grace

Scripture: Hosea 10:12 (NIV)

“Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.”

Think of forgiveness as a garden. Tended slowly, watered with tears, blooming in its time. Weeds of resentment may sprout, but grace uproots them gently.

God doesn't rush our healing from hurts. He kneels beside us, with His hands in the soil, whispering, "You're still growing."

Try to plant peace today, even if the harvest feels far away.

Prayer Response: Holy Father, You sow unfailing love in us. Help us reap a bountiful harvest, so we have plenty to share with others. Amen.

Journal your thoughts here:

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The Weight He Carries

Scripture: Psalm 55:22 (NIV)

“Cast your cares on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.”

We carry burdens we were never meant to bear. Shame, regret, the ache of “if only.” But Jesus carried them first. On the cross, He bore all our failures. Every wound.

Forgiveness isn't something we have to earn. It's a gift we receive from the loving arms of a Father who is ready to carry all our heavy loads.

Lay it down. Let Him lift what's crushing you.

Prayer Response: Father, thank You for being strong enough to carry away all the things that are weighing me down. I can't do this on my own anymore, and I don't want to. I want You to take control and do what only You can. Amen.

Journal your thoughts here:

[illegible]

When the Story Turns

Scripture: Romans 8:1 (NIV)

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Every good story has a turning point. Yours might be today. The moment you choose grace over guilt. Mercy over traumatic memory.

God is the Master Author who rewrites endings. They may not turn out to be fairytale endings, but what He works out will be good.

The characters in my story thought their past choices were going to define them forever, but love had other plans. They got their happy ending.

God, who is love, has other plans for you too. Trust in His heart and His purpose.

Prayer Response: God, You have good in mind for me. You have even before I was born. Help me to trust in Your plan for my life. Lead me down Your path of righteousness all the days I'm on the earth, and welcome me with open arms across the finish line when my race here is done. Amen.

Journal your thoughts here:

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Here's a sneak peek at *Fireman's Lesson in Love*, from Elk Lake Publishing.

A heavy weight pressed against Audrey's chest, shortening each breath. Icy tentacles of panic squeezed her heart. Distant angry howls flooded her mind as the pain in her chest intensified.

She opened her eyes, face to face with the source of the angry howls, much nearer now. Audrey shook off her sleeping state. She pulled her gray-and-white Persian cat, Sadie, off her chest and dumped her on the empty side of the queen-sized bed.

The cat landed with a soft thud and rolled over to stand on the dark brown-and-blue paisley comforter, staring with narrowed eyes in her human's direction. Feeling more charitable now that she was awake and aware the anxiety-producing danger had passed, Audrey stroked Sadie's fluffy back. "Sorry, but your claws hurt. Time to feed you, huh?"

The cat purred her appreciation of both the offer and the backrub.

Audrey glanced at her phone, and her sleepy eyes popped open. She clenched the slippery device tighter. Seven a.m.? She had forty-five minutes to shower, dress, eat breakfast, and drive to school before they released the students to their homerooms.

Plus, feed the cat. Judging by the expression in those big blue-green eyes, feeding Sadie was one of her most pressing concerns.

"Okay, Sadie. Let's get you some food." She hefted the cat up in her arms and headed toward the kitchen. "Why did I oversleep? Did the cell phone alarm not go off? Good thing you think you're starving to death. I could have been a lot later."

The cat let loose a long, mournful sound punctuated by several clacks.

Audrey laughed and shook her head. "I wish I understood what you said. Who knows? One of these days, I might." Solidifying her identity as the crazy old spinster cat lady. Fabulous.

At the ripe old age of twenty-eight, the push to marry was strong, although no potential husband was in the picture. Her grandmother, who made sure to call at least once a week, never let her forget.

"If the man's not going to come to you, go out and find him," Gran said at the end of every call, the same way other grandmothers said, "Bye, sweetie" or "Talk to you soon."

Not the sort of advice you'd expect from a seventy-something-year-old woman. And not the easiest to follow.

Finding a man was easy. They were everywhere. She was rarely alone on a Saturday night in college and grad school. She met guys in the grocery store. Guys who were married, not straight,

or complete jerks only after one thing. Some guys fit into more than one category. And they all eventually left for one reason or another. Enough to cause an unmarried woman to despair of ever finding someone who would love her for who she was on the inside. For as long as she lived, no matter what.

If Mr. Right, her Mr. Right, was out there, he should've arrived by now. According to her fourteen-year-old brain's plans, he was late.

She was supposed to marry at age twenty-one and become a mother by age twenty-three. All while finishing college and grad school. In hindsight, Audrey was glad she'd avoided the overwhelming responsibilities of marriage and motherhood while finishing up her master's degree in teaching. But she couldn't deny her present loneliness. And she couldn't deny the ever-present ache of losing Eric much too soon. If he hadn't gone, would her life have kept up with the arbitrary schedule she'd set for herself?

No way to tell. He was gone, and she was alone. She finally acknowledged he fit into the category of someone who only wanted a physical relationship. At the time, Audrey hadn't thought of him as a complete jerk. She'd truly believed he loved her.

Now, the only thing she had to look forward to in the mornings was waking up to Sadie's fat, furry face and enjoying a solitary cup of coffee before heading out the door to face the cell phone-addicted beings also known as her senior English students.

She raised the cat's head up to hers and nuzzled her forehead. "Well, I've seen your fuzzy face. Time for coffee."

The cat purred again and jumped down beside her empty food bowl.

Audrey popped open a can of Friskies and spooned it out into the bowl. The cat fed, she reached into the cabinet for a coffee mug. Oh no. No alarm blaring earlier. No strong caffeinated aroma filling the kitchen now. An inspection of the coffee maker solved one of the mysteries. She forgot to set the timer last night.

Only two months into the school year, and she was already losing her capacity for thought. Or her memory. Or both.

"Perfect." She sighed. No way would she have time to wait while the coffee brewed in her ancient Walmart special. But there was still hope for a quick cup of coffee. "If I hurry, I'll have time to stop by The Little Sweet Shop before class. Then I can pick up something to eat too."

The cat turned away from her breakfast long enough to give her a pitying stare. Audrey didn't have to speak cat to be able to understand the message: "Poor human. Don't you wish you had someone around here to serve you like you serve me?"

“What about her?” Thad Duncan nudged his friend, Max Winters, with his elbow, indicating the owner and head barista of The Little Sweet Shop.

Max frowned. “Kelly? No way.”

“Why not?”

“She’s been in love with you since high school. Not going there.”

Thad rubbed his chin with his hand and tried to hide his ear-to-ear grin behind his fingers. “She has, has she?”

“You know it. Why don’t you ask her to the firehouse Halloween dance?”

He puffed his chest out. “I might. You think she would go with me?”

Max chuckled. “She won’t if you don’t ask her.”

“You need to ask somebody to go with you. The dance is only two weeks away.”

He shuffled his feet and gazed at the floor. “I’m not ready to start dating again.”

Thad groaned. “Dana ditched you six months ago. About time you got over it.”

“I am over it. Over her. I just don’t want to date anyone else. Work’s been crazy lately....”

His friend and coworker raised an eyebrow. A phony excuse. Thad knew how quiet work had been in the past six months or so. In a town like Chokeberry Falls, the only excitement the first-shift firefighters saw was a stranded cat up a tree. Or an emergency call from a little old man who forgot to open the flue before lighting a fire and panicked when he saw smoke.

Occasionally, they had to deal with a teenage temper tantrum or prank gone awry. This mid-October, most people were keeping their cats inside, nobody was lighting fires yet, and the town’s teenagers had been unusually calm and quiet.

Max offered a half-smile and a shrug. The sound of The Little Sweet Shop’s door jingling open and banging shut diverted his attention away from the uncomfortable conversation with his friend. He turned to greet whoever had just entered. He knew everybody in Chokeberry Falls, but the morning café regulars had become like family to him in the three years since Kelly moved back and took over running the café after Donna retired.

This knockout redhead was a stranger to him. “Who is she?”

Thad threw a glance over his shoulder as he moved forward to keep up with the line. Only two customers ahead of them now.

Max stood, transfixed, his hazel eyes focused on the woman who now stood a few customers behind them.

She shifted her weight from one foot to the other and kept her gaze on her phone screen.

Thad pulled him a few steps forward and lowered his voice. "The new high school teacher. The one who took Old Mrs. Donovan's place when she retired in May. Her name's ... what is her name? Starts with an 'A.' Her old man's the one who owns the fireworks shop down the street."

Max grimaced. Morland's More Flames?

She was the daughter of the lunatic who'd moved into town a little over a year ago and kept his fireworks shop open year-round? Even though people only ever bought fireworks in Chokeberry Falls on the Fourth of July and New Year's? Well, and Founder's Day in November, right smack dab in between Halloween and Thanksgiving.

For nine months out of the year nobody had any interest in buying his barely legal explosive offerings. Good thing. The explosives caused some dangerous fires in the woods by the river on those key holidays. In the off months, Morland sold handmade candles. Thankfully, those weren't the cause of any major destructive events. People were less accident-prone with candles than they were with fireworks.

Max should be grateful to the man. Without the fireworks he sold, they would have much less excitement to anticipate as members of the CFFD.

And he could most definitely appreciate the man's beautiful daughter. He stole another glance her way.

She still stared at her phone screen, her face scrunched, like she might cry at any moment.

The realization gave his heartstrings a familiar tug he hadn't experienced in a long time. She was in distress, and the protector and fixer in him had to help.

He motioned for Thad to save his spot in line.

Thad frowned and lowered one eyebrow.

No time to explain. Max headed toward the end of the line.

The beautiful schoolteacher didn't glance up from her phone. Or stop shifting her weight from leg to leg.

He cleared his throat.

She gazed up at him with eyes a captivating shade of blue with a goldish band around the pupil. No smile. She stared at him, her eyes widening and lips parting.

He turned on his best cartoon-character smolder, which fell flat a second later. Intense embarrassment and panic jabbed his heart and mind. What was he thinking?

Oh well. He was committed now. Might as well go for broke. He swallowed, took a deep breath, and rubbed his sweaty palms against his pants legs. "Hi. I couldn't help noticing you're upset." Wow, way to state the obvious!

She blinked, and her lips tightened into a frown. “I... I...” Her gaze traveled down his fireman's uniform, and her shoulders stiffened. “I’m not in need of rescuing, if that’s what you think.”

Ah, there was the brush off.

Max’s heart plunged to the pit of his stomach. Picking up girls was never his forte in high school. Not much easier fifteen years after he graduated. “I’m Max.” He ran a hand down his flaming neck.

Her pupils constricted. “I’m late for school. Work. Or I’m going to be late in—” She gazed again at her phone. “In about five minutes.”

“You can cut in front of us.”

The collective groan from the people in line ahead of them reverberated off the coffee shop’s walls and faded into oblivion as the expression on the woman’s face softened.

A hint of a smile played at the corners of her lips. “Can I? Are you sure you don’t mind?”

He shook his head. “No, of course not. There won’t be any major fires to deal with for at least another hour or so. I’m in no rush.” Oh, brother. Did she catch his bad joke?

Without a glance in his direction or a change of expression, she moved in front of him—heedless of, or ignoring, his failed attempt at humor.

Okay by him. He didn’t want her to remember him for his conversational ineptitude. If she remembered him at all. Would she? He suddenly wanted her to, more than anything.

By the time the two of them got back to the position Max had vacated, only one customer stood in line in front of them. Morland’s daughter graced him with a dazzling smile before turning her head toward Kelly, who tapped the screen of the tablet in front of her and wiped the granite countertop clean.

“Hi, Aud.” Kelly’s tone was bright. “What can I get you?”

Thad gave his friend a knowing glance.

Max grinned and shrugged again. How could he explain what had happened when he didn’t quite understand himself? Where did the overwhelming desire to offer up his spot in line so the redhead could order her coffee first come from? Why couldn’t he produce something halfway intelligent to say to her?

What was her name?

Kelly had called her “Aud.” Had to be short for something. What? He couldn’t think of anything off hand. In fact, he couldn’t think of anything. Period. Except those beautiful eyes.

“Audrey,” Thad hissed in his ear. “Her name is Audrey Morland.”

Max nodded and gave a half-shrug. Did his attempt at indifference work? Judging by Thad's ear-to-ear grin, no, it didn't.

Audrey ordered her coffee and a fancy-looking flaky pastry and rushed out of the cafe without another word to, or look at, him.

Max deflated. No chance of getting her phone number as a reward for giving up his place in line. Who was he kidding? She hadn't even told him her name. His best friend provided that key information. Why would she give him her phone number the first time they met? Would Thad have that bit of knowledge too? Would Kelly?

He opened his mouth to ask.

Thad punched him in the side as he stepped up to the counter. "Six months is long enough, huh?"