

**WAY  
TRUTH  
LIFE**

Discipleship  
as a Journey  
of Grace

**David A. Busic**



**THE FOUNDRY  
PUBLISHING**

## Praise for *Way, Truth, Life*

*Way, Truth, Life* is not just another discipleship book to add to the stack. It is a journey adaptable to the global context. David Busic takes the reader to the depths and joys of understanding the meaning of grace—the missing ingredient in the book market today. Busic’s writing is compelling, weaving a biblical foundation with historical and theological principles and current-day experiences of grace. The great hope throughout the book will bring renewal to a hungry world.

Jo Anne Lyon  
Ambassador and General Superintendent Emerita  
The Wesleyan Church

When denominational leadership decided to commission a book that would present our theology and philosophy on discipleship, we immediately thought of Dr. David Busic for this work. We needed someone with the ability to provide sound theological foundation and practical applications to the new denominational framework envisioned by the Board of General Superintendents. This book provides a contemporary summation of our essential doctrines as they apply to the practice of discipleship, both globally and at the local church levels. We believe this book will serve generations to come as we fulfill our mission “to make Christlike disciples in the nations.”

Gustavo Crocker  
General Superintendent  
Church of the Nazarene

Grace—the unmerited and unending favor of God toward all people—is not only amazing but also deep and potentially complex. In his uniquely gifted way, Busic clarifies, simplifies, and celebrates the multifaceted diamond that is God’s grace. However, more than a head-directed theological exploration of the many dimensions of grace, this book serves as a heart invitation to live into God’s grace in ways that have not only “brought us safe thus far” but also that will “lead us home” into God’s grace-filled new creation.

Scott Daniels  
Lead Pastor  
Nampa (ID) College Church of the Nazarene

*Way, Truth, Life* is a thoroughly Wesleyan-Holiness guide for those participating in the Great Commission, both from the perspective of becoming a disciple and of being a disciple maker. The role of sanctifying grace is a crucial centerpiece of this work, encouraging all readers to continually grow in truth. Busic has provided the church a gift through this theologically informed resource for discipleship in the twenty-first century.

Carla Sunberg  
General Superintendent  
Church of the Nazarene

*Way, Truth, Life* is a profound, comprehensive understanding of God's unselfish love displayed in Jesus Christ, the full image of his being. Busic biblically and theologically describes how God encounters us in all the stages of life, graciously offering himself through Christ, restoring us to his eternal purpose of full fellowship with him. Our journey with God through Christ is an intimate relationship of grace. Busic contributes to the church as the body of Christ, bringing it back to its Wesleyan roots and aiming to launch every believer on the journey of grace together, demonstrating Christ and expanding the kingdom of God.

Christian Sarmiento  
South America Regional Director  
Church of the Nazarene

I have been on a few trips before. When I went alone, I was lonely, often lost and consequently late. Had I a companion and a correct map, it could have been so different. On your trip, I suggest you take Busic's *Way, Truth, Life* because these pages will tenderly lead you to a divine Companion. Once you finish reading it and discover for yourself the transforming truth therein, you will never want to travel alone again.

Robert Broadbooks  
USA/Canada Regional Director  
Church of the Nazarene

Combining a Wesleyan-Holiness theology of grace with a practical focus on the journey of discipleship, Busic calls every follower of Jesus to a life marked by ever-increasing Christlikeness. A true gift to Christ's church! Join the journey, and bring someone along.

Scott Rainey  
Global Director of Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries  
Church of the Nazarene

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# INTRODUCTION

Jesus invites us to a journey. “Come, follow me.” It is a simple invitation to go on an adventure with a beloved friend. The Christian life is more than right belief. It is more than intellectual assent. It is an invitation to a journey with Jesus.

Another word for the journey with Jesus is discipleship. Discipleship, following the *way* of Jesus *with* Jesus, has many twists and turns and unexpected bends in the road. Sometimes the path feels easy and other times like a demanding incline. But the end goal (in Greek, *telos*) of discipleship is always the same: to be like Christ.

If that seems impossible, you are actually in a very good place to start. In fact, it *would* be impossible if it were not for a very important certainty: we make the journey *with Jesus*. That is why it is a journey of grace.

When Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), he was talking about more than a sequential intellectual equation or a transactional agreement we make with God. He was describing the relational way discipleship will happen. Indeed, Way, Truth, and Life are not philosophical abstractions or life principles. Way, Truth, and Life are a Person.

Jesus was pointing toward the proper *telos* (goal) of the journey: real *life* as God intended, and the means by which we reach the goal

are the *way* and the *truth*, fulfilled in and through himself.<sup>1</sup> The journey of grace is relational to the core.

James K. A. Smith describes discipleship as “a kind of immigration, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col. 1:13).”<sup>2</sup> This is journey language—moving from one country to another.<sup>3</sup> It is about changing citizenship and allegiances, which is entirely impossible apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who is the Way. Smith continues: “In Christ we are given a heavenly passport; in his body we learn to live like ‘locals’ of his kingdom. Such an immigration to a new kingdom isn’t just a matter of being teleported to a different realm; we need to be acclimated to a new way of life, learn a new language, acquire new habits—and unlearn the habits of that rival dominion.”<sup>4</sup>

I really believe that when Jesus said, “I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14), that promise included the guarantee that he has personally made reservations for the trip, including accommodations when we arrive. He is our heavenly passport who enables us to become locals of a new country—of his kingdom. Best of all, he promises to accompany us all the way home. Jesus will be our Way for the way. This is the hope of a journey of grace.

## I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life

When Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” he wasn’t suggesting an abstract life principle to hang on the wall. Rather, it was a response to a question raised by scared and uncertain

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1. Richard John Neuhaus defines *telos* as “the ultimate end that gives meaning to the thing in question.” Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 127.

2. James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 66.

3. John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) was a fictional early version of this same concept of the journey one takes to change countries/kingdoms.

4. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 66.

disciples. It comes from a section in the Gospel of John that biblical scholars refer to as The Last Discourse (John 14–17). These four chapters of John, more than any of the other New Testament Gospels, give us an inside look into what Jesus was thinking about and teaching his disciples during the hours just before his Passion and death on the cross. Thus, they could well be described as the last will and testament of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Remember, the disciples have just heard incredibly *bad news*. They have gathered in a borrowed room. Everyone is packed into tight quarters. Jesus washes his twelve disciples' feet, which makes everyone uncomfortable. Then he proceeds to tell them that very soon one of them will betray him (13:21). To make matters worse, after several years of traveling everywhere together, Jesus tells them that he is leaving and that they cannot go with him (13:33).

This is all very upsetting! Jesus can feel the weight of his words settling over them. No wonder he says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (14:1). The word translated as “troubled” is the same word used to describe the waters of the Sea of Galilee during a raging storm. When the wind blew, the waters became choppy and churning. The disciples are feeling like that. Their stomachs are churning. Their heads are spinning. Their emotions are on overload. Jesus tries to comfort their raging hearts: “Do not let your hearts be troubled . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going” (vv. 1a, 2b, 3b–4).

Then Thomas speaks up. History has named him Doubting Thomas, but I am glad he was there because Thomas has the cour-

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5. Frederick Dale Bruner refers to John 14–16 as Jesus's discipleship sermons, with chapter 17 serving as a closing prayer and, taken altogether, “Jesus's compact systematic theology for his missionary church.” Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 786.



age to ask the question everyone else wanted an answer to. He is like a student in a classroom who stops the professor in the middle of the lecture and says, “Excuse me. This may sound silly, but we have no idea what you’re talking about right now.” In fact, it wasn’t a silly question. I can appreciate the fact that Thomas had the presence of mind to identify the large elephant in the room and ask the pressing question on everyone’s mind: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (v. 5).

Life is like that, isn’t it? There are times when we find ourselves wondering which way to turn. Times when we thought we knew where we were going—or *hoped* we knew where we were going—but having to admit we’d completely lost our way. There seem to be so many intersections and turns, so many options and dead ends. What we wish for more than anything else in the puzzle of life is a map. However, many people, not finding that map, decide it’s better to go somewhere than stay nowhere, so they pick a direction and head off on whatever seems to be the path of least resistance.

Thankfully, Jesus answers Thomas’s question (and ours): “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (v. 6). It’s interesting that the emphasis of Jesus’s claim is clearly on “the way.” The way is sequentially first. That is not to say that the truth and the life are not important. It simply means that the truth and the life explain *how* and *why* Jesus is the Way.<sup>6</sup>

He is the Way because he is the Truth—the revelation of God. He is the Way because the life of God available to every person resides in him and him alone. He is simultaneously both the *access to*

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6. Considered by many to be the preeminent Johannine scholar of his generation, Raymond Brown believes, “*the way* is the primary predicate [of the statement of Jesus], and *the truth* and *the life* are just explanations of the way.” Brown, *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI, The Anchor Bible Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 621. If this is correct, the truth and the life are explanations of the way—or, said differently, Jesus is the Way because he is the Truth and the Life. Jesus personally embodies all three.

and the *embodiment* of life with God. The heart of the good news of John's Gospel is that in Jesus—the incarnate Word and unique Son of God—we can see and know God in a manner never before made possible. He is the authorized self-disclosure of God.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Jesus is not merely *a way* but *the way*—because he is the exceptional, visible manifestation of the invisible God whom we know as Father (1:14, 18; 6:46; 8:19; 12:45).<sup>8</sup>

“No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6). Many of us can relate to Thomas's question, “How can we know the way?” (v. 5) because every person, whether articulated or not, is searching for answers to spiritual questions. Our society today is more spiritually open than it has been in many years. The problem is that people are open to many different avenues of spirituality.

The modern Western worldview—drawing from an all-encompassing consumer mentality and linked with the very recent political concern for gracious plurality—causes many to view one spiritual path to be just as relevant and legitimate as any other, as long as our personal needs are being met, and as long as we are being authentically true to our own selves. And so it is assumed—whether one chooses Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Scientology, Judaism, Christianity, or any other religion—that, as long as one is sincere and is gratified by one's choice, then that alternative is as good as any other because all paths lead (so the worldview says) to the same God.

One of the many problems with such a view is that these different beliefs often contradict each other and make mutually exclusive claims. When Christianity is viewed in light of the many other di-

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7. Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 811. Bruner reminds us that “Jesus's disclosure of God the Father gives us great hope that the Father too [like Jesus] will be—and, indeed, is and always has been—very, very good.”

8. I draw inspiration for this sentence from a poetic footnote in *The Wesley Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, Joel B. Green and William H. Willimon, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).

verse religious systems, it is the only faith that makes the definitive claim that Jesus is the exclusive way to God. One cannot believe in Jesus Christ's exclusive claim, "No one comes to the Father except through me," and still maintain that there are other ways to gain access to the Father. In effect, to do so would deny the very Christ who spoke those words. Jesus did not say, "I am one of many ways to the Father." He did not say, "You can choose to follow me if you like, but there are other choices that are just as viable." Nor did Jesus say, "Whichever spiritual path you walk down will be fine with me, as long as you're sincere." Jesus never even hinted at that. He stated clearly that he is the only way to the Father.<sup>9</sup>

Not long after our family moved to a new city, my wife and I had an appointment across town. We had to take separate vehicles. Because her sense of direction has always been better than mine, she led the way. Suddenly we were caught in dense traffic, and I lost her. I thought I was following her, but by the time I realized I wasn't, I was on a completely different road, and it was too late even to get to the appointment. I simply turned around and went home. The moral of the story is simple: You can be sincere in the path you choose and simultaneously be sincerely wrong. The fact is, it takes more than sincerity to find the right way.<sup>10</sup> It takes truth! A person can be making good time in the direction they are going, but if it's the wrong way, it doesn't matter how quickly they arrive.

Jesus's claim is radically *inclusive* because all are invited to follow the way, but it is radically *exclusive* in that every path a person follows

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9. This is not to limit the sovereignty of God to graciously reach adherents of other religions and faith traditions who may die without knowing or even hearing the name of Jesus. God is always free to do that which God sovereignly chooses to do. I fully expect to be surprised by grace in the reconciliation of all things.

10. No one is more sincere about their truth than suicide bombers. However, sincerity—no matter how passionately committed one is to their truth—is not enough if it isn't grounded in ultimate reality.

to find the truth winds up as a dead end—unless it is the one Way that leads them to the one true God.

Every person—every single one of us—is guilty of taking the wrong turn, spiritually speaking. As a result, we find ourselves far from God. The prophet Isaiah pointedly writes: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way” (53:6a). The apostle Paul reiterates in Romans, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). Why? Because we have all taken the wrong road in life. We have all chosen to follow our own way instead of pursuing God’s will and way for our lives.

The gospel (good news) is that Jesus came for people like us. Another Gospel writer, Luke, tells us that Jesus’s stated mission purpose is “to seek out and to save the lost” (19:10). Rather than leaving us standing indecisively at a fork in the road, or worse, aimlessly following the wrong path entirely, Jesus came to show us clearly the only way to God, to the new country of the kingdom, and to eternal life.

One commentator paraphrases Jesus’s words this way: “I, I am the Way there, and I, I am the Truth that will lead you on the Way there, and I, I am the Life that will give you the power to follow the Truth along the Way there.”<sup>11</sup> Not a set of directions, not a roadmap, not a set of clues—I AM<sup>12</sup> the Way. Not a set of life-organizing principles or philosophical presuppositions—I AM the Truth. Not an alternative way to live with a more optimistic viewpoint—I AM the only real Life, the singular means to becoming truly human.

This claim of Jesus Christ to be not merely *a* way, and *a* truth, and *a* life, but to be the true and unique Son of God, is the bedrock of

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11. Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 823.

12. The pronoun [*ego*, “I”] is emphatic, turning the emphasis from a method to a Person. It is also noteworthy, and has been highlighted innumerable times, that Jesus’s “I AM” sayings in John are a not-so-subtle reference to God’s burning bush pronouncement to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod. 3:14). “I AM” became known throughout the Hebrew scriptures as *Yahweh*.

Christianity. That is not to malign other faith systems; it is simply to say there is only one way to the Father, and it is through Jesus Christ. He is the only means by which we may be saved. As Frederick Bruner has pointed out, “The East has perennially longed for ‘the Way’ (the *Tao*), the West for ‘the Truth’ (*Veritas*), and the whole world (east, west, north, and south) for ‘the (*real*) Life.’ Jesus is, in person, all three.”<sup>13</sup>

Imagine you are in an unfamiliar town and you ask someone for directions to a particular destination. The person you asked for help could say, “You have to veer to the right at the next big intersection. Then cross the square, go past the church, stay in the middle lane, which will take you directly to the third street on the right, until you come to a four-lane stop.” Even with clear guidance, when the way is complicated, the chances of making a wrong turn or getting lost are fairly high.

Suppose that instead, the person you ask says, “You know, there is no easy way to get there. It is fairly complicated if you have never been there before. Just follow me. Better yet, *come with me*, and I’ll take you there.” That person not only becomes your guide, but they also essentially become the way, and you cannot miss getting where you need to go. That is what Jesus does for us. He doesn’t just give advice and directions. He walks with us on a journey of grace. Indeed, he does not tell us about the way—he becomes the Way!

British theologian and renowned missiologist Lesslie Newbigin powerfully articulated this perspective: “It is not that he [Jesus] teaches the way, or guides us in the way: if that were so, we could thank him for his teaching and then proceed to follow it on our own. He himself *is* the way. . . . To follow this way is, in fact, the only way to the Father.”<sup>14</sup>

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13. Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 812.

14. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 181. Emphasis added.

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice comes to a crossroads and asks the Cheshire Cat a question: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to go," answers the Cat.

"I don't much care where I go," Alice replies.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

Perhaps no one has more eloquently summarized Jesus's unique claim than Thomas à Kempis in his devotional classic, *Of the Imitation of Christ*:

Follow thou me: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living. I am the way, which thou oughtest to follow; the truth, which thou oughtest to trust; the life, which thou oughtest to hope for. I am the way inviolable, the truth infallible, the life that cannot end. If thou remain in my way, thou shalt know the truth, and the truth shall make thee free, and thou shalt lay hold on eternal life.<sup>15</sup>

In Jesus, we find the Way to the Father. He is the way home.

In Jesus, we find the Truth. He embodies the unchanging, sure, and certain truth of the character and nature of the Father.

In Jesus, we find Life—abundant life, both now and in the promised new creation of God to come.

This is the journey of grace.

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15. Thomas à Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ*, Book 3, chapter 56 (c. 1418–1427).

# 1

## AMAZING GRACE

*Grace is everywhere.*

—Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*

“Amazing Grace” is one of the most famous and beloved songs in the world today. Although it is more than two centuries old, it continues to be sung in hundreds of languages and dialects.<sup>1</sup> It transcends race and creed, geographical and generational boundaries. You don’t even have to be a Christian to know the words and be moved by their meaning.

An English pastor named John Newton wrote the song. During the early part of his adult life, he was the captain of a slave ship and was responsible for bringing hundreds of slaves from West Africa to Great Britain. However, following a near-death encounter during a violent storm at sea, he had a conversion experience that radically changed him. He would never be the same.

Not only did he begin a journey of grace with God, but he also came to deeply regret and repent of his personal involvement in the

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1. As I write this sitting in an airport lounge in Johannesburg, South Africa, I can hear one of the workers humming it softly in Afrikaans. American journalist Bill Moyers was attending a performance at Lincoln Center where the audience sang “Amazing Grace.” He was so impressed by the unifying power of the song, among Christians and non-Christians alike, that he was inspired to produce a documentary by the same name.

slave trade. He resigned his captainship, became an Anglican pastor, and later came to be a mentor to William Wilberforce, who led the campaign to abolish slavery in the British Empire. At the age of eighty-two, as he lay dying, Newton declared, “My memory is nearly gone. But I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.” No wonder he could write so poetically—he had received, experienced, and been transformed by amazing grace.

This is a book about grace. It is about the journey of grace by which we are made more and more into the image of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Grace comes in many forms, both in Scripture and in our lives, but the nature of grace remains the same. We receive it personally as a gift from God and cooperate with God within a mutual and transforming relationship.

### What Is Grace?

What is God’s grace? How does it come into our lives, affect us, change us, and empower us to live Christlike lives? There are many definitions of grace:

- God’s unmerited favor.
- God’s undeserved love.
- The favor given to someone who deserves the opposite.
- The absolutely free expression of the love of God finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver.<sup>2</sup>
- God’s no-strings-attached goodness.

All of these definitions for grace attempt to describe those indescribable and astounding aspects of God’s loving response to undeserving humanity. This is why we use the word “amazing.” It defies our human categories of relationships and transactions.

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2. This is a loose paraphrase of the definition of grace attributed to now-deceased New Testament scholar, linguist, and missions leader Spiros Zodhiates.



Those in the world of finance know what a “grace period” is. Grace periods are small windows of time when what someone owes to a lending company is deferred without penalty. When a loan is deferred without incurring late fees, that is a grace period—but there *are* strings attached. It only lasts for a short time (it is a *grace period*). Eventually, it will be over, and if someone still has not paid what they owe, they will be charged additional penalties. It is free—but it is not unconditional.

God’s grace is different. God’s grace comes free of charge (not to be confused with “no cost”—more on this idea at the end of the chapter), and it is a good thing it does because we could not afford it anyway. We could never pay or repay what we owe to God. It is by his grace that God does for us what we could never do for ourselves. That is why we say grace is unmerited and undeserved. God treats us better than we deserve. It is the favor given to us when we deserve the opposite, and that compels us to follow Jesus in thoroughly devoted discipleship.

The simplest definition of grace is “gift.” The apostle Paul borrowed the common Greek word for “gift” or “favor,” *charis*, and helped reimagine it as a way to describe the vast meaning of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 8:9; 9:15; Gal. 2:21; Eph. 2:4–10).<sup>3</sup> It is also important to note that *charis* is derived from the root *char*—“that which brings joy.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the action of grace given and received evokes both joy and gratitude. In that sense, it is appropriate for recipients of grace to offer something in return: thanksgiving and a consecrated life. This does not imply that divine grace is a relational transaction. The desire (or expectation) to repay the favor

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3. The Greek word *charis* is translated in Latin as *gratia*, or simply, “grace.”

4. Thomas A. Langford, *Reflections on Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 28.

negates the power of the gift.<sup>5</sup> Transactional thinking always undermines and devalues the intentions of a gift.

If I give my friend a gift, I might say, “I want to give this gift as a sign of my love for you.”

The normal response would be for my friend to receive the gift and simply say, “Thank you.”

What if, instead, my friend said, “That is very nice of you. How much do I owe you?” He has then moved the language of a gift into the language of a transaction: *You are doing something nice for me. I owe you one.*

There is another problem with conflating the gift of grace with transactions that are repayable. The underlying meaning of grace is that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and nothing we can do to make God love us less than he already does.<sup>6</sup> There is nothing so good about us that makes us worthy or able to earn God’s love, and there is nothing so bad about us that can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35–39). God doesn’t love us because we are good, and God doesn’t hate us because we are bad. God’s essential nature is holy love, which means God’s characteristic action is divinely self-giving, poured-out grace.<sup>7</sup>

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5. In *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), John M. G. Barkley makes a strong case that the idea of “gift” as something handed over “gratuitously, for nothing” is a modern Western concept. Throughout antiquity, and even today in many parts of the world, gifts are given with strong expectations of return—even in order to gain something that would strengthen social solidarity. The New Testament Gospel understanding of the “gift” of salvation is that, while it is not deserved and cannot be earned, grace begets righteousness, and righteousness begets obedience.

6. Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing about Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 70.

7. “God’s most essential characteristic is love. ‘God is love,’ John says simply yet most profoundly. We may modify God’s love with the word ‘holy.’ However, this adds little to an understanding of God because, by nature, God’s love is holy. The modifier ‘holy’ does remind us, however, that God is beyond us as other than us. God is holy and always different from us in nature.” Diane LeClerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The*

Philip Yancey gets at this when he writes: “Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.”<sup>8</sup> Since God did not initially love us based on our good behavior, how could better behavior make God love us more? Similarly, how could worse behavior make God love us less? You cannot pray more, give more, serve more, or sacrifice more and cause God to say, “She is doing so much better. She is finally getting herself together. I love her more now than I did before.” No. You are loved as you are. Everything does *not* depend on what you do or how you behave—not because you deserve it but because this is the first and last inclination of the heart of God.

A common comparison between justice, mercy, and grace says it well: Justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you do not deserve.

Jesus told many parables to help us reimagine life from a kingdom point of view. These parables were not just moral stories told to show us a better way to live. They help us better understand, and correct, our concept of the nature and heart of God. Think about the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost sons (Luke 15).<sup>9</sup> Jesus describes God as a shepherd who is overjoyed not because ninety-nine sheep followed the rules but because one of his own who was lost has been found. He describes God as a woman who turns her house upside down in search of a precious coin. When she finds it, she is so ecstatic that she throws a party to celebrate with her friends. Then he describes God as a lovesick father who searches the horizon for signs of a wayward son. When he spots the wandering boy “while he was still far off” (Luke 15:20), he is filled with compassion and runs

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*Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010), 274.

8. Yancey, *What's So Amazing about Grace?*, 70.

9. My use of “sons” in the plural is intentional. Jesus’s teaching in this parable seems clear that both sons were lost for different reasons—but only one left home.

to welcome him home. These are all insights into the nature and heart of God. *Foundness* delights the heart of God! Grace overcomes wandering, lostness, and infidelity.

Jesus told another parable about laborers in a vineyard whose employer pays all the workers the same wage even though some worked far fewer hours than others (Matt. 20:1–16). This story makes no economic sense. It seems like an unwise business practice. This kind of reckless behavior from business owners runs the risk of alienating the hardest-working employees and encouraging laziness from the less motivated—but this isn't a parable about best business practices; it is a parable about the extravagant grace of God. Grace is not a mathematical equation that keeps a tally of employee hours, follows proper accounting principles, or rewards the hardest workers. Grace is not about who deserves to be paid; it is about *undeserving* persons who are given gifts anyway. If this sounds scandalous to your ears and ludicrous to your common sense, then you are beginning to get the point of grace.

## Grace Is Personal

We can speak of the *experience* of grace because it is profoundly personal and relational. Grace is personal for two important reasons. First, grace is not a *thing*. It is not a commodity. It is not a holy substance poured into us like Christian motor oil to help our discipleship engine run more efficiently. Grace is personal because it comes to us in the *person* of Jesus Christ, who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”<sup>10</sup>

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10. When the Gospel of John speaks of the Holy Spirit as “another” Advocate, it means that the Spirit of Truth will continue the ministry of Jesus the Truth (14:6, 16–17).

Thomas Langford, a theologian in the Wesleyan tradition, maintains that throughout the history of the church there has been a struggle between two understandings of grace:

On the one hand, grace has been thought of as some *thing*, some thing God possesses and can give, and perhaps some thing persons can accept and possess; or, in larger terms, some atmosphere, energy, or power which represents God's action and provides a surrounding context for human life. On the other hand, grace has been identified with some *one*; grace is a person, grace is God—God present to human beings. To speak of grace is to speak of God's presence and caring interaction with creation. In this understanding, considerations of grace are based upon reflections on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus Christ is grace; grace is Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

I am struck by the power of Diarmaid MacCulloch's weighty statement in his monumental history of Christianity: "A *person*, not a system, captured [Paul] in the mysterious events on the road to Damascus."<sup>12</sup> In so many ways, Saul of Tarsus—later renamed Paul the apostle—was not prepared for this astonishing revelation. His commitment had been to a religion, a defined system, a tradition, a Law. He knew it all too well. He was its trained and passionate defender—but it was a *person* who changed him. That person was Jesus of Nazareth, whom Paul would later identify as Christ and Lord.

Paul's previous belief system was total adherence to the Law. After the Damascus road experience (Acts 9:1–22), he saw things differently. He still believed the Law was good—but incomplete. When he met the Person, he turned his focus from what was good (his Jewish heritage) to someone incomparably better: *Jesus Christ*. Through

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11. Langford, *Reflections on Grace*, 18.

12. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 99.

the experience of an intimate meeting with Christ, he discovered a righteousness that was not his own.<sup>13</sup> Paul believed that the relationship of the believer to Christ (the Person) could become so intimate that he speaks of it as “oneness in Christ,” indicating total union. Oneness was not an abstract Greco-Roman, Platonic concept for Paul. Jesus Christ was (is) a real human being in recent historic time and space, not only like us in his humanity—but, as the Person Paul met on the Damascus road, a risen, transcendent Person whose life, death, resurrection, and ascension reversed the catastrophe of our sin and fallenness (1 Cor. 15:22).

In a very real sense, the name change from Saul to Paul was more than a conversion—it was an awakening: “something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored” (Acts 9:18). It was a regeneration. Paul was given a pure, unadulterated gift that he could neither earn nor deserve. Now he could see where the Law had been pointing all along—to a Person. This is why he would later write: “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23–24). Scandalous to those bound by Jewish law and tradition and madness for those absorbed in Greek elite culture and Western philosophical worldviews. But for those who could believe that Jesus was the Christ of God (in Greek, *Christ* means “anointed One”), by the grace of God, he became their salvation.<sup>14</sup>

The first Christians did not preach a system or even a religion. They proclaimed a *Person*. For Islam the Word became a *book*

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13. *Dikaioun*, “to be made righteous” (or in the phrase made famous by the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, “to be justified”), denotes that there is a grace that comes from outside of ourselves.

14. *Strong’s Concordance of the New Testament* indicates that *charis*, “grace,” appears at least eighty-eight times in Paul’s letters to first-century churches.

(Qu'ran); for Christianity the Word became *flesh* (John 1:14).<sup>15</sup> A human being. The Eternal, One God, became a Person. Incarnation. The first Christians did not give up their lives for a theory, a principle, or a life force. It was for and because of a Person—a real Person who was really crucified and buried, who was really raised from the dead as the firstfruits of the new creation, who really ascended into heaven, and who is really coming back again.

I know of no one who describes this more articulately than Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “With an abstract idea it is possible to enter into a relation of formal knowledge, to become enthusiastic about it, and perhaps even to put it into practice; but it can never be followed in personal obedience. Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

So the journey of grace is not about following a system, a book, a *Manual*, a denomination, or a tradition. We follow, worship, and serve Jesus Christ. Grace is the result of all the benefits of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of the personal Jesus, who is now Christ and Lord.

A Christocentric (Jesus-centered) account of grace is not to neglect a more robust Trinitarian theology of grace (God as Creator and Father; the power of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life). Understanding grace as a Person is to remember that whatever we come to personally know of God is revealed most clearly in the life, teaching, and experience of the Person God has chosen to make himself known. The goal of all Christian discipleship is to shape the recipients of

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15. I am indebted to Dany Gomis, Church of the Nazarene Regional Director for Africa, for this important distinction.

16. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1949), 63–64.

grace into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. Grace is not something—grace is someone.

This affirmation leads us to the second reason that grace is personal: grace comes to every person according to his or her particular need or capacity to receive it. Each person uniquely receives and appropriates grace.

I have many friends, but I relate to them in different ways because each one is unique. I have three children, and while I love them all an equal amount, I cannot treat them all the same way. They are all different, so my parenting approach must adapt for each one. This is the loving way to be a friend and to be a parent.

Likewise, grace is appropriated and received uniquely by every person because we experience grace in a personal relationship with the triune God, given to us from the Father, extended through Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Grace is personal because it comes to us in a Person, personalized according to our needs. As God gives more of himself to us, more grace is given.

### Grace Is Costly

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that, although grace is free, it doesn't come without a cost. In a piercing paragraph from his most well-known book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer highlights the difference between cheap grace and costly grace as a lack of demand for or expectation of real discipleship: “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”<sup>17</sup>

Further, Bonhoeffer bluntly states that cheap grace is the “deadly enemy of our church,” “the bitterest foe of discipleship,” and “has been the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works.”<sup>18</sup>

17. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 47–48.

18. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45, 55, 59.



One can say they are justified by grace alone as a gift from God, but the fruit of a justified life is the one who has left all and followed Christ.<sup>19</sup> And the reason, Bonhoeffer rightly points out, is that when one hears the call of Jesus to follow him, the response of disciples is first an act of obedience before it is a doctrinal confession of faith (Mark 2:14).<sup>20</sup>

Bonhoeffer goes on to describe how grace is costly and why a complete and fully surrendered discipleship is the only appropriate response:

Grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: ‘ye were bought at a price,’ and what cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.<sup>21</sup>

The life of discipleship is a journey of grace. It begins with grace, is empowered by grace, and is infused with grace from start to finish. There is no true discipleship unless we follow and obey the way of Jesus. The grace of God can be received as a free gift, but it cannot remain apart from the demands of discipleship.

### Grace Is Amazing

Philip Yancey recounts a scene from the movie *The Last Emperor*, of the young boy anointed as the last emperor of China. He lives a life of luxury with many servants at his command.

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19. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 55.

20. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 61.

21. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 47–48.

“What happens when you do wrong?” his brother asks.

“When I do wrong, someone else is punished,” the boy emperor replies. To demonstrate, the boy emperor breaks a precious artifact, and one of the servants is beaten for the transgression.<sup>22</sup>

This was the ancient custom of kings and emperors. It was neither just nor merciful. Then someone arrived from another world. He was a King who brought new meaning to the concept of authority. He reversed the old order and inaugurated a new kingdom. When his servants fall into sin, this King takes their just due. Yancey reflects, “Grace is free only because the giver himself has borne the cost.”<sup>23</sup>

This is not justice or mercy—this is grace. Costly grace. Perhaps this is why we still love to sing Newton’s song. Grace is amazing.

So how does the extravagant grace of God play out in our daily lives? It is one thing to know what grace means. It is great to know that God loves us like that, but what does grace look like when I see it? What does grace do when I experience it? What difference does grace make in my everyday life?

Grace is experienced in multifaceted, nuanced, and diverse ways. The rest of this book will explore the manifold expressions of the journey of grace.

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22. Yancey, *What’s So Amazing about Grace?*, 67.

23. Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, 67.