

**BECOMING WHO YOU ALREADY ARE—  
HOW THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS OUR  
LIVES AND BRINGS US PEACE**

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# WHY I AM THE WAY I AM AND HOW GOD'S GRACE ENABLES ME TO CHANGE

## IS CHANGE EVEN POSSIBLE?

**“When it seems that you are in a losing battle with sin, you can say, I have hope for victory because Christ is working in me right now to complete what he has begun.”  
Lane & Tripp**

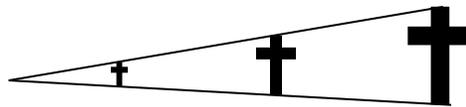
- We often think we are the only one who struggles with a certain sin—but this is *not true*. We all have secrets—things we never talk about; secret “pet” sins that we think we’re keeping “in check” (but are actually eating us alive). So often we take on our sinful patterns and lifelong struggles as identities—but *that is not who we truly are!*
- *Especially* when we are at our *worst*—God’s love for us does not waver (Romans 5). This is the gospel! In Christ, this is who we already are: justified because of Christ; adopted as His children; and *being* sanctified.
- It is not easy to change—but it is guaranteed. A fact. We *will* become like Him because it is God Who works in us; growth in grace and conformity to Christ is God’s *agenda* for our lives until Christ returns or we go Home (Col. 3:10).

*“By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Hebrews 12:14*

## WHY AM I THE WAY I AM?

**“We must understand that our relational conflicts and lack of internal peace reveal with great clarity the condition of our hearts.”  
(p. 20 of *Peacemaking Women*)**

### The Cross Chart



- If we fail to see, believe in, and lay hold of the Cross (“The Cross” is shorthand for the entirety of the finished work of Christ), we will be filled with blindness and unbelief; prone toward licentiousness or legalism.
- Either we will be blind to our sin and depravity such that we fail to see our need for Christ (“I’m not as bad as *her*”); or we will be blind to the richness of God’s grace such that we have too low of a view of God and the finished work of Christ (“He could never forgive me!”). Either way, we will be living by works.

## HOW DOES GOD'S GRACE ENABLE US TO CHANGE?

**“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” Calvin Inst. 1.1.1**

- So often, we don't need to be taught more—we simply need to remember. *Remembering is the first step of change.*
- By faith, we remember God—Who He is; what His character is; and what he is up to in our lives. We stake our lives on the doctrine of justification: the penal, substitutionary, and just sacrifice of Christ on the cross is sufficient for our sins—in the past, the future, *and the present*. The means of grace help us to believe that the past benefits and future benefits of the gospel bring *real and present benefits today*.
- Daily, *and within community*, we grow in a more honest, accurate, biblical understanding of who we really are in Christ—not just who we will be one day (in Heaven), but who we are *today* in Christ. *We understand who we are and then we grow to become who we already are.*

## OVERWHELMED BY GRACE

**“Only one thing is strong enough to overpower a stormy life; what God promises to do in and through Jesus Christ.”  
David Powlison**

- Are you blasé to the gospel? Do you say—“Yeah, yeah ... Christ is the Son of God, died on the cross for my sins. Whatever.” *If so, be careful!* The Christian life—in all its joy!—is to be one where we are daily, moment-by-moment *overwhelmed by the gospel; overwhelmed by grace.*
- Listen! Knowing what God's Word says is not the same thing as believing it with saving faith. Mere knowledge will *never* bring about change. But here is our hope: the same grace that has forgiven us is *now* in the process of changing us to be more like Christ. Yes, the change may come slowly—but there *is* progress. We are not who we once were. God is at work in us. He is with us!
- Let us confess and believe and *revel* in His wonderful nearness. No more hiding! Just worship—for the same power that raised Christ from the dead *is* at work in our hearts. We are forgiven! Christ with us! He is our Hope and our Confidence. *Christ is our Husband—faithful when we are faithless; loving when we are unlovable; our Savior because we can't save ourselves.*

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Be honest—who are you? By what *functional identity* do you define yourself when you wake up in the morning? What hats do you wear? As you go throughout your day and interpret everything that happens to you, how do you evaluate yourself, your circumstance, and other people? What is your place in God’s larger story of redemption? Do you think about eternity as you go throughout your daily tasks?
2. Do you ever feel like you know a lot *about* God but struggle with actually knowing *Him*? Have you ever really thought through the idea of Christ as your *husband*? If you treated your earthly husband like you treat Christ, what would your marriage be like?
3. Tell me about who you *truly* believe *you are in Christ—right now*. Are you caught in paralyzing self-condemnation, vague but deadly shame, or hopeless despair? Or do you think you’re a pretty good Christian—surely better than most—because you are so disciplined and “together”?
4. To help you identify areas of blindness/unbelief and whether you are living by works or faith, check the sentences that best describe how you usually feel as you go throughout your day:  My heart is troubled. I don’t have peace and joy.  I feel that God is disappointed in me. I have a hard time believing that he delights in me.  I am angry with God because of the pain and suffering in my life.  When I struggle with sin, I am slow to run to Christ. I question His grace to *me*.  I have a vague sense that I am not good enough no matter how hard I try.  I am not satisfied or happy unless I do things perfectly.  When someone does not like me, I feel crushed.  I know a lot about the Bible, but my day-to-day living doesn’t reflect what I know.  I blame myself for things that aren’t even entirely under my control.  I will go days without reading the Bible—especially when I am busy.
5. What change do you want to see in your life? Honestly—do you believe that God can change you? That you will *ever* get over *this* sin? Review the present benefits of your salvation: justification, adoption, sanctification. What does it mean for these *graces* to impact your life and your journey of sanctification *today*?
6. Read Psalm 27. Personalize it for your life situations and pray it back to God.  
(For example: “O, Lord, you are my light and my salvation—why should I be afraid of what people in my small group think of me? When my finances are in a terrible situation; when someone I thought was my friend gossips about me; though everything around me feels overwhelming and out of control—*my heart will not fear*. I will be confident because I *know* that my Home is secure with You and that in this very day of trouble, You *will* keep me safe. Ultimately, You are with me and that is enough. You are giving me wisdom and faith and counsel and resources to persevere—and I trust You, my Savior and my God.”)

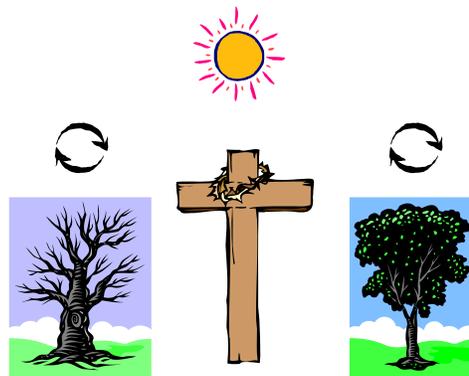
“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

# LEARNING TO LIVE IN A CYCLE OF GRACE—REPENTANCE, CONFESSION, AND FORGIVENESS

## IN WHAT CYCLE ARE WE CURRENTLY LIVING?

**“God is not just about fixing situations and relationships—he is intent on rescuing us from ourselves. We are the focus of his loving, lifelong work of change.” Lane & Tripp**

- Every aspect of your life will be shaped by how you complete this statement:  
*My problem is ....*
- Do you naturally point the camera *outwards* at your circumstance and the other people in your life? While external conditions can be very influential in our lives and should not be ignored, the Bible says that they are only the *occasion* for sin *not* the cause. If we only focus on external problems, we will focus on external solutions and miss the application of the gospel to the deeper, *real*, issue of the heart.
- *The Three Trees*



*“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires ... if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.” 2 Peter 1:3-9*

## GROWING IN WISDOM CONCERNING *PLEASURES*

**“The better you know your sin and the extent you hate it? That’s the extent (and no farther!) you will “grasp for grace against it.”  
Kris Lundgaard**

- We are all on a daily continuum between slavery and freedom; false worship (functional idolatry) and right worship of God. *How we interact with life’s pleasures is a true indicator of our place on this continuum.*
- Real pleasures refresh and delight us because God is in His rightful place—God is God and we worship Him alone. We look to Him for what we need. From His bounty, we enjoy innocent pleasures—but they don’t pretend to promise us anything. They simply reflect His goodness and glory.
- Guilty pleasures leave us tired, guilt-ridden, depressed, and anxious. We hide our guilty pleasures because we know that there is something wrong with our obsessive selfishness related to them. Guilty pleasures lie to us—they tell us we’ll feel better after we indulge, but we always feel worse. So then we indulge again in order to avoid how bad we feel.

## INTELLIGENT REPENTANCE

**“Never think for a minute that the war against sin is over in this life.”  
Kris Lundgaard**

**“Human sin is stubborn but not as stubborn as the grace of God and not half so persistent, not half so ready to suffer to win its way.”  
C. Plantinga**

- When we are caught in our habitual sins and ruling lusts, the idea that we need a Savior begins to sound quaint and simplistic. *This is a red flag that something is seriously, seriously wrong!*
- You cannot deal with the “blob” and “gray-ness” of vague feelings. (How do you deal with pain? Suffering?) Take it out of the gray; define it by biblical terms; and run to Christ. This is intelligent repentance and saving faith that believes the promises of God
- *Grace* makes us ready to confess. God knows me and still wants me? YES! This is the gospel in real-life—a cycle of repentance, confession, and forgiveness. And as we believe in God’s grace for ourselves, we are able to minister that grace to *others*.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. What are your secrets? What habitual sin do you struggle with on a regular basis? What thoughts or actions do you prefer to keep in the dark? Where do your actions, attitudes, and words fail to reflect the gospel that you profess to believe? Are you slacking off? Blaming God? Running away by escaping to too much eating, spending, working; escaping with too much TV or too many novels; too much emphasis on things like clothing, appearance, houses, cars? Do you ever think: "If God would only deliver me from ...XYZ ...THEN I'd be SO happy!" What is the "XYZ" in that statement?
2. What is your "blob"? Are you afraid? What do you worry about?  Money  My work  My marriage / finding a husband  My children / having children  My unsaved relatives  My weight and looks  My church  My ministry  How people view me  Whether someone is mad at me  Conflicted relationships  The future  What will happen if people find out about \_\_\_\_\_  What people say about me behind my back  A big project or commitment \_\_\_\_\_  Whether I might be going crazy  Everything! My life is a mess!  That I'm really as bad as I feel  Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. We are all on a continuum between slavery and freedom. Consider your daily life—especially how you spend your time *in secret*. Where are you on the continuum? What innocent pleasures encourage freedom and joy in Christ? What refreshes you and reminds you of God's goodness toward you?
4. What are your guilty pleasures—things that make you increasingly depressed, anxious, or bound in slavery (once their temporary "relief/pleasure" has ended)? How do you compulsively seek a change of mood?  Hard work and discipline  Too much TV or reading  Fantasizing  Overeating  Exercise  Shopping  Sexual Indulgence  Alcohol or Drugs  Recreational Diversions (Ipad? Surfing? Email?)  Work  "Ministry"  Focusing on others  Avoiding people  Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. When you can't sleep, what's your pet "go to sleep" dream/fantasy? (See what you really value.)
6. Pray through Philippians 2 and name your guilty pleasures as you engage in thoughtful repentance and turn back to Christ. For example: "My favorite Chinese food, you look lovely to me, but did you leave Heaven to come to earth to rescue me from Hell? Did you suffer so that I could be delivered? Chinese food, did you shed your blood to forgive me my sins? Did God raise YOU to life on my behalf? Are you my advocate before the Father? No! And so I will enjoy you in a God-honoring way, *but I will worship Christ alone.*"
7. Confess to the Lord and ask Him to forgive you. Turn away from yourself and your unbelief! Lay hold of Christ—Who is already laying hold of you. Turn to Him. Run to Him. Believe what you already know to be true—there is forgiveness. Christ *has* paid the penalty.

## THE TRUE STATE OF MY RELATIONSHIPS AND HOW GOD'S GRACE CALLS ME TO SOMETHING BETTER

*“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! ... For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.” Psalm 133:1,3b*

### WHAT ARE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS REALLY LIKE?

**“People are unusually primed for covenantal ministry because they want meaningful relationships. They have seen the relationships around them crumble and they want substantive, lasting relationships. Meaningful, lasting relationships are characteristic of the covenant of grace. It is only grace that can move us beyond self-serving relationships.”**

***WIC Biblical Foundations for Womanhood  
“Paul’s Letters to Maturing Churches”***

- As human beings, created in God’s image, we have an innate desire to be in community. *But*—we also fear and dread the intimacy of true, redemptive, intimate relationships.
- Sin corrupts our relationships—we want them too much; or we avoid and disdain them. We crave them; we don’t care about them at all.

### WHY DO RELATIONSHIPS MATTER?

**“Jesus gives the world the right to judge whether the Father has sent the Son on the basis of whether the world sees observable love among all true Christians.”**

**Francis Schaeffer**

- The Bible places our individual growth in grace in the context of the body of Christ. Community is important because God himself lives in community and community among people is important to God! In fact, our relationships show the world Jesus (Matthew 5:23-24, John 17:20-23). *The Church is God’s Plan A—and there is no Plan B.*
- Relationships reveal our idols (James 4:1-3). When our demands are not met, *how do we respond?* One of the most common idols in relational strife is *justice*. Justice is a good thing, but often we want it too much. And when we don’t get it—we think we’re justified in our bitterness. But joy cannot coexist with bitterness.

## DEVELOPING GOSPEL-INFUSED RELATIONSHIPS

**“Be so awash in the ocean of His love, my soul, that the shortcomings of all human love will, more and more, seem but a trifling thing.”  
Andree Seu**

- It takes time and effort to develop truly redemptive relationships. Even the best ones take sacrifice and many relationships are unpleasant, taxing, and simply exhausting. It may seem inefficient to invest so much time and effort in building community, but God has made it clear in His Word that we grow in grace *within the Body*. Being around other people forces us to either die to ourselves or to sin. (Let’s not sin!) *The grace of God redeems our relationships.*
- We all have conflicts so we need to know God’s call on our lives and God’s resources to equip us to be *peacemakers*. But all of the training on peacemaking in the world will never empower you to forgive someone.
- If you wait until you are perfect or the people around you get their acts together—you *will never have any real relationships*. By faith, we are called to turn away from comparing, measuring, or trying to “fit in/be acceptable.”
- As we remember how much we have been forgiven, we begin to live in a *posture of mercy*. Rather than holding grudges, we begin to live in a cycle of grace; an atmosphere of grace. And it permeates all of our relationships. Remember the possibilities of grace!

*“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6:10*

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. How would you describe your relationships?  Nonexistent  Great! Relationships are my LIFE! They ALL make me SO happy. (me-centered; Man-centered; pleasant-centered)  Gospel-infused (some pleasant and intimate; others outward-ministry focused; appropriate wisdom and love for various spheres of influence).
2. Do you value relationships and community? How much so? Do you often sacrifice unity and community because you're not getting what you want? (Even something *good!*)
3. Do you crave acceptance, respect, and constant affirmation? Are you bound by the fear of rejection? Do you take a defensive position that says, "You'll never hurt me like that again!"?
4. Do you have *any* relationships that are deep enough to help you grow and change? What are some of the common obstacles that hinder redemptive relationships from developing in our lives? Think about your closest relationships: spouse, parent, children, or small group. What needs to change so that you can form more meaningful relationships with the people who are already in your life?
5. Many conflicts that might have been resolved quickly get worse simply because we do not restrain our tongues or choose our words more carefully. Proverbs 13:3 says, "He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin." Where have you spoken rashly and inflamed conflicts?

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## NEXT STEPS FOR LAYING HOLD OF AND MINISTERING GRACE IN OUR LIVES

*“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”* Philippians 4:9

### MAKE IT CONCRETE

- Action steps:
  - Before I leave this event, I will:
  - By this time next week, I will:
  - Within one month, I will:
  - A pattern I’d like to see develop in my life is:
  - By this time next year, I hope to see this grace growing in my life:
  
- *Feel like too much to tackle?* I understand! How about this:
  - One thing I will stop doing today:
  - One thing I will start doing today:

**“Change isn’t change until  
change takes place.”  
Judy Dabler**

### NEXT STEPS CONCERNING YOUR WALK WITH GOD

- Do you know Who God is—from His Word? What steps will you take to learn more? (Bible study, more diligent use of sermon time, study CDs, courses)
- Do you *know God*? Are you reaching for Him with a saving faith? Or mere head knowledge? Dare you pray, “I want to know You, God?” Dare you not?
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**“Are you too bad to receive  
grace? Grace woos and  
comforts us when we think we  
are too far gone to be rescued.  
How could you be too bad to  
receive what is for the bad?”  
David Powlison**

## NEXT STEPS CONCERNING YOU

**“The gospel makes us joyfully free to root out and admit our weaknesses and inadequacies because we know that we are safe and secure in the hand of God.”  
(p. 97 of *Peacemaking Women*)**

- What does Scripture say about you, your heart, your words / actions / attitudes? *Do you believe it?*
- What are your habitual sin patterns of blindness and unbelief? What step will you take today to turn away from your sin and turn *to God*? (Acknowledge it to yourself. God. Another person. Get help—biblical counsel; accountability; ecclesiastical redemptive discipline.)
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## NEXT STEPS CONCERNING OTHERS

**“On the last day, Jesus will not ask about our IQ, social status, health, or wealth. He will ask how our relationships were. And the chief characteristic of a good relationship is love.”  
Alfred Poirier**

- What are your stronger, most real, most Cross-centered and redemptive relationships? What steps can you take to continue to deepen them and encourage others to grow similar relationships too?
- If your relationships are nonexistent or shallow, what steps will you take to develop and improve them? (Prayer; time; sacrifice; growth in relational skills and wisdom.)
- What about conflict? Which “G” are you convicted about today? Who have you dropped off of your Christmas card list/cell phone? Who can you reach out to for help? Remember! We are called to trust God and love people.
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**(A QUICK REVIEW OF ...)**  
**WOMEN & PEACEMAKING—A JOURNEY OF GRACE**

**THE GOSPEL OUR FOUNDATION FOR PEACE**

- The law is good (1 Timothy 1:8), but only the *gospel* changes our hearts (Luke 6:43-45, Romans 8:1-39). We must first remember who God is and what *He* has done before we ever try to change.
- Generally, we give grace to others to the extent we experience it ourselves. If we are living in a “works” mentality towards God, we are probably living in a “works” mentality towards others and ourselves (Matthew 18:23-35).
- Remember! God calls us His beloved because it *delights* Him to do so (Eph. 1:5). Why does God love us? *Not* because of what we *do* but *because we are His*. *Nothing* can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39, Isaiah 49:16).

**BIBLICAL (AND PRACTICAL!) HOPE FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT**

- Our reconciled relationship with *God* is what makes reconciled relationships with *others* and peace *within* possible (2 Peter 1:9, Isaiah 26:3-4).
- The “4 G’s” of Peacemaking: Glorify God, Get the Log Out of Your Eye, Gently Restore, Go and Be Reconciled.

**OUR RELATIONSHIPS REVEAL OUR IDOLS**

- When the desires of our hearts are elevated to demands (James 4:1-3) and our demands are not met, *how do we respond?*
- Do we live to impress others and gain their approval? Are we bound by the *fear of Man* (Prov. 29:25, Jer. 17:5-8)? Or do we rightly worship *God* alone?
- Any motivation for living other than finding our satisfaction in God will eventually bring emptiness and despair *because idols never satisfy*.

**RELATIONSHIPS THAT REFLECT THE GLORY OF GOD**

- By resting in God’s love, his grace enables us to love others (John 15:9-13, 1 Peter 4:8, John 13:3-5). Remember—you don’t find a friend; you grow a friend.
- Grow in humility and love by *delighting in the differences among God’s people and setting aside self to serve others* (1 Thessalonians 5:14, Romans 15:2-3a, Colossians 4:6). Not “Jesus Plus Anything”—*just Jesus*.
- Don’t forget the three qualities of God’s character that are essential ingredients for lasting change—grace, truth, and redemptive time!

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- All of the books by CCEF.org's authors, especially *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Welch) and *How People Change* (Lane & Tripp)
- *The Enemy Within* (Lundgaard)
- *The Habits of Grace* (Mathis)
- *Holiness by Grace* (Chapell)
- *Mortification of Sin* (Owen)
- *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (C. Plantinga)
- *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and Triumph of Christ* (R. Moore)
- *The Transforming Power of the Gospel* and *Respectable Sins* (Bridges)

I would also like to point you to Pastor Colin Smith's Unlocking the Bible for a plethora of biblical, helpful resources; and also to Challies.com for his extremely timely and helpful ideas and resources for a limitless array of practical helps- especially online/smart-phone-app helps. Pick an area that you'd like to "bring out of the darkness and into the light" with purposeful accountability and customization and tracking and Tim Challies has listed some of the best/most helpful resources that currently exist. Plus, I have never disagreed with any of his theological analysis-so that gives me even more confidence in his advice concerning such things as budgeting, screen time, exercise/eating, spiritual disciplines, etc.

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*Thank you so very much for the privilege of serving you at this event!  
I count it a great honor to learn with you and I hope that we will stay in touch:*

**Blog:** [tarabarthel.com](http://tarabarthel.com)  **FaceBook:** [tara.barthel](https://www.facebook.com/tara.barthel)  **Twitter:** [@tarabarthel](https://twitter.com/tarabarthel)

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
**The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.** 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24*

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