A Gospel-Centered Process for Christian Discipleship

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Written by

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BY

JAMES WHATLEY
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ABSTRACT

A Gospel-Centered Process for Christian Discipleship
James Whatley
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2018

The following doctoral project develops a process for members of Peace Lutheran Church to experience grace-centered discipleship in a way that allows individuals to see God's work in their lives and share grace with others. With this goal in mind, this project seeks to equip members to examine their own lives through a personal timeline exercise, discover the biblical concept of grace, cultivate grace through spiritual practices, and learn to share grace with others.

The first section of this paper examines the social, cultural, and theological factors that have shaped Peace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The Reveal survey serves as an inflection point in this chapter. Reveal shows that attenders were not progressing in their understanding of Christ as savior. This section concludes by examining early efforts at Peace to foster greater personal discipleship.

Part Two of this paper offers a theological articulation of grace-centered discipleship and its role in Christian formation. The reader will begin to see discipleship as a gracious act of reconnection with the triune God. Next, this chapter explores how God uses grace, law (God’s commands), and gospel (God’s forgiveness) to disciple Christians. Finally, this section examines specific spiritual practices that cultivate one’s ability to live in grace and share grace with others.

In light of the discipleship challenge at Peace Lutheran Church and the theological understanding of formation set forth in the second part of the paper, the third part of this paper offers a strategy for grace-centered discipleship at Peace. It explains the development and use of a personal timeline exercise, discusses leader training, and addresses the launch of a pilot program. Finally, this section explains how this project will be assessed.

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Peace Lutheran Church (Peace Church) is a congregation located in the north woods of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Peace Church was planted as mission congregation in 1951. At present, the congregation is at a turning point. After years of focusing on numerical growth, church leadership has realized Peace can draw people in, but struggles to help them become mature Christians. The purpose of this project is to develop a process for Peace attenders to learn about grace, and to see God’s gracious work in their lives and share grace with others. This project gives Peace church a clear process for Christian spiritual formation\(^1\) that can be used by our leaders and members.

This project aims to equip members to examine their own lives through a personal timeline exercise, discover the biblical concept of grace, cultivate grace through spiritual practices, and learn to share grace with others. The thesis of this project is that grace is essential in Christian formation. Christians mature when they move through a process that allows them to understand grace intellectually (knowledge), see it concretely in their life story (experiential), and learn to share it with others (relational).

Peace Church is at a crossroads between drawing people in and developing them spiritually. For thirty years Peace found its identity in providing compelling worship experiences and expanding the building. Leaders often describe Peace as an attractional church. We offer many programs and worship services intended to draw outsiders in.

\(^1\) Spiritual formation is difficult to define but for the purposes of this paper, I will use Hagberg and Guelich’s approach. They assume that formation is a linear process that moves through four stages. Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem, WI: Sheffield, 2005), 5.
However, Peace lacks a clear process for Christian discipleship. As a result, many of our members worship but do not progress in Christian knowledge or service.

Peace leadership has self-identified two barriers to spiritual growth: an emphasis on old patterns and too many options. For thirty years, Peace has devoted a great deal of time and energy to attracting new worshipers. In 1983, Pastor Mark Schulz was hired as senior pastor. Mark brought an emphasis on contemporary worship. This new worship brought numerical growth which led to three building expansion projects (1989, 1995, and 2006). As a congregation, Peace knows how to build buildings and frequently engages in building projects. Peace leadership has noted that this continued emphasis on attracting people and building facilities has resulted in too little emphasis on developing a process for spiritual formation.\(^2\)

During the last three decades Peace Lutheran has been driven by an engine of attraction. We have been good at bringing people to our campus, but we have been less effective in helping a majority of our people mature in their faith. Pastor Mark Schulz has expressed that for years it seemed the goal of Peace was to offer such compelling worship services and preaching that people desired to come back the following week.\(^3\) An unintended consequence of such effort was that little energy was given to helping people learn about spiritual formation.

In addition, Peace suffers from choice paralysis. Members are inundated with options for participation in the life of the church (e.g., participate in a mission trip, join a


\(^3\) Mark Schulz, interview by author, August 4, 2017.
small group, serve locally, join a Bible study). Members have no clear path for formation. Our Director of Member Engagement has noted that the sheer number of options available at Peace is overwhelming and leads people to stall and pursue no option at all. Peace is an example of what Sheena Iyengar noted in her book, *The Art of Choosing*: when people have too many choices, they often just walk away.⁴

Excessive options limit a person’s ability to pursue certain truths with depth or an eye toward formation. It would seem wise that rather than encouraging people to pursue every element of the Christian tradition, they should be encouraged to look at one of the core elements of the faith. For example, if a person shows up at Peace and wonders what is the next step toward involvement, Peace has no clear starting point. Rather, a person would be presented with a vast array of options. A simple process would be helpful.

This project argues that the grace of God is a worthwhile theme to leverage in Christian formation. As Jerry Bridges has noted in *Transforming Grace*, grace bestows identity and leads to formation.⁵ As one becomes aware of God’s free gift (grace), that person develops the ability to see God’s work of grace in their life and desires to be transformed.

Chapter 1 of this paper examines the social, cultural, and theological factors that have shaped Peace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. This chapter explores Peace’s emphasis on attracting members over the past twenty years as a core aspect of Peace’s identity. Over the past thirty years, Peace has put great energy into creating new

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⁵ Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God’s Unfailing Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Nav Press, 2008), 97-98.
worship services, expanding our campus, and attracting new members. An unintended consequence of this focus is that we have drawn people in, but not given them a clear path to formation. Pastor Mark Schulz has had significant and fruitful influence on Peace Lutheran Church. With more than thirty years of tenure at Peace, Pastor Schulz has played a role in developing Peace’s culture. This section focuses on his influence and the programs that have defined the church during his tenure.

This first chapter explores how the multiplicity of options at Peace and the lack of a clear process for spiritual growth have led people to stall in their Christian formation. As one member of Peace has remarked, “Peace always seems to be jumping on to the next thing. One minute you think you have figured out what Peace wants you to do; then the church moves on to the next innovation or project.” Drawing on personal accounts and statements by Peace leadership, the project examines the current challenges to spiritual formation at Peace Lutheran Church.

Following a review of relevant literature in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 offers a theological articulation of grace-centered formation and its role in Christian formation. The reader will begin to see formation (discipleship) as a gracious act of reconnection with the triune God. Next, this chapter explores how God uses law (God’s commands) and gospel (God’s forgiving grace) to grow Christians. Finally, this section examines specific spiritual practices that cultivate one’s ability to live in grace and share grace with others.

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6 Brent Goska, interview by author, April 8, 2017.
This section develops the concept that grace is more than an idea to be learned but truly a practical driver for discovering identity and growing spiritually. Drawing on Scripture, Lutheran tradition, and contemporary scholars, the project will show the connection between knowledge about grace and Christian behavior; we live in a grace spiral where one is constantly learning about grace, seeing God’s grace in one’s life, and sharing grace with others.

In light of the formation challenge at Peace Lutheran Church and the theological understanding of formation set forth in the first three chapters, Chapter 4 offers a strategy for grace-centered formation at Peace. It explains the development and use of a personal timeline exercise, discusses leader training, and addresses the launch of a pilot program. Chapter 5 offers an evaluation of the project. The project concludes by discussing how the project may benefit the wider church.

The pilot program will take place in a small group setting. Members will begin by defining grace through reading scriptural examples. They will then complete a personal timeline exercise. The pilot program utilizes a coaching process that leads participants on a journey of exploring God’s gracious work in their lives and catalyzing that work for service toward others. The ultimate aim of this process is to create a straightforward process for discipleship at Peace that can be used by new or existing members to remind them of their grace-oriented identity and determine next steps for growth and witness. It is my hope that Christians who have completed this process can articulate a biblical definition of grace, express how God has been at work in their life, and share grace with others.
CHAPTER 1  
CHURCH CONTEXT

This chapter examines the social, cultural, and theological factors that have shaped Peace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Attention is given to Peace’s history, pastoral transitions, and expansion projects. This chapter concludes by examining Peace’s efforts at Christian formation.

Eau Claire: A City in Transformation

Eau Claire is a thriving community located on the banks of the Chippewa and Eau Claire rivers in northwestern Wisconsin with a population of 68,000, a strong economy, a thriving arts scene, and well-performing schools. Eau Claire has the youngest median age, 30.5, of any city in Wisconsin, and has seen a recent influx of high tech jobs.1

The city of Eau Claire was discovered by French settlers in the 1700s and named after the clear water in the river that gives the city her name. Eau Claire was a haven for Scandinavian immigrants in the late 1800s, a demographic that still comprises the majority of the city’s ethnicity. The Scandinavian roots in Eau Claire are so strong that one can still find residents who speak Norwegian and Finnish.

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Eau Claire grew as a lumber town in the early- to mid-1800s and eventually found its identity as a manufacturing town with a local branch of the University of Wisconsin. A major transition occurred in 1991 with the closing of the local Uniroyal tire plant, which was the largest private employer in Eau Claire at the time. While painful, the closing of Uniroyal led to a major transition in Eau Claire, one that saw an influx of high tech jobs. Over the next two decades Eau Claire witnessed the launch of Cray Supercomputers, the purchase and expansion of one of our hospitals by the Mayo Clinic, and significant growth at Eau Claire’s local university and technical college. These events led to an influx of educated professionals.

The last few years have also seen an increase in Eau Claire’s arts and culture initiatives. In 2015 Eau Claire native and Grammy Award-winner Justin Vernon launched the Eaux Claires music festival, which draws fans and headliners from across the country. Vernon’s success served as a catalyst for the Confluence Project, a waterfront expansion that caters to art enthusiasts and two eclectic music-centered hotels.

Peace Church: From Small Church to Large Denominational Outlier

On November 10, 1957, the North Wisconsin District of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) purchased ten acres in the Putnam Heights neighborhood for a new church plant. In 1959 an organizational meeting was held at Our Redeemer Lutheran

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in Eau Claire, and Peace Church was officially chartered. As the city has grown, Peace Lutheran has grown along with it, ministering to the community.

The first fifty years of Peace Church’s history are documented in her record of official acts and in short historical compilations in annual directories. Historical information about Peace is recorded in the notes and personal accounts of Melvin Gleiter. Gleiter, a university professor, had been active in the congregation since 1971 and served as congregational chairman from 1978-1985.

The early years of Peace were marked by missional excitement. In the early 1950s, the North Wisconsin District decided to plant a church on the south side of Eau Claire in an expanding suburban development referred to as Putnam Heights. Early organizational meetings were held at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church with founding members of Putnam Heights Mission Church (later Peace) transferring their membership from Redeemer to the newly chartered mission congregation.4

Redeemer took out a $100,000 mortgage on their church to help fund the launch of Peace Church, a fact that has influenced the missional culture of Peace to this day. Vicki Vogler, who joined Peace shortly after its founding, recalls how Peace’s early members would speak of being called or sent to reach those living in Putnam Heights. Members still talk about how Redeemer Church risked to reach those who have no church. That statement is frequently followed by the question, “How are we risking for the lost today?”5

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In November of 1960, Peace began construction on a new church and one month later called her first pastor, Herbert Praeunner. Praeunner guided Peace for eight years. Praeunner is credited by members with helping Peace become financially stable, reaching out to our neighbors, and helping Peace develop a unique identity apart from Our Redeemer.

Pastor Gene Merrill was called to Peace and served for fourteen years. Vicki Vogler and Mel Glitter recall the “Merrill years” with fondness. The congregation achieved several milestones during this time. Peace celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 1981, paid off its first mortgage, and increased in both attendance and giving. A high point was a visit by Oswald Hoffman, Lutheran Hour Speaker, who spoke at Peace’s twentieth anniversary celebration.

It is worth noting that in these early years Peace did little to intentionally foster Christian spiritual formation. Looking at church records, significant events are focused around adding members, paying off debt, and constructing and improving the building. Peace did support missionaries and funded missionary projects; however, expanding the facility and holding worship services were the main congregation drivers.

In 1982 Peace entered a season of significant transition and challenge. Pastor Merrell accepted a call to Hayward, California, and the congregation called its next pastor. The next pastor's time at Peace was tenuous. Shortly after arriving at Peace, the

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congregation began to question the pastor’s suitability for ministry. According to members, the pastor was never a good fit for Peace and did not grasp the culture of Eau Claire. According to Gleiter, the pastor appeared to be in open conflict with multiple members of Peace at the same time.8

During this season Peace saw a decline in both attendance and giving. “This was a period of struggle for the congregation as worship attendance declined to an average of 140—down from a high of 250 in the early 70s.” Years of stability under Merrell were replaced with a caustic environment. Members became increasingly frustrated with the pastor and began to leave the church. The situation became so dire that Peace was forced to sell a portion of her property in order to meet the budget. Mark Steil, who served as vice chairman of Peace, orchestrated the sale. Steil recalls that the sale and construction of houses were a sign that Peace was struggling.9

During this time, Melvin Gleiter served as congregational chairman. Gleiter recounts that this season was challenging, but also catalyzing for the congregation. As chair, Gleiter had to lead the congregation to transition the pastor out of Peace. This process required the intervention of the local denominational president. While the pastor did eventually leave the church, his transition was conflicted and traumatic for the congregation.

While these years were filled with conflict, they united the remaining members of the congregation. Longtime member Mel Gleiter recalls several members meeting


together and stating that no matter how challenging the present situation might get, they were committed to Peace Church and her ministry and were not going to leave. That season brought members closer together and many of them still have a strong bond today.

These initial activities during difficult times are one of the first indications of spiritual growth apart from the regular worship services. These members not only gathered together for support, they prayed together, studied the Word in groups, and discussed how Scripture applied to their situation. While the times were challenging, Gleiter recalls that those members grew closer to Jesus and one another.

In the fall of 1984, the pastor accepted a call to Forestville, Wisconsin. In earnest, the congregation formed a call committee and began seeking her next pastor. In July 1985, Pastor Mark Schulz, then serving in Connecticut was extended the call to serve as pastor. The membership of Peace was supportive of Schulz from the beginning. Gleiter recalls members personally reaching out to Schulz and encouraging him to take the call. One member, Margret Bergen, told Schulz, “We have gone through a rough patch, but we are a good congregation. Please give us a chance.”

**Pastor Mark Schulz**

Mark Schulz accepted the call to Peace Lutheran, and inaugurated a new season of hope. Schulz was the youngest pastor, twenty-eight, in Peace’s history and, as of the writing of this paper, its longest serving minister, thirty-two years and counting. As a twenty-eight-year-old, Mark had a connection with younger families in the community.

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10 Gleiter, “A Short History of Peace.”

11 Mark Schulz, interview by author, July 20, 2016.
In addition, having just gone through a significant time of transition, Peace leadership gave Schulz latitude in launching new initiatives.

Contemporary worship development, program innovation, and building expansion are hallmarks of Pastor Mark’s time at Peace. One of the first innovations that Pastor Mark brought to Peace was the addition of a contemporary worship service. Mark’s wife Lynette also serves on staff as an accomplished worship leader. Together, they began planning and implementing contemporary worship services at Peace.

The first contemporary service was held in 1990. At that time, no other mainline church in Eau Claire had contemporary worship. The new service became a driver for growth and drew new people into the congregation. By the conclusion of 1988, the existing sanctuary was out of space, and Peace began planning a new worship center. The new worship space (Spiritual Life Center) was completed in 1989. This new space had capacity for over 300 worshipers and is still used for four weekend services.

Another factor that aided Peace’s growth was Schulz’s willingness to cut against the grain of traditional LCMS thinking. Not only did Schulz add contemporary worship, but he also pushed outreach in a way that few other LCMS congregations did. Pastor Tim Klinkenberg recalls how Schulz sent out postcards to all of Eau Claire with a bold heading that read, “Are You Ready For Something New?” Essentially, the idea was if you are looking for something more in life than what you currently have, come and worship at Peace.

Klinkenberg states that shortly after the new postcards were sent out, he and Schulz attended a regional pastors meeting, and one of the pastors brought the card to the meeting. The pastor handed the card to Schulz and said, “What are you trying to do?
Steal sheep?” Schulz replied, “There are 50,000 people in Eau Claire. Less than half go to church. If you are not going to do something about it, then I am.” For Klinkenberg, this was more than an outreach effort. It demonstrated that Schulz was willing to think in new ways and embrace conflict if it allowed him to reach new people with the gospel.12

This story is illustrative of Schulz’s early ministry at Peace. The focus was geared toward bringing people in and not necessarily developing them spiritually. As Schulz would note years later, “I came to learn that it is easy to get a crowd. It is much more challenging to grow a congregation.”

Schulz credits church leadership with allowing him to push efforts that would draw people to the church. He notes that the recent departure of the previous pastor gave him freedom that he otherwise would not have had. Regardless of the reasons, Schulz was able to capitalize on those looking for something new. Peace grew in membership during this season.

In 1991, the Uniroyal tire plant closed and laid off 1,200 workers. At the time Uniroyal was the largest private employer in Eau Claire. The Uniroyal closer was a transition point for the city of Eau Claire and Peace. Eau Claire viewed itself as a blue-collar industrial town. After the closing, the city transitioned toward high-tech industries and white collar jobs. The local hospital was purchased by the Mayo Clinic and became a regional medical center. Shortly thereafter, Cray Supercomputer expanded its facility in neighboring Chippewa Falls.

12 Timothy Klinkenberg, interview by author, March 8, 2016.
High-tech expansion brought an influx of highly educated individuals to Eau Claire. Schulz notes that he connected with this demographic. His highest strength on StrengthsFinder is learner, and his sermons tend toward the intellectual. Peace grew during this season as Peace provided an intellectually-stimulating environment.

Schulz’s tenure as lead pastor was also marked by frequent innovation. A significant focus for Schulz was reaching his generation (Baby Boomers). In 1996, Schulz completed his Doctor of Ministry degree at Fuller Seminary. His major project focused on reaching and retaining Baby Boomers. More on Schulz’s Doctor of Ministry project is discussed under efforts at spiritual formation.

**Growing and Building**

The 1990s and 2000s brought significant growth to Peace Lutheran Church. During this time Peace expanded its existing facility two more times. In 1995 Peace launched a one million dollar campaign to add a children's ministry wing, fellowship hall, and office space. During this time Peace added two additional worship services for a total of four on a weekend. The new space also saw another increase in attendance from 200 to 500 in weekly worship.

In 2006, with attendance exceeding 800 a week in worship, Peace engaged in another facility expansion project. This expansion, the church’s largest to date, doubled the size of the existing facility at a total cost of 4.4 million dollars. Peace added another worship space, a large gathering area, and larger children’s ministry facilities.

This expansion was pursued for two reasons: existing facilities were at capacity and Pastor Schulz realized that while the church was growing numerically, it was also
aging with him. By building a second worship space of equal size to the existing sanctuary and by calling a young pastor, church leadership hoped to attract younger worshipers to Peace.

In 2006 Peace called James Whatley\(^\text{13}\) to serve as associate pastor. His responsibilities included launching new worship services in the newly constructed community life center, leading the church’s mission efforts, and assisting with general pastoral responsibilities. Peace continued to grow in this next season, and worship attendance increased to 1,100 a week.

According to personal conversations with Schulz, the primary driver at Peace during the 90s and 2000s was worship attendance. The weekend service received significant attention and resources. Schulz notes that historically Lutheran culture prioritizes weekend worship as the primary influence on personal spiritual life. Thus this season of ministry was driven by the belief that the church fulfills its mission by offering highly compelling services that inspire people to come back the following week.

The results of investing in worship services and facility expansion are still evident at Peace. As of the writing of this paper, Peace offers seven weekend services, employs four full-time pastors with preaching responsibilities and two full-time worship leaders. In many respects, the church is geared to meet the needs of weekend worshipers.

**Formation Initiatives**

Peace’s history with intentional spiritual formation dates to 1995 and the hiring of David Forke. Forke at the time was working in Fort Collins, Colorado, as a Director of

\(^{13}\) From this point forward, the author will primarily speak of himself in third person.
Christian Education (DCE). Forke spent his initial years at Peace focusing on youth ministry and adult education. His presence brought intentionality to the study of the Word and an emphasis on spiritual growth beyond the weekend service.

Forke was instrumental in bringing two significant initiatives to Peace. In the late 1990s Peace launched a Wednesday night confirmation program and meal. Members attend dinner, and then children and adults move to separate times of Christian education. Wednesday youth education is split into Discovery Club (ages 3-5th grade), confirmation (6th-8th grades), and High School (9th-12 grade). Over 300 people attend Wednesday night activities.

David Forke also launched small groups at Peace. Small groups were Peace’s first major effort to help people grow spiritually apart from the Sunday worship experience. Currently, Peace has sixty groups with about 500 in attendance. Groups are allowed to set their own agenda for study and routine. Peace groups are primarily comprised of Baby Boomers and older adults.

The late 1990s brought another spiritual formation initiative. The congregation participated in two sermon series based on Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *Forty Days of Community*. These series were widely praised by the congregation. The series catalyzed the congregation and created a sense of desire for personal study and Christian service. Peace saw an increase in the number of small groups and in community service during these series.

The year 2000 saw the implementation of Pastor Mark Schulz’s Doctor of Ministry project. According to Schulz, he was troubled by the low number of Baby Boomers that didn’t attend church at all or stopped after their children were confirmed.
Following Lyle Schaller, Schulz believed that Boomers stalled in their spiritual journey due to an over emphasis on “Rock Theology.” Rock theology privileges “Jesus our unchangeable rock.”

Rock theology churches emphasize biblical passages that encourage one to stand on the finished work of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 58) and draw on hymns such as “On Christ the Solid Rock, I stand, all other ground is sinking sand” and “Built on the Rock the Church Does Stand.”

For Schulz, rock theology was not without benefits. It encourages Christians to embrace the unchanging doctrine of justification by faith alone. Christ is the solid rock on whom Christians find certainty of salvation and everlasting life. Moreover, in a rapidly changing world, rock theology serves as an anchor allowing us to stand up and stand firm.

The drawback of rock theology is that “Confessional and Reformed churches have for the most part emphasized a conservative, ‘remain unmovable’ brand of Christianity, echoing Luther’s words, ‘Here I stand.’” Rock theology failed to reach those seeking a dynamic journey with Jesus. Schulz believed reaching a new demographic required moving beyond rock theology and embracing a metaphor that maintained biblical truth while allowing for innovation and movement. For Schulz a new metaphor was needed, and that metaphor was the “journey.”

Schulz began promoting journey theology at Peace. Peace began preaching about passages that encouraged personal movement: “If anyone would come after me, he must

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14 Mark Schulz, “A Journey Paradigm for the Ministry of Peace Lutheran Church” (DMin thesis, Fuller Seminary, 1999), 120.

15 Ibid., 122.
deny himself take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23); “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Cor 9:24); “Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Pt 2:2).\(^{16}\)

Over the next several years, Peace leaders cultivated a journey environment at Peace. Imagery and language were changed to encourage progress on one’s spiritual journey. Peace adopted the slogan “Sharing God’s Journey on the River of Life.” In addition, river language and motifs were employed in Peace literature, promotional materials, and around the campus. The church’s letterhead, website, and logo were redesigned to incorporate the river logo.

In addition, Peace incorporated spiritual journey language into its new member process. For example, new members were shown the following table that describes Rock and Journey approaches to Christianity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rock Theology</th>
<th>Journey Theology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>Sanctification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Jesus + Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God for me</td>
<td>God in and through me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand</td>
<td>Run/Walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change-resistant</td>
<td>Developmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinner/Saint</td>
<td>Ever-increasing in Glory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members were taught that the relationship between the two metaphors (rock and journey) is that the “objective work of Christ, the ‘rock’ comes first, with the ‘journey’ of Christian experience and growth flowing from it.” For Schulz, this was not an

\(^{16}\) All Scripture quoted is from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.
abandonment of the certainty of Jesus’ justifying work; rather, it was an emphasis on the importance of the process of being made more like Jesus.

**The Discipleship Problem**

In 2008 Peace Church used the Reveal Survey from Willow Creek Community Church to assess the vitality of our worshiping community. The Reveal assessment is intended to gauge the spiritual vitality of a church. The underlying assumption of the Reveal survey was that as people increased participation in church activities (worship, ushering, groups), they would become spiritually mature. As Willow’s own research showed, this assumption was simply not true.\(^{17}\)

The results of the Reveal assessment were not a surprise to Schulz although they were both disappointing and sobering. Of the four categories of spiritual growth used in the assessment, “Exploring Christ,” “Growing in Christ,” “Close to Christ,” and “Christ-centered,” Peace had far more people in the “Exploring Christ” and “Growing in Christ” than other churches our size. Moreover, we had far less “Christ-centered” members (13 percent) than other churches of a similar size.

Most distressing was that 21 percent of our membership was in the “Exploring Christ” quadrant. Exploring Christ is defined as those who “believe in God but I am not sure about Christ.” Even more concerning, 5 percent of those in the “Exploring Christ” quadrant had been attending Peace for more than ten years.\(^{18}\) Upon seeing the results,

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\(^{17}\) Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (South Barrington, IL: Willow Creek, 2010).
Pastor Mark said, “It is pretty disappointing as a Lutheran pastor to preach to people for ten years, and they still don’t know the gospel.”

The Reveal assessment became a catalyst for change at Peace. In 2012 Peace contracted with Auxano and went through the Church Unique process. Church Unique helps a church discover its own unique gifting ability. A leadership team was formed and met regularly to determine what areas Peace should pursue as central to our identity and the growth of our members.

Four areas emerged as vital to Peace’s identity and future health: Word (individual and corporate Bible study), worship, groups, and mission. Each area was assigned a full-time staff member, and banners were hung around Peace to emphasize the four areas. The four areas became known as the Peace Mosaic.

Several significant changes were driven by our time with Auxano. First, the entire Peace budget is aligned with the mosaic. Each category has a specific line item, and Peace tracks how each area is resourced. A staff person champions each area and is accountable for how well it is promoted at Peace. In addition, Peace devotes one or two sermon series a year to a different mosaic category. The goal is to ensure that people are regularly aware of the church’s desire for people to grow through pursuing Word, worship, groups, and mission.

The Church Unique process also led to a revision in Peace’s mission statement. The previous mission statement, “Peace Church creates fully alive followers of Jesus

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18 Willow Creek Association, “Reveal Results for Peace Church, Eau Claire, WI,” 17, appendix 39.
19 Mark Schulz, interview by author, October 7, 2012.
Christ,” was changed to “Peace Church guides people to fully live as followers of Jesus Christ.” Church leadership had come to believe that the worship experience alone was not sufficient to help people mature spiritually. Nor could the church simply make Christian resources and opportunities available to people and assume that they would grow. Rather, Peace needed to equip guides that could lead our members and attendees through a process of spiritual formation.

The new mission statement, adopted in 2013, became a catalyst for refocusing ministry at Peace Church. Peace evaluated its ministry and began discussing how it would reposition staff and resources to align with the new mission statement. Leadership identified the need to invest significantly in developing a process for individual spiritual formation.

As a result of this discovery process, Peace identified several key transitions that need to take place for the next several years. First, Peace needs to move from an event-centered church to a process-driven congregation. For example, Peace was known for hosting large events, from concerts to ministry breakfasts, and a significant number of stand-alone events took place each year. The church board challenged the staff to be thinking in terms of process and ask questions like, “How does this event lead a person toward Christ?”, “Do our events connect with one another in a way that fosters Christian growth?”, and “Are we aware of what we are doing to help people become mature Christians?”

Shortly after the Church Unique process, another significant event occurred in the life of the church. Schulz began expressing his desire to step out of the lead pastor role.
and transition to an associate role at Peace. This transition would allow Schulz to devote the majority of his time to fostering spiritual growth among our members.

In June 2016, the congregation voted to allow Pastor Mark Schulz to transition to an associate role and Pastor James Whatley to become lead pastor. The transition was effective September 1, 2016. As of November 2017, Pastor James continues in the lead role, and Pastor Mark continues to work on developing a program for guiding Peace.

While developing the coaching and guiding process, Peace Church contracted with Terry Walling and Leader Breakthru. The initial phase of our work with Leader Breakthru focused on having the staff coached by Terry Walling. The idea was that the staff could not effectively coach others without experiencing coaching.

As part of this process, the staff went through Leader Breakthru’s leadership development modules: Focused Living, Apex, and Resonance. In addition, three Peace staff members and two lay leaders became certified Leader Breakthru coaches. These individuals have begun to lead others through the Leader Breakthru process at Peace.

In 2016 Peace hired Bryan Willkom as director of member engagement. Willkom’s primary task was to develop a pathway that would foster both leadership development and spiritual formation. Schulz and Willkom, in collaboration, created the three stories process at Peace. Three stories consist of three sessions that Peace worshipers attend together. Session one, “Your Story,” involves creating a timeline of significant life events, “God’s story” is a Bible overview, and “Peace’s story” focuses on the culture, values, and opportunities at Peace.

As of November 2017, 160 Peace members have competed the three stories process. While three stories is gaining traction at Peace, there remains little clarity on
how three stories increases personal spiritual formation. While the process is useful in helping one understand the basic tenets of the Christian faith and see formative moments in one’s own life, the current process lacks clarity on the necessity of the grace of God in one’s life. The goal of this paper is to offer a tool that will fill that gap for Peace and, in doing so, better equip members to see God’s grace in their lives and share grace with others.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
RELEVANT LITERATURE

The Need for Spiritual Formation

Chapter 2 examines theological literature pertinent to grace-centered discipleship. Following Grenz and Bridges, the reader will see discipleship as a gracious act of reconnection with God. This chapter will then address how God works to form believers over the course of their lifetime. This formation begins with God’s gracious development of the Christian through people, events, and circumstances. Finally, the last three authors will highlight the ongoing role of grace in Christian discipleship as a gift to receive and a practice to adopt.

*The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*

by Stanley Grenz

Stanley Grenz was Pioneer McDonald Professor of Baptist Heritage at Carey Theological College in Vancouver, British Columbia. Grenz completed his PhD in Munich under the direction of Wolfhart Pannenberg and authored twenty-five books in the area of Christian ethics. For Grenz, theology is intended to function like a compass, leading people to realize God’s intended purpose for their life. According to his friends,
Grenz wrote, “from the deep, interior vision of the sure hope that we would enter into the community of God in the renewed creation. He articulated the reality of this new community as the compass for Christian theology.”

*The Social God and the Relational Self* is written in response to the problem of the global soul. Following Pico Iyer, Grenz defines the global soul as a flexible and fluid sense of personal identity. It is constantly being created around whatever interests a person has in a particular moment. Sixteen-year-old Aminah McKinnie of Madison, Mississippi, is illustrative of the global soul. She “confesses that she is beset by feelings of isolation mixed with longings to be ‘connected;’” Like other members of her generation, she spends much of her non-school waking hours on the internet shopping, looking for a job, doing homework, and talking to her friends.” She is connected and isolated. And while she has an identity, it is fluid.

Drawing on Stanford psychologist William Damon, Grenz notes that Americans are isolated in a way that was not possible in previous generations. They live in a world where social groups and identity are fluid, much like an internet chat room or online community people can take on and discard identities with ease. The result is a global soul that takes on everything and yet is anchored in nothing, a soul that is open to endless connections but often fails to connect to anything of value.

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3 Ibid., 2.
For Grenz the answer to our current predicament is relationship and community. A person learns his or her identity, discovers how to relate to others, and grows spiritually through encountering the *Imago Dei*. Building one’s identity on the *Imago Dei* gives a sense of self that is anchored in the ontology of God. Hence, it is secure in even the most fluid of circumstances.⁴ Second, since all humanity shares this mark from their Creator, it creates a common starting point to build community. And, finally, God’s image serves to guide Christian formation. By looking at the image of God, we learn how to live in the present.⁵

Grenz’s work has implications for a grace-based process of spiritual formation. Three elements are key. First, Grenz helps identify a major problem in spiritual formation, namely, the global soul.⁶ At present Christians live in a state not unlike the internet chat room, many Christian are chameleon-like, ever changing and fluid. Grenz points us back to finding our identity in the work of God in our life. This is a core concept that will be revisited later.

Second, the impartation of the *Imago Dei* is a gift of grace. God’s move toward humanity and giving his image is an unmerited act; it is grace.⁷ For Grenz, grace is relational.⁸ It is through specific acts of grace that a person comes to discover the

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⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid., 224.

⁶ Ibid., 1-3.

⁷ Grace is a free gift of God or unmerited favor. See Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, 21.

personal work of Jesus Christ. Simply put, Grenz helps us see that God is social. He wants to interact with humanity, and doing so is an act of grace.

Finally, Grenz opens the door to seeing how God’s work in community leads to spiritual formation. For Grenz, our relationship with God and life in Christian community are formative. Community with God and others plays a key role in helping people see God’s gracious work in their lives and share that grace with others.

_Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God’s Unfailing Love_ by Jerry Bridges.

Jerry Bridges served as a full-time staff member with the Navigators. In this capacity, Bridges taught widely on grace and grace-driven spiritual formation. Bridges authored seven books on Christian spiritual formation.

_Transforming Grace_ is a response to the observation that most Christians misunderstand grace in their relationship with God. Grace is a free gift given by God to a human being. It is “God’s free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely.”  

Bridges argues that while grace is one of the most important topics in Scripture, it is the least understood. The result is that Christians proclaim the grace of God but live as though they are saved by works.

For Bridges, having an accurate assessment of one’s spiritual condition before God is critical to spiritual formation. Bridges uses federal bankruptcy code to illustrate the nature of our spiritual condition. When a business files bankruptcy, they can file under chapter seven or chapter eleven (named after the respective chapters in the federal code).

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9 Ibid., 21.

10 Bridges, _Transforming Grace_, 15.
bankruptcy code). Chapter eleven deals with temporary bankruptcy. This option is for healthy companies that need a pause from creditors so they can restructure and return to viability.

Chapter seven is for a company that is no longer viable. It has no possibility of returning to financial health. The company will be liquidated; creditors will receive pennies on the dollar.

So what kind of bankruptcy did we declare? To use the business analogy, did we file under chapter 7 or chapter 11? Was it permanent or temporary? … I think most of us actually declared temporary bankruptcy. Having trusted in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, we have subtly and unconsciously reverted to a works relationship with God in our Christian lives. We recognize that even our best efforts cannot get us to heaven, but we do think they earn God’s blessings in our daily lives.¹¹

The way most Christians view their Christian life could be illustrated this way:¹²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning of Christian Life</th>
<th>Daily Life</th>
<th>Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justification Based on Grace</td>
<td>Christian Life Based on Work</td>
<td>Glorification Based on Grace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to this illustration, the Christian life is a grace-works-grace sequence. Christ does the work of bringing us into a relationship with God. Then we maintain and grow that relationship. Our journey concludes with grace when Christ brings us into his kingdom.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 9.
The thesis of Bridges’s book is that “the entire Christian life from start to completion is lived on the basis of God’s grace to us through Christ.” The following illustration demonstrates how Christians should view their life in Christ:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning of Christian Life</th>
<th>Daily Life</th>
<th>Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Justification Based on Grace</td>
<td>Christian Life Based on Grace</td>
<td>Glorification Based on Grace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A core theme in Bridges’ work is that grace is the driver in Christian spiritual formation. God uses grace to move us toward spiritual maturity.

Furthermore, grace does not first rescue us from the penalty of our sins, furnish us with some new spiritual abilities, and then leave us on our own to grow in spiritual maturity. Rather as Paul said, “He who began this good work in you [by His grace] will [also by His grace] carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). John Newton captured this idea of the continuing work of grace in our lives when he wrote in the hymn “Amazing Grace,” “Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

For Bridges, grace and spiritual formation are connection. Two elements are key: awareness and appreciation. Christians need to be aware we usually couple grace with legalism. Christians fear that if they accept they are loved and blessed by God solely based on the merit of Christ, then they will have no incentive to do the things they need to do to live a disciplined Christian life.

Bridges argues that this kind of legalism limits the depth and authenticity of Christian growth. He shares the story of a man he once knew who tithed all of his life.

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13 Ibid., 19.

14 Ibid., 22.
The man never gave less and he never gave more because he was afraid of what would happen if he stopped tithing.\textsuperscript{15} 

Bridges argues that God’s grace leads us to a deeper spiritual maturity where our actions are not self-serving, but motivated by love. Grace “frees us to obey God and serve Him as a loving and thankful response to Him for our salvation.”\textsuperscript{16} How does grace drive spiritual formation? Bridges offers a helpful personal story.

Once I was on my way to a weekend conference to speak on the pursuit of holiness. As I boarded the plane, I was confronted with an extremely alluring temptation to indulge in lustful glances at a young woman. Immediately the thought came to me, \textit{You can’t do that! You’re on your way to speak about holiness}. In saying that to myself, I wasn’t concerned about being truly holy in the way I could challenge others to be. Rather I was afraid I might forfeit God’s blessing on my messages. As I realized my wrong motive, I bowed my head and said, “God even if I never open my mouth to speak for you again, You are still worthy of my saying ‘No’ to temptation.” I changed my motive for obedience from a self-centered to a God-centered motive.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{God’s Work in Spiritual Formation}

\textit{The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith} by Janet O. Hagberg and Robert Guelich

\textit{The Critical Journey} arose out of the collaborative effort between Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich. Guelich attended a lecture on leadership given by Hagberg and perceived a connection between “how we relate to each other and how we relate to God.”\textsuperscript{18} Their work led to the creation of \textit{The Critical Journey}. The Critical Journey

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 95.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 93-94.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{18} Hagberg and Guelich, \textit{The Critical Journey}, vii-viii.
offers insight into God’s work in spiritual formation. In addition, it offers concrete descriptors of progress in Christian spiritual formation.

The authors find that people often move through six stages on their spiritual journey: The Recognition of God, Life of Discipleship, Productive Life, Journey Inward, Journey Outward, and Life of Love.\(^{19}\) Hagberg and Guelich offer a descriptive look at each stage, provide Scripture references, and include common statements made by persons in a particular stage. For example, a person in stage one (The Recognition of God) might assert, “When I saw the earth from out in space, I knew instantly there was a God and that I needed to serve him.” Whereas a person in stage six (the Life of Love) might say, “This is God’s trip. I am just the passenger.” The point is that spiritual formation may be described as journey from point A to point B.

*The Critical Journey* walks through several key discoveries about spiritual formation. First, the authors note that spiritual formation is both an act of grace and a journey. Maturing as a Christian involves God’s action on us and our response to God. As the authors put it, “Spirituality is the way we live out our response to God.”\(^{20}\)

As a Christian matures spiritually, she moves from doing things for God to desiring greater intimacy with God. Proximity to God culminates in a desire to serve God without counting the costs: “We seem to disregard our own needs and not care for ourselves at this stage. This is because those needs are secondary to our need to totally

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 3.
obey and listen for God’s direction. We can give up our lives for a person, a cause, or a principle if it is God’s will.”^21

This desire to do the will of God often manifests itself in acts of grace toward others. For example, Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (Jn 13:4–10) is a key illustration of life at stage six (the Life of Love). Jesus is so filled with the gracious will of God that he takes on tasks that should be beneath him.

While the authors use descriptive statements like, “neglect of self” or “apparent waste of life” to describe the mature Christian (stage 6), they could have just as easily used the word “grace” or “gracious.”^22 *The Critical Journey* implies that sharing grace is a fruit of spiritual formation. Drawing on Camus’s *The Plague*, Hagberg and Guelich reference Dr. Castel who chooses to remain with plague victims rather than leave them unattended. “He knew that his chances of contracting the disease would be extremely high. He did it anyway. He found life’s meaning in giving up his life for his ‘friends.’”^23 Hagberg and Guelich demonstrate that sharing grace with others can be used as a litmus test of spiritual formation.

Another worthwhile aspect of *The Critical Journey* is the way the authors respond to the question of whether people require others to grow spiritually. For Hagberg and Guelich the answer is generally, yes. Movement toward spiritual maturity often requires someone else. Movement from stage one to stage two requires others, and while

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^21 Ibid., 156.

^22 Ibid., 158.

^23 Ibid.
movement between the other stages can be self-propelled, one most often will have help from others (e.g., friends, small group, pastor, priest, spiritual director). For the purpose of this project, if someone is going to see the grace of God in their life and learn to share that grace with others, they should seek the assistance of others.24

Finally, The Critical Journey emphasizes that good and bad circumstances can be used to shape your spiritual journey. One should not shy away from a past challenge as God often does his most formative work during the low points. In these moments of great challenge, God brings us to an even deeper understanding of forgiveness, love, and grace. Here one finds a helpful aid for processing the grace of God in one’s life; in moments of weakness, God moves.25

_The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development_

by J. Robert Clinton

_The Making of a Leader_ is an examination of how God shapes leaders over the course of a lifetime. This work emerged out of the personal experience and research of J. Robert Clinton. Clinton was serving as a foreign missionary with World Team. Clinton was removed from his position by a supervisor who believed he was unfit for ministry. In response, Clinton asked a confidant, “How does a person like that get to be in a position of Christian leadership?” The response would launch a lifetime of research around how God forms leaders.

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Clinton devoted his life’s work to studying God’s formative work. *The Making of a Leader* is the compilation of six years of research examining the lives of hundreds of biblical, historical, and contemporary leaders. Three aspects of Clinton’s work are helpful for the purposes of this paper: the five developmental phases, the two developmental tracks, and finally the mechanics of development. God works in a person so that he can work through a person.

Through his research, Clinton found that God shapes leaders over the course of their lifetime. In doing so, God uses people, events, and circumstance to shape a person. For the purposes of this paper, Clinton helps us see that development is a process that requires an examination of one’s life. For Clinton, leadership development happens in five developmental phases: Sovereign Foundations, Inner-Life Growth, Ministry Maturing, Life Maturing, and Convergence.

In phase one (Sovereign Foundations) God uses the events and circumstances of this time, good and bad, to lay the foundation for character traits. These traits, when mature, will be used by God. Phase two (Inner-Life Growth) is a time when a person undergoes some sort of formal training, academic or otherwise. However, for Clinton the real training is what God does in the heart of a person. In phase three (Ministry Maturing) a person gets into the work of ministry. In this phase the daily work of ministry seems most important. In phase four (Life Maturing) God uses one’s gifts and life to influence

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26 While Clinton’s work (Robert J. Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* [Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 1988]) focuses on leadership development, his findings are applicable to Christian spiritual formation, as well. After all, does God only want to conform Christian leaders to image of Christ?
others. Giftedness and priorities merge during this phase. Finally, in phase five (Convergence) the leader is moved into a role that matches their gift mix. Convergence is God’s goal for every leader. In Convergence, God is at work conforming the leader to the image of Christ.  

Clinton argues that God uses two developmental tracks to form a person. One track is tactical and involves the skills of doing ministry. The other track is about spiritual formation, intimacy with God, and being conformed to his image. Both tracks are important and leaders often falter because they do not attend to both tracks. They might learn the tactics of ministry, but are not close to Christ, so skills are used to advance their agenda. On the other hand, a leader can grow close to Christ, but never develop their gifts or skills and, as a result, never advance the kingdom. A core insight here is that Christian maturity is not solely about acquiring knowledge or skills; it also requires an intentional look at God’s work in one’s life and a desire to cultivate that work.  

For the purpose of this paper, Clinton’s insights into how God forms leaders is key. The position of this paper is that God not only forms leaders through people, events, and circumstances; he forms all Christians through those moments (or as Clinton calls them, “process items”). “God processes a person by bringing activates, people, problems—you name it—into his or her life. … God’s ultimate purpose for these process

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28 Clinton does not use the terminology of two tracks. Terry Walling notes that one can find two developmental tracks in Clinton’s work. Terry Walling. Terry Walling, interview by author, March 12, 2015.

items…is conforming you to the image of Christ (Rm 8:28-29). … His approach is to work in you, and then through you.” The mechanics of development are theocentric. God works in a person, conforming them to the image of Christ, so that he can work through that person.


Father Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest serving in the diocese of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Rohr has written over twenty-five books in the area of Christian formation and spirituality. Rohr is the Founding Director of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Rohr gives attention to how God works to form a person over their lifetime.

In _Falling Upward_, Rohr develops the concept that spiritual formation is a lifelong developmental process. God is constantly working to develop a Christian and move him or her closer to God. The process of being formed spiritually consists of two primary seasons, the first half and second half of life.

In the first half of life, people are preoccupied with forming the proper container. During this season a person asks questions like, “‘What makes me significant?’, ‘How can I support myself?’, and ‘Who will go with me?’” Answering these questions appear to be the goal of life. However, Rohr notes that this season is preparatory. “The container

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is not an end in itself, but exists for the sake of your deeper and fullest life. …

(However,) far too many people just keep doing repair work on the container.”

Spiritual growth requires building the container and then moving toward using it for what Rohr calls, “your deeper and fullest life.” Two insights are key at this point. First, most people do not realize that they have a deeper and fuller meaning or purpose to their life. They remain locked in an ongoing process of building and repairing the container. Second, we have a limited ability see beyond our own stage of development. “From your own level of development you can only stretch yourself to comprehend people a bit beyond yourself. Some theorists say you cannot stretch more than one step above your own level of consciousness and that is on a good day!”

Spiritually maturity can be served by a process that allows a person to look at how they have been forming their life and ask deeper question about the ultimate purpose of their life. Rohr refers to Anne Sullivan who mirrored love toward Helen Keller. “Thank God, Anne Sullivan knew how to beautifully mirror Helen Keller, at great loving cost to herself; we all need such a mirror if we are to thrive.” We grow best when we are guided.

One of the keys to formation and moving toward the second half of life is a more profound appreciation of our relationship with God as it is formed by the grace of God.

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32 Ibid., 1.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 10.
“Every time God forgives us, God is saying that God’s own rules do not matter as much as the relationship that God wants to create with us.”36 Just as the biblical notion of absolute forgiveness, once experienced, should be enough to make us trust and see and love God.37

Times of success and failure are both opportunities to experience the grace of God. Following Lady Julian, Rohr notes that both our fall and our recovery from the fall are the mercy of God. For Rohr God is constantly at work forming us over the course of our lifetime. This formation involves that grace of God and helps unlock our life’s purpose.

*Falling Upward* has much to say about the second half of life. Many think of the second half of life as a time of dealing with health issues, retiring, and preparing for the death of our body. While this season can be seen as one of falling for the Christian, it can be filled with a sense of falling upward. In this season the soul can find its fullness and discover the “Big Picture” of life.38

Helen Keller is example of embracing the spiritual depth of the second half of life. Keller realized that a significant life was not dependent on building the proper container but on living out of depths of what God has created. She found herself despite her limitations and lived a life of service toward others. Such is a goal of formation to

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36 Ibid., 56-57.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 153.
help free people from a life devoted to securing the self and learning that the self has been created for the service of others.

**Discovering Grace in Spiritual Formation: The Transformative Acts of Giving and Receiving Grace**

The final section of this chapter examines the transformative nature of grace. Discovering grace in one’s life, seeing grace in the world, and learning to see and share grace with others all contribute to spiritual formation. Following the work of David Brenner, Dallas Willard, and Paul Zahl, this section will lay out practical ways to discover and share grace.

*The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* by David G. Benner.

One of the greatest gifts a person can be given is discovering the person that God has created them to be. For Benner this discovery is often missed; a person either devotes all their energy to creating a self or they miss that true identity is always a gift from God. Only in exploring God’s role in creating Christ-centered identity does a person discover who they are.

Benner develops the process of discovering identity along three lines. First is the need for transformational knowing of God that comes from meeting God in the depth of our beings. The next is the need for a transformational knowing of ourselves that comes from discovering how we are known by God. And, for Benner, the final part of the
process is the need to find our identity, fulfillment, and vocation in our hidden self in Christ.\textsuperscript{39} This project will explore these three concepts in the space below.

Spiritual formation lies at the intersection of what we know about God and what we know about ourselves. A serious issue arises when a person knows a great deal about God but very little about how God intersects with their life. Benner tells the story of a pastor who fell from ministry. The pastor could talk at length about God. “He knew that God was forgiving but had never really experienced this forgiveness, at least not in relation to any significant failure. … He knew that God is love, but again this was a belief, not an experience.”\textsuperscript{40} For Benner, truly transformational knowledge is “knowing of” not just “knowing about.”\textsuperscript{41} Hence, the experience of God is just as important as knowing God. Failure to cultivate both can allow a person to substitute ideas about God for a direct experience of God.

For Benner a person never fully discovers who they are until they have an experience of God. “Knowing God’s love demands that we receive God’s love experientially, not simply as a theory. Personal knowledge is never simply a matter of the head.”\textsuperscript{42} Jesus’ restoration of Peter is a worthwhile example of integration between knowledge and experience.

Mirroring the pattern of his denials, Jesus asked him three times if he loved him more than the other disciples. This gave Peter three chances to declare his love—

\textsuperscript{39} David Benner, \textit{The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery} (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2004), 16.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 24-25.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 25.
one for each denial. ... What might Peter tell us at this point? I suspect he would have first said how little he had truly known either himself or Jesus prior to this. With regard to Jesus, I suspect he would repeat with amazement how forgiving Jesus was. What he had known as objective information from witnessing Jesus’ encounters with others, he now knew deeply and personally, and I am sure he would have spoken of his new level of readiness to follow the Christ whom he now knew in his heart, not just his mind.43

Peter had witnessed Jesus’ grace toward others and now he experiences it in his own life.

According to Benner, God offers a divine invitation for Christians to know him more deeply. Many stall at just knowing about God. They know God is loving but do not know what it means to be loved by God. They talk about a relationship with God but have settled for knowing about God.

Benner offers the integration between knowledge and experience as a road map to spiritual maturity. In speaking to those who have settled for information about God but have not experienced his grace and mercy, Benner pushes believers to something more. “If this is your experience, don’t allow yourself to be discouraged by guilt. Hear God’s call to a deep personal encounter as an invitation...It is an invitation to move beyond objective knowledge to personal knowing.”44

The second component of Benner’s work is the idea that we only fully know ourselves when we realize how God knows us. This knowledge involves a way of seeing and experiencing the love of God. Since God created humanity, personhood is not something to be accomplished; rather, it is a gift from God.

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43 Ibid., 29-30.
44 Ibid., 30.
Benner merges God’s creative work with spiritual formation. If God created humanity, then self-awareness is wrapped up in the discovery of how God created us. At the same time, this discovery is a call to vulnerability and to be personally known by God. Following Thomas Merton, Benner remarks, “To be unknown by God is altogether too much privacy.”

We know ourselves when we are known by God and know God.

Another core concept for Benner is that identity and spiritual growth are vested in the love of God.

Neither knowing God nor knowing self can process very far unless it begins with a knowledge of how deeply we are loved by God. Until we dare to believe that nothing can separate us from God’s love—nothing that we could do or fail to do, nor anything that could be done by anyone else to us (Rom 8:31-39)—we remain in the elementary grades of spiritual transformation. … An identity grounded in God would mean that that when we think of who we are, the first thing that would come to mind is our status as someone who is deeply loved by God.

This type of love only comes when we approach God just as we are, filled with sin and failure. When we realize that we are so broken that we can only experience God through his grace and mercy, and not simply through knowledge, we begin to move toward spiritual maturity. This self-acceptance requires an honest look at ourselves. Only once we stop bringing God our cleaned-up self can we fully experience the beauty of his transforming love toward us.

45 Ibid., 47.

46 Ibid., 49.

47 While Benner (ibid., 61) often uses the word “love,” one could easily substitute the word grace (a free gift). God certainly does love us. His act of love is grace. Benner speaks this way when he talks about pretending to bring our cleaned-up selves to God to show him someone that he might approve of. Rather, God loves us as we are. This is grace.
The Gift of Being Yourself concludes by addressing the process of becoming your true self. This involves overcoming the temptations of the devil who calls us to embrace a false self. This false self believes that our true identity can be found apart from God. We are lured by the devil and our own desires to believe that we can be “like God without God.”

This process depends on God’s intervention and deliverance from our inward self-deception. Benner writes, “Every moment of everyday of our life, God wanders in our inner garden, seeking our companionship. The reason God cannot find us is that we are hiding in the bushes of our false self. God’s call to us is gentle and persistent: “Where are you? Why are you hiding?”

How does the false self contrast with the true self? Benner offers the following description:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The False Self</th>
<th>The True Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security and significance achieved by what we have, what we do, and what others think of us.</td>
<td>Security achieved by being loved by God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness sought in autonomy from God and in attachments.</td>
<td>Fulfillment found in surrender to God and living our vocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our idealized self.</td>
<td>Identity is who we are and who we are becoming in Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved by means of pretense and practice.</td>
<td>Received as a gift with gratitude and surrender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintained by effort and control.</td>
<td>Maintained by grace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48 Ibid., 80.
49 Ibid., 88.
Illusions as means to become god. Embraces meeting and being transformed by God.\textsuperscript{50}

The true self is marked by realizing and embracing who God has created us to be. To quote Benner, “my temperament, personality, abilities, interests, and passions all say something about who we are called to be and not simply who I am.”\textsuperscript{51} If we really believe we are created by God, then we are called to take seriously the gifts we possess and the desires we have as markers of our true self. In simple terms, God has created us to be the person we are and we are called to live out that identity.

For the purpose of spiritual formation Benner reminds us that we can look at the person God has created us to be and the events that have shaped us over the course of our lifetime. God works through these events to give us an identity that serves him. Understanding and embracing who God has created us to be is critical to spiritual maturity.

\textit{The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship} by Dallas Willard

\textit{The Great Omission} serves to correct theological practice that assumes one can be a Christian without being a disciple.\textsuperscript{52} A disciple is one who is intent on becoming Christ-like and systematically rearranges his or her affairs to that end.\textsuperscript{53} For Willard, a great

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 92.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 101.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Dallas Willard, \textit{The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus Essential Teachings on Discipleship} (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), x.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 7.
\end{itemize}
number of Christians fail to take seriously Jesus’ call to discipleship. The cost of non-discipleship is a loss of abiding peace, the abundant life (Jn 10:10), and rest for the soul.

For the purpose of this project Willard offers three key contributions. First, Willard notes that Protestants may put significant effort into formation without jeopardizing the theological teaching of grace alone. For Willard there is a proper place for works in the Christian life. The issue is properly understanding the connection between grace and good works. Willard writes that “grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude.”

In simple terms effort is hard work, earning is the belief that if I try hard enough God will love and accept me. Willard helps one see that pursuing Jesus does not undermine grace but necessitates it.

Another significant contribution of Willard’s is his connection between grace and regeneration. For Willard the church misunderstands scripture when it limits grace to the forgiveness of sins. Grace is the driver of regeneration in the Christian life.

If you would really like to be into consuming grace, just lead a holy life. The true saint burns grace like a 747 burns fuel on takeoff. Become the kind of person who routinely does what Jesus did and said. You will consume much more grace by leading a holy life than by sinning, because every holy act you do will have to be upheld by the grace of God. And that upholding is totally the unmerited favor of God in action.

*The Great Omission* helps a person see the connection between grace and discipleship. The more seriously one takes spiritual formation the more they will require grace to accomplish the task.

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54 Ibid., 61.
55 Ibid., 62.
Willard also offers assistance in connecting knowledge and behavior. Willard is concerned with Christian formation that relies solely on information and neglects practice. Such approaches prepare a Christian to die but not to live.\textsuperscript{56} For Willard a robust theology of grace necessitates assisting Christians in how to live by showing them what it means to intentionally follow Jesus. In taking up these practices one embraces the full life Jesus promises.

\textit{Grace in Practice: A Theology for Everyday Life} by Paul F. M. Zahl

Paul Zahl is a retired Episcopalian priest. He pastored multiple congregations and served as dean and president of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. Zahl’s completed his PhD in Systematic Theology under Jurgen Moltmann at the University of Tubingen. Zahl’s work gives specific prominence to God’s grace.

\textit{Grace in Practice} is divided into two major sections. The first outlines the theology of grace, and the second teases out practical implications of grace in daily life. Zahl begins by looking at the biblical concepts of law and grace to explore how God works on people. The law is a tool God uses to reveal our sin and brokenness, but it has no power to make us right before God.

The point is crucial: law tells us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about ourselves. It holds the mirror up to nature (William Shakespeare). But the law fails to convey the power to correct the maladies it diagnoses. The law is painful like iodine to a cut, but another agent is required for healing to occur. That agent is grace.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{57} Paul F. M. Zahl, \textit{Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 2.
The law is the way the God relates to self-absorbed human beings. In that sense, it is relational and plays a role in Christian formation. The law is an exposing agent; it reveals human sin and the gulf between humanity and God. The law prepares the way for grace.

Grace is the instrument God uses to both redeem and grow believers. While there are many short definitions of grace (e.g., unmerited favor or “God’s Redemption At Christ’s Expense”), Zahl’s extended definition is worth stating: “What is grace? (Zahl asks) Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable.”

For Zahl, the one-way love of grace is the only agent that can create lasting transformation in the human heart. Theologically, God’s one-way love often results in a response and this response is a step toward Christian maturity. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). While a bit trivial, Zahl uses the illustration of a teenage boy who witnesses the advances of a beautiful woman. He notes that simply indicating that she likes him is enough to elicit a response. It does not matter if she has good qualities or is relationally compatible, showing interest is enough to make him pursue her. God’s grace toward us leads us toward him. An extended excerpt on grace and teenagers is helpful here as it demonstrates how grace is to be applied.

“Tough love! Hold them responsible for their actions. Do not attempt to bail them out or go out after them. … They must be held accountable!” That particular expression of the deep magic, which got Aslan killed as well as Christ crucified, is the law. The "deeper magic still” speaks grace. Forget words like “responsibility” and “accountability.” They only create an “equal and opposite reaction,” as the law inevitably does. Instead, love the child through the worst. Go

58 Ibid., 2.
59 Ibid., 38.
to the court appearance even the fourth or fifth time. Jesus said, “Not just seven times but seventy times seven.” One-way love is one-way love. Only grace will tame the wild beast of adolescents. On the surface, adolescents are asking for the law precisely so they can break it. At a deeper level, adolescents are asking for grace, again and again, so they can return to the love that always gives thanks.\textsuperscript{60}

The second section of \textit{Grace in Practice} focuses on specific ways that grace works in different aspects of life (grace in family, grace in society, and grace in church) and how grace is catalytic in Christian formation. In each instance undeserved love (grace) changes a person and leads them to become more mature. Grace ends competition. It demolishes self-righteousness and increases the compassion necessary for love to thrive and continue.\textsuperscript{61} Grace truly equips us for life together. Grace once received becomes a practice that is the evidence of Christian formation.

\textbf{Summary of Relevant Literature}

The relevant literature shows that grace is not simply an intellectual concept. On the contrary, grace moves a person away from sinful practices, fosters a relationship with God, and leads a person to embrace new behaviors. This makes grace an essential element in Christian formation. When systematically applied, grace is the substance that creates change and movement. As Dallas Willard says, grace is the jet fuel of the Christian life.\textsuperscript{62} The more you do what Jesus said and did the more grace you will consume. The goal of this project is to create a process where the members of Peace Church can intentionally consume and share grace.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 170.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 145.

\textsuperscript{62} Willard, \textit{The Great Omission}, 62.
CHAPTER 3
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Chapter 3 articulates a theological foundation for grace-centered discipleship as rooted in scripture and the action of God. First, this chapter examines biblical teaching on grace and human brokenness. Second, this chapter will look at the contributions of theologians who view grace as central to the disciple-making process. Next, this chapter will explore the Lutheran contribution of law (God’s commands) and gospel (God’s forgiveness) as tools that assist Christians in applying God’s grace to their lives. Finally, this chapter looks at the practice of sharing grace as worthwhile Christian behavior.

Grace from the Beginning

Grace is undeserved favor or merit, a free gift that is initiated by the giver. As Paul Zahl defines it, “grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable.”\(^1\) Grace is not a New Testament concept; rather, it is the thread that runs throughout the entire Bible. Grace touches the creation, makes its way through the fall

\(^1\) Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, 2.
and marks the ministry of Christ and his disciples. From beginning to end the Scriptures are a testament to the grace of God.

In the beginning God created all that existed, and this creation is an act of grace. During the creation God affirms that everything he creates is good. The light was good (Gn 1:3); the dry land and waters are good (Gn 1:9), the trees and the vegetation that produces fruit in season are good (Gn 1:11-12), the stars in the sky and heavenly bodies are good (Gn 1:14-19), and, every living creature that walks on the earth and flies in the sky is good (Gn 1:24-25).

God then takes all of his good creation and hands it over to man declaring “let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth” (Gn 1:26, CEB). God’s first act in Scripture is an act of grace. Adam and Eve are the receivers of a free gift from God.

In Genesis 3, God’s grace is even seen in the midst of the fall. Adam and Eve rebel against God by eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Their goal was to be “like God” (Gn 3:5). Ironically, before eating the fruit Eve quotes God’s own words back to serpent, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die” (Gn 3:4). Eve knows the consequences for her actions, and yet she is all too willing to rebel against God.

In response to the rebellion of his creation, God responds with grace. Immediately after eating the fruit Adam and Eve realize they are naked and hide themselves from God (Gn 3:5-9). God seeks them out, shares the consequences for their sin, and then immediately reveals his plan for humanity’s ultimate salvation (Gn 3:14-19). As if this
initial act of provision were not enough, God even provides clothing for Adam and Eve (Gn 3:20), a small but meaningful act of grace.

One of my colleagues with young children noted how amazing God’s response to sin is in Genesis 3. “When my kids make something out of play dough and it does not meet their expectations they smash it and start over. Not God when his creation misses the mark, he sends his one and only Son to redeem them.” That is grace.

God’s grace extends throughout the Old Testament and serves to unify the Old Testament narrative. An example of this is the way God’s unmerited favor is at work both when he calls Abram and when he brings his people Israel out of bondage in Egypt. In Genesis 12 God calls Abram, promising to make his descendants into a great nation with a great name. God declares that he will curse the nations that curse Abram and bless the nations that bless him and that through Abram’s descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gn 12:1-3).

God chose Abram to be the father of many nations and the patriarch of his chosen people because of grace. Abram lived beyond the Euphrates and that his family served “other gods” (Josh 24:2). Without any indication of effort or desire on Abram’s part, God calls him and promises to make his descendants into a great nation (Gn 12:1-3). Despite moral failures (on two occasions he lies and tells other men that his wife Sarai is his sister [Gn 12 and 20]) and questionable decisions (fathering a child with Hagar [Gn 16]), God keeps his promise to Abram. Abram did not earn God’s affection or promises; rather, God gave his blessings to Abraham solely out of divine goodness and mercy.

The theme of grace in Abram’s life cannot be overstated. God calls Abraham out of a pagan family and land (because of grace). God remains faithful to Abraham despite
moral failings and questionable decisions (because of grace). God allows Sarai to conceive a child well beyond the age of natural child bearing (because of grace). Again and again God provides for Abraham not as a result of Abram’s merit or worth but as reflection of God’s character and desire to be gracious.

God’s grace once again emerges as he calls his people Israel and leads them out of bondage in Egypt. In Deuteronomy 7, God makes clear that Israel’s deliverance is an act of grace:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut 7:7-8).

If grace is unmerited favor or a free gift, then the exodus is a testament to God’s grace. As slaves without power or recourse, God promises to deliver his people out of Egypt and lead them into a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 6:2-8). One by one God dispatches the gods of the Egyptians through plagues (Ex 7-12) and delivers his people out of the hands of the Egyptians. God’s provision continues as he leads his people toward the promised land. He guides them with pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day (Ex 13). He ensures their escape from the Egyptian army by parting the Red Sea (Ex 14). God’s chosen people have done nothing to merit anything from God. On the contrary, as soon as they leave Egypt the people of Israel grumble and complain about God’s provision. Rather than respond with hostility, God is gracious and provides for his people sending quail and manna to feed his people (Ex 16).
The grace of God is not limited to a few isolated events but is the thread that runs throughout the entire Old Testament. On countless occasions in the Old Testament God delivers his people without contribution on their part. Adam and Eve rebel against their creator, but God sought them out in the Garden. The world becomes mired in horrific sin and a flood is sent to wipe out creation, but God leads his servant Noah to build an ark. The people of God are held in captivity in Egypt, but God sends Moses to deliver them. The people of God are carried off into exile, but God rescues them and leads them back to the promised land. Ultimately, God reminds his people again and again that one day a savior will come and by his stripes we will be healed (Is 53:5).

The Transforming Power of Grace

While grace is a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament illustrates the power of grace to change a person. In Luke 7, Jesus is invited to dinner at the house of Simon the Pharisee. Part way through the meal a “sinful woman” enters the house and begins to weep over Jesus feet, wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with oil (Lk 7:38). When Simon sees this he responds, “if this man were a prophet he would who and what sort of woman this is for she is a great sinner” (Lk 7:39).

Jesus’ response is helpful in demonstrating that grace changes a person. “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” (Lk 7:41-42) Simon rightly guesses the one who had the larger debt loves the lender more. Great forgiveness leads to great love. Just as a cut leads to physical pain, great forgiveness leads to great love.
Jesus tells this parable in room filled with Pharisees. It is obvious from Simon’s comment that they perceived the woman as a great sinner who was not welcome in the presence of a holy crowd. The point of the parable is not that some people are forgiven little and love little while others are forgiven much and love much. The point of the parable is that great debtors are all there are. And those who experience the forgiveness of God love much. Grace is transformative.

Another example is Zacchaeus, the man who happened to be the chief tax collector in Jericho. In order to see Jesus, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree. The story in Luke 19 is a testament to the transforming power of grace. After calling Zacchaeus down from the tree Jesus invites himself to dinner at the tax collectors home.

On three levels the text affirms that Zacchaeus brings nothing to warrant Christ approaching him and requesting dinner. First, the text identifies Zacchaeus as a tax collector, a category of people considered far from God. Second, those that witness Jesus going to Zacchaeus’ house declare that he is going to be the guest of a sinner (Lk 19:7). Third, in reference to Zacchaesus, Jesus says that he came to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:9) a clear indication that Zacchaeus is lost before his encounter with God.

Jesus goes to a tax collector, who is sinful and lost. This act of grace leads Zacchaeus to declare, “Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Lk19:9). Zacchaeus was changed by grace. Jesus went to a lost and sinful person and that act of grace changed Zacchaeus to point that he was willing to part with his wealth.
Grace and Transformation in Acts and the Pauline Epistles

It should come as no surprise that we see the effects of grace among the members of the early church. In Acts 2, shortly after hearing Peter proclaim the gospel, the early church immediately began doing what comes naturally: they study the apostles’ teachings, participate in the Lord’s Supper, and sell their worldly possession to provide for the material needs of one another (Acts 2:42-47).

In Romans, Paul connects forgiveness by grace with personal change. In Romans 5, Paul writes, “where sin increases grace abounds all the more” (Rom 5:20b). While Paul’s argument is lengthy, his point is simple. Life with God is a work of grace and not matter how sinful a person might be. It is absolutely impossible to sin beyond the capacity of God’s grace. Grace covers every sin at every point in every way imaginable. In addition, it moves people out of sinful habits.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:1-4).

Paul anticipates that some may ask, “If grace covers every sin and there are no limits to what God can forgive then why not keep on sinning so that grace can increase?” Paul answers with the strongest possible negation in Greek (ma genata): “may it never be.” Paul’s emphatic response is rooted in the reality of baptism; this act of baptismal grace links a believer to the finished work of Christ and creates a desire to live in the “newness of life.” Paul connects the grace of God with change in behavior.
God’s grace is not simply limited to reducing sin; the Scriptures speak of other ways grace leads to change. In Ephesians 2, Paul offers a clear proclamation that salvation is a gift from God and not the result of human effort. He states, “It is by grace through faith that you are saved and not by works so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9). In this passage Paul articulates a foundational principal of the Protestant Reformation that unearned grace saves. Equally striking is what Paul says in verse 10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). The Greek word ποίημα (workmanship) denotes God’s work to “make us what we are.”

For Paul it is the grace of God that sets us apart from sin and leads us to produce good works. Note how intimately God is involved in the process of change. God sees the future and the good works that will be required of us. He saves us by grace without any “good works” on our part and then he shapes us so that we might perform the good works that are our neighbor needs. Both salvation and good works flow out of God’s gracious work in our life.

**Theologians on Grace and Transformation**

In Peace’s context, members regularly hear about the grace of God in preaching, but no tool exists to help members see the grace of God in their life and gain clarity on the good works God has called them to do. This project focuses on helping members gain

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clarity on grace during the initial phase of spiritual formation. In *The Making of a Leader*, J. Robert Clinton calls the early phase of clarity on grace “sovereign foundations.” While his focus is leadership development, the sovereign foundations phase is equally applicable to all Christians. In this phase God works through people, events, and circumstances to bring a person to faith and equip them for future service. The following section examines how theologians apply grace in this early phase.

Theologians with a high view of grace in spiritual formation go to significant lengths to point out the depth of spiritual brokenness. After all, if people have the capacity to reach God on their own, then there is little need for grace. Human brokenness is so bad that it necessitates God’s intervention, and his intervention leads to the transformation of the person.

It is worth asking how bad off are we when it comes to life with God and salvation. Using Jerry Bridge’s bankruptcy illustration is helpful. The human situation is like chapter seven bankruptcy, but with an insidious twist. We know that we have filed chapter seven bankruptcy, but I believe most Christians live as though they have filed chapter eleven. We might not think that God needs our help to get us into his good graces, but we live as though our good efforts keep us in God’s favor. Sin is chapter seven bankruptcy; we must see it that way in order to view God’s grace in the proper

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3 J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 44-47. Clinton’s influence on this project cannot be understated. While his focus is on leadership development, I would argue that a God follows a similar process of development in all Christians (at least at the early stages) whether one is a “leader or not.”

4 For a detailed description of sin as bankruptcy see Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, 15-21. I have added to his illustration.
light. Only when we reject the notion that we can save ourselves, albeit with a little help from God, can we fully appreciate the depth and power of God’s grace.

Grace plays a critical role in understanding the gospel and Christian transformation. Lutheran theologian Rod Rosenblatt offers a helpful illustration of his personal realization of the grace and the change it brought to his life. The grace of God came to him at a moment of total moral bankruptcy. Shortly after turning sixteen, Rosenbladt took the new car his father bought him to a party. At the party Rod got drunk and totaled the car. He walked home and spent the night weeping before his father. The next morning when he woke up, Rod walked downstairs and found his father at the breakfast table. Rod’s father looked up and said, “Let’s go get you a new car.” Rosenbladt said that in that moment he became a Christian.\(^5\) For the first time in his life, the grace of God became real to him. He realized that grace is not about God’s appreciation of our best work but God coming to us in the midst of our bad work.

Ironically, Rosenbladt notes that when he tells that story, people become angry with his dad. They assume his dad was an awful parent who set Rod up for failure because he offered his son grace instead of what was deserved.

The story is a good illustration of grace. We hope that doing things on our own will result in being reward. The above illustration dismantles that notion of accomplishment and reward. Grace does not come to us when we are doing it right (whatever it might be). On the contrary, God’s grace is given when we are doing it wrong.

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\(^5\) Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, 86.
Rosenbladt credits his dad’s actions with helping him understand grace intellectually, see grace in his life, and show grace with others, a point that will be explored in Chapter 4. Rosenbladt credits his father’s act of unmerited grace with leading him into ministry and a life of Christian service. Grace both changed his life and led him into the service of others.

Grace not only changes lives, but leads to spiritual formation. In The Critical Journey, Janet O. Hagberg and Robert Guelich note that spiritual formation is both an act of grace and a journey. Maturing as a Christian involves God’s action on us and our response to God. As the authors put it, “spirituality is the way we live out our response to God.” One’s desire to do the will of God often manifests itself in acts of grace toward others. For example, Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (Jn 13:4–10) is a key illustration of a spiritually mature life. Jesus is so filled with the gracious will of God that he takes on tasks that should be beneath him.

Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church tells a compelling story of what it looks like to share grace. Keller notes the story of woman who worked at a large investment house in New York.

Not only after staring she made a big mistake that she thought would cost her the job, but her boss went in to his superior and took complete responsibility of what she had done. As a result, he lost some of his reputation and the ability to maneuver within the organization. She was amazed at what he had done and went in to thank him. She told him that she had often seen supervisors take credit for what she had accomplished, but she had never seen a supervisor take the blame for something she had done wrong. She wanted to know what made him different. He was very modest and deflected her questions, but she was insistent. Finally, he told her, “I am a Christian. That means among other things that God accepts me because Jesus Christ took the blame for the things that I have done wrong. He did

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that on the cross. That is why I have the desire and sometimes that ability to take the blame for others.” She stared at him for a long moment and asked, “Where do you go to church?”

This story is an act of grace. The employee was completely in the wrong, and her boss took the blame for her. His actions are illustrative of Paul Zahl’s definition of grace: “grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable.” Grace runs counter to our transactional culture. The woman in the story was in the wrong and yet she got the opposite of what she deserved. That is grace.

It is worth noting the way that grace was transformative in the life of the employee and her boss. He had experienced God’s grace through the gospel message and had internalized the concept that God had taken the blame for him on the cross. This act of undeserved mercy led him to be gracious to others by taking the blame for them. In return, having experienced grace the young investment banker asked, “Where do you go to church?” Having received grace, her life moves toward worshiping God.

**Objections to Grace-centered Transformation**

This section addresses three common objections to grace-based transformation and offers a response to each. The first is that a total reliance on grace leads to a permission to sin; if grace is a free gift, there is no reason to reduce sin. The second objection is that grace is opposed to effort, so the more you teach about grace, the fewer

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good works a person will do. Third and finally, taking grace seriously results in a reduction in God’s standards.

First Objection: A Reliance on Grace is Permission to Sin

Al Pacino once said, “I asked God for a bike, but I know God doesn’t work that way. So I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness.”⁹ Pacino’s statement taps into a fear that if grace is taken seriously, then it will give permission to sin. If every sin can be forgiven and grace simply abounds, one might argue there is no reason not to keep sinning.

While there is no guarantee that grace results in transformation, the Scriptures indicate that giving grace does not equate to a license to sin. For example, in Romans Paul concludes his great treatise on grace in Romans 5 by posing this question in Romans 6:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:1-4).

For Paul, God’s grace has no limits; it truly can cover any sin. However, the grace of God does not encourage us to sin more. On the contrary Paul sees the grace of God as grafting the believer into the death and resurrection of Christ an action that leads us to walk in the newness of life.

Christ offers a similar teaching in narrative form in John 8 when a woman caught in adultery is brought to him. Surrounded by a group of Pharisees waiting to stone her,

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Jesus says, “Let the one among you who has no sin cast the first stone.” He then looks at the woman and says, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She says, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus says to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (Jn 8:1-11).

Jesus shows grace. The woman has done nothing to merit the approval or forgiveness of Jesus. Jesus simply forgives her as an act of grace. However, Christ does not say, “Go back to your old life.” On the contrary he says, “Go and sin no more.” From a biblical perspective grace does not encourage an increase in sin, but a reduction.

Second Objection: Grace Results in Fewer Good Works

Grace does not make a person lazy; rather, it changes their attitude. In *The Great Omission* Dallas Willard states, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.”¹⁰ For Willard grace is opposed to an attitude that believes people can make themselves right with God. It is not opposed to hard work for the sake of the kingdom. Willard goes on to note that true kingdom effort necessitates grace.

The true saint burns grace like a 747 burns fuel on takeoff. Become the kind of person who does what Jesus did and said. You will consume much more grace by living a holy life than by sinning, because every holy act you do will have to be upheld by the grace of God. And that upholding is totally the merited favor of God in action.¹¹

For Willard, grace fuels Christian behavior. Grace allows the Christian’s complete holy acts.


¹¹ Ibid., 62.
Third Objection: Grace leads us to be inwardly focused and overlook our neighbor.

Grace does not make life all about oneself. On the contrary, grace has the power to take our eyes off ourselves and allow us to see the needs of our neighbor. Following classic Lutheran teaching, Oswald Bayer states,

Those who are born anew are no longer entangled with themselves. They are solidly freed from this entanglement, from the self-reflection that always seeks what belongs to itself. This is not a deadening of self. It does not flee from thought and responsibility. No it is the gift of self-forgetfulness. The passive righteousness of faith tells us: Do not concern yourself at all! In that God does what is decisive in us, we may live outside ourselves and solely for him.12

In a similar vein, author Brennan Manning shows that grace is the fuel that restores relationships. For Manning the grace of God lifted the bitterness and resentment he felt toward his mother. One day in prayer and reflection Manning recalled that his mother was abandoned in an orphanage as a little girl, and he pictured her sitting by a window praying that God would send her a mom and dad to love her unconditionally. In that moment Manning saw her in need of the grace of God. Seeing her need for grace allowed Manning to forgive her and let go of the hostility he held.13 For Manning this was the outgrowth of personally experiencing the forgiveness of God and see the same need in others. He writes that “a trusting heart is forgiven, and forgives.”14

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12 Oswald Bayer, Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 23, emphasis mine.

13 Brennan Manning, All is Grace: A Ragamuffin Memoir (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011), 196.

14 Ibid.
The Gospel as Grace in Transformation

Lutheran theologians weave three strands together when teaching about transformation in the Christian life: grace, the gospel, and good works. Grace and the gospel are always the force that produces good works. From this standpoint, grace is the fuel that changes behavior.

In his loci on grace and the gospel, Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper defines the gospel as the free forgiveness of sin merited through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the believer. For Pieper the gospel is a manifestation of God’s grace and this grace leads to good works.15 As God lives and moves in the life of the forgiven believer, she produces good works.

Speaking of good works, Martin Luther notes that all “good works” begin with God’s good work of salvation. Salvation as a free gift (grace) and is the highest good work. All the good works we do flow out of a response to the gospel. Luther believed that our first good work was trusting that a loving God had sent his Son for us. Grace leads us into a deeper relationship with God and that relationship produces new behavior in the life of the believer.

The first, highest, and most precious of all good works is faith in Christ, and as it says in John 6[:28-29], when the Jews asked him, "What must we do, to be doing the good work of God?" Jesus answered, "This is the good work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." Now when we hear that or even preach it, we pass over it: we think nothing of it and think it easy to do, but actually we ought to pause a long time and think it over properly. For in this work all good works exist, and from faith these works receive a borrowed goodness. We must make this absolutely clear, so that men can understand it.16

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C. F. W Walther, the founder of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) follows a similar vein to Luther. In *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, he offers a helpful understanding of the gospel, grace, and good works. He writes,

The Gospel does not require anything good that man must furnish: not a good heart, not a good disposition, no improvement of his condition, no godliness, no love either of God or men. It issues no orders, but changes man. It plants love into his heart and makes him capable of all good works. It demands nothing, but it gives all. Should not this fact make us leap for joy?\(^\text{17}\)

Walther views the gospel as pure gift (grace). God is the one that seeks people out. God is the one that does the transforming work, and God is the one that makes the believer capable of all good works. Note the emphasis on the unmerited action of God. God alone brings people into relationship with him. In addition, God’s action not only saves but fuels a believer’s good works.

### The Law as Grace in Transformation

Lutheran theology also understands law as a form of grace. In his systematic theology Robert Mueller defines the law as the requirements of God in the scripture. Following Luther, he notes that the law allows us to live in a way that is “pleasing and acceptable to God.”\(^\text{18}\) While the law does not save, it is certainly good and can be viewed as an act of grace.


In his book *The Grace of God*, Andy Stanley notes that the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai can be viewed as an act of God’s grace. The purpose of the Law was not to make us good (that is the work of grace), but to keep us free.\(^{19}\)

Context is key. The Commandments were given on Mount Sinai immediately following the Exodus, the delivery of God’s people out of slavery in Egypt. The Ten Commandments serve to ensure that the people of God would not enslave themselves again.

[The Ten Commandments] are intuitive to us, but that is because we were raised in a culture that for the most part champions these values…. But for Israel, a former nation of slaves, this was new territory. They had come from an environment where there were practically no individual rights. An environment in which an individual could have been considered of lesser value than an animal. In Egypt people were bought and sold and traded as commodities. From that context we begin to understand the dignity these simple rules brought to the men, women, and children of this new community.\(^{20}\)

The law also functions as a gift in that it deepens our relationship with God and other Christians. As Luther notes, there are two tables to the law.\(^{21}\) The first three commandments are directed toward our relationship with God. They remind us to serve only him, keep his name holy, and remember the Sabbath day. The final seven commandments on the second table foster healthy relationships with others by reminding us to honor our mother and father and not to murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet.

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 70-71.

Grace and Discipleship at Peace Lutheran Church: Law and Gospel.

Lutheran theologians hold that God gifts His church with law and gospel. They are tools that He employs to shape a Christian and are therefore useful in a conversation about Christian formation. For Luther, God is personally involved in changing a person. He does this through preaching two sermons, one of law and the other gospel. God is the subject actively at work shaping and transforming believers. It is important to note that the application of law and gospel is done primarily through preaching.

Now the first sermon, and doctrine, is the law of God. The second is the gospel. These two sermons are not the same. Therefore, we must have a good grasp of the matter in order to know how to differentiate between them. We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things. The law is thus directed solely to our behavior and consists in making requirements. For God speaks through the law, saying, “Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you.” The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says, “This is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake.” So, then, there are two kinds of doctrine and two kinds of works, those of God and those of men. Just as we and God are separated from one another, so also these two doctrines are widely separated from one another. For the gospel teaches exclusively what has been given us by God, and not—as in the case of the law—what we are to do and give to God.22

In my context, discipleship is facilitated in part through preaching law and gospel. The hope is that God will work on the hearts of believers through hearing his word proclaimed and will bring about life change. This view is not without merit; after all, God’s word is “living and active (Heb 4:12) and capable of creating faith (Rom 10:17). While Peace has seen numerical growth, an increase in small groups, and missional

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service over the years, she lacks a process that makes God’s grace, gospel, and law explicit in the lives of individual members. They hear a lot about grace, but there are no tools to help them apply it personally.

Discipleship requires more than just preaching. Spiritual formation lies at the confluence of what we know about God, what we know about ourselves, and how we put God’s truth into practice. A serious issue arises when a person knows a great deal about God but very little about how God intersects with their life. For author David Benner, a person never fully discovers who they are until they have an experience of God; "knowing God’s love demands that we receive God’s love experientially, not simply as a theory. Personal knowledge is never simply a matter of the head."23 Jesus’ restoration of Peter is a worthwhile example of integration between knowledge and experience.

Mirroring the pattern of his denials, Jesus asked him three times if he loved him more than the other disciples. This gave Peter three chances to declare his love—one for each denial. … What might Peter tell us at this point? I suspect he would have first said how little he had truly known either himself or Jesus prior to this. With regard to Jesus, I suspect he would repeat with amazement how forgiving Jesus was. What he had known as objective information from witnessing Jesus’ encounters with others, he now knew deeply and personally, and I am sure he would have spoken of his new level of readiness to follow the Christ whom he now knew in his heart, not just his mind.24

Benner’s point should not be understated, spiritual formation begins by learning about God (knowledge), then moves to applying the work of God to one’s life (application), and concludes with following Jesus (behavior).

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24 Ibid., 29-30.
The focus of this project is to help the members of Peace Church understand grace intellectually, see grace in their lives, and share grace with others. What Peace requires in this next season is a process that walks individuals through the early stages of spiritual formation. Early stages refer to what Robert Clinton calls “Sovereign Foundations” and Hagberg and Guelich call “The Recognition of God” and “Life of Discipleship” phases of the Christian life. These phases are the foundation of the Christian life.

The Lutheran tradition does have tools that assist in applying the teachings of God to one’s life. A classic Lutheran way of applying grace, law, and gospel is thinking in terms of Capital G gospel, Capital G grace, and Capital L law. Capital G gospel refers to the good news of Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross. Capital L law refers to all the commandments of God and is classically accessible in the Ten Commandments. Capital G grace refers to God’s free gift of grace to the Christians. As Paul Zahl describes it, capital G grace is one-way love. It is all about God’s desire to rescue, forgive, and save humanity. It is theologically summed up in Paul’s words in Ephesians: “By grace you have been saved through faith and not by works, so that on one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

The law holds the answers when a person is seeking to know what is good, or how God desires for us to live with others. The law also helps with sin prevention and self-diagnosis. It can show us how to love our neighbor and, therefore, serves as a useful guide. However, the law cannot make us right with God. The person who is concerned about being forgiven, loved, and accepted (asking if they are good enough to be forgiven

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25 For a similar view of Big G Gospel, Big L Law/ little l law, little g gospel see William McDavid, Ethan Richardson, David Zahl, Law and Gospel: A Theology for Sinners (and Saints) (Charlottesville, VA: Mocking Bird, 2015), 93. The authors have a similar view of law but do not see little g gospel as illustrative of capital G gospel.
or loved by God) needs the gospel. Encouraging Christians to embrace the gospel is the call to take hold of the grace of God.

The question raised is how people apply these concepts to themselves. The Reformation painter Lucas Cranach offers a useful illustration of how this might work practically in his painting *Crucifixion.* 26 The painting shows the crucifixion and contains an interesting twist. Cranach painted himself into his work. He stands at the feet of Christ and our Savior’s blood falls directly on him. Like Cranach, Christians must learn to find themselves at the foot of the cross, covered in the blood of Christ. In a congregational setting, one way to find ourselves at the foot of the cross is to speak of little g grace, little g gospel, little l law. 27 For Peace Church seeing grace, gospel, and law offers tangible tools to see God’s grace and share it with others.

Little g grace is an illustration of God’s unearned disposition toward humanity. It is seen when someone gives something without expecting anything in return. They may give a gift or cancel a debt. The only requirement is that that action is not transactional; it is one-way. These acts of grace are illustrative of God’s grace toward us.

A few years ago, a colleague attended a Christmas party. At the party a distant relative gave gifts to all of my colleagues’ children. My coworker felt embarrassed that he had not purchased anything for the relative. Later in the evening he pulled his relative aside, thanked him for the gifts, and apologized for not purchasing anything for him. His

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27 My claim is that little l law and little G gospel are illustrations of Big L Law and Big G gospel.
relative responded by saying, “that’s okay. It’s a gift, not an exchange.” His statement is an example of little g grace. Items were given with no expectation of return.

When God says, “I forgive you,” his words do what they say. They are performative. Much the same as a judge issuing a verdict, the words of little g gospel do something. Consider the following illustration. A man has an affair, and his wife finds out. He goes to her and says, “I did it.” There is no groveling or mitigation. He just states what he did. His wife looks at him and says, “I forgive you.” Her forgiveness is little g gospel.

Law with a small l refers to an “interior principle or demand or ought that seems universal in human nature. In this sense, law is any voice that makes us feel we must do something or be something to merit the approval of another…. In daily living law is an internalized principle of self-accusation.” While little l law certainly includes following the ten commandments, it has broader implications. Little l law can include any demand or standard placed on a person by which he or she may be judged. This type of little l law finds expression in our daily need to be right and meet the demands of others. It is merit-based and transactional. It is our deep desire to be right. The law in this sense shows us the need for grace.

Grace, gospel, and law are of gifts of God’s unmerited favor. They serve to move us into relationships with God and empower us to love our neighbor. Seeing these key themes is essential in the discipleship process, as they are the drivers of Christian growth.

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Grace and New Behavior

As Dallas Willard reminds us, if grace is just about learning, then it does little to teach the Christian how to live. Grace needs to inform behavior. The Lutheran tradition is not silent on grace and behavior. Luther realized that the grace of God frees us from trying to earn His affection and allows us to help our neighbor.

This behavior is key for Luther, as God intends to care for humanity through the actions of Christians. Those that have experienced the grace of God must look to the needs of their neighbor and caring for them. For Luther this is the highest act of Christian service and the fulfillment of the law. In his commentary on Galatians Luther states,

It is as though Paul were saying: “Why are you burdening yourselves with the Law? Why do you so anxiously strain and vex yourselves with the ceremonial laws about foods, seasons, special places, etc., and with the proper way of eating, drinking, keeping festival, and performing sacrifices? Forget about this nonsense, and listen to what I am saying! The whole Law is completely summarized in this one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ God certainly takes no pleasure in this observance of ceremonial laws; nor does He need it. But this is what He now requires of you: that you believe in Christ, whom He Himself has sent. Then you will be made perfect in Him and will have everything. Now if to faith, the worship that is most pleasing to God, you want to add laws, then you should know that in this very brief commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ all laws are included. Strive to observe this commandment; for if you observe it, you will fulfill all the laws.”

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30 Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5-6; 1519, Chapters 1-6, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 27 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 55–56.
As Luther suggests, new behavior matters not because God needs your new works but because your neighbor does.

A way to foster new behavior is to intentionally share grace with others. In *Grace in Practice*, Paul Zahl offers several examples of how grace can be shared. Sharing grace may include canceling a debt, forgiving someone that has not earned it, or inviting people to dinner whom you expect nothing in return.31 A Christian who has experienced the grace of God should engage in these simple tangible acts as a way to share grace with others.

A key practice of grace in daily life is moving away from a transactional approach to life and to begin giving without expectation of return. Author Brennan Manning offers a helpful illustration in his book *The Ragamuffin Gospel*.

One bitterly cold night in January of 1935 the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes a tattered old woman was brought in before him accused of stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter’s husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving…. LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, “I’ve got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions—ten dollars or ten days in jail.” But even as he pronounced the sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket…. “Here is the ten-dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.”32

Everyone in the courtroom experienced a magnificent act of grace. The requirements of the law were fulfilled but not by the guilty party. Manning notes that we should be

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stunned by the amazing goodness of grace.\textsuperscript{33} When Christians take on this type of behavior, they mirror the heart of God and allow others insight into the grace of God. Sharing grace is an essential discipleship practice for the believer.

The next chapter presents a processing tool and exercise to assist a person in to see, understand, and apply grace, gospel, and law in their life. This tool involves creating a timeline of one’s life and writing down positive and negative experiences, life lessons, and core themes. These experiences are then categorized under the themes grace, gospel, and law. The goal is that a participant will be able to understand grace intellectually, see grace in their life, and share grace with others.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 104.
PART THREE

PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4
MINISTRY STRATEGY

Chapter 4 presents a vision for disciples at Peace Church. This chapter explores the theology, goals, and strategy for developing a grace-centered discipleship process at Peace Church. This program assumes that discipleship begins by examining God’s gracious work in the Bible and in the life of the Christian. The purpose of this program is to develop Christians who can articulate a biblical definition of grace, express how God has been at work in their life, and share grace with others.

**Grace Centered Transformation Leads to New Behavior**

As the theological research laid out in Chapter 3 indicates, grace leads to a change in behavior. Before describing a new ministry innovative for Peace Lutheran Church it is worth examining specific instances of how grace changes a person. The space below provides four illustrations of how grace can be applied, how it leads people to desire change, and finally how it fosters new behaviors.

The apostle Paul shares his grace centered transformation in 1 Corinthians: “For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the
grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor. 15:9-10). Paul’s encounter with the risen Christ ends his persecution of the church (Acts 9) and launches him into missionary service (Acts 9:19-22). As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15 all of this is the result of grace. Note the way that grace affects Paul, sinful behavior (persecution) ends and new behaviors emerge (mission work).

John Newton serves as another example of grace centered transformation. Newton’s ongoing exposure to grace led to his Christian formation. In 1748 Newton sailed home to Europe; off the coast of Ireland his ship suffered extensive damage and began to sink. When Newton prayed to God, the ship’s cargo shifted and plugged the leak. Overwhelmed with thankfulness for his rescue Newton became a Christian.¹

Newton had several experiences he attributed to grace during his life each one leading to greater Christian transformation. In 1749 Newton fell ill and asked God to heal him, ascribing his recovery to God’s gracious intervention Newton increased his devotion to God.² Ironically Newton continued to captain a slave ships until 1754 when he suffered a stroke; Newton recovered, again attributing his healing to God, and became an Anglican priest.

For Newton, grace was an ever-present reality, the more God intervened in his life the more Newton engaged in kingdom work. In 1772 Newton penned Amazing Grace, one of 280 hymns he wrote to accompany Christian services. In 1784, Newton rejected the slave trade and became a leading voice in the abolition movement. For Newton,

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² Ibid.
God’s grace applied over time led to transformation from a slave ship captain to a hymn writer and abolitionist.

Tullian Tchividjian, the grandson of Billy Graham, offers additional insight into grace centered formation. As a young man Tchividjian lived a scandalous life and his parents kicked him out of their house.³ During this time Tchividjian snuck into his parents’ home, stole a checkbook and funded his life style by forging his father’s signature on checks.

Years later his father admitted seeing all the checks clear his bank account but deiced not to say anything about it at the time. Tchividjian notes, “it didn’t happen immediately (the fruits of grace are always in the future) but that demonstration of unconditional grace was the beginning of God doing a miraculous work in my heart.”⁴ In describing his father Tullian remarks, “it was his unconditional, reckless, one-way love for me at my most arrogant and worst that God used to eventually bring me back.”⁵ Experiencing undeserved kindness allowed Tchividjian to more fully understand God’s love for him and led him to embrace new behaviors.

The transformative power of grace has impacted Peace Lutheran Church as well. A few years ago a member described the tremendous heart break that was caused by her husband’s infidelity. Her initial reactivation was to report the affair to her husband’s


⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁵ Ibid., 57.
employer (a local University) which would have resulted in her husband’s termination and the termination of the woman with whom he was having the affair.

After several sessions of Christian counseling, one of my colleagues asked, “What do you want to happen to your marriage?” The woman replied that she hoped to save her marriage. My colleague replied, “Well then rather than seek retribution you should offer grace. If you want to save your marriage you need to forgive and not report the incident to your spouse’s employer.” His suggestion was to offer grace.

After a process of intervention and counseling the couple’s marriage survived. My colleague noted that in his estimation if grace had not been offered the marriage would have dissolved. Grace deescalated the situation and allowed healing to take place. In addition, my colleague made explicit connections between the grace that was shown in this situation and the grace that God gives believers. His effort to highlight God’s grace resulted in the couple reaffirming the importance of their Christian walk. Grace moved the couple away from retribution, allowed for forgiveness, and deepened their Christian walk.

As Peace Church embraces a linear process for helping people understand grace intellectually, see grace in their life, and share grace with other, one would expect similar changes in behavior. The major challenge at Peace is that she currently lacks a systematic way to apply grace to members at large. If this project is successful members will see changes in behavior in their own life and the kingdom will benefit from transformed followers of Jesus who share grace with others.
Theological Implications for Grace-Centered Discipleship at Peace

Before laying out a new ministry initiative for Peace Lutheran Church, it is worth reviewing key theological conclusions. As stated in Chapter 3, grace is the thread that runs through the entire scriptures. From beginning to end, God uses grace in his Word to rescue and change people. Grace not only cancels debt but also leads people to act in a way that benefits the kingdom of God.

The New Testament shows three clear implications of grace. First, grace is a testament to the unmerited love of God (Jn 3:16), which leads to a response in the lives of those it touches. When she experiences grace, “the sinful woman” responds by anointing Jesus feet with expensive perfume (Lk 7:38-42). In the same vein the grace of God leads Zacchaeus to repay everyone he has defrauded and give away half of his possessions (Lk 19:1-10).

Second, grace plays a role in reducing sinful behavior. Paul makes it clear in Romans 5 that the grace of God will cover absolutely any sin that a person may commit. However, grace does not give license to sinful behavior. On the contrary, being connected to the death and resurrection of Christ moves the believer away from sinful patterns (Rom 6:1-8).

Fourth, God’s work of grace in the life of a believer is intimately connected to God’s equipping work for service in the world. As Paul teaches in Ephesians, “It is by grace through faith that you have been saved and not by works so that no man may boast. For you are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance for you to do” (Eph 2:8-10). Paul links the unmerited grace of God with Christian effort in the world.
Grace is free, but it is not opposed to the effort of the Christian. As Dallas Willard argues, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.”⁶ For Willard grace is the opposed to an attitude that says people can make themselves right before God. Grace does not prevent the believer from acting graciously toward others. Dallas Willard writes that “a disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice-a practitioner (of Jesus).”⁷ Or as the beloved disciple writes, “whoever abides in him ought to walk in the way he walked” (1 Jn 2:6). Learning about Jesus and his grace, seeing that grace personally worked out in one’s life and becoming a practitioner are key elements of grace-centered discipleship.

A grace-centered discipleship process includes three components. The first is teaching on the nature of biblical grace as seen in actions of Christ toward others, helping people see through the Scriptures how unearned favor changes people. A second component is personal reflection by the participant on acts of grace in their life, including God’s grace but also forgiveness and grace from others. Finally, grace-centered discipleship moves toward practice. The participant should be equipped to take concrete action to share the grace of God with others.

**Grace-Centered Ministry Initiative at Peace Lutheran Church**

In the context of Peace Lutheran Church, grace is regularly preached. However, there is a visible gap between preached grace and internalization that leads to change. As

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⁷ Ibid., 9.
stated in Chapter 1, Peace’s Reveal survey results indicated the church had a significant number of long-term attenders that believed in God but were unsure about Christ.

There is a need at Peace to help our members internalize what is Preached on a Sunday morning. As Pastor Schulz said (quoted in the first chapter), it is frustrating when people regularly hear about the grace of God and gospel on Sunday, but do not have a personal understanding of the grace of God or a desire to share it with others.

The intention of this project is not simply to talk about grace-centered discipleship but implement a process with specific desired outcomes. An ideal future would include a process that allows individuals to learn about God’s grace, see grace in their life, and learn to share grace with others. The following metrics would indicate a successful ministry initiative:

1. 250 people at Peace participate in the discover process. The discover process would include an event with two to three subsequent meetings with a trained coach. Through the discover process participants would hear about the grace of God in scripture, engage in an exercise to see God’s grace in their life, and learn practical ways to share God’s grace with others.

2. Train forty coaches to facilitate the discover process at Peace. Coaches would receive specific training and be equipped with questions that ascertain a person’s awareness and internalization of the grace of God.

3. See a 50 percent reduction in the number of people in the “Exploring Christ” category on a future Reveal survey. This would indicate that participants had internalized the gospel message.
(4) Participants demonstrate growth in knowledge and behavior by creating a grace-centered learning and sharing plan with their coach. The plan includes how participants will live differently because of learning and sharing grace.8

“The entire Christian life from start to completion is lived on the basis of God’s grace to us through Christ.”9 This means grace is important both in terms of what we learn about God and in relationship to how we live.

The following illustration demonstrates how participants should view their life in Christ after completing the project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning of Christian Life</th>
<th>Daily Life</th>
<th>Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justification Based on Grace</td>
<td>Christian Life Based on Grace</td>
<td>Glorification Based on Grace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peace coaches will be equipped to help participants discover that grace not only saves one from sin but instills behavior essential to daily life. As Jerry Bridges points out,

Grace does not first rescue us from the penalty of our sins, furnish us with some new spiritual abilities, and then leave us on our own to grow in spiritual maturity. Rather as Paul said, “He who began this good work in you [by His grace] will [also by His grace] carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). John Newton captured this idea of the continuing work of grace in our lives when he wrote in the hymn “Amazing Grace,” “Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”10

8 Coaching helps for learning and sharing grace are available in Appendix B.

9 Jerry Bridges, Transforming Grace, 19.

10 Ibid., 22.
The above metrics are useful in moving toward a preferred future. They gauge progress toward a developmental model of discipleship that necessitates ongoing interaction with the grace of God in a way that fosters personal understanding and new behavior.

**Ministry Initiative Components & Implementation Timeline**

**The Discover Event (August 2018)**

A core component of the new ministry innovative is the discover event. The discover event is a two-and-a-half hour experience that includes teaching about the grace of God using storytelling, theological resources, and examples from the Scriptures as well as completing a personal timeline exercise (allowing the participant to see the grace of God in their life), and pairing participants with a trained coach that helps the participant internalize and share grace. A detailed schedule of the discover event can be found in Appendix F.

**Initial Target Group**

The initial discover event will be open to all Peace attenders fifteen years of age and older. Peace will announce the event during worship services and promote it on social media and in our other communication outlets. Since the event can be facilitated in a large group setting, space does not limit the number of attenders. The only limiting factor would be the number of trained coaches at the time of the event. If Peace has fifty coaches and each coach can work with three participants, then our event would be limited to the first 150 participants.
The Post-It Note Timeline

A detailed description of the post-it note timeline exercise is found in Appendix A. A brief description is offered here to demonstrate where grace, gospel, and law intersect with the exercise. The post-it note exercise is a seven-step process that assists a person in seeing how God has shaped their life.11

In step one participants brainstorm major life events and record those events on yellow post-it notes. The goal is to write down people, events, and circumstance that have shaped a participant’s life up to this point. Step two involves separating out painful moments. These moments are transferred to pink post-it notes. The original painful moments recorded on yellow post-it notes are discarded. In step three participants organize their post-it notes chronologically on a large poster board, leaving a post-it note margin at the top and bottom of the poster board. This allows participants to visualize major life events.

In step four participants divide their life into key chapters and give those chapters a title. The titles are written down on a blue post-it notes and placed at the top of the timeline. These chapters could be based on movie titles, sports themes, or anything that resonates with a believer’s life story. In step five the participant identifies six to eight key turning points. A turning point is a moment when “life changed for good or bad,” “someone intervened positively or negatively,” “a decision was made,” or “the participant moved in a new direction.” An x is placed on turning points. The next step in the process involves identifying key life lessons and recording them on green post-it

11 The post-it note process I am describing is a product developed by Leader Breakthru and used with permission. My contribution to the timeline process is step seven.
notes and placing them on the bottom margin of the poster board. These are key summaries of what God has taught a person during the course of their lifetime and may include, “some important lessons regarding character,” “lessons about God and his work in my life,” or “core convictions about being a child of God.”

In the seventh step, the participant looks for tangible moments of grace in their life. Post-it notes that illustrate grace are labeled with a g. These may include moments when they experienced the unearned forgiveness of God or a time when someone gave them a free and unearned gift or canceled a debt. Each moment should fit the definition of grace provided above.

While not part of the initial timeline experience, there is an eighth step which takes place during a coaching meeting (described below under coaching follow-up). The eighth step involves looking for moments of law and gospel in the life of the believer. After defining God’s law and gospel, the coach helps the participant review their timeline for moments of law and gospel.

Post-it notes that describe hearing about the teachings or commands of God are labeled with a capital L (representing God’s Law). Those post-it notes that speak to the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ are labeled with a capital G (God’s Gospel). Moments where a person feels they must do something or be something to merit the approval of another are labeled with a little l (law). Moments where the participant forgives someone are labeled with a little g (gospel).

**Coach Training (February 2018)**

Coaches play a vital role in the grace-centered ministry initiative. Coaches will be required to attend three one-and-a-half hour training events that equip them to lead
people through the discover process and facilitate two follow-up meetings. After completing training each coach will be certified by the associate pastor of guiding (A.P.G.). The A.P.G. is responsible for ensuring coaches possess the necessary skills.

In training session one, coaches are walked through the post-it note timeline exercise. They will have completed the exercise prior to session one. A staff facilitator will teach about the grace of God (based on definitions provided above) and walk the coaches through scriptural illustration of the grace of God (Lk 7 and Lk 19). Coaches are taught how to recognize the grace of God in Scripture, see grace in their own life, and equip participants to share grace with others. At the conclusion of the session, coaches are given a copy of *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning and the grace illustrations handout in Appendix B. Both are to be read before session two.

In session two, coaches are trained on how to walk a participant through the post-it note timeline process. This meeting is focused on growing the participant’s knowledge of grace. The A.P.G instructs coaches on ways to identify gospel, grace, and law in their timeline and are given strategies to assist participants in discovering these core themes in their timelines. The goal is that coaches will be able to help participants see God’s work in Scripture and their life.

In session three, coaches focus on helping develop behaviors that allow the participants to share grace with others. Coaches ask ten coaching questions that are designed to determine next steps.\textsuperscript{12} Peace has three next step experiences (Discover, Grow, and Go). Each step helps a person internalize and share the grace of God. Another

\textsuperscript{12} Coaching questions are in Appendix C.
component of this meeting is completing the grace-centered learning and sharing plan (Appendix E). While there are specific learning and sharing elements incorporated in Discover, Grow, and Go, this plan allows the participant to be accountable, for they will learn about grace and share it in the next three months.

At the conclusion of training session, three coaches are given the Peace Coaching Questions in Appendix C. Coaches are also required to schedule a follow-up meeting with the A.P.G. The follow-up meeting is used to determine if the coach has the skills to be a certified Peace Coach.

**Coach Follow-Up and Participant Next Steps (August 2018)**

Coaches will hold two follow-up sessions with participants. In the first session coaches review the participant timeline and discuss the overall process of pursuing God at Peace. During this session the coach will walk the participant through the coach’s timeline and note instances of grace, gospel, and law. The coach will assist the participant in finding those themes in their timeline. At the conclusion of the session the participant is given two different reading options on grace: *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning or *Transforming Grace* by Jerry Bridges.

During session two the coach walks the participant through the ten coaching questions in Appendix C. The coach then discusses Discover, Grow, and Go steps available at Peace and assists the member in identifying a next step. The meeting concludes with the member completing the grace-centered learning and sharing plan with their coach. The plan must include one learning step and one behavior step.
Participant Next Steps: Discover, Grow, and Go (September 2018)

Based on the responses to coaching questions participants are encouraged to move into one of three next steps: Discover, Grow, and Go. Each step is designed to reinforce the grace of God in the participant’s life and allow him or her to take tangible steps toward being a disciple. It is important to keep in mind that discipleship is about “walking in the ways of Jesus (1 Jn 2:6) and becoming a learner, a student, an apprentice—a practitioner (of Jesus).”

If a participant needs additional instruction in Christian basics, they are encouraged to take one of two courses offered at Peace: Discover God’s Story or Discover Lutheranism. In Discover God’s Story participants are walked through the basic teachings of scripture and given a Bible-reading plan. The plan highlights core biblical teachings. The goal of Discover God’s Story is that the believer will possess a basic understanding of God’s work in holy Scripture and see how Scripture applies to their life.

In Discover Lutheranism the participant is taught the six chief parts of Martin Luther’s Small Catechism. Particular emphasis is placed on teaching the concepts of grace, gospel, and law. A person who completes this course will be able to define these concepts, reference places in scripture where they take place, share how they have impacted their life, and share these teachings with others.

Grow has two primary components at Peace. A person pursuing Grow will either join a six-week small group or attend a six-week large group Bible study. Both Grow groups and Grow Bible studies have a particular focus on the grace of God. For example,

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Grow small groups will study Andy Stanley’s book The Grace of God. This book walks participants through Old and New Testament passages that teach about grace. In addition, the group will also engage in sharing a grace mission project during the study.

Grow Bible studies will also emphasize the grace of God. Participants in a six-week Grow Bible study will walk through the book of Galatians. A Peace staff member will make explicit connections between God’s grace and the life of the believer. In addition, the Grow large group study will participate in a local service project that aims to share the grace of God in the community.

Go events are missional in nature and focus on sharing the grace of God with others. Participants who pursue Go will meet with Peace’s director of mission. Peace divides mission work into two categories: local and international. Local areas of service are centered on meeting local needs in the Chippewa Valley. The director of mission equips local participants to understand their work as an act of grace and shares practical ways to share the grace of God with those they serve.

International mission trips are led by the Peace staff. Each trip involves a written devotional plan that is carried out by a Peace staff member. The devotional plans intentionally incorporate teaching on grace, gospel, and law. During devotional times a Peace staff member helps participants process how they are experiencing and sharing the grace of God during the trip.

The above ministry plan provides a concrete process for the members of Peace Church to understand grace intellectually, see grace in their life, and share grace with others. Doing so allows our members to “walk in the ways of Jesus (1 Jn 2:6) and
becoming a learner, a student, an apprentice—a practitioner (of Jesus).”\textsuperscript{14} For Peace this process moves God’s grace beyond a Sunday morning experience and allows members to comprehend and share the grace of God in new and compelling way.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

Chapter 5 discusses the implementation of a grace-based discipleship program at Peace Church. This chapter details the training, resources, and process necessary to launch a pilot program at Peace Church by September of 2017. This chapter also provides details about how the project will be assed in terms of participant discipleship.

Implementing this project required a series of steps to move participants into a deeper understanding of God’s grace. One of the challenges was holding the grace of God in front of Peace staff, lay leaders, and participants at every step of the process. As the project moved toward implementation, it became evident that a systematic approach to implementation and follow-up was necessary to execute and evaluate the project. The first section of this chapter outlines the timeline for the initial implementation of the project. This section details how the project was field tested, the key leaders that provided leadership and training, the process for training implementation personnel, and the resources required to implement the project. The second section describes how the project was evaluated and included a description of the assessment tool that was used, how it was implemented, and project results. The final section offers an overall assessment of the project.
**Project Implementation Timeline**

This project began in September 2016 with a leadership transition at Peace Lutheran Church. Pastor James Whatley moved into the Lead Pastor role and Pastor Mark Schulz (former Lead Pastor) became the Associate Pastor for Guiding. This new role allowed Pastor Schulz to put greater energy into spiritual formation at Peace and served as a catalyst to place greater energy into grace-centered discipleship. While the project is ongoing, this summary ends in September 2018.

**Early Discussion and Project Preparation**

As indicated above, the Reveal survey was catalytic in encouraging Peace Church to do more in the area of member discipleship. A few years after taking the Reveal survey, Peace began a partnership with Dr. Terry Walling at Leader Breakthru. Dr. Walling encouraged Peace to explore what was missing in the formation of our members. After discussion, Peace leadership believed that Peace lacked a process to assist our members in seeing God’s work in their life. Peace talked a lot about God’s work but needed to take steps to help our members internalize His work in their life.

Pastors Schulz and Whatley both attended Dr. Walling’s “Organic Leadership Development” course at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena. The course and subsequent conversations with Dr. Walling\(^1\) assisted Peace is seeing a connection between how God develops leaders and how God works in the lives of all believers. For Peace it was essential to move toward a coaching process that would assist members in seeing the ongoing work of God in their lives.

\(^1\) Dr. Walling has been coaching Peace staff since 2014.
Over the next several months it became evident that our Lutheran context required emphasizing the core Lutheran doctrines of grace, gospel, and law. In addition, Peace needed a program that increased knowledge about grace and fostered grace-centered behavior. In late 2016 Peace staff began developing a process to implement this project at Peace Church. At the time two working groups were formed. One group focused on recruiting and developing coaches to implement the project. The other group discussed the program components necessary for grace-centered discipleship at Peace. Peace was assisted in coach training and program development by the staff of Leader Breakthru. Throughout 2016, Dr. Walling coached core staff at Peace and assisted them in building a coaching culture at Peace Lutheran.

**Pre-Implementation: Coaching Preparation and Development**

In May of 2016 Peace began preliminary work on training coaches. Staff members Mark Schulz, Associate Pastor of Guiding (A.P.G.), David Forke, Associate Pastor of Spiritual Growth, Bryan Willkom, Director of Member Engagement and one layman, Robert Solberg, attended Leader Breakthru’s coach training in La Jolla, California. These individuals completed the process of becoming certified coaches. The coach certification ensured competency in coaching and equipped them with the skills to train other coaches.

In March 2016 Dr. Walling conducted a two-day coaching seminar at Peace. Dr. Walling and Peace staff led lay members through a coaching skills workshop. As part of the workshop Dr. Walling took lay coaches through a post-it note timeline exercise. This initial lay training served as the foundation for additional training specific to this project.
Over the next twenty months Pastor Schulz and Bryan Willkom conducted coach recruitment pushes. In that time, they were able to train over fifty coaches. These coaches learned to administer the post-it note timeline and ask general coaching questions. As coach training continued coaches were trained to assist members in learning more about the grace of God and to assist them in finding ways to share grace with others.

**Program Development and Implementation**

In May of 2016, the staff held a retreat at The Heartwood Center in Three Lakes, Wisconsin. At the retreat the staff collaborated on an initial plan for grace-centered spiritual formation. The initial concept was to conflate membership and spiritual formation into a three-part process called Three Stories (Your Story, God’s Story, and Peace’s Story). The retreat and subsequent follow-up meetings served to train staff and lay leaders on implementing Three Stories. In the “Your Story” class members complete a post-it note timeline exercise. And begin to process how God has been at work in their life. During the God’s Story class participants are walked through a basic outline of Scripture (creation, fall, redemption, Christian life). In Peace’s Story Luther’s Small Catechism, grace, gospel, law, and programing at Peace Lutheran were discussed.

Three Stories was offered four times a year on consecutive Thursday evenings. Following completion of three stories a participant was paired with a trained Peace coach. The coach assisted the participant in analyzing their timeline for God’s work their life and assisted in determining next steps.
Staff Responsibilities

Executing Three Stories required a significant amount of staff involvement. Staff responsibilities included marketing, reserving space, teaching classes, recruiting and training coaches, and tracking follow-up. The overall task of implementing Three Stories fell to the Peace Lead Team (management team) and Pastor Mark Schulz. The first three stories experience was held in the fall of 2017 and once a quarter thereafter. For the first year $2,000 was budgeted for Three Stories events.

Marketing and Logistics

Susan Larson (Executive Assistant) and Tim Stein (Associate Pastor) oversaw communication and scheduling, insuring classes were publicized, rooms reserved, and materials printed for each Three Stories class. In coordination with Bryan Willkom (Director of Member Engagement), they assisted in tracking participant progress.

Three Stories Teaching and Coaching Follow-up

Pastor David Forke (Spiritual Growth), Pastor Mark Schulz (Guiding), Pastor Tim Stein (Communication), and Pastor James Whatley (Lead Pastor) taught the God Story class. Bryan Willkom and Pastor Whatley facilitated the timeline experience for Your Story. Pastor Whatley led the Peace Story class. Pastor Mark Schulz and Bryan Willkom oversaw ongoing coach training and follow-up with participants that completed the timeline process. Schulz and Willkom created systems to record progress and ensure that participants were meeting with their coaches. In addition, they began monitoring the program for initial effectiveness.
Mid-Stage Implementation Revisions and Alignment with Doctoral Project (Late 2017)

After a few cycles of Three Stories, Peace leadership began to evaluate initial progress. On the positive side over fifty coaches had been trained by Pastor Schulz and Bryan Willkom. The coaches reported that they enjoyed coaching and expressed a willingness to continue being part of the Your Story class. In addition, over 160 people had completed the Three Stories process, meaning they had attended all classes, completed a post-it note timeline and attended two follow-up sessions with a coach.

The evaluation process noted several areas for improvement. First, the Three Stories process was content heavy. While the staff felt the content was good, too much information was covered over the three classes. In addition, some attenders felt as though three stories was a bait and switch. Three Stories was promoted as a membership process, but it felt more like intense spiritual formation.

Another concern with the initial program is that it did not explicitly teach about grace in Scripture, assist participants to see grace in their lives, or share grace with others. While grace was mentioned in coaching questions and grace-centered formation implied, it did not receive the clarity it needed. As a result, few members internalized grace or shared grace in the way the author hoped.

An additional short-coming was that the program offered no intentional connection with staff or action steps beyond coaching. Participants could complete Three Stories with a coach and then stall in their pursuit of internalizing and sharing grace. Peace needed to create next steps and a system to develop Three Stories participants. The staff assessment led revisions that better facilitated grace-centered discipleship at Peace.
The first revision was to reduce Three Stories to one discover event. The new discover event would follow the project proposal outlined in Chapter 4. In addition, it would explicitly incorporate the grace component.

Coaches were also given additional training in August 2018. Coaches received the grace illustrations in Appendix B and the revised coaching questions in Appendix C. Significant time was devoted at the training session to assisting coaches in identifying grace in a participants’ timeline. In addition, it was impressed on coaches that they needed to work diligently with participants to ensure that they understood grace intellectually and were taking concrete steps to share grace with others.

At the same time Peace improved participant next steps and implemented a system to track movement through the process. In collaboration with staff three potential next steps were developed to follow the coaching sessions. A participant was encouraged to take a Discover, Grow, or Go step. Detailed information on these steps is listed in Chapter 4.

**Project Assessment and Goal Attainment**

Brennan Manning once wrote that life is grace from beginning to end. A person does not move beyond grace but returns to it again and again. Assessing this project has a similar feel; while one can assess the extent to which people understand (knowledge) grace and share (practice) grace with others, one never moves beyond grace.

The Peace Strategy Team was tasked with creating evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of this projection. The team initially struggled to identify qualitative and quantitative metrics. Eventually the team decided to measure the project’s effectiveness
along two lines. First, the team decided to track the number of participants who were actively engaged in the project. Actively engaged means completing the timeline, taking a Discover, Grow, and Go next step or serving as a trained coach. The group called this line of assessment “steps.” A step indicated movement in the process of grace-centered discipleship.

A second set of metrics centered on gauging the qualitative effectiveness of the program. Upon completion of a Discover, Grow, and Go step, participants should be able to define God’s grace and articulate their plan to share grace with someone else. The team began developing a survey to evaluate the extent to which our members were internalizing and sharing grace. The team called this the Grace Participant Assessment.

While not included in this project, the team thought it would be helpful to conduct another Reveal survey one to two years after project implementation. As mentioned previously, 21 percent of our membership was in the “Exploring Christ” quadrant. Exploring Christ is defined as those who “believe in God but I am not sure about Christ.” More concerning, 5 percent of those in the exploring Christ quadrant had been attending Peace for more than ten years.² Our hope is to see a 50 percent reduction in the number of people in the “Exploring Christ” category. If grace truly is transformative, then one should see a reduction in the number of people at Peace who do not believe in Jesus Christ.

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² Willow Creek Association, “Reveal Results for Peace Church, Eau Claire, WI,” 17, appendix 39.
Measuring Steps

Bryan Willkom and Pastor Schulz were tasked with measuring steps and reporting on our success in implementing the project. An excel spread sheet was created. The spread sheet recorded names of participants at various stages in the grace-centered discipleship process. Participants progress was recorded as they completed the timeline, participated in two coaching meetings, and moved into a Discover, Grow, and Go Step. Completion of the Grace Participant Assessment was also recorded.

Willkom and Schulz also used an excel spreadsheet to track coach development. The spreadsheet tracked when coaches completed initial certification and participated in subsequent training events. Bryan Willkom oversaw pairing trained coaches with participants and evaluated the coaching participant relationship.

Step Results

Peace established two step goals. By mid-2018 we wanted to have forty trained coaches and see 250 people complete the timeline process and meet on two occasions with a trained coach. While we realized the Discover, Grow, and Go classes were important, we did not believe the staff could implement the courses before October of 2018. Peace does plan to implement the classes in October.

In reviewing our results, Peace Church achieved our coach recruitment goal. As of July 1, 2018 Peace has fifty-three trained coaches. Of those coaches thirty-two are actively engaged in coaching a Peace member. Regarding members who completed the timeline and are meeting with a coach, we exceeded our goal. To date 303 people have
completed the timeline process. Of those that completed the timeline 230 are meeting with a coach. Our hope is to increase the number of participants over the next year.

**Story Results**

While the number of participants is important, we also wanted to gauge how participants internalized the message of grace and took on new behaviors as a result of the project. After discussion, the Peace Strategy Team believed the best way to do so was to survey participants. A survey was created to gauge the effectiveness of instilling grace in participants.³

The participant survey consists of five short response questions.

1. In your own words define God’s grace.
2. Write down a significant passage that illustrates God’s grace and explain why it is meaningful to you.
3. Reflecting on the timeline and coaching process, how have you experienced the grace of God in your life?
4. What is your next step in the Discover, Grow, and Go process?
5. How do you plan to share the grace of God in the next three months?

The survey is emailed to Discover event participants after they complete their second coaching session. The surveys are evaluated by Pastor Whatley or Pastor Schulz. Surveys can earn a maximum score of fifteen points, three points per question. If an answer clearly meets or exceeds expectations, it is given a three. If the response is marginally acceptable it receives a two. An unacceptable response receives a one.

In August of 2018, survey results were compiled. Twenty-four surveys were completed. Eighteen received a score of twelve or higher, indicating satisfactory responses in terms of understanding grace, seeing grace in one’s life, and taking steps to

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³ The participant survey and evaluation criteria are located in Appendix D.
share grace with others. Four received a score of eight to eleven indicating a marginally acceptable result. Four respondents scored between zero and seven indicating an unacceptable result. These results indicate progress in assisting members to understand (knowledge) grace and share (behavior) it with others. The survey responses indicate the project was a fit for the ministry context at Peace Lutheran Church. Hopefully survey data remains positive as additional surveys are completed.

Overall, this is a satisfying result and indicates that the program resonated with members of Peace Lutheran Church. Peace has moved from scattered attempts at Christian formation to an intentional process that measures the theological development of her members. It was exciting to see movement both in terms of learning and adopting new behaviors. The project provided a foundation that assists Peace Church in discipleship now and in the years to come. By the grace of God, this project will help Peace Church embrace a preferred future where her members understand grace intellectually, see grace in their lives, and share grace with others.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The first season of this project was a success. Over 200 members are currently involved a grace-centered discipleship process, and over fifty trained coaches are assisting in spiritual formation. All the core themes expressed in this paper were brought together in the Discover event or follow-up steps. Peace Church went from primarily sharing the grace of God in weekend worship to implementing a comprehensive plan that increased participant understanding and practice.

This ministry initiative had several clear benefits. First, it offered Peace Church a clear process for developing members. In the past Peace had so many options and choices for spiritual growth that it was challenging for members to know where to begin. In addition, it was impossible for staff members to say with certainty where a particular member is on their faith journey. Now Peace can speak with a level of clarity regarding member spiritual formation at Peace Church. If a person has entered the Discover process, their progress is tracked, and the staff can say with clarity where that person is in terms of understanding grace and implementing new grace-sharing behaviors.

In addition, this process addresses a core discipleship challenge at Peace Church. As the Willow Creek Reveal study indicated, Peace Church had a significant number of people that attend the church (21 percent) and are not Christian. Even more concerning, 5 percent of those in the Exploring Christ quadrant had been attending Peace for more than ten years. This process allowed Peace to have intentional conversations around belief in Christ as savior. Those new to the faith or unfamiliar with core Christian concepts are

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4 Willow Creek Association, “Reveal Results for Peace Church, Eau Claire, WI,” 17, appendix 39.
reassessed through coaching questions, assisted by their coaches, and placed in classes and other experiences that allow them to internalize core Christian beliefs. While Peace Church cannot change the heart, we have created environment that facilitates exposes to core Christian themes. Peace plans to take the Willow Creek Reveal survey again in two years. If the new process is successful, one should expect to see movement.

Another benefit of this project is that it equipped our members with new behaviors. Lutherans are accused of defaulting to learning and being slow to take on new practices. From an intellectual standpoint, Dallas Willard’s statement that “the true saint burns grace like a 747 jet on take off” was helpful to our community.\(^5\) This perspective allowed members to see that grace was not opposed to effort. It was also exciting to see how members used the practices in Appendix C to develop their own grace-centered practices.

During the implementation of this project, a water main broke on the west side of Eau Claire, and the basements of fifty homes filled with sewage. The city of Eau Claire’s insurer found the break to be an act of God and did not cover any losses or repairs associated with the backup. Peace’s director of mission, Jordan VanProosdy, reached out to those affected by the back-up and promised that Peace church would support them in rebuilding their homes.

Over the next several months Peace members raised over twenty thousand dollars and contributed thousands of volunteer hours to repairing homes. The connection with grace was clear. On numerous occasions volunteer teams told homeowners, they simply

wanted to help and expected nothing in return. They shared grace. As a result, two families who did not attend church now attend Peace.

As the westside repair project neared completion, the twenty-year-old son of a homeowner who has special needs approached VanProosdy and asked if he could serve as the bat boy for the Peace softball team. He has attended every game and formed a special bond with the team. It is worth noting that the westside rehabilitation project was not specifically part of this project. That said, it gauged the way the project affected the behaviors of the church. Members are growing in their ability to share grace with others.

**Future Ministry Plans**

This project has a number of implications for future ministry at Peace Church. The Peace staff is currently evaluating how to cascade the project into additional ministry areas. Currently Courtney Limmer (middle school director) and Bryan Willkom (High school director) are exploring how to create an age-appropriate version of the timeline process for middle and high school students. If people grow through understanding and sharing grace, it seems intuitive that we would use a similar formation strategy for all ages.

Middle school and high school ministry is well-suited to implement this project. Currently over 200 students, along with fifty adult volunteers, meet on Wednesday nights during the school year. In the next year Peace will explore how to train these adults to coach students in the grace-centered discipleship process. In addition, the current program requires volunteer service from students which makes adding a grace-specific service component straightforward.
Peace’s facility will also undergo changes in the next year that will further the implementation of the project. Over the past year the staff has come to realize that the building can be used as a communication tool. Peace Church has contracted with a local architect and design company to discuss how the building can be enhanced to communicate grace in a way that is clear, simple, and compelling. This upgrade may involve adding adult classroom space and using signage and graphics throughout the building that connect grace and discipleship. Currently, an aesthetics team is creating pallet walls that contain literature on the Discover event and articulate next steps in the discipleship journey at Peace. The staff hopes that when people walking onto the Peace campus, the message of grace and spiritual next steps are clear.

Another area of focus in the next year is learning how to more fully engage people that do not participate in the discover event. For instance, a number of people at Peace participate in local and international mission experiences; however, they have not completed a timeline or worked with a coach. Our hope is to find ways to incorporate the timeline process into short-term mission experiences.

Pastor Tim Stein (associate pastor) is developing a timeline process that can be used at the end of a mission experience. In addition, he is exploring ways that a participant can be connected with a coach after a mission experience. It is clear that Peace will need to find ways to engage people in grace-centered discipleship that do not follow the standard process. If Pastor Stein can determine how to do this in the area of mission, then we can export his findings to other ministry areas.

In the next year Peace Church also needs to determine next steps for those that complete the process. The Peace staff is also discussing a multi-year approach to
discipleship where a person completes the timeline process every year. Each year could then have a different grace-centered focus. For example, year one is focused on internalizing grace and sharing grace. Year two may look at grace in terms of leadership development and draw on materials from J. Robert Clinton’s *The Making of a Leader*. Year three could involve encouraging those that have gone through the process to become coaches. Regardless of the specific next step, it is clear that Peace will need to develop additional ways for people to grow in their capacity to understand and share grace.

**Implications for the Larger Christian Community**

Jerry Bridges once remarked, “The entire Christian life from start to completion is lived on the basis of God’s grace to us through Christ.”6 This project can assist church leaders as they seek to take discipleship beyond the worship experience. The timeline process, coaching, and next steps can be used by any church and can assist local churches in assessing their members understanding (knowledge) of grace and ability to share it with others (practice).

While the scope of this project was limited to Peace, the larger church can certainly benefit from this project in several ways. First, this project offers an intentional process for discipleship that allows leaders to evaluate participant learning and behavior. It can be challenging to move discipleship beyond the worship experience. A strength of this project is that it equips leaders to engage with members in way that does not solely convey information but creates ownership of core Christian concepts. In addition, it

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provides a coaching process that facilitates clarity in participant understanding and their ability to share grace with others.

Second, this project offers an organic way to look at discipleship. Following Ephesians 2:8-10 discipleship is seen as God’s work in the believer; it is His free gift of salvation through faith. The timeline process relies on core Scriptures and timeless biblical themes while at the same time it takes seriously God unique work in the lives of individual believers. The timeline process allows the participant to see what God has done in their life and leverage that work for learning and service.

In addition, the timeline component is adaptable to wide range of ministry settings. While Scripture norms overall learning, the timeline allows the leader and participant to appreciate how God has worked in their unique context. The leader can offer local illustrations from their context to shape and guide the overall process. In addition, a local leader may also craft sharing grace options to fit their local context.

This project also offers the church a fresh way to think about evangelism in the twenty-first century. Building a strategy on giving free, unmerited gifts and equipping the members to do the same is filled with possibilities for reaching our neighbors. In a world that is highly transactional, discovering and seeing grace might well hold the key to reaching those that are far from Christ. In doing so they can experience the grace of God and, Lord willing, share grace with others.

The hope of this project is that people may understand the grace of God, see it in their life, and share it with others. One can hope that in years to come people look back at this project and say it helped them understand the depth of God’s grace for them. Grace is God’s great gift to the church. May that gift be enjoyed and shared.
APPENDIX A

Step-by-Step: Creating a Post-it Note Timeline

Supplies: Standard Poster Board (cut in half)
          Smaller Post-it Notes - 4 Colors

Step One: Brain Storming

God has been at work throughout your life shaping you for a unique and ultimate
contribution to his kingdom: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to
do good works, which God prepared in advance for unto do” (Eph 2:10).

Note: As you begin the process of journaling your story, events and details of your life
will return to your memory that many of you have not thought about for a while. Some
may be good, and some may be difficult. Our purpose is not simply to “drag up the past”
but to help you gain insight from the past that can help guide you in the future. The use of
a post-it notes helps you be able to build your timeline and add events as you remember
them.

Begin with a brainstorming exercise to surface the key people, events, and circumstances
that have shaped your life up to this point. Remember: the law of brainstorming is that
there are no wrong answers.

As soon as a name, an important event, or a circumstance comes to mind, write a one to
two-word name or description on a post-it note. Place the note on the table where you are
working and write another. Brainstorm both good and difficult events.

(Note: Do not place on poster board yet. Clear a space at a table and place the results of
your brainstorming on the table).

Some helps:
• The people who influenced and shaped your life (e.g., friends, family members, work
  associates, peers, mentors, pastors, spouse, teachers, church friends and members).
• The events that have impacted your life (e.g., graduation, awards, projects, jobs,
  changes in the community, job loss, defining moments).
• The significant moments that have affected your life any direction, including any
  incidents or statements made about you before your birth (e.g., where you lived, job
  demands of your parents, early childhood experiences, places you lived, schools you
  attended, ministries you were involved in, retreats you attended).

Step Two: Painful Moments

Everyone has experienced difficult and painful moments. We know as believers that God
works these together for good. In spite of the pain caused, God can take these experiences and use them for good or bring good out of them.

“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” (Rom 8:28).

The next step is to take a look at all the post-it notes you have assembled and ask yourself, “Which of these were painful or hurtful when I experienced them?”

Once you have identified those that were painful, transfer what you wrote on the original yellow post-it note onto a pink note.

Why? This causes you to acknowledge those expenses as difficult or painful. God does some of his greatest work of shaping in and through some of our most difficult moments. Continue your brainstorming recalling both good (yellow notes) and painful events (pink notes) and placing your post-it notes on the blank table in front of you. Write one incident per post-it note.

**Step Three: Organizing your post-it notes**

Our next step is to organize your post-it notes chronologically. First, take your poster board and cut it in half by width. You should have a half poster board that measures 14”x22” in dimension.

Note: Before you begin organizing your notes, place a post-it note marked with a big “X” at the top and bottom of the poster. Do not place any notes above or below the two notes marked with an “X.”

Next organize your post-it notes chronologically, integrating the two colors (yellow and pink). Start at the top left with your earliest post-it note, placing it below the note marked with an “X.” Place the notes on the poster board proceeding down until you reach the bottom note marked with an “X.” Then return to the top.

Continue to add the notes across the poster board in that manner. Your timeline moves from top to bottom and left to right across the board. You have the entire poster board to use.

**Step Four: Chapters in your story**

Each timeline represents a believer’s life. Each life story can be organized into a series of chapters. As you look at the post-it notes now assembled on your poster board, you may now be able to see three to five key segments of your life journey.

You should identify no fewer than three and no greater than six chapters. You might want to take a few moments and move your post-it notes around to reflect these chapters.
Using blue post-it notes, go to the top of your poster board and give each chapter a title. Your chapter titles should reflect your thoughts on your life during those times. Choose titles that show something of yourself. Feel free to be creative.

Example: Some have used movie titles, hobbies, or sports. The key is to choose titles that mean something to you. It’s your life story.

**Step Five: Turning Points**

Some of the post-it notes on your poster board are “turning points.” A turning point is a life changing event or circumstance. It is a defining moment in your journey when:

- Life changed for the good or the bad
- Someone intervened
- A decision was made
- You moved in a new direction

God works in significant ways and teaches important lessons as a result of turning points. Discovering these lessons is the next step in the process, and this can help guide you into the future.

Begin to identify six to eight key turning points. Once you have identified these, in BOLD letters write the letter “X” on the corresponding post-it notes.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on each of those events. If possible, talk through each of these events with someone else. Describe the event, process what occurred, and reflect on why it is important.

**Step Six: Lessons from Your Story**
*(Note: During the Peace Church process step six occurs after step seven).*

The value of the post-it note timeline experience is to discern some of the lessons from your past that can help inform your future. Under each of your turning points and chapters it is important to write a summary of what God has taught you.

Look at each of your post-it notes and use the following questions to help you discern the following: What was God trying to teach me during this turning point or chapter? What do I dare not forget as I move forward? What has God deposited into my life as a result of this experience? What do I want to take into the future?
Record each of these lessons on a green post-it note and place it underneath the corresponding turning point or chapter.¹

**Grace, Gospel, and Law Additions to the Timeline Process**

**Step Seven: Finding Grace, Gospel, and Law**

Examine your timeline and look for tangible moments of grace. **Label post-it notes that illustrate grace with a lower case g.** Remember grace is a free gift and not something you earn. It may help to reflect on the story of Jean Valjean as an illustration of grace.

- Have you experienced the unearned forgiveness of God. Do you remember a time when someone told you that God loves and forgives you? These experiences may have happened inside or outside of church.
- A time when you received a free and unearned gift?
- Did a parent of a close relative treat you with undeserved kindness or affection?
- Did someone cancel a debt or forgive you without any work on your part?

**Step Eight: Coaching Meeting**

While not part of the initial timeline experience there is an eighth step which takes place during a coaching meeting. The eighth step involves looking for moments of law and gospel in the life of the believer. After defining God’s law and gospel the coach helps the participant review their timeline for moments of law and gospel.

Label Post-it notes that describe hearing about the teachings or commands of God with a capital “L” (representing God’s Law).

- This could include a time when you heard the Ten Commandments in church.
- Did a parent teach you about God’s commands in scripture?

Label post-it notes that speak to the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ with a capital “G” (God’s Gospel).

- Did you hear about the forgiveness of God in church?

¹ The post-it note time line process was created by Terry Walling and Leader Breakthru. Used and adapted with permission.
• Did a parent or friend teach you about God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ?
• Perhaps you had a camp experience where you made a “personal decision for Christ.

Label post-it notes when you felt like you must do something or be something to merit the approval of another a lowercase “l” (law).

• Was there a time in your life when you felt like someone would love or accept you if you performed a certain way?
• Did you not meet an expectation or requirement and feel rejected?

Label post-it notes where someone forgave you with a lowercase “g” (gospel).

• Did someone take the blame for mistake you made?
• Have you been the beneficiary of someone else’s hard work or effort?
• Did a friend or a colleague help you advance at great cost to themselves?

This completes the post-it note timeline exercise. You should now have a good overview of your life. Take time and review the exercise with your Peace coach.
APPENDIX B

The following illustrations of grace are intended to assist in the coaching process. Coaches make sure to share at least one illustration of Grace and one example of how to share grace with others. For additional illustrations see:


Receiving Grace illustrations

Jean Valjean (Les Miserable)
As the story begins, Valjean is being released from nineteen years on the chain gang, paroled back into the world but shackled with his conviction, which keeps him from being able to start over and make a new life. In despair, he returns to a life of petty crime. He is caught by the police after stealing silver from a church, where a bishop had offered him shelter. But when the police bring him back to the church, everything changes. The bishop denies the charges, insists the silver was a gift, and gives Valjean the most valuable silver candlesticks in the church.

Valjean deserves judgment and condemnation, but instead, he receives grace. Not just forgiveness for his sins, but an abundant, over-the-top gift. This act is the heart of Les Mis. Grace transforms Valjean.

He sings:
My life was a war that could never be won . . .
Yet why did I allow that man
To touch my soul and teach me love?
    He treated me like any other
    He gave me his trust
    He called me brother
    My life he claims for God above
Can such things be?
    For I had come to hate the world
    This world that always hated me
I feel my shame inside me like a knife
    He told me that I have a soul,
    How does he know?
What spirit comes to move my life?
    Is there another way to go?
I am reaching, but I fall
   And the night is closing in
   And I stare into the void
   To the whirlpool of my sin
I'll escape now from the world
   From the world of Jean Valjean
   Jean Valjean is nothing now
   Another story must begin!

The priest responds:
   . . . By the Passion and the Blood
   God has raised you out of darkness
   I have bought your soul for God!

Rod Rosenbladt (Car Illustration)
Shortly after turning sixteen Rosenbladt took the new car his father bought him to a party. At the party Rod got drunk and totaled the car. He walked home and spent the night weeping before his father. The next morning when he woke up Rod walked down stairs and found his father at the breakfast table. Rod’s father looked up and said, “Let’s go get you a new car.” Rosenbladt said that in that moment he became a Christian.

Fiorello La Guardia (Courtroom Illustration)
One bitterly cold night in January of 1935 the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes a tattered old woman was brought in before him accused of stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter’s husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving.… LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said, “I’ve got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions—ten dollars or ten days in jail.” But even as he pronounced the sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket…. Here is the ten-dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.”

Matt Chandler (Jesus wants the rose)
This illustration from Matt Chandler is both an illustration of grace and an example of sharing grace. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLgIecL1IdY)

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3 Zahl. Grace in Practice, 86.

Illustrations of Sharing Grace

Timothy Keller (Investment Banker Illustration)

Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, tells a compelling story of what it looks like to share grace. Keller notes tells the story of woman who worked at a large investment house in New York.

Not only after staring she made a big mistake that she thought would cost her the job, but her boss went in to his superior and took complete responsibility of what she had done. As a result, he lost some of his reputation and the ability to maneuver within the organization. She was amazed at what he had done and went in to thank him. She told him that she had often seen supervisors take credit for what she had accomplished, but she had never seen a supervisor take the blame for something she had done wrong. She wanted to know what made him different. He was very modest and deflected her questions, but she was insistent. Finally, he told her, “I am a Christian. That means among other things that God accepts me because Jesus Christ took the blame for the things that I have done wrong. He did that on the cross. That is why I have the desire and sometimes that ability to take the blame for others.” She stared at him for a long moment and asked, “Where do you go to church?”

Abraham Lincoln (Slave Auction)

Abraham Lincoln went to a slave auction one day and was appalled at what he saw. He was drawn to a young woman on the auction block. The bidding began, and Lincoln bid until he purchased her—no matter the cost. After he paid the auctioneer, he walked over to the woman and said “You’re free.” “Free? What is that supposed to mean?” she asked. “It means you are free,” Lincoln answered, “completely free!” “Does it mean I can do whatever I want to do?” “Yes,” he said, “free to do whatever you want to do.” “Free to say whatever I want to say?” “Yes, free to say whatever you want to say.” “Does freedom mean,” asking with hope and hesitation, “that I can go wherever I want to go?” “It means exactly that you can go wherever you want to go.” With tears of joy and gratitude welling up in her eyes, she said, “Then, I think I’ll go with you.”

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5 Timothy Keller, Every Good Endeavor, 290-91.

APPENDIX C
Coaching Questions and Next Step Guide

Discover Jesus
Discover Jesus questions are intended to gauge a person’s faith in Christ and their grasp of basic Christian teaching. Ask the questions below and make referrals as indicated.

Who is Jesus to you?
React to the statement, “I am going to heaven because I am a good person.”
Describe what you think it means to have a relationship with God.

Discover God’s Story
How would you tell the story of the Bible in a few paragraphs?
What are the key events and teachings of the Bible?
Staff contact: Bryan Willkom (bryanw@mypeacechurch.com)

If the person doesn’t know the Gospel, doesn’t know God’s story, or both, this is a priority next step for them and needs to be indicated on the form and returned to Bryan for pastoral staff follow-up. You may then want to say:

For Discover Lutheranism/Jesus:
“We believe that your best next step would be Discover Lutheranism/Jesus. This will help you clarify what the Good News of Jesus is and what it means for your life. How does that sound to you?”

For Discover God’s Story:
“We believe that your best next step would be Discover God’s Story. Discover God’s Story will help you give you a better understanding of the grand story of the Bible and its connection to your life. How does that sound to you?”

Part B: Individualized Next Steps
Those individuals who have clarity with regard to Jesus and God’s Story (as well individuals who don’t but have another particular next step in mind), will be helped in this section to identify their next step with Jesus. Hopefully you will have already gathered some good information about the person’s relationship with Jesus from earlier conversations and how they desire to grow.

Transition questions:
I think it’s a good time to pause and find out how this feels to you thus far …. Perhaps you already know what you desire for a next step? …
What do you believe is your greatest need in your relationship with Jesus?
What are you interested in becoming involved with at Peace?
Grow Essentials
Grow Groups: if they are currently not in a group or lack significant Christian community. Ask the following questions to determine if a Grow Step is helpful.
Who do you have in your life to lean on when life is difficult?
Who is encouraging and helping you in your life of faith?
Have you ever been in a Christian small group? Are you currently in a group?
If the person needs Christian community refer them to pastor David for a next step.
Staff contact: Pastor David (davidf@mypeacechurch.com)

Grow Scripture: if they are currently not reading the Bible regularly.
What’s been your experience reading the Bible?
What book in the Bible or particular themes are you most interested in reading?
What resources or practices have helped you grow in your faith? What are you engaged in currently?
If the person needs to grow in their knowledge of Scripture refer them to Lynette Schulz for a next step.
Staff contact: Lynette Schulz (lynettes@mypeacechurch.com)

Go Essentials
Go Service: if they want a place to serve at Peace.
How have you served at Peace, in its mission trips, and/or in other volunteer opportunities in the community? What are you currently doing?
Do you want to keep serving where you are or could you be more fruitful serving somewhere else? What most interests you?
Are you interested in a mission trip or local service?
If the person would like to pursue serving or mission work have them contact Jordan Vanproosdy for a next step.
Staff contact: Jordan VanProosdy (jordanv@mypeacechurch.com)

Go Witness: if they feel inadequate in expressing their faith to others.
Which statement comes closest to describing you?
Faith issues are personal, so I don’t reveal to people what I believe or ask them about what they believe.
I am willing to let others know about my faith, but usually only if they ask.
I look for opportunities to let others know about my faith.
What does sharing your faith look like to you?
Would you be willing to be trained to share your faith more clearly and confidently?
If the person would like coaching in evangelism refer them to pastor Tim for a next step.
Staff contact: Pastor Tim S. (tims@mypeacechurch.com)
APPENDIX D

Name____________________________ Date____________________________

Email____________________________ Cell____________________________

Thank you for completing the Discover process at Peace. We hope the process has been a blessing and would love to hear about your experience. Please complete the following form and email it to Bryan Willkom (bwillkom@mypeacechurch.com) in the next week.

1) In your own words define God’s grace?

2) Write down a significant scripture passage that illustrates God’s grace and explain why it is meaningful to you.

3) Reflecting on the timeline and coaching process, how have you experienced the grace of God in your life?

4) What is your next step in the Discover, Grow, and Go process?

5) What is your sharing grace step? How do you plan to share the grace of God in the next three months?
Thank you for participating in the Discover process at Peace. An intentional learning and sharing plan can be helpful in preventing you from stalling on your journey with Jesus. You and your coach should have created a grace learning and sharing plan. In the space below briefly describe the specific steps you will take in the next three months to learn more about grace and share it with others.

Name________________________________ Date________________________________

Email_____________________________ Cell______________________________

Learning Step(s)
(Example: I have signed up to take the God’s Story class with Pastor Forke on September 21st. I am also reading The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning.)

Sharing Step(s)
(Example: I am participating in Peace Church’s westside sewage recovery project on October 13th. In addition, my family has blocked off three dates on the calendar when we will invite neighbors over for dinner. Our goal is to bless them without expecting anything in return.)
APPENDIX F

Detailed Breakdown of the Discover Event

6:00PM Participants arrive and engage in a welcome activity and icebreaker. The icebreaker allows the group to get to know one another and allows the staff facilitator to pair each participant with a Peace Coach.

6:10PM A peace staff member outlines the evening and begins a discussion of the grace of God. Each participant is given two definitions of grace. The first by Jerry Bridges, “Grace is underserved merit of favor, a free gift.” The second by Paul Zahl, “Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable.”1 In small groups participants are asked to give initial reactions to the definitions of grace. The group is asked to compare the definitions of grace to Ephesians 2:8-10. A brief connection is made between God’s grace (verses 8-9) and God’s work to form the believer (10).

6:20PM A Peace staff member walks the group through examples of biblical grace. The story of “the sinful woman” in Luke 7:38-42 and the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19. Participants are asked the following questions: how do these biblical accounts fit the definitions of grace? How did grace change the people it effected?

6:40PM Participants begin a post-it note timeline exercise. The timeline exercise assists participants in thinking critically about their life and seeing God’s grace as a part of their story (the timeline is described in detail in Appendix A).

7:00PM While individuals work on the timeline exercise, illustrations of grace are shared. Additional stories of grace are found in Appendix B. These stories serve as practical applications of the grace of God and handles for participants to begin seeing the grace of God in their life.2 The illustration below from Les Miserable is shared at all Discover timeline events.

As the story begins, Valjean is being released from 19 years on the chain gang, paroled back into the world but shackled with his conviction, which keeps him from being able to start over and make a new life. In despair, he returns to a life of petty crime. He is caught by the police after stealing silver from a church, where a bishop had offered him shelter. But when the police bring him back to the church, everything changes. The bishop denies the charges, insists the silver was a gift, and gives Valjean the most valuable silver candlesticks in the church. Valjean deserves judgment and condemnation, but instead, he receives grace. Not just forgiveness for his sins, but an abundant, over-the-top gift. This act is the heart of Les Miserables. Grace transforms Valjean.

Valjean sings,

My life was a war that could never be won . . .
Yet why did I allow that man

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1 Ibid., 2.

2 For contemporary illustrations see Appendix B. These illustrations may be used during the Discover process or by coaches during follow-up meetings.
To touch my soul and teach me love?
He treated me like any other.
He gave me his trust.
He called me brother.
My life he claims for God above.
Can such things be?
For I had come to hate the world,
This world that always hated me.
I feel my shame inside me like a knife
He told me that I have a soul,
How does he know?
What spirit comes to move my life?
Is there another way to go?
I am reaching, but I fall.
And the night is closing in,
And I stare into the void
To the whirlpool of my sin.
I'll escape now from the world,
From the world of Jean Valjean.
Jean Valjean is nothing now.
Another story must begin!

The priest responds,

By the Passion and the Blood
God has raised you out of darkness.
I have bought your soul for God!

The timeline facilitator points out how the story is an illustration of God’s grace toward the believer. Valjean did not deserve the bishop’s forgiveness or the additional silver candles both were an act of grace. In addition, the grace Valjean experienced changed his life leading him to become a moral and selfless man.

7:40PM A Peace staff member shows their completed timeline to the group. In doing so she points out moments of grace. This may include when she experienced unearned forgiveness from another person, when a debt was canceled without contribution on her part, or when she received a free gift. She also points out moments when she did similar acts for others. The staff makes clear biblical grace in her life and explains how she came to experience God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Participants are then encouraged to put little g’s on their post-it notes that represent moments of grace in their life.

8:00PM Coaches spend the next thirty minutes working one-on-one with participants to assist them in completing their timeline. They also review grace in detail. The coaches discuss the definition of grace, provide an additional contemporary illustration of grace, point out moments of grace on their timelines, and give one example of how they have shared grace with others.

8:30PM The evening concludes with coaches scheduling a follow up meeting participants.

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