

LEADING GRACE

SUMMER 2024

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FREE GRACE ALLIANCE



THE BEDROCK OF DISCIPLESHIP
ED UNDERWOOD

A CALL TO GROWTH
DANIEL GOEPFRICH

A TALE OF T-SHIRTS AND STUMPS
BOB NYBERG

TITUS / HOLISTIC DISCIPLE-MAKING
JOSH MANNING

THIS ISSUE:
DISCIPLE-MAKING



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GATHER AROUND THE FIRE AS WE SHARE STORIES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM YEARS ON THE TRAIL OF DISCIPLE-MAKING.



As a pastor of a mid-sized church in a mid-sized town in Wisconsin, summers always seem discombobulated to me. Our “Faith Groups” (our name for our small groups) don’t meet regularly, people are always on vacation, the staff, elders, and leaders are harder to connect with on a regular basis, everyone is going hither and yon. By the time August comes I am ready to get back into the rhythm of the ministry year with Fall being just around the corner. It’s in the Fall that everyone seems to be back, Faith Groups start to meet again, ministries get back into their routines, and we get back into the pace of what we are called to do as the Church: make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

This issue of Leading Grace is perfectly timed as it is focused on disciple-making. The articles will help us all (no matter what ministry we are involved in) keep this Great Commission Jesus gave to us, the central focus of our lives. I hope you will be inspired and equipped by the insights and encouragement you will find in each article.

If you haven’t already done so, I want to strongly encourage you to sign up and come to our annual international conference being held at Faith Bible Church in The Woodlands, TX (in the Houston area). It will be on Thursday through noon on Saturday, October 17-19. The speakers that we have lined up are some of the top teachers in the world (see pages 11-12 for who they are). I know you will be edified. And as an alliance, this conference is one of our main tools to help us connect with each other. It is also a time to hear what is happening in the Free Grace Alliance and in many ministries associated with our organization. The cost to you is just to get there, for we are making the conference free of charge to everyone (with an option to contribute if you’d like to help). I look forward to seeing you there this year.

I hope you are experiencing the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in tangible ways as you lead in the different ministries each of you are involved in. I count it a privilege to serve our Savior alongside of you in my neck-of-the-woods.

Still Amazed by His Grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Vance', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Jeremy Vance
Executive Council President

Grace ensures that discipleship is deeply ingrained in our student's personal ministry DNA as they go forth to teach others about the love of Christ.

STUDENT

Testimonies



"I used the pattern of Grace Student Discipleship Group and used a few verses to focus on application. People at church were starting to share. I am so thankful for what I learned with the whole leadership training."

DENNIS PUEBLAS

Master of Ministry, *Philippines*



"I am surprised at how many people aren't discipling in their personal lives. So, the Grace Student Discipleship Group is a good launching pad for them."

ED WAKEN

Master of Ministry, *Arizona, USA*



"I couldn't imagine life without Grace. I love being a student of God's word in such a positive, uplifting environment."

JULIANN SALEE

Master of Ministry and Master of Arts in Biblical Studies, *Michigan, USA*



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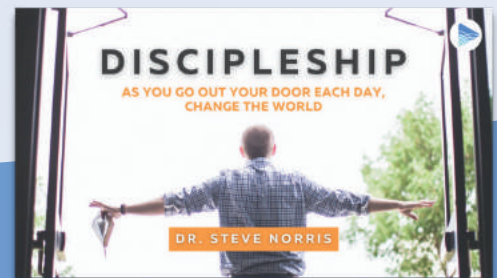
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YOU ASK. WE ANSWER.

By Jeremy Mikkelsen



What if I do not always feel saved? Asks a young man from Virginia (who did not want his name printed.)

I called him to visit and to clarify. This young man has a clear understanding of what the Bible taught. He believes he is a sinner. He understands he deserves hell. He believes that Jesus was God in the flesh, that He had lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world, and rose again. He believes in the person, the work, and the promise of Jesus Christ about eternal life. He even understood that he was secure in Christ by believing this— that nothing could take away his salvation.

He had stumbled onto Free Grace teaching that helped immensely in his peace with God, but he was still suffering from anxiety. In particular he was struggling over his occasional lack of assurance, and after reading articles on “assurance is of the essence of saving faith” he became worried was actually not saved after all. He felt anxiety before, now it was worse. (I doubt this was the outcome these authors intended.)

His story reminds me of being a camp counselor, every summer many of the same kids would raise their hands at the gospel invitation. Why? It is a heaven or hell thing, they wanted to be sure! Looking back, some of those gospel invitations were clear on the gospel, others were not. But the truth is that some of those thirteen-year-old kids were going to raise their hands at the altar call again next year regardless of how clear this year’s message was. Why?

It is because assurance is more than just a theological truth to be understood. It is something that is experienced— not just theologically “proven”. Our FGA covenant says “Assurance of justification is the birthright of every believer from the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, and is founded upon the testimony of God in His written Word.” If you understand your theology, yes, you should have assurance from the moment you believe. Even if a believer does not always subjectively “feel it”, they can still be saved and secure— simply because they read the Bible objectively, and trust Jesus’ words.

As a pastor I have often had people whom I was discipling tell me they believe (intellectually) that the Bible teaches “once saved always saved”, but because of their struggles (and emotions from bad teaching) they are still questioning their own salvation. We review the gospel. They believe the gospel. They believe in eternal security. I can tell them they should have confidence by trusting in Jesus’ finished work. But the sad truth is that they were not experiencing security. What a loss!

How joyful it is for our children when they allow us as parents to pick them up and throw them into the air and catch them because they trust us completely. They are experiencing both assurance and security. This is God’s desire for us, to rest in the finished work of Jesus.

As our kids age they learn that we as parents are not perfectly reliable, and eventually, we are not strong enough. God however is. He loves that childlike faith of believers who leap wholeheartedly into his grace, trusting that no matter what happens, He has us... because, He does.

I am reminded of Jesus’ response to the crowd of unbelievers in John 20:24-28 –

“I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

If one does not believe, then they are not His sheep. But to those who do believe, they are His sheep, and once His sheep, they will never perish and nothing can change that. We are objectively secure in His hands.

Lord, I ask that every word of teaching that leaves my mouth or keyboard encourage those who have believed in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to rest knowing they are safe in your hands.

Have a question? Send it in!

The Bedrock of Discipleship

Who You Are and What You Need

By Ed Underwood

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” – Galatians 2:20

What if you could pull Jesus aside and ask Him for that one thing you desire most? “Jesus, I need to ask you for something. Could I just have a minute? Just you and me, a quiet conversation about something that’s been on my heart, something I want you to know, something I want you to do for me, something I can’t live without. Something you just have to say yes to.”

What if Jesus took you by the hand, led you to a quiet place, looked you in the eye, and said, “What do you want me to do for you?” There you are, standing before the One who washed you from your sins in His blood, the One you will spend eternity with, the One seated at the right side of the Father, the Lord of Creation and Lord of the church, the One who told His followers all authority has been given to Him. Face to face with Jesus, knowing that the next sentence from your lips could determine your destiny in Him, what would you ask for?

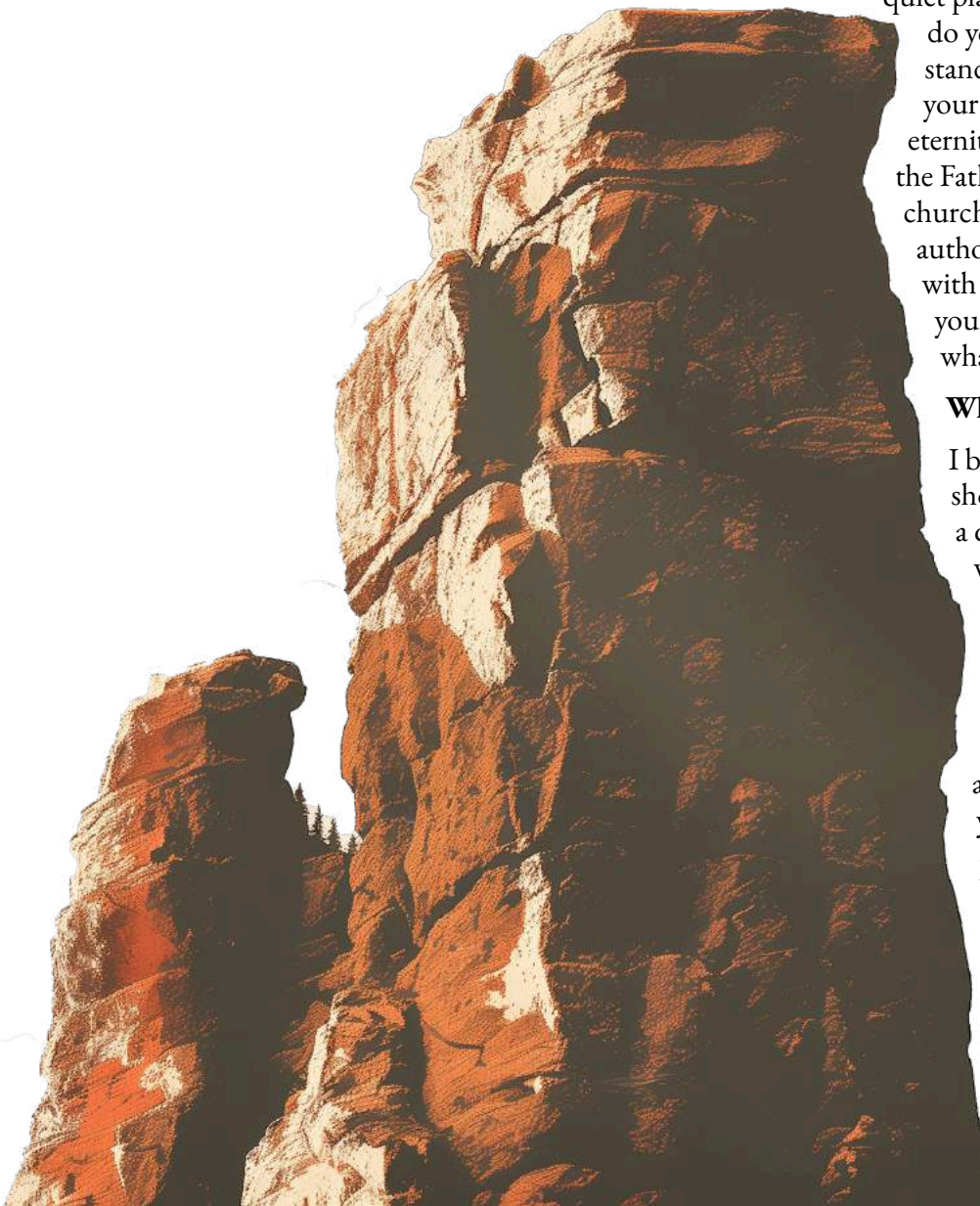
What would you ask for?

I believe there’s a question every Christian should ask, a question Jesus wants you to ask, a question He loves answering, and a request when properly understood and asked in abandoned faith, He always says yes to.

This request puts your life on the trajectory Jesus knows will give you all your heart desires and more. His only concerns are that you know what you’re asking for, what it will cost you, and how you’ll live it.

But isn’t telling Christians that Jesus will give them what they want wrong? No, it isn’t. Not if we’re telling believers to express the deepest desire of their redeemed hearts.

Learn to trust your new heart and ask for what you need.



A lot of confusion exists among Christians regarding trusting a believer's heart—and it's not difficult to see why.

Your New Heart in Christ

The New Testament teaches explicitly and repeatedly that, once you believe, you can trust your new heart in Christ.

The dramatic difference between an unbeliever and a believer:

The issue for every non-Christian is to change or be changed. The non-Christian needs grace to become something they could never be apart from the work of Christ—a new Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) in union with Christ (John 14:20). The unredeemed heart cannot be trusted because, in the weakness of humanity, there's no righteous option. They're headed in the wrong direction, they live to sin, and they desire to do what God doesn't want them to do.

But when we trust in Christ to deliver us from sin, He changes us into something we weren't before. We become the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19), a new order of mercy-receiving people, called out of darkness (1 Peter 2:9-10) and reborn to a living hope (1 Peter 1:3), having received *“all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2 Peter 1:3).

Paul's extended discussion of who we are in Christ in Romans 6-8 emphatically states that, once we have believed the gospel, he's not ashamed of us, we're not who we used to be, and we don't have to live the way we used to live. Therefore, the essence of our new life in Christ isn't in the change of direction of our lives on the outside but in the change of who we are on the inside. It's not in the change of our behavior; it's in the change of our nature.

If you're going to follow Christ as His devoted disciple, you need to be involved in disciple-making.

The greatest challenge in encouraging believers to follow Jesus isn't to turn them from their sin.

Believers need to learn how to turn from mistrusting God to trusting Him (Galatians 2:20):

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

What you need: A grace-trusting, disciple-making community

You need more grace. Paul introduced most of his letters to churches with a greeting: *“Grace to you.”* Peter begged God for “ever-increasing measures of grace” for the suffering churches on the frontier of faith (1 Peter 1:2). Paul exhorted Timothy to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1). He reminded Titus that “the grace of God that brings salvation to all men” teaches us to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” look for the glorious and purifying hope of Christ's soon return, and makes us “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

If you're going to follow Christ as His devoted disciple, you're going to need more grace, not less.

You need disciple-makers. Mark used the verb *genesthai*, to translate Jesus' promise to His first four disciples, “I will make you fishers of men.” *Genesthai* means, “I will make you become something you are not now.” The difference between you and Jesus' disciples is that you have a resource they didn't have: the church (Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:1-2).

If you're going to follow Christ as His devoted disciple, you need to be involved in disciple-making.

You need community. Disciple-making isn't only hierarchical (Paul-Timothy-faithful men), it's communal. Disciple-making isn't only vertical, it's horizontal (The Twelve, Paul's band), 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philipians 2:23.

If you're going to follow Christ as His devoted disciple, you need a healthy community of faith.

Begin with what you have and ask for what you need!

You have a lot! New life in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9), the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12), and the irrevocable promises of God (Romans 8:29). Keep in mind that, as a believer, you have already been "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

But ask for what you need! Jesus promised that His Father would provide what you need to follow Him. Jesus' staggering Upper Room promises about prayer have everything to do with what you need to follow Him. "I will do whatever you ask in my name.... You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13-14, NET).

"I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 16:23, NET).

The context of these promises has nothing to do with a BMW or a Rolex but *everything to do with what you need to follow Jesus*. These are promises to devoted disciples that if they ask for anything Jesus would sign off on (in my name), His Father in heaven would grant it. You can claim these promises when you ask God to give you what you need to follow His Son—a *grace-trusting, disciple-making community*.



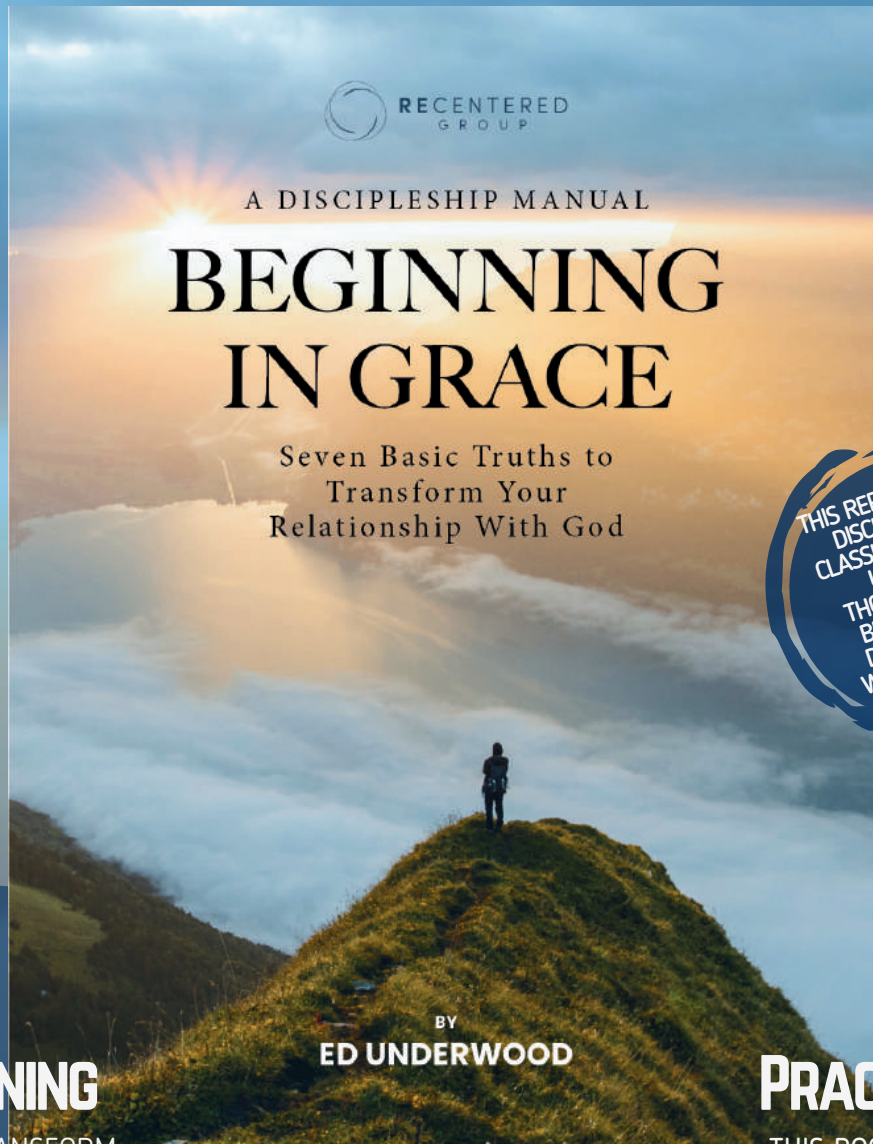
So, ask, and keep on asking: Father, please give me a safe, grace-trusting, disciple-making community.

P. S. For those readers who are looking for a grace-based, biblically accurate discipleship resource that stays true to the original gospel of grace and introduces believers to their sanctification mercies (identity in Christ), in addition to the usual discipleship topics, please consider this *Beginning in Grace* from Recentered Group. Thousands of believers worldwide have used this resource to ground their faith and make disciples in their world. This discipleship manual has been revised and updated with more discussion questions and a critically important new chapter on the believer's identity in Christ. *Beginning in Grace* equips leaders to shepherd their flocks in Christ-honoring, grace-based ways, resulting in healthy churches with biblical depth and mature believers. Any believer who desires to make disciples will find this resource immensely helpful.



Ed Underwood is the founder and director of Recentered Group, a nonprofit focused on helping pastors and church leadership realign with Jesus' heart to build healthy communities where discipleship thrives. Ed's experience ranges from fighting wildfires with the Fulton Hotshots to serving as an Army Officer during the Cold War to being a Lead Pastor for over 40 years at the historic Church of the Open Door. A gifted author, he has written several books, including *Beginning in Grace*, a discipleship manual thousands have used to deepen their relationships with God and others.

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FREE PREVIEW



Lessons in Discipleship: A Tale of T-Shirts and Stumps

By Bob Nyberg

One Sunday afternoon I was getting my BBQ grill going when Jase came running around the corner of my apartment and stopped in his tracks. He took one look at me, and he immediately knew that something was not right. Like a deer caught in the headlights, he just stared at me almost as if I were someone that he did not recognize.

Joey and Jennifer lived in a duplex apartment next to me. Their three kids would often play in the yard in front of my apartment. Normally after church, I would change into some casual clothes before having lunch. But on that particular Sunday, I decided to get my BBQ grill started before changing my clothes. I think that was probably the first time that Jase ever saw me in my good clothes. Normally I would wear blue jeans and a cotton Henley T-shirt around the house.

I love soft cotton Henley T-shirts. In fact, I pretty much live in Carhartt Henley T-shirts. When it comes to shirts, that's about all that I ever wear. It is no wonder that Jase thought that some stranger was messing with my BBQ grill on that memorable Sunday afternoon.

Eventually, I retired and moved to Florida. About a year later, I received an email from Jennifer. She had been shopping with the kids and stopped at a consignment store. As they were walking down an aisle, Jase pointed to a table with items of clothing on it and said, "That's mister Bob's shirt!" At first Jennifer was puzzled by her son's statement. Considering that Bob moved a year ago, Jennifer was baffled as to why he would be selling a shirt at a consignment store. Why would Jase think that the shirt belonged to Bob? Then she saw the Carhartt logo on the shirt and realized the connection that Jase had made between mister Bob and the shirt on the table. Of course, that shirt belonged to mister Bob. That's the only kind of shirt he ever wore, except for one Sunday afternoon when he was firing up his BBQ grill.

*...the fact is our
lifestyles
communicate
volumes.
Our attitudes and
actions should
support the words
we intend to
communicate to
those we wish to
disciple.*

Jennifer's email made me smile. Jase still remembered me even though I had been gone for a year. As I thought about that email, it struck me just how perceptive children can be. They often notice small details that adults might be totally oblivious to. Then another sobering thought began to haunt me. Since Jase was aware of how I normally dressed, then he probably also noticed the actions and attitudes that I displayed. I began to wonder how often he and his siblings might have seen the "old Adam" being displayed in my life, rather than the character of Christ.

never forget that we lead by example

continued in prayer, he opened his eyes to see what the other guys were doing. Much to his chagrin, he was met with a comical sight. Since there was only one stump along the riverbank, the other men had nowhere to place their right feet. So, they simply stood on their left legs with their right feet raised in the air. They each struggled to balance themselves on one leg while attempting to place the elbow on the right knee and rest their heads on their fists. The poor missionary struggled to keep from laughing out loud at the comical scene that lay before his eyes.

When I think of the term "discipleship," I picture the intentional communication of truths found in God's Word. But the fact is that our lifestyles communicate volumes. Our attitudes and actions should support the words we intend to communicate to those we wish to disciple. It is a good idea to periodically pause and take inventory of how we are doing. At times we might want to ask ourselves, "What message do we intend to communicate, and how effectively is it being conveyed?"

Years ago, a missionary planted a fledgling church among an indigenous people group living in a remote jungle location. He had a handful of men who he was discipling. He was training them to evangelize in other villages surrounding their location. He decided to take a select group of men with him on a trip to share the gospel with some of the villages up the river. As they prepared for the trip they loaded the large canoe with their provisions. Before leaving, the missionary decided that he would teach the men the importance of prayer in relation to evangelism. He gathered the men around him and led them in a word of prayer. The canoe was tied to a stump along the riverbank. He placed his right foot on the stump and leaning forward he rested his elbow on his knee. Then he brought his hand toward his face and rested his head on his closed fist. Closing his eyes he began to pray out loud. In the middle of his prayer a thought crossed his mind. He wondered what he was communicating to the men around him. As he

There is much truth in the old adage, "actions speak louder than words." What we communicate verbally is certainly important, but what we say needs to be supported by both our attitudes and actions. As we consider how to disciple others well, we should never forget that we lead by example.

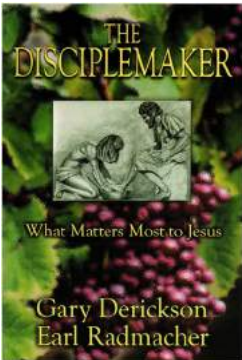


Bob Nyberg taught 33 years at the Missionary Training Center of Ethnos360. After retiring and moving to Florida, he joined the Biblical Resource Group of Ethnos360 where he is involved in writing and editing doctrinal papers for the organization.

BOOKS

In each issue we feature books published by FGA member authors, friends of grace, and others, and this month we are turning our attention to the topic of discipleship. The QR code is our affiliate link to the book on Amazon (help support FGA by using the link).

<https://amzn.to/45Vq0mV>



Gary Derickson & Earl Radmacher – *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus*
A classic, what was on Jesus' heart the evening before He died for you and me? These keys to blessing and answered prayer were what His closest friends needed to hear, then and now.

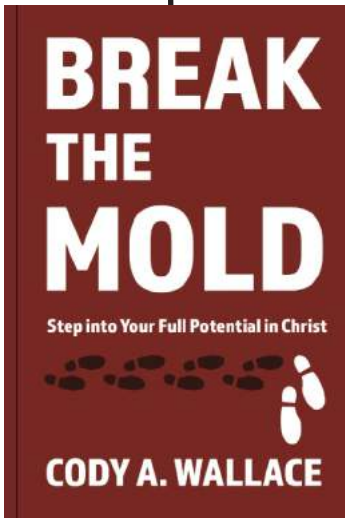
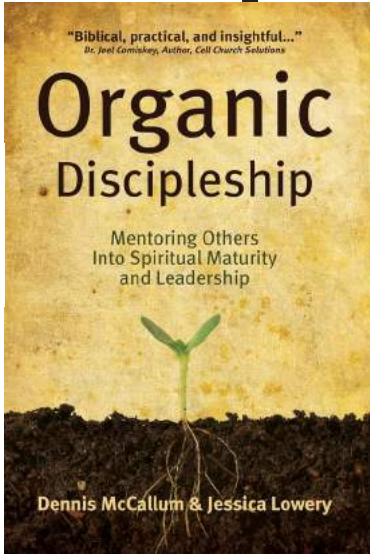
Daniel Goepfrich – *Biblical Discipleship: The Path For Helping People Follow Jesus*
Biblical Discipleship will get you started on a process - the path - an easy to grasp set of Biblical steps leading to maturity.

Jason Moore – *People Building: Impact Generations*
From our friends at Greater Grace, discover how to invest in people– how to gather and develop teams, and how to build a lasting legacy that will impact generations to come.

Dennis McCallum & Jessica Lowery – *Organic Discipleship*
Another classic, from our friends at Dwell, Biblical and immensely practical, this book gets down to the real questions in the disciple making process. The 12 appendices are a particular gold mine.

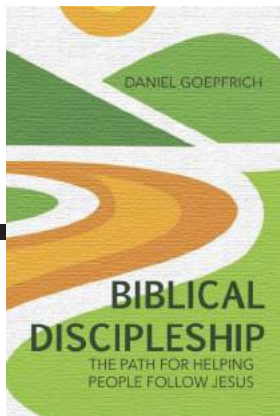
Cody Wallace – *Break the Mold: Step Into Your Full Potential in Christ*
This book takes Paul's powerful words from Romans 12:1-2 and inserts the reader into an applicable understanding of what it means to be a living sacrifice.

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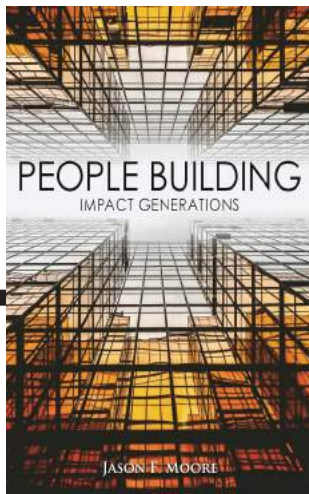


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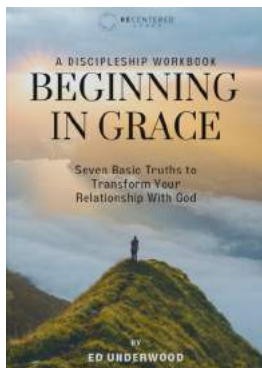


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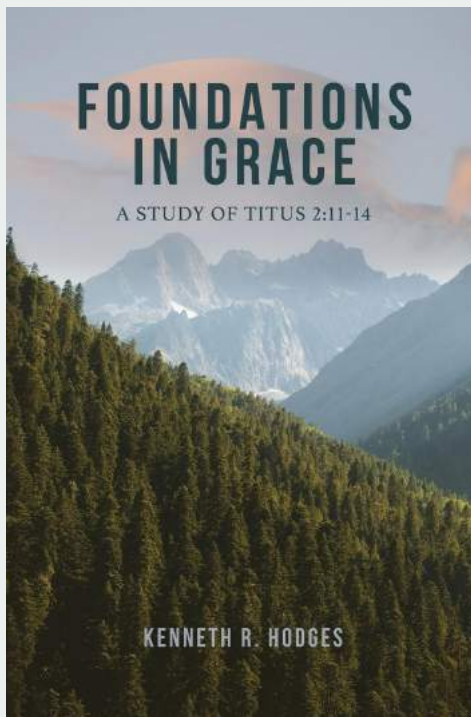
Also, don't miss Ed Underwood's recently expanded *Beginning in Grace*. (See ad on page 8 for more details.)



<https://amzn.to/3Wi0YLg>

New from Grace Theology Press, *Foundations in Grace*, is a new study by FGA Executive Council member “Kenny Hodges”. Here is what Dave Anderson (Founder and President, Grace School of Theology) writes in the forward:

“So often spiritual teachers tell us we must perform, (keep God's commandments) in order to win His love (Acceptance). Those who adhere to that kind of teaching will always live in fear of not behaving well enough to get God's Acceptance and God's Approval. The former comes through believing in Christ (Acceptance) while the latter comes through obedience (Approval). We receive our Acceptance while we are alive on earth, but we receive our Approval at the Judgement Seat of Christ in the next life. Dr. Hodges clarifies all this through explaining the difference between justification and sanctification.”



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Kenny Hodges graduated from Mississippi State University in 1974 with a Bachelor of Science in Business and Industry. After spending a year at Florida Bible College he enrolled in Dallas Theological Seminary and graduated in 1980. He moved back to Mississippi in 1984 and in 1987 began a thirty-three-year ministry at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Starkville, MS. In 2020 Kenny graduated with a D.Min from Grace School of Theology. Dr. Hodges is the founder of Two Circles Ministries, the2circles.org a web-based platform for teaching the gospel of grace.

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“Grace in Discipleship” – Ed Underwood

“Grace and the Pro-Life Movement” – Carmen Pate

“Building People in the Mystery of Grace” – Jason Moore

“Leading through Loss” – Katherine Barner

“Charles Ryrie: the man, ministry, and method” – Paul Weaver

“What is Free Grace Theology” – Mark Rae

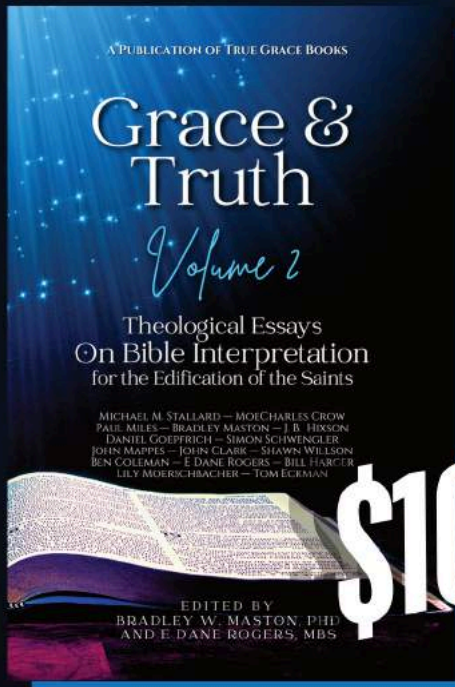
“The Mystery In Transforming Muslims” – Asare Baffour

“Grace in marriage” – Carri Mikkelsen

Those interested in seeing more grace churches planted are invited to a special church planting roundtable hosted with Bryan Threlkeld.

*Are you a free grace teacher or author with something to share?
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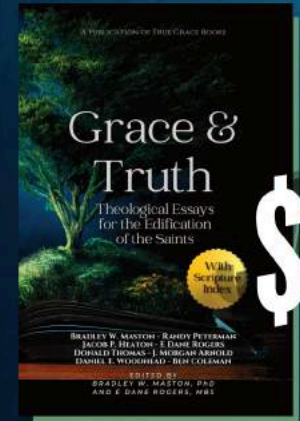


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Holistic Disciple-Making: The Path to a Healthy Church

By Josh Manning

Recently I was doing some shopping at a local grocery store when a sign in the store really grabbed my attention. It advertised, "...healthy living for less." This jumped out to me because I had been thinking about what it looks like to live healthy, not in terms of physical nutrition, but in terms of spiritual vitality in Christian community. In other words, healthy living within the context of the local church. The correlation of the store branding for health and our spiritual vitality present similarities. The store is selling a low-cost healthy life, but it did not show the high individual investment to attain that health. The initial cost may be low, but there is a high cost of self-control and perseverance. And so it is in our spiritual life. The cost of our salvation is free—Jesus paid the price for us—but our spiritual vitality is dependent on our intentional investment of abiding in Christ.

Throughout the New Testament, the local church is expected to be the most natural place for fostering this kind of spiritual wholeness, since the local church is united to one spiritual life, Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:5-6). The longer I have served in local church ministry, the more I have seen this proven true: spiritual health is best accomplished through relational disciple-making within the church community. Interestingly, I believe this was one of the Apostle Paul's main points when writing his letter to Titus as he dealt with spiritual unhealth and dysfunction within the church on Crete (Titus 1:5). The following are principles of discipleship that Paul shared with his spiritual son and disciple, Titus.

From Faithfulness to Godliness (1:1-4)

Paul's purpose in writing this small but significant letter is clearly summarized in his introductory thought to Titus (1:1-4). In verse 1, Paul states the main reason for his personal call to ministry was "for the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness." Paul's ministry to Titus and the Cretan church was for the purpose of nurturing sanctifying faith or faithfulness among believers in Jesus Christ. This is the essence of disciple-making like Jesus. It is important that Paul was called to nurture this "faith" or faithfulness of "God's elect." These believers in Crete were, in fact, "elect" or chosen, not to eternal salvation, but to be faithful to the charge of their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. As they were faithful, the "knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" would result. In order to experience his primary purpose of a healthy church (1:5),

Lessons from Paul's letter to Titus

Paul calls for Titus and the Cretan church to take these action steps: to know the truth of God's Word, and to apply it to godly living. From the start, Paul establishes just how essential making faithful disciples truly is if the local church is to function as God intended.

Throughout Pauline theology, the idea of "faithfulness" is often associated with effectively making disciples. For instance, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul highlights this necessary component of discipleship when he writes, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to *faithful* men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2, emphasis added).

Faithfulness, then, is an essential characteristic of authentic disciple-making. Being a disciple is required to make disciples. At this point, it is important to note that biblical faithfulness does not mean being flawless, but rather, being full of faith, persistence not perfection.

These believers were to be trustworthy, not because of

Biblical faithfulness does not mean being flawless, but rather, being full of faith, persistence not perfection

behavior modification or self-improvement tactics, but as a result of being dependent on Christ and His grace alone to live and lead the Christian life. This highlights the fact that faithfulness is required in biblical discipleship and that making disciples is heavy on Paul's heart as he writes this personal letter to Titus for the sake of a fully functioning



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church. Thus, a healthy church can only be built through disciple-making, and a healthy church should be the most fertile ground for effective disciple-making to take place.

It is also important to note the natural results of faithful discipleship according to Paul—truth leading to godliness. In other words, authentic disciple-making includes the perfect ratio of belief and obedience. This foundational balance within biblical discipleship is often overlooked. For example, Christians often focus so much on filling their minds with biblical truth that they disregard any transformation of the heart. On the other hand, many believers go straight to the “doing” of discipleship but lack a sound theological foundation upon which personal application must be built. In the end, both ditches miss the mark of holistic discipleship and the potential of a healthy functioning church family.

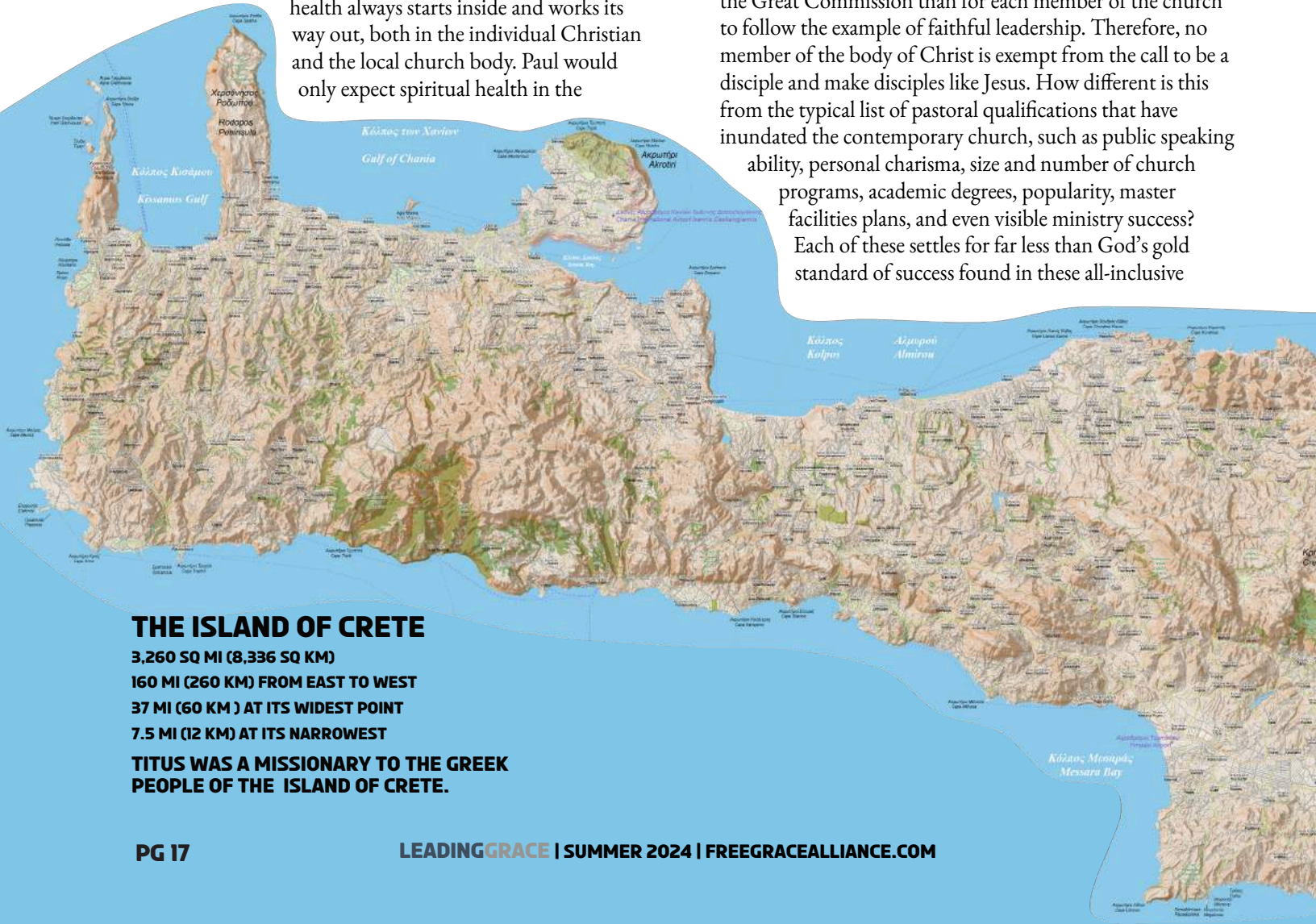
Healthy Church Through Healthy People (1:5-9)

There are two sides to holistic discipleship: it must be both personal and collective. Paul’s first unit of thought within the body of his letter (1:5-16) jumps immediately into the qualities of healthy local church leadership (1:5-9), of “setting things in order” in the Cretan churches (1:5). Local churches are only as healthy as their leadership. Spiritual health always starts inside and works its way out, both in the individual Christian and the local church body. Paul would only expect spiritual health in the

collective group if it was first present in the individual leaders. Church leadership should never ask those they are leading to go somewhere they have not first gone themselves.

True disciple-making does not happen in isolation but within the context of the community. This point is clear from the text when Paul states, “An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As an overseer of God’s household, he must be blameless, not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled” (Titus 1:6-8). Notice how intentional Paul is to begin his list of leadership qualifications with the leader’s stewardship of his own family—his wife, children and himself. There is no coincidence that the home becomes the proving ground for deep personal spiritual health through relational discipleship.

As we see in Titus 2, this list is not exclusive to church elders but should be characteristic of the entire church. It should be modeled first by its leadership so that it may effectively spread to all the members. Being a faithful disciple-maker of Jesus is the real non-negotiable for church leadership. And what better way to expect every disciple of Christ to participate in the Great Commission than for each member of the church to follow the example of faithful leadership. Therefore, no member of the body of Christ is exempt from the call to be a disciple and make disciples like Jesus. How different is this from the typical list of pastoral qualifications that have inundated the contemporary church, such as public speaking ability, personal charisma, size and number of church programs, academic degrees, popularity, master facilities plans, and even visible ministry success? Each of these settles for far less than God’s gold standard of success found in these all-inclusive



THE ISLAND OF CRETE

- 3,260 SQ MI (8,336 SQ KM)**
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- 37 MI (60 KM) AT ITS WIDEST POINT**
- 7.5 MI (12 KM) AT ITS NARROWEST**

TITUS WAS A MISSIONARY TO THE GREEK PEOPLE OF THE ISLAND OF CRETE.

qualities of relational disciple-making. Disciple-making is not exclusive to certain paid professionals, but is the privilege and responsibility of all who make up the church.

Intentionally Opposing False Teaching (1:10-16)

Paul then identifies the opposition to holistic discipleship: false teaching that must be expected and corrected, specifically within the local church (1:10-16). When he writes, “For this reason, rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13), Paul is instructing Titus to deal with toxic teaching directly.

First, it is very important to note Paul is directing this exhortation to believers in Jesus (“them”/”they”) who have the real possibility of believing the doctrines of these false teachers. This is also true because of Paul’s use of “sound in the faith” found in verse 13. The word for “sound,” *hygiainō*, could also be translated as “healthy” or “whole.” Interestingly, Paul uses this word four different times in his letter to Titus with a similar meaning each time (1:9, 13; 2:1, 2, 8). Luke also uses this word in a physical illustration when recording Jesus’ words in his Gospel, “It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick” (Luke 5:31, emphasis added). It should be obvious that these individuals who are on the verge of falling into a false standard of belief and practice within the church are genuine believers. Only someone who has already accepted “the faith” can hope to improve their “health” in such doctrine. In other words, this imperative would never make sense to an unbelieving audience. Only a Christian community could be expected to mature in their belief and obedience to God’s Word.

Secondly, it should come as no surprise that the specific false teaching threatening the health of the Cretan church was legalism (1:10). It’s not that these believers were being tempted to believe that salvation came through keeping the Mosaic Law, but that they must be sanctified through it. The

real threat to the church was that they could be deceived into believing that a healthy walk with God requires a commitment to

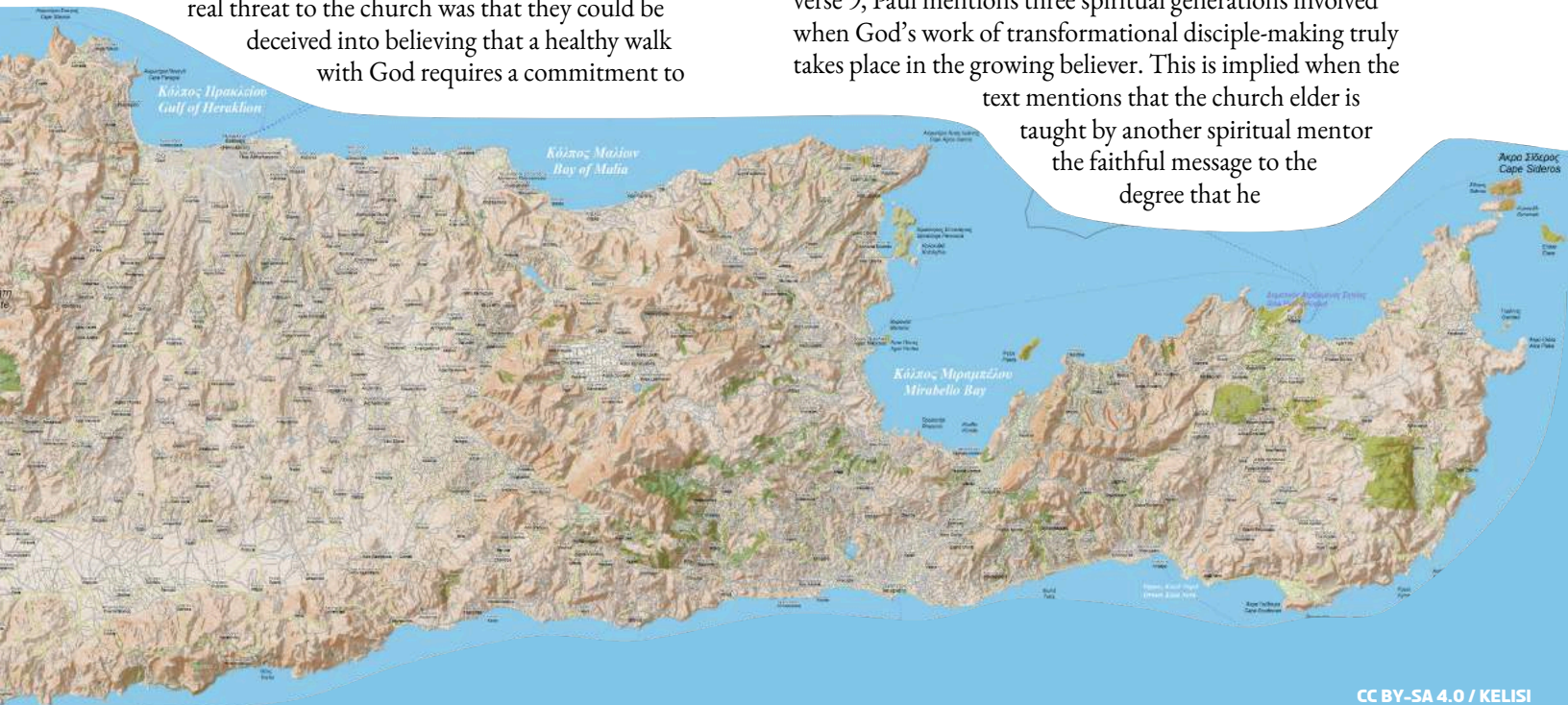
living under the Old Testament law instead of under grace alone. This is a timeless principle that the church today should not forget. Discipleship within the context of the church will always run the risk of producing a “we try harder” kind of Christianity. If it is only a list of “good Christian” do’s and don’ts instead of a Holy Spirit-empowered process saturated in God’s grace, it will be impossible to accomplish by human effort. Paul says this kind of performance-driven “discipleship” must be intentionally identified and guarded against. Otherwise, the tools required for creating spiritual health will be easily misused as weapons that inflict disease and decay upon the individual disciple, which may ultimately spread throughout the entire church organism like spiritual cancer (1:10-11).

Transferable and Reproducible (2:1-10)

In Paul’s next pericope (2:1-10), he takes a closer look at another very important characteristic of holistic disciple-making. Authentic disciple-making must be transferable and reproducible. For the next ten verses Paul identifies five different demographics of the churches on Crete that play a necessary part in the disciple-making process and provide the church the chance to flourish. Older men (2:2), older women (2:3), younger women (2:4-5), younger men (2:6-8) and even slaves (2:9-10) are each intentionally included for authentic disciple-making to be experienced and expressed in and through the church.

I believe this is an expansion of an earlier point Paul made in 1:9 concerning the qualities of a church leader when he wrote, “holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.” It cannot be overemphasized that in order for disciple-making to be a dynamic work of Christ, and not simply static human effort, it must be passed from one disciple to the next and to the next...and so on. In verse 9, Paul mentions three spiritual generations involved when God’s work of transformational disciple-making truly takes place in the growing believer. This is implied when the

text mentions that the church elder is taught by another spiritual mentor the faithful message to the degree that he



chooses to hold to it himself. This should ultimately result in other members of the church being encouraged and exhorted to believe and obey the truth because of the example set by their leaders. In short, biblical disciple-making in its truest form must be transferable. It must not stay stagnant but must be shared.

Discipleship can take place in one, but disciple-making must be reproduced in many. In the end, shared disciple-making is the ingredient necessary for healthy living to radiate from each individual to the collective whole. Thus, the local church community is only as healthy as its leaders. Church leadership is only as healthy as the families they lead and the family is only as healthy as each individual family member. Disciple-making, according to Titus, is shared by individual believers throughout the entire church community.

Healthy Church Built on Foundation of Grace (2:11-3:15)

Finally, this supernatural process of disciple-making within the church community cannot even be a possibility without being built on God’s grace. The grace of God is not only both bookends to this letter (1:4; 3:15), but is also the centerpiece of Paul’s declaration of church-focused and fostered discipleship. It is no accident that at the very pivot point of this letter, grace is firmly fixed in Jesus Christ (2:11). It is not only God’s grace that “appeared” to the world so that the lost can be saved because of Jesus Christ. This grace of God also provides the teaching and equipping necessary for the saved to function like He intended – as the healthy body of

Christ. Too often, the church assumes that justification is by grace alone, but remains completely ignorant of, or even willfully opposed to, grace being equally essential for progressive sanctification (3:7-8). Our old sin nature feels the need to perform and retain control of our spiritual living, which is why such abundant grace for the church is an absolute necessity for us to live like Christ together and to lead surprising lives before the world. The local church is powerless to foster and experience this kind of holistic disciple-making without such grace to motivate and empower spiritual health within the body of Christ. This grace for living as the church can only be found in the life source of the vine, Jesus Christ, sufficient for each of His branches to bear good fruit together (John 15:5).

Transformational discipleship for the local church does, without question, require the greatest investment, but also produces the richest rewards. Whether for the valuable investment of discipleship or the rich results of a healthy church, God’s gracious enablement is the only means for such spiritual health to grow and flourish.

... this supernatural process of disciple-making within the church community cannot even be a possibility without being built on God’s grace...

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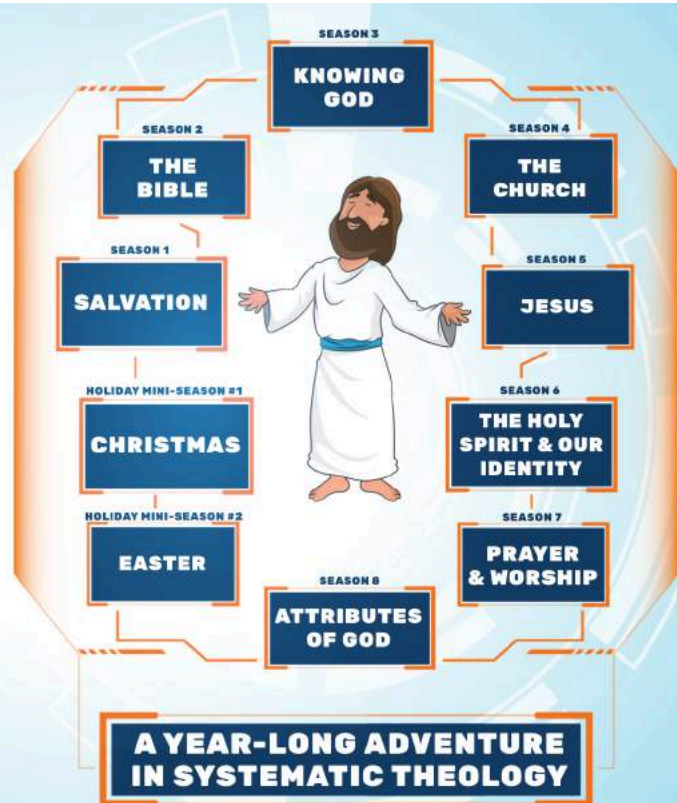
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A Call to Growth

Growth Growth Growth

Although it seems that much of the world, and the United States in particular, has moved on past the events that tried to stop the world in 2020, the pandemic was beneficial to those paying attention, as it highlighted modern Christianity's Achilles' heel—the lack of genuine, committed biblical disciples and the process it requires to grow them. We have auditoriums and worship centers, groups and classes, megas and minis, community centers and food pantries. Every week, in hundreds of languages around the world, sermons are preached and songs are sung, yet the church is in a state of crisis. In the United States, membership is declining across most denominations. Pastors and church leaders are falling in public scandals—some driven to the point of suicide under the weight of their work. Biblical doctrine is being replaced by feelings, experiences, and culture-driven ideology. Across the world, the church has been marginalized by apathy within and attacks from without, and in many places it has begun to assimilate ancient pagan practices that have only stripped it of the powerful, life-changing impact it could have.

The solution for this is a return to *Biblical discipleship*. During the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus gave his eleven apostles only a few commands that are recorded in Scripture, but Matt 28:19–20 provides the broad commission that contains the elements of all the others:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”¹

The command “*make disciples*” means more than “*proclaim the gospel*” (Mark 16:15) or “*be my witnesses*” (Acts 1:8). While it certainly includes those things, this commission is best explained within its context by the two participles that follow it—“*baptizing them*” and “*teaching them to obey*.” A “disciple” is not simply a believer or convert or fan, although he must be all those things. In the fullest sense of the word, a disciple (*μαθητής*, *mathētēs*) is someone “*who engages in learning through instruction from another*,” who is “*constantly associated with someone who has a*

pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views.”² In other words, *a disciple is a person who places himself or herself under the instruction of an expert or master with the goal of becoming like the one they are following.*

Finding a modern term to explain this type of relationship is difficult. Words like “student” and “pupil” do not go far enough. Decades ago, a good word was “apprentice,” although today it suffers from the associated concepts of *rookie*, *newbie*, *novice*, or *amateur*. Even the New Testament writers never used the word “disciple” outside of the Gospels and Acts, preferring more descriptive terms like “holy,” “saint,” or Paul’s signature phrase, “in Christ.” However, it makes sense to continue using the terms “disciple” and “discipleship” to connect them with Jesus’ commission to the apostles.

A disciple is a person who places himself or herself under the instruction of an expert or master with the goal of becoming like the one they are following.

Defining Discipleship

Notice four key elements that biblical discipleship requires. First, discipleship is a process that happens to a person. While groups and classes can help create environments for discipleship, groups cannot be disciplined. Groups may or may not contain biblical disciples, but having a group meet to discuss Scripture, pray, and enjoy fellowship is not discipleship. Discipleship takes place at the individual, personal level. A personal, five-minute conversation in which two Christians intentionally point each other to Jesus may be more effective than three years’ of having coffee every Wednesday or “doing life together,” if Jesus is not the center of the meeting.

Second, discipleship requires a relationship with someone else. Discipleship cannot happen in a vacuum. It assumes that the disciple has attached himself to someone else to accomplish something that he could not do on his own. In Jesus’ commission, this is found in the words “baptizing” and “teaching.”

At its most basic level, water baptism has always been a way for a person to publicly link or identify

himself or herself with the specific message or teaching of the group or teacher they are following. For a disciple to be baptized “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” means there has been a voluntary submission and identification with God through the person of Jesus as he revealed himself and his apostles recorded in Scripture.

Third, discipleship requires an expert teacher. Jesus told the Eleven to teach “them...everything I have commanded you.” Biblical disciples must understand that their pastors, teachers, and professors are not the experts they are following, and those teachers must understand and regularly acknowledge that, as well. While Jesus certainly gave these leaders as an important gift to his church (Eph 4:11), Jesus himself is the expert teacher. He is the great Teacher, the Great Shepherd of his sheep. Yes, he uses both human and non-human (the Holy Spirit) agents to accomplish the necessary teaching (1 Cor 2:6–16), but Jesus is the one we are following—no one else. The expert we choose to follow matters. Thus, biblical discipleship is not simply a casual connection to God or Jesus, but a growing understanding of who he is, what he taught, and what he expects from his followers.

Finally, discipleship has a defined goal or destination. In the preceding paragraph, a few words are missing from Jesus’ command. Not only did he say, “teaching them... everything I have commanded”; He said, “teaching them **to obey** everything I have commanded.” In other words, Jesus expects his followers to grow in their obedience toward him until they finally become like the Teacher. In theological terms, this is how we become renewed in the image of God (Rom 8:29). Consider how the apostle Paul used this concept in his teaching.

Jesus expects his followers to grow in their obedience toward him

“You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and **to put on the new man who has been created in God’s image**—in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.” Eph 4:22–24

“Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with its practices and **have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it.**” Col 3:9–10

The Cost of Discipleship

“Anything worth doing is worth doing well,” says the familiar adage. Another that applies here is, “You get what you pay for.” Salvation is a gift; whereas discipleship requires time, effort, and sacrifice. The Savior once asked the great crowds following him, “Which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t sit down first and compute the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?” (Luke 14:28) It seems like a silly question; only a fool would start an endeavor of that size without thinking through what it will cost him. The Savior agreed, then applied that truth to anyone who wants to follow him. Salvation is free; discipleship is costly. Discipleship is not easy. “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me first. ... A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” (John 15:18, 20) However, the rewards of discipleship are inestimable and eternal.

- It is the process by which we learn to follow Jesus, fulfilling those “good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them” (Eph 2:10).
- It is how we achieve spiritual maturity, God’s will for us: our sanctification (1 Thes 4:3).
- It is our mission (Matt 28:19–20), commanded by the Savior himself and exemplified by the apostles (2 Tim 2:2; Col 1:27; Eph 4:11–16).
- It is the theme of major encouragement in every apostolic epistle.
- It is mentioned frequently, having a specific path laid out, explained, and illustrated in detail, proving its supreme importance in the life of the believer.
- And, while discipleship is distinct from salvation and cannot cause a loss of salvation, the believer who chooses not to follow Jesus will suffer the loss of fellowship and ministry opportunity in this life and rewards in the next.

The importance of biblical discipleship becomes most apparent during transition when a church or ministry is looking for new teachers and leaders. If they have promoted and practiced biblical discipleship well for some time, there is a better chance that those teachers and leaders are available and ready within their congregation or staff. If the intentional discipleship process is relatively new or they have not done it well, they may have to look outside for new leaders because they have not yet been developed “at home.”

An example of this principle can be found in the New Testament, especially in the epistles that were written toward the (real or perceived) end of the apostles' lives and ministries. Consider these familiar passages by Paul when he was a prisoner in Rome, both his first (perceived end) and second (real end) times and from Peter's second letter. Notice how these men thoughtfully emphasized both personal spiritual growth and the importance of growing others in their final words.

“He himself gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, to **equip the saints for the work of ministry**, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature. **So we are no longer to be children**, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.” Eph 4:11-14

“We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom **so that we may present every person mature in Christ.**” Col 1:28

“So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And **what you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.**” 2 Tim 2:1-2

“**I intend to remind you constantly of these things** even though you know them and are well established in the truth that you now have. Indeed, as long as I am in this tabernacle, I consider it right to stir you up by way of a reminder, since I know that my tabernacle will soon be removed because our Lord Jesus Christ revealed this to me. Indeed, **I will also make every effort that, after my departure, you have a testimony of these things.**” 2 Pt 1:12-15



Daniel Goepfrich is the Founder of Theology is for Everyone and the Teaching Pastor of Oak Tree Community Church, where he has served for more than 20 years. Daniel is a graduate of Tyndale Seminary (ThM) and Trinity Graduate School (DMin). He is an author and speaker and holds professorships with Calvary University, Colorado Biblical University, and Word of Life International Bible Institutes. He and Saralynn have been married since 1997. They have three married sons, one daughter, and several grandchildren.

Know Him

Thus, we discover that biblical discipleship is a process and that the goal of this process is individual spiritual growth or maturity—a believer in Jesus becoming more and more like Jesus. However, there is one more phrase the apostles repeatedly used—almost like a mantra—to sum up the entirety of the process: “know him.”

“**This is eternal life—that they know you**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.” John 17:3

“We know that the Son of God has come and **has given us insight to know him** who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life.” 1 Jn 5:20

“**My aim is to know him**, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death.” Phil 3:10

In his final preserved letter, Peter presented eight clear, linear steps that are necessary for any person to move from being unsaved to a full disciple of Jesus.

Interestingly, Peter saturated his teaching—even bookending his letter—with this vital concept of knowing Jesus:

“His divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness **through the rich knowledge of the one who called us** by his own glory and excellence. ... For if these [eight] things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in **your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately.**” 2 Pt 1:3, 8

“**Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day!” 2 Pt 3:18

My book, *Biblical Discipleship: The Path for Helping People Follow Jesus*, explores these eight steps in detail, outlining the apostles' method for spiritual maturity. I pray this will spur you and your church on, echoing the apostolic encouragement: “Let us press on to maturity” (Heb 6:1, NASB).

Endnotes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NET Bible, Second Edition.

² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 609.

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- Justification is the act of God to declare us righteous when we believe in Jesus Christ alone.
- Assurance of justification is the birthright of every believer from the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, and is founded upon the testimony of God in His written Word.
- Spiritual growth, which is distinct from justification, is God's expectation for every believer; this growth, however, is not necessarily manifested uniformly in every believer.
- The Gospel of Grace should always be presented with such clarity and simplicity that no impression is left that justification requires any step, response, or action in addition to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Looking for a community of grace?
Sign our covenant and join FGA!**

Use this QR code or visit our website:
freegracealliance.com



ON MISSION



This month a team of FGA folks including Charlie Bing (middle), Mark Haywood (top), Willie Gaines, Grant Hawley (bottom) were in Africa teaching and training pastors. A big shout out to our brother Asare Kyei-Baffour who coordinates these teams in Africa. We are in the planning stages for a similar regional conference in the Philippines in Spring 2025. Let us know if you are interested in helping make this happen.

FGA MEMBERSHIP

INDIVIDUALS

As we approach our international conference, now is a good time to become a member or renew your membership so that you have a voice and a vote as we meet to provide input on the direction of our alliance. It is also a great way to personally help sustain the ministry of the alliance.



Membership Options

Subsidized \$10/year

Standard \$100/year or \$10/month

<https://freegracealliance.com/membership>

CHURCHES & MINISTRIES

We are better together! Membership is a way your church or ministry can formally affirm the FGA covenant (and be highlighted as such) and it also entitles your ministry to be given priority in advertising, in support, in speaking engagements, etc. This ministry is only possible thanks to those who willing to work together.



Membership Options

Subsidized \$50/year

Standard \$500/year

<https://freegracealliance.com/org-member/>

THANK YOU

We are thankful for faithful members, patrons, and donors that make the Free Grace Alliance possible— enabling us to produce **LEADINGGRACE** and other resources as well as helping to connect, encourage, and equip our community.

We also want to also thank the sponsors who help cover the cost of producing **LEADINGGRACE** by advertising within.

Thank you to Grace School of Theology and Maryland Bible College— both are free grace teaching higher education centers. Thank you Recentered Group, True Grace Books, and Spence, three independent producers of Free Grace discipleship resources.

If you or your organization would like to advertise in an upcoming edition of **LEADINGGRACE** please reach out to our editor to learn more.

THE OPPORTUNITY

As the Executive Council worked on a preliminary budget we identified that in order to sustainably accomplish our goals that we need to grow our financial support by nearly 50%. If you are interested in investing to advance the gospel of grace we believe this is the perfect opportunity to make an eternal impact. Use this link to partner with the FGA:



<https://freegracealliance.com/give>

Editors: Jeremy & Carri Mikkelsen

Special thanks to Charlie Murphey for proofing assistance. Errors that remain, however, are ours. Thank you to Tony Kerns for leading our mapping project.

Executive Council Members: Charlie Bing, Mark “Dean” Haywood, Kenny Hodges, Sam Newton, Jeremy Mikkelsen, Carmen Pate, Juan Sanchez, Ed Underwood, Jeremy Vance (President)

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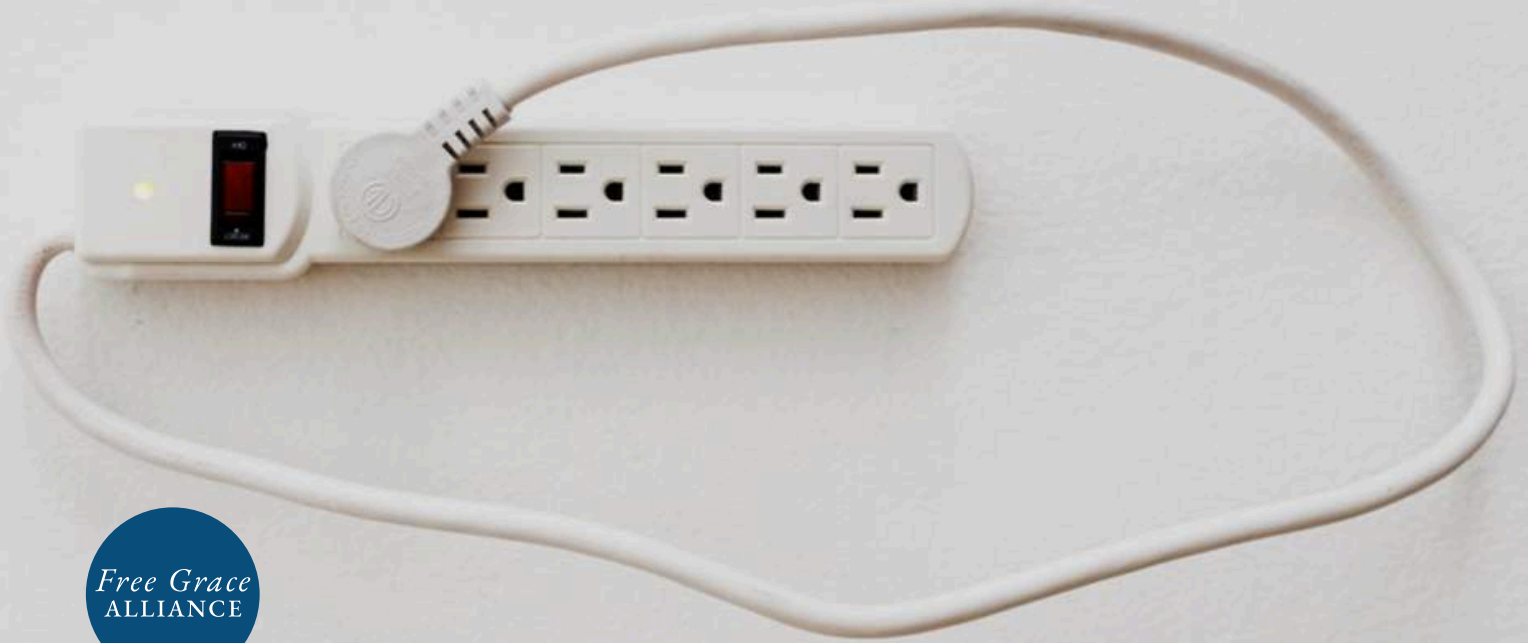


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