

# RELATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP



## **Transformed by God's Love**

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding  
as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being  
transformed into the same image from glory to glory,  
just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).*

**David Ferguson**  
in cooperation with  
**The Center for Biblical Leadership**

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David

## Preface

“Men of Issachar . . . understood the times and knew what Israel should do”  
(1 Chronicles 12:32).

In order to “understand the times” in which we live, we must address the issue of relevance. Is the church having a relevant, significant impact on our world today? Are the saints truly being conformed into the image of Christ? Is church ministry really about events, activities, and keeping up with the latest popular curricula and programs? Are we truly fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:19, 20)?

Restoring relevance to the body of Christ requires that we carefully consider how we relate to God’s Son, God’s Word, and God’s people.

- Do we truly experience intimacy with Christ?
- Have we moved beyond merely seeking to believe and obey the Bible, and begun to experience a loving relationship with the God who wrote it?
- Do we honestly walk in vulnerable, accountable fellowship with a few other saints?
- Can we relate to those who do not know Christ? Are we truly “friends of sinners,” sharing with them not only the Gospel, but our very lives?
- In our churches and ministry settings, do we see others becoming true disciples by experiencing intimacy with God’s Son, encountering God at the point of His Word, and participating in the divine mystery of true fellowship?

The first century church turned the world upside down for Jesus by embracing these relational principles. If we are to survive in our own unique cultural and historical context, we must do the same. This resource is our invitation to you to join us in a movement of restoring relevance to Christ’s church through the transforming power of His love!

Dr. David Ferguson

## Welcome to *Relational Discipleship*!

*Relational Discipleship* is a course of study designed to help you discover God's purpose and calling for your life, and to encourage you to pursue the lifelong, life-changing process of becoming like Jesus.

This *Relational Discipleship* workbook is intended to serve as the participants' guide for the course. It includes everything participants need to thoroughly experience the *Relational Discipleship* resource.

This workbook includes the following features:

- **Key *Relational Discipleship* Principles**—These are introduced as text boxes in each chapter. These foundational principles are then discussed in the text of the workbook.
- **Experiences with God's Word**—Each chapter includes an opportunity to truly experience God's Word together. At these times, participants will have the opportunity to become “doers of the Word” (James 1:22 KJV).
- **Experiences with God's People**—Each chapter includes an opportunity for you to allow the Lord to work through His people. As true fellowship is experienced, you will be empowered to reflect His character and to demonstrate His care and compassion for each other.
- **Experiences with God's Son**—Each chapter also includes at least one opportunity for participants to pause and reflect on God's Son. Through these times of quiet reflection and meditation, a deeper love for Christ will be born.
- **Follow-Up Projects**—At the end of each of the first seven chapters are follow-up projects which present further opportunities for spiritual growth. Participants will be challenged to consider practical life application of *Relational Discipleship* principles, engage in Bible studies, develop specific ministry skills, practice spiritual disciplines, and memorize scriptures. These things will help to continue the Spirit's work of exercising ourselves toward godliness (1 Timothy 4:7).

### EXPERIENCING THIS COURSE IN COMMUNITY

We were never intended to live the Christian life alone. Like the early church, we are to be devoted to real fellowship, or *koinonia*—open, honest, authentic relationships with other people. Thus, this course is not intended to be a study that you undertake alone. Rather, you

are to be coached or mentored by another person who has already completed the course and is continuing to practice its principles.

Spiritual formation is intended to be lived out in community, and it is to be multiplied: “The things you have heard me say . . . entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). “Teach the older women . . . Then they can train the younger women” (Titus 2:3,4). If at all possible, seek out someone with whom you can experience *Relational Discipleship*. You might also wish to work through this course with a small group or class.

Whether you experience *Relational Discipleship* one-to-one or in a small group, we trust that your journey through this course will not be just another study, but rather will radically change your life and ministry!

## **HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS RESOURCE**

In order to get the most benefit and blessing from this resource, we urge you to do the following:

1. **Set aside time each week to read the chapter and work through the Experiential Exercises.** This will prepare you for your interactions with a partner or small group and enrich your personal understanding of each chapter.
2. **If you are working through this resource with a friend or ministry partner, we urge you to make time each week to work through and discuss the exercises.** Make your meetings a priority in your schedule and come prepared to interact appropriately.
3. **If you are working through this resource with a small group, we urge you to make it a priority to attend each small group session.** Make your meetings a consistent part of your schedule and come prepared to interact appropriately. You may also want to make notes and then reflect on the responses of fellow group members from each meeting. We urge you to get to know each person in your group in a meaningful way, show interest in their lives, and demonstrate supportive care.
4. **The following “Participant Promise” page presents some ways in which you can make the most of your experience with this workbook.** We suggest that you read it over and carefully discuss it with your partner or group before making this commitment.

## **PARTICIPANT PROMISE**

We invite each participant to commit to the following in order to enhance their personal and communal experience of this resource:

I will spend time between sessions completing the chapters with honesty and sincerity.

I will be open and willing for God to show me how I can better follow Him as He is formed in me.

I will participate in learning sessions fully, openly, and honestly.

I will seek to give care as others may need it, and receive care as I may need it.

I will be willing to receive feedback from those who know me in my group, team, or family so that I might experience the growth and change that God intends for me through this course.

---

Name

Date

## **Introduction: The Mystery of Our Calling**

“The disciples came to him and asked, ‘Why do you speak to the people in parables?’ He replied, ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them’” (Matthew 13:10, 11).

There are many secrets and mysteries of the Kingdom of God that Jesus has revealed to those who follow Him. This course is about one such mystery: Our divine calling as citizens of God’s Kingdom to be transformed into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Everything in creation has been given a calling by God. The sun and planets themselves have been placed in such a way as to provide for the sustenance of life. If the sun was closer to the earth than it is, or farther from it, most of our planet would be uninhabitable. Nature continually maintains the precarious equilibrium that is necessary for our survival. Every part of the ecological system has an important place, a purpose to fulfill—a calling.

The same is true for you and me. We each have a divine calling. When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, trusting that He paid for our sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary, His Spirit comes to dwell within us, revealing and empowering the calling that God has placed on our lives—not just a general calling, but also a personal one. The question is not just “Why did God create humanity?” but also “Why are **you** here on this planet?”

Perhaps it is already clear to us that part of our calling, like that of the twelve disciples, is to be followers of Jesus. Scripture also tells us that we are called not only to follow Christ, but to become like Him (Romans 8:29). A common label for this process by which God makes us more and more like Jesus is “spiritual formation.” But what does that really mean? How can we live out genuine discipleship in today’s increasingly challenging world?

Tragically, it seems as though few of us have an answer to this question. How else can we explain the fact that the church (particularly in the western world) looks so much more like the surrounding culture than it looks like Jesus? Churches conduct an enormous number of events—seminars, workshops, conferences, concerts, retreats, conventions, and more. If events could produce Christlike character, we would be the most mature followers of Jesus in

all of human history! Instead, in many parts of the world the church seems to be like the salt that has lost its savor (Matthew 5:13). Our homes, relationships, priorities, and lifestyles seem little different from the world's. Obviously, something is missing.

We must engage more and more Christians in the serious, life-changing process of becoming like Jesus. We need a clearer understanding of how to be true followers of Christ. We need a well-defined vision of the target for spiritual formation, as well as instruction in how we can practically move in that direction. We must embrace the awe and wonder of the opportunity we have to be transformed by God's love.

## **An Overview of *Relational Discipleship***

**Chapter 1** of this course helps us to discover and begin living out God’s purpose for our lives. Why are we here? What is our real significance? We will discover that we each have a crucial purpose related to the glory of God.

**Chapter 2** explores the ways in which God the Father and God the Son love each other. We will see that the spiritual formation process mirrors this love relationship. This is critically important because spiritual formation is primarily *relational*—it involves Spirit-prompted relationships with both God and God’s people. Chapter 2 will help us discover that we are loved in the same way that the Father loves the Son, and that we can love God in the same way that the Son loves the Father.

**Chapter 3** affirms that we must actively participate in the process of spiritual formation. Philippians 2:12, 13 instructs us to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” How can we practically cooperate with God? What is His part, and what is ours? Chapter 3 champions the concept of the “yielded walk,” through which we respond to what God is doing as part of our responsibility in the process of spiritual formation.

**Chapters 4, 5, and 6** urge us to walk in the light of three divine “light sources”: God’s Son, God’s Word, and God’s people. The process of spiritual formation should involve being led by the Spirit to walk consistently in all three sources of light, in order that we might better reflect the glory of God.

**Chapter 7** explores the “worthy walk,” shedding light on a critical result of the spiritual formation process—transformed character.

Finally, **Chapter 8** provides a fitting conclusion to the course and issues an ongoing challenge to walk in love as we experience transformation in our relationships.

# Chapter 1

## Life's Purpose Transformed



**“When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush” (Exodus 3:4).**

Imagine Moses tending Jethro’s flock alongside Mount Horeb. As he performs his familiar routine, he catches a glimpse of a burning bush out of the corner of his eye. Moses’ absentminded gaze is soon replaced by an intensifying curiosity, then perplexity as he realizes that the bush is not surrendering to the flames. As Moses draws closer to the fireproof bush, the Most High God suddenly thunders forth from within it: “Moses! Moses!”

What if the Creator is calling you just as certainly as He called Moses? What if He has a clear divine purpose for your life just as He did for Moses? Can you feel your heart tremble with astonishment and swell with shy delight as you imagine the Creator calling out *your* name?

Moses’ brush with God’s glory at Mount Horeb transformed his life, his sense of purpose, his people, and human history. Encounters with Jehovah are like that—we are never the same again. God revealed Himself to Moses in a bush that burned but did not burn up, and Moses responded. This simple principle—God reveals, God’s people respond—will guide us as we explore our life purpose together.

**This simple principle—God reveals, God’s people respond—will guide us as we explore our life purpose together.**

### **WHAT IS YOUR LIFE’S PURPOSE?**

Why are you here? Why has the Creator put you on this planet?

Is the purpose of life simply to accomplish, acquire, and achieve as much as we can? Is it about having influence, financial security, or fun? Is our life purpose accurately expressed by the popular bumper sticker that asserts, “He who dies with the most toys wins”? Or is there more to life than these things?

The tragedy of September 11, 2001, changed the world, and undoubtedly many of us reevaluated the question, “Why am I here?” My wife, Teresa, and I reflect often on where we were that day, just as you and countless millions of others do. We were glued to an airport television, en route to a retreat for ministry couples, when the first World Trade Center tower collapsed. Humankind’s evil toward one another shook our world that day, but I believe that through it all, God was revealing Himself. The Spirit brought immediately to my heart Hebrews 12:26, 27: “‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.” We saw things shaken that day that we did not think could be shaken, and were reminded that, ultimately, only eternal things will remain.

More than two decades ago, I was personally shaken by an event that forced me to reevaluate my life’s purpose. A man in his late sixties who had recently become a follower of Jesus was speaking at a community-wide leadership event. He shared that as a young adult he had embraced the importance of financial security and the influence it would bring. He purposed that before he reached the age of thirty he would become a millionaire – and he did. He then set out in pursuit of other goals — becoming a multi-millionaire by age forty, seeing the world, and gaining prestige and power along the way. Although he was successful in achieving these new goals, he tragically lost his wife and family to divorce along the way. Next came more financial success, but a second broken home. A teenage daughter attempted suicide, and a son ended up in prison.

I can still remember the sobering impact of his next few sentences. As he reflected on his life, he said, “Early in life I purposed to climb the ladder of success, and from the world’s viewpoint I climbed it! But when I got to the top, I looked around, and the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall.”



## Pause and Reflect

### Is Your Ladder Leaning Against the Right Wall?

Pause to consider the fact that you and I are in some ways climbing our own ladders. We each do something with the 1,440 minutes of each day. We invest time, energy, and resources in some set of priorities. But how do these investments relate to eternity? There are many ladders to climb, many things to pursue. But we should be concerned with investing our lives in priorities that last—in things that “cannot be shaken.”

Consider for a moment some of your top life priorities, the investments of your life that matter most.

*As I look back on my life, I hope I have made a lasting investment in and impact on \_\_\_\_\_*

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*(For example: my spouse; my children; those with whom I work; the professional field in which I work; my neighbors; my friends; my grandchildren; my church or ministry; a cause, project, or mission; those around me who do not know Jesus.)*

Share your responses with your partner or small group. As others share, you might want to make note of their responses. This will enable you to know one another better as you journey through *Relational Discipleship* together.

What a tragedy it would be if we discovered late in life that our ladder was leaning against the wrong wall! How can we know that our life priorities will stand the test of time? How can we be sure that our lives will be all that God intends?

We need clarity of vision—an eternal perspective on our life's purpose. Followers of Jesus have been called into His eternal Kingdom (Colossians 1:13), and with this call comes a divine plan and purpose. In this course, we will explore the mystery of God's desire for your life and mine. How do your life priorities relate to His? How can you discover God's hope for your life? What is **He** longing to see happen through you and in you? We gain additional insight into these questions as we follow the biblical story of the glory of God.

## **THE STORY OF GOD'S GLORY: A CLUE TO OUR LIFE PURPOSE**

Throughout its pages, the Bible tells the story of God's glory. The story begins with God walking and talking in the Garden with Adam (Genesis 2:15–20). Then, God is personally present with Abram, promising to birth a nation from his descendents, multiply them greatly, and deliver them from their oppressors (12:1–3; 15:1–16).

On the back side of the wilderness, Moses spots a bush that burns but is not consumed. The glory of God is present in that bush (Exodus 3:1–6). Moses becomes the human leader of the Israelites as they escape from bondage in Egypt, but they are **really** led by the glory of God, which appears as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (13:21, 22).

### **God Initiates the Experience of His Glory.**

Picture yourself as a young boy or girl traveling through the wilderness with Moses. Time and again, you observe supernatural phenomena that confirm God's physical presence in your midst. A mysterious cloud settles on the tabernacle and the Lord pervades it with his glory, causing the cloud to burn with fire by night. You always halt your travels until the cloud or the fire lifts from the tabernacle.

With each divine disclosure, you become increasingly aware of the tangible presence of the Lord among you. Day after day and night after night, when God's glory moves, you move—God initiates, you respond.



## Pause and Reflect

### Your Testimony to His Initiative

Pause to consider the truth that God drew you into a relationship with Him at your “new birth,” following this same simple pattern:

- He initiated: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44).
- You responded: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).

Reflect on your testimony:

- *God took initiative to reveal His Son, Jesus, to me by* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- *I responded by* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Further Manifestations of God's Glory

Later, after Moses has led you and the other Israelites out of Egypt, you see the glory of God descend upon Mount Sinai, accompanied by smoke, fire, thunder, and lightning (Exodus 19:16–19; 20:18–21; 24:15–17). Moses journeys up the mountain, where He receives the Ten Commandments. After another close encounter with God in which the Lord's glory passes before him (33:12–23), Moses returns to the people. The glory of God radiates from his face (34:29).

Picture Moses instructing you and your people to build a portable ark and tabernacle using the resources God has given to you. Then, at the precise moment when the consecrated priests are prepared, and the tabernacle, with all of its furniture and implements, is completed, the glory of God, manifested by His cloud, descends upon it (40:34–38).

After much wandering in the wilderness, and the occupation of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, God's people encounter Him for centuries in the wilderness tabernacle. Then King Solomon is allowed by God to build a lavish, more permanent temple.

Now imagine that the day of the temple's dedication has arrived. As you watch God's high priests carry the Ark of the Covenant into that most sacred of places, the Holy of Holies, the expectancy and reverence of the people proves contagious, and the tension mounts as you wait longingly to see what will happen next. Suddenly, the cloud from the wilderness fills the temple, signifying the presence of the Lord, and His glory permeates the place. The intensity of His holy presence forces you to prostrate yourself before Him in worship and adoration as you rejoice in the midst of His glory once again (1 Kings 8:10, 11; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3).

### **Responding to God's Initiative**

Before we move on, consider your heart's response to the truth that God always takes the initiative to reveal Himself to you. Just as He made Himself known through the burning bush and the pillars of cloud and fire, the Creator has revealed His Son to you, made you a part of His body, the church, and involved you by His Spirit in the process of being transformed by His love. What emotions touch your soul when you reflect on the wonder of these truths?



## **An Experience With God's Son**

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Pause and consider Christ's cry to His Father from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46)? As Jesus took our sin on Himself, the Father, in His holiness, had to turn away.

Reflect once more on being born again. Why did Christ become sin—or, more personally, for *whom* did He do it?

Quietly listen to His Spirit whisper the words to your soul: “He did it for you. He did it for you!”

The One who knew no sin became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). If He did not need to die for any other person in the whole world, He would have died for you—and He *did* die for you!

Allow yourself to respond to this glorious truth. Meditate on the thought, or even whisper the words, “He did it for me.” Is your heart moved with wonder, humility, and joy? Do gratitude and praise fill your soul?

Now share these feelings with God. Give thanks for His initiative in manifesting His glory and presence to you.

*Lord, I am so grateful that* \_\_\_\_\_

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### **God's People Reject His Glory.**

As time goes on, God's people compromise and go the way of the world. The kingdom is divided. Both Israel and Judah fall into immorality and idolatry, and eventually both are taken into captivity. From bondage in Babylon, the people of God inquire of the prophets, "Why have we been treated so? Why do we find ourselves in captivity?" The prophet Ezekiel sees a vision depicting what has happened to them: "Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. . . . Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple" (Ezekiel 10:4, 18).

**The Israelites are in bondage because of their rebellion against God. He has withdrawn His presence. The glory is gone.**

God's chosen people are in captivity because they have failed to respond to the experience of God's glory among them. Thus, the glory of God is withdrawn from them, not because He really wants to leave them, but because their behavior demonstrates that they do not really want His transforming presence. The Israelites are in bondage because of their rebellion against God. He has withdrawn His presence. The glory is gone.

### **The Results of the Absence of God's Glory**

Following the ministry of the prophet Malachi, the Lord's messengers fall silent. For the next four hundred years, people go to the temple at the appointed time to perform their religious duties, but the presence of God is gone. Year after year, decade after decade, they "go to church," but God is not there. Not surprisingly, the Pharisees rise to power during this period. The bondage of legalism arose in the context of the practice of religion apart from the presence of God.

### **God's Glory Returns**

Fast forward to that chilly night on the hills outside Bethlehem. The shepherds are admiring the stars, when suddenly an angel of the Lord bursts forth from the sky. The shepherds are overcome by wonder and fear, robbed of speech and powers of description, and "the **glory** of the Lord shone around them" (Luke 2:9).

This appearance by the angels to the shepherds signals the return of the glory: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory" (John 1:14). For thirty-three

years, the glorious presence of God—which was previously in the bush, in the cloud, in the fire, on Mount Sinai, on the face of Moses, in the tabernacle, and in the temple—is displayed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is betrayed and dies a criminal's death on a cross. But the good news of the gospel is that, on that cross, He pays the penalty of sin. The One who has never known sin becomes sin, for a divine purpose—that we might become the righteousness of Christ through Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). He dies that we might **become**. Our calling is all about His hope of our becoming.

After three days, Jesus rises from the dead. For the next forty days, He teaches his followers about the Kingdom of God. He then ascends into heaven. But before He leaves, He tells His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Obediently, they gather, pray, and wait for ten days. Suddenly, a noise like a violent wind roars through the house, and tongues of fire descend from heaven and separate to rest on each disciple (2:1–4). The glory is back!

### **God's Glory—in Us**

Until this point, the glory of God had dwelt in a bush, on the face of Moses, in a cloud, in a fire, in a tabernacle, in a temple, and in His divine Son. But now the glory dwelt somewhere that it had never been before Pentecost—inside created beings, inside God's children.

Scripture confirms this new home for the glory of God: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). The glory of God, which was manifested among Moses and the Israelites and in the person of Jesus, now rests inside you and me. Christ in us represents God's greatest hope of making His presence known here on Earth.

### **LIFE'S PURPOSE: EXPRESSING THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

The kingdom to which we have been called is a kingdom of God's glory. Our calling and purpose are directly related to His glory. We are here to make His glory known—to express the presence of God. He wants to be seen and known through us, just as He was seen and known in the tabernacle and the temple.

If God had consulted me about His plan for making His glory known on Earth, I am sure that I would have recommended another way. I might have suggested writing messages across the

sky, or just having Jesus travel around in His resurrected, glorified body, walking through walls and showing up in churches and communities. I do not think I would have approved of the idea of God entrusting His presence, His glory, to mere mortals like you and me. But God, in His wisdom, *did* choose us to bear and express His glory. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” He has entrusted His glory to me. He has entrusted His glory to you!

**We are here to make His glory known—to express the presence of God. . . .He has entrusted His glory to me. He has entrusted His glory to you!**



## Pause and Reflect

Pause to consider the truth that the Creator has a definite hope and desire for your life. His heart is longing to engage you in His divine purpose.

What thoughts and feelings do you have about being trusted as a bearer of God's glory?  
(Check as many as apply to you.)

\_\_\_ *I feel blessed to enjoy such an awesome privilege.*

\_\_\_ *I feel inadequate for the responsibility.*

\_\_\_ *I am afraid that I will make God look bad.*

\_\_\_ *I need to know more about what it means and how I can live it out.*

\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Complete the following sentence:

*As I consider God's hope for me and reflect on the privilege of being home to the very glory of God, I feel . . .* \_\_\_\_\_

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## **HOW CAN WE FULFILL THIS PURPOSE?—THE WONDER OF HIS GRACE**

You are the home for God's glory. You are to bear and express the glory of God wherever you go. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). His hope of glory, the prevailing evidence of His divine presence, is in you. But how are we to consistently live in a way that allows His glory to shine forth?

### **By God's Grace We Were Chosen To Bear His Glory.**

What did Moses do to earn the privilege of bearing witness to dramatic displays of God's glory?

What did the people of Israel do to deserve the honor of having God's glorious presence dwell among them?

What have **we** done to make ourselves worthy of being trusted to express God's glory?

The answer to all of these questions is, "Absolutely nothing!"

Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us. It is given not because of anything we have done, but simply because God longs to give it (Isaiah 30:18). By grace He extends His love to us, showers us with blessings, and imparts purpose to our lives, in order that His glory might be displayed through us.

**What have we done to make ourselves worthy of being trusted to express God's glory? Absolutely nothing!**

God's grace enlisted Moses and delivered and guided Israel. His grace persevered through Israel's unfaithfulness. It was by His grace that the glory returned that night in Bethlehem. It was His grace that embraced us: "For it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8).

So what is the evidence of His presence in our lives? Are we to look for the fire? The cloud? The shine on our face? No—any of these would in some way call attention to us, rather than to Him. It is His grace—His unmerited favor, His undeserved love—that testifies most clearly of His presence.

## **Gratefulness for His Grace Empowers Us to Live as Glory-bearers.**

Gratefulness is the only appropriate response to this grace we have experienced. Unfortunately, as Israel so tragically demonstrated, gratefulness for the grace of the presence of God is far from automatic. Even we, as Christians who carry the glory of God within us, can take His grace for granted.

But as we reflect on the truth that Christ in us is the hope of glory, gratitude should be our prevailing emotion. We need not feel a sense pressure, obligation, or duty. Instead, we should embrace the wonder of it. The Creator has graced us with the privilege of joining Him in making Himself known here on Earth. He wants you and me to experience the “joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8 NASB) that comes from a life of receiving and giving grace—a life in which we never get over the wonder that, by His grace, we have been loved, and in which we are excited to share that same grace with others.

What a God we serve, what a joy we possess, what a gift and a privilege to experience genuine relationship with the God of the universe! May the name of the Lord be worshipped, glorified, and praised! May His holy presence fill us each day so that we may venture forth as His living epistles to love and to serve in the name of our God.

## **RESULTS OF FULFILLING OUR CALLING**

The *Relational Discipleship* course is intended to equip us to live out the awe-inspiring purpose of expressing the glory of God. As we make this journey together, what results may we expect?

### **The Glory of God's Grace Will Be Praised.**

“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:5, 6 NASB).

This verse, which describes so eloquently God's loving initiative toward us, reveals an important result of fulfilling our purpose and calling: Wherever God's grace is displayed, the glory of His grace will be praised. Every demonstration of His unmerited love in our lives presents us with an occasion for offering Him our heartfelt praise.

In addition to prompting praise in our own hearts, our recognition of God's grace will bring Him glory among those who hear our testimony. One of our challenges is to honestly explore and reveal the pain, tragedies, trials, betrayals, and failures of our lives, in order to demonstrate the glorious grace of the One who brought us through those times and loved us even in the midst of troubles of our own making. Such grateful testimony to the wonder of His grace brings Him praise.

### **How Displaying Grace Prompts Praise to God**

In our frequent role as conference speakers, my wife, Teresa, and I often share stories about our own marriage journey that illustrate the glory of God's grace. Teresa will usually tell about our honeymoon. "We were married at age sixteen, neither of us being Christians" she might say by way of introduction, "and at that age, one of us didn't have much sense." (You can probably guess which one of us that was.)

Teresa usually goes on to tell about the morning after our wedding night. That morning, my buddy, Stanley, knocked on our motel room door and invited me to go play pool. Teresa was still asleep, so I figured she wouldn't mind—the pool hall was just a couple of blocks down the road after all—so I went with Stanley to shoot some pool, leaving my new bride alone.

People often come up to me after Teresa shares this tragic story and ask, "Why do you let her tell that story? It makes you look like a jerk!" I understand that, but I always tell them, "When she's telling that story you need to understand what is going on inside of my heart. I'm not feeling embarrassed, guilty, or ashamed. I'm feeling overwhelmed by the grace of the God who has healed that terrible hurt. I'm awed and overjoyed that God has brought complete forgiveness and restoration."

How did my wife forgive my insensitivity? How was Teresa's acceptance of me restored? How was trust restored to our relationship? Only by the grace of God. So I want her to tell that story (and many others) because they inspire praise of the glory of His grace.



## **An Experience With God's Word**

“To the praise of the glory of His grace” (Ephesians 1:6 NASB).

Pause to reflect upon your experience of the glory of God's grace, recently or in the more distant past. Be still before the Lord and ask His Spirit to stir up remembrances, perhaps of times when:

- He unexpectedly provided for you.
- He accepted you in the midst of a failure.
- He healed your physical or emotional pain.
- He restored a broken relationship.

Complete the following sentence:

*I give thanks and praise to God for the grace He gave me when \_\_\_\_\_*

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Share your completed sentence with your partner or small group. Then pray together, expressing further thanks and praise to God.

### **The Glory of God's Kingdom Will Be Expanded.**

A second result of fulfilling our purpose as bearers of God's glory is the expansion of His kingdom. As we come to understand that the kingdom is about Him, not us, we will recognize

His heart, His passion, His love for people. As we realize that the Christian life is about bringing glory to Him, things like evangelism, discipleship, and missions will no longer be religious activities that we do just in order to feel better about ourselves or to earn God's approval. Instead, these things—indeed, all forms of ministry—will represent opportunities to express and expand God's glory!

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Some of us are familiar with church environments in which it is understood that if you are really spiritual, you will not only come to every weekend and mid-week service, but you will also come when the “super saints” gather for organized evangelism or early-morning prayer. If you are going to be a **real** Christian, you must consistently and faithfully participate in every church-related activity, regardless of whether it is generally considered “required” or “optional.”

Tragically, in such environments, the expansion of the glory of the kingdom is often reduced to an endless string of activities which we use as a basis for comparing ourselves with others. This often leads us to become either smugly self-congratulatory or critical and condemning of those who don't quite measure up. The Christian life thus becomes just another self-focused enterprise.

**Our calling is about His presence, about His glory, about His kingdom.**

Our calling is about **His** presence, about **His** glory, about **His** kingdom. Yet if we are honest, we must all admit that on some level, we are wondering, “What about me?” In Matthew 16:25, Jesus says, “Whoever loses his life for me will find it.” One of the keys to finding your calling and purpose is to become so absorbed by His presence, His glory, and His kingdom that you lose yourself, and thus find your life.

**We Find Life's Purpose by Fulfilling Christ's Great Commission.**

"Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) is Christ's invitation to join Him in making His glory known here on Earth. As we express the glory of God, His Spirit is at work, challenging people to notice and turn aside, just as Moses did when he saw the burning bush. They will want to know, "What is that? Where did you get that love, that acceptance, that compassion, that grace?" Our only explanation is that we got it from God. The calling that He has placed on our lives is evidence of the grace that He has extended to us.

**There are demonstrations of  
God's glorious grace in your life.  
He wants to send people your  
way who want to know,  
"What is that?"**

As a husband who has made so many mistakes, imagine my wonder at the fact that, by His grace, Teresa and I recently celebrated forty years of marriage. Having started by abandoning my wife for my pool-shooting buddy on our honeymoon, how is it possible that I now share deep closeness and abundant love with this same lady forty years later? How could that have happened? It only happened because of the glory of His grace. I cannot get over the wonder of such grace.

There are similar demonstrations of God's glorious grace in your life. He wants to send people your way who will want to know, "What is that?" There is no doubt that what he is doing in Teresa and me through the calling He has on our lives is partially for the benefit of other leaders, couples, and families. When other people notice the evidence of His presence in our marriage and ask, "Where did you get that acceptance?" or "Where did that spirit of forgiveness come from?" or (more bluntly) "How did you put up with that jerk, Teresa?" there is but one true response we can offer: It was only made possible by His glorious grace.

**How will you so live and love that the  
glory of God's presence is manifested  
among those you long to impact?**

Consider again the life priorities you previously identified. Are your spouse, children, family members, and friends being compelled to turn aside and notice the glory in your life? Is your workplace, profession, community, or ministry being impacted by His presence in you? How will you so live and love that the glory of God's presence is manifested among those you long to impact?



## An Experience With God's People

### Expressing the Glory of His Grace

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10 NASB).

Consider for a moment the “manifold” or “multi-faceted” grace of God of which Peter speaks in this passage. God’s grace—His unmerited favor—has, at times, been expressed toward you as:

- Acceptance when you have failed (Romans 15:7).
- Encouragement when you were down (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- Support when you have struggled (Galatians 6:2).

Then pause to ask God, “*How could I better express the glory of Your grace to others?*” Ask Him specifically about how better to express acceptance, encouragement, and support. Listen—be still. Recall from earlier in this chapter who it was that you said you hoped to impact. Allow God’s Spirit to reveal who needs to receive His glorious grace through you. Then complete the following sentences.

- *I could better express God’s . . .*
- *acceptance to* \_\_\_\_\_.
- *encouragement to* \_\_\_\_\_.
- *support to* \_\_\_\_\_.

(For example: *I could better express God's acceptance to my son. I tend to be critical of most of what he says or does. I need to stop focusing on the negative and start telling him that no matter what he says or does, I still love him.*)

(For example: *I could better express God's encouragement to my wife. She tends to get discouraged, and I could let her know that I recognize and appreciate her gifts and abilities.*)

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds”  
(Hebrews 10:24).

With vulnerability and sincerity, share with your partner or small group what God has revealed to you. Then pray, specifically asking that God's Spirit would express His grace through you so that others will turn aside to see Him in you. Offer simple yet specific prayers, such as the following:

*Heavenly Father,*

*Please help me to be more accepting of \_\_\_\_\_. Please show me how to do this in practical ways.*

*In Jesus name, Amen.*



## Pause to Pray

Close your time together with the following prayer:

*Heavenly Father,*

*I pause to consider the wondrous truth that Your Holy Spirit has taken up residence in me, and the awesome privilege I have to reflect Your glory. In all aspects of my life, I see expressions of Your undeserved favor, unmerited love, and incomprehensible grace. May these outpourings of grace continually prompt praise from my heart. I understand that through the person and power of Your Holy Spirit, I have the potential to so express Your presence that others around me would wonder, “What is that? Why is that happening?” May I honestly answer that what they see is not the result of my goodness, but of Your grace.*

*As I pray and reflect on this, may my heart be challenged with the words of Jesus: “Whoever loses his life for me will find it.” Father, would You give me the revelation of what you are going to do in me as I come to focus first on You? Would You introduce to me the wonder of the truth that I can be an expression of the very presence of God? Would You unveil by Your Spirit more and more of the mystery of “Christ in me, the hope of glory?”*

*In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

After He was raised from the dead, Jesus announced, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). In Chapter 2 we will explore the questions, “How did the Father send the Son?” and “How is He now sending us?” We will explore the mystery of the love that is expressed and experienced within the Trinity, and discuss the significance which the coming of this same transforming love to dwell in **us** has for our spiritual formation.

## CHAPTER 1 FOLLOW-UP PROJECTS

1. **Ministry Skill:** Developing Your Personal Testimony
2. **Life Application:** Sharing the Glory of His Grace
3. **Scripture Memory:** 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 1:27



## Ministry Skill

### Developing Your Personal Testimony

“Always being ready . . . to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15 NASB).

As others begin to witness God’s glory expressed through our lives, and to “turn aside” like Moses did at the burning bush, we must be ready! The testimony of the 1<sup>st</sup> century church was that people “took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Living out the glory of His grace will cause those around us to notice that we also have been with Him.

First comes our “walk” with Him, and then our “talk” of Him. Being prepared to talk of Him can begin with our personal testimony of coming to know Him at our new birth. Reflect on the time when you received Him as Savior and submitted to Him as Lord. Then complete the following sentences:

- My life before receiving Christ can be described as . . .
- Some of the events leading up to my salvation included . . .
- Some of the people God used in my life to draw me to Himself included . . .

- Some of the changes that God's Holy Spirit began to make in my life over time included . . .
  
- I'm thrilled to describe my relationship with Him today as . . .

After reflecting on these responses, you might wish to write out your testimony in narrative form, being prepared to share it as God provides opportunities.



## Life Application

### Sharing the Glory of His Grace

“Faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10).

Imagine being given a multi-faceted diamond with many aspects to its brilliance and worth. God’s grace is just such a priceless, many-sided gift!

Imagine that one facet of His grace is His **acceptance**, and that we have the opportunity and privilege to share it with others. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 15:7).

To whom did you previously indicate that you might better express God’s acceptance? Write that person’s name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Accepting this person might involve:

- Giving him/her another chance when something has been done wrong.
- Allowing him/her to think, act, or feel differently from you.
- Loving him/her in spite of offenses.
- Speaking words like:
  - “*What you did was wrong, but I still love you and want a relationship with you.*”
  - “*We do think differently on that issue, but I still want to be your friend.*”
  - “*No matter what you do, I will always love you.*”

Pause to consider how this person might receive God’s gracious acceptance through you—how might you freely give it this week?

*The Lord has impressed me to give His acceptance in a special way this week to \_\_\_\_\_  
by \_\_\_\_\_.*

Now imagine that another facet of God's grace is revealed as you encounter His **encouragement**. Maybe while reading the Word, you are reminded by the Spirit that "Through . . . the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4), and challenged to "Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

To whom did you previously indicate that you might better express God's encouragement?  
Write that person's name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Encouraging this person might involve:

- Making a phone call, writing a card, or sending an email to check on him/her.
- Promising to pray for him/her and then actually praying on a regular basis.
- Spending personal time with him/her in order to hear what he/she is working on, and then urging persistence toward the goal.
- Speaking words like: *"You can do it!"*  
*"I believe in you and in what God is doing in you."*  
*"Keep at it—I know you can succeed!"*

Pause to consider how this person might receive God's gracious encouragement through you—how might you freely give it this week?

*The Lord has impressed me to give His encouragement in a special way this week to \_\_\_\_\_  
by \_\_\_\_\_.*

Next, imagine that God turns the beautiful "grace diamond" ever so slightly to reveal yet another facet of His grace: His **support**. "Bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2 NASB). The law of Christ is the law of love, and He has first loved us by bearing the burden of our sins upon the cross.

To whom did you previously indicate that you might better express God's support? Write that person's name here: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting this person might involve:

Noticing that he/she is under stress and then giving specific help (such as bringing a meal, doing work around the house or office, assisting with a move, running errands, or providing child-care) in order to alleviate it.

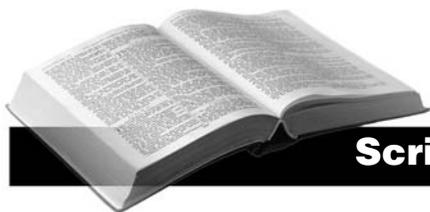
Speaking words like: *"I can tell you are under stress and I'd like to help. I've got three hours tomorrow afternoon. What could I do to support you?"* (If the answer is uncertain, suggest some possibilities.)

Pause to consider how this person might receive God's gracious support through you—how might you freely give it this week?

*The Lord has impressed me to give His support in a special way this week to \_\_\_\_\_*  
*by \_\_\_\_\_.*

You have now identified three aspects of God's glorious grace that He could share through you. His glory is resident in you. You can now express the glory of His grace to the people you have identified.

In the next seven days, would you make at least one of these possibilities into reality? After you do, share what God has done in and through you with your partner or small group when you meet again.



## **Scripture Memory**

### **1 Corinthians 10:31**

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

### **Colossians 1:27**

“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”