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Project WorldReach (T&M™ ministry operation)

Dr. George Patterson (Originating Author)

SEAN International



Contact: **Project WorldReach PWR™**

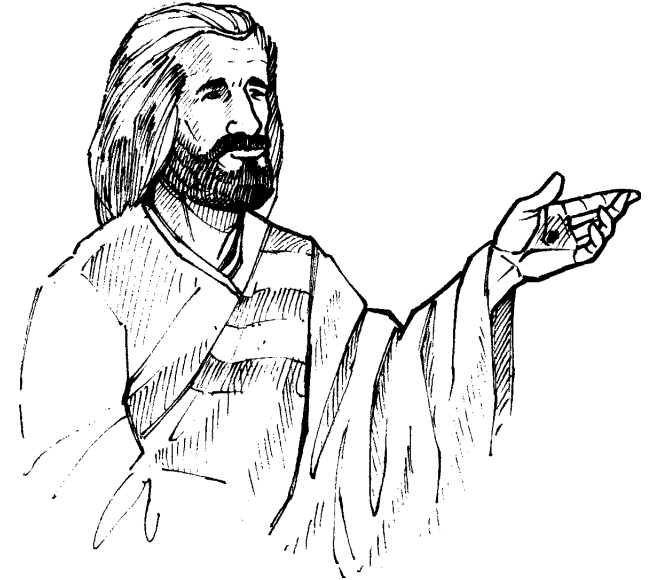
474 - 800 - 15355 - 24th Ave  
Surrey BC, Canada  
V4A 2H9

E-mail: [pwr@trainandmultiply.com](mailto:pwr@trainandmultiply.com)

Website: <http://www.trainandmultiply.com>

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# **River of Grace**



**Pastoral Leader Training Booklet**

# **63**

**Train & Multiply™**



**T&M™**

# RIVER OF GRACE

*“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!”*

(Isaiah 55:1)

*“They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life...”*

(Psalm 36:8-9)

*“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”*

(Revelation 22:1-2)

Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*”

(John 7:37-38)

## NOTES

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want,' she says. To protect herself from dogmas and the truths of Scripture, true science and history, she builds a shell around herself that is more confining than the worst dogma. She locks herself in her own little dream world. She says she's free, but no one is free unless he loves with the kind of love that only God's grace can bring. We'll pray for her."

"Why do you say that love assures our freedom?" Marla asks.

"Joseph helped me think this through. Follow the logic. Only a truly free man can do whatever he wants, right? A sinful man cannot do whatever he wants because he wants to do bad things. Police, society, his conscience and eventually God will restrain him. Only a thoroughly good man can be allowed to be free to do whatever he wants, because what he wants to do is always good. Only a person who loves God with his whole heart and his neighbor as himself is truly good; Jesus said to love that way fulfills the whole law."

"I see. People who truly love—in the Christian way—can do what they want, because what they want to do is always good for others. Yes! I see it now! In heaven we'll have no sin; we'll love God and each other so much that we'll finally be perfectly free to do whatever we want."

"Yes. For all eternity we'll be free to serve God and one another in love—the greatest display of grace of all."

This vast river of grace streams constantly from God's throne. The Holy Spirit flows from God the Father at Christ's request to bring us abundant life (John 14:16-17). Satan, however, lures our attention away from this abundant flow of grace. God in His unlimited wisdom lets him do it; He lets the devil lie to test our trust. The river runs near enough for us to drink at any moment; the Spirit of God is as close as the air we breathe. But when our faith weakens we listen to the demons' lies and look away from the stream. Our souls thirst; our spirits become dry. When people doubt God's limitless grace some turn legalistic — tied to nonessential religious laws. Then they keep others from drinking freely.

***The following fictitious story illustrates how we detect Satan's lies and let God's grace flow freely.***

## **Marla Finds the River of Grace**

Marla moved to the city and sought new friends. She met Shaji and before long they married. Soon after he tells her, "After work some friends are joining a Hindu swami to meditate. Why don't we try it? We haven't ever been baptized or practiced any religion. I'll meet you there at seven. Here's the address."

Marla yearns for deeper meaning in her life and agrees to experiment. The address is unclear, however, and she goes to the wrong house. "Is this where the meeting is for the meditation?" she asks at the door.

"Ah... Yes. You're early," a smiling lady about her age replies. "I'm Julie. My husband Joseph leads the group. Come in. Care for tea or coffee?"

Others arrive; some bring Bibles. Marla wonders where Shaji is. She hears them pray for each other in the name of Jesus Christ. A neighbor tells how she came to know His love. "I had so much to be forgiven. I never dreamed that God's grace could cover all the bad things I'd done, but..." She couldn't finish; she was crying for joy.

An older man began shyly, unaccustomed to speaking in public, "For weeks you begged God to heal my emphysema. He has. My doctor asked what new medicine I took. I said, 'Prayer in Jesus' name.' He said, 'It must be that. Nothing else I know of can account for such complete healing.'" They clap and praise the Lord.

Another younger man relates, "You know how miserable I was, addicted to drugs. But our Lord Jesus Christ freed me." Again they praise the Lord and promise to help him grow in the grace of God.

Marla hopes no one will ask her to speak. They discuss God's grace—His love, forgiveness and merciful goodness that go

studied about God's infinite holiness. God is perfect love and goodness. That's why He must punish sin. He wants His people to live forever with Him, but He is perfectly holy and cannot allow sin to enter His presence. Heaven would become hell if he did."

"If God punishes in anger then He is not a God of grace!"

"We cannot appreciate His grace until we see it against that painful background of sin, punishment, blood sacrifice and perfect judgment. Hell is the place of perfect justice. God's judgment will be absolutely fair, or He would cease to be God. Heaven is not the place of justice but of grace and mercy. If we do not appreciate Jesus' painful sacrifice and death we cannot appreciate God's grace. If you really appreciated it, you'd love Him so passionately that you'd never think of reducing him to a little god that humans invent in their imaginations. Please come back and learn about it with us. Will you?"

"They've brain-washed you, my dear! Thank goodness I've found freedom from all that. Thank you for the cookies. Good night."

She leaves and Marla falls in a chair. After a long moment of silence Shaji sighs. "I smelled marijuana. I also saw needle punctures on her arm. Heavy drugs. Those who refuse to build their beliefs on solid truths and plan their futures accordingly will become victims of evil men who plan things with worldly wisdom. She's a prisoner of her own idolatry. 'Believe what you

Arnold and Matt leave along with the other visitors they brought, except for a lady wearing very brightly colored clothes. When the meeting ends she lingers to talk with Marla and Shaji. "I have arrived at a very advanced level of faith," she announces. "I now see what few in the church ever discover. God is bigger than any one religion. Your truth is true for you; mine is true for me. It's so liberating! All these petty doctrines in the Bible are so confining! And violent! We are to wash in Jesus' blood! How primitive!" She laughs loudly. "What have Jesus' red corpuscles got to do with me?"

Shaji responds, "You are carving your own god, then. That's idolatry."

"I don't believe in idols, young man, much less make them!"

"Not in the old way with chisel and stone, but you invent your own beliefs about the spiritual world the very same way pagan idolaters have always done."

"You talk about grace," she continues. "I'll tell you what grace is. I don't believe in your prehistoric doctrine about God's judgment. A loving God won't punish people that way! He forgives all sin. Salvation is universal."

Marla answers "Ephesians 1:7 says we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. I could not appreciate this until we

beyond anything we deserve. Joseph reads Romans 5:21 and asks, "So what happens when people sin a lot?"

The young man answers, "It says that God's grace is greater than our sins. Just as sin brings death to us all in the end, grace brings us eternal life through Jesus Christ because He is righteous."

Joseph asks, "So how will we keep this infinite grace of God flowing in our lives and to others?"

Marla whispers to Julie, "Is this how you meditate? Is your husband Joseph the swami?"

"Oh, no! They're across the street, probably high on marijuana or something worse by now. We're a Christian home group, a cell, which is a tiny church within our larger one. Did you come here by mistake?"

"If so it was the best mistake I ever made. I never saw such joy. Can I bring my husband next time?"

## **Truth #1:**

### **The River of Grace Brings Forgiveness and New, Eternal Life — *Freely***

Marla goes to bed that night still thinking about what she has learned from God's Word. Grace is unearned; we receive it by

faith throughout our entire earthly life. She tries to explain it to Shaji the next day. "Whoa!" he begs. "What did you drink at that meeting? Or was it drugs? Strong incense? Wild pictures? Electronic messages?"

"Oh, no, Shaji! It's not like that. Grace is love, joy and forgiveness. It flows from God, through people. Not through electronic equipment, beautiful buildings, fragrant incense or mysterious sounding chants."

Julie and Joseph visit Marla and tell her and Shaji the good news about Christ's death and resurrection. "He promises pardon and eternal life to all who trust Him and turn to God" Joseph explains, quoting Luke 24:46-48. Shaji asks many questions.

After going to four meetings both Shaji and Marla agree to receive the Son of God as their Savior. Joseph urges, "To validate your faith and repentance, let's plan for you to be baptized."

"Wait, Joseph!" Arnold, an elder in the church and assistant leader of Joseph's small group, argues, "To confirm their conversion they need to straighten out everything in their lives first. Marla, you must learn to dress like a Christian. You use too many cosmetics. Shaji, you must stop drinking and using drugs. You must wait at least a year and attend our basic doctrine class." He hands Shaji a list. "Here are rules I wrote for you,

At the next meeting Marla is shocked when Arnold and Matt arrive with friends who had not attended the group for a long time. "We're going to have a business meeting to elect a new leader for our group," Matt announces. "We've had too much confusion under Joseph's leadership. I nominate Arnold."

An older man replies "I refuse to participate in an election with Joseph absent." Most of the others say "Amen!"

Matt makes another proposal. "We need bylaws for our group. I propose that we elect two elders to serve as group leaders for a term of two years." Arnold cries, "I second the motion!"

Shaji protests, "That may be very democratic, but what if the Holy Spirit gives three people the pastoral gift for shepherding? Your rules would limit it to two. Or what if God's gift lasts for more than two years? Does he take it away? Such man-made rules limit our freedom in Christ. Let's take advantage of this freedom that we have in small home groups, to allow more flexibility and freedom in the spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:17 assures us, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

"You sound just like Joseph!" Arnold gripes.

"I hope so. He left me in charge of this meeting and I'm doing what he asked. We're going to discuss how we will practice the 'one another' verses."

## Strategic Purpose of Teaching:

Law: preparation for Christ, Galatians 3:23-26

Spirit: transformation, ultimate perfection, Romans 8:23, 28-30

## Elders' Primary Role:

Law: ruled as judges, Exodus 18:24-26, Mark 15:1, Acts 15:10

Spirit: serve as humble shepherds, Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4,  
Matthew 20:25-28

## Stewardship Standard:

Law: tithe, Deuteronomy 12:11

Spirit: give as ones heart intends, cheerfully, 2 Corinthians 9:7,  
1 Corinthians 16:2

## Promised Inheritance:

Law: land, assured by human kinsman-redeemer, Genesis 12:1-2,  
17:1-8, Deuteronomy 6:1-3, Ruth 4:13-17

Spirit: guaranteed for eternity by the Holy Spirit, Genesis 12:3,  
Ephesians 1:3-14, Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 Peter 1:3-5

to become members of our group. They include leaving drugs, liquor, fornication, cards, all forms of dancing, smoking, bad language and hard rock music."

Julie leans over and quietly whispers into Marla's ear, "If we could see with angel's eyes right now, we'd see Satan fitting to his bow a flaming arrow labeled 'Legalism.' It's the virus of Pharisees. They say, 'Careful! Don't go so fast. Once one becomes a Christian, then he must earn approval by acting religious and avoiding our list of sins'."

"But Arnold," Joseph argues, "of course Shaji and Marla have repented from their sins and will leave them. But we discourage new believers if we delay our acceptance of them until they learn all the doctrine and prove themselves worthy in every detail. Your list reflects your personal opinions, not Scripture. Right now Shaji and Marla need assurance of God's grace more than at any other time." He reads from Acts several passages where converts were baptized without such delay to confirm their conversion, then pleads, "Shaji and Marla are newborn babies in Christ—spiritual infants. When you were born your mother did not leave you outside the door in the rain until you stopped dirtying your diapers. Likewise, we bring newborn converts into the warmth of the church body at once, just as the apostles always did, for Jews and Gentiles."

"But we can't receive people as members of our group who still have sin in their lives!" Arnold exclaims.

"The apostles received them," Julie protests. "They show us how to correct sins without condemning the sinner. First Corinthians corrects the worst sins, but without condemning people's souls. And that letter is for all of us today. The apostle graciously reminds all believers of our standing in God's grace then urges us because of who we are in Christ to stop living like the ungodly. We are God's forgiven children. Let me finish, Arnold. New Christians all have many faults; some are more obvious and public than others are. That's why God gave shepherds to the church, to lead them gently. In the New Testament, for example, baptism was for bad people."

"You degrade the church!"

"You degrade God's grace. Those who asked John to baptize them because they were good he called snakes and refused. But those who confessed their evil ways he baptized at once. The apostles baptized all who expressed repentance and faith, then taught and dealt with their bad habits later within the body of Christ under pastoral care."

"But times were different then," Arnold contends.

"Of course, but only in the social and material realms; technology has always been growing. But the spiritual realities we are talking now about are changeless. Sin is always sin. Grace has always been grace. The church's responsibility to bring it freely to God's newborn lambs has never changed, Arnold. They need it today as much as those Corinthians did, to whom Paul wrote."

## **Sanctification:**

Law: obeying specific laws, Leviticus 11, Isaiah 55:7

Spirit: spiritual rebirth, cultivating the fruit of the Spirit,  
Romans 14:1-9, 17, 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Timothy 4:3-5

## **Most Emphasized Requirement:**

Law: Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:1-17

Spirit: trust Jesus and His redemptive work, John 3:16,  
Luke 24:44-49

## **Form of Guidance Besides Written Word:**

Law: specific laws for all aspects of life, Exodus 18:20,  
Exodus 24:3

Spirit: Holy Spirit illuminates us, Ephesians 1:17-20, John 14:26,  
Romans 8:1-27

## **Main Revelation:**

Law: laws, visions, by angels, Numbers 12:6, Deuteronomy 31:9

Spirit: God becomes flesh, the living Word, John 1:1-3,  
Hebrews 1:1-3, 2:2-4



## Emphasis for Conduct:

- Law: obey detailed laws, for fear, Deuteronomy 6:1-3, 28:15-26, Exodus 20:18-20
- Spirit: live in the Spirit, obey for love, John 14:15, Romans 13:8-10, 2 Corinthians 3:3-11, Galatians 5:5-6, Matthew 22:37-40

## Means of Worship:

- Law: animal sacrifices and feasts, Leviticus 1-7 and 23
- Spirit: worship in spirit, break bread with believers, Acts 2:42



## Day of Week to Worship:

- Law: 7<sup>th</sup> day of week recalls old creation, Exodus 20:8-11, Revelation 21:1, Leviticus 25:1-7
- Spirit: 1<sup>st</sup> day celebrates new creation, beginning with Jesus' resurrection, Acts 20:7, Luke 24:1-7, Ephesians 2:6, Hebrews 4:4-11, Revelation 21:1-4

"I don't care," Arnold persists, "You'll do as I say, Shaji and Marla."

"They will obey Jesus!" Joseph counters. "We ask new believers simply to do what Jesus commands, Arnold. They obey Him out of love, not because we threaten them. We have no authority to force them to do things in any way different from what the apostles asked of new believers. Do you prefer that we all obey you instead of Christ, Arnold? And follow you instead of the apostles?"

"We'll see about that!" Arnold mutters. His friend Matt adds, "I think we should add fasting once a week to that list, Arnold. And tithing. We could buy a big mahogany pulpit with the money. That will make sure any converts are really sincere!"

"How legalistic, Matt!" Julie protests. "That is the Old Testament way to justify ourselves by our own works. The New Covenant offers grace through faith. We are kept by the risen Christ—not by our own efforts—and enjoy abundance of mercy, love and peace, as Jude 1-2 assures us. You confuse cause and effect. God sees our good works as the effect, the result or outcome of our salvation and walk with Christ, not the cause of it. Ephesians 2:8-10 makes this very plain, we are saved not by our good works but for them, that is, to do them. You, Matt and Arnold, reverse it, as all non-Christian religions do. All other religions teach that eternal salvation results from one's good works, from following old traditions and repeating ceremonies

over and over. Christ teaches the opposite. We are saved only by God's grace and the good works come as a result. They are an essential effect or result of our salvation."

Joseph visits Shaji and Marla the next evening. "I'm discouraged," Shaji confesses. "Arnold doesn't really believe we received God's grace after all. If our leaders have such doubts, how can we be sure?"

Joseph replies, "I talked with the pastor and the other elders of our church. They agreed that it's wrong to discourage you by requiring you to wait so long for baptism and acceptance by the group." He asks Shaji and Marla to read Romans 8 to assure them again of God's grace.

### Your Plans:

What is the best way to assure your people of their standing before God?

- ☐ Give them many strict rules to follow.
- ☐ Teach them to trust God and His love.

(Find the answer in Colossians 2:20 through 3:1.)

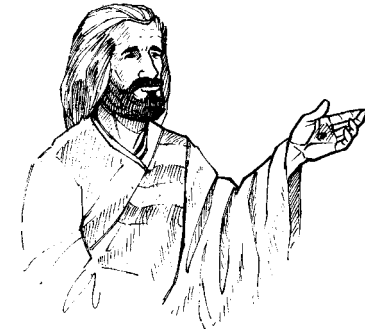
What is the best motivation for obedience?

- ☐ Love.
- ☐ Fear.

### Main King:

Law: David, conqueror of other nations, Leviticus 20:23,  
1 Samuel 18:7, 2 Samuel 7:8-16, Deuteronomy 20:16-18

Spirit: Jesus, Head of the elect of all nations, Matthew 28:18-20,  
Acts 1:8, Ephesians 5:23, Revelation 19:15-16



### Dealing With Surrounding Nations:

Law: separation, conquest of idolaters in the land, Exodus 6:6-7,  
Exodus 19:1-6, Deuteronomy 2:31, 4:1-9

Spirit: reconciliation, all disciplined, Matthew 28:18-20,  
Ephesians 2:12-22, 3:1-6, Colossians 1:19-22,  
Revelation 7:9

### God's Holiness:

Law: seeing or nearing God meant death, Judges 3:22,  
Exodus 19:12, Leviticus 10:1-2, Isaiah 6:1-7

Spirit: Jesus' holiness is imparted to us, Romans 5:18-19

## **Purpose:**

Law: law exposed sin, brought condemnation, Romans 3:19-20

Spirit: gives life, liberates, Colossians 2:11-17, Hebrews 5:9,  
2 Corinthians 3:17

## **God's Presence:**

Law: behind the veil in temporary temple, Exodus 25:8-9,26,  
40:35, Leviticus 16:2

Spirit: Holy Spirit dwells in us forever, John 14:16-17,  
1 Corinthians 3:16

## **Main Prophet:**

Law: Moses the lawgiver, John 1:17, Numbers 12:6-8

Spirit: Jesus brings grace, truth, John 1:1,14,17, Acts 3:22-26,  
Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:1-4

## **Main Priest:**

Law: Aaron in earthly Most Holy Place, Leviticus 16:1-27

Spirit: Jesus mediates for us in glory, Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:4-10,  
9:1-14, John 14:2-3

(Jesus said in John 14:15, "*If you love me, keep my commands.*")

Explain how you plan to help your people appreciate God's grace:

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## **Truth #2:**

### **The River of Grace Brings the "Fruit of the Spirit", Starting With Love**

Twang! Unseen by Shaji and Marla, Satan shoots another fiery arrow labeled Fear. Twang! A second missile flies, called Distrust. He aims toward Arnold and Matt. Twang! Twang! He fires 'Materialism' and 'Rationalism.' He laughs and shoots another: "Hell's strongest deterrent to the flow of grace—Power Hungry Leadership!"

"I don't feel the same joy now," Marla confesses to Julie when they meet next. "The river of grace dried up for me."

"Never, Marla. The Holy Spirit lives in you, bearing all of God's grace. It's always ours. We simply need to embrace those things that God gives us to assure us of His presence and His grace."

"But I don't feel anything."

"Don't try to work up your own feelings, Marla. Just relax and trust God. His Holy Spirit fills you with the 'Fruit of the Spirit,' starting with love. He then adds joy, peace and the other Christian virtues. This love from God enables true church body life as we practice the New Testament 'one another' commands and do the other things that build our assurance."

"What things, Julie? What really assures us of God's grace?"

"God assures us of His grace through His Word, the Bible. He also assures us through our gift-based ministries as we serve one another, pray and celebrate the Lord's Supper. Satan keeps plaguing our mind with doubts through his lies. He tries to drown out the voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, who assures us that we are God's beloved sons."

"Arnold made me think that I had to keep so a lot of rules, and understand all Biblical doctrine in order to please God."

"He's very rationalistic, Marla."

"What does that mean?"

"Rationalists have to analyze something rationally and understand it fully before they can believe it. But no man will ever understand God's grace. Grace is illogical. Justice is logical."

## **Means of Forgiveness:**

Law: animal sacrifice, of temporary value, Hebrews 10:8, Hebrews 9:6-10, and 10:1-4

Spirit: Jesus' one sacrifice, forever, Hebrews 9:10-11, 10:9-10

## **Type of Rewards and Punishments:**

Law: material, earthly, temporary, Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Spirit: spiritual, heavenly, eternal, Ephesians 1:3, John 3:16, Revelation 20:13-15

## **Ceremonial Seal:**

Law: circumcision of flesh, Genesis 17:10, Deuteronomy 10:16

Spirit: baptism (circumcision of heart), Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 2:29, Colossians 2:11-12

## **Memorial Meal:**

Law: Passover lamb, Exodus 12:1-15

Spirit: Jesus' body and blood, Luke 22:19-20

The next day Joseph prepares a chart for Shaji and Marla a chart showing the differences between the old law and its rules of conduct and the new life in the Spirit. They are amazed to see how the cross of Christ divides all history, and how God's form of rule for His people changed from law to being led by the Spirit after Jesus died and rose from the dead. The old rule for conduct was law; the new is life in the Spirit.

## **OLD: LAW (CONTRASTED WITH) NEW: SPIRIT**

### **Duration of Covenant:**

Law: temporary, Jeremiah 31:31-32, Hebrews 8:13

Spirit: eternal, Hebrews 9:15, 10:10-14

### **Greatest Miracle:**

Law: escape slavery through the sea, Exodus 14

Spirit: escape from death by resurrection, Luke 24, Romans 6:1-14



Even mercy can be understood logically. But grace defies all human reason. It's always undeserved. Christ, when he was spat upon, insulted, slapped and crucified paid them back with pure love. Such grace is beyond human understanding, Marla."

"Is that why Arnold says there is no mystery at all in the Lord's Supper? That bothered me, Julie, because we memorized 1 Corinthians 10:16 that says we participate in Jesus' body."

"That's the rationalistic point of view. But there is a divine mystery because God Himself takes it very seriously. In 1 Corinthians 11 He punished those who failed to discern Christ's body in the sacrament. Arnold, with his background, has to define it in purely rational terms. He leaves out any supernatural work. By his reasoning, the Holy Spirit takes a vacation when we break bread together! I used to think that way but I asked God to forgive me. He did, Marla. He taught me to be skeptical of my skepticism."

"Matt also discourages me. He worries all the time about money for the church."

"Matt is a materialist, Marla. He measures God's grace by the material things people have. He strangles every new idea anyone has for ministry because he fears that it might strain the church budget. In their hearts Matt and Arnold mean well, but they have embraced some very common, human philosophies."

That night Joseph meets with the other elders. Arnold stands and asserts, "I fear division if we let each home group leader have his way like you do, Joseph."

Matt adds, "I don't trust creative leaders like you, Joseph. We need tight control over the home groups from the top down, with strict rules. The home groups, acting like small churches, have too much freedom. They must use only the curriculum that we provide, and become simply Bible study groups."

"Please, Matt," Joseph groans. "That would destroy what God is doing in our home groups. They practice all the ministries that the New Testament requires for a group. God requires much more than Bible studies. And if we must all follow one teaching schedule, how can we apply our teaching to the current needs of our people?"

"We'll do all the ministries that the Bible requires," Arnold asserts. "We'll see that some group practices each one. Each group will have its own specific ministry and stick to it. One group can teach the Word. Another will do evangelism. Another can help the needy. Another will promote missions. We'll keep a tight control on all of them."

Joseph replies, "That program-based organization opposes what Scripture requires! It locks people into little boxes! It compartmentalizes the church! It gathers those with the same spiritual gift into one group, rather than harmonizing their different gifts in small groups with people having distinct

idolatrous nations who inhabited Israel's land were to be driven out or put to death. We'd slay male sheep for our weekly worship and travel to Jerusalem to do it. This all had its purpose then. The law exposed sin and prepared God's people for Christ, as Romans 3 and Galatians 3 explain."

"I see!" Marla exclaims. "That's why Jeremiah said the Old Covenant was temporary, to be replaced by our New Covenant in which God's law is written in our hearts instead of on stone."

"The letter of the law condemns and leads only to death," Joseph continues. "The Spirit brings eternal life. Listen—they're calling my flight. Before I go, hear what 2 Corinthians 3:6-10 reveals about life in the Spirit." He quickly reads:

*He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.*

Testament sinners were saved by grace through God's free forgiveness. This was seen in the blood sacrifices that were accepted by God because they stood for the blood of Christ. His blood even then covered sin, because in God's sight the blood of Christ was already effective for forgiveness, because all things, past, present and future, are known to God. Time does not rule Him as it does us; He created it! The Old Testament believers also needed God's grace and were not saved by law. That was the Pharisees' false interpretation of the Old Testament law."

"Do people still interpret the Old Testament wrongly?"

"Yes. Watch out for men who see little difference between the law of the Old Covenant and the New Testament standards of conduct. The death and resurrection of Jesus changed God's way of ruling forever from law to walking in the Spirit. Legalists still cling to the old Pharisee mentality of conduct by law. They multiply rules. They do not always use the Old Testament laws because some of them so obviously applied only to ancient times, but they find plenty of other man-made rules."

"Why do you say that some Old Testament laws applied only to ancient times?" Marla asks.

"If you gathered firewood on the Sabbath, you were liable to be stoned to death," Joseph replies. "Farmers were to let their fields lie without working them every seventh year. Children who cursed their parents were to receive punishment by death. The

ministries. Romans 12, as well as 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-16 all show that we are to bring people with different spiritual gifts together, not separate them. We serve one another with our different ministries in the same body. Small home groups can do this well."

"But that is hard to control," Arnold argues. "We need organization that gives top leaders real power."

"You worry too much about your power, Arnold. Let's rather trust the Holy Spirit to be in control of each group, and let them develop ministries as God leads, with the freedom that the New Testament offers."

"You always introduce new things, Joseph," Arnold replies. "Everyone in your group is doing something different. No one knows what you're doing from one week to the next. That destroys our unity. We need one standard practice."

"You confuse unity with conformity," Joseph replies. "True unity in Christ is not uniform practice. It's the opposite. The apostles taught about unity in the body, in the same passages that I mentioned that deal with gifts. Their teaching about unity was that we all have different gifts but that the Holy Spirit harmonizes our different ministries in love. We teach and equip our people for ministry, according to what edifies the people. Their needs and opportunities for ministry change constantly, just as we find in the New Testament."

The other elders agree with Joseph. At home, he finds Shaji and Marla waiting for him. "We don't know what to do, Joseph," Shaji explains. "We're tired of fearing that we might offend Arnold and Matt. They force us to do what they want out of fear of rejection by the group, its leaders or God. We cannot enjoy fellowship with such fear."

"I and the other elders are taking care of this, Shaji. They agreed that we should build organization around loving relationships and spiritual gifts. Arnold and Matt no longer have their support. Your job is to keep building loving relationships with others in the group. Love casts out fear, the Bible says."

"They are tyrants competing for power!" Marla complains.

"So don't pay them so much attention. The rest of us don't."

"They are stingy with God's grace!" Shaji adds.

"But they are powerless to stop its flow. Please, let's discuss something that is more joyful. I'm going to visit missionaries from our church and must be gone three weeks. While I'm gone I want you to help each person in our group to serve others with their different spiritual gifts. It's not necessary that everybody know all their gifts. But it is important that they practice the New Testament 'one anothers.' Please explain these 'one anothers' and help everyone practice them. Anything that keeps us from interacting with one another this way will stifle the free flow of God's grace."

Joseph adds, "Watch out for those who use the Word of God merely as content for their preaching or teaching. We must also use it as the norm for our group's activities. It's our norm for the way we witness, confirm new believers, organize for ministry, train pastors and place missionaries. Some churches, although they use the Bible for teaching content, do these things in a traditional way that is contrary to New Testament norms."

"We need balance," Julie adds. "Some Christians base their faith only on feelings and subjective experience. Others base it only on Scripture and very objective teaching. Others base everything on community life; they embrace only what makes their group happy. These views are all lopsided. The Holy Spirit helps us combine all three essentials: experience, objective truth and community. He helps our church and its groups to maintain balance. Otherwise we take our greatest strength to excess and it becomes our greatest weakness."

"My greatest struggle," Shaji admits, "is still with Arnold and Matt. They keep poking my conscience to make me feel guilty. Then I doubt that God is with me, helping me to overcome sin and to love others. Arnold keeps quoting verses from the Old Testament prophets about how God punishes us. He doesn't let up. He seems to forget the rest of the Bible."

"To really appreciate our freedom from the Old Testament law," Joseph explains, "we need to discern clearly between the Old Testament covenant based on law and the New Testament covenant based on faith. Both covenants offer grace. In the Old



"He has. But there is a time to be dogmatic," Joseph clarifies. "We need strong convictions, based on God's Word. We study it in depth not to argue with pride or earn grace, but because we appreciate the grace that we are already receiving."

"How will we ever learn all these things?" Marla sighs.

"You're on your way," Joseph assures her. "You and Shaji already understand more about God than many older Christians. The Holy Spirit illuminates your mind so you can apply God's Word to your life, your family, friends and even your enemies. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says the god of this world—Satan—blinds unbelievers' minds. Only by the miracle of grace can we discern God's truth. The Holy Spirit gives us an inner witness; He guides us in a supernatural way, as we see in Romans 8."

"Does He only use Scripture to illuminate our minds?" Marla asks.

"Scripture is our final authority," Joseph replies, "but the Psalms and Romans 1 reveal that God also uses other means to reveal truth. These include nature, history, friends, conscience, contemplation of spiritual realities, experience and on occasion dreams."

"I read in Jeremiah," Shaji recalls, "that false prophets use dreams. How do we detect false teaching?"

"It contradicts Scripture," Julie answers, "and it glorifies the man or a human organization, not God."

"You want me to do this?" Joseph exclaims. "I'm new! I don't know what you mean by spiritual gifts!"

"The original word in the Bible for this kind of gift was 'charisma' and is translated as graces or gifts. It's related to grace. God's grace also flows to us through our gift-based ministries as we serve one another. It's not just pastors who do ministry; we are to prepare all of you for it, as Ephesians 4:11-12 says."

"I thought ministry was mainly preaching."

"It's much more than that. God gives us all special grace for different ministries. These gift-based ministries are to bless others. We serve them through pastoral counseling by humbly correcting straying lambs and consoling those in grief, healing, helps and mercy, words of exhortation, prophecy and encouragement, stewardship, intercession and family devotions, marriage, family and child care, worship and planning special events for fellowship, evangelism, discipling and shepherding, applying the Word to life and training leaders, starting new churches and groups, and sending missionaries.

These all start by simply serving one another in love. Please teach the 'one anothers.' Marla can help."

"Do you think we can?" Shaji asks.

"I know you can, with God's help. We'll all be praying. The Holy Spirit's oil lubricates arthritic joints in old church bodies. Here." He hands Shaji the following list of New Testament 'One Another' commands.

## "ONE ANOTHER" COMMANDS

(Mark any that need attention in your church.)

### For fellowship within and between groups:

#### ☐ Love:

Love one another: John 13:34-35, John 15:12,17,  
Romans 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 John 3:11-14, 23,  
1 John 4:7, 1 John 11-12, 2 John 5, 1 Peter 1:22.

Love one another to fulfill the law: Romans 13:8.

Increase our love one for another: 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

Abound in love one for another: 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

Love each other deeply, to cover a multitude of sins: 1 Peter 4:8.

true events from history that stimulate their minds. Raise questions that help them meditate on God and His work. Ask them to write poems or songs that awaken their zeal. Let several of them work together to prepare the teaching rather than just one person. Let them plan learning activities together."

"Oh," Marla exclaims, "I'd love to help others prepare dramatic demonstrations, to teach God's Word! Can we act out the scene in the Garden of Eden? Or Ruth? I'd love to play queen Ester! Shaji would make a good prodigal son; he has the experience. Oh, will our leaders let us do such things?"

"You have that freedom now, Marla," Joseph assures her. "We've fought that spiritual battle, against proud dogmatism. It discourages new believers like you from discussing God's Word freely. It offends them by arguing too much. Proud dogmatists assume that God's grace comes through works—in this case, the good works mean much study, from their viewpoint."

"The proud dogmatist pictures a church as a building with only pulpits and pews," Julie says. "The people have only mouths or ears. He does not see the church as a living body, serving one another, warring against Satan in the surrounding community, feeding the starving and healing the sick."

"Oh, dear God, deliver us!" Shaji groans.

house. Both the wise man and the foolish man heard Jesus' words; that means they both had the right knowledge. But only the wise man loved Jesus enough to obey him."

Julie adds "The dogmatist drills a hole in the top of your head, inserts a funnel and downloads his opinions into your brain. Our younger generation doesn't want to be the passive 'hearers only' that James 1:22 warns against. They want a more interactive approach to learning with more discussion. They want more freedom to think for themselves."

"Isn't it dangerous for young people to think for themselves?" Shaji asks Julie.

"Without good shepherding, of course. If we don't help them to think by learning God's liberating Word, the idolaters of our world will capture their minds. They offer false gods and philosophies in the name of freedom. That always leads sooner or later to some form of idolatry that enslaves them."

"I'm of the younger generation," Marla replies. "We want dynamic relationships with other Christians. We want leaders that will make it happen. But how? How can we teach, for example, so that everyone present can participate actively and relate to one another as they learn?"

"Ask them to relate or act out Bible stories," Julie suggests. "Then ask them what the story teaches us about God, and what we should do about it. Use role-playing or short skits. Relate

## ☐ **Care:**

Have fellowship one with another: 1 John 1:7.

Forgive one another: Ephesians 3:13, 4:32, Colossians 3:13.

Greet one another with a holy kiss (embrace in some cultures): Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Peter 5:14.

Wait for one another to break bread: 1 Corinthians 11:33.

Bear one another's sufferings: 1 Corinthians 12:26.

## **For serving one another within and between groups:**

## ☐ **Serve:**

Serve one another with the gifts each person has received: 1 Peter 4:10.

Serve one another in love: Galatians 5:13.

Be kind to each other: 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

Care for one another: 1 Corinthians 12:25.

Bear each other's burdens: Galatians 6:2.

Wash one another's feet as a sign of humble service to others:  
John 13:14.

Work with one another: 1 Corinthians 3:9, 2 Corinthians 6:1.

### ☐ **Teach:**

Teach one another: Colossians 3:16.

Instruct one another: Romans 5:14.

### ☐ **Encourage:**

Encourage one another: Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 10:25.

Exhort one another: Hebrews 3:13.

Speak the truth to one another: Ephesians 4:25.

## **Truth #3:**

### **The River of Grace Brings Light and Freedom**

Shaji, Marla and Julie take Joseph to the airport. While waiting for his flight he reminds them, "Satan's lies are so commonly accepted that we need God's help to detect them. Christ gives us the shield of faith as Ephesians 6:16 says, to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. These are the arrows of Materialism, Rationalism, Individualism, Proud Dogmatism, Idolatry, Lust and many more. We are bombarded from every side by these doctrines of demons, in one way or another."

"We've resisted Satan's attacks against grace through materialism and rationalism," Shaji replies. "How does he use individualism to stifle the flow of grace?"

"You'll find out when you help our people to practice the 'one another' commands. Individualism wants only a private faith—a loner's religion. It hints that a closely-knit, loving group is for fanatics. Such isolation is the enemy of love. Churches that embrace Satan's individualism almost never organize seriously to practice the New Testament 'one another' commands.

"How does 'Proud Dogmatism' cancel grace?" Marla asks.

"It lays foundations on knowledge," Joseph answers, "but knowledge puffs us up, as 1 Corinthians 8:1 warns. Our one foundation is Jesus, the rock upon which the wise man built his

(If you are unsure of your answer, please read carefully Romans chapters 1-8, Ephesians chapters 1-2 and 1 Corinthians 10:16.)

Rationalism fails to allow God to bring us His supernatural grace through church ceremonies. What danger lies in trying to define God's grace and how He gives it to us by means of mere human logic and reason?

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Materialists define God's grace in terms of earthly wealth. Give a Biblical definition of grace:

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How do you plan to organize your church or home group to serve one another in love as God requires?

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Lay down our lives one for another: 1 John 3:16.

Spur one another to love and good deeds: Hebrews 10:24.

☐ **Edify:**

Edify (strengthen, build up) one another: 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:1, 11.

Edify one another with a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or its interpretation: 1 Corinthians 14:26.

☐ **Give spiritual care:**

Confess our sins one to another: James 5:16.

Pray for one another: James 5:16.



## For cultivating unity in and between groups:

### ☐ **Act with humility:**

Honor one another: Romans 12:10.

Be of one mind one with another: 2 Corinthians 13:11;  
Romans 12:16, and Romans 15:5.

Do not criticize one another: Romans 14:13.

Do not speak bad one of another: James 4:11, 5:9.

Submit to one another: Ephesians 5:21.

Be clothed with humility toward one another: 1 Peter 5:5.

### ☐ **Live in harmony:**

Have patience one with another: Ephesians 4:2.

Live in peace one with another: Mark 9:50.

Receive one another with hospitality: Romans 15:7, 1 Peter. 4:9.

Glorify God together: Romans 15:6.

## Review:

God promises to bless us in this life with:

- ☐ material blessings.
- ☐ spiritual blessings.

(Ephesians 1:3 promises spiritual blessings. Otherwise, how do we account for so many millions of Christians in the world who are quite poor materially? They are heirs, however, of riches in glory and will reign there with Christ.)

What is the best way to assure your people of their standing before God?

- ☐ Keep them always fearing that they will break some rule and fall from God's grace.
- ☐ Make them feel guilty for all their sins.
- ☐ Remove all barriers to the flow of God's grace by teaching it from His Word, using it to serve others, thanking God for it daily and celebrating it regularly in the Lord's Supper.