



RHYTHMS OF GRACE

By definition, grace is a gift. Grace is receiving the unmerited favor of God. Some might question then - *what is a rhythm of grace?* How can grace be both a rhythm and a gift?

Grace is a gift that is received and applied by faith. In other words, when an individual believes the declaration of the gospel – they receive the overflowing grace of God (1 Timothy 1:14). Then when a follower of Jesus continues to walk in humble, dependent faith – they continue to experience being trained up by grace (Titus 2:11-12). This faith looks like *knowing* and *applying* the God-prescribed rhythms of grace that are found in the Word. These rhythms were not invented by spiritual gurus or the church fathers – but rather they are graciously given by God in the Word. These rhythms of grace include things like:

Devoted to God's Word (Psalm 119:1-16)

Earnest in Dependent Prayer (Colossians 1:9-11)

Eager to Confess Sin to God & One Another (Psalm 32:1-5)

Constant in Life Together (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Embrace Suffering by Faith (1 Peter 4:12-19)

Honorable Mentions: fasting, serving, giving, going, & killing sin ¹

As followers of Christ walk by faith (which is defined by knowing what the Word says and then applying it to life by and because of faith), then they will begin to know the rich benefits of grace that come from continuing in rhythms of grace. As we by faith remain in these healthy and necessary rhythms of grace – we will be *trained up by grace*.

¹ Each of these *rhythms of grace* are equally valuable and necessary in their own right. Biblically they are all vital to growing in grace and ministering God's grace to others. For an excellent resource on understanding and applying the God-prescribed rhythms of grace, ***The Discipline of Grace*** by Jerry Bridges & ***Habits of Grace*** of David Mathis are both excellent, easy to read, and wonderfully encouraging regarding the various rhythms of grace that should be increasingly normalized in the Christian life.



WHAT IS LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST

Life together as a Christian is an intentional & continual move towards other followers of Jesus because you are firmly convinced that we all need one another to mature in Christ and to stay faithful to Christ. And in this – life together is a vital rhythm of grace that God has given to His people.

In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul makes a powerful case for *opening our hearts to one another*. He must make this argument because it is possible, even as Christians, to close our hearts off to one another due to pride, being self-willed, fearful of being known and judged, saving face, hypocrisy being exposed, and so much more.

It is crucial that we define life together biblically so that we can have convictional faith that are shaped by the Word. Therefore, we will walk through 2 Corinthians 6:11-13 together.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:11-13 – We have spoken openly to you, Corinthians; our heart has been opened wide. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. I speak as to my children; as a proper response, open your heart to us.

#1: Life Together in Christ Speaks Truth Openly – v. 11a

TEXT: *We have spoken openly to you* – v. 11a

- A. Life Together cannot be rooted in carnal, surface level, compatibility based friendships.

Much of what is called fellowship among Christians is little more than friendships with people who share a common profession of faith, common moral values, and common social rhythms.

- B. Life Together in Christ is only possibly when we know one another at the heart level & are able to speak openly at the heart level.

Notice how 2 Corinthians 6:11 unpacks life together – it requires speaking openly. For it is impossible to open up to one another and truly do life together if we are hiding who we really are and what is truly going on.



#2: Life Together in Christ Holds Nothing Back

TEXT: *our hearts have been opened wide* – v. 11b

- A. Life Together cannot be limited to attending meetings, participating in Bible studies, or going to an event.

When life together becomes participating in events, it becomes easy to check off spiritual boxes, thinking all the while that we are welcoming others in.

- B. Life Together in Christ begins when there is a complete and total welcoming of others into all of your life as a way of life.

To open up your heart is to welcome others into the recesses of your heart. To holding nothing back. To actually desire to be known because you are convinced by faith that it is necessary and good for you.

WHAT IT TAKES TO OPEN UP YOUR HEART: Transparency with others about your heart (i.e. fears, anxieties, doubts, sins, struggles, addictions, guilt, shame) is vital to opening up your heart to someone else. Without heart level transparency there can be no actual opening up of the heart (not opening up our hearts to others is something we are all very good at in the flesh). Your actions might appear spiritual but you will not be known.

TABLE DISCUSSION: Why do you struggle to open up your heart (i.e. doubts, fears, anxieties, temptations, failures, etc.) to a brother or sister in Christ?

#3: Life Together in Christ is Deeply Affectionate – v. 12

TEXT: *We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us* – v. 12

- A. Life Together cannot happen if we are merely passing along information that is void of genuine, deep affection for one another.

Far too often – Christian friendships are awkward, spiritual(ish), tip-toe around everything significant kind of relationships. Because of this, Christians end up going to support groups or peer groups outside the local church to find any form of real help or significant care.

- B. Life Together in Christ requires relational depth, genuine affection, and transparent, heart-level conversation that goes both ways (that is centered around God's grace & truth being applied to the heart).



Is this not how real friendship looks (i.e. relational depth, genuine affection, and a measure of transparency)? God's good design for life together in Christ is that because of the gospel, there is no condemnation between us and God and one another. Therefore, we are free to enter into a deeply affectionate relationship with one another without the fear of condemnation – no matter how well known we are.

This affection for one another moves us towards a genuine thoughtfulness with one another. This thoughtfulness compels us to serve one another in sacrificial ways and speak to one another with Truth-filled words. This thoughtfulness (rooted in a gospel-motivated affection) also compels us to move towards one another in kind, gracious, sacrificial ways (i.e. deep affection).

#4: Life Together in Christ is the Ultimate Family – v. 13

TEXT: *I speak as to my children; as a proper response, open your heart to us – v. 13*

A. Life Together has a Familial Intimacy that is Right, True, and Good

The familial imagery is helpful because in the flesh we are skilled separating the family from God biological family. In the flesh, we can check a box when it comes to our faith-family. But Paul is pressing into the eternal family, the family of God, and is speaking to his brothers & sisters as a parent would to his/her children.

B. Life Together is not Always Easy – but it is Always Good

At times, you open your heart up to others, but they close their heart to you. Just like a parent does with a child, we continue to keep our hearts open to one another. We bear patiently with one another. We endure suffering from one another and with one another.

Being part of this faith-family is a sacrificial commitment to one another. Just as family life is not always convenient, life in the family of God is equally inconvenient but absolutely necessary and worth it (both for your good and the good of one another).

Like any healthy biological family – there is a unique measure of dependence on one another. This familial dependence is what causes us to move naturally and normally towards inconveniencing our biological family members. Similarly – Life Together in Christ is wonderfully inconvenient as we depend on one another to walk by faith.



TABLE DISCUSSION: What would change if you had this kind of affection for the people at your table tonight?

HOW LIFE TOGETHER IS A RHYTHM OF GRACE

When we embrace & submit to a biblically defined life together by faith, we begin to enjoy the grace of God that is promised to all who welcome others into their hearts and lives by faith.

Like all other rhythms of grace, we must first be informed by the Word (for that is where convictions are formed) and then we must put those convictions into practice (by faith we apply the convictions that have been formed by the Word). When we submit to the God-revealed rhythms of grace, we begin to enjoy the rich blessings of grace that is promised in & through those rhythms.

#1: Life Together Keeps Me Aware of My Heart

TEXT: *The purpose of a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out* – Proverbs 20:5

HONEST ASSESSMENT: We are less aware of our own hearts than we think we are.

GOD'S GRACIOUS GIFT: Our faith-family is a gift of grace to help us unpack, nuance, and know our own hearts.

#2: Life Together Keeps My Heart Tender to the Lord

TEXT: *Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start. As it is said: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion* – Hebrews 3:12-15

HONEST ASSESSMENT: A Christian in isolation is the devil's playground. The ultimate play of every temptation and every sin is to *turn you away from the living God*.

THE GRACIOUS SOLUTION: Encourage one another continually with the Word of God so that none are hardened by sin's deceitfulness.



TABLE DISCUSSION: How has my heart grown hard at times in my Christian experience due to isolation (remember - isolation can be mental or physical or both)?

#3: Life Together Keeps Me Faithful for the Long Haul

TEXT: *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near – Hebrews 10:23-25*

HONEST ASSESSMENT: It is easy to begin well and hard to finish well.

THE GRACIOUS SOLUTION: God has kindly given us the family of God to continually speak His truth into our hearts so *that* we will hold fast to our confession.

TABLE DISCUSSION: If God's gracious solution to our longevity in the faith is open & honest life together with one another, why are we so slow to embrace this gracious gift of God?

BIBLICAL CASE STUDIES FOR LIFE TOGETHER

Throughout the Bible, when God's people were going astray, God used an embodied messenger to bring His truth. Those who brought God's truth knew the ones they came to well enough to speak God's truth to a particular moment. Even though God could have used a different means (i.e a supernatural voice from heaven or the quiet conviction of the Holy Spirit), God most often uses an individual to bring and to speak His truth to the one going astray.

#1: David Needed Nathan – when David went his own way and sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah (not to mention his other wife, children, the nation, and God), God sent Nathan the prophet to speak truth to David - 2 Samuel 12:1-15

#2: Peter Needed Paul – when Peter was becoming a theological coward and wanted to be accepted by both the Jewish and Christian community, God sent Paul to speak God's truth to Peter – Galatians 2:11-14

#3: Paul Needed Titus – when Paul was discouraged God sent him Titus to be a minister of grace & encouragement – 2 Corinthians 7:6

#4: Moses Needed Jethro – when Moses was called to lead the Israelites, he couldn't keep up with the work. He was going to burn out and Israel would not be



led well. God used Jethro to speak wisdom into Moses's life and Moses submitted to Jethro's wisdom as though it was from God – Exodus 18:13-23

TABLE DISCUSSION: Does anyone know you well enough to speak God's truth to the specific matters of your heart?

HOW TO PRACTICE THE RHYTHM OF LIFE TOGETHER

#1: Life Together is a way of life not an event on the calendar ²

#2: Life Together begins with you opening up your heart to others

#3: Life Together requires humbly receiving God's truth from others (applied to your heart & life)

#4: Life Together requires gently speaking God's truth into the hearts & lives of others

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

#1: Why is it essential to be convinced by the Word of the absolute necessity of life together with fellow Christians?

#2: Why is it essential for the Word of God to define what life together is and does?

#3: What would it take for you to actually embrace and practice this kind of Life Together by faith?

² The issue here is about disposition vs. commitment of time. Regardless of how many "Christian commitments" are on your calendar, the flavor of your life is working out your heart with your fellow Christian.