

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

**F**or a number of years, as a Christ-follower and as a pastor, I lived the wrong way round. For reasons of which I am only partly aware, I struggled to believe that God really loved me. While I knew with my head all about the gospel of grace, the gap between my head and heart was vast. Deep down I felt that I needed to *earn* God's grace. If I achieved enough in my work, then perhaps I could get God to like me. It was a disastrous way to live. I started out trying to be fruitful, so that I could be significant, hoping then to gain sustenance so that I might be accepted. Not surprisingly, very early in my ministry I found myself living on the edges of emotional burnout and spiritual exhaustion.

Along the way, I received a treasure during my training in the early nineties with the UK-based Acorn Healing Trust in their Christian Listeners Training Program. There the Rev. Anne Long shared with us a simple model called the Cycle of Grace. Based on the Gospel explorations of a British psychiatrist by the name of Frank Lake and the well-known theologian Emil Brunner, this model described the balanced rhythms in which Jesus of Nazareth lived and ministered.\* That gift-moment showed me that a more grace-filled way to live and minister existed.

Over the years, the Cycle of Grace has become a good friend. Not only have my own life and ministry been shaped by its insights, I have enjoyed sharing it with colleagues in ministry whenever possible. Usually its uncomplicated wisdom strikes a deep responsive chord. Those who hear about it want to explore it with others. Thankfully, someone who valued the richness of the model was prepared to invest huge amounts of time, energy, and competence in order to make it more widely available. That person was Jerry Haas of Upper Room Ministries. This resource expresses his faithful commitment to the soul-care of all involved in the ministry of the local congregation.

Jerry introduces the different dimensions of the Cycle of Grace so that you can either explore it on your own or with a small group. I have little doubt that you too will find it helpful. As I mentioned above, it has helped me to live the right way round. I would like to tell you how this happened for me. The Cycle of Grace, based on the life of Jesus, has four dimensions. It illustrates the continual resourcing of Jesus by the Spirit for Jesus' ministry with and to others. Here are several dimensions that I found most helpful.

The first dimension of the Cycle of Grace makes it obvious that the starting point for fruitful and effective ministry involves a clear sense of identity. This was Jesus' starting

point. His public mission began only after he gained assurance in his baptism that his heavenly parent delighted in him unconditionally. Furthermore, throughout each stage of his life and ministry, he needed a freshly confirmed knowledge of his own identity as Beloved of God. This inward assurance of being beloved by God set Jesus free to be his own person, to pour himself out in extravagant self-giving, and finally to lay his life down in complete surrender on the cross.

I can still remember as I listened to Anne describe the Cycle of Grace how different my rhythms of life and ministry seemed to be. I was living and ministering in the opposite direction! I sought to gain a sense of acceptance from God through endless attempts to achieve more and more. Jesus' gospel invitation was clear: turn around and learn to live and minister the Jesus-way round. This is what I have been seeking to do ever since. While I still catch myself falling back into old ways again and again, the Cycle of Grace is always only a step away. I shudder to think how life and ministry would be for me without it.

The second dimension of the Cycle of Grace underlines the absolute necessity for ongoing sustenance in our life with God. I found it eye-opening to note the many ways in which Jesus was renewed regularly in body, mind, and spirit. Grace flowed into his life through many different means. Again the invitation was clear. If Jesus needed to be sustained in an ongoing way for life and ministry, then so did I. Like Jesus, I needed to find those ways that would best open my life and ministry to the nourishing grace of God and then build these practices into my life.

This dimension of sustenance in the Cycle of Grace also encouraged me to build my personal spiritual practices around those activities that nourish and bring joy to my life. It does not matter whether they are "religious" or not. Presently, my rule of life has practices like setting aside each Monday evening to be with my wife, going for a daily run, intentionally deepening friendships on a Friday night, and spending time alone with each of my children—besides my commitments to some solitude and silence, praying with the scriptures, and ongoing study. In all these ways I experience the grace of God sustaining me for life and ministry.

The third and fourth dimensions of the Cycle of Grace help us see that our personal ministry vocation requires answers to two questions: Who am I called to be? What I am called to do? The model shows that Jesus ministered through the significance of who he was *and* the fruitfulness of what he did. However, it also illustrates that *being* always precedes *doing*, an important sequence. Hence, even in his powerlessness on the cross, Jesus continued to minister through who he was to those around him.

This part of the Cycle of Grace has challenged me ever since my introduction to it. Not only have I sometimes limited my ministry vocation to those aspects I believe God wants me to do, I have also tended to put doing before being. This approach has often led toward placing my sense of significance in my achievements. Now I find myself trying to

live the other way round. Over recent years it has been immensely life-giving and liberating to discern how God is calling me to be a sign of the love of Christ to those around me.

I do not want to say too much more. I hope though that I have whetted your appetite to explore further. Thanks to Jerry Haas you have in your hands an accessible resource that will help you to do this. It will introduce you to the Cycle of Grace and enable you to participate in its rhythms fully.

The implications of this model for our relationships, the way we raise our children, the structures of our congregations, as well as our personal lives are immense. I pray that the Spirit will use this model to help you, like it has helped me and continues to do so, to live the Jesus-way round.

—Trevor Hudson

\*In his writings Dr. Frank Lake refers to this conceptual model as the Dynamic Cycle. It represented his attempt to correlate the dynamics of a well-functioning personality and spiritual health based upon the life of Jesus Christ. In my own presentations of the model I have relied on his pioneering work, while adding my own understanding of the life of Jesus in the Gospels.