INTRODUCTION to the RHYTHMS of GRACE

Why they unlock the growth of believers everywhere

PATRICK HEGARTY
THE IMPOSSIBLE MADE POSSIBLE

How do you work sacrificially for God without becoming exhausted?

How can you enjoy restful time in God’s presence without neglecting the needs of the world?

You can’t, it is impossible!

That is unless you are doing both those things with God’s unlimited help.

You are invited to live fruitfully in the rhythms of grace – a way of partnering with God in every aspect of life.

These pages introduce some of the principles that have proven to transform the hearts of anyone prepared to rely on God for strength and breakthrough.

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For over a decade I had the chance to learn, develop and apply the ideas found here. They work as powerfully today as they have for millennia.
An Invitation to Walk & Work with God

We are created to be in union with God. From Genesis to Revelation we consistently see the theme of God inviting us into an abiding relationship.

Jesus was clear – “Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5) ... so, anything worth doing in life will naturally require God’s help!

And yet we constantly default to doing things our way and in our own strength. This is the reason so many well-intentioned believers get stuck or stale in their faith – they are doing it without God! Union with God can easily become an idea we agree with, and yet be a promise we are unable to embrace.

What is a Rhythm of Grace?

I use this term to describe the various dynamics where you and God engage together to bear kingdom fruit. The rhythms take two elements that complement each other, and join them in a way that brings sustainable and growing life. At times the two elements may have previously seemed to oppose each other, but by joining them they produce an outcome that unlocks growth and calling.

In each rhythm you play your part, and God plays His. And yet they bring great fruit in the absence of striving.

Rhythms of Grace in God’s Created Order

In Genesis we see a beautiful picture of God walking with Adam in the garden, following his day of fruitful work. Walking & Working formed a rhythm that brought fruitfulness, purpose as well as rest. After the fall, it seemed that this dynamic was lost.

But then Jesus invited us back into that glorious rhythm: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace” (Matthew 11:28-30 The Message).

A life of fruitful rest was made available again in the person of Jesus.
Rhythms of Grace in Discipleship and Growth

For over a decade I was a pastor of spiritual development. My job was to help people progress in their walk with God. In that time I saw thousands of spiritual journeys become unstuck as disciples encountered God and adopted new disciplines.

I also found that some people remained stalled or stale in their journey towards truly fruitful Christ-centredness.

As I analysed the process that I had seen bring radical breakthrough to so many, I discovered over and again the rhythms of grace consistently playing a significant role at key points of change.

Stages and Movements
Throughout the last ½ century or so, much research has been conducted into the stages of spiritual maturity, and how to move through them. Findings by James F. Engel and more recently the Reveal material detailed these stages of growth, fleshing out the journey that 1 Cor. 2-3 describes as going from natural, to carnal, to spiritual people.

Reveal’s research importantly noted the presence of key movements between the stages of growth. Each of these movements was catalysed by a common set of beliefs and actions.

I went looking deeper however, because in my own observations I had seen that God too was doing a work in those that were growing. It was a partnership. All Reveal’s findings were obviously correct, but our actions alone are not enough to transform us. God’s grace must be involved somewhere or there simply cannot be such good fruit!

After looking, learning, running programs & retreats, and experimenting with over a million words of our own developmental content, I came to this conclusion – each movement is activated by the symbiotic cooperation of God and the individual, often in a specific dynamic that is relevant to that stage.

Awareness of that process, and the part both God and the person plays, greatly increased the momentum of the disciple’s journey in our context.

In this introduction, I highlight three specific rhythms of grace that relate to the discipleship process. Each rhythm produces its own fruit, and all these rhythms can be running all the time. However I found it helpful to emphasise one in particular for each stage.

The following illustration lays out the stages of spiritual growth and the rhythms that can catalyse movement.

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1. Reveal was an initiative of Willow Creek Community Church - Chicago

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CORE ELEMENTS OF THE KINGDOM

God’s Spirit is developing in us the things that matter in His kingdom, and which will endure for eternity.

1 Corinthians 13:13 identifies what these core elements are, saying: “these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love”

There is a rhythm of grace for each:

Spirit & Truth produces FAITH
The righteous live by faith from beginning to end (Romans 1:17). We can develop faith in partnership with God by combining Spirit & Truth. We dwell on what is true, and God testifies to our Spirit, revealing Himself at that deep level.

Repentance & Belief produces HOPE
God gives theological permission for optimism because He invites us to see things from heaven’s limitless perspective. By changing our thinking to be like His (repentance) and relying on Him for power (belief) we can embrace a preferred future.

Faith & Deeds produces LOVE
Faith in God will always compel an action. We are to work in the gifts in proportion to our faith. These two combine to release God’s love to the world.
## Critical Stages and Movements in Spiritual Growth

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*adapted

Rhythm 1: Spirit & Truth releases Faith

Whilst faith is something that grows throughout our entire walk with Christ, it is particularly important to establish it in the early days of salvation and growth.

In a world that bombards us with messages of unbelief towards God, how does one come to believe?

Two key elements combine to build our faith: Understanding of truth about who God is and what He says about Himself; and a spiritual awareness and reliance on this God who is real.

**Spirit:** No one comes to me unless the Father draw him (John 6:44). The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (Romans 8:16).

**Truth:** Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ (Romans 10:17).

Getting Things Started
Faith ultimately comes from knowing and experiencing God – and so to get the rhythm started, we must actually want to know God more. If that hunger is combined with a willingness to surrender our self-will and self-reliance, then we have created an irresistible environment for God’s transformative grace.

From there, each element does its job to lead us into a greater experience of the other. Jesus said that the **Spirit leads us in to truth** (John 16:13); and obviously a pursuit of theological **truth will lead us to a greater reliance on the Spirit** to fulfil all that the cross of Christ made available to us.

Facets of Faith
Faith in God takes many forms, but the core faith that this rhythm produces is foundational to a fruitful life. Some of the key facets of this faith are: Faith in the atoning work of Christ; Faith in God’s word; Faith in the nature of God; and Faith in the sufficiency of God’s grace.

The following infographic shows the contributing elements and subsequent fruit of the rhythm called Spirit & Truth.
God at work in us

The SPIRIT works in us to:
Draw us to God (John 6:44)
Reveals Himself (Luke 10:22)
Redeems us (Galatians 3:3; John 3:16)
Place His Spirit within us (2 Cor. 1:22)

Sustaining factors
(keeping the engine running)

Disciplines: Reflect on scripture, confession
Relationships: Spiritual friends
Activities: Serve in the church
Church programs: Church services, small group

Our work with God

We pursue TRUTH by:
Seeking God through scripture (Romans 10:17)
Seeking God through prayer (Hebrews 11:6)
Acceptance of the gospel (Eph. 1:13)
Developing early beliefs & disciplines of Christianity (2 John 1:6)

The fruit of this rhythm of grace is FAITH in:

The atoning work of Christ
1 John 2:2; Hebrews 9:12
Person relies on Jesus’ death to pay the price for their sin

God’s word
2 Tim.: 14-16; Ps 119:42
Person relies on God alone as means of salvation and provision of needs

Nature & character of God
1 John 4:16; Romans 8:31
Person relies on God as a loving Father and constant helper

God’s sufficiency
Ps. 16:5; Ps. 73:26; 2 Cor. 12:9
Person relies on God alone as means of salvation and provision of needs

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” John 4:24

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Rhythm 2: Repentance & Belief releases Hope

When Jesus preached, even to those who already believed in God, He would say “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15)

Most of us quickly get familiar with the idea of repentance, but to believe in God for transformation is not so common. And yet this is the single biggest key to becoming what 1 Corinthians 3:1 defined as *pnuematikos*: the spiritual person.

Instead, many stall in their discipleship journey. By not being able to embrace the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they remain carnal – essentially driven by their old nature. These people frequently lose hope in the power of the gospel. Eventually they cannot envision a future where their sin is overcome or that they experience freedom in Christ. Despite routine confession and prayer, they remain locked down and ultimately without hope.

**Repent:** Repentance is not merely confession of sin or saying sorry. It is to change the way we think about ourselves, God, and the sinful fruit in our life. We need to turn to Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:16)

**Believe:** To believe in Jesus means I rely on Him, not just agree that He exists. By relying on the power of the Spirit to live as God wants, we are positioned to receive His tangible and enabling grace. One of the most powerful skills a believer can possess is knowing how to embrace the tangible strength of the Spirit.

The Root & Fruit of Hope

As with other rhythms of grace, this one is fuelled by spiritual hunger. In this case it is a genuine desire to grow in Christ. If we sincerely want to grow, we will. If we don’t want to, we simply won’t.

Much of the transformative fruit of this process is related to how we begin to see ourselves in relationship with God. Both good and bad fruit has roots in our inner world. If our identity and intimacy with God is real, then our lives will eventually reflect that abundance.

The most impacting aspect of repentance is related to our relationship with God. We are to switch our view of Him from that of a boss, to that of our loving Father. By relating to Him as a child we are able to embrace the abundant provision of the Father. Hope is restored for a preferred future when we learn to live from the fullness of the Spirit’s power which gives us strength where & when we need it.

The following infographic shows contributing elements and subsequent fruit of the rhythm called Repent & Believe.

A SHIFT FROM SLAVES TO SONS

The transition from being one who is driven by the old nature, to one who is empowered by the Spirit is a significant one.

Paul described this shift in radical terms saying: “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Rom 8:15)

Being a son is a positional term. It relates to “coming of age”, being released to take responsibility to grow the family estate.

That is what the presence of the Spirit releases in those who believe! We don’t need to continually ask God for guidance about every little thing, we walk in the freedom to choose wisely and advance God’s kingdom.

This rhythm of grace has been powerful in unlocking the spiritual lives of people all over the world.

By repenting of the mindset of a slave, and believing in the power of God’s Spirit, anything thing is possible, and hope is restored.
God at work in us
We rely on the SPIRIT to:
Convict of sin (John 16:8)
Empower us to overcome (Romans 8:5-11)
Develop the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25)
Increase intimacy (John 14:17;26)

Hunger
“I want to GROW in Christ-likeness”
Catalysing factor
Willingness to humbly SUBMIT specific areas of my life as God convicts

Our work with God
We REPENT of the old nature by:
Recognising the lies and entanglements of our life (Mark 4:18-19)
Confessing and surrendering our will to God (James 4:7)
Choosing to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25)

Sustaining factors
(keeping the engine running)
Disciplines: Reflect on scripture, pray
Relationships: Spiritual friends
Activities: Evangelism, serve needy
Church programs: Small groups, serve in church

The fruit of this rhythm of grace is HOPE through:

Identity in Christ
2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 4:6-7
Person recognises their position as God’s son/daughter

Intimacy with God
Gal. 4:6; Romans 5:5
Person has increased sense of closeness and engagement with God through the Spirit

Empowerment of the Spirit
Eph 3:16; Col. 1:29; 2 Ti. 1:7
Person grows in keeping in step with, and being helped by the Spirit

Purpose & significance
Romans 8:17; Titus 3:7
Person becomes aware of a sense of calling and meaning for their life

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Rhythm 3: Faith & Deeds releases Love

The command we are most reluctant to obey is the one where we go into all the world. We are much more enthusiastic about knowing & growing in Jesus than we are in going.

That is because we seldom know how to receive love, and then release it in a way that fits the gifting and anointing we have. We are only called to steward the gifts we have been given, not those we have not been given. Peter and John demonstrated love in Acts 3 by releasing healing. Not everyone has that gift, but as they said “Such as I have I give to you” (Acts 3:6).

The love we have for the world is connected to the spiritual gifts God has given. As such, our deeds and faith are connected:

**Faith:** “I will show you my faith by my deeds” (James 2:18);

**Deeds:** “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If it is prophesying, then prophecy in accordance with your faith” (Romans 12:6)

Growing faith will grow your deeds. Deeds done in God’s power will drive you to trust only in Him. This third rhythm of grace is the only way to effectively and sustainably impact your world.

Love Received Enables Love to be Given

Paul once said that Christ’s love was the compelling force in his life (2 Corinthians 5:14). He was alluding to the reality of God’s love for him, and the unlimited potential that lies behind that love. Love embodies the very motivation and nature of God. Love cannot help but give of itself, releasing grace from an awareness of overflowing abundance.

Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they would become aware of this love, and therefore live out the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:16).

By appropriating the love we have received, and the gifts He has given to release that love, we can go effectively in His name. We can: Love God and our Neighbours; Love the fellowship of believers; Make disciples of all nations; and Advance the domain of God’s kingdom in our vocation, city and nation.

The following infographic shows the contributing elements and subsequent fruit of the rhythm called Faith & Deeds.
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God at work in us

We have FAITH in God:
I exercise gifts in proportion to my faith (Rom. 12:6)
I abide in and rely on God to bear fruit (John 15:5)
I am filled with a revelation of God's love (Eph. 3:16-19)
I live in rest by faith, knowing that God is the one who ultimately does the work. (Hebrews 4:2-10; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9)

Sustaining factors
(keeping the engine running)

Disciplines: Reflect on scripture; pray for others
Relationships: Spiritual friends
Activities: Focussed mission/ministry through gifts
Church programs: Serve needy, serve church

Hunger

“I want to GO in to the world”

Catalysing factor
Willingness to SACRIFICE all things for the sake of the gospel

Our work with God

My DEEDS are compelled by love for God & people:
(2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
I give from the overflow of what I have received (Acts 3:6)
I cooperate with what I see the Father doing (John 5:19)
I commit to focussed working in God’s strength (Col. 1:29)

The fruit of this rhythm of grace is LOVE shown through:

- Loving my neighbour
  Gal. 5:14; Mark 12:30-31
  Person reaches out intentionally to love family, friends and community

- Loving believers (church)
  John 13:34; 1 John 4:11-21
  Person shows grace to believers in Christ

- Making disciples
  Matthew 28:18-20
  Person demonstrates love by actively sharing their faith and growing others

- Advancing the kingdom
  Genesis 1:28
  Person sees every part of society as potential ground to bring kingdom influence

LOVE

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.” James 2:18
What’s Next?

Want to know more about the Rhythms of Grace? I am developing a growing library of resources for individuals, groups, pastors and churches. They will give you all the background and tools you need to grow personally, or lead others.

Personal Reading

*Unlocking the Rhythms of Grace* is designed to give you more insight into how each of the rhythms mentioned here can work for you. It is designed in a daily readings format so individuals, groups and churches can follow along. Small group material is included in the book to facilitate discussion and application of the principles.

**Available Formats:** Print, i-book, Kindle and Audio. Separate audio for each day can be downloaded from the website. Allows for convenient listening on any device.

Church-wide Series

Use the *Unlocking to the Rhythms of Grace* book as material for your whole church. Download sermon outlines and other resources at the website.

In-depth Discipleship Program

Full discipleship courses and other materials are being developed right now that dig deep in to specific rhythms of grace. This material will give you all you need to ensure the whole church can grow and learn with common language and theology.

Online Resources

Our website will be updated constantly with new material, blog posts, and resources for individuals and church leaders. Learn how to build a culture of growth; embrace the substantive work of God’s Spirit; and develop leaders.

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