

## CHAPTER 16

A summary of the book...

### **“TRUE FACED”**

by Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch

**This book draws a clear distinction between two very different underlying motives** – my determination to “*please God*” or to “*trust God*.” One results in a striving that never feels it has done enough to please Him; the other results in a trust that experiences His full pleasure. As believers, our motives will either keep us in unresolved sin and immaturity, or free us into God’s astonishing dream for our life.

**God wants you to discover “your destiny” and walk into the reasons He placed you on this earth.** He has a ticket of destiny with your name written on it – no matter how old, how broken, how tired, how frightened, or how many times you have failed. The dreams many believers have simply become “cruel mirages” – shimmering pools of a once naïve hope. Here is the reality – God’s dreams for you and me are ultimately not really about “*us*,” they are about “*others*” – for their benefit – loving them, guiding them, serving them, influencing them. There are no other types of God dreams. Nothing less or else will compel, attract, or seem worthy of this “*God heart within you*.” It is all about *His glorious kingdom*, and others being freed, healed, and convinced of who they really are.

**Think about it – God’s dreams for us reflects “His heart.”** One of God’s dreams is that we would influence others far more out of “*who we are*” than out of “*what we do*.” So, above all else, your destiny requires that you be a *maturing person* – maturing into the “likeness of Christ.” *True Faced* was written for those who pant for a life worth living; for those longing to see their God with eyes no longer filtered with fear, self-disgust, desperate proving. In a very real sense, we are all *performers* – because of sin we have lost confidence that we will always please our audience, so we have put on *masks*. As an unintended result, no one, not even the people we love, ever get to see *our true face*. Do you remember how mask-wearing got started? In the garden of Eden – “*I was naked, so I hid myself*.” Nakedness cried out to be covered – Adam and Eve fashioned leaves to hide what was true about them. When we lose all hope that we can be changed or “fixed,” we cover up. Mask wearers fall into 3 groups:

1. We live in the land of “doing just fine” – The truth is, we are not; we are weary of hurting, and we feel betrayed... even by God.
2. We look for “new techniques” that promise to help change us – We’ve admitted life isn’t fine. Those in this group grow increasingly more disillusioned and skeptical. We have convinced ourselves that they are answers, but we are befuddled that we can’t find them. What’s wrong with me? Nothing I try works. Maybe my performance disqualifies me. We start to lose all hope that we can change. We feel stuck in our deep insecurity and shame.
3. We are the “together folk” – We don’t need help. We’ve got it all together. We are the standard by which the industry is judged. We intimidate others... we know it’s because they are jealous. If they had our self-determination and discipline they wouldn’t have to be intimidated. We deny that we even wear a mask... but the truth about us is this: those who know us best wish they could tell us that... the truth is, we are emperors wearing no clothes.

**Most of us have deep, painful feelings**... distorted, dysfunctional thoughts... and befuddling behaviors that we feel an almost involuntary need to *mask*. Whenever we are unable or unwilling to deal with the

guilt or hurt of sin done by us or to us, then pain and confusion floods our lives. When sin remains unresolved, it causes a nagging sense in the heart that won't go away. We start trusting techniques, conscience-numbing medication, pop psychology, spiritual fads, and other nicely packaged teachings. Next thing we know, we are looking for a top-of-the-line mask... all the while, our heart whispers, "You're a fake! an impostor! a loser!"

**It is very expensive to wear a mask.** For one thing, no one – not even those we love – ever gets to see our face; even though there are moments when some hint of the real me bleeds through. Mask-wearing thwarts our maturing. Sadly, our masks deceive us into believing that we can hide our true selves. Not so, and most of us realize that. In time, others can usually see what we are trying to hide. Many of us are hurting. We harbor painful junk that is eating us alive. God allows our masks to crack and chip because He loves us so much. The book *True Faced* was written to help the believer begin, by God's grace, to reveal their true face. We are all on this same journey of learning these truths. (13-36)

**"Two roads diverged in a wood – I took the one less traveled, and that has made all the difference."** Those are the words of Robert Frost. The day will come when we will arrive at a pivotal place on our journey with God, and we will be forced to choose – and our choice will make all the difference. Either we choose the path that says "*Pleasing God*," or the one that reads "*Trusting God*." There is no third path, by the way, and we must choose one. Only one. Pleasing God and Trusting God represent the *primary and ultimate motives of our hearts*.

1. On the path of determining to "**Pleasant God**," and striving to be all God wants us to be, this one is referred to as the "*Room of Good Intentions*." An enormous banner on the back wall reads: "*Working on My Sin to Achieve an Intimate Relationship with God*." Sounds a lot like, "Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy." Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the road of Pleasing God has turned into "What Must I Do to Keep God Pleased with Me?" In this room you will get tired of pretending and keeping up appearances. Ultimately, you will decide to retrace your steps and head out for the "Trusting God" trail.
2. The path marked "**Trusting God**" has a room with a sign above it that reads, "*Living Out of Who God Says I Am*." Where is the part where I get to prove my sincerity? Where are my guidelines? When do I get to give God my best? I stoop down and read what it says on the doorknob – "*Humility*." This particular room is referred to as the "*Room of Grace*." On the back wall is a huge banner that reads – "*Standing with God... with My Sin in Front of Me... Working on It Together*." I can't help but notice that in this room everyone seems *vitaly alive*. The people are obviously imperfect, full of compromise and struggle, but they are *authentic* enough to talk about it and ask for help. Many have a level of integrity and freedom I never saw in the Room of Good Intentions.

**Our "motives" direct what we value and how we act.** For example, if we are motivated by money, we will value lucrative careers and people who can help us make money. That value will then shape how we act. It will influence us to pursue certain education, experience, jobs. We get the word "*motion*" from "*motive*" – our motives ultimately determine our actions; God designed us this way. Our motive as followers of Christ will either keep us *enslaved* in unresolved sin and immaturity, or it will *free us* into God's astonishing life for us. The key to our maturity and freedom lies in the "*dominant motive*" that governs our relationship with God. It all starts with motive.

**Hebrews 11 declares,** “Without *faith* it is impossible to *please* God.” Did you recognize the two paths in this verse? Trusting and Pleasing God? If our primary motive is “**Pleasing God,**” we never please Him enough and we never learn trust. That is because life on this road is all about “*my effort*” and “*my striving*” and “*my ability*” to make something happen. On the other hand, if our primary motive is “**Trusting God,**” we find out that He is incredibly pleased with us. So, pleasing God is actually a by-product of trusting God.

**Here is the deadly trap** – If my life motive is determining to “**Please God,**” then my values will be “Striving to Be All God Wants Me to Be”... and my action will be “Working on My sin to Achieve an Intimate Relationship with God.” When we live in the “*Room of Good Intentions,*” our theology sets us up to fail and to live in hiddenness. Furthermore, it disregards the godliness and righteousness that God has already placed in us [at infinite cost], and will sabotage our journey. We can never resolve our sin by working on it, nor can our striving to sin less keep us from future sins. A theology of “more right” and “less wrong” will ultimately cause us to lose hope; *sin-management theology will break your heart.* Many believers have spent their entire lives serving God, yet they are lonely, broken, defeated, and full of despair. They have embraced a theology of “*rebuilding their old barns*” and have placed all their efforts in “*trying to be good.*” Cain was “trying to be good” on his terms—when his offering didn’t please God, he felt dishonored. Early in his reign, King Saul struggled with trusting God, just like the Galatians whom Paul corrected. Saul ended up trying to keep God pleased with him. He thought his sacrifice would please God enough to give him success against Israel’s enemies. But God told him, “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 13:5-15; Heb 3:18-19; 4:2) – He knew Saul’s obedience would be the evidence of his trust.

**Pleasing God is an incredibly good longing, but it cannot be our primary motivation,** or it will imprison our hearts. Pleasing God is not a *means* to our personal godliness; it is the *fruit* of our godliness, the fruit of trust. We will never please God through our efforts to become godly. Rather, we will only please God – and become godly – when we trust God (Heb 11:6). When our motive is to “**Trust God,**” our value will be “Living Out Who God Says I Am.” Have we already been changed? Yes! We have received a new heart... we are a new creation... with a brand new identity... we have been changed, and now we get to mature into who we already are (2 Cor 5:17). God paid an infinite price to buy us back, to redeem us, and make us new creatures in Christ (Eph 1:3-14). So He gets deeply disappointed (it grieves Him) when *we choose not to believe* what He says is now true about us. He values our high-priced identity, and He wants us to do the same. How can we show that we really value our identity? By “*believing*” what He says is true about us.

**Let’s review what we’ve learned** – “If my motive is **Trusting God,** then my value will be “Living Out Who God Says I Am,” and my action will be “Standing with God, with My Sin in Front of Us, Working on It Together.” *God has given us the DNA of godliness* – we are righteous saints, and nothing we do will make us more righteous than we already are. Furthermore, nothing we do will alter this reality. God knows our DNA. He knows that we are “Christ in me” (Col 1:27). And now He is asking us to join Him in what He knows is true. Remember, it is not what you and I do – it is what God is doing, and He is creating something totally new, a free life! (Gal 6:15).

**Here is the “Great Disconnect”** – Many people talk as if they have taken the “**Trusting God**” path, but in reality they live in the “Room of Good Intentions.” So many people say the right thing, but then live the wrong life! This chasm exists everywhere in the body of Christ. Jesus warned us about this very thing when He said, “Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity... don’t be impressed with charisma... look for character.” Who preachers *are* is the main thing, not what they *say*. The reality is this –

*By taking the path marked “Pleasing God,” many Christians never fully understand or live out what it means to be “in Christ Jesus.”*

**We discover in the “Room of Grace” that the almost unthinkable has happened – God tells us:**

- He has taken away all elements of *fear* in condemnation, judgment, and rejection.
- He *loves* us and will always love us.
- He *loves* us right now, no matter what we have done.
- He *loves* us just like He loves His only Son.
- There is *nothing* we can do to make His love go away.
- He doesn’t keep a log of past *offenses*, of how little we pray, how often we have let Him down.
- We actually have the *righteousness of Christ*, therefore we should stop beating ourselves up.
- We can stop being so *formal*, stiff, and afraid around Him.
- There is *nothing* we can do to make Him love us less or love us more.
- We are going to *heaven* no matter what – that is a done deal.
- It is ok to *be who we are* at the moment, with all our junk.
- He will *never punish us* when we mess up.
- He will *never hurt us* even if we should hurt Him.
- Life is not about *self-effort*, but about allowing Him to live His life through us.
- This is the way of life in the *Room of Grace* – it is the way home to healing, joy, peace, fulfillment, contentment, and release into God’s dreams for us.

**If we don’t enter the “Room of Grace,” we will constantly strive in the Room of Good Intentions.**

In the Room of Grace we grow up and mature into something that is already true about us – godly. God is not interested in changing you. He already has. The new DNA is set. God wants you to believe that He has already *changed* you, so that He can get on with the process of *maturing* you into who you already are. *Trust opens the way for this process* – if you do not trust God, you cannot mature, because your “*focus*” is messed up. You are still trying to change enough to be godly. If you are living in the Room of Grace, you are not making desperate attempts to improve yourself. You know you cannot change yourself; you can only mature because of who you already are in Christ – a spiritually new creation born of the Spirit, a saint maturing into the image of Christ.

**On the road of “Pleasing God,” effort got me into the Room of Good Intentions.** On the road of “*Trusting God*,” effort is never a means of pleasing God or getting God’s grace or changing us. Effort born out of striving to please God never ceases to tire us or renew us. When we reverse “*trusting and pleasing*,” it is like switching “trust & obey” to “obey & trust.” Placing obedience before trust locks us into a mindset of obeying to *please God*, to earn His favor and His pleasure. (37-58)

**Let’s explore the “Room of Grace” and see how grace works, how grace resolves our sin issue.**

The following five truths give us lasting answers for this question.

1. **Grace is attracted through “humility”** – Humility requires trust – it is her core feature. We define humility as “*trusting God and others with me.*” Remember, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jam 4:8). In Scripture we learn that *grace can never be earned*, but it can be spurned through untrust, the absence of humility. We never deserve grace – it is always unmerited – but we can invite grace into our lives... we can attract it. How? *By trusting God.* God gives His grace to those who trust Him – to the humble. Trust, humility, and grace guide us into an astonishing life. Proud striving brings God’s resistance.

2. **Grace changes our “life focus”**— When we became Christians, something happened that actually changed who we are... yet, in this life we will always have “*sin issues*,” and we will always have the “*identity God gave us*” – and “trusting who God says I am.” These two realities are constant – the key question is, “Which one of these two constants defines my life focus?” If we opt for the “*sin issues*,” we will never experience “trusting who God says I am.” Do you see why the path of “Trusting God” is so important? We will never know our identity in Christ – and we will never live out of our identity – unless we start on the path of Trusting God. *To resolve our “sin issues” we must begin trusting who God says we are.* If our life focus is on “sin issues,” if we strive to eradicate our sin issues so we can somehow create a “new me” or a “changed me,” we will always keep “me” bound to “my sin” and we will remain immature. *Trusting Who God Says I am lays the foundation for maturity.* Many of us say we believe that salvation brings a “*new birth*,” a “*new identity*,” but the way we view ourselves betrays our words – we don’t believe its reality in us for a second. Instead we think we must “*keep striving*” to become someone who will be better. And all along we deny the mind-boggling truth that we have already become that someone. The “**Great Disconnect**” is the gap between who we say we are, and who we actually believe we are. This is the reason this book teaches that, how we *view ourselves* is the most revealing commentary of our theology. It tells me...

- About my relationship with God
- About my relationship with others
- Whether my trust is in myself or in God
- If I am maturing into Christ’s likeness

3. **Grace lets “God handle sin”** – Many Christians know God loves them and wants to be with them, but they also believe their sin has put an impossible mass between God and them. As such, “*they believe they will have to settle for rare moments of intimacy with Him.*” They know themselves too well, and there is no way they are ever going to be able to keep from sinning. *They believe God loves them, but they also believe He’s pretty disappointed with them.* That is as good as it gets on this earth... or so they have come to believe. Why do millions of Christians, now possessing the righteousness of God, feel distant from God, imagining that a pile of sin separates them? It is as if their salvation never took place. Ironically, striving to achieve this relationship with the Father will keep us in unresolved sin and immaturity. It produces just the opposite of what we are looking for!

**People in the “Room of Good Intentions” hold this view.** There, piles of sin separate each person from God, who is on the other side of the pile. Supposedly, “*moral striving*” will save the day, so everyone in the room keeps trying to chip away at that mound of sin, all the while realizing they are creating a bigger pile. When they finally achieve some level of success, they think they have accomplished something big – thus, this process breeds pride, not humility... sin, not maturity. The truth is, “*sin will not be managed.*” Our efforts will not make us godly.

**Grace teaches us to “trust that God can handle our sin – and only God.”** Our thoughts begin to run like this – I can’t handle my sin. I can’t change myself. Thank you, God, for already making me godly. *Lord, thank you there is “no pile of sin and junk between us.”* If there were, I wouldn’t stand a chance of intimacy with you. I know I can’t survive away from You. Father, as we look at my sin together, I am learning to trust Your assessment of what will truly satisfy me. I trust You, Lord, for the next step. This “*heart-set*” changes our entire approach to sin –

for only in the “Room of Grace” do we take sin seriously. In the Room of Grace, Jesus Christ is honored, depended upon, and submitted to for the resolution of our sin issues.

**Now when we mess up, we can say:** “Lord, I hate that I am prone to sin. This sin doesn’t surprise me in the least. I expect that sinful desires will trip me up at times. Experience tells me that I cannot stop sinning. That is how powerful I believe sin is. Lord, I need You.” Do you really think God would make it so hard to live a life that pleases Him? What if we didn’t have to work so hard? What if our sin doesn’t affect how close we are to God? What if God meant it when He said, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Heb 13:5). What if we truly believed we were without condemnation? (Rom 8:1). What if grace was that strong? Welcome to the “Room of Grace” – amazingly, the more we depend upon Jesus and His full ability to heal the effects of our sin, the less we sin.

- 4. Grace melts “masks”** – Striving leaves us dysfunctional and immature because it creates hiddenness. Masks abound in the Room of Good Intentions. Grace creates *authenticity*, and reveals our true face. In an environment of grace sin issues and striving gradually start sliding off of us. Grace brings us adoption into God’s family, a new identity, a new life, new power, and God’s full protection – with absolutely no strings attached. *Grace is more than a theological position – it is an actual environment, a realm, a present-tense reality.* The triune God lives in the realm of grace. Trusting God means trusting that such a realm exists. God does not ask us to get our act together or to stop sinning so much before we can enjoy this realm. God wants only one thing from us – He wants us to become more *dependent* upon Him. He wants us to walk on the path of Trusting God.
- 5. Grace changes how we “treat each other” and “our sin issues”** – When we live in the Room of Grace, we begin to relate to others differently. We begin to experience true intimacy. We no longer feel we must compete with each other. We stand in front of each other “true faced.” We see one another as saints who sin, rather than as sinners who are saved. If we truly believe in our hearts that we are saints, then we are able to stand with each other in the reality of our sin. When we trust God, we live by this value – *the godly are those who trust God with themselves.*

**Resolving sin is only the starting point of life in the Room of Grace.** God’s ultimate goal is maturing us into who He says we are, and then releasing us into the dreams He designed for us before the world began (Rom 8:28; 1 Pet 1:3-5). Note the sequence of truths –

- We cannot profoundly influence others without *maturing*.
- We cannot mature without finding resolution to our *sin issues*.
- We cannot find resolution to our sin issues without *trusting who God says we are*.

**God’s ultimate dream for us is that we bring significant beauty into the lives of others** – that is what the Room of Grace ultimately prepares us for. The fragile, the goofed-up, the compromised, the failed, the inadequate, the squirrely, those full of pain and despair, even the arrogant and the controlling – all mature into health when they enter the Room of Grace. Those who are *genuinely humble*, even with their warts and boils, become a healing balm to others. The Room of Grace is tricky business for those who have believed that “*self-made excellence*” makes the man. Either we learn to rest in the sufficiency of Christ in us, or we will soon return to the Room of Good Intentions. When you think you don’t belong in the Room of Grace, because you are unfit or because you have failed, others in the room will say to you, “That’s all you got? You’re welcome here!”

**Do you see how the “Room of Grace” helps people trust who God says they are,** and then deal with sin in a new way that enables them to mature? Grace allows them to strip away the veneer and trust God with their sin, their healing, and their growth. They are vulnerable people who rely on God’s strength in the midst of their often-compromised existence. *The power is in the “grace”* – and you can attract grace through a *humble heart*. God loves to give excessive amounts of grace to humble people. Trust God and others with you. Initially, we come to Christ “*me-centered,*” and we struggle to progress beyond that condition. The wonderful dreams God has for us often remain unclear because “*unresolved sin*” issues block our view. God thinks about “*our influence on others*” all the time – He designed us to influence others. *Every so often we catch a glimpse of the destiny God has planned for us, and new longings stir within.* We fill up with fresh motivation to learn how grace works and to follow God’s voice into a land of adventure and fulfillment. Then we struggle to remember the entry point to that great land. It is the door that teaches us how to live out of who God says we are by turning the door-knob of *Humility*, and stepping into the *Room of Grace* — remember, humility is the doorway of grace; it results in the infusion of more grace in us, which in turn transforms our lives! (59-81)

**THE SUPREME GIFT OF GRACE is “LOVE”** – When you enter the Room of Grace, Jesus has some gifts for us... gifts of grace... and the greatest of all gifts is “*love*” – it acts as a balm that can begin to heal our unresolved sin. The gift of love is not about learning to love more or better. In God’s world *receiving love* comes before *giving love*. We learn how to love only when we first learn how to receive the love of God and others – “*we love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). We so much want to “do” something, rather than let something “be done to us.” We have not learned to “*receive love,*” because we have been urged to “*give love.*” Knowing we are loved and experiencing that love are two different things. Experiencing God’s love involves the following six steps:

- 1. I understand that I have needs** – We see our needs as weaknesses; sin influences us to define our innate needs as weaknesses. Our weakness also stem from our unwillingness to accept our *limitations*. If we see needs as weaknesses, we will hide our needs, or we will pretend that we have no needs (*call it independence*). Or we may believe no one should ever have to meet our needs (*call it strength*). Or we believe that as we grow more “*spiritual,*” we outgrow them (*call it maturity*). Needs do not come from sin, and they are not sin – Adam and Eve needed the love of God long before they sinned. *The problem is sin has distorted our understanding of needs.*
- 2. I realize that having my needs met is experiencing love** – Every day we need to be loved, and every day God wants to meet our needs for: attention (Jn 13:5-20) – acceptance (Rom 5:5, 8) – security (Zeph 3:17) – trust (Lam 3:32-33; Jer 31:3) – guidance (Heb 12:6) – truth (Ps 33:4; 119:160; Heb 6:18) – protection (Ex 34:14-15; Hos 11:1-12) – significance (1 Tim 1:12) – affirmation (Jer 31:3). These needs never go away. *Sadly, if we cannot identify our needs, we cannot know love* – conversely, if we deny we have needs, we will not experience love. If we don’t know love, we will be stuck with open wounds that will not heal. Thus when our needs go unmet, we are not happy people.
- 3. I freely admit that I desire to be loved** – Deep within each of us resides the desire to be loved. Oh, but the pain and risk of love! Therefore we creatively fashion masks to make others think, at least in our case, that love is optional. Many of us have spent years perfecting *self-protection routines*. Some of us had good reasons for *erecting walls and barriers*. These walls, however, have never truly protected us – *they have simply kept us isolated and alone*. These walls won’t come down until we *admit* we have needs... we can only experience love when our needs are met... and we really, really want to be loved.

**4. I choose to let you love me – on your terms, not mine** – People who are unable to *trust* will never experience love. Ever. Despite years of abuse and the *lonely life*, we can learn to trust ourselves to God and others. Grace, when it is conceived in trust, begets astonishing resolution, healing, maturity, and powerful influence. Many people who deeply want to be loved are not loved, because they won't turn the doorknob of "*Humility*" – "trusting God and others with me." They stand out in the cold, outside the Room of Grace, in pain (and blame), because people don't love them. The truth is, the people God wants to use to love you deeply and to meet your needs stand right on the other side of that door – turn the knob. Learning to let others love us on their terms is part of what it means to "*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*" (Eph 5:21; as a result of 5:18-20). If, despite our need for acceptance and people's attempts to include us, we continually reject them because we want them to meet our needs on our terms, we will remain unloved and in the darkness of our unresolved sin. We cannot experience another's acceptance, love, or guidance unless we let that person give us these things. Neither should we wait for people to *love us perfectly* or *trust perfectly* – remember, this is the Room of Grace, and "*Grace is the face love wears, when it meets imperfection.*"

**Learning to love or trust perfectly is not the point – it is learning to receive love.** We can't wait for perfect people before we trust people. We live in an imperfect world – it is simply not going to happen. In the Room of Grace we learn that God won't let us down, even when others do. When they turn away, we remember He won't. He is our safety net – He has our back. *Trusting God frees us to move into these relationships.* Trusting God frees our hearts to experience His safe, constant, intimate sufficiency. Trusting God, who can't let us down, allows us to move toward others in love despite the risk... and that propels us into a different dimension of living.

**5. I am fulfilled when I have experienced love** – Trusting God is the path that leads us into the Room of Grace where we gradually receive the supreme gift of grace – love. If we have spent our lives building walls of self-protection, it will take time and trust for us to unwrap this gift. But when we receive love – when we are loved – we feel fulfilled. *Love completely satisfies* our longings, ambitions, and potential. God, the ultimate fulfiller, invites us to trust Him. Those who hang out very long in the Room of Grace always experience too much love to return to a life without such a gift. *Received love turns frightened pretenders into confident dreamers*, and even turns violent lions into humble and tender receivers of love.

**6. I am now able to love others out of my own fulfillment** – Having our needs met by receiving the love of God and others is not just about "feeling better;" it is about fulfillment/being satisfied. *When the requirements of our soul – our needs – are met, it satisfies us.* This fulfillment produces inward peace, contentment, and healing for our wounds. As our wounds heal, we can turn away from them with a fresh passion, confidence, and love for others. To serve others out of a contented, fulfilled soul is like rubbing eucalyptus oil onto the sore muscles of a friend. The person experiences healing. If it is unerringly true that each of us enjoys only the love we will allow in, and if it is equally true that God went to unending lengths to bring us love in a way that we would allow in, then it becomes stunningly obvious that the carriers of God's love ought to be wildly driven to learn to give His love in a way that can be easily put on. *To give love that can be trusted changes everything – this is where life gets worth living.* When others experience God's love past their double-bolted defenses, they wonder out loud what took them so long. And they almost

involuntarily begin to offer to all around them a love as rich and freeing as what they are taking in... and the world around them dramatically changes, through one refreshing act of love at a time. (83-98)

**THE SWEETEST GIFT OF GRACE is “REPENTANCE”** – When men don’t know how to deal with their sin, they will try to hide it; it has been that way since Adam and Eve in the Garden. Repentance is a gift of God’s grace because it doesn’t have a chance without “*grace*.” Grace alone resolves sin. Grace alone heals. And grace alone gives power over sin. Yet many of us act as if repentance is a matter of the “*will*” – it is not. We cannot make a decision to stop sinning. We cannot “*will*” ourselves into change. *Repentance isn’t doing something about our sin; repentance means admitting that we can’t do anything about our sin.* All of our striving and willpower have only momentary, external value when it comes to fighting an opponent as crafty, persistent, powerful, and experienced as sin – to confirm that simply look at the legalistic Judaizers. *God did not design us to conquer sin on our own.* To think we can is an incalculable under-valuing of “*sin’s power*,” and a huge over-valuing of our own “*will power!*”

**Some of us fool ourselves into believing we can “manage our sin” – sin cannot be managed.**

Our goal is not to solve all of our sin issues. Our motive is to “*trust God*” so we can live out of who God says we are – so that “*together*” we can work on our sins issues. When we try to manage our sin through willpower, the process looks something like this: Sin – confess – do better for a while – then sin again and again and again. Despair, anger, shame, distance from God, guilt, self-loathing, and sin again. Disillusionment, doubt, self-pity, resentment at God – “Why doesn’t He hear my prayers?” “Why doesn’t He do something?” More disappointment... more anger.

**Confession does not resolve our sin either.** Agreeing that we have done something wrong is not the same as “*trusting God*” with what we have done. Confession is not the same as truly needing God to free us of the sin we have committed. Sin is resolved when we are cleansed of it, and only dependence upon the “*Cross of Jesus*” cleanses us from sin (1 Jn 1:7). There is power there. When grace introduces us to repentance, the two of us become best friends. When anything else introduces us to repentance, it feels like the warden has come to lock us up. When “*grace*” gets involved, the truths of repentance reveal a fabulous world of “*life-freeing beauty*.” Repentance is about “*trusting*” not “*willing*.” Yes, there is a choice involved, but if our motive is a determined straining to please God, all our striving will be a pile of filthy rags (Is 64:6). In repentance we depend on God to turn water into wine. Trust in our act of repentance releases the gift of God’s grace to transform our hope into reality.

**Trusting God with ourselves allows us to “receive love” – His love, and the love of others.**

Because we are loved, we can face what we have done to others and ourselves without having to retreat to a cave of hiddenness. Love acts as a safety net that can keep us from destruction as we admit the truth about ourselves. We know that nothing we do can change how God sees us. When we feel safe, we let go of our self-defense and call out to Him saying, “God, I no longer have anything to prove. I have nothing to hold on to. I want only what You want for me.” Every act of repentance depends on an act of redemption. To *redeem* means “*to release from debt or blame*.” Willpower, no matter how sincere, cannot buy you this freedom. By the way, there is no difference between the power to *save*, and the power to *resolve sin*. Healing requires that we face God with what is true about us and to trust God to cleanse us. We must stop walking down the road of self-effort, and start walking down the road of “**Trusting God.**” When we repent through trust, it is exclusively and entirely a “*gift of God’s grace*.” That is where the power is. This kind of repent-

ance actually provides a real power over sin. The work of Jesus is not just the *forgiving* of every sin, but the *healing* that is needed as a result of every sin (Tit 3:4-6).

**In the event that we attempt repentance in the “Room of Good Intentions,”** it will be out of a motive to make God happy with us, to become more godly. But trying to repent without grace is like trying to swim without water. In a “*grace-filled community*,” this community expects and anticipates imperfection – we honor others in the community as saints, but we also face the reality of each other’s sin. We applaud vulnerability and view godliness as something much more than the presence of good behavior and the absence of bad behavior. The individuals in this community trust God to mature them from the inside out, by the power of His Spirit. It is a community of saints... who sin. Such a community will make a *mask-shattering difference*, because these folks will treat you for who you are – a saint – and will stand by you with outstretched arms, and *accept you...* as such, you will learn to receive their love. In such an environment repentance becomes a way of life. And when that happens, grace heals, matures, reconciles, and unleashes the love of God through people. When failing strivers stumble into a community of grace, safety, and vulnerable repentance, it radically disrupts their game plan. Suddenly, they are face to face with a real, tangible option of sweet freedom. And as the community treats them as they have never been treated before, their confidence grows that grace can support the full weight of their sin.

**Give up trying to look good and sound like a saint.** The principles of God’s grace play off of each other – grace begets repentance, and repentance nurtures forgiveness. Trust attracts grace, and grace helps saints to trust – even goofed-up, compromised, failed, and confused saints. Especially them. The truth always sets us free – free to love God and others, free to trust even more truth, free to heal, free to follow our callings and dreams. The question is, do we really believe the God we trust is strong enough and powerful enough to heal us? That is the bottom line. As we exercise our trust, we receive His grace – just like we did the first time we met Him. So, trusting God for His grace in repentance prompts us to ask:

- God, are you strong enough to heal my patterns of self-destruction?
- God, do you always have my best interests at heart?
- God, are you able to take care of me if I live without the mask?
- God, are you able to vindicate me if I do not vindicate myself?
- God, are you able to deal with my sin if I make the decision to turn away from my willpower and trust in your power?
- God, are you able to protect me when in disclosure I am vulnerable to others when they know what is true about me?

**In the Room of Grace no one is above anyone else.** No one brags about his/her accomplishments. No one keeps score. No one is shunned. No one can lose membership for blowing it. This room is not a utopian ideal – it is simply a home where people live together. When you are ready to trust God’s provision for resolving your sin, you will pray something like this – “God, here we go. Here is a sin I trust you to do something about. I am convinced I cannot deal with this sin. I trust what you did at the Cross is powerful enough, not only to bring me to heaven one day, but powerful enough that it can break this very sin’s power that is now plaguing my life.” (99-116)

**THE MOST MYSTERIOUS GIFT OF GRACE is “FORGIVENESS”** – Forgiveness breaks down walls, frees hearts, restores families, and draws out the best in us. It can turn hatred into tenderness. It is more powerful than any weapon, government, or wealth. Nothing else can bring such profound

healing. Like repentance, forgiveness is a matter of the heart—when we forgive, it makes us ready to love again. *Forgiveness releases us from bitterness and resentment—when we forgive, our heart heals;* such is the miracle of God’s grace in our heart. Forgiveness forms the foundation of our relationship with God. Have you ever noticed that Jesus waits for our repentance before He forgives us? Think about that. God’s forgiveness isn’t realized until we repent. By receiving it in humble trust that God can actually free our heart and heal our relationships, then the miraculous can happen. Forgiveness brings alienated enemies together. *Here are the seven keys of forgiveness—*

- Admit something happened.
- Forgive the consequences of the act done against you.
- Tell God what happened to you.
- Forgive the offender for your benefit.
- Forgive the offender when they repent, for their sake.
- Distinguish between forgiving and trusting your offender.
- Seek reconciliation, not just conflict resolution. (117-130)

**MATURING INTO GOD’S DREAMS FOR YOU** – Life in the Room of Grace teaches us to wait for God’s exaltation rather than to pursue position or power. The timing is perfect. For one thing, our dreams are being clarified as our sin is being resolved, our wounds are being healed, and we are in the process of maturing. You never stop returning to the Room of Grace, for your heart and protection reside there. *Now you get to draw others into the Room of Grace*—that is what this dream is ultimately about—your place in God’s Kingdom. It is a kingdom where God uses healing and maturing people to bring His grace to hopeless and hurting people. You get to use your gifts, passion, and healed heart to show the glory of Jesus, who has loved you beyond telling from the beginning of time.

**God’s goal for us is never just healing, safety, rest, or even receiving love,** as astounding and stunning as those gifts are, *His goal is that we be released into these dreams we’ve not been able to shake all of our lives.* Ever since we were children we have had dreams and hopes of destiny. Some of these dreams are our own, but others came from the very hand of God—and *God’s dreams never go off the radar screen;* not even time, failure, or heartbreak can make us forget them entirely. Still, most of us have tried to stuff them into the attic. We have been rudely awakened out of too many of them, too many times, and each time we lost a little more of the dream. Yet even if we have forgotten the fiber of those dreams, God has not. *God has a ticket of destiny with your name written on it—no matter how old, how broken, how tired, or how frightened you are.* No matter how many times you may have failed. God longs for the day when He gets to hand you that ticket.

**People in the Room of Good Intentions never get released into the dreams God has for them.**

We may become competent and skilled, and even achieve impressive stuff... but without *humility* we will miss “*God’s destiny*” for our lives. Remember, there is no humility without choosing to walk a road called “**Trusting God.**” Those of us in the Room of Grace have come to believe who God says we are – we aren’t trying to change into another person. God has made us exactly who He wants us to be, and we have come to believe it. Any change that takes place in us comes from maturing into the person we already are – much like a caterpillar matures into a butterfly.

**In the Room of Grace we must learn to trust... to wait... to rest in God’s promises,** to grow in health and authentic relationships, so we will mature toward the day of God’s releasing us into our destiny. We wait to receive God’s authority, His exaltation of the humble. *We patiently wait for*

*God to give us the desires of our hearts.* We are no longer in a hurry. We know He cares about our destiny more than we do. We depend upon God and His power and resources. We are free to trust Him for repentance. We are free to trust Him so we can forgive others and be forgiven. Most of all, the mature have a childlike joy and freedom. We are playfully alive. *But such maturity does not happen overnight.* God uses many others for our benefit in this process – teachers, counselors, friends, pastors, spouses, siblings, children, mentors, disciplers. *Spiritual disciplines* are practiced in the Room of Grace as part of the process of maturing and releasing the saint to minister the gospel of the kingdom. These disciplines are no longer seen as a means of entry to the Room of Grace – *they are disciplines designed to help us be active and effective in the spiritual realm of our own heart,* now spiritually alive by grace in relationship to God and His kingdom. Maturity in the Room of Grace occurs in three general phases –

1. Healing the Needy Christian – Everyone who enters the Room of Grace is **“me-centered.”** In this room we become acquainted with the power of love, grace and truth. We identify various wounds we carry, and we embrace the significance of our new identity. We also discover the process of unresolved sin issues as well as the cycle and power of sin. We become immersed in the person and work of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father. In this room, teachers and mentors help us learn the priority of disclosing who we really are – thus setting us free to be who we really are.
2. Maturing the Healing Christian – In time we become more **“others-centered.”** In the previous stage, the emphasis was on introduction and new awareness of truth. In this stage we focus on applying, developing, and processing the truths we learned in phase one. For example, we learn to apply love, grace, and truth to our life situation and circumstances, and so our wounds begin to heal. We begin living out our new identity and apply truth to the dynamics of sin. We are in the process of developing a vitally wonderful relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father. In this phase, we are looking around our world and beyond to see how God wants us to love others. This stage more fully introduces the reality of *“suffering.”* God uses suffering to mature the humble as they come under His influence and obey His truth, out of a heart of love. As they grow in trust during this suffering, God will enlarge their sphere of influence, because the humble can be trusted with truth. At this stage we are looking for and encouraging vulnerability, made evident by our new level of *authenticity.* We no longer hide. We don’t arrive at this stage by taking an eight-week crash course – maturity is a process that takes time. Don’t rush the pace.
3. Releasing the Maturing Christian – In this stage our life becomes more **“Christ centered.”** We naturally respond to life out of our “new identity” – a Christlike identity – that we live through grace and truth. In this stage we are looking around our world and beyond to see how God wants us to love others through His particular plans and destiny for us. We gauge maturity by how we live with others who are maturing. Mature Christians delight in God’s exaltation of others. We do not fear others’ strengths; we understand them, submit to them, and benefit from them. The mature are always learning, studying, and inviting others to speak into our lives and meet our needs.

**God’s grace is perfected in our imperfection** – The Room of Grace is not a place where we do not sin; rather, it is a place where we are protected by those who love us... by people we have learned to trust with the deepest part of our pain, ugliness, fear, and failure. When we grow in grace we come to realize ever more clearly that *“we are really loved by God”*... and our identity in Christ becomes our lifeline.

Though we are daily made aware of how prone we are to engage, at any moment, in unhealthy behavior, and continue to struggle with sin, yet we believe God that “*we are really who He said we are.*” When that is the case, we can be honest about all of who we are... and can trust others to help us heal. The truth is, *we are by faith who God says we are, even on our worst day...* yet, in humility, we never deny that we are capable of great wrong.

**The life in the Room of Grace is not conjecture or wishful thinking;** neither is it a utopian state where no one lives. Many people all over this world live there. The play has been written; the good works have already been created for us to walk in (Eph 2:10). We are believing who God says we are, and we are actually choosing to trust it in spite of what we act out every day. We are astonished by the reality that a life beyond appearances can truly be ours. In grace, God has made it possible for us to live “*True Faced.*” (131-146)