



# NCD Sample Pages: *The 3 Colors of Love*

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The sample pages contain the table of contents, the introduction plus pages 20-40 which present the basis on which the whole book has been developed. These pages may give you an idea of the character and layout of the book, so that you can decide whether it is useful for your purposes. The remaining focus on practical exercises, both for individuals and groups, to put the principles into practice.

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# The 3 Colors of Love



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# Reflecting all the colors of God's love

## Introduction

I remember the scene in all of its revealing comedy as if it had happened yesterday. I had been invited to share the initial results of our research of more than 1000 churches worldwide with a group of church growth experts. Since I had only twenty minutes for my presentation, I decided to focus on *one* example of our findings that I believed was representative of the whole project. "In growing churches," I said, "there is measurably more laughter than in non-growing ones. This is one of the most provable church growth principles I know."

The reaction of the experts? The group broke into laughter. "Very funny, Christian. Ha ha ha. All of us like your sense of humor. But you certainly don't expect us to believe that you have invested several years of your life just to come up with stories like this. Please, tell us the hard facts of your research, the strategically relevant points." I replied, "Gentlemen, these *are* the hard facts. These *are* the very factors that are strategically relevant in order to win the world for Christ."

The laughter dissipated, but only to be substituted by clear signs of disappointment. Some of those present pointedly checked their wrist watches, leaving it to me to decide whether this was a sign of protest or sheer boredom. The rest of the afternoon they continued to focus on those items that *they* believed were most relevant to church growth: management methods, marketing tools, leadership techniques, famous church models.

### Why laughter is a symptom of health

Why did I choose to put "laughter," of all things, at the center of my presentation? Once we realize what kind of church life is needed to create an "upbeat" atmosphere, it becomes clear why laughter in the church is a sign of health. In a healthy church, people are able to laugh at themselves. They know they are forgiven. They know they are accepted. Salvation has touched their whole being, not just their brains. Authentic joy is shared, personally and publicly. Yes, it is fun to be part of such a church.

It is *this* kind of atmosphere that we need to facilitate, model, radiate, teach, and learn; it is the atmosphere of love. That is the reason why this book is included as one of eight building blocks in the *NCD Discipleship Resources* series.

### Three distinctives of this book

In the development of this tool, I have read more than 200 books on loving relationships. Many of them are excellent. What, then, are the distinctives of the book you hold in your hands?

1. Believe it or not, even the majority of Christian books on this subject are based more on a secular-romantic notion of love than on a biblical understanding. Since the biblical concept is far superior to

When you choose to grow in love, you are not dealing with a weekend hobby, but with the heart of the Christian faith.



any other concept, I have placed it at the center of this book. As with all of the other tools in this series, *The 3 Colors of Love* is based on a **trinitarian (“three color”) compass** that is at the strategic root of Natural Church Development (NCD). While trinitarian teaching, as many of us have experienced it, tends to be irrelevant for our daily lives, in NCD, the trinitarian compass has proven to be one of the most practical tools imaginable, with revolutionary consequences for what we will be doing next Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and the rest of the week. You will experience it!

2. One of the most visible consequences of our approach is that it doesn't treat everyone alike. It has been very frustrating for me to discover that many books on loving relationships do just that. All of a sudden, *all of us* have to pay more attention to our feelings ... or learn how to confront ... or focus on social justice. Nonsense! While some readers may truly need to work on one of these areas, others might have to stress different aspects in order to grow in love. Depending on our **individual starting points**, we may have to follow very different paths in order to reflect God's love more fully.

It has been very frustrating to discover that many tools treat everyone alike.

3. As you will quickly see and hopefully appreciate, this book originated in the context of **cross-cultural ministry**. This has shaped the theoretical paradigm on which the practical exercises are built. I have learned that a number of Oriental cultures (in several Asian and Arab countries) seem to be, in many respects, closer to the original biblical concepts than Western societies. Numerous misunderstandings about love result from the fact that many cultures—especially those with a Greek/Indo-European heritage—have drifted far away from the Oriental roots of their Christian faith. It is beneficial for all cultures to learn from others. This is what globalization is—or should I say: ought to be?—all about.

### **Love—the center of the Christian faith**

When you choose to grow in love, you are not dealing with a weekend hobby that may be of interest to you, but others can safely ignore. You are dealing with the heart of the Christian faith. At the same time you are dealing with the heart of church development. The *motive* of church development is love, the *message* is love, and it is empirically demonstrable that there is no better church growth *method* than love.

It is my prayer that believers who work through this book will become increasingly open channels for the love of God, being able to reflect all the colors of God's love more fully than they do now. This will create a natural growth dynamic in our churches that is much more powerful than all of the clever marketing techniques in the world. Get ready to see it happen!

Christian A. Schwarz

Institute for Natural Church Development



# Three dimensions of God's love

The Bible, in its original terminology, constantly summarizes the essence of God's character in terms of justice, truth, and grace.



Take a look at the diagram on the right (page 21). The concept of love can be expressed in two different ways. We can use just *one* word, "love," in the center of the diagram (where we could also put the term "God"); or we can use *three* words, "justice," "truth," and "grace," that refer to different aspects of love. Of course, these three terms cannot be radically separated from each other; in reality, their meaning is overlapping. In fact, the more we reflect God's love, the more the meanings of these three terms merge.

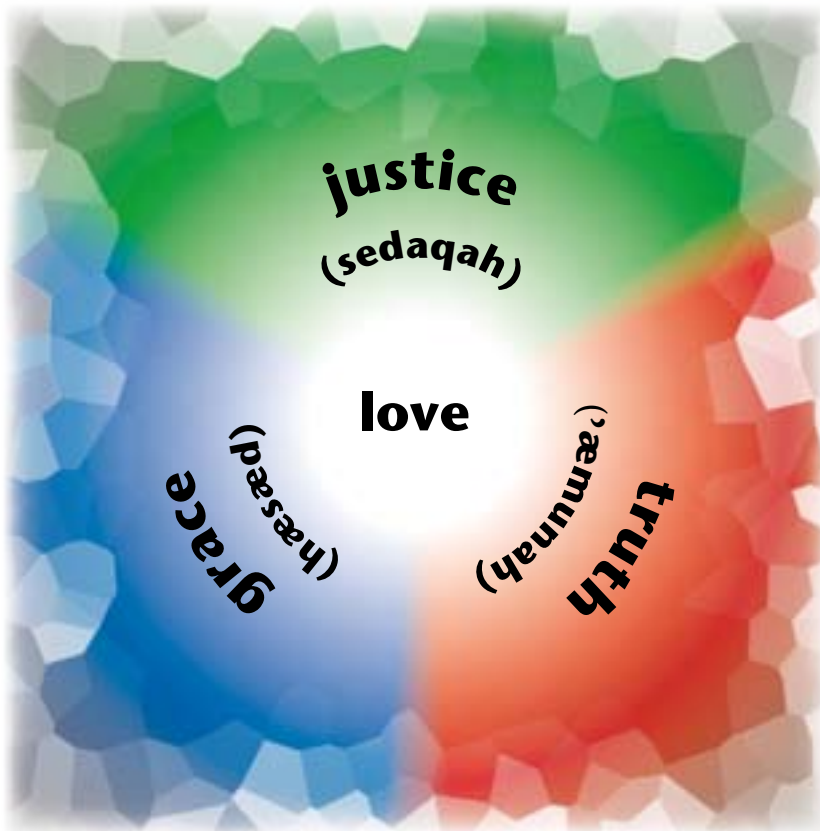
If these terms are so central to understanding God's nature, we might ask why we can't come up with any Bible verses that summarize these three aspects in one sentence? Every Bible reader knows that Scripture speaks about each of these dimensions at length, but if it is true that the integration of justice, truth, and grace is a key spiritual issue, shouldn't we expect to find verses that make explicit reference to this *trio*?

## The problem of translation

The fact of the matter is that the Bible, in its original terminology, constantly summarizes the essence of God's character in terms of justice, truth, and grace. The reason why most of us

*The three terms 'æmunah (truth), sedaqah (justice), and hæsaed (grace) are used together throughout the book of Psalms when it comes to praising God. In most of our Bible translations, however, the terms have been rendered differently (below, NIV).*

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Psalm 33:4-5    | For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is <i>faithful ('æmunah)</i> in all he does. The Lord loves <i>righteousness (sedaqah)</i> and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing <i>love (hæsaed)</i> .          |
| Psalm 36:5-6    | Your <i>love (hæsaed)</i> , O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your <i>faithfulness ('æmunah)</i> to the skies. Your <i>righteousness (sedaqah)</i> is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.          |
| Psalm 40:10     | I do not hide your <i>righteousness (sedaqah)</i> in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your <i>love (hæsaed)</i> and your <i>truth ('æmunah)</i> from the great assembly.            |
| Psalm 88:11-12  | Is your <i>love (hæsaed)</i> declared in the grave, your <i>faithfulness ('æmunah)</i> in destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your <i>righteous (sedaqah)</i> deeds in the land of oblivion? |
| Psalm 98:2-3    | The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his <i>righteousness (sedaqah)</i> to the nations. He has remembered his <i>love (hæsaed)</i> and his <i>faithfulness ('æmunah)</i> to the house of Israel.            |
| Psalm 119:75-76 | I know, O Lord, that your laws are <i>righteous (sedaqah)</i> , and in <i>faithfulness ('æmunah)</i> you have afflicted me. May your unfailing <i>love (hæsaed)</i> be my comfort.  |



*We can express it in one word, love (in the very center), or we can express it by using three different terms (justice, truth, grace), each one covering a different aspect of God's love. When dealing with these terms, however, we should go back to their original Hebrew meaning, which may differ considerably from the everyday usage of the terms in our own language.*

aren't familiar with this terminology, is simply that the terms have been translated differently. For instance, look at the table on the left (page 20). I have selected six passages from the Psalms (that are representative of countless others), each of them containing an explicit reference to God's justice, truth, and grace. When you read most English translations of these texts, you will observe that though in most cases all three terms are used, they are seldom found in the same passage. Why?

### **Oriental versus Western paradigms**

The answer lies in the fact that in Hebrew (which is not only the language of the Old Testament, but also the conceptual background of Jesus and the apostles) these terms have a meaning that is hard to translate adequately into other languages. In some languages it is difficult to communicate the exact "flavor" of these terms, especially in those that have been strongly influenced by the Greek heritage (for instance, many of the Indo-European or "Western" languages). Just take a look at the individual terms:

- *ʾæmunah*, the Hebrew word for truth, is sometimes translated as “truth,” sometimes as “faithfulness.” As we will see later (pages 32-33), it is characteristic not only for Hebrew, but for many non-Western languages, to use one term that covers “both” aspects.

Countless Christians place special emphasis on one of the three aspects, since that one has special significance to them.

- *sedaqah*, the term for justice, is sometimes translated as “righteousness,” which is another nuance of the rich meaning of the biblical term.
- *hæsæd*, the term for grace, is frequently translated “love.” This seems to be a consequence of the exclusively “soft love concept” mentioned above. If love is reduced to certain aspects of grace, the next logical step is to use the word “love” in order to translate the Hebrew word for “grace.”

**Three relational terms**

It is noteworthy that in Hebrew (as well as in other Middle Eastern languages), these three words are relational. Thus *justice* doesn’t relate primarily to the “objective fairness” associated with a court of law. It includes a genuine compassion for others that goes beyond legal justice. *Truth*, when put into practice, implies trustworthiness and cannot be reduced to mere honesty. *Grace* is based on a relationship of acceptance. It is more than just forgiveness. According to the Bible, it literally includes giving yourself.



In Western languages these three terms can be easily separated one from another. In Middle Eastern languages this is more difficult. However, since Western (Greek/Indo-European) thought has shaped Christian theology more than Eastern thought throughout church history, Christianity today suffers from an isolated rather than an integrated view. Countless Christians stress primarily one of the three aspects, since that one has special significance to them. But we can only practice the three values *in love* if we integrate all of them. If we fail to do this, though we might still practice justice, truth, or grace, we have failed to truly love.

The diagram below highlights the relational nature of the terms *justice, truth, and grace.*



# God is light

## Chapter 1: Foundations

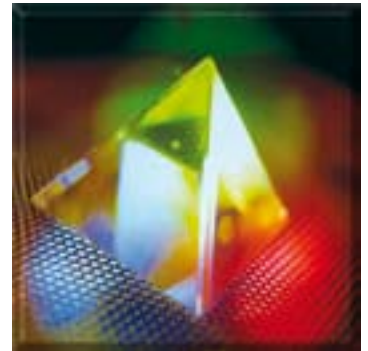
**I**n our cross-cultural ministry, it is a constant challenge to find images that aren't too culturally bound, and communicate universally. There are far fewer images of this kind than one might assume. However, there is at least *one* image that has been used throughout the centuries in various cultures and religions, including Christianity—the image of light. It is a truly universal metaphor for life, wholeness, and happiness, whereas darkness symbolizes sin, deceit, and death.

While in many religions this metaphor has been used in highly speculative ways, it is characteristic of biblical teaching that it is devoid of any esoteric connotations. John, especially, used the imagery of light and darkness throughout his writings, culminating in the sentence, “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). In the same way, Jesus calls himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12). Thus we can be challenged to “believe in the light” and to become “sons of the light” ourselves (John 12:36), which means no more nor less than reflecting the divine light in our own lives.

### An inter-cultural metaphor

In the trinitarian paradigm of Natural Church Development, I have given this metaphor a central place, since it can help us understand complex theological realities in an easy-to-grasp way. Just as light that falls through a prism fans out into the different colors of the spectrum, the light of God can be perceived by us humans in various ways. Some people might see green, others red, others blue—yet we all encounter the same God (see graphic below).

Just as light that falls through a prism fans out into the different colors of the spectrum, the light of God can be perceived in various ways.



*The metaphor of light is frequently used throughout the Bible. While 1 John 4:8 states that “God is love,” we read in 1 John 1:5, “God is light.” Considering the terms “light” and “love” in relationship to each other opens up helpful vantage points from which to understand the dynamics of how God’s love is spread. In essence, we reflect God’s light rather than producing our own lights.*

*The light metaphor is often used to describe the different aspects of God’s love. In Isaiah 51:4 we read, “My **justice** will become a light to the nations.” Psalm 43:3 presents a prayer for God’s “light and **truth**.” Psalm 112:4 states that even in darkness light dawns for the “**gracious** man.” It’s always the same light shining, even if we perceive different shades of it at different times.*

The graphic also reveals that, the closer we are to the center, the better we are able to reflect God's love. The further we move away from the center, the darker the colors get. There are still traces of God's light even in those remote places, but the further we get from the center, the more the light of God's love gets diffracted and dimmed.

### **The colors of light**

What is light? In the world that God has created, light is nothing other than color. It is important to notice that the colors of light (self-luminous colors) function differently than object colors. When we mix object colors (such as oil or water colors), the presence of all colors results in black, while the absence of all colors is white—an empty canvas. Self-

luminous colors function the other way around: white is the result of the presence of all colors, while black is the absence of any color. In the color white, the whole spectrum of light is reflected. The brighter the light, the more powerful the reflection.

Those of us who work on computers are accustomed to these dynamics, since that is how images are projected on a computer screen. In order to display a picture in full color, the screen has to project red, green, and blue. If one color is missing, the image is distorted (see pictures to the right).

### **Light in Hebrew and Greek thought**

It is interesting to note that in biblical times, the Greek and Hebrew cultures had a somewhat different view of color and light, a difference that can still be observed when comparing Western and Oriental cultures today. For the Greeks, color played a more important role; for the Israelites, it was light. When it came to color, the Hebrews especially appreciated white and red, since they were closest to fire light.

While in Western cultures (that are based on the Greek heritage) a concrete form is indispensable in the representation of beauty, in the Hebrew paradigm one of the highest kinds of beauty was seen in the formless fire—the life-giving light. This observation has helped me understand how different cultures function. Whatever our cultural heritage might be, light *and* color, energy *and* form, the dynamic *and* the static are parts of the reality God has created. Thus we try to integrate both poles in our three-color paradigm.

### **What does the light metaphor imply?**

As religious history has proven, the imagery of light is so powerful that it can be easily used—and misused—for wild speculations on the nature of God. Therefore it is important to carefully consider what the biblical statements communicate about light. In the context of this book, the following biblical truths about light are the most relevant:

The colors of light function differently than object colors. White is the result of the presence of all colors; black, the absence of any color.





*Green missing*



*Red missing*



*Blue missing*



*Green, red, and blue complete*

*To display a photograph on a computer screen, the three colors red, green, and blue are needed. If one color is missing, the picture is incomplete—a distorted view of reality (first three photographs). Only when all three colors are displayed is the picture complete (last photograph).*

- It is certainly no coincidence that the first thing God created was light (Gen. 1:3). Light is the precondition of life. It illuminates, reveals truth, destroys illusions, shows us the path we must take. At the same time, it heals, warms, and nurtures.
- Probably the most practical consequence of understanding God and his love in terms of “light” is to show us clearly our human job description. We are to reflect the divine light. The Bible speaks about “walking in the light” (1 John 1:7). In John’s writings, “knowing God” is a synonym of “living in the light,” which again is a synonym for “living in God’s love.” The proof that we actually live in the light—metaphorically speaking—is that all three colors of God’s love are visible in our lives.
- The light metaphor is also helpful when it comes to understanding its “opposite.” Darkness is nothing other than the absence of light. It doesn’t have any power of its own. The practical conclusions are obvious. How can we fight against the manifestations of darkness, such as sin and heresy? By spreading the light! Where light shines, darkness has no place. It disappears “all by itself.” In the three-color paradigm of Natural Church Development, we consistently try to apply these dynamics to the daily lives of churches—with highly encouraging results.

# What is darkness?

**D**arkness is the absence of light—no more, no less. Thus it is not really appropriate to present darkness as the “opposite” of light. That would suggest that it has the same power as light. But darkness cannot shine like light can; rather, it disappears the moment the first glimmer of light emerges. Therefore, the most precise definition of darkness would probably be “non-light.” As such, however, it is still an important part of reality.

It is not true that people who live in darkness have no knowledge at all. They can see reality, but without divine light they are in danger of having a distorted view. Things will be out of proportion or out of balance. Small things appear big and big ones, small; meaningless goals appear divine and divine goals, meaningless. The less access people have to the light of God’s love, the more they create artificial lights that merely decorate the darkness. These artificial lights just add to the sense of confusion.

## Darkness inside and outside the church

The New Testament frequently uses the term “darkness” to describe reality outside the Christian faith. However, it also speaks of darkness inside the church and in the life of the individual believer. The Christian faith is a constant battle to bring light, which both reveals and heals, to areas of darkness.

In my opinion, the darkness within the church has always been a greater problem than the darkness in the world. Lies disguise themselves as piety. Clear manifestations of sin are presented as expressions of God’s love. Jesus rightly warned, “If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matt. 6:23).

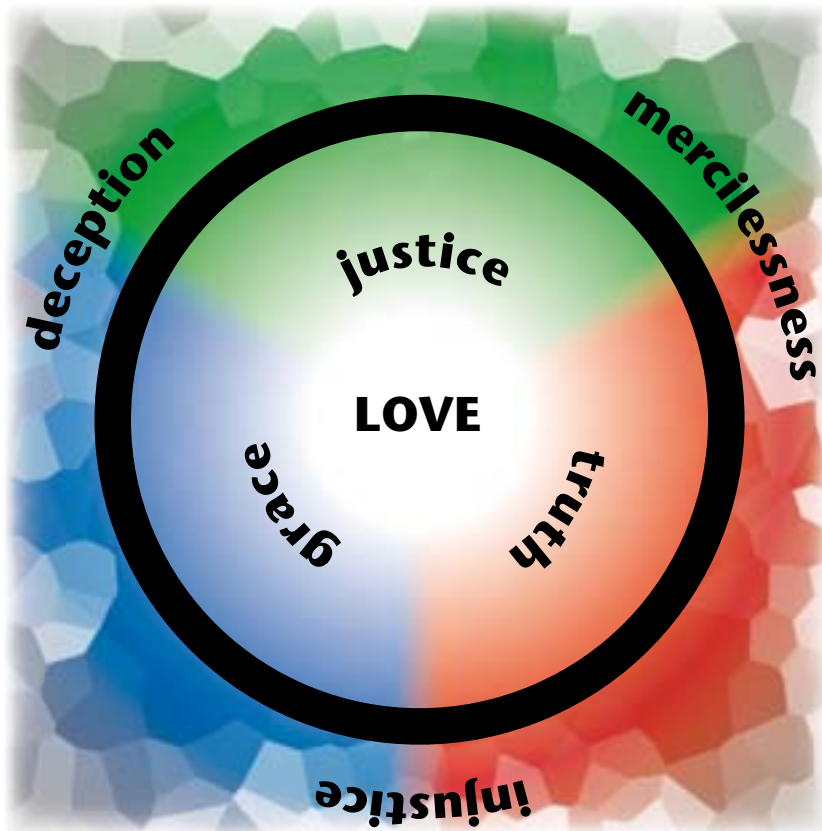
## Three manifestations of darkness

Take a look at the diagram on the right (page 27). As we have seen before, people who want to live in the light should not separate the three dimensions of justice, truth, and grace. However, it is easy to focus on one or two of these components, and forget about the others. This kind of imbalance can take place in all three directions, with equally dramatic consequences. Look at the three expressions of darkness outside the black circle:

- The first is *deception*. This is the result of stressing justice and grace, but bypassing truth. We could have also chosen the word “lie,” however, since people are more often victims of lies rather than being personally responsible for them, the broader term “deception” better identifies this particular danger.
- The second expression of darkness is *mercilessness*. This is frequently seen in groups that stress both justice and truth, but lack a practical

The less people have access to the light of God’s love, the more they create artificial lights that decorate the darkness.





This diagram shows that heresy is not necessarily the opposite of biblical standards, but is often something far more difficult to detect: a partial truth. One aspect of the biblical message is presented as an absolute, while neglecting other aspects. The three terms outside of the black circle (deception, mercilessness, and injustice) reveal what happens when we fail to integrate one of the three components of love.

understanding of grace. They might have the “right” topics on their agenda, but rather than communicating them in a spirit of grace, their fight for biblical goals comes across as hard-hearted, harsh, and intolerant.

- The third danger is *injustice*. This is found in groups that emphasize truth and grace, but fail to consider justice. It’s amazing how often people, in the name of truth and grace, resist movements that strive for social justice (usually by demanding grace toward those people in power and thus benefiting from unjust conditions).

When we look at these groups, there is no doubt that all of them have biblical values on their agenda. But since they fail to integrate the three dimensions of justice, truth, and grace, their activities become unloving. Yes, you can be a social activist, an advocate of the truest truth, or the most gracious person on planet earth—and still miss the center of biblical faith: love. Striving for biblical balance will make every believer more mature, more effective, and more Christ-like.

Chapter 1:  
FoundationsPracticing love means  
reflecting God's light

Jesus not only called himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12); he also used the same terminology in his Sermon on the Mount to describe his disciples: *they* are “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). Does this imply that there are two lights of the world? Yes and no. Metaphorically speaking, Jesus is the sun, his disciples are the moon. Both shed light, so the effect is similar. However, the sun is the source of the light, and the moon merely reflects the light that it receives from the sun. When we see the “moonlight” at night, we should never forget that we are still seeing the “light of the sun.”

Once you know  
where your color  
deficiencies are, you  
will be able to clean  
your mirror and  
reflect God's love  
more fully.

**Before giving, we must receive**

The Bible communicates the very same truth in a plethora of different ways: You can only give away what you have previously received; in order to share God's love with others, you first have to be filled with his love. Love should not be confused with the doing of “good deeds” in one's own strength. Rather, it requires living in the love you have received and allowing it to permeate your whole being. 1 John 4:19 is probably the shortest description of this principle: “We love because he first loved us.”

**The New Commandment**

Jesus continually communicated these dynamics to his disciples. The climax of his teaching on love is recorded in John 13:34-35: “A new command I give you: Love one another.

**Contemporary examples for justice, truth, and grace**

Over the next few pages, I will illustrate each of the three dimensions of love with examples of Christians who lived in the past century and became famous for their achievements in a specific area (be it justice, truth, or grace). I have always been **reluctant to present “big names”** as models, since I have too often experienced the counterproductive effects of this approach:

- The models are usually presented in a “blissful” light, ignoring the less favorable aspects of their character. As a result we put them (at least psychologically) almost on the same level as Jesus, not remembering that they were **imperfect and lopsided** in many respects, just as all of us are imperfect and lopsided human beings.
- Consequently, we tend to **revere these heroes** (“Isn't it great that we had people like them: so courageous, so smart, so gracious?”), rather than identifying with their agenda and applying the values they stood for to our own lives.

Having said this, however, I believe that real-life examples can help us to understand that the biblical values that are shared in this book are highly relevant for our times and, more importantly, literally have the **potential to change the world**.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In a way, these two verses are a summary of Jesus' whole mission. Let's have a brief look at the three key ingredients of this passage:

- First, Jesus *introduces* his message as a "new command." In his day, there were 613 commandments in Jewish law, 365 negative ones and 248 positive ones. "New" definitely didn't mean that Jesus was now adding commandment number 614. The new thing about this command was that it encompassed all of the others and revealed their deepest meaning (compare Matt. 22:40). That was revolutionary, indeed. Rather than concerning yourself with hundreds of details, focus on one essential thing!
- Second, he presents the *content* of his message: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." It's characteristic of Jesus' teaching to give not only the command to love, but also to relate that command to his own love for his disciples. In other words: "Gentlemen, never forget this: Here is the source, and there is the river. Here is the sun, and there is the moon."
- Third, he predicted the *effect* of his message: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples." By their *love* the disciples would be recognized as God's people. What is the result? Many will be drawn to become disciples themselves. To put it into our cold, abstract, statistical NCD slang: "If the love quotient of a church is high, the church will grow numerically." Isn't it amazing that one of the pivotal conclusions of the most comprehensive research of this kind ever done simply confirms what Jesus taught 2000 years ago?

You can only give away what you have received before.



### What are your problem areas?

The goal of this book is to help us put Jesus' teaching into practice. It is focused on the New Commandment which is, indeed, nothing less than a summary of the biblical message in its entirety. The aim is not to produce loving actions in our own strength, but to reflect the light of God's love. The Christian mystics liked to use the image of a mirror to communicate this truth: A mirror can only reflect when it has first been cleaned. This is the deepest background of the many "purification" practices that we can find in these groups: to become a more effective mirror for reflecting God's light.

In the next few pages, we'll take a closer look at each of the three dimensions of love, and then ask ourselves the following question: In which of these areas is my own mirror smudged, so that I'm not reflecting a specific color of God's light as adequately and fully as I could? Once you know where your color deficiencies are, you will be able to clean your mirror and reflect God's love more fully than before.

Chapter 1:  
Foundations

# The color green: justice

Justice puts God's  
compassionate love  
into action.  
It takes sides with  
the underprivileged  
and suffering.



Contrary to a widespread misunderstanding of the term, justice—as portrayed in the Bible—can take sides. It has little to do with the unaffected neutrality that many of us associate with the term and even project on God: a funny mixture between a British judge and a German bureaucrat who constantly quotes jurisprudence in order to make life much more complicated than it ought to be. Justice in the Bible is something altogether different. It is the active expression of God's compassionate love. It takes sides for those who need it most: the underprivileged and the suffering, the weak and the poor. Justice is far more than applying laws. It aims at a morality over and above the legal code.

### The core value: compassion

The Latin term *compassio* has always represented a central value in the social justice tradition of Christianity. *Compassio* in its original sense means suffering together with the crucified Christ. It is Christ himself who is seen in the countless victims of injustice (see Matt. 25:31-46). Thus, serving these people and helping them receive fair treatment, is seen as a direct ministry to Christ. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount outlines a very precise program of the kind of justice that God has in mind.

Jesus taught us to consider "poor Lazarus" as our primary example in the quest for justice (Luke 16:19-31). It is this perspective that many of those who have never suffered from injustice are entirely unaware of.

### Contemporary example: Martin Luther King (1929-1968)

This Baptist pastor became a worldwide symbol for **nonviolent resistance** against unjust laws which, in his day, affected the African-American population of the United States. His core principle was to counter violence with non-violence, hatred with love. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness," he preached, "only light can do that. **Hate cannot drive out hate**; only love can do that." His strategy of civil disobedience implied consciously disobeying unjust laws while peacefully accepting the penalty for it. This took him to prison innumerable times. "There are two types of laws: just and unjust," he said. "One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral **responsibility to disobey** unjust laws." When his opponents accused him of being an extremist, he replied, "Was not Jesus an extremist for love? Was not Amos an **extremist for justice**? So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?"

To this day, King remains a **controversial figure**. Many see him as a model for Christian action in politics and one of the martyrs of our times; others criticize him for his "insurgent views" and a life-style "inconsistent with biblical standards."



*Justice (represented by the color green) is one of three indispensable dimensions of God's love. However, it must be supplemented by truth (red) and grace (blue) in order to maintain balance.*

### **Focus on society**

People who are committed to justice—in biblical times as well as today—are usually controversial people. They upset those who benefit from the status quo. They live in tension with representatives of the state, the military, and the business world. For example, the founder of the Quakers (one of the churches at the very center of the social justice tradition), made the principle of *égalité* a feature of his personal life long before the French Revolution. He consistently treated everyone—rich and poor, powerful and weak—alike: no titles, no bowing down, no symbols of reverence. Initially, American soldiers who became Quakers were not rejected because of their pacifism, but because of their alleged “disrespect” for their officers.

The Old Testament clearly demonstrates that justice has an affinity to the social and political dimension of the faith (as seen in many of the prophetic books, especially Amos). Justice not only sees individuals in their misery, but it also inquires after the causes of that misery. It is focused on society and its structures.

# The color red: truth

One of the early meanings of the Greek term for truth, *aletheia*, was to tear away a veil. Truth is “unveiled reality”; reality as seen through God’s eyes. The Apostle John liked to combine this concept of truth with one of his favorite terms, light: “Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light” (John 3:21). Where the light of truth shines, revelation happens, deception disappears, and reality becomes visible. The light of truth exposes lies where they would otherwise go unnoticed, which may be painful. It is tempting to avoid confrontation and justify that decision in the name of “love”: “I don’t want to hurt the other person’s feelings.” However, our hesitation to confront often has

little to do with our concern for the other person. Rather, we are concerned about our *own* feelings. We don’t like to confront others because we fear rejection and don’t relish the difficult task of walking beside them through the process of change. Thus it is understandable that we try to avoid communicating the truth. But this should never be done in the name of love. One of the indispensable components of love is to minister truth to other people.

### The core value: trustworthiness

There is a second aspect to the biblical concept of truth that comes out of the Hebrew term for truth, which can also be translated “faithfulness.” While according to Greek thought you can *show* the truth, *speak* the truth, and *teach* the truth, it is characteristic of the Hebrew mindset to *do* the truth. The use of this terminology in John 3:21 is a good example of this.

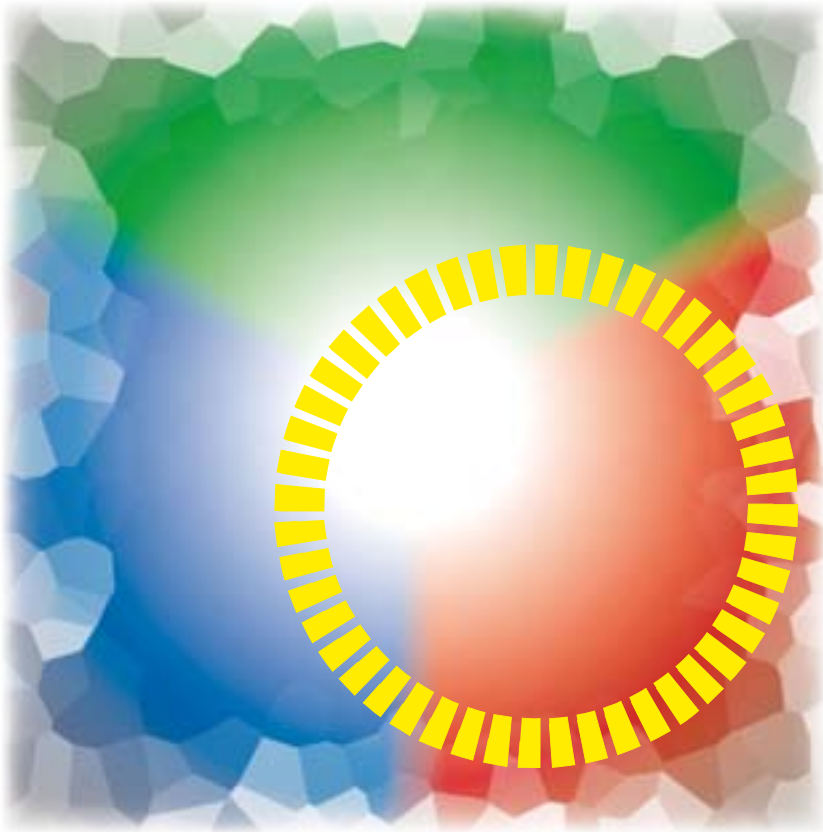
Truth puts God's trustworthy love into action. It reveals reality as seen through God's eyes.



### Contemporary example: Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984)

Francis Schaeffer was one of the most influential advocates of “right belief”—the “**true truth**,” as he liked to put it—that the last century has seen. “We not only believe in the existence of truth, but we believe **we have the truth**,” he wrote. And he continued, “Do you think our contemporaries will take us seriously if we do not practice truth?” This conviction made him a **man of conversation**. His community L’Abri in the Swiss Alps was his response to the hippie communes that desperately sought community and meaning. Schaeffer’s extensive understanding of the Bible was combined with a **critical study of the world of man**, including philosophy, history, culture, and the arts. He analyzed the roots of modern thinking in its rejection of rationality and strongly argued for **rationalism** in apologetics. Probably his greatest gift was his ability to communicate extremely complicated philosophical and theological issues on a non-technical level. Schaeffer’s commitment to the unity of truth reinforced his lifetime insistence that the **Bible was inerrant** in all respects.

While many admired him for his exceptional encyclopedic knowledge and his facility in communicating the truth, especially to young people, others criticized him for imposing a **far too rationalistic grid** on Christianity.



*Truth (represented by the color red) is one of three indispensable dimensions of God's love. However, it must be supplemented by grace (blue) and justice (green) in order to maintain balance.*

The Hebrews weren't so concerned with what is true in the objective sense, but with what is reliable in an existential sense. In Exodus 1:19, for instance, we learn that the midwives clearly told a lie (according to Western thought!) in order to protect human life. In Hebrew thought, as in many other Oriental cultures, this wouldn't even be called a lie. According to them, a lie is that which is powerless, empty, and vain. A spring that gives no water "lies" (Isa. 58:11). In essence, this concept of truth calls us to be reliable, to be trustworthy, to do what we are meant to do.

#### **Focus on both the Bible and reality**

Truth, in the Christian sense, has a dual focus. One is the word of God, the other is reality. Christians who are strong in truth do not usually feel threatened when others challenge their views. On the other hand, people who are weakly rooted in truth regularly find themselves on the defensive and often develop an unspiritual fanaticism. When one is strong in the biblical understanding of truth, the opposite is true: you enjoy questioning yourself, *your* views, *your* traditions, *your* values, in order to give more and more room to the light of truth in your life.

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# The color blue: grace

While truth may require removing veils from reality, unmasking people to reveal who they really are, grace may well imply respecting those veils if they shelter the shame, mystery, or dignity of a person. To understand what grace is all about, it's worthwhile to meditate on the New Testament term *charis*. It's the root from which the English word "charming" stems. Actually, *charis* has a lot to do with charm: It can refer either to physical beauty or to a winsome attitude that radiates warmth, acceptance, and joy.

Grace puts God's accepting love into action. It's a winsome attitude that radiates warmth, acceptance, and joy.

The biblical concept of grace contradicts a widespread understanding of justice. And, in fact, grace isn't always just. Why does a father throw a party for his son who has squandered his wealth in wild living rather than for the older son who has served his father faithfully all along? Grace is an undeserved, free gift. Christians who live and die for high moral standards often reject a radical application of the principle of grace. They have paid a great price to become members of what they hoped was an exclusive club, the church. Now they want to keep it as exclusive as possible. They regard grace as unfair.

### The core value: acceptance

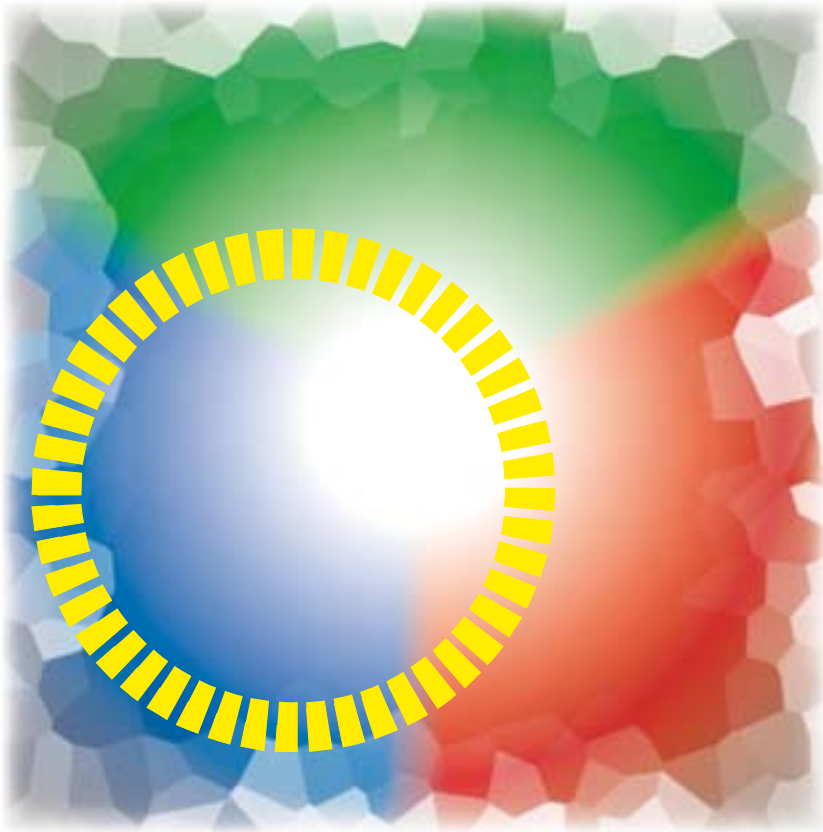
While Jesus may never have used the term, he constantly modeled grace. From him we learn the true extent of forgiveness: not seven times, but 77 times (Matt. 18:22). A wonderful case study of grace in action is Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). We learn that while grace in no way justifies sin, it does accept the sinner. And



### Contemporary example: Mother Teresa (1910-1997)

The ministry of this Roman-Catholic nun was focused on the **poorest of the poor**: the incurably ill and the outcast, the dying and the victims of AIDS. This focus also made her an advocate for the unborn. While acknowledging the impact of unjust political structures, her own ministry exclusively targeted **helping the individual**. One of her core values was not only to minister unselfishly, but **"to do it with a smile."** The motto that she taught her co-workers was, "Never allow yourself to meet someone who will not be happier after their encounter with you." An American journalist recalled sitting behind Mother Teresa watching how she tenderly washed a dying, worm-ridden person. "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars," the journalist said. Mother Teresa responded with this short, profound answer: "Neither would I." Later on, she added, "I see in every human being the helpless Jesus. Therefore, **I can do it for free.**" When invited by wealthy organizations, her message was, "We don't need your money, we need your time. We want you **to give yourself** to the poor."

While for many people Mother Teresa has become a worldwide symbol of Christian mercy, others have criticized her for **not addressing the social structures** that produced the poverty she sought to address.



*Grace (represented by the color blue) is one of three indispensable dimensions of God's love. However, it must be supplemented by justice (green) and truth (red) in order to maintain balance.*

this is the key: The sense of being accepted enables people to open up their hearts, and show us who they really are. Acceptance is far more than mere tolerance. It embraces a person regardless of his or her condition, and then helps that person mature.

### **Focus on the individual**

Grace focuses on the individual. It looks at people through the eyes of Jesus. As a result, it not only sees their present situation, but also their God-given potential and future possibilities. When you encounter Christian leaders who aren't rooted in grace, you may admire them for their achievements, but you usually feel very small in their presence. On the other hand, with leaders who radiate grace, the opposite happens: Though initially one might approach them feeling small, helpless, and unimportant, afterwards you sense that *you* have grown considerably.

We must never forget that as Christians we have not only been saved by grace, we must also live by grace. Our failure to do this seems to be the number one reason for the emotional and relational problems that can be detected in so many churches.

# Three models of love in action

Over the next few pages, I want to expand on the three dimensions of God's love with reference to the teachings of three biblical authors: James as a model for justice, John as a model for truth, and Paul as a model for grace. Although each one has become especially well-known for his emphasis on one of the three dimensions, all of them are good illustrations of how to balance justice, truth, and grace.

## Different messages for different people

Thousands of pages have been written by the most brilliant scholars about "contradictions" in the messages of James, John, and Paul. In fact, Martin Luther was so convinced of the theological contradiction between James and Paul that he promised to give his doctor's cap to the person who could make their messages sing the same tune.

Let's face it. James, John, and Paul definitely did *not* say the same thing.

Each of them was addressing a unique situation that was in need of a unique message. James stressed *justice* because he was addressing second-generation Christians whose moral vigor had faded. John stressed *truth* because he was warning Christians against certain heresies. Paul stressed *grace* because he was dealing with teachers who were trying to re-introduce the judaistic system of righteousness.

Take a look at the picture on the left. Are the different figures walking in the same, or in different (even opposite) directions? Do they need the same, or different (opposite) instructions for reaching their destination? Think about it for a moment. If you have found the answer, you have also found the answer to the theological debate mentioned above.

## Ministering to different minimum factors

One of the most basic principles our NCD consultants are taught is that they should focus on the "minimum factor" of each church they work with, rather than promoting their own favorite suggestions. If they were to take the same recommendations to every church, they would do a disastrous job as consultants. It is helpful to think of James, John and

Paul as church consultants who were addressing the color deficiencies of their respective audiences—because this is what they were doing!

If you had the opportunity to see me teach in different settings, you could easily detect the same sort of "contradictions" that scholars have identified when studying James, John and Paul. Is this because I am opportunistic, communicating what a specific group wants to hear? No. The opposite is true. I don't focus on the topics that are most *popular* in a given group, but on those that they most need to hear—their "color deficiencies." Guess from whom I have learned this?

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to James, John, and Paul! We sorely need their messages.

It is helpful to think of James, John and Paul as church consultants who were addressing the color deficiencies of their respective audiences.



# Model for justice: James

## Chapter 1: Foundations

**J**ames, an earthly brother of Jesus and one of the pillars of the first church in Jerusalem, passionately kept the Jewish law even after he became a Christian. The early church historian, Eusebius, records that James “used to enter the temple alone and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, until his knees grew hard like a camel’s because of his constant worship of God. Due to his excessive righteousness he was called ‘the Just.’”

### **James’ message: “Do what the word says”**

The letter that carries his name contains nothing that cannot be found elsewhere in the Bible. In form, it follows the tradition of Old Testament wisdom literature. In content, it is very similar to the gospel of Matthew, particularly to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). The core message of his teaching is, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). In contrast to other books of the Bible, however, James puts this message at the very center of his letter. He loves the imperative verb form (do it!); in the 108 verses of his letter we find 54 imperatives.

James does not attack an intellectual heresy, but a practical heresy that can well occur in conjunction with orthodox doctrine. He is interested in a faith that shows itself in practical acts of love, and therefore stresses that “faith without action is dead” (James 2:17). His goal is to drive out the worldly spirit that has infected the church (James 4:4). He is especially concerned that the poor and needy have been treated unfairly (James 5:4-6) and that the wealthy have been granted special privileges (James 2:1-7). According to James, this kind of partiality is unacceptable in the church of Jesus Christ.

### **Who needs James?**

All of us are in need of repeated exposure to James’ message; however, his teaching is especially beneficial for:

- upper-middle-class churches that have become so comfortable in their cushy armchairs that they have forgotten about the needs of the “Lazarus” on the street.
- churches where the rich and famous receive special treatment.
- churches that have allowed their “openmindedness” to reduce biblical standards so that the church fits the spirit of the times.
- churches that are characterized by an intellectual orthodoxy that merely influences the minds, but not the daily lives of the believers.
- churches whose slant on grace has actually begun to justify sin rather than help the sinner get rid of unbiblical behavior.

*Since James was addressing second-generation Christians whose moral vigor had faded, he stressed the importance of justice (green segment) in pursuit of a holistic understanding of love.*



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# Model for truth: John

There is a widespread image of the Apostle John that portrays him as a gentle, tolerant, and amiable person. From all we know about the historical John, he was just the opposite. There were good reasons why Jesus called him a “Son of Thunder,” a nickname that fits well with the impulsive, stormy, demanding description of him in the gospels. It is noteworthy that it is John, more than the other gospel writers, who highlights the severe side of Jesus: calling the Jews children of the devil (John 8:41-45), accusing the Pharisees of spiritual blindness (John 9:39-41), describing his predecessors as thieves and robbers (John 10:8). Tough words!

### John’s message: “Walk in the truth”

When we look at John’s recommendations for dealing with people who teach falsehood, we certainly wouldn’t regard them as especially tolerant, either: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 10-11). It is told that John consistently practiced what he preached. When he heard that the heretic Cerinth was in the same public bath house as himself, he immediately ran out of the bath. The historian Eusebius reports that he couldn’t stand to be under the same roof as “the enemy of the truth.”

On the basis of this account, how could the “soft” image of John emerge? The answer is simple. John’s gospel and his letters speak more about love than other books of the Bible. If our own concept of love is exclusively soft, we will project this softness onto John’s writings and thus create our own “soft Johnny.” But John’s focus, when writing about love, was primarily on the dimension of truth. “I have no greater joy,” he wrote, “than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4). “If we claim to have fellowship with God yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth” (1 John 1:6).

When reading his writings, it is evident that John’s focus on the truth, even his harshness toward any form of heresy, was motivated by love. He knew well what the effects of heresy are, that it can literally destroy people’s lives. That explains his passion for the truth.

### Who needs John?

All of us need to be repeatedly exposed to John’s message; however, his teaching is especially beneficial for:

- churches that have adopted a relativistic view of truth.
- churches that have more of a secular understanding of love than a biblical one.
- churches that have put “truth” at the top of their agenda, but don’t seem to see its inner connection to love.
- churches that have been affected by false teachings without even noticing it.

*John had to cope with heretics that were increasingly becoming a danger to the church. For that reason, his writings focused on how Christian love can express itself in truth (red segment).*



# Model for grace: Paul

## Chapter 1: Foundations

**P**aul has rightly received the title, “Apostle of Grace.” While he does write about justice and truth as well, we get the sense that, when it comes to grace, we meet the “real Paul.” The term is mentioned 156 times in the New Testament; and 100 of these instances are found in Paul’s writings alone. Every one of his letters starts by striking the note of grace (at least by the second sentence), and ends by leaving the sound of grace ringing in our ears. And the message in between?

### **Paul’s message: “All is grace and grace is for all”**

Paul knew who he had been (a persecutor of the church) and what he had become (an apostle of Jesus Christ), and he could only give one explanation for it: grace. “I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect” (1 Cor. 15:9-10). Paul knew better than anyone that grace is exclusively traced back to God’s initiative. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. Grace is an expression of God’s *unconditional* love.

His passion for grace explains his equal passion to fight teachings that would undermine grace. He calls them “a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:6-7). To the Galatians, who had started to follow these doctrines, he writes, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (Gal. 3:1). Paul knew what was at stake if grace were removed from the center of one’s understanding of God’s love.

It’s important to note that, according to Paul, we are not only saved by grace, but we are also called by grace. It is certainly no accident that the key term used by Paul for gift-oriented ministry—*charisma*—has the same root as the term for grace, *charis*. In Greek, the suffix *-ma* at the end of a word usually describes the effect of the word in front of the *-ma*. So what are spiritual gifts? They are the effect of grace in our lives. They are God’s grace in action.

### **Who needs Paul?**

All of us need repeated exposure to Paul’s message; however, his teaching is especially beneficial for:

- churches in which the appeal to grace is part of their doctrine, but its practical meaning for the believers has been lost.
- churches that have become proud of themselves and their achievements.
- churches that are truly committed to the Great Commission but have lost the balance between receiving and giving and have burned out their members.
- churches that have legalistic tendencies (note that there are evangelical, charismatic, and liberal varieties of legalism).

*Paul’s controversy with legalistic groups forms the background of many of his letters. His remedy? A radical focus on grace (blue segment).*



# What does this mean in practice?

**A** mature, loving person is able to express love in a wide variety of ways, depending on the need of the moment. If you have only learned to express love in *one* specific way, you will only be able to respond appropriately to a very limited number of situations. Outside of these settings your typical love pattern may be useless or, even worse, counterproductive.

Sometimes love must be tough; other times, it can be tender. Sometimes we need to put on our rose-colored glasses, deliberately overlooking the less favorable aspects of someone's character. At other times, however, we need to focus on the negative in order to help people grow. If we always respond in the same way, because that is comfortable for *us*, we may end up expressing thoughtlessness, but definitely not love.

Training your  
"love muscles"  
includes leaving  
your comfort zone.

## Two criteria for ministering love

What is the most important color—or expression of love—in a given situation? To answer this question, we need to consider two primary issues:

1. What does the other person most need in this situation? Would it be an expression of justice, of truth, or of grace?
2. What am I able to offer at this time? For example, you might sense that the other person primarily needs to experience God's grace, but that in your present circumstances,

you are not able to minister grace effectively to them. This could be a hint that you need further training in this area.

## Leaving your comfort zone

Training your "love muscles" includes leaving your comfort zone every now and then. If you aren't willing to do that, you cannot mature in love. There will be topics in this book that you might view with a certain amount of skepticism since they are outside of your comfort zone. Look at the pictures and examples that I have—deliberately—chosen to characterize the three dimensions of love (pages 30-35):

- People involved in demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience: "Dear Lord, a nest of terrorists!"
- People focused on the absolutely binding authority of Scripture: "For heaven's sake, hard-core fundamentalists!"
- People focused on radiating the positive, energizing atmosphere of grace: "Spare us the warm fuzzies!"

Leaving our comfort zone is usually an unpleasant exercise in the short run. But the very thing that we experience as unpleasant in the short run lays the foundation for overwhelming fulfillment in the long run. And even if we don't need to display certain aspects of love in a given situation—wouldn't it be nice to know that we *could*, at any given moment?

