

**A Men's Study**

# **Rebels with a Cause**

**The Reach of Radical Grace for  
Rebels in the Race**

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# INTRODUCTION

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If you are old enough you will remember a 1955 American film classic entitled *Rebel Without a Cause*, starring James Dean and Natalie Wood. It an attempt to portray the moral decline and delinquency of American youth, the story focused on a rebellious teenager, played by James Dean, who dishonors his parents, disobeys the rules of society, defies the popular high school bullies, and is drawn to the high school gang girl, Natalie Wood.

The word “rebel” identifies someone who is in opposition to the authority placed over him. The word “cause” identifies a goal or desired outcome that is worked toward. A “rebel without a cause” suggests someone who is rebelling simply for the sake of rebellion. With no great social or political struggle set forth in the movie, the story seems to capture the inherent frustration and fear experienced by the American youth culture.

The title of this 1955 movie is actually the perfect title for an “in-the-beginning” movie, starring Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They were the original rebels, who opposed the rule and authority of God and had absolutely no cause to do so. God had given them everything they needed to live lives of meaning, purpose, significance, and joy. And the most important thing they needed was God. All of life was to be rooted in an intimate, personal relationship with the Living God, for it was only in Him that they would find their true identity. He was to be both the center and circumference of their lives.

In this perfect environment there would be no selfish ambition or self-serving motive. They would rejoice in the perfect love for God (vertical relationship) and each other (horizontal relationship). Their *worship* of God would be as pure as their *witness* for God would be perfect.

God gave the first family authority and dominion over all of His creation . . . except for one tree. God strategically placed one forbidden tree in the center of the Garden, warning Adam: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). God did this for only one purpose: to let the man and woman know that they were still to be dependent upon and ruled by God Himself. Created by God for God, man was created dependent upon God to meet his every need. Like everything that was created by God, dependence was part of

man's divine design and not a result of the fall. So in defying God and seeking a life of self-sufficiency and autonomy, Adam and Eve were actually defying themselves and all that they had been created for.

God made them rulers over creation, yet they, in turn, were to be ruled by God. You know the rest of the story. These two "rebels without a cause" plunged all of creation into a sickening downward spiral of disease, decay, and death. They turned a garden of grace into a garden of groaning.

But God—are they not the two most glorious words in Scripture?—but God didn't leave it that way. As soon as man turned his back on God, God sought him out and called to him as man hid, trembling and ashamed, in the Garden, clutching a flimsy tunic of fig leaves to his chest in a futile attempt to hide from God. There was nothing Adam and Eve could do to hide their appalling wickedness from the Judge of all the earth. For the first time ever, man was filled with emotions that had been entirely foreign to him prior to his act of cosmic treason: fear, guilt, and self-loathing. Now, instead of delighting in his communion with God, man was debilitated with a conscience seared by sin.

At this point, nothing short of an all-out rescue would do. And that is exactly what God did by sending His Son. Jesus did not come to rehabilitate, refresh, recover, or restart man. Jesus came to rescue man who was utterly without hope of ever rescuing himself. "In the day that you eat of [the forbidden fruit] you shall surely die," God had warned, and that is exactly what had happened. Man was dead in his trespasses in sins, as dead—as Charles Dickens said of Jacob Marley—as dead as a doornail, utterly beyond hope of resuscitating himself.

This is the Gospel. Paul paints a beautiful picture of this Gospel in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." This is the good news of the Gospel: eternal life is rooted in the grace of God and not the "good" works of man.

But what about everyday life? How are we to view the time between the moment we are saved and the moment we are received in glory? We must view them through the same set of lenses. Eternal life and everyday life is all of grace. We are NOT saved by grace and then expected to live by the spiritual "sweat of our brow."

The Christian life can be separated into three categories; salvation, sanctification, and glorification. All three aspects are rooted in grace. The grace that saves is the grace that sanctifies and the grace that glorifies. Sadly, far too many Christians receive salvation as a gift of God and then base

their continued relationship with God on their personal performance. In my observation of Christendom, this persistent and pernicious misunderstanding has done more to cripple the witness and impact of the church than any other misunderstanding or error in its history.

Think about it this way: if you believe you are saved by grace but sanctified by your goodness, how positive do you feel about that? How good have you been lately? I'm not just talking about those obvious scandalous sins. You haven't murdered anyone or had an affair. How are you doing in the area of patience? How quickly do you find the speck in your brother's eye without ever seeing the plank in your own? Is anger or unforgiveness the confession of your life? Is one of your spiritual gifts a spirit of humility? Or is yours a critical spirit? Do you remember Jesus saying that anyone who calls his brother a fool is in danger of hell's fire? Tell me honestly, when was the last time you looked at a woman who was not your wife and lusted after her beauty or her body? Do recall that Jesus said that to look on a woman lustfully was as evil as the sin of adultery? Christian man, I ask you: how "good" have you been doing lately?

If you are anything like me (and you are), your bad days far outnumber your good days. And if you're thinking that your good or bad behavior is what determines your standing with God, that places you on a "Performance Treadmill" that you can never get off! With all your time spent running on the treadmill to attain, maintain or re-gain your acceptance and affection of God, there is no time left to spend to expand the cause of the Kingdom.

From the time I was saved in 1995 until 2005, this is what defined my Christian life. As an athlete, coach, and martial artist for more than thirty years, I was convinced that all I needed to do was to become more disciplined and committed. Every time I "missed the mark" (we will discuss this in detail later), I was convinced that I simply needed to try harder. It was only when I was given the book *The Pursuit of Holiness*, by Jerry Bridges, that I caught a glimpse of the real Gospel of grace and its far reaching implications.

For the first time I learned that the Gospel is intended just as much for the Christian as it is for the non-Christian. I learned the importance of the profound words of Jack Miller when he said, "Preach the Gospel to yourself every day." The more I looked deeply into the Gospel, the more I began to understand and appreciate what Jesus did on that cross for me. He didn't die solely for my entrance into the Kingdom of God; it was also for my everyday living in the Kingdom of God.

And this is the message of this study we're beginning together. *Rebel With a Cause* chronicles the message of continuing grace in the life of the rebel who has been called by God and given the greatest cause in this world: expanding the Kingdom of God in a fallen, broken, and sin-filled world through the stewardship of God's three part story, creation, fall, and redemption.

Because we were made by God for relationship and community, this study is best applied in the context of relationship and community. I have found over the years that the best approach in maximizing the impact of the studies and books I have worked through is to read it privately and respond to it corporately. There are some blessings that can only be received in the context of community. It is instructive to keep in mind that when God saves an individual He places him into a community called the church. The Bible knows nothing of the solitary saint, who lives in intentional isolation from other believers. There is something supernatural that I have seen occur time and again when men work through a book or study together and discuss what God is placing on their collective hearts.

The first printing of *Rebels With a Cause* is for the 2010 Brother Brigade Men's Ministry at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, under the direction and leadership of my friend, pastor, and preacher of the grace message, Tullian Tchividjian. At the end of each chapter you will find "Brother to Brother" questions designed to drive the roots of grace deeper into the soil of the sanctified life . . . by the grace of the God who saved you.

As you embark on this journey of discovering the role of grace in everyday life, perhaps for the first time, or rediscovering it, I encourage you to do what my first seminary professor instructed me to do in approaching all of my studies, "Read, study, and meditate as one preparing to share with, sacrifice for, and shepherd others."

Purpose & Passion,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tommy Boland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pastor Tommy Boland

"By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).