

**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).

# 1

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## Runners, Take your Mark!

Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Read it.

God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink.

Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made.

Can you ask for a louder voice than that?

~St. Augustine

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:1, 26, 27



# ONE

## **Runners, Take Your Mark!**

As we stood along the side of the track we were filled with great anticipation. It was time for the 100 yard dash, and our 5<sup>th</sup> grade daughter Jenna stood in the first lane, representing her school, Westminster Academy. “Runners take your mark! Get set . . . go!” And off they went, racing toward the finish line. To our delight and my great surprise, Jenna was out in front. I say “surprise,” because my Jenna is built more for power than for speed, and she had never run in a track meet before. My wife, Kim, and Jenna’s two brothers and sister were cheering for her as we leaned over the fence that separated the spectators from the runners on the race track. A little more than 17 seconds after the race began, it was over, and Jenna crossed the finish line ahead of all the runners, setting a 5<sup>th</sup> grade record for her school.

To be sure, a world record had not been set, and Sports Center would not be showing the highlights from this race that evening, but you would never have known that from my response. Having strained my vocal cords from my “encouragement,” I now proceeded to strain my hamstring as I tried to clamber over the fence to get onto the track and hug my daughter. Realizing I was too old for that approach, I dashed off to run around the end of the fence. In one of those classic moments of community between husband and wife, my beloved Kim called after me, “You might want to simply open the gate and walk through!” The gate was only a few feet from where we were standing.

### **THE MAKER’S MARK**

In the Genesis creation story we read that the God of all creation essentially said the same thing to the first two runners in the race of life. The “runners” were Adam and Eve “made in the image of God” (*imago Dei*) to reflect God in a uniquely special way that nothing else in creation was created to do. They were not the highest form of animal. They were above and beyond all that God created, made for the specific purpose of bearing the image of God. The “mark” was the perfect plan and purpose for which God had created them. Known as the cultural mandate, Adam and Eve were to be creational caretakers of all that God had created, as explained in Genesis 1:28-30.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

What a wonderful “mark” God had given to our first two parents! Man and woman, Adam and Eve, living, laboring, and loving in perfect harmony, happiness, and holiness, each for the other and both for God. God created a perfect place of unimaginable beauty with a menagerie of land, sea, and air animals and two perfect people who were perfectly bearing the image of the One who had created them. In a word, this was paradise. In her book *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey identifies this “mark” as “The first job description.”

The first phrase, “be fruitful and multiply,” means to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, “subdue the earth,” means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, compose music.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly they had not been placed in the garden to serve themselves. God was to be both the center and the circumference of their existence, eliminating any possibility for self-survival, self-protection, and self-satisfaction to shape their lives. At the outset of the creation story, in living out the cultural mandate in a way that reflected the creative character of their Creator, it is clear to see that man was made for both communion with God (vertical relationship) and companionship with others (horizontal relationship). Let’s take a brief look at this cross-shaped community.

## **COMMUNION WITH GOD**

Man was created *by God for God*, and upon his heart was written both the *desire for* and *dependence upon* communion with the Almighty. This makes man a religious being by nature and throughout all of recorded history, men have given expression to their religious nature through their

pursuit of God, in whatever form they sought Him. It is critical to understand that both *desire* and *dependence* preceded the Fall. We did not “fall” into our desire and dependence; we were formed into it by God. When God spoke to Adam and Eve, He was making it clear that they needed His Word to understand life and how to live it out in a way that brought God glory. Everything else in creation simply did what it was created to do: glorify the Creator.

Communion with God places man above all other life forms, and therefore gives man special significance and meaning in life. In fact, it is absolutely impossible for man to find significance and meaning without living in communion with God. With so much talk these days about purpose, I am cautioned to use it here without making something clear. There is not a person who has ever lived, living today, or will ever live on this earth who is not purpose-driven. Every person is always living in the pursuit of something. Sadly for many, it is something smaller than God. The key is to be purpose-driven for the glory of God and God alone. St. Augustine rightly observed, “When I am completely united to you (God), there will be no more sorrow or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete.”

It is God who invites man to commune with Him as soon as he is created out of the dust of the ground (Genesis 1:28). This makes man a religious being by calling and by vocation. Adam was to be found walking in the Garden in the cool of the day and communing with his God. Adam was from God, and only by orienting all of life back toward God would Adam be able to live a fully functioning life of freedom and faithfulness. Communion with God was designed to enlarge his mind, enflame his heart, and empower his will. The most amazing thing about God is the fact that He never ceases to invite man into communion with Him—even after man’s cosmic rebellion, after which communion was the *last* thing Adam wanted with God, as we will see in the next chapter.

## **COMPANIONSHIP WITH OTHERS**

Everything God made was good and God pronounced his benediction upon it all. The first malediction (something that was not good) appears in Genesis 2:18, where the Lord God announces, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.” Man was never created to live in intentional isolation. Man was created for companionship with others. In a word, man was made for community. Paul Tripp explained:

We were made to need one another, and this community was meant to exist in a variety of forms, including neighbor, family, friend, church, city, state, nation, brother, sister, parent, and spouse. This web of ongoing relationships daily calls us out of our insulation and isolation to experience a community glory that selfish, personal focus can never deliver. God makes Adam and Eve and immediately calls them to the transcendent glory of a world-reaching, generation-spanning, and history-encompassing community. This commitment to community was meant to be a major shaping focus of their day-by-day living.<sup>2</sup>

In that community, Adam was perfectly designed by God to be the spiritual head of Eve, not to lord it over her but to sacrificially love and serve her. Adam's life was to be a living epistle, reflecting to his wife what God had done and was continuing to do for him. The degree of success Adam would experience in community would be in direct proportion to his communion with God.

When I am doing pre-marital counseling I always spend some time discussing the word "helper" as Scripture often uses it in describing the relationship between the woman and the man. Rather than identifying the woman's inferiority, God was identifying man's inadequacy. In other words, men, ***we are not all that...and apart from Christ we are nothing!***

In this perfect place there was no unhealthy competition, no unholy desire or unmet need. Suffering and sorrow, depression and disappointment, fear and guilt were as far removed from man as the east is from the west. Love for God and others was the foundation upon which their race was to be run. And run they did, without a care in the world.

In God's perfect Garden there were no weeds and no thorns, providing our first parents with labor that caused them to "whistle while they worked." They worked together with just one heart beat for the glory of God and the good of each other. They knew nothing of a so-called "hump day," racing off at 5:00 pm to get to "happy hour," or TGIF. They thanked God for every day. Instead of working for the weekend, they worked for God as his resident managers, reigning over all created things to God's glory.

Adam and Eve were created to live missionally for their Maker. Created by Him and for Him, their DNA was hardwired to know precisely who they were, what they were there to do, and to whom they were to be doing it for. They knew nothing of today's all-too-common split between the sacred and the secular, the perfect and permitted, eternal and temporal. All of life was to be lived "*coram deo*," before the face of God, with passion and perfection and lived "*doxologically*"—as an act of worship. Their worship service was not confined to an hour on the Sabbath. Worship was meant to be twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 day a year. They never thought in a way that invaded their worship; they never spoke in a way that interfered with their worship; they never acted in a way that interrupted their worship. Pastor Scotty Smith sharpens the focus on this incredible picture.

Adam and Eve enjoyed face-to-face and side-by-side relationship with God and each other. Their face-to-face relationship was a celebration of utter shamelessness, trust, and security. Their side-by-side relationship consisted of partnering with each other in glorifying God and enjoying him forever. Sex and worship were pure and passionate—beyond imagination.<sup>3</sup>

Worship of God ruled their hearts and ultimately shaped their lives. Because they were living for the glory of God, they gave no thought to living for their own glory. Big Kingdom living was the confession of their lives. These two runners took their "mark" from God (His perfect purpose and plan for their lives) and they followed it flawlessly . . . that is, until the day the devil showed up and convinced *both of them* they could live a life of autonomy, independence, and self-rule.



## BROTHER TO BROTHER

1. Describe the Maker’s “mark” for the first two runners in the race of life.

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2. What is this “mark” commonly known as? What does Nancy Pearcey identify it as?

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3. What are the two components of a cross-shaped community?

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4. What is the shape of the community you have been living out lately?

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5. Are you stronger in the area of your vertical relationship or in your horizontal relationships? Please explain.

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6. What steps do you need to take to improve in either area?

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7. We read in today’s study that every person is always living in the pursuit of something. As Rebels with a Cause, we should be living in pursuit of the glory of God and God alone. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you say you are currently doing in this area?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Totally self absorbed			Halfway there			Totally sold out for Christ			

1. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 47  
 2. Paul Tripp, *Quest for More*, 20-21  
 3. Scotty Smith, *The Reign of Grace*, 86.