

The Grace-Giving Leader

Jan Greenwood

Foreword by Holly Wagner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword by Holly Wagner

Introduction

Chapter 1 Laced with Grace

Chapter 2 Grace to Wait

 Secret #1 Grace Empowers

 Secret #2 Grace Connects

 Secret #3 Grace Matures

Chapter 3 The Power to Change

 Secret #4 Grace Received Empowers You

 Secret #5 Grace Given Empowers Others

 Secret #6 Grace Withheld Disempowers

Chapter 4 The Power to Influence

 Secret #7 Leadership is Not About You

 Secret #8 Leadership is Always About Others

Chapter 5 The Power to Lead

 Secret #9 Leaders Love

 Secret #10 Leaders Multiply

Chapter 6 Make It Personal

Grace-Giving Leadership Secrets Recap

Questions for Book and Group Discussion

INTRODUCTION

My personal journey to becoming a Grace Giving Leader was long. I began by striving to earn each leadership position by proving myself every step of the way. I did not understand that when God calls you to lead others, He calls you by grace—not by works.

Without that understanding, as an emerging leader, I found myself wrestling with much uncertainty. Impatient to accomplish great things, I was often frustrated when obstacles were placed before me that seemed designed to hold me back. I was overly sensitive to other opinions and strove to please everyone. I had an insatiable yearning to make a difference in the world by being part of something meaningful, but I knew nothing about the importance of grace as a powerful tool of leadership. Instead, I thought the answer was to ignore the discomfort in my heart and just work harder.

That is why my husband called me the “queen of de-Nile”.

For years, I simply denied my feelings and just kept going. I wanted to prove myself to God and others. I did not want to stop and really look at the sensation of resistance that I later discovered was the presence of the Holy Spirit asking me to wait on His timing. I did not want to wait. Because He created me competent with a willingness to help others and He put me in these leadership positions to do just that, I pressed on taking on more projects and responsibilities, in spite of my discomfort and impending burnout.

By ignoring that nudging on my heart, I soon began to believe I was due more leadership positions. I thought “they” owed me. Somehow, someone was holding me back or even taking advantage of me. This kind of self-centered thinking led to many frustrating days waiting on promotions that I believed were long past due. I didn’t want to wait for what comes next. I was in a hurry. Surely God needed me to keep pushing forward so I can get all His work done.

During those early years, I would feel my head press against a leadership lid, a limitation, even a glass ceiling, and I would think surely someone will see that I had “earned” advancement. When they didn’t notice or seem to care, I just performed more. Blame would race along the edges of my mind and injustice would scream for relief. It became easy to believe I was personally rejected or disqualified, and that someone or something was personally holding me back. Was it because I was a woman? Was it because they wanted their friend to have the position? I didn’t know, but I was dissatisfied. More than that, I was easily offended, stressed out

and anxious.

I often felt overlooked, disqualified, unchosen, and left out. I struggled with thoughts like, “maybe I’m not called”, “God doesn’t like me, trust me or care about my feelings”, “I must have missed it”. There was also a struggle with hopelessness, constantly battling the lie that my dreams will never come to pass and that I am doomed for failure and frustration.

My moment of truth came when I finally crashed, burned, and realized *I* was the one creating most of the proverbial glass ceilings all by myself. My own need for recognition, acceptance, even success was creating a leadership lid on my life. I couldn’t be trusted (by God) to lead sooner or greater, because my own heart was not at peace. In His unsurpassed wisdom, God frustrated my plans and resisted my strategies in order to sift out my selfishness and insecurity. If I had advanced easily, according to my own plan of action, I would have spent my whole life trying to work *to earn* what God wanted to give me *for free*.

It’s called grace.

When it finally hit me, I noticed that every time I strove for recognition, He comforted me with His presence. Every time I wondered if my gender was the problem, He accepted me. Every time I wanted to shatter the hindrances and obstacles I perceived; He gave me the grace to wait. And I’m so glad I did. I have learned priceless lessons over these years and I want to give these insights to you, dear friend. I want to mentor you to be a Grace Giving Leader through the pages of this book.

If you are concerned about the glass ceilings in your own life, I assure you that they are more effectively and more quickly shattered by grace than by hammers. I also assure you that all of us have a glass ceiling formed by grace. It protects us from our own foolishness. It guards and shepherds our future and prepares us with a greater capacity to love.

Over the years, while I spent a lot of time lost in performance and striving to do it all on my own, I knew I needed help. I really longed for a mentor, someone who would actually see me and support me. It took me a long time to realize that mentors were already all around me, they just didn’t look like what I was searching for or what I thought I needed in the moment. As a result, I often walked alone. I was blind to the resources and support that were already readily available.

This idea that I could change the way I view myself and others through a lens of grace instead of a lens of performance began as a seed of hope in my heart that eventually broke

through my hard shell of self-protection, opening my eyes to the continuing patterns of self-sabotage that limited my leadership.

That season of growth and maturity eventually led to a greater intention on my part to learn from others, embrace my passion to lead, and allow God to stretch my understanding of what it means to do those things with grace. It's been years since God revealed this all to me and now, I am so humbled and honored to get to share these lessons with you.

It's taken me five years to write this book. The original draft came easily. I was at a critical moment in my own health journey and I was experiencing tremendous grace. People were loving me well and in spite of the threat of the moment, I was being carried on the wings of prayer. I was at peace in the midst of war. I was on a temporary leave from work and found myself with a lot of time in mandatory rest and not enough outlets to share my journey or to express my gratitude. The work had been stirring in me for about two years and I had already taught on the very basic principles you will find here. I started playing with an idea and something very special began to flow from deep within.

Transformation is powerful like that. When you can tap the place in your heart, and for a moment find an expression that captures it, you can overflow with love and grace. I unintentionally came out of that crisis moment with a new message and a greater sense of hope. Over the past five years, the message has been tested by waiting. I've waited and grown and understood so much more. As a result, what you hold in your hand is some of the best wine of my life, aged and seasoned by grace.

As I am drafting the final edits to this book, we are in the midst of a world-wide pandemic. Our culture is in shock and our nation is in turmoil. Every single person around the world has been touched. If ever we needed a vision for healthy leadership, it is now.

Maybe that's why this project is coming to fruition in this moment. You and I are intersecting at a critical moment in God's plan to make Himself known to all, and you have a part to play. Every believer must become a leader. Your faith journey is on display and those who are within your sphere need the grace you carry within.

This is why this book is so timely. I don't want this generation of influencers to struggle as hard and as long as I did to understand the power of grace and its impact on your leadership

life.

Who you choose to do life with either expands your dreams or limits your boundaries. I want your dreams to be expanded. I want you to find trusted counsel and practical resources to build wisdom and understanding that can change your life. And I highly recommend finding a mentor as part of who you do life with. Mentoring is a pure form of discipleship, time-proven and incredibly impactful. A genuine relationship with a seasoned mentor is an invaluable asset to anyone who aspires to intentionally influence others.

My own life has been transformed by the influence of many mentoring relationships. Some I knew personally and am even related to. Others I found in the pages of Scripture or the pleasure of an autobiography. Sometimes I rubbed shoulders with a wiser woman at a critical life stage and often I watched, gleaned, and learned from afar. When I encountered Jesus Christ, I began the most loving and empowering relationship I have ever known. His love for others and my value for relationships lit a life-long passion in me to build up and encourage others.

Through the pages of this book I want to be part of your journey and mentor you. Please allow this to be my investment in you and your leadership, just as others invested in me.

Why should you follow me? Why should you trust my counsel?

For more than thirty years, I've been studying leaders. One of my most significant leadership roles began when I became a mom of four kids. I also worked outside my home and served as a leader in my local church. I held leadership positions in the marketplace and within the business my husband and I owned. I have been a fund-raising consultant for several Christian ministries and have even run a non-profit educational organization. I eventually established a ministry called *Brave Strong Girl* and wrote a book about healthy female relationships called *Women at War*.

For the past decade I have been serving as a part of the pastoral team at Gateway Church, a 60,000+ member, multi-campus church in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. For eight years, it was a transformational experience to serve alongside our senior pastor's wife and women's ministry leader, Pastor Debbie Morris, helping to lead a team and direct a beautiful conference for women called *Pink Impact*. Even today this gathering continues to grow, reaching well over 15,000 women a year. Currently, I serve as the Pastor of Equip at our Southlake campus where one of my most important responsibilities is to disciple, engage and mentor the next generation of leaders.

I have been discipled by some of the most influential Christian leaders of our day and inspired as well by a community of leaders who are both friends and family to me. I am so excited to introduce you to many of them throughout this book. Not only will I feature in each chapter a particularly impactful grace-giving leader in my own life, but I will also be sharing the experience and the advice of a variety of leaders who are worthy of your following. I encourage you to take the time to get to know them more. Each one has so much to offer to you.

And of course, I'm going to be sharing with you about my own journey. I know you will relate to my pain and failures, but I want you to also relate to my healing. Because of God's grace and the intersection of my life with grace-giving leaders, I have laid down the leadership tools of control and management to pick up the power of love and grace.

On the journey, I've discovered a few principles that came to me like secrets. Mysteries that were revealed became principles upon which I lead and mentor today. These "secrets" truly work. They are secrets that empower rather than discourage, that ignite passion rather than destroy dreams, and that create successful teams rather than lone rangers.

I want to share these secrets with you.

Just to be clear, this book isn't going to tell you about how to increase your social media presence, sell more widgets, or build a personal empire. You can find that information elsewhere. Instead, I am urging you to step out and bravely explore what it means to lead yourself and others from a place of grace. I am challenging you to push past self-doubt and interrupt your fears with courage. You will encounter the truth that the highest levels of leadership have very little to do with position, title or public accolades, but has lots to do with learning to create safe, confident, empowering environments where everyone gets to become their best.

I don't want this to be just another book on leadership. My hope is that you will experience this book. That as you gain knowledge and understanding you will not just store it away like a book on a shelf, but rather you will bring the tools to the table of life and learn to apply the principles within.

With that goal in mind, you will see each chapter ends with ten questions and every secret includes a moment to pause and ponder. The pause and ponder questions are for your personal reflection. The chapter questions are for discussion. These prompts are not meant for a mental or intellectual process only, rather I want you to learn to think, listen and ponder with others. Don't rush pass these opportunities. Slow down. Listen. Think. Discuss. This simple

practice will improve your leadership skills exponentially. More importantly, you will be developing a habit that every leader desperately needs; to ask a great question, followed by the ability to quiet yourself enough to listen and think before you speak.

You can take this exercise to a whole new level by also learning to ponder and process with the Holy Spirit. Thinking about a question all by yourself limits you to your experience, beliefs and current leadership lid. Processing with another person – and especially with God -- always helps you open up your inner man to perspectives and answers you can't find alone. Be careful to not take the exercise of discussion and turn it into an academic experience. You can be disciplined in a topic without being disciplined in the Spirit.

So how do you ponder and process with God? Just begin by quieting your own thoughts. Maybe spend a few moments in prayer or worship. Then position yourself to listen. Ask the Holy Spirit a question and wait. Maybe journal your thoughts. Then ask yourself if what you sense is true according to the written Word of God. The Scripture is the final authority in testing all claims about what is true and right. Is what you are sensing lining up with God's word?

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV)

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Psalm 32:8 (NKJV)

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. John 14:26 (NKJV)

The pattern of seeking to connect with God and to understand His counsel through the Bible is a self-leadership skill that is priceless. Of all creation, only mankind was created with the ability to reflect, evaluate and intentionally change our minds. This advantage, well developed and deeply loved, will lead you toward a life that is sincerely satisfying and full of purpose.

The journey of becoming a grace-giving leader will not be easy nor painless. In fact, it's going to be costly. It will require you to be vulnerable, authentic, and transparent. You may feel exposed and afraid. You will need wisdom, practical advice, and other people for real

connection. Most of all, you will need the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's divine power and inspiration.

Whether you are a young woman embarking on your first leadership assignment, in a season of transition, or after years of aiming high in the workforce or nonprofit sector, I'm eager to intersect your life in this critical season of your development as a leader. Together, we will launch out on a journey of personal growth and leadership development *so that you can help as many other people as possible.*

If your heart is set on a journey to serve, love, and lead, then you'll live a life that is rich, full, and gratifying. More importantly, your life will grasp the real mission of every leader—to train others in this way of life.

Today, I challenge you to accept God's commission and to go far and near in grace.

"God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life ..." Matthew 28:18 (MS

1

Laced with Grace

Years ago, my husband and I moved from a tiny town in central Texas to the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. We were so excited when right out of college, Mark was accepted into a management program with a fortune 500 retailer. His career was taking off and every year or so, he was promoted. With each promotion we moved, and I found myself in search of a new job. I had done a variety of work, but nothing that I thought was cool or exciting.

Then I landed the dream job.

I went to work as an assistant to an executive in a small consulting firm who served several large non-profit Christian organizations around the nation. She was smart, polished and had been in the field of advertising for years. She was “up and coming” bringing to the company a passion and experience level that was opening more doors and producing new customers. She was powerful, a decision maker and a woman who knew how to lead. I attached my dreams to her coat tails of success and wanted to be just like her.

I helped her establish an office in a beautiful high-rise building. We bought expensive furniture and stocked the kitchen with free drinks and snacks. Every day I wore a suit (a big deal to me in the 80’s), unlocked the office and managed her clients and office work while she traveled all over the United States. We got along well, and I did a good job of assisting her. My skills were soon recognized in our other offices and I was promoted to a junior consultant. I began to earn my keep by learning to develop billable hours for a portion of my time.

When I was invited to travel a bit and support another consultant on the team, things started to shift. I soon found the more others wanted my help the more critical she became of my work. I responded by ramping up my efforts, determined to please her and prove my worth. I tried harder and harder and things got more and more tense. I couldn’t put my finger on the problem, but I knew one of us had shifted and she was suspicious of me.

Then one day, I made a huge mistake. I faxed (don’t laugh – it was the latest in high tech communication) a private piece of correspondence to the wrong client. That client was a

competitor of another one of our clients.

Within an hour, I got a phone call from her asking questions that were difficult. My mistake was revealed, and I was duly embarrassed. I apologized fervently, but I did not realize how significant my error was until the president the company called me from the home office to let me know the ramifications.

Although I didn't lose my job that day, I did lose the support of my boss. She no longer trusted me and within a short amount of time, I didn't trust her either. She bore the embarrassment and consequences with the clients and as a result, ultimately lost faith in me. I felt so ashamed and unsafe that within about six weeks I chose to quit the dream job - and I blamed her. Thirty years later I can assure you it was not her fault, but I can also tell you she extended me no grace.

I left the company humiliated and burned. In my anger, I declared I would never make such a stupid mistake again. This became an impossible inner vow that led to many disappointments over the years because of course, I made many more mistakes.

Sometimes I look back on that moment and I still feel the sting of embarrassment and my sadness at the loss of the job, but what stuck with me for years were the vows I made. "It's not okay to make mistakes." "Don't count on others when the going gets rough." "Don't trust women."

These lies, along with my already firmly rooted people pleasing patterns set me steadfastly on a path of self-sufficiency and fear of man. Over the years, I became just like her. I led well but withheld full trust and support. If someone began to excel, I would feel threatened. If they made a major mistake, I took responsibility, tried to correct it and harbored resentment toward them. I simply did not extend grace to others nor to myself. I was harsh in my judgments and foolish in my thinking.

Looking back, I now realize that I thought she owed me something more. I had worked hard to prove myself worthy and I didn't think one mistake should be so costly. I did not understand that people do not owe me anything. If you work and get a paycheck – it's called a wage – and that is all that is owed to you. Loyalty, favor, patience or even a promotion are not something to be expected or demanded. By their very nature they can only be given to you as gifts of grace.

I wonder what giving and receiving grace would have looked like in that situation. It certainly wouldn't have meant that there were not consequences, for I surely needed accountability, additional training, closer supervision or even a period of probation. But what if that process had bent me toward an experience of grace? What if I had been forgiven? What if I had been given a chance to apologize to our customer? What if I had been coached in moving forward? What if I had survived it?

It's probably no surprise to you that people do not flourish in harsh, frightening, or abusive situations. They don't respond well to know-it-alls or bullies. They leave leaders and organizations who are selfish, and they crumble under constant criticism and a lack of grace.

On the other hand, people do grow in safe, kind, encouraging environments. They thrive when treated with graceful words or deeds. They flourish alongside a forerunner who speaks with wisdom and leads with grace.

If you have experienced significant kindness or nurture, your personal leadership bent will be toward giving grace to others, but if you have experienced pain, failure or even rejection at the hands of a leader or a lover, your bent will lean toward rules and regulations, control and management.

No matter what your bent, I want to help bend you toward Christ and His example so that you can see and experience everything in your life, through the lens of grace.

Why grace? Because I believe that grace is a powerful gift from God. Grace arrives in our life in the form of strength or courage or kindness or care. It is the doorway to salvation and the road upon which our discipleship journey is laid. Yes, it is undeserved favor – a free gift to every believer in Jesus Christ - but more than that, grace is power. It is a divine enablement that produces an anointing in your life. It makes you powerful when you are weak, and able to heal when you've been wounded. It makes you positively influential in the lives of others. It empowers you to lead people with the grace you've been given.

What comes to mind when you think of being a *leader*? Do you imagine yourself as the captain of your own fate? Do you see yourself standing in front of others, giving a charge? Or maybe you imagine yourself hiding on the back row, looking at your feet and hoping no one calls your name. Some of us are eager to be handed the reigns of leadership while others fear the

responsibility. Both of those perspectives are extremes.

I am one of those eager for the reigns. I have always dreamed of leading. I can't quite explain it, but since I was a little girl, I had a confidence in myself that I would know what to do in a situation if people would just listen and obey. As you can imagine, my leadership journey has had a few bumps and bruises along the way due to such a prideful heart. Over the years, I have had to evaluate why I want to lead and consider how I can do it more effectively.

A part of that process has been my discovery and following of some mentors who have substantially impacted my thinking, experience, and expression of leadership. God has been so faithful to introduce me to these leaders at critical moments in my journey. With the advantage of hindsight, I can see how God brings people into our lives who are meant to impart gifts, share vision, and challenge us to be brave.

In the very early days of my call to serve as a women's leader in my local church, I came across a unique voice that seemed to understand the secret desires, concerns, and weaknesses of my heart.

Holly Wagner was an emerging force among Christian women leaders. She was already known for her leadership within Oasis Church, a diverse and thriving Christian community that she co-founded and co-pastored with her husband, Phillip, in the heart of Los Angeles. She also had a recognized and growing ministry to women called God Chicks. Today Holly is a prolific author having written a dozen books, preached at conferences around the world and still hosts and ministers to a community of women called *She Rises*. I don't remember how I first became aware of Holly, but I can, with great clarity, remember how her life and message impacted my journey.

When I read Holly's book, *God Chicks: Living Life as a 21st Century Woman*, I knew I had found someone who "got me." In my tiny little church in Abilene, Texas I often felt so strange and insecure. I had big passion and big dreams – so big, that I was a little ashamed of my zeal and very intimidated by the concern that I might violate a spiritual boundary of leadership just because of my gender. Holly was powerful and deeply rooted in the Word of God. She was confident, but not arrogant. Beautiful but not prissy. Empowering but never condescending. I wanted to know so much more.

Holly mentored me for years from a distance, completely unaware of my existence. Both her teaching and her writing influenced me. I embraced the wisdom found in *Warrior Chicks*,

Rising Strong when Life Wants to Take You Down; Love Works, Develop Healthy Relationships in a “love Broken” World; and her most recent release, Find Your Brave, Courage to Stand Strong When the Waves Crash In. These messages changed my perspective and grew my Biblical foundation for service and leadership. She made me feel like I was a part of this community of women and that God found me trustworthy. I began to grow in confidence and in calling.

It was in this transition that I could see how God used my season there to prepare me for the greater responsibility to come. It is so important to not despise those small beginnings and to trust God as you grow in your leadership. Trusting Him to use every bit of everything He instills in you is part of what makes this faith-filled life so incredible.

It was during the course of this growth, that I transitioned from serving as a volunteer lay women’s pastor in a congregation of about 250 people in West Texas to supernaturally becoming a part of the women’s ministry team in a congregation of about 6,000 (at the time) at Gateway Church in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. In joining Gateway, I found myself right in the center of a community of women who were in love with Jesus, empowered to minister and full of huge vision. My heart was on fire and I knew I had found a home. A church. A community where I could connect and grow.

While my responsibilities and influence were small, I was invited to contribute to the work of the ministry. As I served, I naturally became a part of the team who worked on Gateway’s women’s conference *Pink Impact*, and as a result, I was introduced to other influential female voices including Christine Caine, Priscilla Shirer, Charlotte Gambill, Lisa Bevere and so many more. It would be a few years, but eventually Holly was invited to the *Pink Impact* platform.

When I finally met Holly, I remember being attracted to her lack of insecurity, her ability to preach and teach and most of all, her passion to raise up other women leaders – especially those who were called to pastor within churches and para ministries. I also remember that although my position was insignificant, Holly took the time to connect with me. She didn’t say or do anything extraordinary. She simply honored me with her friendship.

Holly Wagner

Leadership is something that has always been a part of my personality from childhood. I was always that child who got people to follow me. That doesn't always mean I led others the right way. In fact, I think it led a few right into trouble! But things seemed to work themselves out as I got older and I took on leadership of youth groups in high school.

After moving to California, I met my Phillip. We fell in love and married. At the time, I was acting, and he was in ministry. Being honest, I wasn't sure what leadership in ministry looked like. It started with serving in the church and helping where it was needed, but with my leadership gifting it soon turned into leading a team of greeters, or people in children's ministry. Whatever door opened, wherever the need was, I served.

Great leadership includes grace. As a leader, I needed to extend grace to people no matter where they were in their own journey. I needed to recognize that others had the potential to lead and should be leading. For me, leadership happened in what seemed to be a very natural progression, but that's not the case for everyone.

After reading Titus chapter two this one time, it jumped off the page at me that I had a responsibility as an older woman to bring in the next generation. Ministry at the time though seemed to be heavier, spiritually speaking, and we were losing the younger generation. I needed to change the way I communicated. I wanted to teach truth and have Holy Spirit moments, but also have fun! And that became the model for God Chicks which has now become She Rises.

It started as a quarterly gathering at my church, and then it grew to a conference for women from all over. I felt such a responsibility for these women, but especially for the 20 women pastors who had come to that first conference. Spontaneously, I asked them all to lunch which we had in our nursery because it was the only room with chairs! And that was the beginning of She Leads. It was the moment I realized I could help speak into leaders.

As I taught these leaders, I wanted to affirm women pastors that this was not about having conferences. Leading women was about reaching others, lifting them up and inspiring them. It's about extending grace and leading from right where you are. It's about sharing the pitfalls of comparison and affirming women in their own gifts and talents to give to others what they have. It's passing the baton and realizing that every leader has their part to fulfill and not being afraid to let go and release them to begin leading others also.

Grace filled leadership is remembering that this leadership journey is about fruitfulness. It's about the parable of the talents and growing what's been given to us, what's in our hand. And as we grow what's in our hand, we can help others grow what's in theirs.

Holly has mentored me through all kinds of seasons and challenges and most of the time she was probably unaware I was following her. She herself is a breast cancer survivor. She was one of the first women to reach out to me when she heard about my diagnosis and she has shown me how to walk well in the face of adversity, keeping my focus and leadership on God's promises and not my weakness. That is why I reached out and asked her to write the foreword of this book. She is a fore runner of graceful leadership and her endorsement means so much to me.

What drew me to Holly was that, like me, she too was always eager to be a leader. But not all leaders are like Holly and me. Some leaders are more like Esther—reluctant to lead but obedient when called to do so. What I discovered as I began working under the leadership and discipleship of Pastor Debbie Morris, was how much I could learn from a woman who described herself as a reluctant leader.

Pastor Debbie is a dear friend and precious gift to me. Our journey began in the midst of a tumultuous season of transition for her at Gateway Church. I had been hired by an interim leader and when Debbie returned to the leadership position, she really had no reason to keep me on her team. Not only did she not know me, but I was radically different and so immature in my spiritual journey that it's a miracle of grace she gave me a chance to grow and learn while serving with her. She trusted me when she had no evidence that I was trustworthy. She immediately began to lead me toward a kinder, more tender, and grace-filled expression of leadership.

I can truly tell you that the first person who ever taught me about grace or being a grace-giving leader is Pastor Debbie Morris. I still have my notes from June 26, 2016 from a message she taught entitled "Leading with Grace." She defined leadership as a responsibility of stewardship and a requirement to be faithful with whatever influence God gives to you. This thrust toward Christlikeness was a revelation to me. Despite the tremendous influence that she carries, she is a servant rather than a celebrity. She lives a life of self-sacrifice and love for others. So many times, I watched her trust God with impossible circumstances, challenges, and

people. She has always been devoted to unity and generously shares with others the blessing that comes as a result. If Pastor Robert Morris' life message is generosity, I like to think Pastor Debbie's message is grace.

I had the great privilege of working directly with Debbie for about eight years. I never found her to deviate from this pattern of leadership. Debbie had quite a challenge in leading me. I needed to be seeded with humility, patience, and trust. She had to uproot a lot of selfish ambition, insecurity, jealousy, violation of boundaries and mistrust within me. She taught me how to care about people over projects and how to trust leadership even when I didn't understand a decision or a boundary. And when the time came for me to transition to a new responsibility, she blessed me, released me, and sent me out with both gifts and grace. She is still my pastor today and I am humbled to be her friend and follower. I willingly confess my continued loyalty to her and her dreams.

One of the highlights of my years with Pastor Debbie was during the season she was writing her book, *The Blessed Woman, Learning About Grace from the Women of the Bible*. Not only did I learn so much more about her journey, but I gained an understanding of the importance of the women of the Bible – such as Esther, Mary, Hannah, Miriam, Deborah and Neomi -- should and could be to me as mentors and guides for my own journey. If you want to know the heart of this gentle leader, you will find it on the pages of her story.

Although Pastor Debbie might not choose the public leadership responsibilities she holds, her impact is huge because she trusts God more than herself and embraces whatever assignment she is given with wisdom, love, and grace. She understands what it took me years to grasp – leaders are servants – not bosses – and that most often God calls us to obedience that is uncomfortable and even out of the scope of our experience or gifts.

I'm not the only one who has been impacted by grace-giving leaders like pastor Debbie and Holly Wagner. My friend, Amber Colberg has become a grace-giving leader by embracing her personal passion to help others align with God's purpose for them and their life. She believes our prayers and words are seeds planted, inspired, and watered by God for specific identity and purpose to grow. Using her prophetic gift, she opened an online business named *Prayerful Signs* where she designs a line of custom products that utilize acrostic poetry and prayer to speak truth and encouragement into the heart of others. You might have noticed her

work in the opening of this book, where I share her inspirational design for “grace.” Here’s what Amber has to say about her experience with grace-giving leaders.

“On more than one occasion, I remember the grace-giving leaders that God lovingly placed in my life. In a season when I felt overwhelmed by hardship and pain, I found myself searching for God’s outstretched hand to carry me through. I was so uncertain, and I had so many questions. The grace-giving leaders in my life recognized my pain, prayed with me and for me, encouraged me in my position in Christ, and offered a tangible grace to me. Being a grace-giving leader goes beyond what we can see. For me, it was about the leaders extending that outstretched hand I was searching for, and I experienced the immense love and grace of God through them.”

I love that Amber was propelled forward through a difficult transition by reaching out and trusting other leaders to speak into her life. Today she passes that blessing along. But you don’t need to start a business or a ministry to demonstrate grace-giving leadership. New mom and friend, Jacquelyn Beckworth shares how she intentionally invites others into her world to connect and disciple them.

“I try to be available. In this season of life, I’m a first-time momma and my time and energy pretty much all go into my family. I still try to make myself available. I invite girls over to our house and chat with them on the couch while Liam plays on the floor. My husband and I look at the calendar for the week and intentionally set aside discipleship time for both of us to invest in others. Whatever season I’m in, I try to be available and welcome others in.”

“There are two female pastors that I have worked with who have had the most influence in my leadership journey. These women invited me into their lives. This was huge for me. I’ve heard it said before that mentorship says, ‘take me to coffee’ while discipleship says, ‘take me with you.’ Because they opened their lives to me, I have been deeply discipled. I am so grateful.”

Jacquelyn reminds me that we can be grace-giving in every season of our life. Ever since I’ve known her, she’s had a heart to encourage other young women.

Rhonda Love is a new friend from the past few years whom I divinely connected with when we crossed paths. She just retired from 40 years of service as a part of the staff at her local church. Rhonda’s presence is powerful, bringing peace and confidence into every conversation. She’s also passionate about discipleship and prayer. Even though she’s retired, she’s not

finished. As she looks forward to the next season of leadership, I asked her to share about who mentored her.

“It began when I signed up to volunteer as an altar worker at church. Although I knew I had the desire and passion to pray for others, the group leader saw something more in me that I had no idea was there. I knew nothing about effective intercessory prayer. She took me under her wing, led me to the Bible, taught me how to study the word of God, and how to pray His Word over others. She poured herself into me even investing resources; a Bible and a devotional to help me become consistent. Sitting with her, opening the Word and praying together changed my life. Today, I still have both books and refer to them often.

As she began to have some health challenges, she asked me to take over the Sunday morning prayer team. I was shocked. There were others I felt were more qualified, but she said, “God qualifies the called and she was sure I was ready!” As one of her sweetest gifts to me and one of her last prayer assignments, she met with our senior pastor and our women's ministry leader. They invited me to take over her position as Prayer Leader for all of our women's events and conferences. This woman, led by grace, prepared me for one of the most important responsibilities of my life. She showed me how to live with Jesus at my center and how to always point others to Him and His Word.”

Sometimes grace-giving includes correction, redirection and greater discipleship. Kerrie Oles was able to humbly receive counsel and change course because she and her mentor have a deep and abiding relationship. Kerrie is an author, inspirational Bible teacher and founder of *Unlocked Ministries* and *The Best You* podcast. She passionately serves as an evangelist and teacher to a growing community of women who have experienced significant pain or trauma in their life, leading them to health and wholeness. We've spiritually grown up together, having started out in ministry around the same time and encouraged one another all along the way. Kerrie recently shared with me:

“I remember thinking that our ministry was ready for an “office space,” so we went forward with a plan and signed a one-year lease. I never asked my mentor for her advice in advance but when we entered a financially challenging season, I went to her for counsel. When she found out we were struggling, she confidently and with such grace said, “I feel like your office space is draining important funds that could be put to better use.”

I resisted her counsel because I didn't want to relinquish the space. I felt like it made us seem more of a legitimate functioning ministry. She waited until we were together in private to ask me about the reasons, I desired the office space. That day she was able to help me see that if the ministry was designed to really help and heal others, then the public's perceptions were not something I should be concerned with. We gave up the office space shortly after that. It was the best decision otherwise as I feel sure we would have had to close the ministry. By doing so our ministry began to thrive because we were able to "give" more to people. By listening to loving correction from my mentor, something that could have been a stumbling block for our future, was privately and graciously addressed.

With all that's going on in the world today, I continue to be so thankful for her guidance, Because of her grace-filled counsel I now look through the same lens as "the office space" experience with every decision I make. I now seek counsel, consider my options and pray. I've become a much wiser decision maker and a better leader."

The investment you make in others, and the wisdom you share, can not only propel someone along in their journey, but you can also rescue them from danger, missteps or threats while equipping them to become more effective leaders.

Whether you are the "raise your hand first" person or the "oh no, not me" person, you are needed as a leader. Whether you feel weak or strong, courageous or fearful, certain or insecure, God can and will invite you into relationships that are ripe for His grace. God has spotted you and he is undeterred by your concerns. He's called you out. You can trust God. Even when man fails, God will not. Remember this verse from 2 Corinthians 12:9,

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Pause and Ponder

Congratulations! You are investing in your personal growth and leadership gifts as we travel along together. It's important that you give yourself permission to experience a lifetime of learning. A great leader is always sharpening their skills and growing in character.

- What do you hope to learn, experience, or understand about yourself or others through this study?
- Why do you want to be a leader? Write down what you feel is your motivation?
- The journey to becoming a grace-giving leader will require a vulnerable, authentic, and transparent heart that is teachable. How do you know you are ready to grow in grace?

