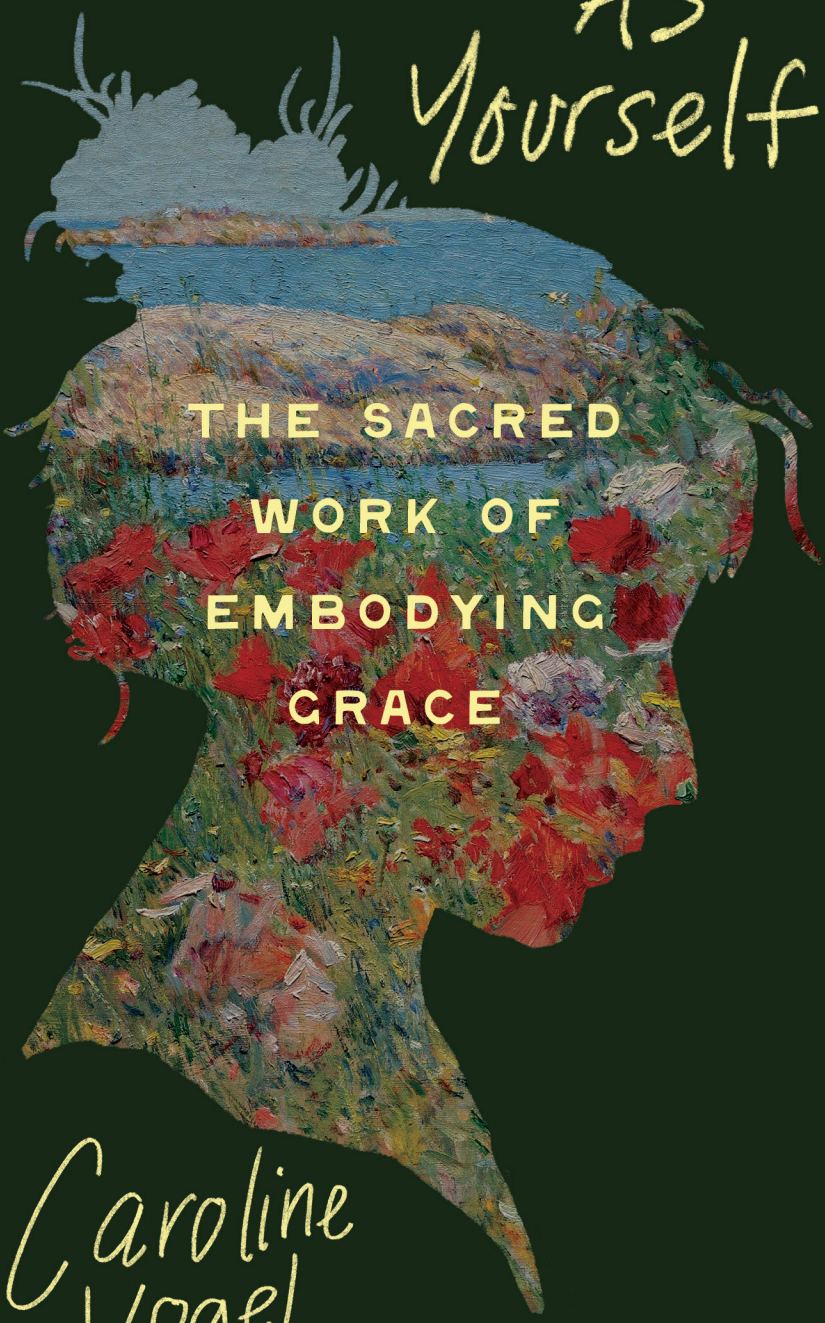


SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

AS
Yourself



THE SACRED
WORK OF
EMBODYING
GRACE

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As Yourself: The Sacred Work of Embodying Grace

6 Week Study Guide

Week 1: As Yourself (Prologue and Chapter 1)

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Week 1: As Yourself

Prologue

As you start the book, what have you believed about grace before reading this book? What definitions and understandings have you worked with? What intrigues you about grace?

Have you ever considered that grace is meant to be embodied in addition to pondered in the mind?

What is your understanding of the Holy Spirit? Have you ever considered her your guide in life? How so?

Chapter 1: Love Your Neighbor As Yourself

How much do you consider loving yourself as a direct connection to how you're able to love others? How have you drawn (or not drawn) that connection in the past?

What are your fears about loving yourself?

Jesus could have just told the disciples the new mandate—"Love one another as I have loved you." He does it, however, in the context of touch, a felt sense of the very love he's talking about. How do you think his actions impact his offering of the new mandate?

When have there been times in your life that someone's loving action has conveyed more than their loving words?

Have there been times when you experienced God's grace radiating into every fiber and cell of your body?

How does the reality of being God's beloved shape your actions?

Similar to my experience, have there been times when you noticed a disconnect between what you say you believe and how you act?

How do you see and/or feel that loving ourselves as God loves us so that we can authentically love others may be the linchpin of faith? If you see it differently, how so?

In what ways do your actions point to a belief that you have to hustle for your worthiness and belonging?

What practices do you utilize that draw you home to a loving God?

Week 2: Understanding Grace (Chapters 2 and 3)

Chapter 2: What is Grace?

Grace is God's favor towards us, unearned and undeserved; by grace God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts, and strengthens our wills.

As you allow yourself to be with, sit with this definition of grace, how does it strike you? What parts resonate with you? What parts do you struggle with? Why do these parts both resonate and struggle?

What makes it difficult for you to claim your belovedness?

Have there been times when you have felt transformed by God's love and grace? When were those times, and what did they feel like?

Do you believe that God's love is the starting and returning place for all humanity? How does a cornerstone of grace shape and impact our daily lives?

How do you think about "right relationship" with a loving God?

How does the invitation to "right relationship" over "right belief" sit with you? What are the challenges in this invitation?

Have there been times in your life when you were hyper-focused on the rules and guidelines of life to the detriment of openness to the Spirit? What were those times like for you? How can rules, guidelines, and structure *assist* our relationship and openness to the Spirit?

How have you managed your sense of worthiness? What does your hustle look and feel like?

Chapter 3: Receiving God's Favor Towards Us

What are your thoughts about The Great Commandment that yokes the 1st and 2nd Commandments together? Which parts are easy for you? And, which parts have you found challenging? Love of God, Love of Self, or Love of Neighbor?

Do the words in Matthew "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" sound like a warning, an invitation, or elements of both? How so?

Can you think of ways or times you received God's love with ease? If there are people connected to these ways and situations of receiving God's love, who are they? What characteristics do they have? Are there common elements to the ways and times you have received God's love? (For example, during prayer, walking in nature, being with particular loved ones, serving others, etc.)

What are ways you have overextended yourself in the name of faith?

Just as the kindergartner yelled at me from the front row of chapel, "God doesn't need you to be perfect," do you actually believe this? What actions of yours would back up the belief that God indeed doesn't need you to be perfect?

When you really look into your own heart and span your lifetime thus far, do you believe you're worthy of God's love if you aren't earning it?

Receiving love from God is one thing; how are you with receiving love from others? Is it awkward for you? Do you resist it a little or a lot? Are you more comfortable giving? What are your thoughts on why this is so?

What takeaways do you have of how Mary received blessing and divine favor from God? Do you resonate with how she resisted at first?

How can we humbly take on a spiritual cloak of favor?

What do you imagine the impact of Elizabeth's words is on Mary? What do you think God is up to by having such powerful back-to-back experiences for Mary? (First Gabriel and then Elizabeth and John in the womb)

Week 3: The Relationship between Shame and Grace (Chapter 4)

If you have struggled with receiving God's love, be mindful for a moment about why this might be true in your own life. Also consider why humanity at large may struggle with receiving God's love. What do you come up with?

What is your experience with shame? Shame being the feeling and/or belief that we are unworthy of love and belonging. Are there particular experiences in your life or beliefs about yourself that evoke shame?

Have you considered that the essence of grace being unearned and undeserved is a statement about God's abundance rather than humanity's unworthiness?

When you read the story of the Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Luke, do you identify most with the younger son, the older son, or the father? How so? Do you have elements of all three within you? What might you identify within yourself as aligning with each of these three characters?

What is your favorite part of this story? Why? How is your favorite part of the story connected to an understanding of grace?

For you, what is the most loving, generous, compassionate part of this story? Can you think of a time when God's love or someone's love felt this loving, generous, and compassionate towards you? When have you been this for someone else?

Are there ways you try to ensure your favor with God? What do those look like?

Are you prone to drawing yourself outside the circle of grace? Why do you think you do this?

Do you ever sense God is waiting for your return? Not even that you've run so far off course like the Prodigal Son, but simply waiting for you to remember God is there and waiting to love on you?

How are you with holding everything to be held in love? What aspects of life are easy to hold in love? What aspects are challenging to hold in love? How has the Holy Spirit assisted your ability to hold something challenging in love?

Considering the woman in Matthew 15 (21-28) and her interaction with Jesus, are you surprised that Jesus initially responds the way that he does? How do you reconcile "this Jesus" with your understanding of Jesus?

Similar to this woman in Matthew, have there been times in your life when the darkness made it really clear what true light looks like?

How do you imagine Jesus looking at this woman after she says, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table”?

The reality that grace is so extravagant that even God’s crumbs are holy and have the power to heal and transform, how does this inform how you see and understand grace?

What takeaways do you have about this woman’s encounter with Jesus?

Are there healthy boundaries you need to consider about how you embody grace with others in your life? What might those be?

Week 4: Living Grace in Our Body and Mind (Chapters 5 and 6)

Chapter 5: Living Grace in Our Bodies

When you read these words from 1 Corinthians, “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit”, what goes through your mind?

What is your relationship with your body like? Do you tend to think your body is a gift? Do you tend to “do battle” with your body, wishing it were different from what it is?

How does thinking of your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit shape what you do with your body? How you eat? Whether you move your body? What you drink?

How does culture shape how you think of your body? Movies, TV shows, social media, etc?

Do you think of your body as a friend? How so?

How do you experience (or not experience) your body as part of God’s offering of grace?

Do you think of your body being woven with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit? How did you come to this understanding of your body containing holy wisdom?

How might it benefit you to lean into the Spirit’s wisdom that our bodies hold valuable insight and give us the capacity to follow the Spirit’s guidance?

What, if any, resistance do you have to attuning to your body’s wisdom?

How do you experience stress in your body? Do you get headaches, stomach aches, heart racing, tingling, etc.?

What are situations in your life that create the most stress for you? Work, relationships, lack of time, not enough resources, etc?

Do you have certain “go-to” thoughts that create stress for you? For example, “I can’t do anything right.” “I’m not good enough.” “I’m all alone.”

What has been an experience in your life when you were able to stay with something painful, whether it was physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual, and feel the love of God with you?

When have you been able to be a loving presence to someone else in their physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual pain?

Why do you think God sent his only Son with flesh? Was there any purpose to Jesus having flesh? How has humanity benefited from having one aspect of the Trinity with skin?

What do you think about God not closing Jesus' wounds?

How did it impact Thomas to be able to touch the wounds of Jesus?

How does it impact how you relate to your own wounds (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual), given that the resurrected Jesus had obvious wounds that God could have healed and "made whole" again, but didn't?

What are some of the deaths you have lived through in your life thus far? How has God worked through and/or the Spirit breathed through those deaths?

Chapter 6: Embodying Grace Mindfully

Are you more of a Mary or a Martha? Allow yourself to be curious about how you have both Mary and Martha qualities within you.

Most of us have heard this story so many times that we don't really consider whether Jesus' words are surprising. When you allow yourself to have a beginner's mind about this story of Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary, are you surprised that he reprimands Martha and sides with Mary? Is there a way in which his response is actually quite loving to Martha?

Had you ever considered what Jesus was telling Mary as she sat at his feet? If so, what did you imagine he was sharing with her?

Have you ever given much thought to the relationship between Jesus and this Mary? (The Mary that keeps kneeling at the feet of Jesus.) What have your thoughts been?

How does it affect you and your perception and understanding of Jesus to think of him weeping with Mary and the rest of the community?

How do Jesus' tears embody grace in your opinion?

Who have you shared your broken heart with?

Have there been times when a community has supported you through your loss? What was that like for you?

What do you think the experience was like for Mary as she anointed Jesus while he was in a private room with men?

In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus says that anytime this anointing story is spoken of, it will be shared “in remembrance of her.” How have we honored Jesus’ wish to remember her? How might we do better in our remembrance? What would it look like?

Have you ever considered your life a heart song for God? What aspects of your life would you point to being just that—a heart song to God?

Have there been moments in your life that you felt a sense that you were not alone, that God was with you? What were those experiences like for you?

What have been the aspects that have shied you away from prayerful meditation?

What emotions do you have a difficult time “swinging the door open to” with laughter and inviting in?

Has there been a time when you’ve been able to hold a situation and/or relationship loosely, and the Spirit has breathed through it?

Week 5: Spirit Guidance (Chapters 7, 8, and 9)

Chapter 7: Guided by the Spirit

How do you conceptualize the Holy Spirit?

Did this chapter open any doorways to thinking of the Spirit differently or more broadly? How so?

Have there been times in your life when you look back and think, “Wow! That would have gone better had I relied on the Spirit.” What are those times?

Has the Holy Spirit ever spoken to you in a dream or through a dream? What gave you the sense that it was a Spirit dream?

When has there been a time when you felt the Spirit nudging you to do something, but you resisted the guidance?

When has there been a time when you had a hard time believing or accepting a truth Spirit was showing you?

What are some of the ways you show reverence to the reality that the Spirit is with you?

What in your life or in what you see in others’ lives or the world assures you that the Spirit is alive and well?

Have you sensed the Spirit to be both indwelling AND newly breathing through you? What is that experience like for you?

When have you pondered things in your heart like Mary? Has the collection of things ever felt like a love note from God?

How have these love notes from God (that you’ve pondered in your heart) strengthened and supported you during trying times? And/or, how might they in the future?

What do you make of Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness?

When has the blessing of your baptism been test-driven?

When have there been wilderness periods in your life? What were those stretches like for you?

How has the Spirit kept you company in the wilderness stretches or chapters of your life?

What has the Spirit taught you in and through your wilderness times?

Chapter 8: Enlightening Our Minds and Stirring Our Hearts

Has the Spirit ever given you a knowing that served as a touchstone? How did returning to the touchstone assist your journey?

What has been your relationship with waiting on God's enlightenment and stirring? What are spiritual practices that empower your wait? How have you managed the vulnerability of waiting?

How does your practice of Advent each year (the weeks before Christmas) empower your ability to wait on God at any time of year? Or, how might that intentional practice each year empower your waiting moving forward?

What have you found gets in the way of your waiting on God?

When have you struggled with work in God's time? Have there been times that it's been easy or more organic to work in God's time? Were there aspects that made it particularly easy or organic for you?

What do you think it was like for Joseph to receive the dream and follow the guidance? Do you think he questioned the direction? Do you think he talked it over with Mary?

What does it mean to you that our faith is meant to be embodied? How is this different than merely believing?

Have you tried mindfulness and/or meditation to connect with our loving God? What has your experience been like?

Why might the Spirit desire for us to be non-judgmental with what we notice about our minds?

Why do you think the Spirit yearns to meet us with/in every breath?

Have you experienced meditation as a way to ready your mind, heart, and body to register an enlightenment of your mind and/or a stirring of your heart? How so?

Who have been the people in your life you can talk to about possible enlightenment? Do they have similarities? What is the common thread of these individuals or groups that you can ponder with?

How have you encouraged your stirred heart? What have been the practices or objects that kept you Spirit tethered and grounded to the stir?

How have you coped in the times when Spirit hasn't been palpable when you really wish she had been palpable?

Can you imagine being the men walking to Emmaus? What must it have been like to have their eyes opened to the reality of the presence of Jesus?

Do you think there was significance that their eyes were opened when he broke the bread and gave it to them? What meaning do you make of it?

I love when they say, "Were our hearts not burning within us?" What do you think they meant by this?

Have you ever asked yourself a similar question? Has there ever been a time when, in looking back on a situation or experience, you realized that God was trying to give you a knowing through a burning in your heart? What was that experience like for you? How did the awareness, even in retrospect, benefit you?

Have you ever had an experience when God stirred your heart with a warning signaling danger? How did you work (or not work) with the awareness God was giving you?

Chapter 9: Strengthening Our Will to Flow in God's Will

How have you conceptualized God's will through your life? Have you always understood God's will to be "good"?

Have you ever feared God's will for your life? Why?

Ultimately, how do you conceive of God's will for your life?

How do you hold the tension that God's will is inherently good, though likely not always easy?

Do you tend to be someone who leans into God's will or resists it or both? What circumstances pull for your leaning and which circumstances pull for your resistance?

Have you ever had a time when God's will was not what you expected, maybe even contradicted what you thought you "should" do? How did the Spirit assist you in this situation?

How do you conceptualize "humility"? Does it resonate with the idea of "staying right-sized with God?" How so?

Have there been times when you believed (overtly or covertly) that your will was better than God's will? How did you sort through this situation?

Are you aware of why you sometimes cling to your own? What have you discovered about yourself when you cling to your will?

What is your relationship with your own weakness? What role do you allow God to play in your relationship to weakness?

Are there ways you conceive of your will and God's will working together rather than creating tension? When have there been times in your life where there has been a gentle or robust yoking of your will with God's?

What do you imagine it was like for Peter to hear God ask him to do something that was in complete opposition to what he thought it meant to be faithful?

How does God strengthen your will to empower your ability to act on the times Spirit enlightens your mind or stirs your heart?

How do you imagine the Spirit emboldened Peter to handle the criticism for his actions?

What do you make of Peter's statement—"Who was I that I could hinder God?"

Have you considered how not acting on your stirred heart, enlightened mind, or strengthened will might hinder God? What comes up for you as you sit with this idea?

Have there been times when God has stretched your understanding of widening the circle of grace for others or maybe yourself? What was that stretch like for you?

Does this resonate with you—"The core of God's will is always grace"? How so?

Week 6: Resurrected Living (Chapter 10)

How do you respond to the story of Jesus weeping? Does it move you? Does it upset you? Does it comfort you? How so?

Have you ever sensed that God was *greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved* by something going on in your life? That God was weeping with you?

When have there been times in your life or someone else's life when you have had a sense of "God with us"?

What have you learned from Jesus' embodiment of love about turning towards the pain of others?

What have you learned from Jesus' embodiment of love about turning towards your own pain?

Do you ever wonder how Jesus coped with humanity's unbelief? What do you think it was like for Jesus to keep encountering disbelief?

Have you participated in someone else's unbinding? How so? How were you invited into this experience?

Have you allowed others to participate in your unbinding? What has that experience been like for you? How might you benefit from allowing people to participate in your own unbinding?

Once unbound by an old pattern, belief, situation, or relationship, how did you find your way forward? Was it awkward and clumsy? What practices and/or people helped light the way?

How do you conceive of being set free as holy transformation? What does it mean to you?

How is transformation different from putting things back together again, like Humpty Dumpty?

How might trying to put yourself back together again actually work against the movement of God within you?

Do you think of transformation more as a being made new or returning home to the wholeness of God within you, or both? What words would you use to articulate the fullness of what transformation means to you?

How do you feel nudged, encouraged, or called to be God's love in the world? How does embodying God's love fit into that nudge, encouragement, or call?

How do you conceive of the fruits of the Spirit? Do you sense humanity is born with them? Do you believe we have to cultivate them? Both? Does the Spirit assist?

Of all the fruits (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), which is the easiest for you to embody? Which one challenges you the most to embody?

Love

How do you experience the Spirit replenishing God's love within you?

Do you believe that God's love is woven into every fiber and cell of your being? How does this belief or disbelief impact you?

When are times when you have allowed yourself to stop and actually feel the love you are experiencing, whether with God or another human or pet?

How do you claim your belovedness in a loving God?

What are your "tells" from when you're hustling love rather than sharing God's love?

What invitation might there be to claim your belovedness in God even more so?

Joy

Have you ever meditated on this verse from the Gospel of John when Jesus says, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete"? How does this verse impact your understanding of God's desire and intention for your joy?

When has there been a time in your life when joy has bubbled up organically? What was that like for you?

Do you feel open and/or also closed off from God's joy within you? What aspects of yourself help you open to joy? And, what aspects close you off from joy?

Peace

What role has peace played in your resurrected living? Or, what role might you imagine it could play?

How might your day begin and flow differently if you were to start each morning with “Peace be with you this day”?

How does an embodied peace assist you in your daily life? In your mind, your heart, and your body?

How does an embodied peace impact your conversations and relationships?

How do you suppose peace creates fertile ground for the rest of the fruits of the Spirit to flourish?

Patience

When have you felt empowered by the Spirit to drop down into the deep well of patience? How did it benefit you?

How do the first three fruits (love, joy, and peace) strengthen your ability to be patient?

What practices allow you to tap into your sense of patience?

Is there someone in your life who is especially patient with you? What are their actions and/or words that convey their patience?

Are there people with whom it’s easier to be patient than others? What do these people have in common?

Are there people who test your patience? What do these people have in common?

Kindness

When you read the Gospels, do you sense and witness the kindness of Jesus?

Which stories within the Gospels speak most clearly of Jesus’ kindness?

What is it like for you to even consider approaching the parts of yourself you’re less fond of with kindness?

How might Jesus approach these parts of yourself?

Have there been times when you've been able to turn toward your own pain with kindness?

Generosity

How might extending generosity to others be a response to God's grace towards you?

How can we conceive of generosity being less about measurables and more about orientation?

Do you tend to have an easier time extending generosity to others or yourself? How might you learn from your easier tendency to influence balance in the other direction?

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to dial back your generosity? What was that like for you? What did it teach you?

Faithfulness

Does showing up speak to how you think of faithfulness? How so?

How do you conceive of God's faithfulness towards you individually and humanity collectively?

For you, what does trust have to do with faithfulness?

What parts of faithfulness feel vulnerable and risky?

What do you make of this sentence—"Faithfulness is about standing with the core of our being where the Spirit resides within us, and a willingness to be and act from this core stance."?

Similar to the older son in the story of the Prodigal Son, have you ever sensed that your faithfulness came with expectations of God and/or others?

Gentleness

We oftentimes think of Jesus as gentle. Are there scriptures that challenge the "always gentle Jesus" for you?

Are you able to practice gentleness with yourself? What are circumstances that make gentleness easier for you? What makes gentleness challenging?

How do you reconcile “tough love” and gentleness? How do you hold these together? DO you ever sense the Spirit is assisting you in this both/and?

Self-Control/Equanimity

Are there particular circumstances and/or relationships that challenge your ability to have self-control? What do these circumstances and/or relationships have in common?

In your opinion, what are the connections between self-control and learning to regulate your emotions, thoughts, words, and behavior?

What is your perception of how people practice self-control?

What is your experience of practicing self-control for yourself?

What practices bring you back to self-control and equanimity when you have lost control?

How does the Spirit assist you in returning to self-control and equanimity?

Holy Anger

What is your relationship with anger?

Do you ever experience anger as holy? How so?

What has anger taught you about faith?

Reading this chapter, what invitations do you sense for allowing yourself to embody the fruits of the Spirit?