

# The Real Plan: From Grace, Through Cost, to Peace

## *The way Jesus leads us home*



*Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.*

Some months ago, I wrote a blog about grace. I reflected on how freely God gives it and how gently He uses grace to draw us toward the cross. Grace meets us exactly where we are. It does not demand that we become someone else before we come. It does not require performance or perfection. Grace is undeserved, unconditional, and freely given. In that sense, it truly costs us nothing.

Grace is the open door. It is the invitation home. It is the moment when love reaches us before we ever reach back.

But grace does not end at the cross.

Something happens after redemption. After restoration. After we begin to find our footing in Christ and catch a glimpse of a future far greater than we ever imagined. The same grace that saves us begins to invite us forward, gently and persistently. It calls us not only to believe, but to follow.

And that is where another word quietly enters the story.

Cost.

We often speak of what it cost Jesus to die on the cross. The suffering. The surrender. The laying down of His life so that forgiveness could be offered to us all. That cost is beyond comprehension. Yet once

that gift is received, grace does not remain something we simply take in. It becomes something we are asked to live out. Grace saves us freely, but discipleship forms us intentionally.

This is where faith becomes challenging in the modern world.

Along the way, particularly in Western culture, we absorbed the idea that the self is central to all meaning. Perhaps born from humanism or from sincere attempts to relieve emotional pain, the focus gradually shifted inward. Even within modern psychology, the language of self became dominant. Without realizing it, many of us began to approach God as though His role was to meet our emotional needs, affirm our desires, and support the version of life we preferred.

When that happens, something subtle but significant occurs. Instead of honoring that God created us in His image, we begin shaping God into ours. Faith becomes shallow. God becomes transactional. Prayer turns into a request line. Christianity slowly begins to resemble a vending machine. Insert belief. Press a button. Expect blessing.

It may feel comforting for a moment, but it does not nourish the soul.

There may be another reason this kind of faith has become so appealing in our time, and it has less to do with theology and more to do with how we are wired.

Neuroscience has shown that the human brain is powerfully drawn toward pleasure. Anna Lembke writes about this in *Dopamine Nation*, describing dopamine as a molecule of pursuit. Dopamine fuels wanting. It pushes us toward what feels good, what promises relief, what offers reward. It is not a bad molecule. It is a gift. But it was never meant to run our lives.

When dopamine dominates, we naturally seek more pleasure and less pain. We want ease without effort, reward without sacrifice, grace without cost. The brain simply does what it was designed to do and asks for more.

Yet the nervous system always seeks balance. As pleasure rises, pain follows. Anxiety increases. Restlessness grows. Satisfaction fades. What once felt soothing begins to feel empty.

Daniel Lieberman in his book, *The Molecule of More*, describes dopamine as a forward-moving molecule. It lives in the future. It thrives on anticipation. But we were never meant to live perpetually in pursuit. When life becomes an endless chase, even a spiritual one, the soul grows weary.

There are other neurochemicals that restore balance. Serotonin and oxytocin emerge not through pursuit, but through presence. Through relationship. Through commitment. Through choosing one another. These are bonding chemicals. They arise not from consuming grace, but from carrying it.

When we are willing to accept cost, when we slow down our pursuit of immediate relief and instead choose faithfulness, something different begins to happen. We begin to experience connection rather than craving. Meaning rather than movement. Belonging rather than striving.

This is not the fleeting pleasure of dopamine.  
It is the deeper peace of attachment.  
So, when do we become willing to accept cost?

Not when we are pressured into it. Not when we are shamed. Not when faith is framed as obligation. We accept cost when grace has created safety. When we trust the One who walks with us through it.

When grace has assured us that we already belong, cost no longer feels like punishment. It becomes participation. We are no longer paying a price to earn love. We are offering sacrifice because we are already loved.

This is when obedience changes. It moves from fear to devotion. From striving to surrender. From duty to desire.

The Latin root of the word cost comes from **constāre**, meaning to stand firm. Cost is not simply about loss. It is about alignment. It is about where we choose to stand when comfort and conviction pull in opposite directions.

I am no spiritual giant. I am not a hero of the faith. I am simply someone who once believed that following Jesus would not cost very much. I was drawn wholeheartedly to the cross, but I did not yet understand that obedience would eventually ask something of me.

At one point, God made it clear that I needed to change my ways. That obedience cost me a relationship with someone I deeply cared about. The loss was painful. And yet something beautiful emerged. She later came to know Christ, and I went on to meet my soulmate, Leah. Looking back now, I can see that had I refused the cost, neither story would have unfolded as it did.

As my faith deepened, the invitations to stand firm continued. Speaking publicly about difficult and unpopular truths cost me professionally. Standing for conscience brought complaints and threats against my license. Advocating for those being treated unjustly cost me opportunities I likely would have received had I chosen silence. My research team eventually gave me a name that both humbled and honored me. They called me MAV, a maverick. It reminded me that obedience does not always reward us with advancement. Sometimes it simply reveals who we are willing to be.

Time has a way of clarifying what matters most. It feels like only moments ago that I received Christ at nineteen or twenty years old. And now I am seventy-one. Life passes far more quickly than we ever expect. What once felt distant now feels precious.

I find myself wanting the remaining years not for comfort, but for faithfulness. Not for ease, but for depth. I understand now that following Jesus will involve cost. There will be sacrifice. There may be pain. Jesus never said the way would be easy. In fact, He was honest that it would be hard.

But He also promised something else.

He promised life. Eternal life. And He promised peace. Not the absence of struggle, but the presence of Himself.

Scripture gently reminds us, ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** Philippians 4:7.

This promise matters not only spiritually, but neurobiologically. When the heart feels safe, the mind can rest. When the mind rests, the body begins to settle. When we are anchored in Christ, the nervous system no longer has to remain on constant alert. Safety is restored from the inside out.

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This is the foundation of the NeuroFaith® model. Healing does not come from elevating the self, but from securing the heart and the mind in Christ. In Him, the soul finds coherence. The body finds calm. The heart finds home.

Grace is free. We receive it with open hands.

Discipleship, however, asks us to stand. Not harshly or fearfully, but firmly and lovingly. It calls us to live aligned with truth even when that alignment carries cost.

Following Jesus is not easy. But it is good.

And in the end, the cost we pay is far outweighed by the peace we receive. A peace the world cannot manufacture. A peace the self cannot generate. A peace that settles gently into the deepest places of who we are.

There, in that quiet and sacred space, we discover that we were never meant to carry life alone.