

# God's Grace for your Career

*Katie Conley suggests ways in which to assess yourself, your talents and experiences in order to decide on or change your career. She uses the acronym GRACE to explore how your Gifts, Relationships, Abilities, Curiosities and Experiences can inform your choice.*

God's GRACE is extraordinary. I hadn't realised quite how extraordinary until I felt inspired to write a book about careers for Christians. As a Career Coach, I realised that my clients long to understand their career purpose and to have meaning in their work. There are many resources to help people find purpose in their careers, but as I reviewed these resources, I felt there was a 'God-sized' hole in them. I wanted to develop some ideas which helped people explore their careers from God's perspective, to help them pray about their careers and consider career ideas within a Christian framework. In a time of personal prayer God gave me the GRACE outline which I used in my book, *God's GRACE for Your Career*<sup>1</sup>.

- G for the *gifts* God has given you, both natural and spiritual.
- R for the *relationships* you have with God and other people.

- A for your *abilities*; comprising your talents, skills and strengths.
- C for your *curiosities* about the world, which provide clues for your career choices.
- E for your *experiences*, understanding that God uses everything, both good and bad.

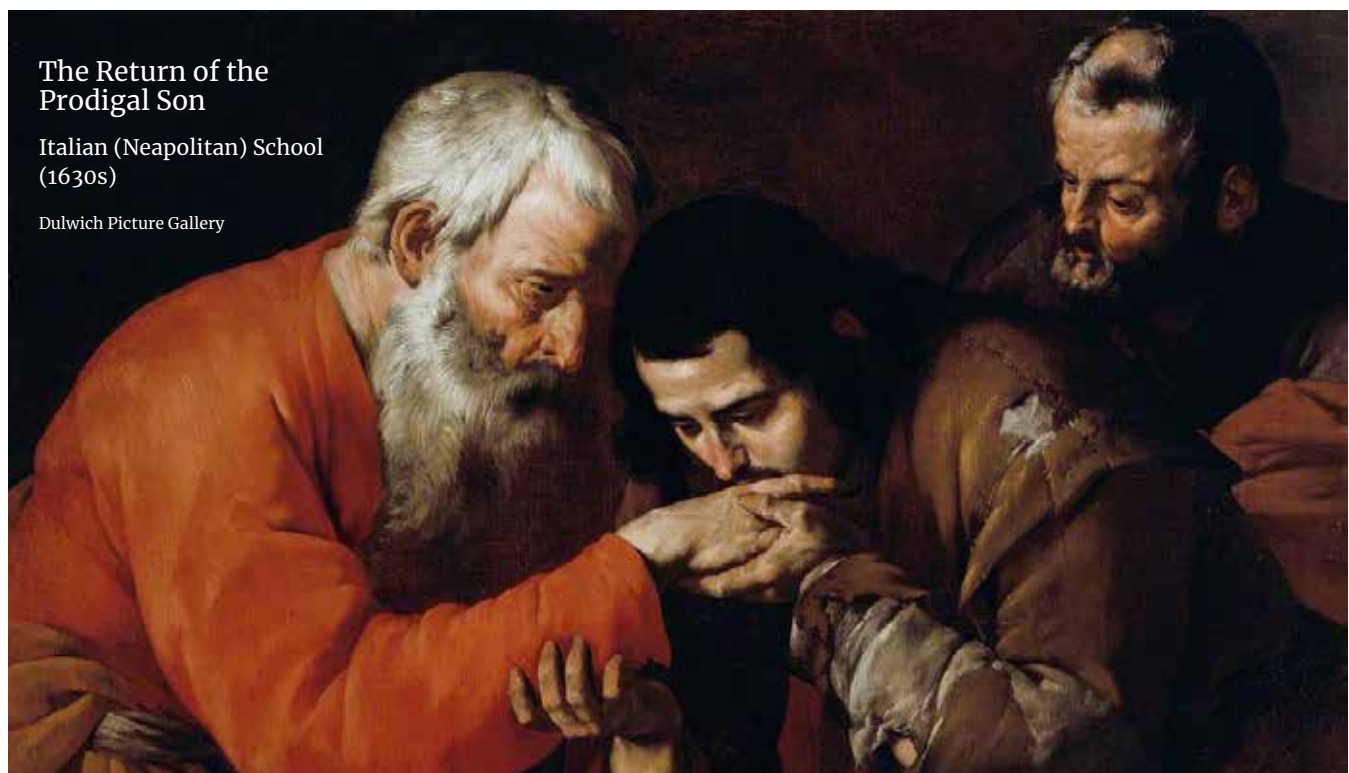
My inspiration came from the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) which has much to teach us about God's grace. The younger son has strayed from his father and gone his own way, and his father lets him go. He gives the younger son his inheritance, including gifts, abilities, curiosities and lets him experience life without a relationship with his father.

This is a wonderful story demonstrating God's grace. The son has lost his way in life but returns home, expecting a lukewarm greeting, hoping to work as a servant. He is bowled over by the unconditional and

wholehearted greeting he is offered. His father longs to restore everything his son has lost and immediately reinstates him in the family.

It's the same for people who feel they have gone their own way and are a bit lost in their careers. They wonder what they are doing or where they are going. They sense that God has something better for them, and they long to make a difference and to do the work God has planned for them (Ephesians 2:10).

In the story of the Prodigal Son, you'll remember there is another brother, an older brother who has stayed at home working in the family business. Although he is not happy about the merciful treatment his younger brother receives, his father's compassion extends to him as well. "My son", the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31). He too has access to everything his father has.



Some people feel they have been on the career treadmill for a while, they feel stressed or burnt out despite doing what God wants in their career. They long to experience God's grace in their careers and feel confident they're pursuing the career God had in mind for them, but they're not sure how to go about this.

## Self-Evaluation using the GRACE Framework

A starting point for self-evaluation is Psalm 139:13: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." God created each of us just as he planned with a unique package of gifts, talents, skills and aptitudes that make up 'you'. Ken Costa writes, 'The better we know ourselves, the more we can imagine what kind of work God might be calling us to'<sup>2</sup>. So, I invite you to get to know yourself better, to explore the GRACE God has given you for your career.

Understanding the *gifts* God has given you starts with exploring your natural gifts, by reflecting on what you liked to do most when you were a child, when you lost track of time, when you were fully absorbed in something. Reliving these childhood activities provides clues to the activities that will enable you to thrive as an adult. These are the building blocks of your future abilities. Your personality and your dreams are

also included in the gifts God has given you. As are your spiritual gifts, gifts of grace<sup>3</sup>, enabling God's divine power to work through us in ways beyond human possibility.

Next comes your *relationships*. We are relational beings and relationships are essential for our career journeys. The first focus is your relationship with God. I believe he has a plan for your career, which he will reveal throughout your life, so it makes sense to cultivate your relationship with God to find out what he has to say about how you should spend your working life.

From the story of the Prodigal Son we are reminded how much God loves us. It's a wonderful story of repentance, forgiveness and redemption, demonstrating God's amazing grace for each and every one of us. Do you want to know God's will and provision for your career? Take the time to get to know him well and grow your relationship with him. I imagine the Prodigal Son wanting to hear all about the plans his father has and how he can work alongside him in restored relationship, relieved and excited to be home. The more time you take to listen to God the more you will hear his voice (John 10:27).

God did not intend us to work in isolation. He created us for community. We need other people to share ideas with, to hear wise counsel, to spark creativity, to grow as a person, to have

fun! Our trusted friends, wider network and role models have significant impact on our careers. You are not meant to search for God's purpose for your career on your own. You need people in your life who know you well and who you trust who will give you inspiration and support to help you make career decisions.

You also need a strong network. In Romans 16, Paul sends greetings to at least 27 people, and their wider networks or churches. This network was essential to the building of the early Church and to support Paul in his career. In the same way your wider network is an important element in your career. When these relationships are in place, then God can use them to communicate with you about your career and make connections that can result in career moves and job changes.

God gave us all *abilities*; unique talents, skills and strengths designed specifically to do the work he planned for us (Ephesians 2:10). There's an overlap between talents, skills and strengths and our natural gifts. This is all part of God's handiwork, his blueprint for us. Over time and with practice, the natural gifts God has given us grow into talents, skills and strengths which we can use for God's glory. When you're using the abilities God specifically gave you, you will experience fulfillment and satisfaction and you will know you are doing the work God created you for.

Understanding  
the *gifts* God  
has given you

Picture:  
Taylor Hampton





A modern Oholiab

Photo: answeredfaith.com

Start by exploring your talents, following clues God has provided. We can't all enter talent competitions so how do you know what your talents are? Max Lucado calls these 'your sweet spot'<sup>3</sup> – times in your near and distant past when you did something well and enjoyed doing it, and experienced success and satisfaction. Take note of these times and track the themes they expose.

Identifying your skills is a lifelong exercise. Skills are about getting things done, which have an end result. The Bible is littered with examples of people using their God-gifted skills. In Exodus, chapters 25–37 God gives full and detailed instructions about how the Tabernacle is to be built. The task is vast in scope and elaborate in its design. God allocates people he has gifted with specific skills to build the Tabernacle, such as Bezalel and Oholiab.

This wasn't just any old tent they were building. It required a high level of skill including the making of beautiful, twisted linen and intricately embroidered curtains (Exodus 36:8). Designers, engravers, embroiderers, carpenters, weavers, sowers, tailors, smelters, blacksmiths and perfumiers were all required along with skills including project management,

teamwork, communication, organising, scheduling, managing resources, delegating and supervising.

God also fills his people with his Spirit for the workplace so that when they use their skills, other people are impacted beyond our expectations. Bezalel was filled with the Spirit of God as well as being a skilled craftsman. God says, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts" (Exodus 31:3 & 35:31). Nicky Gumbel writes, 'It is possible to be a talented musician, writer or artist without being filled with the Spirit. But when the Spirit of God fills people for these tasks their work often takes on a new dimension. It has far greater spiritual impact.'<sup>5</sup> No doubt something like this happened through Bezalel. The Holy Spirit took his skills to another level.

David was a man of many skills, grown from his early days as a shepherd and musician through to leading a military force and then becoming a king. As a shepherd, he was skilled at looking after sheep, finding them pasture and water, shearing them, probably birthing lambs as well as protecting them from danger and wild animals. He would be using organising skills, planning skills, caring/nurturing skills, self-awareness skills, practical

skills and physical skills. With great insight, David explains how his transferrable skills will help him win against Goliath, "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defiled the armies of the living God" (1 Samuel 17:35).

As the story unfolds, David's leadership skills grow, taking responsibility for people who suffer because of King Saul's actions, seeking God's counsel for his own actions and strategies, learning how to negotiate with both allies and enemies, forming alliances, caring for people's material needs and wellbeing, and speaking with wisdom (1 Samuel 22:2). The leadership skills he developed when he led a flock of sheep expand and grow as he becomes King of Israel (Psalm 78:70–72). All of David's skills were from God, and God uses David to build up His people Israel. David was given success in using his skills for a purpose. 'In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him' (1 Samuel 18:14).

There is so much you can do when you know what your skills are. You can improve them and grow them, you can learn new ones, you can review those you're not particularly good at. It's



## Esther

Jean-François Portaels (c 1869)

Art Gallery of New South Wales



really well worth taking time to explore your skills, asking God what he thinks, and then talking to one of your trusted friends about what they think your skills are. Once again your relationship with God is key; we see David excelling when he seeks God's counsel, as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14 & Acts 13:22), but falling short when he neglects his relationship with God (Samuel 11:27:b).

Knowing and using your strengths is key to career satisfaction. Think of your strengths as equivalent to five talents! Again the Bible gives us many examples of people using

their strengths; Samuel has spiritual strength (1 Samuel 3:19-20 MSG), Ruth displays strength of loyalty (Ruth 1:16), John the Baptist displays strength in his sense of purpose (Matthew 3:4-6). Nathan and Esther both display strength of courage (2 Samuel 12:1-14 and Esther 4:11). God wants you to use your talents, to invest in them, so that they grow into strengths (Matthew 25:20-30).

Next delve into your *curiosities*. God's creation is awesome and there is so much for us to learn. He has hidden things for us to find and he reveals things to us all the time. Your

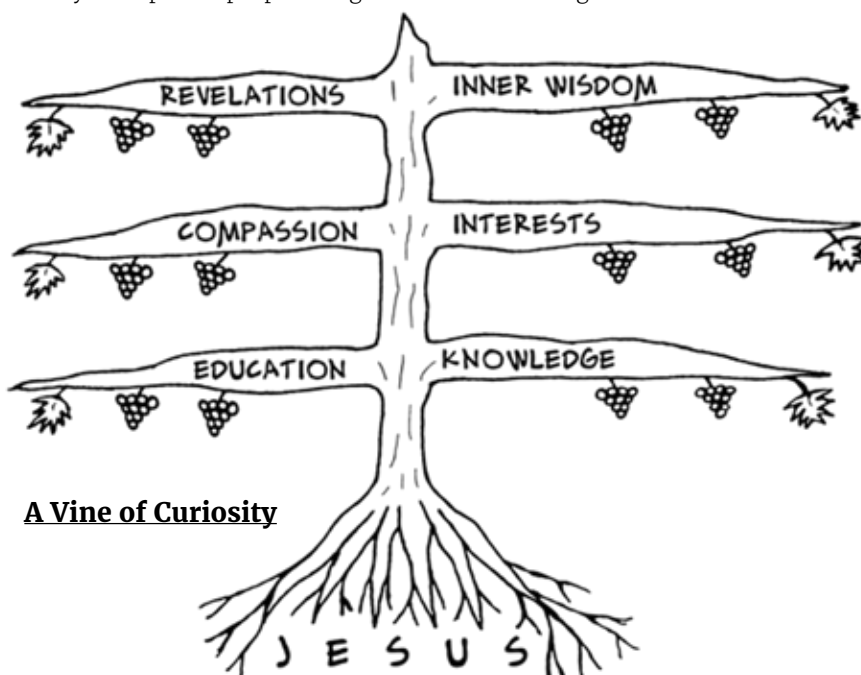
curiosities can lead to career ideas. You might discover them in:

- Your Education – the subjects you chose to study.
- Your Knowledge – gained through the life you have lived.
- Your Interests – the topics you are keenly interested in.
- Your Compassions – the causes you care deeply about.
- Your Inner Wisdom – the things you feel God has put on your heart.
- Your Revelations from God – the ideas he has revealed to you through his word, prophecies or other people.

God has made us curious creatures and I'm sure you'll find you are curious about many things, but how do you know which things lead to what God has intended for you, and which things don't? I propose you draw a *Vine of Curiosity* rooted in Jesus.

In John 15 Jesus is described as the vine and believers as the branches. This image is borrowed to help you explore your curiosity so that it is rooted in Jesus, with each branch representing a different area of 'curiosity' in your life and career.

Making sense of your past *experiences* leads to clarity about your future career. Romans 8:28 states 'And we



**A Vine of Curiosity**

know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose'. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Søren Kierkegaard, the Christian philosopher wrote 'Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.'<sup>6</sup> When you look back you can see the clues God has given you for your future and unearth the treasure he has left to guide you on your career journey. We all have stories from our career journeys that will impact on what we do next, but it's a case of knowing where to look. Drawing your own career journey can lead to many insights about God's strategy for your future career.

Observing Joseph's career through the lens of hindsight demonstrates how God was at work throughout Joseph's career (Genesis 37-47). As illustrated below, we can see his achievements, how he has overcome challenges, the fruit he bears, the blessing he receives and passes on, and also the values that shape who God made him to be. When Joseph looked back on this period of his life he commented how God had used the difficult times to prepare him for what was ahead (Genesis 50:20).

This included his own mistakes as well as injustices he had experienced.

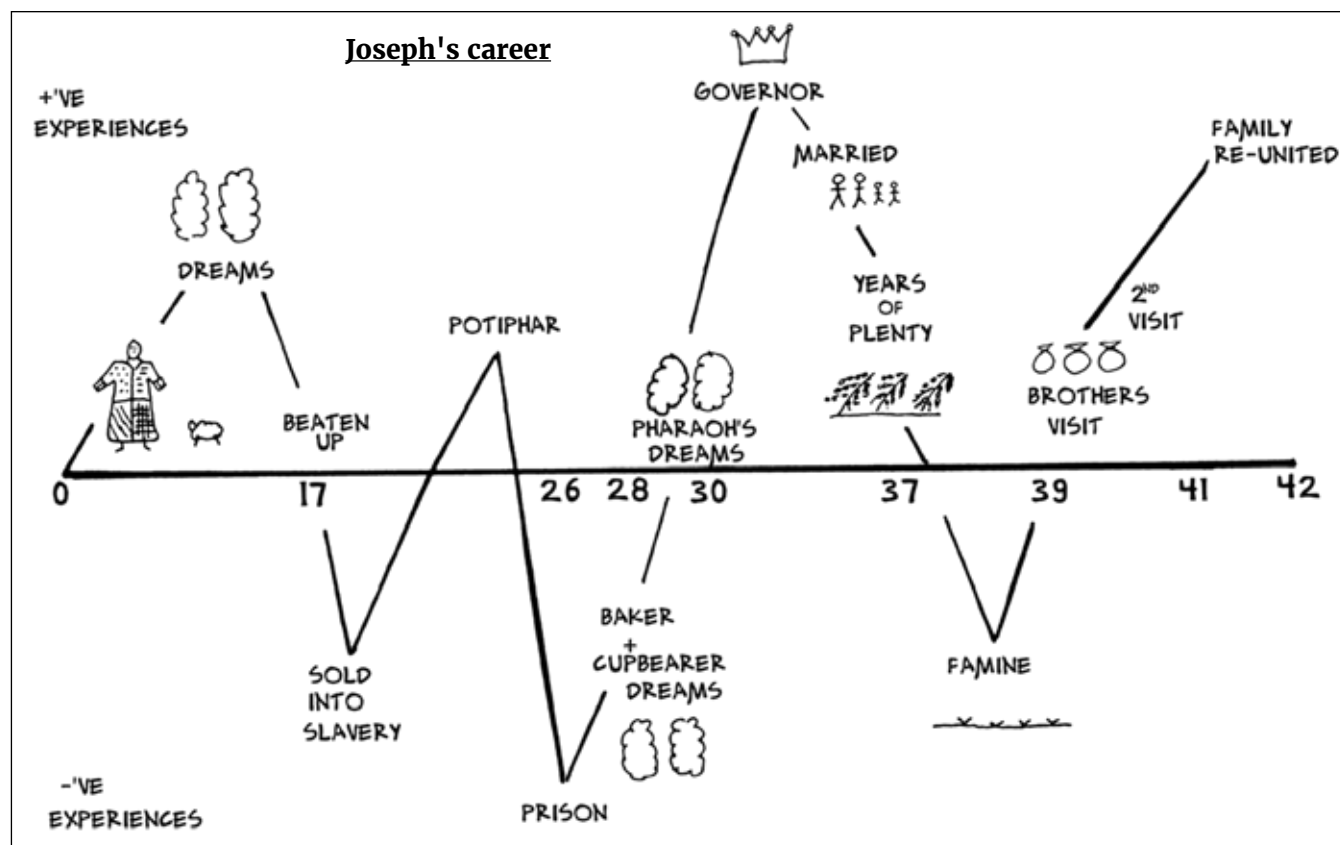
Often we learn more from the difficult times, in our career journeys, than from successes. You may have worked with difficult people or bosses, you may have been made redundant, or been sacked, you may have missed out on promotion, or not got the job you desperately wanted. You could have stayed in a job you hated because you needed the money, or because it fitted with other areas of your life, such as caring for family members, or you felt there was nothing else you could do. Often, we don't realise the skills and qualities we've gained through persevering and overcoming these challenges, and how God uses these experiences to shape us.

Making an honest assessment of the highs and lows of your career journey, can yield insights of gold which can inform the decisions you make next, made even more impactful when combined with a spiritual assessment of how your values align with God's kingdom values (Romans 8:5). How are you reflecting God's values in the workplace so you point people to God?

How might you align your values with God's values, such as forgiving people who hurt you, stewarding resources well, being obedient to God's voice, displaying humility and extravagant generosity? Kingdom values are often counter-cultural and are driven by a love for God and other people (John 15:12).

It's worth saying a bit more about bearing fruit in your career. The fruit you bear through your work and life is made up of three things: the good works God has planned for you, the development of your character, and your Christian witness to others, believers and non-believers. The word 'fruit' (as well as related words including fruits and fruitful) is found 66 times in the New Testament<sup>7</sup>. It includes what you do as well as how you do it, both in your actions and in your motives.

Understanding that God is growing fruit in your career helps you to see your career from God's perspective, especially when things don't seem to be going well. Are you going through a time of trial? What fruit is God growing in you? When you are flourishing, what fruit are you displaying for others to see?



## Career Blueprint

You could have completed a career exploration without any mention of Christian faith, but it is my view that God's perspective makes all the difference. When you understand he has made you uniquely for a purpose and you find the career path he prepared for you, you will find you can flourish at work. By using the GRACE framework to explore the way God has put you together including your skills, dreams, curiosities and experiences you can identify the blueprint which makes you unique and then be more able to align your work with God's purpose in mind.

To draw up your own blueprint you need to revisit your GRACE exploration and ask some questions.

- Who are you?
- What are you good at?
- What has God already done in your career?
- What career clues has God given you?

The first two answers provide a summary of you as a person, built up using the GRACE framework, and the second two focus on what's happened in the past and the clues you have gleaned about the direction to go in next. This gives you a foundation to

make quality decisions about your future working life. It also points to God's overall purpose for your career. When you've drawn up your blueprint, ask yourself, 'What does this tell me about God's purpose for my career?' The words you write should you make you shout a resounding "yes!"

When your career purpose is aligned with God's purpose for your career, then the jobs you choose to do can be meaningful and satisfying, even as you travel along your career journey.

I started with the story of the Prodigal Son, and the father's amazing response of grace to both sons (Luke 15:11–32). It's a story about the lost being found, an olive branch being extended, of restoration and renewal. I love to let my mind wander and think about what happened next. The banquet has been joyful, the younger son is reinstated, the elder son is reunited (my hope) and plans are being made for the future.

The father looks on joyfully as his sons discuss their *gifts* and *abilities*. He smiles as they become embroiled in a conversation about their dreams and curiosities, the plans they have for the family business. He sighs with peace as they discuss their experiences, their achievements and what they have overcome. The father knows the fruit they will go on to bear in their

lives and careers, and he knows the blessings he longs to bestow on them as they co-labour in his Kingdom, living in full *relationship* with him.

Both sons have choices to make about the GRACE they have been given. The offer is there, and it's there for you too. Unwrap the Father's GRACE and put it to good use, replete in the knowledge that he made you for a specific purpose and he has good plans for you and your future. There may be times of transition in your career where you stop and consider what has gone before. There may be changes ahead, or decisions to be made. There may be times when you struggle in your career and there will be times when you flourish.

Perhaps you will unwrap new gifts. Perhaps you will grow and develop your skills and strengths. Maybe you will explore new ideas and curiosities that will take you down new paths. Hopefully you will build strong relationships and grow closer to Jesus. And you will see how the experiences he walks you through are all part of the purpose he has for your career. Return to God. Seek him out and you will find that he is ready and waiting with his unique package of GRACE for your career, ready to fill you with a sense of purpose for the work he has planned for you. 🎁

1. Katie Conley, *God's GRACE for Your Career: Rediscover Your Purpose at Work*, Ladey Adey Publications, 2023
2. Ken Costa, *God at Work: Living Every Day With Purpose*, Alpha International, 2013, p.57.
3. What are Spiritual Gifts? <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/spiritual-gifts.html> (accessed 31/05/21).
4. Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life*, Max Lucado, Reprint edition, 2011, p. 7.
5. Nicky Gumbel, *Bible in One Year*, Alpha International. <https://bibleinoneyear.org/en/classic/> (accessed 25/02/21).
6. Søren Kierkegaard, Volume IV of his journals, written around 1843.
7. Woman of Noble Character, Susan J Nelson, <https://www.womanofnoblecharacter.com/fruits-in-the-bible/> (accessed 01/06/22)



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