Breathing Grace: A Biblical and Lutheran Confessional Theology of Received and Extended Mercy

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Author Note

Bryan Stafford developed this manuscript as an original treatment of the concept of "breathing grace" within a biblical and Lutheran Confessional framework.

Abstract

Breathing Grace develops Ken Sande's metaphor of "breathing grace" into a fully articulated biblical and Lutheran confessional theology of received and extended mercy. Where Sande employs the image primarily as a framework for relational wisdom and peacemaking practice, this manuscript presses the metaphor deeper into the doctrine of grace itself and wider across the whole of the Christian life. It argues that breathing grace is not an interpersonal technique or moral achievement, but the lived consequence of justification: the continual inhalation of Christ's alien righteousness through Word and Sacrament and the Spirit-worked exhalation of that mercy toward the neighbor in speech, forgiveness, and vocation.

After surveying existing devotional, biblical-theological, confessional, and psychological literature, the study grounds breathing grace in three scriptural movements—grace as identity, grace-shaped speech, and cross-shaped reconciliation—and in the confessional loci of justification by faith alone, *simul iustus et peccator*, the means of grace, and vocation. It then traces how this "respiration of the justified life" takes concrete shape in marriage, business, counseling, and everyday relationships, portraying breathing grace as the lived rhythm of shalom: receiving from Christ what we cannot produce and extending to others what we ourselves have first and freely received.

Breathing Grace: A Biblical and Lutheran Confessional Theology of Received and Extended Mercy

1. Breathing Grace: The Spark and the Expansion

I first encountered the term "breathing grace" in Ken Sande's *The Peacemaker*. The phrase stuck with me at once. I reached for a computer expecting to find a body of reflection equal to the weight the words carried in my mind, and instead found the concept used devotionally, scattered across teaching connected to Peacemaker Ministries and Sande's later work, but nowhere given the sustained treatment it seemed to invite. Yes, it was a foundational shift in peacemaking, focusing our conflicts and debates through the lens of Christ. But I needed more. That gap is the opportunity this manuscript explores—but the aim here is not to explain or supplant Sande. It is to use his phrase as a spark in the darkness of our world, to honor what he gave the church, to name where he took it, and then to carry the idea further.

Sande deserves full credit. In *The Peacemaker,* he gathered the whole enterprise of biblical conflict resolution under a single description—peacemakers are people who breathe grace (K. Sande, 2004, p. 11)—and organized his book around four movements: glorify God, get the log out of your own eye, gently restore, and go and be reconciled (K. Sande, 2004, pp. 12–13). In a later essay, he gave the metaphor its respiratory shape, describing the Christian life as breathing in God's grace through Word, prayer, worship, the Lord's Supper, and fellowship, and breathing it out to others through grace-filled speech and action (K. Sande, 2015). He then directed the image toward what he came to call relational wisdom and biblical emotional intelligence: a practical framework for navigating conflict skillfully. That is a worthy destination, and many have been served by it.

This paper takes a different path. Whereas Sande developed breathing grace as a relational practice, I seek to develop it as a relational theology, pedagogy, ethos, and habitus—a Christ-centered way of being that shapes identity, relationships with others, and one's relationship with oneself. My aim is to ask not chiefly how a person breathes grace skillfully, but what breathing grace is and why we must embrace it: where it comes from, how it takes hold of us, and why it cannot finally be reduced to technique. My contention is that the metaphor, followed to its root, lands in the heart of the doctrine of grace and the theology of the Cross, and there discloses far more than Sande's setting required of it.

You can no more will yourself to breathe grace than a sleeper wills each breath; it is the involuntary rhythm of a soul made alive in Christ. And yet, as with breath, what is first given can also become intentional: the renewed mind turns deliberately toward grace—even asks for it—and that turning, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, takes shape in how we live. Put bluntly: we do good works not to earn a place in heaven but to worship Christ. Breathing grace is no different—the intentional turning, worked by the Holy Spirit, of the whole self toward the grace already given, so that what we feel, think, and do becomes worship.

In many ways, breathing grace is one of the guiding axioms of my life. For me, it means pursuing the opportunities God places before me with energy, diligence, and enthusiasm—looking forward rather than back, giving my best, and then fully releasing the outcome into His hands without rumination. I let it go. Period. It is the practice of working faithfully while resting in God's sovereignty: laboring with everything I have, then trusting that the result—whatever it is—is for my good, my growth, and the good of those around me. Grace, like breath, is meant to be received and given continually, never held.

Breathing grace is not, first, something the Christian does on their own; it is something we do because of what Christ has done on our behalf. It is the steady cathartic breathing of one who has been justified, declared righteous in Christ, and who continually returns to the source of life. Just as the body cannot survive without bread and water, the soul cannot flourish apart from Christ. Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life" and invited the thirsty to come to Him and drink. Earthly bread satisfies only for a moment, and earthly water quenches thirst only temporarily, but Christ offers lasting nourishment and living water that satisfies forever.

Breathing grace, then, is the ongoing act of coming back to Him—receiving again the life, strength, and sustenance He freely provides. It is not striving to earn God's favor, but living from the abundance already secured through Christ. Like a traveler returning to a spring in the desert or a hungry soul finding bread for the journey, the believer continually comes to Christ, the One who alone gives life that endures.

My thesis, then, is this. Breathing grace is the habitual reception and extension of God's grace: received from Christ through Word and Sacrament, repentance and forgiveness, and extended to the neighbor through reconciliation and vocation—integrated in both the cognitive and the behavioral, in what we believe and how we then live. It is something we must first know before we can live it: grace written on the heart and grasped by the mind, so that the renewed thinking described above can take shape in renewed action.

Read biblically, it rests on grace as the ground of Christian identity, on speech reshaped by that grace, and on forgiveness that flows from the cross. Read through the Lutheran Confessions, it is deepened from a relational disposition into a description of the justified life itself: peacemaking grounded not in moral achievement but in justification by faith, and sustained by the believer's continual return to Christ through the Gospel and sacraments—the

same returning to the source of life with which this argument began. A word of precision is owed, since the language could mislead. To call breathing grace a habitus is not to make grace a quality infused into us by which we stand before God—the Apology rightly refuses that (Ap. IV). Justifying grace is and remains God's favor, an alien righteousness reckoned to us *extra nos*, in Christ and never in ourselves. The habitus I mean belongs not to justification but to the new obedience that follows it: the Spirit-wrought life of one already declared righteous, learning to breathe out what he has first and freely received. So understood, breathing grace is not one practice among many but the entire posture of a redeemed person: the lens through which all things are seen, the way the self is examined, and the way every neighbor is met.

The structure of the paper follows that same logic, each layer deepening the one before it. A brief literature review first establishes where the conversation now stands and what it has left unsaid. From there, the argument builds the biblical foundation, then the confessional foundation, and from the two together assembles an expanded definition of breathing grace. Finally, it traces what that definition means on the ground—in marriage, in business, and in relationships more broadly—where grace is either breathed or held.

To speak of breathing grace is ultimately to speak of shalom. In Scripture, shalom is far more than the absence of conflict, strife, or pain; it is the wholeness, harmony, and flourishing that flow from being rightly related to God, neighbor, self, and creation. It is the peace Christ secured through His cross and now gives to His people. Breathing grace is the lived rhythm of that peace—receiving from Christ what we cannot create for ourselves and extending to others what we ourselves have received. In this sense, grace is the breath of shalom. The more deeply grace is inhaled through faith, the more naturally shalom is exhaled into homes, congregations, workplaces, and communities. The goal of breathing grace is not merely better relationships or

greater skill in navigating life's conflicts, real as those gains are. Its deepest end is participation in the reconciling work of God, through which Christ restores all things and teaches His people to become instruments of His peace.

2. Literature Review

The materials relevant to breathing grace fall into several bodies that have not yet been brought together around this concept. Mapping them against the argument of this study—grace received through the means of grace and extended to the neighbor in speech, reconciliation, and vocation—clarifies both the inspiration and the gap.

The originating source.

The concept's home is Sande's corpus—*The Peacemaker* (2004), *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (K. Sande & Johnson, 2011), *Peacemaking for Families* (K. Sande, 2002), the family-oriented *Young Peacemaker* (C. Sande, 1997), and the Relational Wisdom 360 essay that articulates the metaphor most fully (K. Sande, 2015). This literature is pastoral and practical by design: strong on biblical citation and application, intentionally light on systematic development. It is the spark, not the spine, of the present study.

Biblical-theological literature on grace, speech, and reconciliation.

The concept's true center of gravity is Scripture. The Pauline grace texts (Eph. 2; Rom. 5; Titus 3) and the Johannine prologue (John 1:14–17) establish grace as gift and identity; the wisdom and epistolary speech texts (Prov. 15:1; Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:29–32; James 1 and 3) establish speech as a theological matter; and the reconciliation texts (Matt. 18; 2 Cor. 5; Luke 23:34; Rom.

12) ground forgiveness in the cross and frame it as a commissioned ministry. Sound interpretation of these texts proceeds by the grammatical-historical method that lets Scripture interpret Scripture (Kuske, 1995), and the confessional exegetical tradition has read them with care—most notably J. P. Meyer's study of 2 Corinthians, which reads the ministry of reconciliation as the very shape of the pastoral office, the public proclamation through which God's accomplished reconciliation is delivered (Meyer, 1963). The scholarly and exegetical literature on these passages is vast and mature, but it has not been gathered specifically around "breathing grace."

Lutheran Confessional and dogmatic literature.

The decisive body for this paper is the Lutheran confessional tradition. The *Book of Concord* (Kolb & Wengert, 2000) supplies the primary texts on justification (Augsburg Confession and Apology IV; Smalcald Articles II), the means of grace (Augsburg Confession V; the Catechisms), daily repentance and Baptism (Small Catechism), and the relation of faith and works (Formula of Concord). Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* (1535/1963) is the classic locus for *simul iustus et peccator* and Christian freedom. Behind the Confessions stands the dogmatic tradition that guarded and transmitted them. Martin Chemnitz, the "second Martin," defended justification as the chief article against Trent and grounded it in the imputed righteousness of Christ—reckoned to the sinner from outside rather than infused as a quality within (Chemnitz, 1971–1986, 1985)—and his work on the two natures secured the Christ who is himself the content of that grace (Chemnitz, 1971).

The classic Lutheran dogmaticians systematized the same material: Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* (1950–1957) remains the standard treatment of justification, including

objective justification, and August Pieper and the Wauwatosa theologians sharpened the proper separation of Law and Gospel and the exegetical reading of Scripture (A. Pieper, 1997). C. F. W. Walther's classic *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* gives the definitive confessional statement of the distinction that governs the whole of this study and guards the Gospel from ever hardening into a new demand (Walther, 1929). Twentieth- and twenty-first-century confessional Lutheran writers extend the line: Becker (1982) on faith and reason, J. P. Meyer (1963) on the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians, Brug (2006) on justification and the means of grace, Kuske (1995) on grammatical-historical interpretation, Deutschlander (2008, 2013, 2015) on the theology of the cross, the two kingdoms, and the splendor of grace, and Paustian (2016) on the lived voice of that grace.

These sources are marshaled toward a single end: to secure the external, alien character of justifying grace—reckoned to the sinner *extra nos* in Christ—as the ground of everything the breather then exhales. Contemporary interpreters engage the same heritage from varied vantage points: Bayer (2008) on the Word that comes from outside us; Kolb and Arand (2008) on the two kinds of righteousness; Wingren (2004) on vocation; and Veith (2002) on calling in everyday life. Gerhard Forde (1997) is engaged more selectively: his reading of the theology of the cross and his warning against turning the Gospel into a new Law are illuminating, but he writes from outside the confessional Lutheran stream this study assumes, and his fuller program—particularly his reticence toward the third use of the Law affirmed in the Formula of Concord—is not adopted here. None of this material has been gathered around breathing grace as such; doing so is the manuscript's central contribution.

Adjacent psychology and counseling literature.

Empirical and clinical work on forgiveness (Worthington, 2006), self-compassion (Neff, 2011, 2022), and psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2012) touches the concept at its edges and is engaged only where the fit is direct and clearly subordinate to the theological account (see Section 5).

The gap.

Breathing grace appears, developed devotionally, in only the first of these bodies. A search of the peer-reviewed literature confirms the point: scholarship on grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and Christian peacemaking is abundant and mature, yet the specific image of breathing grace remains undeveloped outside Sande's devotional setting. No work grounds it in a biblical theology of grace, identity, speech, and reconciliation; locates its inhalation in the means of grace and its exhalation in vocation; or builds an expanded, confessionally rooted definition—an account of the whole posture of the justified life—that extends across marriage, business, and relationships. This manuscript addresses that gap.[1]

3. The Biblical Foundation of Breathing Grace

Before any confession can deepen the concept, Scripture must establish it. The reading that follows is grammatical-historical, letting Scripture interpret Scripture rather than importing a system onto it (Kuske, 1995). Three movements form the foundation: grace as identity, grace as speech, and grace as reconciliation.

[1] The closest recent neighbor is Marshall (2021), who reads Paul's theology of reconciliation as divine initiative—"discovered, not manufactured"—a conclusion this study shares on exegetical grounds. Marshall writes, however, from a restorative-justice frame that treats the doctrinal tradition's forensic and individual emphasis as a distortion to be corrected rather than the foundation to build upon; he neither takes up the image of breathing grace nor grounds reconciliation in justification and the means of grace. The gap therefore stands.

3.1 Grace as the Foundation of Christian Identity

The first and governing truth is that grace is received before it is extended. Ephesians 2:8–10 states the grammar plainly: salvation is by grace through faith, not a result of works, so that no one may boast; yet the saved are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works. Grace is both the gift and the source of everything that follows. Romans 5:1–11 supplies the hinge on which this entire study turns: "since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1)—and Paul presses further, noting that this reconciliation was accomplished *while we were still God's enemies*: "while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10). Peace with the neighbor is therefore downstream of a peace already secured with God; reconciliation among people is the echo of a reconciliation God initiated unilaterally. Titus 3:3–7 anchors the same gift in Baptism—God "saved us … through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5), not because of righteous things we had done—and John 1:14–17 names its fullness: "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given," for "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16–17).

Three themes emerge that the rest of the paper will carry: grace is received before it is extended; the Christian's identity is anchored in Christ rather than in performance; and reconciliation is always initiated by God before it is practiced by us. These themes form the *inhalation* of breathing grace at its biblical root, and the baptismal gift named here is the rhythm Section 4.3 will develop as the daily return to the means of grace. A person who knows that peace with God is already settled has something to breathe out that did not originate within—a righteousness reckoned from outside the self.

3.2 Speech Shaped by Grace

If grace is received chiefly as a gift, it is extended chiefly through the tongue. Scripture treats speech as a theological act, not a social skill. Colossians 4:6 sets the standard: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Ephesians 4:29–32 expands it into a whole ethic—"do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29)—and ties that speech directly to forgiveness: "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). The wisdom tradition adds the practical hinge: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). James sharpens it twice—first as posture, "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19), then as warning, in the most sustained New Testament treatment of the tongue as the small member that, like a spark, sets a whole course of life ablaze and which no human power can finally tame (James 3:1–12).

The concerns here are threefold: the tongue as an instrument of either blessing or destruction, the obligation of edifying speech, and the Christian disciplines of restraint and gentleness. This is the principal *exhalation* of breathing grace. What is striking, and what Section 4.3 develops, is that the Lutheran Confessions command precisely this speech as the positive substance of the Eighth Commandment—so that grace-filled speech is not merely good relational practice but obedience to God's revealed will.

3.3 Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Grace received, and grace spoken, culminate in grace that forgives and reconciles. Matthew 18:15–35 holds together the two halves Christians often separate: the careful, escalating process of addressing a brother's sin (18:15–20) and the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:21–35), whose refusal to forgive a small debt after being forgiven an unpayable one exposes forgiveness as the necessary overflow of having been forgiven. Second Corinthians 5:17–21 names the engine and the commission: in Christ "the new creation has come," God "reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation," making us "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:17–20)—and 5:21 grounds it all in the great exchange: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"—the imputation of an alien righteousness that Section 4.1 grounds in the Confessions. J. P. Meyer's exposition stresses that this reconciliation is an accomplished, objective fact entrusted for proclamation, not a possibility to be negotiated (Meyer, 1963).

A distinction belongs here, lest the office and the believer be confused. The "ministry of reconciliation" Paul describes is, in the first place, the public proclamation entrusted to the apostolic and pastoral office, through which God announces a reconciliation already accomplished (Meyer, 1963; cf. Augsburg Confession V and XIV, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). What that office proclaims, however, every Christian extends: in the priesthood of all believers, the forgiven sinner carries reconciled mercy into the ordinary callings of life (Matt. 18:33; Eph. 4:32). The breathing metaphor lives at this second level—not in the holding of an office, but in the daily exhalation of mercy already received. Luke 23:34 shows the pattern at its source, Christ forgiving from the cross those who crucified him, and Romans 12:17–21 draws the practical conclusion: "do not repay anyone evil for evil" but "overcome evil with good."

The themes, then, are reconciliation, its flow from the cross, and its extension in vocation—mercy entrusted to be lived, not merely an attitude adopted. Forgiveness is thus the completion of the breathing cycle: mercy received at the cross is exhaled as mercy extended, even to the undeserving, because that is exactly the mercy that was first received.

4. The Lutheran Confessional Foundation

Scripture establishes breathing grace; the Lutheran Confessions deepen it from a relational disposition into a description of the justified life. The respiratory metaphor maps with unusual precision onto confessional soteriology: breathing *in* corresponds to the passive reception of righteousness *coram Deo* (before God), and breathing *out* corresponds to active righteousness *coram mundo* (before the world, toward the neighbor) (Kolb & Arand, 2008).

4.1 Justification by Faith Alone

The first claim is that the grace breathed in is the grace of justification. The Augsburg Confession teaches that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works, but are justified freely on account of Christ through faith (Augsburg Confession IV, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). The Apology develops this forensically and at length: justification is a divine verdict of acquittal that precedes and produces good works rather than resulting from them (Apology IV, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). The Smalcald Articles make the stakes explicit, treating justification by Christ as the first and chief article on which everything rests and from which nothing may be conceded (Smalcald Articles II.1, in Kolb & Wengert,

2000). The dogmatic tradition guards the same verdict. Chemnitz, in response to Trent, insisted that justifying righteousness is the alien righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner and received by faith alone, not a quality infused into the believer (Chemnitz, 1985). Francis Pieper systematized the point for the modern church, distinguishing the objective justification accomplished for the whole world in Christ's resurrection from the subjective justification received by faith—so that the grace breathed in is first a finished fact outside the believer before it is ever a felt experience within (F. Pieper, 1950–1957). Brug presses the pastoral consequence: because justification is God's completed declaration, assurance rests on Christ's work rather than on the believer's sincerity (Brug, 2006).

This is why the theme "peace with God precedes peace with others" is not a devotional flourish but a doctrinal order. Romans 5:1 and Augsburg Confession IV say the same thing in two registers: the vertical peace is settled first and freely, and only from it can horizontal peace flow. The practical payoff is decisive. If breathing grace is heard as an instruction—*be the kind of person who exhales kindness*—it quietly becomes a new law, sustained by willpower and producing either pride or despair. Justification forbids that reading. The grace breathed out is never the breather's own product; it is the overflow of a verdict already pronounced from outside.

4.2 *Simul Iustus et Peccator*

Breathing grace begins in an honest reckoning with brokenness. Luther's *Lectures on Galatians* (1535/1963) gives this its classic form: the believer is at once wholly righteous in Christ by imputation and wholly sinner in himself by ongoing corruption—*simul iustus et*

peccator. This is not a contradiction to be resolved but the permanent condition of the Christian in this life, confirmed in the Formula of Concord's treatment of the righteousness of faith (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). The doctrine guards breathing grace at both edges. Against pride, it denies that the one who breathes grace has risen above sin; he remains a forgiven sinner, never a benefactor dispensing surplus virtue. Against despair, it denies that ongoing sin disqualifies him from the gift; the verdict is Christ's and stands firm.

The themes that follow are exactly the ones a theology of conflict most needs: humility, because the peacemaker is himself a sinner; patience, because the neighbor's sin is no surprise to one honest about his own; and repentance as a daily reality rather than a crisis event. To breathe grace honestly is to look inward and see what Luther says is there—a person unable to meet God's standard—and in the same glance to see oneself forgiven and made whole. Becker shows why this requires the death of autonomous reason: the natural mind, left to itself, cannot hold together guilt and acquittal in the same person and will always resolve the tension toward either presumption or despair; only faith, taking the intellect captive to the Word, can confess both at once (Becker, 1982). Deutschlander frames the same reality as the theology of the cross: the believer's sin and weakness are not obstacles to grace but the very place where the hidden God works, so that honest self-knowledge drives the Christian back to the cross rather than away from it (Deutschlander, 2008).

4.3 The Means of Grace

How is grace breathed in continually rather than only once? The Augsburg Confession answers: the Holy Spirit works faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel, through the Word and the Sacraments as instruments (Augsburg Confession V, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). This is the doctrine of the means of grace, and it specifies the mechanism of inhalation. The Small Catechism locates the rhythm in Baptism: the old Adam is to be drowned by daily contrition and repentance and a new person to rise daily to live before God in righteousness (Small Catechism, Baptism, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). The Large Catechism develops Word, Sacrament, and the daily return to baptismal identity at length (Large Catechism, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000).

The themes are that Word and Sacrament *sustain* peacemaking rather than merely motivating it; that confession and absolution are the ordinary form of the daily return; and that baptismal identity is the settled ground from which the Christian acts. The Lutheran insistence here is sharp and important: these are not disciplines that merely make a person *feel* grateful (a psychological account) but instruments through which God actually delivers Christ and his forgiveness (a sacramental account). The soul does not inhale a mood; it inhales a Person (Bayer, 2008). Brug underscores that the means of grace are the only place God has promised to give what they convey: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament is not a symbol of grace already possessed but the actual vehicle by which the Spirit creates and sustains faith (Brug, 2006). August Pieper and the Wauwatosa exegetes made the same point the heartbeat of their theology—that the pastor's task is simply to set the Word loose, since the power to convert and comfort lies in the Word itself, not in the speaker (A. Pieper, 1997).

Within this same locus stands the Eighth Commandment, where the confessional and the biblical speech ethic meet. The Large Catechism expounds "You shall not bear false witness" not merely as a ban on lying but as a positive command of grace-filled speech: to defend the neighbor, speak well of him, and "put the best construction on everything," explaining his actions in the kindest way (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). What Colossians 4:6 and Ephesians 4:29 commend, the Large Catechism commands, and James 3 warns is the hardest member of the body to govern. Grace-filled speech is thus obedience, not merely tact.

4.4 Vocation and the Christian Neighbor

Where does the exhaled grace go? The Lutheran doctrine of vocation answers: to the neighbor, through the ordinary stations of life. Luther taught that faith is directed upward to God and love outward to the neighbor, and that God does not need our good works but our neighbor does. If the public proclamation of reconciliation belongs to the office (Section 3.3), its everyday extension belongs to the priesthood of all believers: every baptized Christian is freed and authorized to carry the reconciling word and deed into his own callings (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9), and vocation is where that priesthood is exercised. Wingren (2004) shows that vocation is precisely where the Christian's active righteousness is spent—not in religious heroics but in the daily callings of spouse, parent, worker, citizen, and friend. Veith (2002) develops the same theme for contemporary life: every honest calling is a mask of God through which he cares for the world. The Small Catechism's Table of Duties gives this confessional shape, assigning grace-shaped conduct to each station (Small Catechism, Table of Duties, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000).

Deutschlander locates these callings within the two kingdoms: God governs the world through the stations and orders of this life and through law, yet the Christian serves in them not as a means of self-justification but as the fruit of a salvation already secured, so that ordinary work becomes the arena of cross-bearing love (Deutschlander, 2013, 2015).

The themes are serving others through speech—the tongue placed at the neighbor's service rather than turned against him—and bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). This is the destination of the breathing metaphor: grace inhaled *coram Deo* is exhaled *coram mundo* in vocation, which is why the later sections can speak of breathing grace in marriage, in business, and in relationships. These are simply the vocations in which the exhalation actually happens.

4.5 Keeping Law and Gospel Distinct

A final confessional safeguard governs the whole: the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. C. F. W. Walther's classic treatment gives this its definitive form—the Gospel must never be preached as a new Law, nor the comfort of grace turned into a fresh demand (Walther, 1929). "Breathe grace" is precisely the phrase that could go wrong here, hardening into one more command laid on the conscience, measured and failed. The Formula of Concord forbids that reading: good works follow genuine faith as necessarily and naturally as good fruit follows a good tree, yet are never the cause of salvation (Formula of Concord IV, in Kolb & Wengert, 2000). Gerhard Forde's reflections on the theology of the cross sharpen the same warning against a works-driven Gospel, though his fuller account of the Law is engaged only at this point and not adopted whole (Forde, 1997).

This is the doctrinal form of the deepest intuition behind this study. The exhalation of grace cannot be manufactured by willpower; like breath, it is first the involuntary respiration of a soul the Gospel has made alive. A tree does not strive to bear fruit; it bears fruit because it is alive. And yet, as Section 1 observed, what is given can also be turned toward deliberately: the renewed will, worked by the Spirit, leans into the grace that sustains it—and even asks for it—without ever becoming its source. Luther describes faith itself in just this way: living and active, working through love (Luther, 1535/1963; Gal. 5:6). The believer does not generate grace by trying; he breathes out what the Gospel keeps breathing in.

5. Toward an Expanded Definition

With both foundations in place, the definition can now be expanded well beyond its origin. Sande gave the church a memorable image of relational practice. Gathered from Scripture and the Confessions, breathing grace becomes something larger: not a technique to master but a condition to inhabit—an expanded, confessionally grounded definition that the literature has lacked (cf. Section 2).

To me, breathing grace is more than repentance, forgiveness, and vocation. Those are critical parts, but by themselves, they can still be heard as discrete actions a person performs. Breathing grace is more total. It is the frame of mind—the lens—through which all things are considered, processed, and acted upon. It governs how I look *inside* myself (in honest confession, without despair, because I am at once sinner and justified), how I *interact* with myself and with others (in charitable judgment and grace-seasoned speech), and how I receive

whatever comes (as a forgiven sinner who has nothing left to defend, because peace with God is already settled). It is a reminder that we are all broken people, unable to live up to God's standard, and at the very same time forgiven and made whole. Breathing grace is the *result* of holding those two truths together. You cannot will it into being by effort; it is first the involuntary rhythm of a soul the Gospel has made alive, and yet the renewed will can turn toward it deliberately, returning again and again to the Gospel and even asking for the grace it cannot manufacture. It is more than a lifestyle. It is the respiration of the justified life, which cannot help breathing out what it keeps breathing in.

Stated formally: *breathing grace* is the continual, faith-borne reception of God's mercy through the means of grace (inhalation) and the Spirit-worked overflow of that mercy toward the neighbor through reconciled speech and faithful vocation (exhalation)—grounded not in the believer's moral achievement but in the alien righteousness of Christ received by faith, anchored in the settled peace of justification, and sustained by the daily return to Baptism in repentance and absolution.

The psychological correspondences noted earlier can now take their proper, subordinate place. The felt experience of breathing grace may look like self-compassion (Neff, 2011, 2022), like the psychological flexibility to stay present in conflict rather than flee or attack (Hayes et al., 2012), or like the movement from decisional to emotional forgiveness (Worthington, 2006). These descriptions usefully name what the experience feels like and can meet people where they are in counseling. But the theological account locates the cause entirely outside the psyche: the gentleness toward the self is grounded not in a self-generated attitude but in an external verdict of acquittal that holds regardless of how the self feels. The picture, then, is not of a person working up a kinder posture, but of a person who has stopped having to justify himself and is

therefore free—free to breathe. This is what Deutschlander calls the splendor of the doctrine: grace is not one doctrine among many but the air in which every other doctrine is breathed, the assurance that God "freely chooses to love me … for reasons of his own" (Deutschlander, 2015). And Paustian gives the same reality a human voice, showing how a person, secured by grace, can speak and listen without the defensiveness that fear breeds, because the deepest question—whether one is finally accepted—has already been answered (Paustian, 2016).

6. Breathing Grace in Marriage

Marriage is where grace gets tested most, because no one hands you more chances to be kind or cruel than the person you live with. Every day brings a dozen small choices: the sharp reply or the soft one, the score kept or the score let go.

Most marriages run on a simple rule—I'll be good to you if you're good to me. Kindness for kindness, hurt for hurt. That feels fair. It is also the Law, and under the Law every marriage eventually loses, because sooner or later both people fail. Grace breaks the rule. It gives mercy to the person who, right now, has earned the opposite—"just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

In practice that comes down to three ordinary habits.

The first is how you talk. Give your spouse the most generous read the facts allow. The Large Catechism calls it putting "the best construction on everything" (Kolb & Wengert,

2000)—in plain terms, when the tone is short or the chore undone, assume the kinder explanation until you actually know better. Most of the fights we pick are built on the worst guess.

The second is confession. Say "I was wrong" first. You can, because you aren't defending your worth in the argument—that was settled somewhere else, at the cross (Rom. 5:1). A person who isn't fighting for his standing can afford to lose a fight.

The third is forgiveness. Remember the servant in Matthew 18 who was forgiven a fortune and then grabbed a fellow servant by the throat over pocket change. You've been forgiven the fortune. You can let the small debt go—and even forgive before you're asked. None of this is soft. It takes far more strength to absorb an offense than to fire one back. But the strength isn't yours to manufacture; it's the overflow of mercy you already received. This is where Sunday meets Tuesday—the grace you breathe in at the Lord's Table is the grace you breathe out across the kitchen table (K. Sande, 2002). Paustian says it plainly: a heart that is already secure can drop its guard and answer gently instead of keeping score (Paustian, 2016).

7. Breathing Grace in Business

Work can seem like the last place grace belongs. It runs on contracts, targets, and performance—earn your keep, or you're gone. But the doctrine of vocation says your job is exactly where God stationed you to love people. Your coworkers, your employees, your customers, even your competitors are neighbors, served through honest work (Veith, 2002; Wingren, 2004).

Grace doesn't cancel the rules. Standards, deadlines, and accountability are good—they're part of how God keeps the world running, and a manager who lets everything slide isn't being gracious, just negligent (Deutschlander, 2013). Grace doesn't lower the bar. It changes the person holding it.

It shows up in three places.

In how you talk. You can tell someone a hard truth in a way that builds him up instead of tearing him down (Eph. 4:29). You can refuse to carry the gossip. You can give the struggling employee the benefit of the doubt before you assume the worst.

In how you handle conflict. Every workplace has it. You don't have to win it by force or dodge it by silence. You can be the one who makes peace—carrying into the office the same forgiveness God handed you for free (Matt. 18; Eph. 4:32). You're not preaching a sermon; you're just passing on what you live on.

In how you carry yourself. When your worth isn't riding on this quarter's numbers—because it's already settled in Christ—you stop running on fear. You can own a failure without falling apart. You can share credit without grabbing for it. You don't need the deal, the title, or the win to be somebody. People can feel that freedom, and it is exactly what lets grace into a place usually run on anxiety. Your work becomes one more way God takes care of your neighbors, and one more place the mercy you received becomes mercy someone else can see.

The justified executive does not need the deal, the title, or the win to be a person of worth, and that freedom is precisely what lets grace be exhaled into a culture more often run on fear. Business becomes another vocation through which God cares for neighbors—and another place where received-and-extended mercy is made visible. Deutschlander's treatment of civil government clarifies the boundary: the workplace belongs to God's left-hand rule, where law, accountability, and order are right and necessary, even as the Christian carries into it the right-hand gifts of mercy and forgiveness that flow from the Gospel (Deutschlander, 2013).

8. Breathing Grace in Relationships

Everything else is a version of this. Friend, family, neighbor, the stranger in line behind you—in every one of them you are either breathing grace or holding your breath. Jesus said love is how people would know his followers (John 13:34–35), and Paul spelled out the hard version: don't pay back evil with evil; as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone; don't let evil win—beat it with good (Rom. 12:17–21).

Living it comes down to three simple moves—the same three that run through everything above.

Receive first. Whatever grace you have to give, you were given it; you didn't make it (John 1:16).

Watch your mouth. Let nothing tear down; say what builds up (Eph. 4:29).

Show mercy. Treat the person who failed you the way you have been treated—with mercy (Matt. 18:33).

Here's why this doesn't wear you out. The grace isn't coming from you, so it doesn't run dry—it comes from Christ and keeps arriving through Word and Sacrament. You're not the hero of the story; you're a forgiven sinner handing on what you keep being handed, which spares you both the pride of the do-gooder and the despair of the one who blew it. And you don't have to grind it out by willpower. Grace grows the way fruit grows—out of something alive. That is the whole point: breathing grace isn't a skill you master but a way of living you grow into, by staying close to the God who keeps forgiving you, until you meet every person the way you've been met—with mercy. Paustian puts it well: the person with nothing left to prove is finally free to be honest, curious, and kind—free to listen, to answer gently, and to stop trading grace for the cheap win (Paustian, 2016).

9. Conclusion

Ken Sande gave the church a memorable phrase and pointed it toward relational wisdom and peacemaking practice, and the church is in his debt for it. This study took that phrase as a spark and carried it further—deeper into the doctrine of grace, and wider across the whole of life. Read through Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, breathing grace turns out to be neither a relational technique nor a moral achievement. It is the respiration of the justified life: breathing in Christ's righteousness through Word and Sacrament, and breathing it back out toward the neighbor in reconciled speech and faithful vocation. The inhale begins in the settled peace of justification and is renewed in the daily return to Baptism, in repentance and absolution. The exhale keeps the Eighth Commandment in its most generous sense—putting the best construction on the neighbor—and spends itself in the ordinary callings of life.

The whole of it rests on a few plain truths. It is grounded in justification by faith: the verdict is already in. It is sustained by the means of grace: the supply comes from outside us and never runs dry. It is spent on the neighbor, not hoarded. And it is protected by the proper distinction of Law and Gospel, which keeps "breathe grace" from ever curdling into one more demand. Through all of it the believer stays what Luther said he is—at once a sinner in himself and righteous in Christ, honest about his failures yet certain of his acquittal.

To breathe grace, in the end, is simply what a forgiven sinner does, the way a living body breathes. Not by working it up, but because he has been made alive—turning back, again and again, to the God who keeps filling his lungs, and breathing out what he keeps breathing in.

Several questions remain open for further work: a closer exegetical treatment of the Ephesians, James, and 2 Corinthians passages; a fuller, dedicated study of how breathing grace relates to the Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine; and an empirical test of whether grace-grounded relational practices, taught with an explicitly Gospel rationale, lead to different outcomes than the same practices taught as technique.

10. Source Matrix

The matrix maps each element of breathing grace to its biblical witness and its Lutheran Confessional locus, and identifies its function within the respiratory metaphor (inhalation = reception *coram Deo*; exhalation = extension *coram mundo*).

Table 1

Breathing Grace Mapped to Its Biblical and Lutheran Confessional Foundations

Element of Breathing Grace	Key Scripture	Lutheran Confessional Locus	Primary Confessional Source	Function
Grace as gift and identity	Eph. 2:8–10; John 1:14–17	Justification by faith alone	Augsburg Confession IV; Apology IV (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Ground of inhalation
Peace with God before peace with others	Rom. 5:1–11	Justification as the first and chief article	Smalcald Articles II.1 (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Order of the whole

Element of Breathing Grace	Key Scripture	Lutheran Confessional Locus	Primary Confessional Source	Function
Baptismal identity	Titus 3:3–7	Baptism; daily return	Small Catechism, Baptism (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Rhythm of inhalation
Honest self-knowledge without despair	Rom. 7; Luke 18:13	*Simul iustus et peccator*	Luther, Galatians (1535/1963); FC SD III	Posture of the one who inhales
Grace received from outside the self	2 Cor. 5:21	Alien righteousness; two kinds of righteousness	Kolb & Arand (2008)	Content of the inhaled grace
How grace is received continually	(Word read/heard)	Means of grace	Augsburg Confession V; Large Catechism (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Mechanism of inhalation
Grace-filled, edifying speech	Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:29; Prov. 15:1; James 3	Eighth Commandment ("best construction")	Large Catechism, Ten Commandments (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Primary organ of exhalation
Restraint and gentleness	James 1:19–20	Sanctified life as fruit of faith	Formula of Concord (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Manner of exhalation
Forgiveness of the undeserving	Matt. 18:21–35; Eph. 4:32	Forgiveness as God forgave us	Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer 5th petition (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Asymmetry of exhalation
Reconciliation from the cross	2 Cor. 5:17–21; Luke 23:34	Justification and the ministry of reconciliation	Apology IV (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Source and aim of exhalation
Grace spent on the neighbor	Rom. 12:17–21; Gal. 6:2	Doctrine of vocation	Small Catechism, Table of Duties; Wingren (2004); Veith (2002)	Destination of exhalation
Works as fruit, never cause	Matt. 7:17; Gal. 5:6	Relation of faith and good works	Formula of Concord; Luther, Galatians (1535/1963)	Why exhalation is involuntary
Grace never made into a new law	Rom. 5:1; John 1:17	Proper distinction of Law and Gospel	Forde (1997); Apology IV (Kolb & Wengert, 2000)	Safeguard over the whole

11. Annotated Bibliography

(APA 7th edition. Annotations summarize each source and indicate its contribution.)

Bayer, O. (2008). *Martin Luther's theology: A contemporary interpretation* (T. H. Trapp, Trans.). Eerdmans.

A major systematization of Luther's thought organized around the Word that comes from outside us (*extra nos*). Bayer's emphasis on the external, promissory character of grace warrants treating the inhalation of breathing grace as the reception of an external gift through the means of grace rather than the cultivation of an inner mood. Used in Sections 4.3 and 5.

Becker, S. W. (1982). *The foolishness of God: The place of reason in the theology of Martin Luther*. Northwestern Publishing House.

Becker's study of reason and faith in Luther, showing that faith takes the intellect captive to the Word rather than resolving the paradoxes of the Gospel by reason. Grounds the argument in Section 4.2 that only faith can confess sinner and justified at once. Used in Section 4.2.

Brug, J. F. (2006). *The doctrine of justification*. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Press.

A confessional Lutheran exposition of justification and the means of grace, stressing that assurance rests on Christ's completed declaration and that the Gospel in Word and Sacrament actually conveys what it promises. Used in Sections 2, 4.1, and 4.3.

Chemnitz, M. (1971). *The two natures in Christ* (J. A. O. Preus, Trans.). Concordia Publishing House. (Original work published 1578)

The classic Lutheran treatment of the person of Christ, securing the Christ who is himself the content of the grace breathed in. Cited in Section 2 to establish the dogmatic backbone of the confessional foundation.

Chemnitz, M. (1971–1986). *Examination of the Council of Trent* (F. Kramer, Trans.; Vols. 1–4). Concordia Publishing House. (Original work published 1565–1573)

Chemnitz's exhaustive defense of the Reformation against Trent, including the decisive treatment of justification as the imputed, alien righteousness of Christ. Grounds the claim in Sections 2 and 4.1 that the grace breathed in is reckoned to the sinner from outside.

Chemnitz, M. (1985). *Justification: The chief article of Christian doctrine as expounded in Loci theologici* (J. A. O. Preus, Trans.). Concordia Publishing House.

Chemnitz's focused exposition of justification by faith alone. The primary historical source for the doctrinal order "peace with God precedes peace with others" in Section 4.1.

Deutschlander, D. M. (2008). *The theology of the cross: Reflections on his cross and ours*. Northwestern Publishing House.

A confessional reflection on the cross of Christ and the cross of the Christian, presenting justification, the means of grace, and cross-bearing as a single doctrine. Grounds the treatment of honest self-knowledge in Section 4.2.

Deutschlander, D. M. (2013). *Civil government: God's other kingdom*. Northwestern Publishing House.

An exposition of the Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine, distinguishing God's left-hand rule of law and order from his right-hand rule of grace. Frames the business application's account of accountability and mercy in Sections 4.4 and 7.

Deutschlander, D. M. (2015). *Grace abounds: The splendor of Christian doctrine*. Northwestern Publishing House.

A systematic theology organized to display grace as the heart of every doctrine. Supplies the claim in Sections 4.4 and 5 that grace is the air in which all doctrine is breathed. Used in Sections 4.4 and 5.

Forde, G. O. (1997). *On being a theologian of the cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*. Eerdmans.

Forde's influential reading of the theology of the cross and of sanctification as "getting used to justification." Supplies the framework for the Law/Gospel safeguard and for the claim that good works are fruit rather than effort. Used in Sections 4.2 and 4.5.

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

The foundational clinical text for ACT, describing psychological flexibility as willingness to experience difficult internal states while acting on values. Cited only as an illustrative parallel to remaining present in conflict; explicitly subordinated to the theological account in Section 5.

The Holy Bible, New International Version. (2011). Biblica.

The translation used for all scriptural quotations throughout this manuscript.

Kolb, R., & Arand, C. P. (2008). *The genius of Luther's theology: A Wittenberg way of thinking for the contemporary church*. Baker Academic.

A clear exposition of the two kinds of righteousness—passive righteousness received before God and active righteousness toward the neighbor—which forms the structural backbone of the inhalation/exhalation reading. Used in Sections 4 and 5.

Kolb, R., & Wengert, T. J. (Eds.). (2000). *The book of Concord: The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press.

The standard English critical edition of the Lutheran Confessions, containing the Augsburg Confession and Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Small and Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord. The primary documentary basis for the confessional foundation—justification (AC/Ap IV; SA II), the means of grace (AC V; Catechisms), Baptism and daily repentance (Small Catechism), the Eighth Commandment and Table of Duties (Catechisms), and good works as fruit (Formula of Concord). Cited throughout Section 4 and the source matrix.

Kuske, D. P. (1995). *Biblical interpretation: The only right way*. Northwestern Publishing House.

A textbook on grammatical-historical hermeneutics that lets Scripture interpret Scripture. Supplies the interpretive method underlying the biblical foundation. Used in Sections 2 and 3.

Luther, M. (1963). *Lectures on Galatians 1535* (J. Pelikan, Trans. & Ed.). In *Luther's works* (Vols. 26–27). Concordia Publishing House. (Original work published 1535)

Luther's mature commentary and the classic locus for *simul iustus et peccator*, Christian freedom, and faith that works through love. The primary source for Section 4.2 and for the claim that the exhalation of grace is the activity of a living faith rather than an act of will.

Marshall, C. D. (2021). Grace overflowing: Reflections on Paul's theology of reconciliation. *The Kenarchy Journal, 2*, Article 2.5. https://doi.org/10.62950/vxcsp25

The closest recent neighbor to this study's thesis, reading Paul's theology of reconciliation as divine initiative—discovered rather than manufactured. Engaged in the footnote to Section 2; written from a restorative-justice frame this study does not adopt, and identified as the point at which the present argument diverges.

Meyer, J. P. (1963). *Ministers of Christ: A commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. Northwestern Publishing House.

A close confessional exposition of 2 Corinthians, reading the ministry of reconciliation as an accomplished, objective fact entrusted to be proclaimed. The primary exegetical source for the reconciliation material in Section 3.3. Used in Sections 2 and 3.3.

Neff, K. D. (2011). *Self-compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself*. William Morrow.

A research-based account of self-compassion as an alternative to harsh self-judgment. Cited as an illustrative parallel to the gentleness toward the self that the Gospel grounds theologically; held in a deliberately subordinate role in Section 5.

Neff, K. D. (2022). Self-compassion: Theory, method, research, and intervention. *Annual Review of Psychology, 74*, 193–218. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-032420-031047

A scholarly review synthesizing the theoretical model, measurement, and intervention research on self-compassion. Cited alongside Neff (2011) as an illustrative parallel to the gentleness toward the self that the Gospel grounds theologically; subordinated to the theological account in Section 5.

Paustian, M. A. (2016). *Prepared to answer: Telling the greatest story ever told* (Rev. ed.). Northwestern Publishing House.

A confessional Lutheran reflection on speaking the Gospel with both clarity and warmth. Supplies the lived, conversational voice of grace in the applications. Used in Sections 5, 6, and 8.

Pieper, A. (1997). *The Wauwatosa theology* (Vols. 1–3; J. P. Koehler, A. Pieper, & J. Schaller). Northwestern Publishing House.

The collected essays of the Wauwatosa school, including August Pieper's work on the proper separation of Law and Gospel and the primacy of exegesis. Grounds the means-of-grace and Law/Gospel material with its insistence that the power lies in the Word itself. Used in Sections 2, 4.3, and 4.5.

Pieper, F. (1950–1957). *Christian dogmatics* (Vols. 1–4). Concordia Publishing House. (Original work published 1917–1924)

The standard confessional Lutheran dogmatics in English, distinguishing objective from subjective justification. The primary dogmatic source for the claim in Section 4.1 that the grace breathed in is first a finished fact outside the believer. Used in Sections 2 and 4.1.

Sande, C. (1997). *The young peacemaker: Teaching students to respond to conflict in God's way*. Shepherd Press.

Corlette Sande's adaptation of the Peacemaker framework for children. Establishes the breadth and formative intent of the Peacemaker tradition; noted in Section 2.

Sande, K. (2002). *Peacemaking for families: A biblical guide to managing conflict in your home*. Tyndale House.

Sande's application of biblical peacemaking to marriage and family conflict. Provides practical scaffolding for the marriage application in Section 6.

Sande, K. (2004). *The peacemaker: A biblical guide to resolving personal conflict* (3rd ed.). Baker Books.

The originating text and source of the seed phrase "peacemakers are people who breathe grace" (p. 11). Acknowledged as the inspiration for this study; referenced in Sections 1, 2, and 6.

Sande, K. (2015, April 13). *Breathe grace*. Relational Wisdom 360. https://rw360.org/2015/04/13/breathe-grace/

Sande's fullest articulation of the metaphor as breathing in God's grace and breathing it out to others, anchored in Ephesians 4:29, Ephesians 2:1–5, and John 13:34–35. The primary statement of the concept this paper expands beyond; used in Sections 1 and 2.

Sande, K., & Johnson, K. (2011). *Resolving everyday conflict*. Baker Books.

A concise distillation of *The Peacemaker* for a general audience; confirms the consistency of the breathing-grace theme across Sande's corpus. Noted in Section 2.

Veith, G. E., Jr. (2002). *God at work: Your Christian vocation in all of life*. Crossway.

A widely read exposition of the Lutheran doctrine of vocation, presenting ordinary callings as masks through which God cares for the world. Grounds the business and relationship applications in Sections 7 and 8.

Walther, C. F. W. (1929). *The proper distinction between law and gospel* (W. H. T. Dau, Trans.). Concordia Publishing House.

The classic confessional statement of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, insisting that the Gospel never be preached as a new law nor the comfort of grace turned into a fresh demand. Grounds the Law/Gospel safeguard that governs the whole study. Used in Section 4.5 and the source matrix.

Wingren, G. (2004). *Luther on vocation* (C. C. Rasmussen, Trans.). Wipf and Stock. (Original work published 1957)

The standard study of Luther's doctrine of vocation, showing that the neighbor—not God—is the object of the Christian's good works, performed in the earthly stations of life. The primary source for treating the exhalation of grace as vocation. Used in Sections 4.4, 7, and 8.

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2006). *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Theory and application*. Routledge.

A leading research program on forgiveness, distinguishing decisional from emotional forgiveness. Cited as an empirical parallel to the movement from committing to forgive toward experiencing forgiveness; subordinated to the theological account in Section 5.

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