

A Church Where God Is at Work

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Gather Grow Give Go / 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10

That kind of leads to what I want to talk about this morning. This is an exciting time to be a part of Bramalea, it really is. You can sense it every time we gather, every time we have a ministry event people are excited about what is going on here.

And praise God for that, God sure seems to be doing a work among us, we are seeing a record number of baptisms, honestly I've lost count. We are seeing new members, people putting their hand up and saying I want to be a part of Bramalea Baptist Church almost weekly. We just come out of an exciting camp season that we've seen the Lord use to impact the lives of hundreds of kids.

This is an exciting time, a season that we shouldn't take for granted.

Yet it's always good to step back and ensure that we are aligned, that everything is in tune. To not allow excitement to be the indicator of God's working.

How do we really know that God is working in our midst? How do we know this isn't just a manufactured, man-centered experience?

The danger is that when things are going well, we kind of have a tendency to go on auto drive. But there are times when we need to just pause and check. Are we still on track? Are we still on vision? Are we keeping the main thing the main thing?

That's what I want us to do this morning, I want us to take this Sunday and revisit our vision, our discipleship path not because anything is broken, but we need to be reminded of the mission.

And maybe there are those of you here this morning, who are just starting your journey with us and you're wondering like what is Bramalea Baptist Church all about? What am I signing up for?

And this is a great Sunday to answer that. But if we're going to answer it, it's got to be rooted in God's Word — is what we're doing here actually in line with what he's called us to?

I want to ask the question what kind of church is God at work at and is BBC that kind of church?

And as we look at our passage this morning in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, here's what we find...

That God is at work in a church where his Word is received, his people are growing, serving, and living on mission together.

That aligns so closely with our discipleship path, Gather, Grow, Give, Go.

I want to share that with you this morning.

Look with me at 1 Thess. this morning.

So what is BBC all about? Well we define our mission in one simple statement.

We exist to equip people to know Christ, to grow in Christ and to live for the glory of Christ.

Now that's not a mission we came up with on our own; it's a mission that we have taken right from the mission that Jesus gave his church when he said to go into the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you...

That mission is not an option, that my friends is the mission of not just our church, but every faithful church.

We exist to equip people to know Christ, to grow in Christ and call them to live for the glory of Christ.

The question is how? We know what we want to accomplish, but how?

And that's where those 4 G's come into focus that you see on the walls.

Those 4 G's represent our path of discipleship. It's the path, the journey that we ask every person who is a part of BBC to join us on.

If BBC is your home church, this is what we call you to, to journey with us on our path of discipleship through gathering together regularly, to grow in your relationship with Jesus and your relationship with others; to give of yourself to the work of this church, to give of your time, your talent, your treasure, and to go, to go back into the world and be disciples who make disciples.

And again we get this not because we've created something fun on our own to do, but it's what we see happening in faithful churches all throughout the New Testament, but it's also what we see God's Word calling each of us to individually.

We are asking the question what does it look like for God to be at work in a church, and we get a snapshot of it here in the church of Thessalonica.

This is a church that God is working in... Paul is writing to this church that he loves.

We can trace the origins of this church back to Acts chapter 17, when Paul was on one of his missionary journeys with Silas.

Paul and Silas come upon the city of Thessalonica, where for three Sabbaths, Paul was in the local synagogue showing people from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ who was appointed to suffer and die for their sin and be raised from dead.

And it says that some of them were persuaded, that is some of them believed as well as a great number of Greeks and some prominent women.

But the Jews became jealous of how the gospel was taking root and so they started a riot and stirred up a crowd and they dragged one of the converts Jason

to the court, accusing Paul and Silas of turning the city upside down, and claiming that Jesus was a king that rivaled Caesar.

And they ran Paul and Silas out of the city... so this church that we read about here started with immediate opposition and conflict and turmoil.

But here it is probably about a year later and Paul is hearing that this church is thriving. That God has not stopped working since they left and indeed it is growing.

Notice what he says as he opens up his letter here in verse 2 he says we give thanks to God always for you... verse 3.

1 Thessalonians 1:3-4 ESV

³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice those three verbs there faith, love, and hope.

Their work of faith, their labour of love and the steadfastness of hope.

That's how Paul know this church is alive. Notice he doesn't mention anything here about how many people they have in attendance. Nothing there about how lively their worship is or how great their children's ministry is, as important as those things may be, that's not the measure of their faithfulness, that's not why Paul is so encouraged.

It's because this church is working in the faith, they are labouring together in love and persevering together in hope.

Every church has a culture. And a culture is a bit different then a mission or priorities. Culture isn't something that you see, it's something that you feel when you walk into the church. It's something that you experience.

Like I often wonder what is it that people experience when they come to Bramalea, what is their first impression? What would they say this is a place where faith is at work and on display? Would they say that love is something

they feel when they walk through those doors, would they say this is a place where you can find hope?

And those things are things that don't happen by accident, but they happen very intentionally.

It's clear to Paul that God is at work in this church, but what's going on in the everyday life.

Here's what we know about life — about faithfulness: it isn't found in the big, sweeping, life-changing decisions. It's found in the daily disciplines. The habits practiced so often they become reflex.

Think about a boxer who wins the big fight. Nobody's watching that fight thinking that's where it was actually won. It was won months earlier — in the daily grind. Getting up early. Running the miles nobody sees. Drilling the same combination a thousand times until it's not something you think about, it's just what your body does.

So what are those daily fundamentals for a church? What's the training, the reps, the things practiced so often they become reflex?

Paul doesn't leave us guessing. Starting in verse 5, he tells us exactly what he saw.

Here's how he knows God is at work.

God is at work in a church where his Word is received.

WORD IS RECEIVED

Notice what Paul is seeing and hearing about what is happening at this church, we saw it in verse 5 where he says our gospel came to you not only in Word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit..

We see that same theme in verse 6.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 ESV

⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

Do you see that? You received the Word even though you were facing affliction, you received it with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

See God is at work in a church where his Word is being received. Because the Word of God is what does the work.

It wasn't just that the word was going forth, but it was what the Word of God was producing in the people of God. The gospel came, that is the gospel was preached and shared with you, but it resulted in power and full conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is saying this is how I know that God is at work, because when the gospel was shared with you, it took root in your hearts, we saw the power of the Holy Spirit transforming lives, hearts, and minds.

And every time the Word is shared, you receive it with joy.

This is why we are a people of the Word. It's why for us as a church God's Word is the focus of all we do. It's why we spend so much time and effort at trying to read, understand and obey the Word. Because there is power, life changing power in this Word.

It's why this Word is so much of the focus of our time of gathering together. That first step of discipleship that we take, we call it Gather.

Because we believe that there is something powerful that happens when God's people gather together in Worship and the Word. It's really the entry point to our discipleship path here at BBC. It's where most of you will start your discipleship journey with us.

And make no mistake about it what is happening here this morning is part of being discipled. You're being discipled here in the songs that we sing, in the

prayers that we pray, your being disciplined in our discipline of giving and as we get ready to take communion together shortly.

Everything here this morning is about pointing you to Jesus, but the greatest way we can disciple you here this morning is by opening up God's Word and sharing it with you, calling you to faithfulness, and obedience.

Consider what Paul says just one chapter over in this letter... he says in

1 Thessalonians 2:11–13 ESV

¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Do you see what he is saying... he's saying like when we were with you we exhorted you and encouraged and charged you to live faithfulness and obedience, that's the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

and then he says when you received the Word you received it as it is, not as the word of men, but the Word of God...

but notice the Word that is at work in you believers.

The Word does the Work. Like if I get up here every Sunday and I just share my thoughts and opinions with you, if I get up here and just give you life advice, and counsel. There's no power in that, in fact we'd run out of things to say after the first week, cause I've got so little to share.

The only power, the only authority I have is what's written in these pages, it's the Word of God at work in you.

The Word of God the writer of Hebrews is living and active, its sharper than any two edged sword, it pierces the deepest parts of the human soul.

The Word does the work.

And so my prayer here as we get back after Summer is that you would make this a priority. The gathering together around God's Word every Sunday, as often as you can make, there is something powerful that happens as we gather together.

But that's not the only thing that's going on at this church, that's not the only sign that God is at work.

See not only are people receiving the Word as they gather together, but people are growing in their faith.

That's the work that the Word of God does in our lives, it produces growth.

God is at work in a church where his people are growing in faith.

GROWING IN FAITH

We see that in verses 6-7:

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7 ESV

⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

Theres a ripple effect going on here. As these believers are being exposed to God's Word, they are beginning to imitate Christ and they are imitating those who are teaching the word, and in turn they are becoming an example to all the believers in their region, that is there are others who are imitating them.

And maybe that sounds a bit strange, you know when I first read about Paul saying imitate me as I imitate Christ, I was thinking, man there are a lot of things in my life that I don't people to imitate.

But that word simply means to follow the example of. I mean there are a lot of people I admire and respect. I admire people who have accomplished great things as a pastor or leader. And I want to learn from their ambition, their drive, their habits that made them successful.

There are men who down through the years I have admired as husband and fathers and I have sought to follow their example of what it looks like to be a godly father or godly husband.

This is what Paul is saying, first and foremost our calling is to imitate, to follow the example of Christ. That's what happens as we read the Word, the more we read, the more we learn of Christ character, his nature, his heart, what he wills, what he calls us to, what his righteousness looks like and we strive to imitate, to follow his example.

But we live in community with other believers, believers who have been following Jesus longer than we have and they can show us what it looks like to live the Christian life, what are their habits of prayer and bible study and worship. We can follow their example.

But as we are growing in our faith, then the calling is that there would then be those that we are showing and teaching what it looks like to follow Jesus and they are imitating us.

What Paul is saying here is that as people are receiving God's Word they are being disciplined in the faith, they are growing.

See we long to see that same things happen here at BBC. This needs to be more than just a place that you come and gather once a week and hear God's Word, this needs to be a community that you are actively growing in your faith.

Not just because of what you're reading in the Scriptures, but because you are part of a community that you can look to for what it means to follow Jesus.

And so you'll see that next step on the wall of discipleship. It's the step we call Grow. Because we are all called to grow. And the main way this happens here at BBC is through our Growth Groups.

We encourage, even challenge everyone here who calls BBC home to be a part of a growth group, because that's where what Paul is describing here can happen. It's where you get connected closely with other believers. It's where yes you gather around God's Word and pray together, but you do life together, you learn to imitate each other, become examples to each other.

It's where newer believers join with more mature believers, where young couples can connect with more experienced couples, new moms with experienced moms, and young dads with experienced dad, people new to their career connect with people experienced in their career and you can learn what it means to be faithful to Jesus in each of those settings.

It's where you can ask questions, and be encouraged and held accountable, loved, and supported.

Each of us are called to be a disciple and make disciples. You should have someone who is discipling you, but the question is who are you discipling. Who is calling you to grow in Christ, and who are you calling to grow in Christ?

But maybe you're saying, well I'm not sure I'm ready for a growth group, I'm not sure I'm at that step. Maybe you still have some questions, maybe you're brand new to the faith.

There are still steps you can take to grow. For instance if you or someone you know is just exploring Christianity, you have some questions about it, we'll have our Alpha course starting up soon, it's designed as a journey for those questioning and learning about Christianity.

Or maybe you've given your life to Jesus and you're ready to take the step of baptism, or maybe you just want to go deeper, we've got a host of discipleship

courses that you can take that are intended to help you grow in your understanding of God's Word.

The point is I challenge you to do something, to go deeper. To take that next step of growth.

To not settle for the Christian faith simply being about showing up to church on Sunday or just tuning in online. Let me ask you how are you challenging yourself to grow in your faith.

But here's what we know. Discipleship is about more than just learning and growing, true discipleship is about doing, true discipleship is about serving.

That's how Paul knew this was a church that God was at work, this was a church that was serving the Lord together.

God is at work in a church where his people are serving the Lord together.

SERVING THE LORD

I mean we've already seen hints of this early on... Paul praises this church for work of faith, and their labour of love in verse 3.

But it becomes clear in verse 9:

1 Thessalonians 1:9 ESV

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

That phrase turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

Literally, you turned from serving idols, to serving God.

You know we all serve something or someone.

The question isn't do you serve, but who you serve.

And I know there are some who have actually done that, turned from idols, actual statue, and image worship, to serving God, but even if you didn't worship an image or statue, you still worshipped idols, they were just idols of the heart.

Some of us serve the idol of money, or career, some of us serve the idol of image and popularity, maybe it's power, or sex, maybe even something honourable like marriage, family, and health.

An idol is simply something you find meaning and purpose in, something you worship with time, money, devotion, and affection to.

But when you come to faith in Jesus, you turn you back on serving idols, and you serve the Lord.

Part of being a disciples of Jesus, is this calling to serve. How are you serving the Lord? What does that look like in your life?

See one of the ways that we are called to serve the Lord is to serve in the local church that we are a part of.

In fact we read passages like 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 and we find out that God has given each of us gifts, spiritual gifts and the purpose of those spiritual gifts is to be used for the benefit of the local church to serve the local church.

1 Peter 4:10 ESV

¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

The reality is that everyone has a role to play, there are no pew warmers in the kingdom. You have a gift, you have a talent, you have time and each of us are called to serve the Lord together in the church, to labour in love, to work in faith.

It's why that third step of discipleship there is what we call the Give step, we call it that because it's a giving of yourself. A calling to discipleship of giving of your time, talent, and your treasure to serve the Lord.

Yeah, there is a lot of great things that are happening at this church. We're excited about new people coming out, excited about baptism, excited about next gen ministries, grateful for the ways we serve the community and the needs of others in missions and outreach and care ministries, there are a lot of things going on here.

But none of it can happen without you. Without your prayers, without your time, without your financial support.

And it's important to point out, we have a lot of people who are actively serving and giving to the work and ministry here and we're so grateful for it, thank you for your partnership in this ministry.

But maybe you've been hesitating to get involved, to start serving. Let me ask you where might the Lord be calling you to give of your time and your talent here at BBC.

Like maybe you have a gift of worship, maybe you have technical capabilities. We are looking for people to serve.

Maybe the Lord has given you a heart of compassion for people, maybe he's called you to serve in our care ministries.

Maybe you've got a heart for the next generation or maybe he's given you a gift to teach or lead.

Maybe you have a love for books... we have a library you might be called to serve.

Maybe you love to connect with new people, greeter, and usher.

There are any number of ways that you can give your time and your talent to the work here, in fact it's why we have our serve drive today, make sure you stop by and check out the booths and consider where it is that God might be calling you to serve here at BBC.

Let me ask you how might the Lord be calling you to give not just of your time, and talent, but treasure.

Part of being a disciple of Jesus is saying Lord everything I have belongs to you, everything including my finances.

Giving is an act of worship, an act of discipleship specifically because giving is a sacrifice.

See we give to things we love, things that matter to us, we give our money to things that are close to our heart. That's why it matters, there is a direct connection between our treasure and our heart, it's why it's an act of worship.

It's why Jesus said things like:

Matthew 6:19–20 ESV

¹⁹ ***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.***

Where your treasure, there your heart will be also... you want to know what matters to you the most, what you love and care about the most, Jesus says follow the treasure, that's why it matters.

The reality is that every thing we do here comes at a cost. All the great work that is going on is only possible because of your financial partnership with us, and again I know there are many of you who give faithfully and sacrificially to the work of ministry here at BBC.

But maybe this morning part of you taking a step of discipleship is saying Lord, I'm going to give this amount regularly to the work you are doing here at BBC because I believe it is important.

Giving is an act of worship, an act of discipleship, specifically because it's a sacrifice — and sacrifice is exactly what connects your treasure to your heart. If

giving cost you nothing, it wouldn't be worship. True worship costs us something.

A church where God is at work is a church where people are receiving the Word, growing in their faith, serving the Lord together.

It's a church where God's people are reaching other people.

REACHING PEOPLE

Notice what Paul said is happening, that what the Lord is doing is not just remaining in the church, but look at what he says in verse 8:

1 Thessalonians 1:8 **ESV**

⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

Do you see what he's saying. What God has done in this local church, how this church has started out and flourished in the face of controversy is causing a stir not just in their community, but in the surrounding communities.

The work that God is doing here is reaching other people everywhere.

Understand how drastic this would be. If you read history, you find out that Thessalonica was as pagan a city as it could be, filled with idol worship, prostitution that was encouraged and celebrated, murders happened daily, children abandoned in the street, evil that you could not imagine.

And yet in the midst of the darkness there is this church, this group of people who were once part of that life but have miraculously turned their back on all of it and are worshipping a God who they claimed has risen from the dead.

What God was doing in their midst was reaching the world.

That's what it's all about. It isn't just about you and me, your family, my family, it's about this calling to go into the nations and reach them with the gospel. To

take the work that Christ has done in our lives and share it with others, if Jesus has done it for me, he can do it for you.

That final step we have up there, the GO step, that's what this is all about. We want you to come in here, and receive the Word, Grow in the Word, learn what it means to Give and serve, but don't stay here, go, go back out there, and reach the world.

Imagine just for a moment if this community started to talk about what God was doing here at BBC, the impact we could have. If like the church of Thessalonica, as Paul says we need to not say anything, not even a word, because the work that is being done here speaks for itself.

As you think about your discipleship journey here at BBC, I want to challenge you and ask you, who is it that you are reaching out there?

How you are being a witness for Jesus in your homes? In your schools? On your jobs? In your family? In your neighbourhood? Do those who know even know how much you love Jesus? Have you shared with them the good news of the gospel... that they too can have a relationship with God, by faith in the death and resurrection of his Son?

Have you told them about what God has done for you through his Son?

What does it look like for God to actually be at work in a church?

And Paul answers it for us, right here in Thessalonica a church where they gather around God's Word, and it takes root.

A church where people are growing in imitating Christ, becoming an example to others.

A church where people give of themselves, serving the Lord together.

A church where people Go, where their faith doesn't stay contained within the wall, but overflows to those around them.

Its not program or strategy, it's what discipleship looks like.

So here's my question for you this morning, coming back after a summer away: is that you?

Where are you at in your discipleship journey... like maybe you're just starting out. Just gathering with us- that's great; we're happy you're here and we pray you continue to explore with us.

But maybe it's been a while and it's time for you to take that next step. What is it?

Maybe today you're realizing you've been sitting on the sidelines of one of these. Maybe it's time to join a growth group. Maybe it's time to start serving. Maybe it's time to give sacrificially for the first time in your life. Maybe you've never once told someone about Jesus, and today's the day you start praying for the courage to.

Whatever it is — don't leave here today the same way you walked in.

Because a church where God is at work is a church where his people Gather, Grow, Give, and Go. And I believe that's exactly the kind of church God is building right here at Bramalea.