



gracefellowship

Series: The Missing Piece
Date: January 1, 2023

Title: Moving Forward
Passage: Titus 1

Happy New Year!

Today I want to attempt to accomplish two things in one message: First, I want to set some vision for the coming year. Second, I want to introduce the direction we will be taking during JTerm this month. If you're newer to our church, JTerm is a time during the months of January and June to invest in people and equip people for different things God is calling you to do in life as you follow Him.

I typically like to begin our time together with Scripture and let God's Word drive the message. Jesus has to be center-stage when we gather in His Name. However, if you'll permit me this morning to begin with some things that will set the table for where we are going this year, I will get to the message as the second part of our time together today.

JTerm:

- JTerm begins this Wednesday, Jan. 4th. The focus is going to be on global missions and the work God is doing in the world through the Church. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us we are one body made up of many parts. Each of us has a role to play in the evangelization of the nations. Some of us will equip, others will give, some will pray while still others go. But we all have a role in God's Kingdom agenda of the gospel being taken to the whole world. You're going to hear a lot more about that this month.
- January 5th will begin a season of prayer and fasting that we are inviting you to join in with us.
 - o I had a member of our church text me this week asking if we were going to begin the year in prayer and fasting again like we did last year. When I told him we were, he replied, "This is the first time in my life I have actually anticipated a fast. I truly believe it is what allowed my marriage to be reconciled last year."
 - We will give you a fasting guide to help you know what to do and how to go about your fast- giving up something in order to focus on Jesus.

- I have made the decision this month to take everything off my phone that is related to social media and entertainment-things I'm addicted to. I need the detox from things that distract me from pursuing Jesus or spending time with my family.
- You may fast from sugar/sweets/certain food/media consumption...something that you crave that can be replaced with pursuing God in prayer and taking in His Word, listening for His voice.
- Our kids will be going on a global journey as well as Ashley and some of our Kids Ministry team help them grasp God's plan of taking His love to the ends of the earth.
- We just came through Advent, a season of anticipation and waiting. This is another way for us to anticipate God moving in our lives and revealing Himself to us.

Vision Casting:

Let me tell you something I am excited about heading into 2023: this year is the 20th anniversary of the founding of Grace Fellowship Church! We made it out of our teenage years! Milestones like this allow us to look back and to look ahead as we move forward into the future God has for us.

Twenty years ago a brave group of people who were living in Kingsport, but attending church at GFC Johnson City, asked the leadership of that church if they could help plant a church in Kingsport that would be similar in nature to what they were doing in Johnson City so the people could have their lives and their faith family in the same city. The church was officially organized in 2003 and started with small group gatherings before launching formal worship services in 2004.

Toward the fall of this year we will be celebrating 20 years of God's grace and the work He has done in Kingsport through Grace Fellowship Church! This is a great milestone for us as we celebrate the things God has done and as we move forward into what God still has for us as a church. We believe that the best days of our church are still in front of us. We want to be faithful and obedient to all God asks us to do and reveals to us to do in His Word.

- Elders praying and fasting in January about the next season of ministry at GFC.
 - Mission: Go and Make Disciples (stays the same)
 - Vision: We are prayerfully looking at making changes to our vision and asking God how to move forward into the next season of ministry. Current Vision: Reach the unchurched by releasing people

who love Jesus passionately and others irresistibly. We are asking God to show us if there is a new vision statement that helps clarify what He is calling us to do as we move forward into the next 20 years of being the church in Kingsport.

- Deacon Ministry launching: In the fall of 2022 we made the church aware that we would be launching a Deacon Ministry at GFC. This is a biblical position we simply have never had. As we continue to grow as a church, different needs arise and we feel now is the time to begin changing some of our church structure. We currently operate with Elders, Staff and Teams (Men's/Women's/Hospitality, etc...) Deacons are servants in the church who meet needs and help fill gaps that exist while providing spiritual leadership to those they serve.
 - Member Care (Ruth Jordan and others to be named)
 - Worship and A/V (Steve Stracener)
 - Connections (Mark Reasbeck and Paul Valenga) Takes some of the load and responsibility off Andy to care for the 70+ people who serve on this team, giving him room to minister in more impactful ways.
- We plan to include more Deacon roles in a few other areas in the New Year, but these are some of the most urgent areas of need for our church as the Elders have prayed and planned to launch this ministry.
- God is blessing us with growth- especially with young families. Our children's ministry areas are busting at the seams on Sunday mornings! That's a great thing! But it means we have to get creative with how we utilize our space in this building.
 - Our current plans are to take the office area and convert those four rooms into preschool space.
 - The current preschool space we are talking about converting into classrooms for Elementary school age kids.
 - The Den will be reconfigured into a multipurpose space for both youth and elementary that will have large group gathering capabilities.
 - We don't know currently what that means for office space when we make that transition. (Temporary trailers/ adding on to this building / long term viability of this building to meet our growing needs / launching a new work)
- The final thing I want to share with you about the year ahead is something I feel like God was challenging me with over the Christmas break- I haven't even shared this with the Elders or our Staff Team yet...
 - In 2023 I believe we need to find ways to make a deeper impact for the Kingdom here in Kingsport. All through January we are going to share about ways we can be part of the advancement of the gospel around the world and how important that is. But God has planted us

in this community to make an impact right where we live, work and play.

- I hope to lead us this year to be even more engaged in our community than ever before. I want us to be a church who goes to the world with the gospel- and the world begins right outside these doors! We talk about doing that individually all the time, but this year I hope to see us be engaged collectively more than ever to show Kingsport that we love our city!

That leads us into the text today. If you have a Bible turn to Titus chapter one.

In this chapter we are going to find 4 things that will guide our JTerm experience this month. I want to set them up for you today and then encourage you to come back on Wednesday nights this month to get the deeper impact.

The gospel reached the Island of Crete and churches had been planted as the gospel spread. The problem was that the pagan culture of Crete had crept into the churches there. There was false teaching and beliefs. There was an acceptance of sinfulness that mirrored the culture. There was a false view of Jesus. The church was a mess. Paul was writing to his disciple, Titus, to give him marching orders for how to take leadership on the island of Crete and deal with these issues.

So let me read the text for us and then introduce four things we are going to be looking at more in-depth this month that will help us understand the role we are being asked to play in taking the gospel to the nations. In every culture that the gospel reaches we find the same four things at play.

:: Titus 1:1-16

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—

2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,

3 and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

4 To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

7 Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

8 Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

10 For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group.

11 They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

12 One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."

13 This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith

14 and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

The first thing we find happening in the world where God's church is planted is...

1. The Church Multiplies

Paul tells Titus to appoint Elders in *every town* where a church exists. The Church of Jesus is growing and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Here's what is crazy about this: the church was multiplying even when it was not healthy! Here's what we need to understand: just because a church has a lot of people coming to it, doesn't mean it is healthy!

Jim Putman always reminds me, "You can't remove the message and methods of Jesus and get the results of Jesus."

Paul saw what was happening on Crete and sent Titus to deal with the unhealthy things so the church could continue to grow and advance in a healthy way.

That's why we have Paul's first instruction to Titus and the second thing that has to happen in every church.

2. The Church Equips Leaders

Paul make sure that Titus goes in knowing that his first objective is to invest in men who can lead the churches. Every church needs a plurality of leadership to protect doctrine and to guide healthy Christ-like living. We will talk about this more in-depth at JTerm, but the kind of men Paul was talking about leading in the churches on Crete were completely counter-cultural. In fact, Paul even quoted one of the poets from Crete who said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." The qualifications for an Elder were modeled after the selflessness of Jesus, so it goes against the natural bent of our carnal, selfish lives. The Elders

of the local church demonstrate authority that is modeled after Jesus and has a concern for the health of the people in the church. That's only accomplished by equipping godly leaders.

Here's the third thing we will talk about in JTerm as we look at the growth of the church around the world:

3. They Church faces opposition and persecution.

For Titus a lot of the opposition came from within the church. We see that in verses 10-14. There were people who were using the church to gain a platform to prosper themselves. In the mean time they were destroying people and households with their false teachings and pursuit of monetary gain. There will always be a need to keep an eye out for false teachers within the church, but what we will see this month is the church being persecuted around the world by outside forces. You're going to hear from people who have served in areas of high persecution to tell us what the life of believers looks like in those situations and what our role is as Americans who are united by our faith even though we are worlds apart.

Then finally we will look at the last common denominator as the Church grows in the world:

4. The Gospel goes out to the Unreached.

What is the point of a life being changed by Jesus? What are we supposed to do once we follow Jesus? There are a lot of ways to answer that question, but our lives being changed is meant to show others in our world how Jesus alone meets our deepest needs.

The Church should be an agent of transformation not through culture wars or assimilation, but through wise, godly participation in culture doing things that is counter-cultural in the love of Jesus!

:: Titus 2:11-14

**11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.
12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,
13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,
14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**

The grace of God is shown to us to allow us to be people who are eager to do what is good as defined by God and His Word.

GFC, we all have a part to play in the gospel continuing to spread in the world. JTerm will help us be AWARE of the global church and our role in

PARTICIPATING in God's plan to reach the nations. It's easy to get sucked in to what is going on around us that we become unaware of what God is doing in other places. The Church of Jesus is on the move and we all need to be more aware and equipped to play our part in the growth of the church globally.

- If you want some more helpful resources going into JTerm, pick up a copy of the book "Revival Starts Here" in the Gathering Area and check out our website and app where a lot of information can be found under the JTerm link.

You don't want to miss anything we have planned this month! Unfortunately, we will not have the ability to stream these Wednesday night gatherings due to the nature of the discussions and for the safety of the people who will be sharing with us as they continue to have a role in parts of the world facing deep persecution. So, come be with us in person! We believe God has some special things waiting for people of all ages this month at JTerm.