



# gracefellowship

MORE

January 31, 2021

Finding More In Jesus

At the beginning of a New Year we typically have a Sunday to lay out our vision for the church and to discuss the direction we are going in the year ahead. Because of the circumstances we have found ourselves in during a pandemic, this year we actually did our vision cast in August as school was starting back and people were getting into somewhat of a different schedule. It felt like a new start and so we took advantage of that to lay some ground work for what we felt like we should focus on this year. And I have to tell you, it's nothing groundbreaking! We tried to ask the question, "In a world where so few things are certain, what can do and what should we focus on?"

Here's what we came to in our focus for the year ahead:

1. Corporate Worship: in-person or online, we want to make worship a priority for our lives
2. Make Disciples: no matter what is happening in the world, the mission of Jesus remains the same: Go and make disciples of all nations. We can still have the 1, 2 or 3 people we meet with consistently in person or online to invest in and disciple to be followers of Jesus. I can tell you during this season the 3 men I meet with weekly have been a great encouragement to me and have helped me maintain my sanity as we talk each week about what God is doing in our lives and how we can follow Him more faithfully.
3. Serve: as Christians we want to find outlets to serve people in our neighborhoods and in our city as many people are going through the most difficult situation they have ever been in. Each of us can serve in some way and shine the light of Jesus to those around us. Ask God to give you opportunities to show His love in the world and don't let our current circumstances stop us from being on mission with God in that way. During the plague in Europe as people were fleeing from cities where death and disease were rampant, it was Christians who ran into the cities to help nurse people back to health- many at the expense of their own lives. But it was transformative and the gospel spread as Christians showed the love of Jesus to people in their desperation.
4. Prayer and Fasting: While the things I just talked about were things we have already been doing as a church, we just had to tweak how to do them, prayer and fasting has not been a consistent part of the culture we

have built at Grace Fellowship. That's why we are putting greater emphasis on these things this year. Our desire is to build a culture where prayer and fasting leads us to have a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with God while having a heart to make Jesus known in our community.

If we are honest, of all the great things about our church, two things that our leadership has identified that is missing is a culture of prayer and fasting and a culture of sharing the gospel.

\* I want you to hear this clearly today, and I shared this with our leadership teams last Sunday: We are not trying to build a program, we want to develop a culture. My hope and prayer is that we learn to value connecting with God through prayer and fasting to the extent that it becomes a habit for us and permeates our church, becoming part of the culture of what is normal about life as a member of this fellowship.

Right now...

- We have individuals who pray and fast regularly, but it's not part of the culture of the church.
- We have individuals who share their faith consistently, but it's not part of the culture of the church.
- As we journey through this year we want to occasionally spend time talking about this topic of praying and fasting for the purpose of growing in our relationship with God so we are passionate about making Jesus known in our city.

I've been encouraged already this year, as we have challenged people to fast because I've heard from several of you who shared your personal experience about fasting for the first time in your life! People have been honest to say it wasn't something they were excited about, but they took the challenge and really felt that they connected with God through the experience.

Today I want to lay out a little more of our plan for this first part of the year and how we are going to approach some seasons where we invite each of you to seek God through prayer and fasting.

This morning if you have a Bible, let's look together at Mark 10:17-22. It's not a passage about fasting, but I want to make some connections to what God may be inviting us in to as we practice the discipline of prayer and fasting this year.

**:: Mark 10:17-22**

**17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

**18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.**

**19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”**

**20 “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”**

**21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”**

**22 At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.**

Whether you know it or not, the question this man asked Jesus is being asked by your friends and neighbors and co-workers all the time. Many of them are coming to the conclusions we wouldn’t agree with (because the Bible doesn’t agree with them), which is why it is so important for us to help people find the truth.

People believe that eternal life is found...

- In their morality: if they are good enough, they will be let into heaven when they die.
- In their religious practices: if they go to the right church or simply go to church at all and they do religious things, they will go to heaven.
- Some people believe eternal life in heaven is a right of everyone and that God universally lets everyone into His eternal kingdom, no matter what they have done in this life.

This man comes to Jesus and calls Him a good teacher- a sign of respect- and he asks Jesus what must I do to inherit eternal life.

Two things stand out here: we get a sense of who this man thinks Jesus is, and we get a sense that he believes eternal life is possible for him to earn through his actions.

Before Jesus answers his question, he addresses his title.

“No one is good- except God alone.”

This is a moment of clarity- he wants to know if the man sees him simply as a teacher who can be dismissed if you don’t like what he is teaching, or if this man sees Jesus as God who must be obeyed when He gives instruction.

Then Jesus begins to answer the man question.

**19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”**

Notice that Jesus only lists 6 of the 10 commandments here- he deals with the horizontal commandments about how we are supposed to treat one another. Jesus leaves out the commandments that deal with our vertical relationship with

God. The man wants a good, helpful teaching- something which will help him feel justified in his own power to earn salvation- and keeping the law was the way to have a right relationship with God at this stage of history.

When Jesus mentions these things the man replies:

20 “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

This implies a perfect keeping of the Law- something that is impossible for any of us to do! But he believes he has done this well enough that eternal life is within his reach.

Look at how Jesus responds:

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him.

If Jesus were from East Tennessee the verse may have said, “Jesus looked at him and said, ‘Bless your heart!’”

This guy believes he has fully kept the Law of God and Jesus knows it’s not within his power to do that. But Jesus loved him! It didn’t say Jesus was critical of him, or judged him; Mark tells us that Jesus looked at him and loved him! That’s important to know for what comes next.

**21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”**

**22 At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.**

I have to be honest with you: I have always thought this sounds like a harsh answer, but it’s not- it’s motivated by love! Matthew and Luke’s gospels tell us something that Mark doesn’t: this man is young and he is a ruler. His youthful wealth and power won’t allow him to give up those things in order to pursue the things Jesus wants for him.

**Youth and wealth are a dangerous combination, especially where faith in Jesus is concerned.**

We didn’t read this in the passage, but Jesus actually goes on to say that one of the most difficult things in life is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. He even repeats it. The disciples are stunned, because their cultural understanding of wealth was that it was a sign of the blessing of God on a person’s life. They even ask Jesus, “Then who can be saved?”

God does the impossible- he knows how to turn hearts away from the things of this world to make our hearts beat for His Kingdom.

Here’s another reason we know this isn’t a harsh request from Jesus: Jesus doesn’t ask this young man to do anything that Jesus hasn’t done himself! Jesus left his throne of power and the riches and glory of heaven in order to come to earth and show us the love of God the Father!

When Jesus asked the man to give up his earthly wealth he offered him a trade: give up your earthly wealth and I'll give you eternal treasures in heaven! Let me tell you, the prize of heavenly treasure surpasses any amount of wealth you can gain on this earth! Now, let me be clear- this was a specific thing Jesus asked of this man. Jesus may not ask you to sale all your possessions and give them to the poor. But Jesus may ask you to give up something else that is important to you! Our first instinct when that happens is to see it as burden to give up something.

**Don't look at the burden of what you are asked to give up to follow Jesus; look at the blessing.**

Jim Elliot was a missionary in Ecuador who had the goal of reaching a tribe in the jungle with the gospel of Jesus. It was dangerous because the tribe had no contact with the outside world and they were known to be very hostile and savage. In fact, in the process of attempting to share the gospel with this people group, Jim and two of his friends were killed by being speared to death. After his death, it was discovered that Jim wrote this in his journal:

**“He is no fool to give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”  
– Jim Elliot**

The things we have and value in this life will not last and we will not take them with us when we die! Think back to the young man who was talking to Jesus: the moment wasn't about what Jesus asked the man to give up, it was about what Jesus wants to give him!

Jesus invited him to sale everything and follow Him! The man was invited to have a front row seat to see the Kingdom of God come to earth and be part of the movement Jesus was creating. But he couldn't do it because he valued his earthly wealth more than eternal treasure.

**Following Jesus does come at a cost. But Jesus' motives are always in your favor and for your good!**

When we follow Jesus and He instructs us to give up something to follow Him we gain from it!

**“Jesus didn't come into this world to take your joy, but to give you His!” –  
Dave Clayton**

My hope is that as we lean in to build a culture of prayer and fasting this year we will discover three things. As Jesus leads us to fast from food or to practice self-denial from particular things at various times of the year here's what I believe we will find:

**In following Jesus there is more for me.**  
**In following Jesus there is more for our church.**  
**In following Jesus there is more for our culture.**

Let me ask you two questions as we wrap up:

1. Are you hungry for more of Jesus?

**:: Psalm 42:1**

**1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you,  
my God.**

2. Are you willing to make sacrifices for more of Jesus?

Let me tell you what the next season of prayer and fasting will look at GFC and where sacrifice may be required next. Today when you leave you will be given a handout that will explain in more detail what I'll mention next. Please take that and read over it this week.

This year we want to encourage you to join in with Christ-followers all over the world for the season of Lent. Beginning on February 17<sup>th</sup>, Ash Wednesday, we will have a service here at the church that evening to educate, give some theological background and call people to action for the season of Lent. Traditionally Lent is meant to be a time of giving up something for the 40 days leading up to Easter with the anticipated goal of heightening our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. As we practice fasting and self-denial for that period of time we will join in prayer for God to bring His Kingdom's power to be revealed in our lives and in our city than ever before.

Prayer:

God, make me more desperate for you than I've ever been. Show me what gets in the way of my desire for more of You.

God, reveal to me what you would want me to sacrifice in order to have more of You in my life.

Father, show me what role prayer and fasting should take in my life as I desire to follow You and develop this discipline for my faith journey.