



gracefellowship

Series: Multiple Month
Date: January 7, 2024

Title: Moving Forward
Passage: Matthew 28:18-20

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:22-41

We are entering a new year and there are some new things happening at Grace Fellowship I can't wait to tell you about today! There are three areas I want to hit on this morning so you know directionally where we are going this month and further into our future as a church.

I do want to preface the time we have together today with a disclaimer. We love God's Word and I love teaching God's Word. But today is going to be a little lighter than normal on the teaching of biblical text. I want to use this morning to introduce some things and give you some awareness of what's coming up this year, so the time we have together is going to be more directional than instructional.

First things, first: today is Life Group Sunday. Life Groups are what we call our small group ministry here at GFC. Our life groups are designed for relational disciple-making. When we look at the life of Jesus we find that we need both his message and his methods for making disciples. We have modeled our groups to fit a pattern that Jesus seemed to use and his disciples used.

Disciple-making is at the heart of everything we do at Grace Fellowship. The final instructions that Jesus left for us before he returned to heaven is found in Matthew 28:18-20.

:: Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Because of these instructions our church has a Mission Statement:

GFC Mission Statement: Go and make disciples!

Disciple-making happens as we share the gospel with the lost before they become followers of Jesus and it continues once they become followers of Jesus.

Notice what Jesus said:

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

We disciple the lost by sharing the gospel of Jesus. Once someone chooses to follow Christ we baptize them into the family. Do they know everything about being a Christian at this point and have all their theology nailed down? No! Think of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. He was reading the scroll of Isaiah but had no idea what it meant. God sent Philip to teach him about Jesus and how He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah. Once the Ethiopian understood that and accepted Jesus as the Messiah he asked to be baptized. Philip baptized him and church tradition says that man went and spread the gospel in Africa. Did he know everything there was to know about Jesus as Messiah or the role of the Church after that brief encounter? I doubt it! But it didn't keep him from being baptized and following Jesus.

But this is why the second half of Jesus' command is also very important. After someone becomes a follower of Jesus he tells us this:

(Go and make disciples...)

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

As we make disciples we teach them to obey the ways of Jesus and the Word of God. Obedience to the teaching of God's Word doesn't make you a Christian. That would be a works based salvation. However, once you come to faith in Jesus you are called to walk in obedience to His teachings and ways of life. Understanding the teachings of Jesus and being instructed how to obey Him can happen in settings like this. But we also believe that it happens with even greater impact in relationship with other people in a smaller group as you are being intentionally, relationally disciplined.

Why was the strategy of Jesus to make disciples and not preachers?

Jesus made disciples for a reason- so they would make disciples who would make disciples! The whole mission of the church across the world across all generations hinges on our obedience to this command. All of us who are followers of Jesus are called to be disciples who make disciples! The Holy Spirit uses all our unique personalities and gifts to reach people within the sphere where he has placed us. The truth is, many of you have influence to make disciples where I would have none. If the responsibility of making disciples only fell to the Pastor of a church, there would be very few actual disciples. We all get to be part of God's plan to change the world as we follow Jesus!

How do we do that? Well, that's where the methods of Jesus come into play. Jesus had 4 core things that were part of his method for making disciples:

The Jesus Method of Disciple-making:

- 1. A Biblical Foundation**
- 2. An Intentional Leader**
- 3. A Relational Environment**
- 4. A Reproducible Process**

When you watch the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of His disciples throughout the New Testament, you will find this pattern used as the Church expands.

We think it is important for everyone to be part of a Life Group! In fact, today we are going to end the service about 15 minutes early so you have an opportunity to sign up for a group to be part of this semester! But here's what we want you to know- our Life Groups are a vehicle to drive people to deeper levels of disciple-making. Being in a Life Group is not the end goal for our church- equipping disciples who can make disciples is our end goal!

We hope that from our Life Groups people will move into deeper levels of disciple-making (1-1/2/3). Jesus had groups of 120, 70, and 12, but He also invested heavily in three of His disciples: Peter, James and John.

Here's the second reason we are pushing Life Groups today: we are entering what we are calling Multiple Month. If you've been part of our church in the past we have taken the months of January and June to do something we called, "J-Term." This was a Wednesday night gathering to equip and train people in various areas of disciple-making. But doing those things on Wednesday night meant that we missed about 2/3 of our church in attendance. This year we decided to do basically the same thing, but move the teaching times to Sunday morning and then have the discussion times and follow up happen in our Life Groups. Through the month of January everything we teach on Sundays will be discussed and worked through in our Life Group times. If you really want to get the full effect of this month, join one of our Life Groups and be part of the discussion.

The big topic for this month is going to be "**The Gospel.**"

- **What is the gospel?**
- **How do we experience personal gospel renewal?**
- **What is our response to the gospel?**

At the end of the month we are planning ways to celebrate the things God is teaching and doing in our church! As we go through this month and God shows you something new or does something in your life, please share those things with your Life Group Leader or one of our Staff Team members so we can know how to

celebrate that with you and maybe even give you a platform to share those things with our entire fellowship.

Here's the second thing we really want to highlight and emphasize today:

21 Days of Prayer and Fasting

We are moving into a period of 21 days of prayer and fasting as a church. Across the world one of the major things we see in places where the gospel is advancing and people are coming to faith, being disciplined and planting churches, is that Christians are regularly committed to prayer and fasting.

In the gospel of Mark Jesus was asked why His disciples didn't fast while the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees regularly fasted. Here was the answer Jesus gave:

:: Mark 2:19-20

¹⁹ Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.

²⁰ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

While Jesus was on earth with His followers the party was happening! The Messiah of the world had arrived and the illustration was that of a wedding. You don't fast at a wedding- you celebrate...and EAT! But Jesus told them the day would come when He was gone and then His disciples would fast. Guess what- that day is today! Revelation describes the return of Jesus and once again uses language of a wedding feast. But in the meantime, as we await His return, we take occasion to fast and pray, seeking to draw near to God and to submit ourselves willfully to Him.

Last week or this morning you should have been given one of our Multiple Month books when you came in. This is going to be a helpful guide for us as a church as we go through the next 21 days together. I want to challenge you to join us in this time of fasting and praying. If you have never done this before and it's a new idea for you, let me just tell you a little about what it means and why we do it.

Fasting is a voluntary commitment to abstain from food for spiritual purposes.

In the past as we have encouraged fasting for our church we have given you options. I have fasted from sweets, from social media, or from Dr. Pepper. But this time around we are putting out the challenge to fast strictly from food. In the Bible, the prescribed fast is always food. I think God does that for a purpose. When we feel hungry, it reminds us to stop and pray and seek God about the specific thing we are praying for. Those hunger pangs are reminders for us to be filled up on something spiritual rather than physical. When Jesus revealed Himself as the

Messiah to the woman at the well, the disciples returned after going into a village to get food. But Jesus responded to them and said, “I have food you don’t know about. My food is to do the will of my Father!” (John 4, my paraphrase)

Here are few instructions for you to consider. First, I’m not asking you to abstain from food completely for 21 days! That would not go well for any of us! I would like to challenge you to abstain from one meal each day for 21 days. If that’s not possible for you, then make your own decision about when and how often you are able to engage in this fast. The point is not to be legalistic about this. The point is to put us in a position personally and corporately to seek God and pursue more of Him.

On page 4 in your book it says this:

“ It is important that we not just fast from something, but for something. We fast from food for more desperation for God and for more focus on spiritual things. We don’t just refrain, we replace.”

Try to choose a time that allows you during your fasting to stop and read Scripture and pray rather than eating a meal. Some of you can’t do that in the middle of your workday. That’s fine. Can you fast at night while you’re home?

Second instruction: If you noticed in the definition of a fast, it said to abstain from food for spiritual purposes. What are the purposes we are calling you to fast and pray about?

As you fast and pray seek God about the power of the gospel at work in your life.

- **Consider the richness and depth of what God has done for us**
- **Spend time contemplating the simplicity of the gospel in a way that we can all remember**
- **Learn to keep the gospel central in our lives**
- **Invite gospel renewal to first take place in our own hearts**

Final Instruction: Use the book we have given you and the resources on our app and website to engage fully in this 21 day period. On our app and our website there are great tools to help you think about all of this more fully and understand what we are calling you to and hoping will come out of this emphasis on prayer and fasting.

Bring the book to church and to Life Group for the next four weeks. This will be a resource to help you get a lot out of the month ahead!

REMINDER: This begins tomorrow! Read day one in your book beginning tomorrow. This is about your heart in relation to God and our collective heart in relation to God. Each day highlight or circle something that stands out to you.

Alright, let’s shift gears one final time today. For the past 6-8 months, probably, the Elders have been discussing a change for our church vision statement to help guide us into the future and clarify what we want to be about as we make

disciples. In the corporate world vision statements change over time when there is leadership change or when a company has lost its direction and is trying to make corrections. Vision statements can also inspire people to know what the dream is for the organization.

When GFC was launched 20 years ago they had a vision:

GFC Original Vision: Build a community to reach a community.

Ten years ago the Elders felt a need to make some changes to the vision of the church as some major changes were taking place. Our current vision statement is:

GFC Current Vision: Reach the unchurched by releasing people who love God passionately and others irresistibly.

As we have talked and prayed for months now about the new season we are entering into as we move into our 20th year as a church, we felt like it was time to revisit our vision and to make sure we are staying in line with who God has called us to be as a church. There is no philosophical or theological change here, but a clarification of direction. You'll see this in your book on page 5.

GFC Vision: Be a community of people transformed by the gospel who love and serve where we live, work and play.

In the few minutes we have left this morning I want to give you four parts of this definition that we see as hills to die on- things of primary importance that we see as we lean into this vision for our church! You can take some notes in your booklet if you'd like.

1. Gospel

:: Romans 1:16-17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Everything comes back to the gospel. The gospel is good news! And the news is that God offers salvation to all who would accept His gift through Jesus. We are going to talk a lot more about that next week. But for us to live out our mission we have to know the gospel, be changed by the gospel and share the gospel. The gospel is counter-cultural! It's not easily accepted by the world. We live in a society- church members included- that is so bought into individualism and what is good for me, that it is incredibly difficult for people to submit themselves to Jesus. We want to share the reality that while we are desperately sinful, we are infinitely loved and God has made a way for us to be saved from our sin.

2. Community

The second place we want to put down deep roots is community. God exists in community and He designed us for community. There should be no lone-ranger Christians! We need one another. This, again, is why we put such a heavy emphasis on groups and teams and relationship in our church. Jesus made disciples in relational community. Life change happens in circles, not rows! In small groups of people we form transparent relationships and accountability that helps us take huge steps forward in our faith. We will fight for community and relationship!

3. Transformation

When we talk about being transformed by the gospel, that doesn't mean we are being saved over and over again. But the gospel does do a transformative work in our lives continually as we walk in its power. We want to be a community that is experiencing the changing power of God in us at all times so we grow in the unity the Bible describes for us.

Transformation carries the idea of fruitfulness. As we walk with Jesus we are changed to be like Him and we do the things He did. The gospel has changed you by justifying you before God. The gospel is changing you as you are sanctified to become like Him. We never want to get stagnate or plateau in our growth as Christians. The Holy Spirit is working to continually transform you more and more into the image of Jesus. Our role as a church family is encourage and expect that type of continual growth and transformation to happen as we pursue Jesus together.

4. Missional Life- Where you Live, Work and Play

As we are transformed into the image of Jesus, guess what we do: we love and serve like Him. And where do we do that? Where we live, work and play.

That phrase just started coming out of my mouth unintentionally months and months ago. I never started using it thinking that it would work it's way into the culture of our church. But as we talked about prayed about this vision statement one of our Elders said, "I think the phrase, 'where you live, work and play,' has to be part of this; it has become part of how we talk as a church."

Here's what we believe: God has strategically positioned you to make an impact for His Kingdom in your neighborhood, in your place of employment or education and where you hang out for fun. You are not in any of those places by accident, but rather by divine appointment!

One of our Core Values as a church is to be externally focused. We want to be people who see themselves as being sent and being on mission. If we are going to see our surrounding community transformed by the gospel like we are being transformed by the gospel, it's going to be because each of us shares Jesus openly everywhere we go.

This is what we want to strive to become and be known as: a community of people being transformed by the gospel who love and serve where we live, work and play. I want us to know this vision statement by heart as we move into 2024 and let it set direction for how you live out your faith as we move forward into the New Year.

In just a minute we are going to be given some announcements about what to do next as we wrap up our time together today.

As we are dismissed today I want you to know three things:

I love you!

God loves you infinitely!

It's our joy to share His love with the world!

- Pray