

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Grace Family Commitment Sunday, Part 1 (10-14-84)

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-3

This is a day when I'm going to just share with you what's on my heart. And I'm going to be able to share with you only a part of what's on my heart because there's so many things that flood my heart and soul to share with you. But I'd like to begin in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. And I just want to read it as a way to begin my sharing with you today.

Paul writes to the Thessalonian church, a marvelous church, and he says this, "Paul and Silas and Timothy unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ, grace be unto you and peace from God our Father. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and enduring hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father, knowing brethren, beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in Word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit so that you were an example to all that believed, in Macedonia and Achaia, for from you echoed out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God is spread abroad so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had of you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come."

Now that is a thankful heart. Paul writes a letter and begins by saying, "You are a remarkable people for which I offer God my thanks." If I were the Apostle Paul today I would write this letter to Grace Community Church. My heart is filled with thanks to God. In verse 2 Paul says, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers." And that is indeed my own heart attitude. I thank God for you over and over and have for all the sixteen years that I've been here. There's never been a time when I have been one wit less than utterly and totally thankful for this ministry. I thank God for you. And I make mention of you in my prayers. I pray for you individually, collectively, by class, sometimes by Bible study, sometimes be fellowship group, sometimes in general because I remember, like verse 3 says, your work of faith and your labor of love and your enduring hope. You are a Thessalonian people. You have demonstrated the work that proves true faith. You have labored in love in this ministry. And you have endured, hoping that things would get better and they always do in God's grace.

And you, brethren beloved, are elect by God. I know that. You see, I have the incredible and impossible task of trying to shepherd God's chosen people. What a monumental task. You, beloved brethren, are the elect of God. And I know that. And I'm in awe of the responsibility to care for His chosen people. I thrill that when the gospel came to you like it says in verse 5, it didn't come just in word and it doesn't. But it comes in power and in the Holy Spirit and with great conviction, you receive it and you hear it and you take it in and it works in you. And I can say as Paul said to them, that you have become followers of us and of the Lord Jesus Christ and I rejoice in that, oh how I rejoice. And you too have become examples, not only in the San Fernando Valley and Los Angeles and California, but from you has echoed out the Word of the Lord across the earth so that I don't even need to say anything about you, your faith is spoken of every place...every place.

And they know that you have turned from idols to serve the living and true God...the world knows...that you are waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ. And I can't tell you what a joy it is for God to have called me and given me the privilege of having a Thessalonian church. He could have given me a Corinthian church, but He didn't. He could have given me a Galatian group but He didn't. By His grace and understanding my frailty and limitations, He gave me the very best people and the best place and the best ministry. And I bless His name.

And I just wanted to start by saying thanks...thanks from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for such a God-blessed place and people, for the great faithfulness that I have seen in your lives to the Word and the ministry and prayer. I want to thank you not only on my own behalf but the behalf of Patricia and our little family for your love, for your prayers and for your financial support. You have been generous. You have provided for our family more than we need, and we're grateful. And we endeavor by God's grace to be stewards of that provision.

I want to thank you for your vision. I want to thank you that you are a people who catch the vision and who see what could be done for the cause of Christ. And you've always been that way and we've always moved ahead and you've never had the ball and chain of tradition dragging you down, you've always said if that's what God's doing then we want to do it with a whole heart, and I thank you for that.

And I want to thank you for supporting the ministries and supporting the staff that God has given us here and thank you on their behalf for your generous financial help to them and your love and your prayers and your support and your encouragement. All of those things mean so much to us...so much.

And I want to say something that I think needs to be said and hasn't been. I've not said it. We have seen revival in this church like few other places that I have ever heard of in this generation. We have seen what people would give anything to experience, that is the mighty working of the power of God

in a place...we've seen that, unquestionably we've seen that. You have been a part of that. What Christians all over the earth would long to see, you've experienced. That's right. What people have prayed for and some never see, we have lived through. In fact, we've experienced so much of the manifest power of the Spirit of God that sometimes we've lost sight of what we're experiencing. We have seen a genuine Holy Spirit movement redeeming people, calling them to obedience, calling them to service, calling them to mission fields, calling them to prayer.

We've seen God build a church like few others and send the Word around the world. We have experienced that. Only God could have done it and He did it here. I don't know why His sovereign choice is such, but every day of your life you ought to thank Him for the privilege because there are millions of people all over the earth who in a split second would change places with you to be here and see the power of God. They've languished in dead places. They have starved without the Word of God. They have seen small glimpses of the light of the power of the Spirit of God. And you and I have literally been overwhelmed by it year after year after year. We've lived in it.

You say, "You mean we've had a real revival?" Well I don't know that I'd call it a real revival because we've never been dead so we've never needed to be revived. You see, being revived assumes that you've died, we've just been alive to the hilt all the time. But we've had no dearth of the work of the Spirit, have we? We've seen the Spirit of God convict of sin and righteousness and judgment. We've seen people, thousands and multitudes, bow the knee to Jesus Christ, coming out of all kinds of other religions and out of paganism itself. We've seen families put together, marriages put together. We have seen the power of the living God in this place. Bless God for that.

I tell you, it's a privilege that few can experience. Revivals and great movements of the Spirit of God are special times in the history of the church in special places where God by sovereign choice does a certain thing and He's done it right here in Panorama City, Grace Community Church. And it wasn't pulled off by the special devices of men, and it wasn't pulled off by some schemes and it wasn't because we're super leaders, it was because God is sovereign and He chose to do it and bless His name...I don't know why He allowed us the privilege of enjoying it but I never want to lose sight that He did and I never want to have a second of a lack of gratitude.

And I'll be real honest, too. We've had some ordinary days, haven't we, in the middle of all the extraordinary ones. And I thank God for ordinary days because if all you had were extraordinary days, the extraordinary would become ordinary. And there are those days when you just sort of plow through and hope it gets better. And when it gets better you say it's getting better. But it wouldn't it be awful if it was always so good you never knew when it was good? And so the Lord gives us enough ordinary days to appreciate the extraordinary days.

Listen, you and I have been a very unusual people. We have watched God build a church to His glory like few others in the world. That's right. Through the proclamation of His Word and the obedience of

His people and it's your church. He's done it in your life. Uniquely put His hand on this place, it has become a source of spiritual life and growth and fellowship for thousands of people in this community and millions around the world by His grace. And we must never forget that God has done it...God has done it. God has done it. And it would be a fearful thought that we would become cold to what He has done and lose our sense of appreciation.

And may I add this? That just because...just because the caretakers of this ministry are weak and frail and faltering and inadequate and very human, does not mean it is any less the work of the living God. Did you get that? Just because we fail and just because we're weak and we aren't all we ought to be does not mean it is any less the work of the living God because He has always chosen to do His work through weak and frail and inadequate men. That's the only kind of men there are. And I mean, if you just want to go around and find the weaknesses, you can, like Thomas Hardy's friend who could find the manure pile in every meadow. You can go through life like that.

And I confess to you my own weakness. I don't try to hide that. I'm not all that I should be. God knows that. I guess that's the staggering thought about the face of my ministry is who in the world am I to do this? And I know I have failed. And I don't try to hide that, I hope. And there have been many times when I overlook things that really needed to be done. Many times when in my zeal to reach the world I failed to meet the needs of the family. There have been many times in wanting to lead and feed the flock that I have been utterly insensitive to one sheep, I know that. And I know there are times maybe when you thought that I was insensitive to you or uncaring or indifferent. And it may have been. I would deny that there may be times that that's true. I deal with, I suppose, the largest problem in my life in terms of who I am is the fact that I'm basically an utterly preoccupied person. My mind is swimming all the time with such a wide range of responsibility, so many things to prepare, so many things to teach and preach and write, so many things in ministry to embrace, so many problems to solve, so many things that if I sometimes appear to be indifferent, it may not be just simple indifference but rather the inability to divorce myself from the utter preoccupations that fill my heart.

And then I confess something that maybe you don't know, but basically I'm very shy. (Laughter) I knew you didn't believe that. But.. (someone does something in the congregation and more laughter)...I'm.....now it's not that unobvious, is it? I'm basically very shy. You say, "It's not true...it is true." When I minister my gift in the power of the Holy Spirit, there's no shyness because that's what God has called me and gifted me and empowered me to do. But in and of myself, there's just a certain shyness in me. If I don't always speak out, it's not that I'm indifferent, it's just that I don't necessarily want to invade your life with something that you may not care to hear. I mean, I'm a human person and I am who I am. Like my kids tell me, "When you're in the pulpit, you're something unusual, the rest of the time you're just like everybody else." And it's really true and I have to deal with all those normal kinds of things. And there's a certain shyness that I've always had.

I just want you to know that if I don't appear to be all that I ought to be to you all the time, it may be that that's due to a preoccupation or just a shyness or in fact it may be an insensitivity and I don't deny that. But I'm trying to say to you that don't ever think for a moment because John MacArthur isn't all that he ought to be that this is any less the work of the living God because it isn't so. It is His work and He's always had to do it through frail men, some more frail than others. And in spite of it, and that's the thing that amazes me, in spite of it we have seen God's blessing in marvelous ways. There are no lacks at this church in terms of spiritual resource, there's nothing here to hold you back from being all you could be for Christ. You can't say, "Well we don't get the Word. Well we don't have fellowship. Well nobody's training me how to do anything. Well I can't get discipled. Well there's no one there that cares." No...no, the resources are here, bless God.

I want you to know we have the greatest staff and elders we've ever had since I've been at Grace Church...marvelous, Christ-exalting people. I mean, it's just incredible. The other day we had a man come in to our staff meeting and he said, "I need a kidney," and he's going through dialysis and he was a missionary and needs a kidney. One of our staff people said, "I'll give him the kidney." I mean, you're talking about people with commitment. I mean, now you're talking commitment. You see, they love you and they care for you and they carry a great load. They really do. They're the most committed and capable people I know anything about. There's nothing here on their part, there's nothing here on your part to limit your spiritual growth. And we're always working. I mean, we're trying to refine the ministry, make it better and more effective and strive for excellence and make every effort because we've only got one life and we want to live it to the maximum to the glory of Jesus Christ. We work hard at that. But there are so many people and there's so many ministries and so many needs, and so many opportunities and so many demands, I mean the elders, we meet weekly, we meet monthly, we meet all the time.

This morning we met and a dear lady came, with a one year old, and a three old little one and she has severe medical problems, she came and said, "Would you anoint us with oil like it says in James 5, lay hands and pray." We did it last week for a young girl with cancer. We did it this week for a young mother. And we prayed over her and we carry the burden of her need. That's just one brief time in the morning, this morning. And we met on Thursday till after midnight. And we'll meet on Monday again. And we do it and we pray and we share and we do all we can to increase the excellence of the ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. And our staff meets, we meet on Tuesday. And first we meet to study the Word and for an hour we intensely study a passage in the Word of God. Why? Because we need to be growing and we need to be learning and sharpening our skills so that we can be better men and women of God to minister to you.

And then we stop and we pray. And then we sing and praise and worship. And then we plan and we plan and we prepare and we try to do things the way God would want them done. So many to counsel. So many needs to be met, physical, spiritual, emotional. Calls to be made. Solving problems, preparing lessons and messages, the work is unending and it is equally joyous.

And you know what makes it so joyous? We know we're in a place where God is working. This is an unusual privilege. I want you to know, our people are thrilled to be here and they have to be because everybody's trying to get them. The Christian world would like to take our staff away. And it happens. It's usually a friend of mine who calls and says, "If you love me, if you really love me you'll give me Tom Brown." I said, "That's not fair." That was Allister Begg(?). He said, "If you love me, you'll give me Tom Brown." I said, "Okay, I'll talk to Tom." The Lord had prepared his heart and Allister got him. You wait, one of these days I'm going to call Allister and say, "If you love me, you'd give me Tom Brown back." But I'm waiting for my time. Don't tell him.

Listen, this is an unusual church. I mean, I've been in an awful lot of churches, I have never in my life been in a church like this where you see so evidently the moving of the power of God on such a wide scale. Just marvelous.

And I want you to know something, people. This is not John MacArthur's church. I could die tomorrow. This is the church of Jesus Christ. And this church is put into your hands. You are the stewards of this church, not me. I'm here to try to teach you the word of God. It is your church, not mine. It's not my church. I can't support it. I can't do all its ministries. I can't keep it going. I can't make it happen. I can do one small thing and that's try to feed you the Word of God. But it's your church. Christ belongs to it and it belongs to Him, but yours is the stewardship of it. And if I go, if the Lord removes me, this church cannot change. It cannot alter. It cannot be different. Its people must be together for His glory whether I'm here or not.

I never wanted this to be John MacArthur's church, I don't like to hear that. I never wanted it to be some kind of preaching center where people just walk in and listen, or a big organization that ships material around the world. No, I want it to be a local church, I want it to be the church of Jesus Christ in this community with people who see it at that and are committed to it as that. And if the Lord wants to take its ministry around the world, like he did the Thessalonian church, then let it happen. But the only reason it has any impact on the world is because it has such a profound impact on its own community. It's your church, it's not mine. I can't do it. Our people can't do it. You have to do it.

It's been my prayer all through the years, and it is now more than ever, that this would be a local church of people who live in this area who love Jesus Christ, who come together in His name and show the world that love, a local group of people who love each other. A local group of people who labor for the kingdom, a local group of people who meet needs in the lives of the people that come into its life. And I tell you, we can't do it. We've finally given up. I mean that. You can't do it. Do you realize the average church in America is very small? For example, fifty percent of the churches in America have under 75 people. Ninety percent have under 300.

Now in those terms, we've got a lot of people to take care of. It can't be done unless you are the stewards of this church, unless you are committed and involved. And what makes it even doubly hard is that we have satanic resistance. I mean, people say, "Why doesn't this happen the way it ought to?" Listen, it isn't always that simple. You realize we're hacking our way through the kingdom of darkness, don't you? Satan doesn't like that.

I picked up one of the newspapers in our area a couple of weeks ago, and there was an article in there by a lady. And she said, "I understand why that young man who went to Grace Church killed himself. I've gotten to know some of their people and went there and I tried to kill myself." And so, the world is getting the perception that we're some kind of odd group of people and if you stick around long enough, you'll wind up taking your own life. I mean, we have a lot of opposition. We're being accused of something else, some bizarre kind of things that just keep coming up and I have to go to a court and give some...some kind of hearing and give some kind of deposition to defend ourselves against another thing that has nothing to do with reality. I mean, it isn't easy. Satan resists us.

But I'll tell you something. I mean, it's a privilege because look at what God has done. Look what he's done. Look what you're living in. Look what you're seeing around you, transformed lives, the miracles that people think are revival somewhere off in space you're seeing it. This is it.

There's a church in the local area that was going to get a pastor and they said, "Well don't get a young one because if we get a young one, we'll have to work and go to meetings and things." God help that church. We'll have to work and go to meetings? You're highly privileged to be in a place where you have to work and go to meetings. Get God's work done. But we need you so much...so much.

I don't know if you know how much we depend on you. Do you know we have a wonderful bookstore. We sell books at discount because we want to give them to you so you'll internalize what's in them. You know, I'm sure you know, no money from the bookstore, no money made from the sale of books ever comes to Grace Community Church, it just goes back into the books. That bookstore doesn't support this church. No book you ever buy there supports this church. And you may not know it either but the tape and radio has no financial connection to Grace Community Church, none at all. No money from Grace Church goes to support tape and radio. No money from tape and radio received ever comes to Grace Community Church...never. The tape and radio ministry is a ministry completely outside the church in that sense. And for me, it's a labor of love. I receive not a dime from that ministry. See, that's just my ministry of love, that's all. I do that because I want to serve the Lord as a volunteer too, see. Nothing comes back to us at the church. This church is carried and supported in its ministry and its finances by nothing beyond you. That's it. It's you. You are the stewards of this church. No one sending money to radio or tape, no one purchasing tapes or books puts money in this church. It's gifts. It's here. It's you. We have no way to support it but you.

And this is my life. I am a pastor of Grace Community Church, of this local church. The tape and radio is just a way that God has extended that ministry, but I don't want that to in any way invade the uniqueness of this local church supported by this group of people. Everything depends on you. All the ministries, all the givings, and we have great needs, I want you to know that. We've recently got some letters from people complaining about our buses. And, I mean, we don't have the most beautiful fleet in the world, I agree with that. But I want you to know something about our buses. We wish we had new buses. Anybody who would like to give us a new bus, we will take it. I want you to know that. But we don't have any way to get a bus. We can't buy a bus. We don't have any money. Last month we couldn't order 18 trash barrels for the patio, we didn't have the money. And trash barrels don't even have motors. I mean, we are down there on the bottom line, folks. We could not order 18 trash receptacles.

People say, "Why do we have these old buses?" Let me tell you about our old buses. We had a study done, a survey group came out and they surveyed churches, charter companies and schools. And they gave us the result of this wide survey. The number one ranking bus service in their entire survey was Grace Community Church. We had 160,000 miles in the last twelve months with eight breakdowns. The number two, went 110,000 miles and had 32 breakdowns. Now we've got old buses, but we do everything we can as excellently as we can, and bless Rick Minor's(?) heart, I don't know how he keeps those things going, but we do everything we can to have an excellent bus service. We do all we can do with the resources we have. Sure we'd like to get some new buses, but that's pretty good...160,000 miles and only eight breakdowns. And you say, "Yeah, but my kid was on six of the eight breakdowns." Yeah, well my answer is, "He's got sin in his life." If you'll get your kid straightened out, we can lower the number of breakdowns. I mean, I want you to know we're trying, folks. Sure we'd like new buses. God bless the folks who work so hard to keep the ones we have moving for the glory of the Lord.

We have a lot of needs. We have chairs that are all torn up over there cause little kids tend to tear up chairs. But we don't have the money to get them fixed so we take them over a few at a time and they repair them because we don't have the resources. We wish we had resources to fix them. There are things we'd like to do with maintenance and things, we can't. We don't have the resources. We want to expand our parking. We found out this week that we can part, we can work a situation to park alongside the wash and get up to 700 parking spaces over there, just by paving along the wash and getting an easement from the city. It's a wonderful idea. We can do it in theory, we just don't have the resource. Everybody says, "We need more parking, we need more parking." Good, we need more money to give you the parking you need. You understand what I'm saying. It isn't enough to say we need more of this and more of that. We need a walk-in refrigerator for the kitchen, we need office space, we need computer facility, we need scholarship money for our school. We've got families who want to send their little kids to the Christian school but they can't afford that. We don't have any scholarship money as we should. We need nursery new air conditioning. We need the office

remodeled up here so we can do what we have to do. We need many things, chapel pews need to be replaced, video, book store expansion. We just can't do it, we don't have the resources. We can't, we want to, we can't. We don't have any source of money, we have no endowment, we don't have some great amount of money, we're not bringing in money from any other source. It's the offering and that's it. It's you. And we depend so much on you for everything.

I had the staff this week go through and identify every identifiable task in the church. And there are a myriad of tasks. Just look at the bulletin this morning, who do you think stuffs that? I don't. I don't. I remember a pastor in an insane asylum going like this with too many years in the mimeograph. Not me, see. I don't stuff, who do you think does that? People do that, volunteer people. You know those little things you write on the back of your card, little prayer requests on Sunday sometimes, do you know we have a group that's been coming in here for 15 years or more every Monday morning praying right through that whole thing? Who do you think does that? Who do you think sweeps up around here and cleans up, keeps the grounds looking nice? We do the best we can. But we need you to do that. We don't have the resources without you.

But we had the staff add up all those identifiable tasks and we came up with 5,213 things that we need done at Grace Church, everything from teaching the Word of God in the pulpit down to doing anything else. Five thousand, two hundred and thirteen identifiable functions, some on going, some part time, some once in a while. But I believe we've got a lot of things to do and we sure don't want 150 people trying to do them, we want everybody. We need everyone. And you want to know something? If we have that many identifiable tasks, that doesn't put a limit on us, we ought to have another twenty thousand people doing the stuff out in the world that we don't identify as happening here because the church needs to be out there teaching and speaking and living and acting and ministering and loving and serving and caring, right? That's just what we can identify that has to happen in what we recognize as an identifiable task or function connected to some official ministry. But beyond that, there are endless things that you as the living church need to be involved in. And we need everybody. And people have the illusion, "Well it will all happen at Grace whether I'm involved..." No it won't. I mean, we make the best out of what we got because we've got such good people. But we need you, we have no feet but your feet, no hands but your hands, no voice but your voice, no heart but your heart, that's all. And there's nobody to do it but you.

We live week to week. We adjust every week based on the offering, what we can do. We've had sent staff to pastor other churches and in most cases we haven't replaced them, we don't have the resources. So we're just waiting on the Lord. And I suppose we have 25,000 local people on our regular mailing list and probably twice that number that say they come to Grace Church. And we're trying to minister to all of them. I mean, we're trying to provide something for everybody. We're trying to do the best we can. And you know what it comes down to? We've got a small group of people financing a ministry for a massive amount of people. We've got a small group of people who are giving sacrificially of time and energy and money so that a wide amount of people can enjoy all of

these things, many of whom are making no investment at all. And that's what makes it so hard. And as the church grows and grows, it seems as though we still deal very often with the same committed core, only the people who are demanding the ministry get larger and larger and larger and larger and we just can't compass the thing. Grace Church is supported by a small group of people who give a lot.

Another group of people who give much, another group of people who give little and a whole group of people who give none. And a church can't survive like that, not when it continues to grow and grow and grow and grow and grow. You know something? We figured out that the average head of household, regular giver to Grace Church gives \$7.00 a week...seven dollars a week. Now you know what that tells me? That doesn't tell me that everybody gives seven dollars a week, that tells me that a few people give a lot more than that and a whole lot give nothing or less than that because the average is only the average. I'm not assuming that everybody at Grace Church gives seven dollars. What I am assuming is a few give a lot and a lot give very little. We can't...you're not investing in the Kingdom. You're not making the ministry possible unless you've learned the blessings of sacrificial giving and you're cheating yourself out of the reward that the Lord would have you have.

Listen, we want you to be a part of Grace Church. I want you so badly to be a part. We need you. We can't do it without you. And you ought to say, "Bless God, I can't get there fast enough to be a part of this miracle that God has done here." What a privilege. We live in a non-commitment time, don't we? People just kind of float around. "Well I go a little here. We don't belong but we go there." No, that shouldn't affect a church, that spirit of the age. You need to be a member of Grace Church. If you love the Lord Jesus Christ and you're in this area, you need to be a member of this church.

You say why? Four reasons. Worship...worship, you need to worship God. You need to come together with a group of redeemed people that you know and love and collectively lift your praises to God. You need to be here on the Lord's day and what a day it is when we come in a celebration of praise and glory to His name. Somebody says, "Oh, Grace Church is too big." Too big for what? Too big for worship? No. When the Lord calls for worship and glory, He gets ten thousand times ten thousand times ten thousand angels and thousands of thousands and all the redeemed of all the ages and He gets them all together and it's still not enough praise. Grace Church is not too big, it's too small. They're 1.6 million people in the San Fernando Valley who aren't here on Sunday praising God. That's too small, not too big. I wish we filled the coliseum every Sunday, 100 thousand people in the seats and 50 thousand on the ?????, wouldn't that be something? That's the morning worship service of the Christians who gather in that area. Wow, the world would take notice of that.

This isn't too big, it's too small. You say, "Well it's too big for fellowship." It isn't. You say, "Well you can only know 200 people." Yes, but the thing about Grace is you can pick the 200 you want to know. And that's not all bad.

Listen, in Sunday we try to lift you to God in my prayer and that's a non-negotiable. I want to lead in prayer in the morning because I believe I want to be the priest who lifts you to God in an act of worship and then to be the prophet to speak to you the message out of the Word of God. You come here for worship and then on Sunday evening you worship again. I love a Sunday-evening service, it brackets the whole day. I ought to have one whole day of worshiping the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave His Son to redeem me. It seems a small thing in the midst of my worldly activity. I love that Sunday night. I love the whole day bracketed with worship. You need to be here to worship faithfully. The Father seeks worshipers.

Secondly, fellowship...you need fellowship. You need mutual love and sharing. You need friends. You need people who can bear your burdens, carry your cares, laugh with you, cry with you, you need fellowship. You need to belong to that fellowship, so you're committed to it so somebody knows you're a part and they feel responsible for you, not like a passing sort of vagary. You need to lock in and be accountable and be in the fellowship and stimulate one another to love and good works. This is a wonderful fellowship. Oh what wonderful people we have. You can meet lifetime friends here, haven't you? Haven't you made lifetime friends? You can meet a lifetime partner here. Some of you are really slow in doing this, however. I mean, look around, guys, you're wasting years here. This is a place to make friends, to build your family, to raise your kids. Your kids are going to marry their friends, you know that? You like them to marry the kind of kids that are here? If you don't show any commitment to this church, why do you think your children will? Why would they? If you don't want to belong, why would they? See, you need a place to share your life.

Thirdly, ministry is another reason you ought to be a part of this church, ministry. You say, "I can minister outside the church." Yeah, but how much more wonderful to say when someone says, "Well where do you...I hear you're talking about Christ, what church do you go to?" Oh I float, I drift. Oh. Are you really committed to this drifting? Oh yeah. How much more wonderful to say, "No, I belong to a community of redeemed people that meet over there on Roscoe Boulevard and we love the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you come along and meet my friends? Would you come along and meet my family?" See you need that. See, it gives base to your ministry, doesn't it? I belong to those. Oh, I know about that place, yeah, that's a good place. You ought to be so thrilled to say I belong to that place, I belong to those people. I serve the Lord in behalf of Grace Community Church, what a privilege, a place where God's Spirit is poured out, where we've seen Him work. I don't know what your ministry might be, whether it's one of those 52 hundred and thirteen identifiable ones, or whether it's something else. You need to have a place where you can come for your ministry, where you can get charged up for it. Where you can say, "I belong to that, I'm a part of the force of people who minister from that place. Bless God. Ministry, so important.

And nothing is lost by the size of Grace Church. No. Nothing is lost. The early church is bigger than we were. The first church Jesus ever started was a church in Jerusalem, had more people than we

do. Nothing wrong with that, it's wonderful, absolutely wonderful to come together like this and celebrate and rejoice and learn to minister and have an identity for your ministry.

And fourthly is discipleship. You need to get into the flow of discipleship where somebody is helping you grow and you're helping somebody else grow. You need to make a commitment. I'm going to be a part and somebody will help me grow and I'll help somebody else grow. And that's my place and those are my people and that's my life and I belong and they're helping me and I'm helping them. I'm learning to minister and I represent that place. And I fellowship there. And they're my friends there and I worship there. I worship my God there. Worship, fellowship, ministry, discipleship.

And what's our part? If you become a member of Grace Church and that's your part, what's our part? I'll tell you what, it's four things. We'll feed you. I promise you that. You will come here and be fed the Word of God. We will feed you the nourishment of your soul. My commitment is to stay free from other things to keep teaching you the Word of God. I will not abandon that. I'm more committed to it than I've ever been. I go to Montreal in a week and in to Toronto to minister to those French speaking pastors up there for two weeks. When I get back on the fifth of November, I will be gone between the fifth of November and next June one week for ministry. The rest of the time is here, this is where God has placed me. I'm committed to that. And I have to be here to study the Word of God if I'm going to have anything to say to you. I've been preaching all these sermons, I have to keep coming up with new ones, you know that. I have to study. Henry Reese, one of the great early Methodist preachers in England was asked by a young man, he said, "Pastor Reese, which of your sermons have been most honored by God." He said very simply, "The ones I prepared the most carefully." There's no inspiration. It's just basically you've got to do it. It's work. It takes commitment.

I want you to hear the best teaching. Over the next year, 85, 86, we're going to bring and we've already contacted them, we're setting the dates up, all the greatest pulpit men, preachers across America, to preach in this pulpit so you'll get to know there are other people saying the same thing I'm saying and saying it better than I'm saying it. We want you to get fed by the best, the most blessed.

Secondly, we'll lead you. We'll provide leadership by example and instruction to lead you into righteousness, to lead you into the areas of understanding your ministry. To lead you in having a meaningful home life and a meaningful marriage and all the things that we can possibly do. We're going to communicate with you. You're going to see the last of this Sunday kind of bulletin. You're going to get a little one, looks like this in the days ahead and you're going to get this in the mail every other week so we can give you the information on a regular basis of what you need. We're going to have family meetings three times a year where you can come and share your heart, tell us what's good, what's bad, what needs to be done at Grace Church. We want to hear from you. We're going to have a cry room over here upstairs, we're getting it ready right now, closed circuit TV. All you moms and little babies go up there and let them cry all you want and have a great time. All right. Well good, we just heard from the moms, that's great.

We're doing all we can. We're doing everything within our power to strengthen families and marriages and just everything. We want to lead you right. And thirdly is training. We want to sharpen your skills and sharpen your gifts and we're going to provide seminars and classes and opportunities and studies and materials, everything we can to sharpen your ministry, sharpen your skills, sharpen your gifts for evangelism, for missions, for leadership, for prayer, counseling, Bible study, you name it.

And then there's the area of shepherding. We want to feed you, lead you, train you and shepherd you. And we've just come up with a wonderful new thing. We have 50 elders. We have 250 deacons. Each of those 50 elders will take five of those deacons. He'll disciple those five, work with those five. Each of those five deacons will take 15 members of Grace Church. When you become a member of Grace Church, you'll be identified with a flock immediately. You'll know who your flock is as a spiritual resource. You'll be identified with a fellowship group. You'll know who your peers are to meet with on Sunday morning and begin to build wonderful life relationships. And thirdly, you will know who your flock...who your deacon is and any need you have, you'll have his name and number, call him and say I have a need, financial need, economic need, spiritual need, emotional need, whatever it is. Everybody will know who his or her shepherd is. So whatever that need, it comes to him and five of those men will come to that one elder. So we as elders will know where the needs of our people are. You'll have somebody to care for you. We're so excited about that...so excited.

All that to say this, we want you to be a part of the church that is your church. And we don't want it to be like the rest of the world that isn't wanting to make commitments. I want you to be committed to this ministry. We can't do it without you. I'd like to know how many of you are members of Grace Church, stand up if you're a member of Grace Church. Thank you...thank you, God bless you. You may be seated.

That's a lot of folks and that's a lot of wonderful folks. Let me tell you something. There are many others of you, we can't do it without you, folks. We need you. We need you. You need us. It's time to make commitments. You say, "I'm only going to be around a year." We don't care if you're only going to be around six months, three months, time for commitments.

Here's what I want you to do. I'm going to ask our elders to come right down front right now and just line up across the front. God bless these men. Come, men. They have in their hand a little slip, we had cards in the first service but we ran out. And so we ran off some duplicates. Now listen carefully, you know what this is? Right up here it says Grace Community Church Membership, a place for your name and address and things. If you can say in your heart I want to be a part, I want to stand up for Jesus Christ, I want to be counted and I want to belong...you know what I want you to do? I want you to get up, come down here, walk up to one of these elders, give him your hand and take one of these back to your seat, fill it out...fill it out. On the bottom it tells you the next step, so fold it in half and tear off the bottom and keep it. Okay? If you're willing to say I want to be a part of Grace Church, my

church, Christ's church, come, take it, fill it out immediately because we're going to collect them, just take it and go back to your seats and fill it out. Tear off the bottom and hold on to it. If that's the desire of your heart, I want you to come right now wherever you are.

Amen.

Praise the Lord for that, amen? (Applause) You know, I have to confess to you that last week I said, Lord, I'm going to believe You for 500 people. And I said it's a step of faith but print 500 cards. I think we gave out 900 and we had to scramble to get them out in the first service. I was overwhelmed, and look again. And we went up and xeroxed them as fast as we could. Whew...all I can say is we've seen the work of the Lord again. Bless His name. Fill it out and just fold it in half like that and tear off the bottom. See what it says on the bottom. It says the next step in the membership process is to attend a meeting next Sunday morning at 8:30 in the chapel. Guess what. The chapel won't hold you and we've already got a group from the early service. They're going to go at 8:20 to the Family Center Gym. Would you go at the 10:15 hour? Don't worry about your fellowship group or whatever, next week's going to have to be special. This hour, come to the early service, you go to the Family Center, we'll deal with you there, we'll give you an application. The following week, Sunday away, you can be officially received into Grace Church. And what we may do when we do that is half of you turn around and shake hands with the other half from the looks of it. Really wonderful...wonderful. Bless you.

Now listen very carefully to what I say. God has given us great responsibility here, great privilege, great opportunity. We stand on the threshold of a wonderful opportunity. Down the street we own four acres, just weeds, old houses. We need to use it for God's glory. It's sat there long enough. We have pressing need. When we prayerfully and thoughtfully looked at all the need we have in this church, we have clearly identified it. We need space for our children, space for our youth, space for our nursery, space. This campus is crammed with our Christian school, LOGOS, Sundays. We need space. After much thought and prayer, the elders have put together the most wonderful plan to develop that into a full children's center, four acres, with two two-story buildings with eight classrooms and a beautiful area for food and like a chapel and a softball field, a full sized football field all grassed in, a little basketball court. It will house our elementary school on Sunday our third through sixth grade kids in the morning. And on the weekends we'll have recreation, family recreation. We can have family picnics there. Fellowship group picnics, it will have all that capability. It will take the children off this campus, give space to our youth. Do you know there's 300...between 300 and 350 high school kids here each Sunday and the same amount of college kids, jammed into rooms? Adult fellowship groups are bursting. We need nursery space. And if we can just take all these three to six-year-old....third grade to six grade, and just take them down there, there will be a little place you can drive in and drop them off, go park, come at the end of the service, drive in and pick them up. They'll have a self-contained program. Marvelous...marvelous. And a facility will be something our church family can use, recreation, the school can use it, it will double for all kinds of purposes that we're so excited about.

The elders believe this is the leading of God. Many others that we've shared it with are excited about it. We can do it reasonably by God's grace and maybe even do a little bit of parking along with it, which we would love to do. But what we want to know is that what's in your heart to do? (Applause) We'll let you express yourself in a minute. I appreciate the applause. However, I'm going to ask the ushers to come right now, gentlemen, and bring a little brochure that I want you to have...very exciting. Just pass them right out to everyone. I want you all to take one, each person.

On the front it says, "Building for the future." And it has just a simple little artist's rendering of the children's center concept. Did you see the one in the patio? If you didn't see it, it's beautiful..for the glory of the Lord, a place to raise the next generation of godly people. A place for our church family to fellowship, for our kids to be trained. And you've said by walking forward in what an exciting moment, "I'm committed to Grace Church." Well here's all of our opportunity to act on that. Look at it, would you? Now look what it says, just the right hand inside page, "I will covenant before the Lord to participate in the following ways...one, to pray consistently that this facility be ready for operation by September 1, 1985. Two, to pledge an amount of dollars over and above my regular giving to be given in the Thanksgiving offering coming up. To help work on the facility whether it be in the buildings or on the landscape. We're going to go out and plant together. We're going to do some building together, some finishing. We're going to have a great family project. Now this is for you to keep. We don't want pledge cards. We don't want a faith promise thing. We want you to write down...you say, "Well I don't know how much I can write down now, I might feel like doing more later." Well that's fine, you can do as much as you want later. But we need to know from you what you're willing to commit to now so that we know whether this is what we want to do, whether you're with us in this. And I'm not talking the \$5.00 or \$10.00, now for some of you that may be a large amount. But for many of us, we're talking about a significant amount.

Last month in the Moody Board Meeting, I'm a trustee at Moody, they had a plan to build a new building. And after much prayer and thought the men said, "We believe it's God's will." And they went around the table, fifteen trustees gave one million dollars plus...fifteen men. Boy, I felt like I was in a special place because somebody was making up for my small amount. But I gave what I felt God put in my heart to give, and it was a sacrificial expression. But it's no sacrifice because I'm so thrilled about it I can't wait to see it come to fulfillment. And I feel the same about this. I mean, this is where you can really stretch yourself.

Then on the bottom, would you write the amount? And if you can't give it in the Thanksgiving offerings, say, "I won't have it till next March, or next Christmas, or within the time from now to the spring," so we know how we can plan. Be generous. Be sacrificial. Say, "Hey, I want to do what God would have me to do." And you say, "Well I'd like to take it home and think about it." No, don't do that, we want to know now. You can think about it and give more. But tonight when we meet, we're going to have the total of all of this and we're going to know tonight what God's church says we'll do. And

on Thanksgiving where there's that one big offering, and do it.

Now if it's a very small amount, it may be your way of saying to us, "I don't think this is what we ought to do." But this is the will of the Lord as expressed through the elders. I'm so excited about this, so thrilled. Listen, people, do you know what's happening to the children of our society? The young people? We must make strides in that area. And just as a further hint, the Lord is even giving us some property in the future, it looks like at no cost to us at all to develop a Christian high school by His grace. God's leading in this area. This is a very important step. What amount can you anticipate giving over and above your regular offering? And on Thanksgiving day, the Thanksgiving Sunday the following Sunday after Thanksgiving, we'll receive that offering. But tonight we'll tell you how much our church family has committed. And if it's a significant amount, we'll know that we can go ahead and maybe we'll receive a great amount of it at Thanksgiving, and maybe at Christmas the remainder, we'll just wait on the Lord for this. We're saying to you what's in your heart to do of sacrificial expression. Maybe it means you have to cut back a little every week until Thanksgiving, or every week until next March and set it aside to give it so that it really expresses your love for the Lord.

Now tear off that little part at the bottom, would you? Just tear it off, down the perforation and down the side, and pass it in. Don't put your name on it, we don't want to know that, we just want to know what this church is committed in doing. Tear it off and pass it to the end of the aisle. Tear it off after you've written an amount that you're in your heart sense God prompting you to give. And you're saying to us you can count on this by God's grace, this is what I want to do. And I believe the Lord will honor your act. I really believe that. Just pass the bottom to the end of the aisle. And in a moment, we'll have the ushers come and collect those after they're all passed to the end. Did you do that?

Okay, gentlemen, you want to come forward and start at the front here and...? Just hold them up at the end of the aisle. If you have one in your hand, just hold it up. Go slowly, men, so we don't miss anyone. Some are still coming down the rows here, so... This is the first time we've ever done this in the ministry of Grace Church but that doesn't bother me, I just feel it so much the work of the Holy Spirit. And today's been a confirmation of that. I'm still in a state of shock about the response today. And I know the Lord is in it. I bless His name.

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