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

Marks of an Effective Church, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1306

This morning, as we come to our message, we're going to be digressing from 1 Corinthians because I want to share with you a message that maybe we needed to share a long time ago. As you well know, I have a great love for the church, not only Grace Community Church, but the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ in general. I have a great love for men of God, for pastors in churches, so I have a great burden that the church should be what God intended it to be. When I hear the words of the apostle Paul in Acts 20, and he said, "Take care of the church, which Christ has purchased with His own blood," that's a tremendously serious responsibility. And I have a great concern for the church, and at Grace Church, we have endeavored to be obedient to the Word of God in framing the directives of this church.

We are not all what God would have us to be, by any means, but we believe that we have a grip on some of the basics that make a church what it ought to be. Off and on, scattered here and there, from time to time, we've endeavored to share with you these priorities, these basics. But this morning, I want to pull all of them together, and I want to share with you, and it will take us two weeks, this week and next week. I want to share with you, what are the marks of an effective church.

No week goes by, I guess no day goes by, but some other church contacts us and asks us to help give them direction. They desire to know how it is that God has blessed us and what it is that we have done that has caused that. Well, this is a ministry that goes on constantly. About a year or more ago, we put out a little syllabus, a little leadership syllabus, and we can't keep them. In fact, they're all gone and in a reprint now. They're distributed all over the country, because there's such a desire to know what are the foundational principles of a church that is effective for God. And that's really what I want to share with you this morning.

And God has blessed Grace Community Church. There's no question about that. God has displayed evidence of His power and His presence again and again and again. Blessings from His grace have been abundantly heaped upon us. We've seen people saved, we've seen lives changed, we've seen homes put back together, we've seen Christians maturing, we've seen them reproductive, we've seen people coming from many places to be a part of Grace Church. There is something here that God is doing, that God is blessing, and I really feel in my heart that maybe everything we've already seen is only the prologue if the Lord should carry to what He could do or what He will do.

And people are saying why is it happening there? Our church has the same Scriptures, the same Holy Spirit, the same Lord Jesus Christ, and it doesn't seem as though too much is going on at our place. Why is it happening there? Well, maybe the best answer to that is because God is sovereign, and God chose to have it happen here, and we're just spectators. And, in a sense, that is true, isn't it? God builds His church. Jesus builds His church, we don't, and He builds it the way He wants, where He wants, when He wants, how He wants. And yet, that isn't all of the story. It isn't just is sovereign choice. There must be submission to certain principles that allow the church to be all that the Lord wants it to be. There are some basic things. Size is not the issue. There are tremendously successful and God-blessed churches that are very small. There are other churches that are very large and having no spiritual success or very little spiritual success.

You never measure a church's spiritual light by its numbers. The easiest thing to do is attract people. That's easy. A hard one is to make disciples. Size isn't the issue. Conferences are held all over America constantly on how to be big. I've never gone to one of them. I'm not interested in that. Who needs to be big? That isn't the issue. The issue is to how to make disciples, and it seems as though we have been trapped in a contest across our land to see who's the biggest church. That isn't the point. That is irrelevant to God.

There are reasons, though, why a church does prosper spiritually, and why it does grow numerically, and these reasons, I think, are important for us to understand. I suppose that I've always been committed to these principles. In fact, I'm confident that I have, but I never really set them out in order. I needed somebody else to do that for me. And when I was at the Moody Pastors' Conference with Jerry Mitchell and Jim Harris and our staff, Howard Hendricks from Dallas Theological Seminary, spoke one day. And in his message, he gave what he felt were the marks of a successful church. He didn't take very much time, and he didn't elaborate on them in detail, and he didn't give any scriptural support for them. That wasn't his purpose. He just listed them. He said, "In all of my travels around the country," and he's been preaching in church after church after church after church for years and years. He says, "In every kind of church, from small to large, from very, very traditional, very routine ritual-oriented to very free-form, let-it-all-hang-out kind of churches. And all these churches, conglomerate, have had the same key factors that have made them successful." So, he said, "These are the things that I have seen as the common denominators of a successful church, and the more of these the church has, the more successful it is. Not all of them have all of them, but all of them have some of them. And the more they have, the more successful they are."

Well, I listened to that message, and I felt like somebody was reciting to me all of the things I believe, and you'll never know how confirming that was to my heart, to know that the things that we believe in here are not something that we pulled out of the air, but here's somebody who's never been to this church in his life, somebody that I never talked to prior to that, and he says these are the things that make a church what God wants it to be.

Well, I have felt also, not to add anything to him or take anything away from him, but I felt there were some other things as well that I would add to the list, so some of his and some of mine has become the message this morning. Number 1. You can just jot them down. There will be more than ten, but that's all you need for today. We'll never get close to that. Number 1, now, here are key ingredients in a successful church.

One, a plurality of godly leaders; a plurality of godly leaders. You cannot bypass this and get to God's blessing. There must be godliness in leadership. There must be Holy men who are in the positions of direction and responsibility in a church. There is no substitute for that. "Christ is the head of the church," Paul says repeatedly. Ephesians, Colossians. Christ, as the head of the church, wants to rule His church. All He needs to rule His church is Holy people through whom He can rule. Unholy people just get in the way. It's amazing how most churches choose their leadership: the people who are most successful in business, the people who have the most to say, the people who have the most money, the people who are professional people. That's how most churches choose. I had a pastor confess to me one of the problems that he had in working with his Board was that half of them were Christians in and a half of them were not, and I said, yes, that is a problem, since Satan and Christ don't cooperate. A man is not to be the leader of the church because he is the wisest, because he is the best businessman, because he has the most money, because he has innate leadership ability, because he is a super-salesman. He is to be a leader in a church because he is a Man of God.

That is the beginning of all effectiveness in the church. God has always mediated his rule in the world through godly people. You go back in the beginning, and God mediated his rule on earth through Adam, and even after the fall, it was through human conscience, and after that, it was through government, and then after that, God began to mediate His rule through patriarchs, and after that. And then it was through judges, remember? And then, it was through kings and prophets and priests, and in the gospels of Canaan, he mediated his rule on earth through the presence of Christ; and now, it is through the church, and the church is specifically by its leaders, and the leaders are simply the representatives of Jesus Christ in the world, and the primary ingredient in leadership is Holiness, men of God. That's what's needed in the church.

And it takes time to make a man of God. Do you know that? It takes time. 40 years, it took God to make something out of Moses. It took years of Joshua being an understudy to Moses before Joshua was ready to lead. It took years to prepare Abraham. It took years to prepare David. It took time and effort and work to get Peter straightened out. It took time in the desert to make something out of Paul. It took time for Philip to cease being a deacon and become an evangelist. Takes time to make a man of God.

When Timothy stayed in Ephesus, he realized that he had to really get the church rolling, and the job was to bring the saints to maturity, and he knew that he couldn't do it alone, but that he needed

leaders for the church. And so Paul said to him, “That’s good, Timothy, it is commendable for a man to desire to be a leader, but you make sure he is a certain kind of man. You just don’t want volunteers; you want certain kind of men.” Titus faced the same thing in Crete. Paul said to him, “Now, Titus, you ordained elders in every city. You pick out those leaders, but make sure they are certain kinds of leaders. They are godly leaders.” And so, in 1 Timothy 1 to 7, in Titus 1:5 to 10, Paul gives a profile of a godly leader. These are the kind of people that are to be leading the church. I’m going to give you the qualifications, and there are 20 of them given in those two passages. I’m just going to read them; listen.

Leaders are to be above reproach. That’s a great place to start, isn’t it? Above reproach. That is, to be unblamable, to have nothing in their life for which they can be reproached or blamed or rebuked. Secondly, they are to be one-woman men; that is, they are to love their wives totally and devotedly. Third, they are to be temperate. That means stable, spiritually, solid. They have it together. They’ve got a clear, biblical, spiritual perspective on life. Fourth, they are to be prudent. Sometimes, the word is translated sober-minded, and it means they know the priorities. They know the priorities. Fifth, they are to be respectable. That means they have such a well-ordered life, such a well-arranged life that they are honored for it. Sixth, hospitable. That means they are to love strangers. Seventh, they are to be apt to teach. That’s one word in the Greek, a word that is used very seldom, only twice. It is *didaktikos*. It is never used to speak of the gift of teaching, and it is never used to speak of the office of teacher. It is something different. It is not saying that a leader must be a great Bible teacher. You’re saying that he must be *didaktikos*. That means two sides of the same thing. He must be teachable, that’s one side of it; and he must be able to communicate to others. And the idea of the word is not so much the dynamics of his teaching as the sensitivity to other people. That is, he is not only teachable, but he teaches with a meekness, and a gentleness, and a right spirit. Nothing is worse in leadership then a guy who comes on like this. “Listen, this is what you got to do because this is what it says, so do it or else.” See? No, that doesn’t make it. This word is somebody whose gentleness is teachable and whose gentleness shows up as he communicates. It’s a sensitivity word. It’s a gentle word. It’s a submissive word, somebody who can receive and give with sensitivity.

Eighth, he is not to be addicted to wine or any alcohol or any drugs of any kind. He’s to be in control of himself. Number nine, not self-willed. That means self-centered. You can’t have people in leadership who are all concerned about themselves. The most important thing about a leader, in this area, is that he be concerned not about himself, but about the people, right? The people that he’s leading. And I find that this is a tremendous thing. It’s so much easier for me to preach in this church. It really is. I would rather preach here than anyplace. You say that’s because you know we love you and we tolerate you. Well, that’s part of it, but the major factor is this: I preach here with a totally different mental attitude than I do anywhere else. When I preach here, I am concerned about you because I’m caught up in your lives, and I am preaching in order that you might learn, and that you might grasp these things, and that your life might be changed. But when I go somewhere else, I don’t know anybody sitting out there, and so, you know, I’m not concerned about them. I’m concerned

about me. That's right. I'm more concerned about how I come across than about what they learn because I don't know them. And I find that I'm much more able to teach here and preach here because it's you that I care about. When I go somewhere else, all I'm thinking is, "Boy, all those people are going to say, 'That John MacArthur. Let's check him out, see if he's any good.'" So, we are to be not self-centered, but people-centered, not self-willed. All right?

Ten, not quick-tempered. Leadership cannot be quick-tempered, patient. Eleven, not cognatious. Remember that old word, cognatious? What does that mean? It means literally not a physical fighter. For a leader of the church, you don't want somebody who goes around popping people with their fist. That's literally what it means. It doesn't mean attitude; it's the actual act of delving somebody. You don't want a guy at a board meeting, standing up and going, "Yeah, you know," shoving the guy off the table or something. Twelve, and here comes the attitude. You don't want somebody who's contentious. That word's only used in the Bible in these two lists, and it means somebody who likes to compete and debate, who wants to argue all the time. Number thirteen, he is to be gentle. Fourteen, free from the love of money. Not necessarily free from money, free from the love of it. Fifteen, managing his house well. That means he keeps his children under control with dignity. I'm sure there are some people who keep their kids under control, but I'm not so sure they do it with dignity. Sixteen, a good reputation with unbelievers. I mean, what does the world think of him? That's important, because he's out there knocking heads with them, and they're going to know whether he's for real. Seventeen, loving what is good. A lover of good things. Eighteen, just, which means fair. Nineteen, devout, which means he is Holy in his practical life. Twenty, not a new convert.

Now, there you have the qualifications given in the Scriptures for leaders in the church. Do you think it's important? Do you think God has got a message there for us? That's the kind of people he wants in leadership. If you don't have that, then at the very beginning, you've got problems. In fact, it's so important that when an elder sins, he is to be publicly rebuked in front of the whole congregation, 1 Timothy 5:20; men of God. God wants. Look at 1 Timothy 6, and let me just show you that term appears in the Bible, Man of God, 1 Timothy 6:11, Paul says to Timothy, "That thou, O Man of God." That's a beautiful title, Man of God. What does it mean? Well, there are two sides to a man, and one is negative and one is positive. The negative side; flee these things. The positive side, what? Follow after these things. So, Man of God flees certain things, and the earlier part of the chapter discusses those: pride, money, discontent, using his authority to manipulate people, et cetera, et cetera. He flees those; he follows Verse 11, righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness and fights the good fight of faith. In the leadership of the church, the Bible says there must be godly men, godly leaders and a plurality of them, more than one.

All right, the second point, the second thing necessary to an effective church, and we're not, by any means, exhausting these, just suggesting them, but the second is that the church must have functional goals and objectives. Now, we must say that the word "functional" is the most important word. We must have functional goals and objectives. And people with no goals are people with no

direction, and if you don't know where you're going, you don't know when you've gotten there, so you have no sense of accomplishment. We can't be like the man who jumped on his horse and ran off madly in all directions. There has to be some direction to what we're doing. Can you imagine a baseball game with no bases? Wouldn't have a lot of sense to it, would it? You hit the ball and you wouldn't know what to do. There have to be goals. There have to be clear-cut objectives placed before people so they know what they are to zero in on.

Howard Hendricks said, "The reason so many of us feel we're doing so well is that we don't know what we're doing." There must be the establishing of goals. Now, first, there must be the establishing of biblical objectives. Now, if I were to ask you what the biblical objectives of the church are, you would be able to answer me. I'm quite confident of that because we've told you and told you and told you. We are to win people to Christ, and we are to make them into mature saints, right? We call that evangelism identification or reach and teach or whatever. We are to win people to Jesus. We are to mature them. We have goals such as this. We want to unify families and prevent divorce and unhappy homes. We want to educate children and the things of God and bring Him out, so that when there are old, they won't depart from them. We have a lot of biblical goals.

But, in addition to biblical goals, we must have functional goals. And this is the thing I want to talk about for a minute. Functional goals are stepping stones to get to biblical ones. It isn't enough to say, "Now, folks, we must learn the Word of God," and then just keep saying it. You must go a step further and provide some steps to get to that goal, right? For example, if we say we want to edify, we want to build up the church, we want to mature in the saints, the next thing we say is: how are we going to accomplish that?

Number one, I know this is what I'm going to do. I will teach the Word of God from the pulpit. That is an objective that is functional. I will do that, and that will realize, in part, the biblical goal of maturity, right? Not only that, we will develop a system of education. We call it ACTS, Active Christian Training Seminars, where people can go at whatever level of understanding they want, and whatever level they feel they're capable of handling, and learn whatever they need to learn. And so, we have a scramble system, where adults can go here and there and learn as they feel the need to know.

In addition to that, we will develop the Logos Bible Institute for people who have reached a certain level and want more knowledge of the Word of God. We'll have classes at night. Now, we find more people who are available in the day; we'll have them in the daytime. These are functional objectives to realize biblical goals. Not only that, we know there are people who would like to meet together in other places and not have to come here. Let's have home Bible studies, and so we have, I guess, about 50 or 60 of those going on.

We have family curriculum provided for the fathers and the family to supplement your own training in the home. This is another functional objective. We have that goal, we wanted to accomplish that, and

now we've realized it. We want to have an ACTS program; now, we have it. We wanted to have a Logos; we have it. We wanted to have a family program. Thank God, we have that. You see, we set some functional goals, and we realized those goals, and we have more.

Now, sometimes, we set a functional goal and we don't always realize it, because sometimes, God has different plans than we do, but that's fun because when something doesn't work out, we can say God did it. There's a great first that you ought to remember. It's Proverbs 16:9. It says this: "The mind of a man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." The mind of a man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. We'll lay the plans, but God may divert us. But that's great, 'cause that's His prerogative. You remember, the apostle Paul, in Acts, was trying to go into Bithynia, and the Holy Spirit didn't let him? And then he said, "Well, okay, I'll go over here," and the Holy Spirit didn't let him go their either. So, he couldn't go north, he couldn't go south, he'd already been east. He said, "I guess I'm supposed to go west." He went west, and, all of a sudden, he got a call, a call to Macedonia. God shut some things off that He thought were functional objectives and directed him anywhere he wanted him to go. God is in the business of changing our plans, which is great. Let Him do it. Paul wrote to Romans, and he said, "I'm going to come to you on the way to Spain." He set some goals. Some you realize, some you don't, and you have to submit all of them to the direction of God. But it is important that you have those.

Another goal that we have in the church, in the biblical sense, is even evangelism. We want to win people to Christ, don't we? How are we going to get to that? Well, one way is to preach the responsibility of the believer to evangelize. Another way is to offer classes in evangelism. Another way is to insert in the bulletin what you see in there this morning, which, periodically appears as an impetus, a motivator, an instruction on how to be more effective in your witness. You see, these are functional goals that help us realize biblical objectives. The reason we have baptism on Wednesday night the way we do, where we have the people give a testimony and said, I usually will say, "Whoever led this person to Christ, are you here?" Have you heard me say that? Are you here? I said, "Who is it? Is it Mrs.," so, the reason I do that is because I want the other people to know that these people are being faithful in sharing Christ, that it might become a motivation for the rest of us to have the joy of seeing somebody baptized that we led to Christ. They're all different ways to get at it. These are functional goals. They've got to be there. You can't just be nebulous. You've got to give people objectives and move toward them.

All right, thirdly, the effective church also has a strong emphasis on discipleship, a strong emphasis on discipleship. Now, remember, these are things that are true of any successful church anywhere in America or anywhere else in the world. These are things that are not just what I believe, but these are things proven to be success factors, a strong emphasis on discipleship.

There must be a concerted effort to teach people the Word of God to bring them to maturity, and everybody is to be involved in that. The teaching pastor is to perfect the saints. The saints are to do

the work of the ministry that the body may be built up. You can build the church by your ministry, even as I am building you by my ministry. We are to be involved in the process of discipling people. Paul put it this way to Timothy: “We are to teach faithful man, who shall be able to,” what? “Teach others also.” The cycle goes on and on and on. The aged man or the older men teach the younger men. The older women teach the younger women. The younger man, it says in Titus 2, “You are to be examples to the ones even under them.” A Christian who isn’t discipling somebody is a contradiction. You’re supposed to be reproducing. You have the germ seed of reproductive life planted in you, and it ought to be operative. We are to be constantly reproducing ourselves.

Now, I look at my own ministry, and let me give you an illustration. I look at my own ministry as a series of circles. The first circle is the personal group of people around me that I disciple. That’s a primary minister. The next circle would be the elders or the leaders of the church that I work with. The third circle would be the congregation that I preach to, and the fourth circle would be the lives of people that are touched by tapes and books and conferences elsewhere. But the priority of my ministry is to take some people and make them disciples. One of the great joys of my life is the realization that of a staff of 23 at Grace Church, 22 of them have come from our congregation. Ministering staff; not just the ones I’ve discipled, but ones discipled by others of the staff, and there are more coming along all the time, and the process continues and continues and continues. This is what the church is to emphasize. This is not a professional pulpitism financed by lay spectators. You don’t come in and drop your nickel in the pot and say, “Now, I’ve paid you guys. Do it.” No.

A guy says to me, “When do you do visitation?” I say, “What do you mean by that?” “Well, when do you do your pastoral visitation?” I said, “Well, I don’t do any pastoral visitation.” “You don’t?” “Well, it’s been traditional in the church for years that the mornings are for study, and all the afternoons are for visiting.” I said, “Well, where does it say that in the Bible?” “Well, it’s got to be in there somewhere.” Where does it say that I’m supposed to do visiting all afternoon? It does say something about visiting. You know what it says? It says in James, “Pure religion and undefiled is to visit.” Pure religion and undefiled is to visit? Who, then, is to be involved in pure religion and undefiled, just the preacher? Everybody. Who, then, is to visit? Everybody. Visitation isn’t my job. It’s everybody’s job. You know, if you’ve got somebody to visit, visit them. If I’ve got somebody to visit, I’ll visit them. You’ll visit the somebody you’re supposed to visit, and I’ll visit the somebody I’m supposed to visit. We won’t get messed up that way. No sense in me visiting who you ought to visit and you visiting who I ought to visit. Do you say, “Do you ever do any visiting?” Sure, I do, when there’s somebody that I feel needs me, when there’s some reason I need to seem someone; absolutely, but I don’t feel that I am called to be the official visitor. There I am. I am the visitor, the universal visitor. That doesn’t mean as much to people as if somebody came who knew them.

You see, visitation is everybody’s responsibility, not just mine, and so it is with discipleship. It isn’t just mine. It’s yours to do. It isn’t just yours; it’s mine to do, and I can’t be content with just standing up there like a foghorn and blowing out all those messages every week. I’ve got to be involved in doing

what I'm asking you to do. Well, that's disciple individuals, and I do that, and I love it.

You say, "John, when you disciple somebody, how do you do it?" Three things I use, basically, and these are simple things. Number one is teaching biblical truth. When you disciple somebody, one thing you got to do is give them some information. The word "disciple" in the Greek is *mathts*. It translates, "learner." Now, if somebody is a learner and assumes that somebody's going to teach them something, so you are to disciple. That means you are to teach learners. The first thing yet is to teach biblical truth, and how do I do it? Well, I'm in the process of discipling people, and what do I do? I give them books to read, for one thing. I know areas that I want them to understand; give them books, give them books, more books, more books, tapes. Give them tapes, teach from the pulpit here, sit down with them and teach biblical truths, teach them out of the Word of God. I'm discipling a particular person now, and I imagine he's read 50 books in the last six months, at least, and he's got a lot of principles there in his mind.

So, teaching biblical content. That's one area, but the second area is this. It is applying Scripture to life. The second thing you have to do is make the Bible come out of its pages and into his life. In other words, you've got to make it tactical. You've got to make some application, because you'd be amazed how many people can learn principles that they never translate into their new action, so when I teach, I'll say, "Now, how do we apply this in our lives. What does this mean to you? How do you relate to you losing your job or how do you relate to this tremendous joy that's come?" What it really boils down to is giving somebody a God perspective. In other words, they see everything through the mind of the Scripture, everything through the mind of God. They interpret everything spiritually. They interpret everything from a divine viewpoint. And this one guy I've been discipling didn't have a problem, panicking over the situation of the world. That problem is dissipating. You know why? He now sees the world from God's eyes, not from the standpoint of a desperate human. And so, all of a sudden, he's saying, "Isn't it terrific what's happening in the world? Look what God's doing?" See? So, what you're doing is not only teaching biblical truth, but translating it into life attitudes. That's necessary in discipleship.

The third thing, and maybe the key, is biblical problem-solving. Do you know when people learn best? When they have to know, right? And when you're going to fly on an airplane, and at the very first, you get on the airplane and they say, "Fasten your safety belt and bring your seats to the full upright position," and all that stuff. "We're now preparing for takeoff," and then the girl gets up there, and the voice says, "Would you please take the cards from out of the seat rack in front of you and check over the emergency instructions? In the event of an emergency, should such occur, and it's highly unlikely, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Little oxygen mask will drop out of the thing. You know, I've heard it so many times. And the girl goes, puts it over her face. "Please put out your cigarette. Otherwise, poof, you know?" And you go through this little routine, and you know what? I looked around, and I said, "Nobody pays any attention to her," so you can always tell who's on their first flight, looking at that little thing, see? But the people who've been around, they don't even pay any attention. You know, I

don’t need that. Now, listen, if you look out the right side of the plane, and you saw flames coming out of the wing, and she said, “Please take your emergency card,” would you grab that card? If there was not enough cards, somebody would get trampled.

Why? Because you learn fast when you have to know, right? When you have to know, and discipleship comes right down to the crux of giving somebody biblical answers to problems that they’re involved in, teaching people how to make application in crisis. I can’t tell you how many times some of the staff, Jerry. It’s usually Jerry, I think, comes in and says, “John, we got a problem. What does the Bible say about this? And we go, “Huh?” And you know what happens when you get that answer? That’s really learning. Then, you got to go apply that solution, biblical problem-solving, so I try to teach biblical truth, try to give people a biblical perspective on life and try to use the Scripture to solve their problems.

That means that you just can’t sit down there and give them a lecture. You’ve got to know enough of the Scripture to be able to give them answers when they need them. Now, that’s really discipling somebody. And that’s what we’re all about. That’s what I’m endeavoring to do and teaching my staff to do, and that’s what they are teaching others to do, and that’s what we want you to do. You say, “Well, I don’t know much.” There is somebody in the world who doesn’t know as much as you. There’s got to be. So, wherever he is, find him and sit him down and go to it. What a joy to see your disciples mature and grow. It’s thrilling. Christian without somebody to disciple is a contradiction. You’re all about giving life. Give it to somebody.

Fourth: a church that is effective and successful will have a strong emphasis on community penetration, a strong emphasis on community penetration. Now, we know that we are to reach people for Christ. We are obviously aware of that. The early church did it. Man, I’m telling you, that early church in Acts, they literally blitzed their community. First of all, 3,000 saved on Pentecost, and then they began to really move, and they went through Jerusalem like a wildfire. Their church grew to 20,000 in no time at all. The people said, “You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.” Isn’t that exciting? Your message is all over this city. Well, shouldn’t it be? Is that the idea, community penetration? But so many of us, as Christians, we arrive in our car, the closest thing we get to community penetration, we come to church, we go out and get back in the car, we have a fish sign on the back window. That’s community penetration. That’s about all. Or we come here, and we say, “I’ve done my duty to God.” We try to live our testimony rather than speak it. My friend, nobody ever got to Heaven because somebody lived their testimony in front of Him. Sooner or later, you got to give them the words, right? Community penetration; reach people.

You know, in the Book of Acts, all the growth of the early church was a matter of penetrating communities. They didn’t isolate. They didn’t sit in the corner and talk about doctrine. They got out and blitzed the community. In Acts 13:44, the next Sabbath day in Antioch, almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God. I mean, those people were so busy that when it came time

for the preaching, the whole city was there. Wouldn't that be exciting? Terrific. That's typical of the earlier church. Chapter 14, Verse 1, they came to Iconium. They went to the synagogue of the Jews and spoke so that a great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed. They penetrated. They went right in, confrontation. Chapter 16, same thing. Verse 5, "And the churches were established in the faith and increased in numbers daily." They penetrated the community. Chapter 17, same thing again. Paul opened the Scriptures and reasoned with them and said, "Christ must suffer," and some believed, and there was a multitude of devout Greeks that were saved. They communicated to their community, and the community responded, community penetration.

This is characteristic of every successful church in the history of churches. Now, you can do it in a lot of ways. You can have all kinds of programs to do it, and I'm not convinced that programs are really necessary except where you have a bunch of uncommitted people who won't do it otherwise. I think evangelism is best done when you just do it in the area where you live.

I'll never forget, and some people go bananas on programs of the evangelism. I went to a banquet to speak to the workers of the church, and they were presenting their big program for the year, and it was a football kind of thing, and they had put goalposts up in the auditorium, right in the auditorium, and a scoreboard, and when anybody got saved, they kicked the ball over the goalpost, so on Sunday, if there were 25 people, and boom, boom, boom, boom. They had a whole big deal, and every week, and there were five or ten pages of materials. These poor leaders were sitting there, just dying while this guy was going through page after page and made phone calls. They hid five footballs in homes of five unsaved families in order to motivate people to go evangelize and to try to find the home with the football because whoever found the football got a prize.

And so, they had to do that, and they had a hot dog stand set up outside for hot dogs for the people who brought people. They had sweaters for the kids who brought so many people. They had all kinds of gimmicks. It was incredible. Couldn't believe it. The people had to make phone calls beyond any kind of normal requirement. Well, anyway, I just sat there dying the whole hour. Then I was to speak, so I spoke, and the pastor had to leave while I spoke. He had to go somewhere, so he left and I spoke, and then I left.

Well, it was on my mind. I thought, that is the worst possible way to evangelize: give people crass motives. Win somebody to the Lord so you can win a sweater. That is ludicrous. Go find a football in the home of an unsaved. How would those unsaved people feel? Some kind of a prize is what they were. So, anyway, I was asked to speak to a group of about 150 pastors, and they were asking me to speak on what I felt were biblical directives for the church, and I said, "You know, I have a good illustration of what not to do in evangelism." And so, I presented this. They went out naming the church, or being specific about it, I just presented it. I just went through it, and I noticed there wasn't much of a reaction to it. And a couple days later, I got a letter, and the letter said, "Dear Reverend MacArthur, I suppose if you had known that I had been in that class, you wouldn't have said what you

said about our program." Signed, the pastor of the church where I spoke at the banquet. That was his program, and he was in there. I didn't know that. Secondly, "I know you wouldn't have, had you known that the hour before, I had presented the program to the same group of pastors."

Boy, my heart started beating. I said, "Well," I said, "Lord, you really had a purpose pulling all of that together." And there's only one thing to do in a thing like that when a brother has been offended, that's to go to him personally. I couldn't get to him because he's not in this area, so I called him on the phone personally, and I said, "Hello, this is me." He was shocked that I would call him, and I said, "I want to confirm to you my love, and I want to tell you that I am very sorry if I personally offended you and if I was unkind or if I, in any sense, was unfair at the presentation. I am so sorry. However, I want also to confirm to you that I stand behind what I said 100 percent, and I don't change my opinion at all." Well, he accepted my apology, reluctantly. I don't know that it ever could be undone.

But the church doesn't need those kind of things. You see, if you try to motivate people to do things for selfish motives, whatever they're doing isn't even honored of God. That's just Phariseeism. I'm not against having a visitation night and going out and winning people to Christ. I'm not against door-to-door evangelism. That's great, and we have groups who do that in our church, and there are other ways. There's neighborhood evangelism, Bible study evangelism. There are all kinds of evangelist outreach programs. There's campus evangelism, and we do that. We have extension campus ministry. There are all kinds of ways. It isn't necessarily that the method is the same, but I agree, and as Dr. Hendricks said, "Every church that is successful has community penetration, one way or another." And I'll tell you, people, the best way to have it is just to have a whole bunch of Christians, who reproduce. Then, you don't need a program. Which would you rather have, a week of revival meetings once a year or 365 days a year, your congregation evangelizing? It's obvious, isn't it?

One of the reasons we've never had a revival meeting, quote-unquote, "one of the traditional, old hell, fire and damnation preaching things," is because I don't like to reduce the church to a once-a-year evangelism emphasis. That ought to be going on all the time. It's important that we evangelize, but that it be a personal thing out of our hearts.

You know, just out of curiosity, a lot of people have come to Grace Church in the last few years, and I would be interested to know of all of this congregation this morning, how many of you have come to Grace from another church? Put your hand up. From another church. That's amazing. How many of you have come not from another church? This is the first church. See that? Vast majority of people here this morning have come from another church. Now, we're glad to have you, and I believe in my heart that God has a purpose in you being here. I am astounded to see the quality of leadership that God has collected in this place. I don't know how the other churches are doing without you, frankly, because we have so much leadership and so much potential, that all I can figure in my mind is God has something fantastic in mind for this place, and I praise God for every one of you.

Think about it. We have 3,000 people here on Sunday mornings. The kind of people that we have, the kind that you are; do you think it would be unreasonable to assume that one year from today, we could have 9,000 people here? That would mean that each of us, in the next year, was involved in winning three people to Christ. Would you say that's in the realm of possibility? Well, wouldn't it be equally a tragedy if next year at this time, we had only 3,500, 400 of whom came from other churches? Listen. You say you're trying to build a big church? Well, no sir, but I'll tell you one thing; 3,000 Christians, just doing what they ought to do in evangelism ought to make this place a monstrosity in a year. That's right, isn't it? That's the way it ought to be. And I believe in my heart, people, that God has gathered the best of His people in so many cases, here, for some reason. I don't know why other than to say He wants to do something here, something in His sovereignty that is unique and wonderful.

But don't you ever become content with being at Grace Church. That's not where it ends. You're not here just to sit here. You're here to receive what you receive in order to go and reproduce and make not only converts, but mature ones. The world could never be the same if just this one congregation reproduced itself every few months. We'd affect the world, eventually, just the mathematics of it. Just figure a year from now, we've got 9,000 people reproducing. Staggering may it be.

Fifth, and the last one I'll talk about this morning. We'll get the rest next time. The fifth ingredient in a successful church is an aggressive, active ministering people, and we've hit on this. Let me just specify it: an aggressive, active ministering people. A church where the staff does everything is wrong. We are to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, Ephesians 4:12 says, "We are to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry." The ministry is your ministry. You say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" Well, in Romans 12, I'm going to point out a couple of verses to you. In Romans 12 verse 3, it tells us that we have received grace and faith in certain measure. Then, in Verse 6, it says, "We have received differing gifts." Some of us, the gift of prophecy, some of ministry, some of teaching, some of exhorting or counseling, some of the gift of giving, the gift of ruling, the gift of showing mercy. Now, it says, "In every case, if you have the gift, then do it. He that has the gift of prophecy. Let him prophesize. If he has the gift of ministry, let him minister; if he has the gift of teaching, teach; the gift of exhortation, exhort; the gift of giving, give; the gift of ruling, do it with diligence; the gift of showing mercy, do it with cheerfulness."

People, until the church really realizes that it is a body, where every member must function with His gifts, it never will be what God wants it to be. I have an illustration. When I broke my leg and I had my surgery, I couldn't walk on my right leg, so I started walking on my left leg, and walking on my left leg, then my hip got sore because my left leg was bearing the weight that my right leg normally would bear. So Sam Britain says to me, "You're limping. You got to get a cane." So, I got a cane. The cane meant that I didn't hurt my right leg, I didn't hurt my left leg, but I hurt my hand. Then, I tried to avoid hurting my hand, and I started to hurt my shoulder, and began to realize that you can't compensate

for an inactive function in your body without messing up everything else. You know, the great story about Dizzy Dean when he was a pitcher, and his pitching career was ended because he got hit by a line drive in the big toe, and it ruined his arm. You say, “Wait a minute.” In the big toe and it ruined his arm. That’s right. You know why? Because when he came off the rubber to pitch, he had to compensate by turning his foot the wrong way, couldn’t get as much of his body into the pitch and over-extended his arm, ruined his arm, and that was the end of his career.

And it’s true in the spiritual sense in the church. Where there are non-functioning members, somewhere, the body is hurting, and to try and always compensate doesn’t make it. There must be the totality of ministry with the saints doing the things that God has gifted them to do. A guy said to me last night, he said, “John, I just want to know what my gifts are so I can get busy and serve the Lord in a place He wants me.” That’s a good question, isn’t it? “How can I know my gifts,” he said. We don’t want to recruit people to run programs. We want to mature saints who will do their ministries. I could sit by my desk, and I could say, “All right, I got a great program here to accomplish a certain goal. Boy, I got to have 49 of these,” and I get a whole lot of ideas of committees and committees, and we can have this program, and now, let’s see. I’ve got to have people. Let’s see. I need a chairman, a co-chairman, vice chairman. Then, I come to you and I’d say, “Hey, you know, God’s laid something on my heart,” and automatically, you feel, oh, no. Not from him. It’s from God. Now, I am in trouble.

You know how strongly I feel about this? Would you help me with this? You know what you’re going to say most times? Yes. You know why? Because you want to be spiritual, and you probably want to show you care about me, and you don’t want to be indifferent to what God wants, and you know what you’re saying in your mind? “Nuts, nuts. Why did he run into me in the patio?” You know? “How did I, I got so much,” and then, you go home and you say, “Oh, Martha, I got to go to that committee tomorrow night. I’m going to go, John.” See what happens? You’re reluctant, and so you know what happens? A few weeks of the deal and you’re unmotivated again, and I got to go up and get you rolling again or find somebody else to take your place. I talked to pastor after pastor after pastor after pastor, who are discouraged because their programs keep falling apart. You know what I decided a long time ago? No programs. Just perfect the saints, and they’ll develop them, and then they have internal motivation to carry them out. That’s right. People say to me, “You know, we need this in our church.” I say, “Good. You feel that way? Do it.”

You know, that went on for a few years some years back, and, finally, nobody said that to me unless they were very serious. It’s the ministry of the saints that we’re after. We don’t want to yank you into something out of a legal obligation to do something you’re not really motivated of gifted to do. We want you to develop along the lines the Spirit has gifted you. Just do your own ministries. An aggressive, active minister in people makes for a successful church. Well, we’ll cover the rest next time. Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for time this morning and considering these most important directives for a successful church. Thank You for the joy of serving in this place, where Your blessing has been so abundant and so free. We thank you for these precious people you've brought together. Lord, we know you've brought these people here for a reason. This huge group, this multitude of people could absolutely revolutionize this part of the world. Oh, God, we pray that all of the potential that is here might be released to reach and to teach, fulfill that which You desire. For Christ's sake, we pray. Amen.

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