

Love God, Love People, Serve Joyfully
1 John 4:7-12, 20-21
(Grace – January 10, 2010)

I. Introduction

100 MILE AN HOUR GOAT

Two hunters are out hunting, and as they are walking along they come upon a huge hole in the ground. They approach it and are amazed by the size of it. The first hunter says "Wow, that's some hole; I can't even see the bottom. I wonder how deep it is."
The second hunter says "I don't know, let's throw something down and listen and see how long it takes to hit bottom."
The first hunter says "There's this old automobile transmission here, give me a hand and we'll throw it in and see".
So they pick it up and carry it over, and count one, and two and three, and throw it in the hole.
While they are standing there listening and looking over the edge they hear a rustling in the brush behind them.
As they turn around they see a goat come crashing through the brush, run up to the hole and with no hesitation, jump in head first.
While they are standing there looking at each other and trying to figure out what that was all about, an old farmer walks up. "Hey there", says the farmer, "you fellers didn't happen to see my goat around here anywhere, did you?"
The first hunter says "Funny you should ask, because we were just standing here a minute ago and a goat came running out of the bushes doin' about a hunert miles an hour and jumped headfirst into this hole here!"
The old farmer said "Why that's impossible, I had him chained to a transmission!"

Before we entered into the holy days of Advent and Christmas, I introduced our new vision/process statement. Does anyone know what it is? (Love God, love people, serve joyfully)

I spent a number of weeks talking about what it actually means to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. To start off the New Year, I would like to complete our discussion on what it means to love God, love people and serve joyfully.

Before I get into that, I want to bring you up to date with our discussions as a leadership team.

Upon my return from my Sabbatical, I felt strongly the need to refocus our vision and efforts as a church. One of the many awesome books I read while away was called "The Simple Church."

Over the last few months, the leadership team and anyone else who is interested have been meeting to work through a process intended to bring clarity, movement, alignment and focus to the church.

II. The Simple Church

A. **Clarity:** Starting with a ministry blueprint

We started by asking ourselves about our vision. What is our vision and is the vision clear to the majority of the people who consider Grace to be their place of fellowship?

The vision I think was clear, but it was still difficult to articulate and when we tried to simplify it, I think it lost some of its punch.

Previously, we had said that our vision was to passionately worship God, intentionally reach out to others, draw them into loving fellowship, and strategically equip them for joyful service.

An excellent vision, but difficult for most of us to remember.

Also, the process we had to accomplish the vision (Foundations through 401) was not simple and clear. Some of that was due to lack of communication, but it also was a lot of information to communicate on a regular basis.

So the need was for clarity (and simplification) of the vision and the process of how to accomplish the vision.

Clarity is the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people.

“If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.” (Proverbs 29:18, The Message)

If the vision is not clear, how do we know what to do? If the vision is clear, we better get busy!

It took us awhile, but we believe that “love God, love people, serve joyfully” is a clear vision statement that aligns itself with the emphasis of Jesus found in Matthew 22.

In response to the question, “What is the most important commandment?” Jesus replied, “*You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.*’ 38 *This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.*” (Matthew 22:37-40, NLT)

It seems pretty clear that loving **God** and loving **people** are on the top of God’s priority list!

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. 8 But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. 10 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 12 No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us...20 If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? 21 And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.” (1 John 4:7-12, 20-21, NLT)

Concerning the third component of our vision, “serving joyfully,” there are numerous passages that show that our service to God and others is of the highest priority.

The last thing Jesus says to the disciples before leaving them and going up to heaven was, “*I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.*” (Matthew 28:18-20, NLT)

Live with a sense of mission. Serve God by utilizing the gifts He has given you to communicate the Gospel to others and help them become followers of Jesus.

Jesus is our great example of joyful **service**: “*Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. 28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (Matthew 20:26-28, NLT)

“*...all of you, serve each other in humility...*” (1 Peter 5:5, NLT)

Believe me, I could give passage after passage about how vital it is for us as followers of Christ to love God, love people, and serve joyfully.

This is not intended to be a cute slogan for our church, but we believe it to absolutely critical for us as followers of Jesus Christ.

Church is not just a place to come and feel better. It is all about growing in your relationship with God, growing in your love for others (which is probably the most challenging and the source of most of our grief in the church), and getting involved in service to others, both inside and outside of these four walls.

Our church is about movement. You are going to be challenged to grow and to get involved. We do not want to passive! I am warning you again: you are not always going to be comfortable here.

B. **Movement**: Removing congestion

Speaking of movement, this is the second issue we have looked at as a leadership team.

Once the vision is clear, you need to know how you are going to accomplish it. What is the process?

“*So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NLT)

What is the process of transformation here at Grace? How are we being changed from glory to glory?

The statement “love God, love people, serve joyfully” not only clarifies the vision – it also clarifies the process.

Let me explain.

We need to start with God. We must be introduced to Him and begin the process of learning to love Him and be loved by Him.

In our context, after you have reached out to a friend, shared as best you can the Good News with them – what do you usually do? [Invite them to church].

Love God – be committed to **regularly** attending our celebration services and inviting others to join you.

This is where we begin and should not move away from.

Second, we want to grow in our relationship with God, and this is biblically accomplished as we grow in our love for others.

We believe this is best facilitated through small groups, and we will be having further discussion on this in the future.

Love People – be committed to participating in a **small group**.

Finally, we want to see maturing followers of Jesus Christ move into places of service. Not only here in the church, but also joyfully serving in the community, at your workplace, and wherever you are.

Serve joyfully – be committed to live **missionally**, both in the church and out into the community.

So, this is the expectation for all of us who consider Grace to be our church home: love God – regularly attend our gatherings for worship, celebration, and teaching; love others – get involved in a small group; serve others – find a place of ministry and live missionally in every arena of your life.

This is a process. Don't expect to come to Grace and immediately find a place of ministry, especially ministry that influences people.

In the future, people in ministry here will be expected to be attending services regularly and be involved in a small group.

In doing this we are attempting to create a ministry process that puts people into places where God can transform them.

We believe this process to be simple, clear, and designed with movement in mind – challenging us to greater levels of commitment and deeper discipleship.

Movement is the sequential steps in the process that causes people to move to greater levels of commitment.

C. **Alignment**: Maximizing the energy of everyone

“I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.” (1 Corinthians 1:10, NLT)

Alignment is the arrangement of all ministries and leaders around the same simple process.

This is what we are currently engaging in as a ministry team and it is a critical stage for us. Over the next few months there will be a few changes in our current ministries and an increased emphasis on small groups as we align our ministries to our vision.

It is vital that everyone who leads in ministry here is committed to the vision and the process that we are establishing; otherwise we will find ourselves heading in many different directions.

This leads to complexity, lack of focus, confusion, and division.

It is not enough to unite the church around the same what (purpose), but we must also be aligned on the same how (process).

All of this can be challenging, especially if someone is unwilling to align themselves with the vision, process and direction we are taking.

But I believe it is critical for us to press through this to a place of understanding and unity:

“How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony! 2 For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe. 3 Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And there the Lord has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.” (Psalm 133, NLT)

D. **Focus**: Saying no to just about everything

“Art is a process of elimination. The sculptor produces the beautiful statue by chipping away such parts of the marble block as are not needed.” (Elbert Hubbard)

Like the fast food industry (which many doctors believe is killing Americans – *Super Size Me*), there is an epidemic of fast food spirituality among believers today.

We like big spiritual menus with lots of options, and we want those options served up fast.

Many churches today are like fast food establishments – ever-expanding menus, special events and packed schedules. Cluttered.

But we keep getting more and more unhealthy. Research supports that fast food spirituality is not healthy. In fact, it is killing our churches.

Our response? Learn to say focused and say no to everything else.

If we successfully negotiate through the process of clarity, movement and alignment, we will enter into the never-ending process of staying focused; a church cannot stay focused without saying no.

We must boycott fast-food spirituality. We must stay focused.

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us **strip off every weight that slows us down**, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by **keeping our eyes on Jesus**, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame.”* (Hebrews 12:1-2, NLT)

Focus is the commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process.

III. Application

Clarity, Movement, Alignment and Focus.

Today, I am going to ask you to take a few moments to pray. We are at a critical place as a church. God is seeking to position us for greater blessing, but we may need to let go of some of the clutter in ministry to attain it.

Not only does God want us to have greater clarity, movement, alignment and focus in the church, but also in our personal lives.

What is cluttering up your life and choking out the life of God in you?

As we play this song (Matthew West – Through the Motions), I am asking you to pray for yourself and for the church.