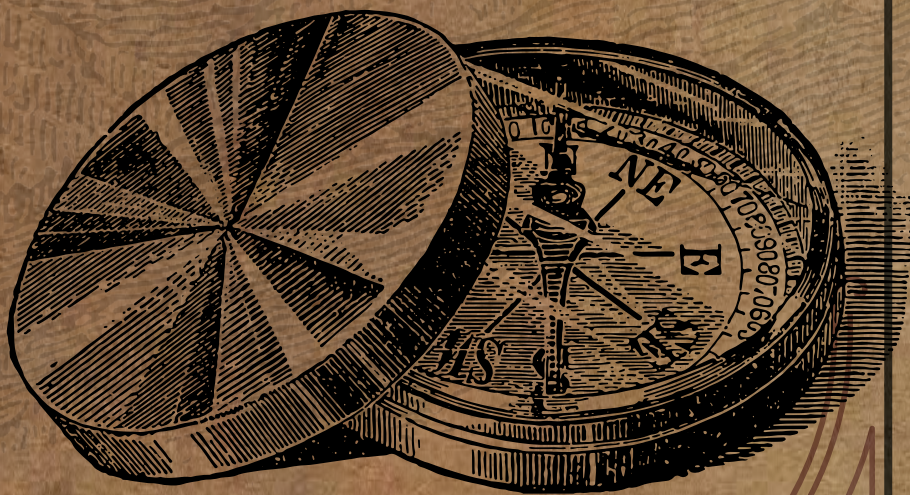


HOMESTEADER PRAYER GUIDE

KEEP WATCH. KEEP GOING.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER

ADAM ROSS



Keep Watch, Keep Going:

Preparing for Battle, Seeking His Blessing

PREPARING FOR BATTLE

This spring, the people of Grace City Church are headed into a season of spiritual harvest.

We will, by God's grace, see Him move in a powerful way in our church family, in this valley, and beyond, as we invite those we know to Easter and our *Stronger Marriage* series.

We are pooling our collective efforts and calling our people to put their hearts behind two specific initiatives... Easter '24 and *Stronger Marriage* series.

We want to see more people baptized into the family of God at our Jesus Is Stronger Easter service.

We want to see godly marriages celebrated and broken marriages healed during our Stronger Marriage series.

We want to see young adults get a compelling vision of marriage and pursue it with passion and purity.

We want to see men grow stronger, women become more noble, and children loved and disciplined as we lay the cornerstone for the Family Capital of the World.

We want to experience His power that flows to those who are aggressively moving towards the front lines of mission.

All of this, we believe, starts with the work of prayer. We do war in the heavenly realm by assailing the doors of Heaven to crash the gates of Hell. Our dream is big, the enemy will mount a resistance, so we go to war with prayer.

PRAYING DOWN POWER

We want to see God work in mighty ways.

But in this particular moment, the Church in America finds herself caught in a swift undercurrent of cultural thought that undermines the very definition of what it means to be a faithful Christian and follower of Jesus. Western civilization is quickly rewriting social norms in a way that is actively eroding the very foundation of society. We cannot survive this self-sabotage.

This swift undercurrent is being accelerated by a shifting geopolitical landscape, rapidly evolving technology, a regime-based hostility towards Christianity never before experienced since our nation's founding, a radical anti-God doctrine embraced by academia & big-business, an ever-expanding administrative state with unchecked powers and a secular agenda, and a constant stream of perverse propaganda-based media.

This is the landscape of our mission field in a negative world reality.

So how can we rightly prepare for this accelerated season of mission this spring? How can we prepare ourselves to be faithful and fruitful? How can we posture ourselves to receive the blessing and power that comes from the Spirit of God?

We resolve to live on mission, and return to the source of power, God Himself, in prayer.

To direct us in that end, Pastor Adam Ross has written this prayer guide for our whole church. For the next 28 days, we will all join together with focused prayer, guided by the Word of God.

The two emphases for us this spring will be *Vigilance* and *Perseverance*. The framework for our focused season of prayer comes from Paul in his letter to Timothy:

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." 1 Timothy 4:16

Paul exhorts us to *keep watch* and *keep going*. And that's what we intend to do.

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER GUIDE

This prayer guide has an entry each day of the week for the next four weeks.

Week 1 & 2 focus on encouraging you towards *spiritual vigilance*. **Keep watch** on your life, integrity, teachability, humility, values, time management, what consumes your mind, and more.

Week 3 & 4 focus on encouraging you towards *perseverance*. **Keep going** on mission, on making disciples, on loving hard people, on showing up, on telling your Jesus story, on being intentional in your marriages and family and work and life.

This guide also serves as a wonderful family worship map. I would encourage those with young families to use this as a guide for spiritual renewal during your family worship time. What better way to spend the next 4 weeks than focusing together on mission as a family? Men, husbands, lead. Everything will get better when you do.

And together, by God's grace, let's keep watch and keep going.

—Pastor Josh

“Keep God At The Center”

Guarding Against Idolatry

Day 1: Monday, 2/26

*“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.
But I, with shouts of grateful praise will sacrifice to you.
What I have vowed I will make good.
I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”*

Jonah 2:8-9

TAKE A MOMENT, and imagine for a second what would happen if God swapped out the sun in our solar system for a dollar-store flashlight. Besides the obvious severe lack of illumination, we’d encounter some version of the major problem of Earth and all surrounding planets immediately hurtling off into deep space at thousands of miles per hour with no adequate force at the center of our solar system to counteract our momentum and keep us in orbit.

I’m no physicist, but here’s the main point: if you swap out a high-mass object at the center of a complex gravitational system for a low-mass object at the center, all hell breaks loose.

Your life is the same way.

Your life has a center of gravity. Your life has an object at the center, around which everything else revolves. In fact, this could be a decent working definition of worship: “Putting something at the center of your life, around which revolves everything else.”

Worship is the act of declaring “worth” and value to someone (or something) and to say, “You are worthy; you are ultimately valuable; I’m defined by where I stand in relationship to you.”

Every category of your life ultimately serves what is at the center: your relationships, your money, your energy, and your time all serve what you worship.

Problems occur though, when the wrong person, or object, is at the center of your life, because only one person is capable of occupying that place at the center of your life.

God is constantly telling us through His word that only He himself is big enough, glorious enough, infinite enough, weighty enough to handle being at the center of our lives... of being the object of our worship.

Idols won’t do. They’re useless to keep your life from spinning into entropy, chaos and nihilism. Worshipping relationships, comfort, power, money, the government or anything that is not God by putting them at the center

of your life is the quickest way to Hell.

We begin this season of focused prayer by restoring in our hearts a right worship of the eternal, unchanging, living God; where have I allowed something else to take His place? Is there anything in my life I can point to that is “out of orbit” so to speak, and thus reveals that God is no longer at the center?

Praise God, we can return to sanity and restored worship and reorder our life in a moment, through simple repentance and crying out to Him in prayer.

At the center of this accelerated season of ministry is Jesus Christ and His mission: to continue to take His good news of salvation to the ends of the earth.

In our lives, we will not allow lesser things to occupy a place reserved for our King. We will set out on mission, resolved to orient our lives, our time, our energy, our resources, our very life’s purpose around Him; and in so doing, we will encounter His life-changing and transformative love (v.8).

Salvation alone belongs to Him, and we will worship Him and Him alone. Amen.

Action Step

1. Make a map of concentric circles with God at the center, in order of priority (God, spouse, children, etc). As you reflect, write down the answer to this question: “How will keeping God at the center of your life keep these other areas “in orbit”?”

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I worship you today. You are the reason for my life. I want to live to please you, to bring glory to your name. Please show me how I can keep you at the center of everything I am and everything I do. I want to offer my whole life to you as a sacrifice of grateful praise. You are the only one who saves, and I invite you again today to occupy the throne of my life. Amen.”

“Keep The Slate Clean”

Guarding Against Secret Sin

Day 2: Tuesday, 2/27

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:5-9

WE ARE PEOPLE of the light. We do not walk in the dark.

There are few things more tragic, and nothing that will render your life spiritually powerless and devoid of spiritual authority quicker, than unconfessed sin that is hidden in the dark.

Where the Lord is, the light is (v. 5). And where the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). Thus, living in the light is where freedom is found.

When you walk in the light before God and man through regular confession and repentance, sin loses its power over you.

When you walk in the light you open the door to honest, healthy relationships with God’s people.

When you walk in the light and are honest and humble before the Lord to confess your failures and shortcomings, God promises that you will encounter the real power of Jesus’ purifying blood and life-transforming grace (v. 7).

As we prepare to invite more people, through our Easter weekend and our upcoming *Stronger Marriage* sermon series, to meet Jesus, to follow Him, and to join us as we leverage our whole lives for His glory, it is good and right that we examine our own lives and “clean out the basement,” so to speak. 1 Peter 4:17 puts it this way:

“For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household...”

Don’t go on a witch hunt for something that isn’t there, but DO take an honest look at your life:

Is there unconfessed sin festering in your heart? Pride? Envy? Cowardice? A caving to temptation?

Where are you blaming others for your circumstances?

How is your thought life? How would you rate your patience these days? Where have you been careless or unwise with your words to your spouse or children?

What do you need to confess and where do you need to invite the Spirit of God to come in and clean house?

Confession and repentance is not a one-time occurrence in the life of the follower of Jesus—it is all of life. And when we walk in the light, we will find freedom and joy, because that’s where our Lord is!

Let’s prepare to invite more and more people to join us as we ourselves walk in the joyful, happy, freedom-filled light of Jesus.

Action Step

1. Are you walking in the light? Is there an area you need to bring into the light?
2. Think of the last time you told someone out loud, “I was wrong, please forgive me.” Got that moment?
3. Have you sinned since then? How? Confess to God and then whoever else you need to and ask for their forgiveness.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I want to be filled with your power to live in the light. Thank you that I am not a slave to sin. Thank you that you are faithful and just to forgive us when we confess our sin to you. Help your people to walk in the light and in so doing, point to you. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and purify us as we seek to be faithful to mission you’ve given us. Amen.”

“Keep The Record Short”

Guarding Against Bitterness

“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Matthew 6:14-15

THE CHURCH IS, fundamentally, a *forgiven* people. We are citizens of the kingdom of grace. Our dirty, sinful slate has been wiped clean by the blood of Jesus, and replaced with His perfect righteousness. What once was stained has now been washed white as snow. Praise God!

Conversely then, the hallmark of the kingdom of darkness is unforgiveness, which leads to bitterness.

If we can compare sin hidden in the dark to a sweating bomb in the basement, waiting to blow the house of your life to kingdom come, then bitterness would be like a deathly black mold in the house of your life, quietly festering in dark, dank areas: left untreated, it will slowly poison you and your relationships to death.

As we find ourselves in a cultural moment where people are increasingly encouraged to be easily-offendable, bitter, brittle, fragile, demanding and unforgiving, the Spirit of God in His people will shine through as we forgive readily, laugh easily, and celebrate our own canceled sin debt by canceling the debts that others owe us.

And yet, forgiveness is not enabling, or a lack of boundaries, or a lack of wisdom; it is a release of a genuine debt that is owed. Forgiveness is not weakness; it is a powerful act. But why?

- When we forgive, we acknowledge that we are not the ultimate Judge in this life.
- When we forgive, we affirm the truth that whatever sin was committed against us, was ultimately against God (Psalm 51) and that He cares infinitely more than we ever could.
- When we forgive, we entrust those who've wronged us to a victorious King who is terrible in His wrath and who will one day bring all things to light and righteously judge the quick and the dead.

- When we forgive, we entrust our very real pain to our all-powerful, all-knowing, and compassionate Heavenly Father.
- When we forgive, we display the reality that we ourselves have had the slate wiped clean of an infinite debt that we had no hope of paying.
- When we forgive, we align ourselves with the Holy Spirit, the God of forgiveness, not the spirit of unforgiveness.

Grace City, together, we go out on God's mission in this valley as those whose primary identity is *sons and daughters of God who have been forgiven much, and thus forgive much...*

So as we prepare for a season of ministry focused on inviting lost people to hear about the forgiveness of God, *who might you need to forgive?*

Action Step

1. Who do you need to forgive? Identify that person.
2. If safe and appropriate, consider making plans to call or meet up with that person. Share about how the forgiveness of God extended to you allows you to forgive them.
3. If you are unable to contact that person, write out what you would say to them. Share it with someone you trust.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, thank you for your forgiveness of my sin that was won at the cross by Jesus. Mold me into a more forgiving, joyful person. I want the way I forgive those who have wronged me to point people to you. Right now, because I have received your forgiveness and mercy, I choose to forgive (insert name(s) here) and entrust them to you. Help me live a life empowered by your Holy Spirit. Amen.”

“Keep Being Transformed”

Guarding Against Stagnation

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:1-2

HAVE YOU EVER felt stuck in your life?

Like you’ve just hit a spiritual, emotional, inspirational plateau with no end in sight? Maybe that’s where you find yourself right now.

If that’s you, I’ve got good news for you: transformation is possible.

A few years ago, Pastor Adam gave me a nugget of incredible insight. He said that sometimes the antidote to tiredness and weariness is not necessarily rest, but a *sense of progress*. How true; When I’m tired of feeling stuck, I don’t need a nap... I need to move!

But how do we “make progress” in our lives? How do we become more and more transformed into the men and women that God would have us be?

Paul tells us the answer: you worship your way into transformation by offering your very body as a living sacrifice to the Lord (v. 1).

The presence of God is always at the forefront of His mission in the world. So if you want to encounter His transformative presence and get unstuck, my simple encouragement is this: get yourself to the frontlines of His mission as fast as possible.

Get on a Grace Team. Get in a City Group. Talk to a coworker about Jesus. Sit down with your spouse and write out a life plan for your marriage and parenting and articulate how you will live on mission for Jesus as a family. Re-examine your vision for your small business as a way to grow the Kingdom of God.

If you want to be transformed, then pour out every resource, physical and otherwise, on the altar before God. Offer yourself to Him afresh and ask Him what He wants to do with you.

This is your spiritual act of worship.

God wants to renew your mind and transform you from the inside out in an ongoing way for the rest of your life.

As we look forward to Easter and our *Stronger Marriage* series, where do you sense He wants to transform you?

The promise of transformation is this: You will then be able to discern what God’s will is for your life.

Don’t try to steer a parked car; put it in gear.

Pray, make a plan, and then make a move. As you gain momentum, you will gain clarity.

Offering yourself for the sake of His mission is the pathway to worship, and worshipping God is the pathway to transformation.

Action Step

1. Join a Grace Team and/or City Group if you are not in one. Surround yourself with other Christians on mission!
2. Identify one thing you could do once a week that would give you a sense of “progress” in your life. Reading a book? Initiating a spiritual conversation with a coworker? A weekly, face-to-face meeting with your spouse to take inventory of your marriage?
3. Implement the practice you identified in step 2.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, help me identify where I am stuck, and help me to get unstuck. Thank you that you have freed me from my sin and from worshipping lesser things, and that I have the privilege of leveraging all of my life to partner with you in bringing about your kingdom. I want to be transformed, so I invite your Spirit to fill me now. Amen.”

“Keep Your Integrity Intact”

Guarding Against Duplicity

*“The integrity of the upright guides them,
but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.”*

Proverbs 11:3

YOU CANNOT FAKE it with God.

He sees your life. He knows the truth. He hears your inmost thoughts. He discerns your motives. He is utterly inescapable (Psalm 139).

It is possible to pull the wool over the eyes with other people, but not God.

*“This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;”*

– Matthew 15:8

And while it is possible to fool those far from you, those closest to you know who you really are. And conversely, you may be hated from afar, but God and those closest to you know who you really are and what you’re like. This is a simple, yet clarifying reality.

I once heard someone give their personal definition of success as, “being loved most by those who know you best.”

As we look forward to a season of renewed emphasis on the mission of God here in our valley, consider this:

Your first mission field is your home. Don’t fail to be a Christian first within the confines of the four walls you sleep in every night.

According to Proverbs, your integrity acts as a “guide,” a set of guardrails that keep you on the wise path that leads to life. The person of integrity lives in the freedom of knowing that his conscience is clear before God, all facets of his life are aware of each other, that nothing shameful is hidden, and thus he is free from the fear of man.

By contrast, the two-faced person, what the Proverbs call the “duplicitous” (such a great word), finds himself on the foolish path that leads to destruction. The person of duplicity lives in constant slavery to his fear and anxiety of being exposed and “found

out,” of the different facets of his life becoming aware of one another (i.e. your Sunday morning finding out about your Friday night). He hides from men, and thus finds his conscience stricken before God.

How can the duplicitous person become free? By a restored fear of God, that then leads to honest living before Him, and others.

Living an integrated life (integrity) means that you are the same “you” no matter where you go, where you are or what situation you’re in: at a church service on Sunday morning, home with your family on Sunday night, and at work on Monday morning.

Ask yourself, “Am I living honestly before God?”

Let us live free, so that we might be ready to invite others to do the same.

Action Step

1. Ask yourself, “Am I living honestly before God?” If not, confess and ask for forgiveness.
2. Consider anything that might threaten your integrity: unhelpful social media, unhealthy habits, questionable work/friend relationships, excessive free time, etc.
3. Identify what it would look like to be “guided by integrity” in the item from question 2 (honest conversation with spouse, getting rid of this phone app, etc). Implement this immediately.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I want to live honestly and freely before you. Cleanse me, purify my heart and my motives to align with yours. Help me live a life of integrity that glorifies and honors you. Help me to avoid sin and not get in the way of your Spirit wanting to work in and through me to reach lost people in my life. Amen.”

“Keep His Word Close”

Guarding Against Lies

“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

John 17:17

WE WILL NOT GROW as disciples of Jesus apart from regularly hearing our Father’s voice through His Word.

To be “sanctified” as a Christian is to be set apart by God in order to be used by Him to accomplish His purposes in the world.

What we learn from Jesus in John 17 is that:

1) We are sanctified by the truth,

And,

2) God’s Word is the truth we are sanctified by.

Here’s the takeaway: growth will come through the truth of God’s Word working its way in and through your life over time. We will not grow by accomodating lies, convenient half-truths, or feel-good platitudes, all of which abound today in all the marketing and headline messaging we are bombarded with on a daily basis.

If growth is to occur, His Word must cut through the noise. The Word of God forces us to behold our own lives in stark relief to His glory, His beauty, His righteousness, and His perfect standards.

And yet, rather than driving us to our knees in despair because of our sinful shortcomings, the truth of God’s Word drives His sons and daughters to our knees in *gratitude and praise* because His Word reveals a cosmic forgiveness and grace that was purchased for us at the cross of Jesus.

The *lie* of our day is that there is no objective standard for right living and morality.

The truth we must proclaim in the face of that lie is that, yes, there actually is a standard, and Jesus Christ has fully met that standard on behalf of His people.

So how can we avoid being taken captive by lies, by “hollow and deceptive philosophy” (Col 2:8),

rendering us ineffective for His mission? How can we grow and become effective Christians?

How will we prepare to engage our family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers with the good news of salvation?

By keeping His Word close.

This spring, through our *Stronger Marriage* series, we will focus on the institution of marriage as God designed it. We will hold up His Word, celebrate His good design, and endeavor to disciple people according to His truth.

Action Step

1. Make a plan to regularly set aside time to hear from God through His Word. How will you prioritize this even when life gets busy?

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I want to walk in your truth. I don’t want to fall prey to deception and lies. I want to be bold to declare the truth and grace of your Gospel. Give your Church clarity as we seek you. I pray for those I know who don’t yet know you. Please wake them up to the truth of your Word and bring them into a personal relationship with you Father. Amen.”

“Keep Yourself Alert”

Guarding Against The Enemy

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand...”

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

Ephesians 6:10-12, 18

THERE IS A REALITY of spiritual warfare according to the Bible that the American church needs to rediscover if we are going to be mission-effective for the kingdom of God in our day and age.

Too often, this reality of spiritual warfare is downplayed, which leads to ignorance of what God’s Word has to say about it. This itself is a tactic of the enemy: he wants to push you towards wrote materialism (nothing exists except what you can see, touch, taste, etc) and ignore the spiritual realm. The other side of the ditch is to put spiritual warfare under a magnifying glass and focus on it to such a degree that it becomes unbiblical and distorted: Christians can get distracted, taking their eyes off of Jesus as the victorious King of kings and all-powerful ruler of heaven and earth (exactly what the devil wants), and become afraid or anxious, thinking that somehow our enemy has more power in the spiritual realm than our Savior.

We must stay spiritually alert (v. 18); If we don’t rightly acknowledge what is happening in and amongst us in the spiritual realm, we will lose our ability to be discerning in the physical realm. Social norms, geopolitical attitudes and cultural mores we encounter will not make sense unless we view these dynamics through the lens of Scripture.

And the stark reality according to the Word is this: There is an all-out war being waged against the Creator as we speak, and these spiritual hierarchies of darkness and evil are at work in the world today through people, philosophies, organizations, governments, etc. Ephesians 6 calls them, “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (v. 12). These demonic forces are intent on attacking God’s people and God’s work around the world through a myriad of outright lies, misinformation, temptations, and various other tactics. As a Jesus-follower, you don’t get to decide whether you are in a battle or not; the fight has already been initiated against you by the enemy of our Lord. What is left to do now for you and I is to stand (v. 13) and fight against this enemy.

How will you do this? By allowing God to fit you with His armor.

Take heart, Christian. God has given us the right gear in order to stand firm:

- Truth, which holds all the pieces of our armor together;
- A righteousness that we didn’t earn but protects us just the same, paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ;
- Feet fitted with the readiness to be light-bringers and good-news-messengers;
- A faith that we hold up as a shield when the enemy’s rounds are flying and we are tempted to be discouraged;
- Our King’s victory over our enemy that we wear as our helmet and crown;
- A sharp, two edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) that discerns hearts and destroys lies.

All these we have been given in this fight!

As we prepare for a season of spiritual harvest leading up to Easter and the *Stronger Marriage* series, let’s resolve to stay alert, armor up, and “always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (v. 18)!

Action Step

1. As you reflect on your life, where do you feel the most pressing need to “armor up?” What does this look like for you?
2. Ask someone you’re close to (e.g. spouse, parent, friend) the above question: “Where in my life do you see that I need to focus on ‘armoring up?’”

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I want to find my strength in you. Help your people to stand strong against the attack of the enemy in these days. I ask that you would equip, empower, and protect your people as we seek to trumpet the truth of your Gospel loud and clear always, and especially in these coming days. Amen.”

“Keep The Unity Of The Spirit”

Guarding Against Division

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Ephesians 4:1-3

NOTHING WILL TANK a great team’s potential for success in the mission like a lack of unity, resulting in infighting and division.

You could have the best talent and skill on that team, but if there isn’t unity, the team ultimately has nothing.

If each team member is in it for their own glory, the mission fails.

If the team doesn’t have clarity on, and isn’t committed to, the same key goals, the mission fails.

If the team loses its focus and begins to look inward at one another more than it looks upward toward the objective, the mission fails.

Unity is powerful. What would be impossible with individual talent alone is many times possible through sheer force of teamwork and relational mobilization.

Unity itself is amoral. There can be unity for the sake of good, and there can be unity for the sake of evil. There is unity that comes from the Holy Spirit, and there is unity that comes from unholy spirits.

This is why Paul clarifies what *type* of unity he is after in the Church: “Just to be clear guys, I’m not for ‘unity at any cost...’ I’m after the unity that comes from the Spirit of God...”

When the going gets rough, a team’s unity is tested. If we are to pass the test of preserving the unity of the Holy Spirit, Paul says it will take “every effort.”

When times get tough, the easy thing to do is to get chippy and begin to tear down those on your team, to align with the critic in the stands, to align with the voice of the Accuser, the devil. But as Christians, we are called higher.

I’m so grateful that here in our Grace City family, we have a healthy team culture. An “I’ve got your back” culture. A “Hey, don’t sweat it, I forgive you” culture. An “I’d love to help however I can” culture. An “I’ll stay late so you don’t have to” culture. An “I’ll cheer you on as you do your thing” culture. A culture of honor, of laughter (mostly at ourselves), of joy and of celebration.

It’s a culture worth protecting, and each one of us contributes towards it, or takes away from it.

Let’s continue to exhort one another in every effort towards keeping our Spirit-born unity so that we can continue to be mission-effective in this season of harvest through Easter and our *Stronger Marriage* series.

And let’s get ready to take the next hill together for Jesus’ sake.

Action Step

1. If every person at Grace City contributed to the cultural health of our church family like you do, would we be left with a healthy culture or an unhealthy culture? Why?
2. Identify one thing you could do today that would contribute towards the unity of the Spirit in your home, with your family/City Group, etc.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, give me patience in all areas of my life. Protect me, my family and our church family from unholy spirits, and fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we might be unified so as to take the fight to the enemy and partner with you as you bring more lost sons and daughters home. Amen.”

“Keep Yourself Humble”

Guarding Against Pride

“This is what the Lord says:

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom, or the strong boast of their strength, or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah 9:23-24

AS YOU READ your Bible, you might begin to notice a common theme when it comes to the storyline of how and when God’s people disobey and fall under his judgment... The biblical authors put it this way, or in some variation of this:

“...everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”
-Judges 17:6

“...he did not do what was right in the eyes of God...”
-2 Chronicles 28:1

Doing what is right in your own eyes: This is pride.

Pride is self-worship, not worship of God. Pride is putting ourselves at the center of the gravitational orbit of our lives (see *Day 1: Keep God At the Center*).

Our pride gets in the way of aligning our lives according to what God thinks, and instead, we orient our lives around us, our preferences, our desires, our thoughts. Pride is itself sin, and is the root of all other kinds of sin. Pride in the heart of man is the root of foolishness and all manner of evil.

Additionally, according to this text in Jeremiah, God says that our pride causes us to rely on our own wisdom, our own strength, our own resources.

Now, the Lord doesn’t say that being wise, strong and rich are bad things; not at all. But *our* wisdom has an end, has limits. We can be boggled by the simplest fork in the road: right or left?

Our strength is small; all it takes is a tiny microscopic virus and we’re physically laid low.

Our resources are finite, and are always at risk of decay and destruction (Matt 6:19-21).

So when mere mortals puff out their chest, and say, “Look at me, my strength, my wisdom, my riches! I am at the center of my universe. I define myself!

I will make my own rules! I can be my own God...” it’s laughable.

God describes a better way: instead of boasting in yourself, boast in the fact that *you know Him*, the Lord.

As God’s people, we should be marked, not by stiff necks, but by bended knees. We lift our hands in worship, we point to Him and say:

“Behold the Lord: His infinite wisdom and righteousness; His incomparable strength and justice; the incalculable riches of His kindness! *That* is my God, and my Father...”

This spring, we will work hard: we will preach the truth, we will sow seed, we will love well, we will invite more and more people to hear about Jesus for the sake of more people meeting, loving and following Him. We will work with all our might to make this valley the *Family Capital of the World*, a place where families can thrive and where the Church can flourish.

But may this truth always be deep in our bones: The Lord is the one who empowers us for the mission ahead. He alone holds the treasures of wisdom, strength and riches.

Let’s seek Him now in humility as we ask for His favor and blessing on our efforts.

Action Step

1. In what ways have you experienced the Lord’s kindness lately? Write a list and share it with someone.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I humble myself in your presence. You are God, I am not. What you say goes. You are mighty in power; I need your power in my life as I try to follow you, obey you and share the Good News of your Son. Please pour out your favor and blessing on your people so we can bring glory to you. We can’t do this without you and we wouldn’t want to. Amen.”

“Keep Believing In His Grace” Guarding Against Self-Condensation

“This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”

1 John 3:19-20

GRACE BY DEFINITION is unearned, undeserved favor. It describes our Father’s habit of treating His people with kindness that we don’t deserve. Grace is something that happens to us, not something we can earn.

At the cross of Jesus Christ, something incredible happened on yours and my behalf: God *didn’t* give to us what we *did* deserve (this is forgiveness), AND He *did* give to us what we *didn’t* deserve (this is grace).

And while we celebrate the forgiveness that Christ won for us by dying in our place as the atoning sacrifice for our sin, if we make the Good News of Jesus *only* about forgiveness, we’ll miss out on the weight of what God has done.

Forgiveness says, “You no longer owe the debt of death and sin and are free to go.”

But *grace*... Grace says, “I’ve adopted you; come and have a seat at my table.”

This truth is why Paul says we can, “set our hearts at rest in his presence (v. 19).”

That inner voice of condemnation, of the accuser in our mind, always says, “Sinner. Dirty. Undeserving. Failure. Hopeless.”

And that voice is technically right about us. We ARE sinners. We DON’T deserve His grace, and apart from it, we ARE hopeless.

But here’s the thing: God loves, and sent His Son for, exactly those kind of people—hopeless, rebellious sinners undeserving of mercy.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
-Romans 5:8

Jesus Christ died for your sin, every bit of it, and He rose from death on the third day, defeating sin and death and securing for you a righteousness

and justification before the Father that comes to you by grace through repentance and faith, so you could be once-and-for-all freed from condemnation, whether from within or without. He has fundamentally changed your identity from that of a sinner, to that of a saint.

So don’t listen to that voice. Don’t give in to the whispering lies of self-condemnation; those things may have been true of you in the past, but they are no longer.

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
-Romans 8:1

This spring, we set out into the mission from a deep-rooted conviction that we are recipients of transformative grace, and that more people in our valley need to experience that grace.

God is greater than your heart; when that inner voice says, “Look what you’ve done,” you can respond with, “Look what He has done.”

Action Step

1. What will you say to yourself the next time you are tempted to listen to the voice of condemnation? Write down a short phrase or Bible verse that will remind you of what is true of you in Christ.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, help me to remember what is true of me because of your grace. Thank you for the cross, thank you that Jesus’ blood has cleansed me from sin. Thank you that I have a new identity in you. Help me to live out of that new identity, and to be characterized by grace in my interactions with others. Amen.”

“Keep Your Hopes Up”

Guarding Against Discouragement

Day 11: Monday, 3/11

*“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God...
For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord...”*

2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5

IT IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL that we guard against discouragement if we are to remain faithful to Jesus and His mission. The text above has convinced me that discouragement is one of the main ways that faithful Christians are susceptible to abandoning the truth and descending into apostasy. Therefore, we should take this idea of “losing heart” very seriously and take steps to combat it wherever we see it.

Paul directly connects becoming discouraged with adopting “missional” tactics that are not above board. He points out four tactics: secret ways, shameful ways, deception, and distortion of God’s Word.

- “Secret ways” could refer to burying the parts of God’s message that you don’t like or that make people uncomfortable. Realities of sin, Hell, and God’s wrath are downplayed or ignored altogether.
- “Shameful ways” could refer to some peoples’ tendencies to apologize for God’s moral standards: “Hey I don’t like it either, but I’m not God.” As Christians, we should elevate and celebrate God’s standards and His good design.
- “Deception” could refer to preaching a Gospel message where repentance of sin is not required to follow Jesus. This is not the true Gospel.
- “Distortion of God’s Word” is just like it sounds: a bending and twisting of Scripture (whether intentionally or because of foolishness) that causes confusion.

All these harmful missiological tactics are present in and around the Church today in our cultural moment. And Paul points out that at the headwaters of these tactics is discouragement and losing heart.

So what is the antidote to discouragement that leads to employing shady tactics in the mission of God?

Answer: encouraging one another and setting forth the truth plainly (v. 2)

Never underestimate the power of encouragement to or from a fellow brother or sister in Christ. To become discouraged is to literally lose one’s courage; to encourage someone is to literally put their courage back into them and get them ready for the fight once again.

What a gift encouragement is.

We will all get weary at times. We will all be tempted to cash it in, throw in the towel and walk the easy road. We will all have moments where our spiritual resolve and our nerve, our courage is tested in the fire before God and man. If you haven’t yet, your moment is coming.

We must not lose hope in the message we proclaim, nor the *Author* of the message we proclaim. We must resist the temptation to soften the Gospel’s edges in order to make it more palatable to modern sensibilities.

The ministry and mission we’ve been given is to loudly, boldly and joyfully proclaim the life-transforming message of Jesus Christ our Lord to all who hear, and then let the chips fall.

So keep your hopes up Grace City. Heaven is on the horizon, our victorious King is coming back, and we’ve got some good work to do before He gets here!

As we prepare for an accelerated season of mission this spring, let’s fan the flame of our faith and refuse to be discouraged.

Action Step

1. Do you find yourself in need of encouragement? Reach out to another Christian and tell them. Ask them to encourage you!
2. Think of 5 Christians in your life who have been a source of encouragement to you. Send each of those 5 people a message thanking them, and then offer an encouragement to them.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I want to persevere to the end. I want to be faithful my whole life. Fill me with your spirit to live a life of courage, and a life that encourages others to follow hard after you. Thank you for the hope of heaven, and for the hope that we will be with you forever. Amen.”

“Keep Gathering Together” Guarding Against Neglect

Day 12: Tuesday, 3/12

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

ONE THING THAT all of us were reminded of in a *ahem* unique way in the 2,020th year of our Lord was the reality that in-person, face-to-face, real flesh and blood relationships are absolutely VITAL to the life of the Church. And not just to the Church, but to the human experience in general.

In a world where the ability to interact with others digitally is heralded by culture as the next great frontier of human progress, these verses hit us with a special resonance. While digital avenues of connecting with the Church are a blessing, none of that compares with gathering in person with a faithful local church to worship Jesus.

The passage begins with an exhortation to “consider how we may spur one another on...” And then the author of Hebrews does something interesting: he immediately equates “meeting together” and “encouraging one another.”

The Church is called “the body of Christ” for a reason: when we get together, we experience the presence of Jesus through the physicality of His people. When we love, care for, put an arm around, cry with, laugh with, share with, pray for, slap a back, shake a hand, give a hug... We are loving one another in Jesus’ name and to His glory (John 13:35). And you simply can’t do all of that without being together in the same space. This is why we do City Groups at Grace City; it’s not just something we *do*, it’s an expression of *who we are* as God’s people—His body. And we all need the encouragement that comes from the regular gathering of His people.

One hot coal taken out of the fire and left on its own will cool, flame out, and ash over after only a short while.

But a hot coal heaped in with a load of other hot and fiery coals? It will not only retain its heat, but the compounding effect of all the hot coals together now ignites into flame any other fuel put on that fire... and the fire burns on, hot and bright, providing warmth to those gathered around it.

Take a single faithful follower of Jesus and remove him from regularly gathering with other Christians under the preaching of God’s Word, from lifting his hands and worshipping together with other believers... remove him from his City Group, from opening his

Bible in someone’s living room and being prayed for, from eating good food and laughing with good friends around Jesus’ table... remove regularly gathering with other Christians in groups both big and small, and tell me how long he has before his flame goes out? Not long friends. This is a genuine tragedy. We must avoid the temptation to withdraw from community at all costs.

But take that same Christian, and watch as he places himself close to the heart of the white-hot crackling bonfire: the presence of the living God, manifested in the gathering of His people, whether on a Sunday morning at a service, or a Tuesday night in someone’s home... Surround him with other Godly men who look him in the eye, challenge him to fight his sin, who pour into and pray for him. Get the Word of God into his mind and deep into his bones by regularly hearing it preached and opening it himself...

A Church full of hot coals will do nothing less than change the world and bring the warmth of Christ to every corner of this earth.

These are not days to fly solo. This spring we are headed into the mission, and into battle. So get into a City Group, join a team, be a part of our weekly gatherings, come to the Stitch or Anchored, come to Stronger Men, Noble Women, etc. We must continue to prioritize in these days the rhythm of *normal life, learning to follow Jesus in life-giving relationships*.

In so doing, we will transform our valley to the glory of God.

Action Step

1. What will you say to yourself the next time you are tempted to listen to the voice of condemnation? Write down a short phrase or Bible verse that will remind you of what is true of you in Christ.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I pray that you would keep the fire of your Spirit burning bright in my life as I seek to regularly spend time with your people. I want to be someone who helps to encourage other Christians’ faith. Please help the people of Grace City Church to continue to be faithful to gather together in order to be made strong for the mission you’ve given us. Amen.”

“Keep The End In Mind”

Guarding Against Loss of Perspective

Day 13: Wednesday, 3/13

“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:13-14

STRAINING TOWARD the goal. Eyes fixed on the finish line.

But for what purpose? What is the goal of your existence?

Achieving a comfortable life so as to be bothered as little as possible by life’s circumstances? Is it to build a life devoid of pain and suffering? To have as much fun as you’re able to squeeze out of experiences? To follow all the rules? Is it to “make your mark” on the world? Is it to always drive this year’s truck? To pass on enough money to send your kids to college? So that they can make enough money to send their kids to college? So that they can make enough money to send their kids... Okay okay, you get the idea.

What is the ultimate goal of your life that you strain towards day after day?

Just a few verses before we see what Paul is pressing on toward:

*“...that I **may gain Christ** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil 3:9-10)*

Simply put, the prize is Jesus Christ himself. This is the goal of our existence. This is our prize for which we are straining: *to know Jesus more and more, and to make Him known* until one Day, we are called to Him to be with Him for eternity.

On that Day, His people will be bodily resurrected and remade, and we will be with our King in His kingdom forevermore (1 Thess 4:13-18, 1 Cor 15:35-55). Our call is to press on toward that great Day. Which means, until then, we will be straining, growing, learning to become more and more like Jesus each day, and laboring, sweating and working in the field to bring as many people to Heaven with us as possible.

Forget what is behind. Leave your sins in the dust, AND your previous victories. Don’t rest on your laurels. As Adam James likes to say, “Your past victories do not equal future success.” Don’t think you can rely solely on what God did in your life 10 years ago... Do you have eyes to see where He wants to work in you now? Where is he calling you to go? Who is he calling you to reach?

Strain towards what is ahead. There is NOTHING, I repeat, NOTHING, more exciting than living on mission along with God’s people. Like kids waiting with baited breath for a surprise present from their dad, we labor and strain with eager, joyous smiles, expectant for God to glorify Himself and prove His strength and faithfulness: “What will God do next? Where will we see Him provide next? Who will He save next?”

So who do you need to begin praying about inviting to Easter? Who do you want to see meet Jesus through participating in our *Stronger Marriage* series? How do you want to be changed as you press on towards the prize of knowing Jesus?

Keep the end goal in mind, Grace City. Our Father has called us heavenward, and there’s no looking back!

Action Step

1. Make a list of what God has accomplished in your life in the past.
2. Thank Him for all that he has done, and then say “What if?” What if God wants to do more? What if he is not done using you? What if He is actually just getting started? What would you want to see Him do in and through you?

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, thank you for all that you have done in me and through me, and thank you that you are not done with me. Lord, I ask that you would show me what you have next for me. Help me to keep my eyes focused on what is ahead and not dwell on things of the past. Give me endurance and strength to press on to that day. Amen.”

“Keep Taking Ground”

Guarding Against Powerlessness

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

WE ARE CITIZENS of a different kind of kingdom.

And as citizens of a different kind of kingdom, we wage war with different weapons than the world. Now, before you start to think that means this “They have a Sig, I’ve got a Glock” type of thing, let me pause you there; I think what Paul is trying to say is more like, “They have squirt guns. We’ve been given tanks.”

Because the battle we fight takes place in the spiritual realm (see *Day 7, Keep Yourself Alert*), we have been given, not just different weapons, but a whole different class of weaponry, fired in the forge of heaven—weapons containing divine authority and power to tear down strongholds.

As we wield the truth of God found in His Word, we demolish the foolish arguments, pretensions, lies, slanderous claims, misinformation, woke propaganda, half-truths, manipulations, vain philosophies, circular reasoning, excuse-making, accusations and blame-shifting of the world and its various tyrannies that oppose the divine logic of Jesus Christ.

We do not cower. We will not shrink back. We are called to take ground. Jesus said the gates of Hell would not prevail against the Church (Matt 16:18), so it sounds like Jesus assumed the Church would be charging some gates!

And we can do just that, because we know that He has already won the victory for us. Because of the shed blood of Jesus on the cross, and his subsequent resurrection, death has been defeated, Hell has been canceled on our behalf, and our sin no longer enslaves us. We have been freed from the pernicious designs of a petty tyrant, and now we fight as free people in the service of our victorious King.

So don’t be dismayed. Keep taking ground in Jesus’ name. *Keep going.* Keep moving forward

one step at a time. Spend time in His Word, fight your sin, examine your thoughts, desires and actions and ask God to mold them, shape them, refine them until they obey Jesus (v. 5).

Maybe you’ve been struggling with feeling powerless over your sin lately. Maybe you’re not seeing the spiritual growth or progress you’d like to see.

Brother or sister, here is the truth for you: You **CAN** become the man or woman that Jesus’ blood paid for you to be.

And you can start becoming that man or woman today. Call out to the Lord in confession, repentance and faith.

The road is not easy, the battle is real, and the stakes are high: eternity hangs in the balance for lost sons and daughters. Which is why this spring, through Easter weekend and *Stronger Marriage*, we want to be a part of His rescue mission to bring more of His lost sons and daughters home.

Let’s pray that God would pour out His blessing on us all, such that our lives demonstrate the power of His victorious grace.

Action Step

1. How will you combat feelings of powerlessness in your life?
2. What is your next step as you follow Jesus? Is it saying yes to a specific opportunity? Is it saying no to a specific sin? Both? Write it down, and take that step before the weekend is over.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I ask that you uniquely equip your Church, that you pour out your blessing and power on her in these days, that we would push back darkness and evil in this valley and beyond in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

“Keep Telling The Story”

Guarding Against Forgetfulness

Day 15: Friday, 3/15

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up... be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

Deuteronomy 6:5-7, 12

IMAGINE THAT YOU and your family were caught in a burning building with no way out—totally trapped in a smoke-filled room, rapidly losing oxygen. You realize you and your small kids only have minutes to live. Your demise is imminent, when, all of the sudden, you hear voices shouting nearby. You call out for help, and moments later, a hole appears in one of the walls, and a team of firefighters pour through the smashed opening and lead your family out of the burning wreckage to safety. You tearfully embrace one another, as well as the brave firefighters who saved you and the lives of your family...

Now, imagine you never talked about that event with your kids ever again, and your grandkids grew up never even hearing that story. That would be weird, right?

Of course you would tell your kids and grandkids. It was a momentous event in the life of your family: that story of rescue would be a foundational, pivotal part of your family history, and you might even celebrate the anniversary of that rescue over the years.

Stories inspire us. Stories define us. You live your life in response to the story you believe (your worldview). This is how God made us. It's why He chooses to reveal Himself through a story, through His Word.

As you read the Bible, you find that God refers to His rescue of the Israelites out of Egypt numerous times throughout the Bible; it is *the* defining story for His people that the rest of the Bible calls back to over and over again. It seems that God believes this story to be foundational to their identity; He seems to believe it to be absolutely crucial that they *remember* they were once slaves, but had been gloriously set free. Why?

In this passage, through Moses, God tells the people two main things: “Worship me; Don’t forget!” What God is teaching His people in this passage is that *obedience* and *remembering* go hand-in-hand. And the inverse of that is true as well: First comes the *forgetting*, and then comes the *disobeying*.

By the time you get to Judges 2, (only one generation after the above passage in Deuteronomy), it says that a generation arose in Israel who, “knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel...” (Judges 2:10)

First comes the forgetting, then comes the disobeying:

*“Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord... They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, **who had brought them out of Egypt**. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them.”*
—Judges 2:11-12

Here’s the simple, but profound twofold takeaway from the passage: **remembering God is the precursor to worshiping God; forgetting God is the precursor to worshiping other gods.**

As God’s people, we persevere in the discipline of regularly **remembering**, celebrating and recounting stories of God’s faithfulness, mercy, grace, strength, provision, etc to our own hearts, our children and grandchildren, our fellow brothers and sisters, and those we want to see meet Jesus.

You too have a foundational, identity-forming story; this is your testimony of how God saved you. You too were once a slave to sin, and yet are no longer. You have been rescued and redeemed in Christ, and you need to tell everyone about it.

And in so doing, you can invite others to respond with you in worshiping the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength.

Action Step

1. Have you ever written out your story/testimony? Do it now. Write out the story of how God saved you, how you repented of your sin and turned to follow Jesus.
2. Storytime: Share your testimony with someone in the coming week. You could share your story with your children, a coworker, or a friend. Don’t be intimidated; just celebrate what Jesus has done in you!

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, thank you for rescuing me. Help me to remember you and to recount more often stories of all the ways in which you’ve been good to me. I want to worship you alone. Amen.”

“Keep Preaching the Good News”

Guarding Against Apathy

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Romans 10:14-15

EVEN IN AN antagonistic culture, the Church is still the primary means God has chosen to tell people about Himself.

Our posture as Christians is not primarily one of “volunteering” to share the Gospel... Rather, we have been *chosen*; we have been sent (v. 15). Just like God is the one who has saved us, God is the one who has sent us. We are His commissioned heralds, ambassadors of His kingdom, sent out to share the good news of Jesus.

*“Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to **persuade** others... And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s **ambassadors**, as though God were making his **appeal** through us. We **implore** you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

-2 Cor. 5:11, 19-21

Here’s the point: **As Christians, we accept personal responsibility for telling people about Jesus.**

So keep preaching the truth of the Gospel—keep **persuading** people to the truth of Jesus.

Paul uses the words *persuade*, *appeal*, and *implore*; these words are not accidents—is Paul telling us that preaching will sometimes sound like passionately arguing against the lies that people believe?

Short answer, yes.

“But Adam, you can’t ARGUE someone into the kingdom of God, can you?”

Greg Koukl, the author of *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, said it this way: “Without the Spirit of God, no [evangelistic tactic] works. With the Spirit of God, many things work.”

IF you’re relying on the evangelistic mechanism itself to save people, then people won’t be saved.

But IF you’re relying on God to save people, then we can employ a variety of different methods with success: preaching, testimony, apologetic engagement, personal evangelism, etc.

God has chosen to use us as a means by which He draws people to Himself, so heed this warning: don’t give in to apathy. Don’t think that “someone else will tell them.”

Why not you?

What if God has called you to tell them? What would it take for you to have a renewed sense of urgency for those in your life who don’t know Jesus? What if there are people waiting to hear about Jesus on the other side of your obedience (v. 14)? Let’s get focused, get on our knees in prayer, and then get to work - not out of duty, but out of opportunity.

This spring through Easter and *Stronger Marriage*, we have the glorious opportunity to partner with God in His work to bring the light of truth and hope to an increasingly dark world that is starving for exactly those things—may it cause those to whom the Father is sending us to say, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (v. 15)

Action Step

1. Make a list of 3 people you know that you would like to have join you for Easter or *Stronger Marriage*.
2. Pray for them every day this week, that God would soften their hearts and bring them into a relationship with Him and they would worship Him.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I ask that you would save many people and bring home lost sons and daughters over Easter weekend as Pastor Josh preaches your Good News of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus. I pray that you would cause many people to be baptized at our Easter service as they declare their new life in you, and that you would be glorified. Amen.”

“Keep Sowing Seed”

Guarding Against Cynicism

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Galatians 6:9

SOWING AND REAPING. Planting and harvest. One comes before the other.

In our fast paced world of “insta”-everything— from microwave popcorn to roadside assistance to home delivered groceries and on demand entertainment— It can be tempting to get frustrated to have to wait for anything.

Is it working? Is anything happening? What’s taking so long?

Have you ever felt that way spiritually? With unanswered prayers or slow personal growth or no sign of change in a situation?

Friend, do not give up. Keep sowing, keep planting, keep watering. Keep working while you wait. Only God can make it grow. We may not know when it will come, but the harvest will happen. You will reap what you sow.

Additionally, there can be no reaping without sowing. So keep sowing!

Let us be a people who are found faithfully sowing. Sowing to the Spirit to reap the good fruit that comes from life in the Spirit. Sowing gospel seeds to reap the fruit of salvation. Sowing prayers to reap the harvest of God’s gracious intervention. And as the Psalmist says, “those who sow in tears will reap in songs of joy.” (Psalm 126)

If we faithfully sow in these ways and more, we will continue to reap a harvest in due time. Do not give up!

Let us not be discouraged or dissuaded, or become cynical or jaded. We will keep going, keep praying, keep inviting, keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking, keep trusting, keep believing, keep obeying, and keep anticipating the harvest.

And when it comes, we will know who gets the glory and who get the thanks and praise. We will say together, “Look what the Lord has done!” We will celebrate with the joy of heaven.

Jesus said, “Look! Lift up your eyes and see the fields. They are ripe for harvest. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.”

Grace City, we are a family of workers. We don’t give up. We keep sowing, keep working the field, and by God’s grace, according to the promise of His word, we will keep reaping a harvest.

So who are you praying for by name? Who will you prayerfully invite to join us for Easter? Who will you prayerfully invite to our marriage series?

Let’s get specific names and faces in our minds and hearts as we seek the Lord in this season of prayer... let’s pray with earnest longing for salvation and healing and strength.

Imagine the potential impact of our specific and collective prayers and obedience in the work of sowing; Imagine the changed lives. Imagine the baptism stories. Imagine the legacies transformed.

Put your hand to the plow Grace City, and don’t look back—keep sowing!

Action Step

1. Review your 3 names from yesterday. Plan *when* and *how* you will prayerfully invite them to Easter or *Stronger Marriage*.
2. Write down 2-3 ways you want to grow and get stronger. How can you “sow” into that future harvest in those areas of your life?

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, thank you for the promises in your word. Thank you for being the Lord of the harvest and for being faithful to bring to fruition the good seeds sown in good soil in my life and the lives of those you are drawing to yourself. Help me to faithfully sow and joyfully reap as you do what only you can do in people’s lives. Keep me sowing and reaping in the hope and confidence that it is never in vain. Amen.”

“Keep Trusting God With Your Efforts” Guarding Against Anxiety

“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Mark 4:26-29

WHEN YOU HAVE an opportunity to sow a seed, to invite someone, to share with someone the Good News of Jesus, there can arise in your mind and heart a tendency to be overly critical, or anxious, regarding that conversation or interaction. “Should I have said that? Did I go too far? Did I not go far enough?”

Maybe you’ve invited someone to church for the first time, and you leave thinking, “Man, I was really hoping they might change their mind about Jesus today; what happened? What did I/we do wrong? Maybe I should have said something different, or maybe I should have invited them LAST weekend, not this weekend...”

While it’s true that, yes, each of us do need to take personal responsibility for telling people about Jesus (see *Day 16: Keep Preaching the Good News*), Jesus’ teaching in Mark 4 is a helpful reminder of just how this proclamation of the Gospel (the sowing) turns into people receiving the Gospel and turning to Jesus in repentance and faith (the harvest).

So the farmer is out there sowing the seed—but then what does he do?

He goes to bed. Then he wakes up in the morning. And he continues to live his life and go about his work like a good farmer would do. But as he does, something remarkable is happening to that seed...

After it left the farmer’s hand and landed in the soil, sometime while the farmer was away or sleeping, the seed *sprouted*.

How much effort on the farmer’s part was responsible for this sprouting? Apparently none. Even the farmer doesn’t know exactly how it works, and he’s certainly not attributing the plant’s growth to his own effort:

“...the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how...” (v. 27)

Seemingly all by itself, that seed sprouts, takes root, and develops into a mature stalk of wheat, ripening a little bit each day while the farmer goes about his business.

Until, one day, it reaches harvest time. That same farmer, who, going about his business, dropped a small seed countless hours, days, and months earlier (and spent a significant amount of that time sleeping), now gets to enjoy reaping a harvest.

We are to be those farmers: ***We don’t sow and stress, we sow and sleep.***

Salvation belong to God alone (Rev 7:10); He is the one who has the power to change hearts and lives, to soften people to His Word, and to wake people up from their stupor of sin, humble them and bring them to repentance. God is sovereign in all things—which means we can work hard in the field, *and* leave the results to Him.

So focus on being faithful, not anxious. Share the truth of Jesus with those you know, and then sleep like a baby, all the while trusting that your Heavenly Father is working in and through that seed you’ve sown in ways that are far beyond you.

By God’s grace, we will sow many seeds this spring, through prayerfully inviting people to Easter and our *Stronger Marriage* series.

And by God’s power, those seeds will result in a harvest yet to come.

Action Step

1. Share the 3 names you’re praying for with another Christian and ask them to pray with you today. Ask your prayer buddy to pray for you as well, that you would leave the results up to God and trust Him.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I want to trust you more and more. I want to be faithful to take opportunities that you put in front of me to share the Gospel, and invite more people to hear your Good News. Help me to remember that I can sow and rest, knowing that you are always working in ways I can’t see. Amen.”

“Keep Telling The Truth” Guarding Against Compromise

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

2 Timothy 4:3-4

IF HOLDING FAST TO the truth of God’s Word in our day feels as though we’re swimming upstream, it’s because we are.

In this passage, Paul warns Timothy that a time is coming when people simply won’t listen to anything that doesn’t “suit their own desires.”

People will only listen to teaching that confirms what they want to hear.

People will not only attack true beliefs, they will attack the nature of Truth itself.

Our culture today champions a religion of convenience, moral relativism, and self-gratification at almost any cost. To stand against this secular religion and declare the unyielding, eternal truth of God’s Word is to commit grave cultural heresy.

But here we are.

We are called to stand firm in these days. We must not compromise the Truth.

We are called to declare boldly what the Almighty God has to say about His world at whatever point, and particularly at those points, where culture has set itself against Him.

We will not be afraid to champion, even in the face of opposition, the truth and beauty of God’s design for marriage, sexuality, the family, parenting, men and women, money, the role of government, and every other area under the sun. We will bring sound doctrine to this world according to the One who made this world.

We will not conform to the pattern of this world (see Day 4: Keep Being Transformed). The world’s approval is capricious and fleeting; God’s approval is eternal.

True love will speak the truth, not lies. True love does not deceive. True love may offend at times, but it seeks to offend **for the sake of restoration and health**. Don’t be tempted to cave; the most unloving thing we could do would be to agree, celebrate, and promote the lies of the enemy who came to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10).

This spring at Easter and *Stronger Marriage*, we will continue to speak the truth. We will call sin sin, we will preach a glorious grace, and in so doing, we can point people to Jesus Christ, the great Savior of great sinners just like us.

So keep speaking the truth in love Grace City. God has given us all we need to remain faithful and uncompromising in our day, and He has the power to change hearts and set captives free as we unashamedly share His good news.

Action Step

1. When was a time that you were tempted to cave on speaking the truth? What was that like? What can you learn from the situation?
2. What would it look like for you, motivated by love, to boldly share truth with the people in your family, at work, your friends, etc?
3. Challenge yourself today to memorize a Bible verse or passage that will strengthen you to persevere in speaking the truth.

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I ask for a boldness and courage that comes from your Spirit as I seek to be faithful to your mission. I want to love people well by not compromising for the sake of convenience. I want to see more people in my life changed by the truth of Jesus; help me to be faithful to be a voice pointing towards you in all thing. Amen.”

“Keep Your Eyes On Jesus” Guarding Against the Fear of Man

“And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

WHEN THE PROPHET Isaiah saw the Lord, “high and lifted up,” (Isaiah 6:1) and saw his glory that shook the very foundations of the earth and filled the temple with smoke, his first reaction was to cry out, “Woe is me! I am ruined! For... my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

Isaiah was totally undone in the presence of the living God. He already knew that he was a sinner, living among sinners. But in that moment of seeing God for who He was, he didn't just know it *intellectually*, he knew it in the deepest parts of himself: “I am ruined, because God is holy, and I am not.” Isaiah was then cleansed in the presence of God, and then sent from God on a mission to be His messenger to the people in an age of apostasy.

The fear of the Lord will ruin you as you behold Him in all of His glory, the King of kings and the Lord of lords; and a right fear of the Lord will empower you as He sends you on mission.

We are ruined in His presence *because* of our sin, for we know that He is perfect and holy, and we are sinful and by nature deserving of His righteous wrath (Ephesians 2:3). But, praise God, we are also ruined *towards* our sin; the greatness and glory of God is so weighty, so unfathomably magnificent and attractive, so perfectly righteous, so pure and so good, that we are left with nothing to do but desire Him and tremble in His presence, undone before the throne of the Creator of heaven and earth.

When we get but a glimpse of Him in His glory, everything else pales and seems petty in comparison, and we are left ruined for any thing less than God Himself.

Today in the Church, the fear of *man*, not God, is running rampant:

“But if I say this, what will *people* think of me?”
“But if I tell *them* the truth here, what will it cost me?”
“If I don't compromise here, what will *they* do to me?”

The only way for the Church to stand firm and faithful in these days and persevere to the end, is to fix our eyes, not on man, but on Jesus Christ.

How can we be free of the fear of man so as to be effective messengers of the Gospel? How can we fight being a slave to other peoples' opinion, and what they might do or say, in order to share Jesus with those we know? *How can we persevere in the mission we've been given?*

We must be totally consumed by the Lord and His glory.

We fear God, not man. We care what He says more than what they may say. We care more about *what He has done*, more than *what they might do*. And in so doing, we will find the strength to go about our mission clearly and boldly.

Grace City Church, my prayer for us is that we will continue to discipline ourselves to fix our eyes firmly on Jesus. The Father has poured out His mighty grace on us through the Great Pioneer (v.1), and it is this mighty grace-through-faith that propels us onward as we take steps this spring to homestead the *Family Capital of the World*.

May we be utterly ruined for anything less than living joyfully and fearlessly on mission for the sake of our great and glorious King, whatever the cost.

Action Step

1. Have you ever experienced the feeling of being “ruined” in the presence of God? Write about that time. What was it like?
2. Where in your life do you need to fix your eyes on Jesus? What would it look like to take that step today? Right now?

Prayer

“Father in Heaven, I want to fix my eyes on you. More than any other thing in this world, I find my worth in you, my identity in you, and my life's purpose in you. Fill me with your Spirit as I seek to tell more people about you and the grace that you have made available to them through Jesus. Amen.”

“Keep Watch. Keep Going.”

“Watch your life and doctrine closely.

Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

1 Timothy 4:16

DAY 21 OF 21 DAYS OF PRAYER

Keep watch; keep going.

Your *doctrine* is what you believe. Your *life* is who you are.

You are like a house. **What you believe** is like the structure of the house itself: foundation, framing, plumbing, electrical, etc. Though these things are not technically seen by the eye, their presence is made clear by what is built *on* them.

How you live is everything else in your house that make a home for you and your family: the furniture, beds, decor, pictures on the wall, shelves filled with books and family heirlooms, a fire in the fireplace, etc.

When a storm comes, a good foundation holds, undergirding and protecting what is inside. If you have a poor foundation, the storm causes what is build on it (your life) to come crashing in on itself.

And yet, you could argue that you have the strongest foundation, the most beautiful architectural design, and if it's devoid of **life** on the inside—no furniture, no pictures on the wall, no sign of relational warmth, no people coming in and out—then what's the point of your house anyway?

Here's the point: **trying to separate right belief from right living will either end in destruction or futility.** There is a direct relationship between right principles and right character, right beliefs and right choices, a healthy mind and a healthy heart.

So *keep watch* on how you're living, and *keep going* on mission this spring: What does my life say about what I believe about God? Is the truth of God's Word working its way in and through me? How will I plan to persevere this spring? Is the truth of the Gospel propelling me to offer everything to Jesus for the sake of *more people meeting, loving and following Him*? Who has God put in my path that He wants me to love and share His truth with in the coming months? Who do I know that needs an invite from me to Easter and *Stronger Marriage*?

There is good work to be done here in this valley, Grace City Church. May God grant us the grace to be the kind of people who believe, and live, according to His truth no matter the cost. May we build the very foundation of our lives on our Rock and King, Jesus Christ, and invite others to do the same.

Action Step

1. What is your main takeaway after spending the last month in a focused season of prayer?
2. What are you going to do about it?
3. Come to our worship and prayer night tomorrow, Sunday 3/24 @ 6:00p.

Prayer

Write out your own prayer, what you're asking the Lord for over the next few weeks and months. Spend some time today seeking Him in prayer. Make a note in your calendar for the month of June to revisit these prayer requests and celebrate what God did.



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