

Do you like playing games? Are you any good at them? We want to play a “one word” game. We’re going to show a popular logo, then I want you to answer with just **one word** the type of business this company does. Ready?

- Starbucks - coffee
- Toyota - cars
- Apple - computers
- McDonald’s - food
- Green Bay Packers - football
- Nike – shoes
- Church -
- Grace Church

So what’s the business of the church? What’s the business of our church? Most pastors and church attendees would have a hard time coming up with one word. In the words of John Swigert, “*Houston, we have a problem?*”

Why is it companies like Starbucks, Toyota or McDonald’s can be described so simply in one word, but in the church, even those of us who are part of the church, have a hard time figuring out what the “one word” is? If we don’t know what our “business” is, how will we ever do it?

What’s the problem? Our churches have become so cluttered even those who are part of the church have a difficult time finding the simple and powerful message of Christ and the Gospel. We’re so busy *doing* church, we forgotten how to *be* the church.

The clutter didn’t come from Jesus, our founder. Jesus was the epitome of simple and clear. Yet, clearing away the clutter allows us to focus on the “one word.” It’s vital we know this or we won’t know why we’re here.

What’s our “one word”? Turn to Jesus’ final words found in Matthew 28:19-20 (p. 835). It doesn’t get much clearer than that. Jesus could have said: Go build strong marriages. Go raise healthy families. Go care for the poor. Go clean up the streets. Go fix government. Go plant churches...but He didn’t. Jesus said, “Go make disciples.” What’s the one word? ***Discipleship.***

Jesus came to earth for one reason and one purpose alone: to save us from our sins. He knew the best way to communicate His life changing message of salvation to a sinful world is through the personal experience and witness of individual people, His disciples – ***Discipleship.***

Most pastors are trained to view the church with a business model. I was. It’s about bodies, bucks and buildings. When a pastor meets another pastor, the typical question is: *How big is your church?* It’s attendance, budget and facilities. Those who attend church have been taught to view the church with a consumer mentality. The church is like Wal-Mart, a grocery store. What’s here for me? Are my needs being met? Do they have programs for me? My children? Do they have a good band? Do I like the music, the preaching, etc? Do I feel good going here? And what’s lost is why we’re here – ***discipleship.***

There’s an interesting incident in the book of Acts about a Roman centurion who feared God but hadn’t heard the Gospel, Acts 10:1-6 (p. 918). There are some critical insights here we don’t want to miss. Cornelius is a God-fearing man who prayed. He’s

generous. But he still needed to have someone share the Gospel with him. What's amazing, even shocking is while God sends Cornelius an angel **BUT** the angel doesn't share the Gospel with him. Instead the angel gives him tedious instructions on finding Peter instead of just sharing the message while he's already there. Why the tedious process?

God does not use angels to be His witnesses. He uses us, people. He uses disciples to share the Gospel. Imagine how much more efficient it would be if God used angels to share the Gospel. We could have an angel in every house, even orbiting the earth shouting the message. But God chose to use us, people to reach people. He's ordained people to reach people. It's as the famous quote says, "*Without God we can't; without us He won't.*"

Discipleship is God's strategy for transforming the world. When we forget our purpose, we end up going in circles, playing the church game and forgetting our purpose. Missiologist Jun Escosar (**picture**) puts it this way: "*God's intent was not just to make us saints who are heaven bound. The word 'saints' is mentioned 45 times in the Bible. The word 'Christian' was used only 3 times in Scripture. On the other hand the words 'disciple(s)' overwhelmingly shows up more than 260 times in the New Testament.*"

There's an urgent need for churches to return to the lost art of disciple making. There's an urgent need for the people of God to return to the lost art of making disciples. It's Jesus' last command. It's the "one word" purpose of the church. It's our purpose. You'll find it in our bulletin: ***Grace Church exists to glorify our Heavenly Father by continually making more disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ.*** There is only one plan – discipleship. It's our business and our purpose. And it begins with a message, the Gospel. That's our focus for 2016 – the Gospel.

Did you notice the banner when you came in today? (**Unashamed logo**) Our theme verse for 2016 is Romans 1:16 "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*" That's because the Gospel is everything. We're tying up our series, *Jump Starting My Faith* with **Jump Starting the Gospel – It can't be done! The Gospel is a God thing.** Yet, many of us have only scratched the surface when it comes to the Gospel. The Gospel is our focus this year.

This summer I'd encourage you to join us for our summer reading. It will impact your life. It'll be the best \$10 you've spent in a long time. Join us as we read the book, *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* by J.D. Greear.

What does it mean that we are Gospel-focused? How does this impact the mission of discipleship? What are we trying to say?

1. Without the Gospel, there is no discipleship and there is no church. The Gospel gives discipleship its direction. We're not making disciples of Amway or America. Our "business" is to produce disciples of Jesus Christ and it distinguishes us from every other religion or group.

Remember a few years ago when Tiger Woods (**picture**) got into a big mess. Newscaster Brit Hume (**picture**) made headlines when he said Tiger Woods needed to convert from Buddhism to Christianity because Buddhism doesn't offer forgiveness and redemption from sin. Buddhists don't believe in "sin" in the sense that "*all have sinned*

and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Christians believe in sin. We believe that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from every sin” (1 John 1:7). We believe there’s only salvation from sin through Christ. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). That’s the Gospel. It’s our message!

Paul wasn’t ashamed of the Gospel. We must not be either. Sadly, some of us are ashamed of the Gospel. It’s sad because it’s our business and the world’s only hope.

What does it mean to be ashamed of something? To be ashamed means: *To be embarrassed by it. To be unwilling to do something because of fear about it.* The Gospel is ours and our dying world’s only hope. What’s the gospel? Well, let’s consider each of the crucial terms in this description of the gospel in Romans 1:16.

a. It’s the power of God. The gospel is the effective, transforming power of God acting on the human soul, imparting life to the dead, light to the blind, understanding to the ignorant, wisdom to the foolish, belief to the unbelieving—all of which are aspects of regeneration, the new birth.

b. It’s the power of God. It’s not man’s power or the church’s power. It’s God’s power. It never fails. All the glory and praise for it go to God alone.

c. It’s the power of God for salvation. The Gospel saves us from sin and guilt. It saves from the wrath of God. It does not though, in this life, save us from poverty, illness, natural calamity, war, crime, ignorance, a bad marriage, sorrow, etc. It saves us from something more important, sin.

d. It’s the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. You must believe to be saved by this Gospel. To those who don’t believe, not only is the Gospel not the power of God, it’s not even the gospel...it’s not good news. It’s bad news. John 3:18b, *“he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”* 1 Corinthians 1:18, *“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”*

All those who believe are saved by the Gospel. That’s the power of God. Jesus said in John 3:15-16: *“whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. It’s available for anyone and everyone.

Let me try to illustrate this. Suppose you’re not feeling well, so you decide to go to the doctor for a check-up. He says, “Let’s run some tests and see what we can find.” When the results come back, the doctor says, “I’m sorry. I’ve got some very bad news. You’ve contracted a very rare disease—the African Cheesecake Virus. You evidently got hold of a bad batch of cheesecake. Unfortunately, the disease is fatal. There’s only one cure. A medicine has just been developed but you have to take it immediately to have any chance of surviving.” You agree and take the bottle of medicine from the doctor. Then you go home, put the bottle on the shelf and promptly forget about it. So what will happen to you?

Before you answer, consider this: You’re sick, you’re dying, and you know it. The medicine will cure you. All you have to do is take it. You’ve got the medicine in your cabinet. The healing power is only inches from your lips. What will happen if you don’t take the medicine? *You’ll die.* The medicine by itself does you no good. It’s not even

good enough to own the medicine. It's not good enough to think to yourself, "I'll take that medicine someday." You've got to personally take the medicine **now...today!** If you don't, we'll be having your funeral in a few days.

It's the same with the gospel of Christ. You and I are sick with the disease of sin. Maybe you've been sick for a long time and didn't even know it. The Gospel is the medicine you need. It has the power to save you from sin. But what good will it do if you never "take the medicine?" What hope is there for you? Answer: There's no hope at all! The Gospel has the power to save you, and that power is found nowhere else but in the Gospel.

2. Discipleship begins with the Gospel. A wife said to her husband, "Shall we watch the six o'clock news and get indigestion or wait for the eleven o'clock and have insomnia?" As one wag put it, "*The evening news is where they begin with 'Good evening'—and then tell you why it isn't.*" Ours is a bad news world. If there's anything this hurting world desperately needs, it's good news. Not only the world in general, but individuals need good news. Their lives are strewn with pain, suffering and sorrow. Everyone you meet needs this good news.

The term gospel is found some 100 times in the Bible. In the original Greek, *Gospel* is the translation of the noun *euangelion* which means "good news." The verb form, *euangelizo*, means "to bring or announce good news." That's what God has called us to do...to share the good news with others, the news that saved and revolutionized our lives, we to share, not hoard or hide. But...

a. The Gospel is not... * The Gospel is not about being a good person or living a good life. Many atheists live decent lives. How good is "good"? That's the real issue. Most people have a warped idea of the true standard against which our goodness should be measured. If goodness were enough, God didn't need to send Jesus. Jesus had to come to die on the cross to make forgiveness possible. It shows *goodness* won't make someone a Christian.

*** The Gospel is not about going to church.** People go to church for a multitude of reasons. Does that mean that all of those people are Christians? Of course not. Even criminals go to church. Some go to church because it's a social habit. Others attend because their family makes them go. It's true Christians go to church and take an active part, but attending church doesn't make you a Christian.

*** The Gospel is not about believing in God.** When asked, most people will say they believe God exists, so are they all Christians? Colonel James Irwin (**picture**), remembered for his Apollo 15 moon mission, shares while he was in the Middle East a Muslim leader said to him, "You talk about God so much, why aren't you a Muslim?" If you can be a Muslim and believe in God, then it's not "believing in God" that makes you a Christian.

*** The Gospel is not about reading your Bible or praying.** Christians love the Bible. Some read it daily. Yet reading it doesn't mean you're a Christian. When Karl Marx (**picture**) was seventeen years old, he wrote a fantastic explanation on part of John's Gospel. Theologians agree with much of what he wrote, but Marx eventually rejected the Bible. Most of his life, he called himself an atheist, a Communist – anything but a Christian. Reading the Bible won't make you a Christian. And while Christians pray, so

do many other religions – Muslims, Hindus. You can pray and still not be a Christian. **b. The Gospel is about Grace.** Grace is not justice. Grace is not fairness. Grace means repentant sinners like you and me don't get what justice says we deserve.

A cartoon showed a husband and a wife standing in a long, curving line before the gates of Heaven. They were waiting for their turn to face judgment. The woman leaned over toward her husband and whispered behind her hand, "*Now Harold, whatever you do, please don't demand what's coming to you.*" She was right, because, thanks to our sin, what we all have coming to us is judgement, death and eternal separation from God. Without the cross there would be no line at the gates of heaven. That's grace!

Let me give you a mental picture to help you understand grace. Imagine you have a six-year old son you dearly love. Tragically, one day your son is horribly murdered. After a lengthy search the investigators of the crime find the murderer. At this point you have a choice. If you used every means in your power to kill the murderer for his crime, that would be *vengeance*. If, however, you're content to sit back and let the legal authorities take over and bring on him what's proper – a fair trial, a plea of guilty, capital punishment, that's *justice*. But if you should plead for the pardon of the murderer, forgive him completely, invite him into your home, and adopt him as your own son...that's *grace*. And it's exactly what God did for us!

In Jesus Christ, we receive an astounding gift, the gift of grace. Let me share an acrostic that will make it easy for you to understand and share Christ with those He brings across your path. It's based on the letters G-R-A-C-E:

"G" stands for the "Gift" of salvation. We can do nothing to earn grace; it's a gift. Ephesians 2:8 says, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith.*" It comes through Jesus who died for our sin and paid our price.

"R" stands for "Repentance." To repent means to turn. In our sin, we were walking away from God. When we turn from sin and begin to follow Christ, that's repentance. It's Peter's message in Acts 2:38, "*Repent of your sins...*"

"A" stands for "Available." It's for everyone. It means no matter how bad you've been, God's grace is available. Think of the vilest sin you've committed. Jesus paid for all of it. Think of the vilest sin you've ever heard of. Jesus paid for all of it. There is no sin beyond God's grace.

"C" stands for "Commitment." You must commit your life to Christ. Accept God's free gift of salvation. You can't work for it or earn it or buy it. It's a free gift. You must simply accept it. That's John 3:16.

"E" stands for "Eternal" life. We receive the gift of eternal life by faith the moment we come to Christ! It extends through all eternity.

3. Discipleship is evidenced by growth markers. The great Reformer, Martin Luther, (picture) said, "*We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.*" We're saved by grace through faith apart from works. But the faith that saves always results in good works. If God has imparted new life to us, that life will manifest itself by a life of good works, **growth markers**. The root of salvation always bears the fruit of a godly life. Most know Ephesians 2:8-9, yet don't realize verse 10 says, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.*" Salvation is entirely of God and will always result in a life of good works.

God has a plan for your life. His plan is to save you, then transform you to be like Jesus. *“For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers”* (Romans 8:29).

What does it mean to be like Jesus? Does it mean we have long hair, grow a beard and wear a robe and sandals?” No. We’re talking about the inner qualities of Jesus. They’re the fruits of the spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, self-control as you’re becoming more like Jesus (Galatians 5:22-23). *“And we know that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:6).

Discipleship means there are **growth markers**. Jesus loved you and now His love flows through your life. We see these growth markers in the early church. They’re normative Christianity. If you’re growing in grace, you too will have these growth markers. What are they?

a. There is a love for God – worship. Read the early chapters of the Book of Acts. The early church continually gathered to worship, to show their love for God. It’s a growth marker. A disciple wants to be in church, to gather for worship, to praise God. David wrote, *“He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD”* (Psa. 40:3). There are two vital elements of worship that are to be normal found in this verse: *celebration* and *proclamation*. David had a celebration experience with the Lord. It’s personal. There’s also a horizontal dimension. David said, *“Many will see (that is, know God's presence) and fear (or revere and be awed by him) and put their trust (or find security) in the LORD in the Lord”* (Psa. 40:3). As David praised God, many saw it.

At church we gather together and worship publicly and corporately. When the church gathers to worship, it also gathers to witness because worship always includes witness.

b. There is a love for family – small groups. It doesn’t matter how much you read your bible or pray. It doesn’t matter how devoted you are to God. You’ll never grow spiritually as God wants you to until you connect with others Christians. God designed us for community. It’s part of our spiritual DNA. We need small groups. Christianity doesn’t work by yourself. You must have others...what the New Testament calls *koinonia*.

Discipleship is about relationships. Connection is a must. Ephesians 4:15 *“Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is Christ.”* When people who care about you (love you, connected to you) speak truth into your life, you’re able to grow up into maturity. There’s no spiritual growth from being a loner. You need connections. It’s a growth marker. You’ll never grow and be what Jesus intended for you to be unless you’re part of a smaller group.

Jesus modeled community in His relationship with the 12 disciples. This community literally changed the world. We’re here today because those 12 men made a deep connection with Christ and a profound connection with each other.

It’s God’s will for us to connect. None of us can successfully connect with hundreds or thousands of people. We can only truly know and be known by a few. We can and must connect with a small group of people. God calls us to go deeper than surface relationships. He won’t allow us to just have acquaintances.

c. There is a love for others – service. Our Savior didn’t come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Every Christian is a blood-

bought servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Being a servant of Christ isn't optional if you want to grow. It's the calling of every believer. If you're not a servant of Christ, you can't rightly call yourself a Christian. It's a growth mark of discipleship. Because we're selfish by nature, we must submit to Jesus and cultivate the heart of a servant as we grow in Christ.

James declares if one has saving faith, serving others is an essential aspect of that faith. Serving is a growth marker of discipleship. Mike Waters writes, *"Our Lord and Savior set a superlative example of serving others during his brief three-year ministry...A study of the life of Christ will reveal a character unconcerned with the serving of self. Jesus took advantage of every opportunity to instill this same trait in His disciples. Christ wanted His disciples to understand that they must learn to think little of serving self and much of serving others."* Opportunities abound for those who want to be like Jesus to demonstrate their love for Him by serving others.

c. There is a love for the world – evangelism. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, Paul reminds us, *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all means I might save some."* What's he saying? Effective evangelism is flexible. The *message* never changes but the *method* of sharing it must continually change. A growth marker of discipleship is that you reproduce yourself. You love what God loves so much you share a part of your life in sharing Jesus.

As long as there are billions of people who have never heard the good news, we must commit ourselves to getting the Gospel to them. An African proverb says, *"There is only one crime worse than murder on the desert, and that is to know where the water is and not tell."* You and I know where the water is! We've got the greatest news in the world: God forgives every sinner who trusts in Jesus as Lord and Savior! We've got to tell everyone.

Here are a few practical steps. First, begin locally. Begin praying for the salvation of those you have regular contact with. Do your children know Jesus? Your grandchildren? Siblings? Pray for opportunities to talk to them about the Savior. Invite them to come to church with you. Bring your grandchildren to church. Then, educate yourself about world missions. Read about it. Pray for our missionaries. God may call some of us to go to those who have never heard. With Isaiah (6:8) respond, *"Here I am. Send me!"*

What's the mission? Discipleship. Are you a disciple? Do you have the growth markers? ***Is there a growing love for God and worship? Are you in a small group? Is there a growing love for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Is there a love for others? Are you serving others? Do you love what God loves? Do you love the world? Are you sharing the Gospel?***

Conclusion: Never be ashamed of the Gospel. Don't be ashamed to share it with everyone you meet. The Gospel alone has the power to meet the deepest needs of our

world. Social programs, politics are never going to change our world. Only the Gospel has the power to wipe away the darkest stains of sin. No one is beyond the reach of the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ.

Would you like to go to heaven? You can. There are three things you need to know: You're a sinner. Christ died for you and rose on the third day. You can be saved by trusting in Christ alone. I'm not ashamed to tell you this because I know the gospel can do for you what it's done for millions of across the centuries. Those who trust in Christ alone will never be put to shame, not in this life or in the one to come.

The gospel is good news. It's the best and most important news in the world. It's good news because it comes from God. It's good news because it tells us what Christ has done for us. It can revolutionize your life. The gospel is the reason why Grace Church exists.

The Gospel is the central message of the Bible. Therefore, we must know it. We must get the gospel right. We should know the Gospel so well, we can share it in our sleep...because we never know when God will give us an opportunity to share His life-changing truth.

The Gospel is God's plan of salvation. Therefore, we must believe it.

The Gospel is meant for everyone. It's good news for the "*vilest offenders*" Since the gospel is true, someone like even me can go to heaven. In myself I see so much that displeases me and much more that must displease the Lord. The good news of the gospel is sinners can be saved while they're still sinners simply by trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Because of the Gospel, you can know with absolute certainty that should you die tonight, you're going to heaven.

The Gospel is the foundation for discipleship. The Gospel is everything. It's our only message. The Gospel teaches us that in Christ our sins can be forgiven and the righteousness of Christ is credited to us the moment we trust in Him. We lose our sin and gain His righteousness. It happens by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This isn't just good news; it's great news! And it's the only way to be right with God.

There's a phrase from an old gospel song I love. It fits today. It's from the 2nd verse of "To God be the Glory," written by Fanny Crosby in 1875.

It goes like this: "*O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, to every believer the promise of God*" and now the key phrase: "*The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.*"

Can that be true? Can even the vilest offender be forgiven from his/her sins? Thank God, the answer is YES! Does it really happen in a moment of time? Yes! This is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Friend of mine, hold fast to the Gospel, the Good News that comes from God. For in the Gospel we find Jesus Christ. Treasure it! Share it! What more do we need? "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*"

What's our business? It's God's business – ***Discipleship!*** We are called to share the Good News. Are you? We are called to make disciples. Are you? Are you doing what God has called you to do? Discipleship is the only thing that will change this world...and it begins with you and it begins with me!