

# Grace Abounds in Discipleship

## Mark 8:27-38

### Introduction

I want to begin by thanking Matt Rugh and the youth of this congregation for leading our worship services last week. Their willingness to do so allowed two things to happen:

1. First – and this feels a bit selfish to admit – their efforts last week allowed me a Sunday off to go meet my brand new granddaughter, Chandler Sue.
2. Second, their efforts powerfully introduced our theme for the month of September: Grace Abounds.

If you have been around this church for a year or more you are aware that we take the month of September to focus on the ministries of this church so that each of you are aware how your past contributions and your future ones make everything about this church possible. And by contributions, I mean not only what you put into the offering plate but also your efforts as you serve Jesus in and through Grace Church.

Here at Grace we talk about the four T's of our stewardship:

Time  
Talents  
Treasures  
Testimony

All of this leads up to the last Sunday of this month – a day we call Consecration Sunday. On that morning each person who considers this place to be their church home will be asked to project how God is leading them to give financial and to serve with their time, talent and testimony to enhance the ministry of Grace Church.

- You should have already received our "Time and Talent" booklet. If not, additional copies are available in the narthex.
- And later this month you will receive a copy of the "2022 Estimate of Giving" card. The collective total what we put on those cards will determine the budget of this church for the next calendar year. We never budget higher than the number God is telling all of us to give.

So this month our stewardship theme is "Grace Abounds." It is a theme with a double message.

1. We are reminded that God's grace is always abounding. In fact, no matter how much we sin, God's grace always abounds more and covers that sin.

Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more ... (Romans 5:20)

2. But the theme also reminds us that because God's grace abounds, we as the body of Christ called Grace Church also abounds.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:58, NKJV)

So here's the flow ... God's grace abounds TO US and thus Grace Church abounds in what it does. Grace Abounds!

The youth kicked that off wonderfully last week as we highlighted the fact that "Grace Abounds in its ministry to youth."

- Today: Grace abounds in discipleship
- Sept 19: Grace abounds in music
- Sept. 26: Grace abounds in its impact

We look to this verse in the Gospel reading:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34)

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Let me introduce this to you with a brief video created by our denomination's Life-to-Life Discipleship team:

## SHOW VIDEO

Becoming a disciple is always connected to the relationships we build with other Christians. It is in living the faith together that we grow into our discipleship with Jesus.

Our discipleship efforts here at Grace are led by a faithful team we call the "Culture Crew." They are so named because they are charged with the responsibility of building cultivating a culture of discipleship within this congregation. That team is composed of:

Pastor Tom	Lori Fain
Amy Fraker	Dean Settles
Beth Szekacs	Jim Kreckman
Sam Poston	Darla Kalifoot

Over the past 10 years or so we as a congregation have become very convicted that our single purpose as a church is to fulfill the Great Commission:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

We realized that while there are many good things we **COULD** do, there is only one thing we **SHOULD** do.

- And we further realized that many of those good things often keep us from doing that one thing Christ has asked us to do.

- Or, worse yet, we engage in the good but become satisfied. We think that in doing good we have done the work of discipleship.

I was meeting with a group of pastors this week when one of them told us about an incredible amount of money that would be available to the Christian community to address one of the important social issues in our town.

- I was asked directly if I was excited about that news.
- My response was, "No, it frankly frightens me."
- The reason for my response, as I explained, was simple: by addressing the social need the church often thinks it has done the work of making disciples. We feel really good about what we did, but we stop short of what we are supposed to do.
- And when that happens, we become nothing more than another social agency in this town.
- But we are not a social agency. We are the church. And the church has been given the mission of making disciples.

So what does a disciple look like? Here's how we describe a disciple at Grace.

A disciple is someone who is Growing in G.R.A.C.E.

If you have been reading my articles in the church newsletter these past few months, you already know where I am going with this. But every person who considers this place to be their church home needs to understand this concept... because Grace Church abounds in discipleship. This is what we are about.

Each letter of the acronym communicates a characteristic of a disciple.

### **G: Disciples grow in God's Word**

We believe firmly that the single best way for you to grow deeper in your faith is to read your Bible. In fact research confirms that truth.

We encourage you to take at least five minutes a day. If you do that, you will be able to read the entire New Testament in less than a year. And that is where I recommend you start: Matthew 1:1. Five minutes is typically the length of one chapter.

As you finish reading, ask yourself this question: What did I read that will make a difference in how I live my life today?

If there is a verse that is especially meaningful, try to memorize it.

Doing those things will help you Grow in God's Word.

### **R: Disciple re-tell their faith story**

In essence a disciple talks to other people about Jesus. It doesn't have to be some big, long drawn out thing. We aren't talking about preaching on the street corners. It is quite simple.

- We all know people who need to know Jesus. Some of those people share your last name! So we don't have to go to Africa to find them.
- It can be as simple as asking: "How can I pray for you today?"

And as you do, you will that you are growing as a disciple of Jesus.

### **A: Disciples apply their spiritual gifts.**

The Scriptures teach us that every Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift – that is, one special way that God works in your life to build up the faith of other people.

- Some of those gifts are upfront; others are behind the scenes.
- But as you apply them, the Holy Spirit does something through you to make a difference in someone else's life.

That's what our Time and Talent ministry is about. Janet Rice, our director of Lay Ministry, can help you discover your spiritual gifts and can help guide you into areas where you can serve in your giftedness.

And as you apply those gifts, you will Grow in G.R.A.C.E.

### **C: Disciples cultivate accountable relationships with other Christians**

When God created Adam way back in the Garden of Eden, He observed that it is not good for a man to be alone. That truth is not gender specific. It is not good for anyone to be alone! We were created to be in relationship with other.

The Book of Ecclesiastes says it like this: "Two are better than one... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

There is not a person in this room who hasn't experienced a bit of loneliness in these past 18 months of a pandemic. You were not created for isolation. Deep down you know that.

So we encourage you to find a couple of fellow Christians and form what we call a "Life-to-Life" group. They don't need to be a part of this church. In fact, spread the love of Christ. But do it together. You might read Scripture together, pray together. You will encourage each other and find that you end up living life together. The Culture Crew can help you make this happen.

And as you do, you will grow in G.R.A.C.E.

### **E: Disciples exalt God in worship**

They come together as the church to praise God. That typically happens on Sunday mornings, but it is not restricted to that time or setting.

- You can worship God in the privacy of your own quiet time and space. A few weeks ago I told you about my 89-year-old Aunt Doris – the one who taught me to sing harmony. I visited her while on vacation last week. She told me that every morning at 7 a.m. she sits outside her house and sings hymns to her God. She also told me that one of her neighbors asked to pick a different hymn because they were tired of hearing whatever she had been singing!
- Private worship is wonderful, but there is something special that happens in a corporate setting that cannot be duplicated in those private times. When the church comes together, God is powerfully at work.

And so disciples exalt God in worship.

### **APPLICATION**

That's our mission here at Grace... to help people "Grow in G.R.A.C.E."

Your stewardship of time, talent, treasure and testimony make all of that possible.

Amen.