

The Next Chapter Part II – Self-Giving Love

INTRO

I was 8 years old when Grace first opened its doors.

I didn't know what to expect. My **dad** was a youth pastor who had never once preached to adults more than two weeks in a row. Our **sanctuary** was an old warehouse with a forklift in the corner. **Shoulder pads** were still a thing.

[Image: Grace's first weekend (if we can find it)]

To our surprise, more than 600 people showed up the first weekend. And then my dad preached a sermon called, "This Church Must Die," and people still came back the next week!

I had no idea what was going on. All I knew is that I was **a part of something different**, and I was very proud of our church.

Well today, nearly 29 years later, I am still very proud of Grace Church. I love this community and what we stand for.

And now, in a twist that I never could have expected 6 years ago, I find myself with the privilege of *leading* this community as its **new senior pastor**.

It's humbling and honestly still a bit hard to wrap my mind around. But I want you to know, Grace Church, how grateful I am for this opportunity and I am eager to see how God will lead.

Before we dive in, I'd love to pray.

[PRAY]

SERIES INTRO

For the next three weeks, I want to talk about my vision for **the future of Grace** - what I see coming in the days ahead.

Not because I'm some upstart whipper-snapper out to turn us in some wild new direction, but because where we are going is thanks in large part to where we've already been.

I'm going to talk about **three ideas** which, I believe, are at the *core* of what makes Grace *Grace* both in the past and in the future.

Next week, I want to talk about what I call the "**humble pursuit of truth**" - our approach to Scripture, to listening to the Spirit, to making sense of our world.

In week 3, I will talk about Grace being "**a refuge in the storm**" - how we practice loving our neighbors; how we live up to our name.

But today, I want to talk about an idea that I believe is not only at the very center of what drives our church, but it's at the core of what it even means to follow Jesus.

If you **got tired** of hearing my dad talk about "destiny," well get ready to be tired of me talking about this: self-giving love.

THIS CHURCH MUST DIE

Now, "self-giving love" is not a new concept. It's just what I call the posture we are to take as followers of Jesus. A posture of surrender, of sacrifice, and of humility.

It actually has a lot to do with **the first sermon my dad ever preached here**. "This Church Must Die."

I thought about naming *this* sermon "This Church Must Stay Dead!", but that didn't seem quite right. The fact is, "This Church Must Die" is still a perfect way to encapsulate what this idea is all about because it is a ongoing act.

We are called - individually and corporately - to **surrender** our desires, to

surrender our comfort - sometimes even our safety - for the sake of God's mission and for the sake of one another.

This church must die.

PHILIPPIANS 2

For me, this idea is expressed nowhere better in Scripture than Philippians 2, so why don't you turn there with me?

Philippians 2:1-11

[announce Twitch Stream next Saturday, June 13, 10am - @barryrod]

[image: twitch with Pastor Barry]

A bit of context. Philippi was a **Roman colony** in Greece, and being a Roman citizen was a very big deal - looking like a Roman, talking like a Roman, acting like a Roman...

But throughout this letter, Paul basically says, "No, you're not a citizen of Rome anymore. You're a citizen of Heaven. And because of that: here's what a citizen of *Heaven* looks like and talks like and acts like."

As we see, in many ways the behaviors he describes are completely the opposite of what was valued in Rome. For example, Roman culture highly valued status and power and esteem. Not so much in the kingdom of Heaven. Let's see what Paul says...

Philippians 2:1-11

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others

as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

*Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Alright. Put simply, Paul is saying that in our relationships, a citizen of Heaven should have the same attitude - the same posture - as Jesus.

Not a particularly shocking thing for Paul to say. I mean, **of course Jesus should be our example** (Love your neighbor, turn the other cheek... yeah yeah yeah).

It doesn't strike us as all that intense until you realize what Paul is actually implying here.

Take a look at verse 8. We're supposed to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus - the son of God who gave up his divine privileges, who appeared in human form, and then, look: who *humbled himself*.

He humbled himself and died on a cross.

Now in our culture, that seems admirable. **We think of humility as a virtue.** But in Ancient Rome? It was anything but. In Roman culture, everything depended on you having status.

If you were humbled, it was something someone did to you. You were defeated in battle, you were publicly shamed, you were enslaved...

Humility wasn't a virtue. It was a curse. It might make more sense for us to use the word "humiliate." Jesus was humiliated on that cross.

And yet no one did that *to* him. Verse 8. Jesus humiliated - he humbled - *himself*. He set aside his own status, his own *life*, for the sake of others. His love was **self-giving**.

And *that* is the attitude *we* are supposed to have. Verse 4 - taking an interest in others' needs, and not just our own. Verse 3 - not being selfish. And, probably most provocative of all, **thinking of others as better than ourselves.**

It's an uncomfortable idea. Last year, during **Hope Month**, I was preaching about issues of racism and discrimination and hatred and I used this passage as the foundation for that.

I argued that all of us, but especially those of us in the majority culture, need to practice setting aside our status, lowering ourselves and considering others as better than ourselves. And I got pushback for that!

People said, "whoa, whoa, whoa. Isn't equality the goal here? We're not supposed to think of others as *better* than us. That's not fair."

All I could do was point them to the Bible and say, "I'm not making this up!"

Philippians 2:5 - we “must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” And he humiliated himself - he literally died for us. It was an attitude of complete self-sacrifice. That should be our attitude. He said it himself:

Matthew 16:24

If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.

My point in all of this is that we as the Church are not called to be nice to each other. We’re not called to be a *friendly* community. **We are called to be a *sacrificial community*** - a community where we willingly lower ourselves for one another in self-giving love.

This church must die!

HOW?

Now, again. I don’t believe this is a new idea for Grace Church. We’ve been working on this since the very beginning.

-We’ve been **led by pastors and elders and staff and volunteers** who value humility and authenticity, not power and success.

-When the **iron curtain** fell in the 90s and we had an opportunity to share the gospel in the former Soviet Union, we didn’t send money to some far-off missionaries. Our own people went. 20 Grace people disrupted their lives and careers to move to Russia.

-From the earliest days as a church we developed **international partnerships** where we Americans came as *learners*, not as saviors. We lowered ourselves to elevate the voices of leaders in the developing world.

-And more recently we’ve created a **Care Center** where we serve our friends not as charity cases, but as brothers and sisters. As we serve, we consider them better than ourselves.

Now, we haven't always done it perfectly. As **comfort-loving, safety-prioritizing, individualistic, suburban Americans** we have a long way to go before we realize the vision of communal self-sacrifice Paul is describing here.

But I believe we are well on our way. Our heart is in the right place. From day one we've aspired to be a church that dies so that others can live.

A church **that sets aside our power and status and wealth and comfort** to show our broken world what the love of Jesus really means.

So what's that going to look like in the days ahead? Where is God taking us? Well, let me tell you what I see coming...

First of all, I believe we are going to become more **multigenerational** than ever before. Our culture is awakening to just how hollow it is to spend all of your time with people in your exact same life stage.

If we want our world to experience healing, we need to practice self-giving love with one another - across generations. **Those of us who are younger** need to get over ourselves and start listening to and learning from our elders.

Those of us who are older need to start stepping back and becoming mentors, lifting up the next generation to lead.

No. It's not comfortable. It's way more fun to hang out with people just like us.

But if we want to practice self-giving love - if we want to model our lives after Jesus - we must dedicate ourselves to volunteer teams and life groups and communities made up of people from all life stages. **Spiritual family. Not just church friends.**

So, we'll become more multigenerational. We'll also become more **multicultural.**

I've talked about this before, but we are at **a turning point in human history**. Different cultures and ethnicities and nationalities are connecting and interacting globally like never before.

Yes, even here in central Indiana. Just look at our **elementary schools**, where dozens of languages are spoken. Where American students from white, black, Latino, and Asian communities are learning side by side.

Generation Z - the generation right after millennials - they don't know anything other than a world that's radically diverse.

And we are positioned to be a church that reflects that diversity.

Not because it's politically correct. Not because it's trendy. But because a rich, multicultural community reflects **the diversity of the kingdom of God** and brings **all the gifts of Christ's church** to bear in our broken world.

This will take self-giving love. It will take humility. Take it from me. I've spent years living in other countries and cross-cultural work is no joke. It's *hard*!

But it is worth it. We have *so much* to learn from one another. And when we "work together with one mind and purpose," as Paul says in Philippians 2, **that's when the church becomes strong**. When the gates of Hell can't stand against us.

That's when our mission kicks into high gear, and we see our world healing like never before.

Finally, if we can commit as a church to practicing self-giving love, we will continue **to grow in genuine compassion** when our world needs it most.

As a case-in-point, the black community in our country right now - including here at Grace - is in anguish. Decades and centuries of injustice have boiled over into absolute despair at the killing of George Floyd.

And yet, **how have so many in our country responded?** With defensiveness. With finger-pointing. With demonization.

Not here. Not at Grace Church. In Philippians 2, Paul asks, is there “any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?” Because those are characteristics of self-giving love.

We will be a church that has compassion for the suffering of others.

To the black community, especially those of you who are a part of our spiritual family here at Grace. Let me speak on behalf of the rest of us.

We acknowledge the injustice and oppression you have faced and continue to face. We acknowledge your pain and grief. We cannot bear it *for* you, but we will bear it *with* you. We lament and we grieve at your side.

And we will give of ourselves to bring *justice* into our world. Not through flash-in-the-pan gestures which make *us* feel better, but with decades of compassionate, self-giving work to make things *right*.

I know you may think those are **just words**. You’ve heard a lot of words like that over the years.

All I can tell you is this: as the senior pastor of Grace Church, **my heart’s desire** is to dedicate myself and this church to compassionate justice in the name of Jesus.

We will be a church of self-giving love.

CONCLUSION

None of this is easy, folks. Multigenerational, multicultural, compassionate... these postures will cost us. But friends, listen to me: **this church must die.**

But I hope you hear me when I say that it’s in that dying that we will find true

life.

- **Multiple generations** serving and teaching one another
- **Many cultures** bringing their gifts to build the body of Christ together
- A community of **genuine compassion** healing brokenness in Jesus' name

As we set aside our individual agendas and start jumping in with where the Holy Spirit is moving, *that's* when we find ourselves arm in arm with the risen Jesus, joining *his* mission. It's where we are called to be.

No, **Grace has never been a comfortable church to attend.** This is a church where you are challenged to surrender, challenged to serve, and challenged to grow in self-giving love.

I get it if that's not your cup of tea.

But if you are willing to trust us and join us on this journey of healing the world, I can promise you one thing: you will discover Jesus. You will find your purpose. And you will awaken to your God-given destiny - the very reason you were born.