



# ADVENT

**'ad,vent** noun  
the arrival of a  
person, thing,  
or event



**CHRISTMAS  
EVE SERVICE**

**1PM & 3PM**

**NORTH LIBERTY**

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Learn more and/or sign up for events on [graceb3.org/events](https://graceb3.org/events)

## December

**Advent Devotional** • Sign up for our 4-week devotional to prepare your heart for Christmas. A new devotional is available every Wednesday. Sign up by texting 'Advent21' to 94253.

### Dec 10 • 7PM

**Carols, Cookies, & Cocoa** • Join the Women's Ministry for a time of worship and fellowship.

### Dec 24 • 1PM or 3PM

**Christmas Eve Service** • Remember the reason for the season at Grace on Christmas Eve. Family sit-together for all ages.

### Dec 26

**Third Service Cancelled** • Services are as usual at 8am and 9:30am. Children's program available for 0-2 years for both services.



## A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM PASTOR BROOKS

*By Pastor Brooks Simpson*

### **This coming April will mark my twenty-fifth year as a pastor at Grace Community Church.**

I have given my best years to serving Christ in the local church and it is my intent to do so as long as I am able. At the age of 54, I am looking at the remaining years God shall give me and I desire to steward them for the building up of the church and the praise of His glory. It is for this reason that I will be taking a sabbatical ministry leave for three months

from mid January through mid April of 2022. During my tenure as a pastor, no one has taken a sabbatical at Grace, so I know you may have some questions. My hope is that this article will help to address them, specifically the four questions below. For more information I encourage you to read the accompanying article, written by the Elder Board, which goes into further details about my sabbatical.

***What is a sabbatical?***

***Why do we need a sabbatical?***

***What will our sabbatical look like?***

***How will the church benefit?***

### **What is a Sabbatical?**

A sabbatical is a guided process that enables a pastor to disengage from normal ministry and leadership involvement for a period of time to allow for evaluation of life and ministry.

Those who constantly feed others need to take time to be fed themselves. Martyn Lloyd-Jones took two months off each summer, and filled it with reading. Charles Spurgeon took regular sabbaticals in France and other locations. Some prominent pastors today, like John Piper and Tim Keller, take regular breaks for reading, writing, and refreshment. While a sabbatical is a time for refreshment and renewal, there are several things a sabbatical is not...

***It is not a vacation.*** Unlike vacations, sabbaticals involve a plan, a goal, and accountability. Sabbaticals are not in lieu of, or a replacement for, earned vacation time.

***It is not academic leave.*** Theological education is extremely demanding and does not allow for emotional, spiritual, and relational renewal. It is not possible to focus on these while pursuing formal continuing education.

***It is not an escape.*** A sabbatical is not a way for pastoral staff to escape a troubled ministry. They must face such troubles and deal with them before true rest is possible. Similarly, a sabbatical should never be viewed as a time to search for a new place of ministry. I am here for the long haul. My sabbatical is to strengthen my ministry, not to run from it.

### **Why Do We (Stacy and I) Need a Sabbatical?**

After my back injury, and recovery from surgery, it would be logical to connect my injury and recovery with a need for extended rest. But that's not the case here. My sabbatical was planned before I was injured. There are at least two reasons I can think of for why we need a sabbatical. (And I will discover more reasons we needed a sabbatical once we are in it.) First, as the new Lead Pastor, I need to hear from the Lord as to how I am to use my gifts to lead well. Second, Stacy and I want to finish *strong*. Allow me to share a little of what I mean by each of these statements.

### ***Learning a New Role***

For most of my tenure, I have served Grace Community Church

as one of the multiple elders who provided the bulk of the teaching, but I was not the Lead Pastor. Before December of 2020, we did not have a Lead Pastor. This role is new to me, and if I am to lead well I need to hear from the Lord about how I should steward my gifts to serve Grace best in this new role. Grace has gone from 200 in weekly attendance in 1998 to 1300 in 2019, to an unknown number in 2020, and rising past 700 so far in 2021. We underwent a complete church restructure in 2020, and recently purchased 15 acres, giving us more options for future ministry. If I am to lead well, I need space to hear from the Lord on how best

to steward my gifts to provide vision and direction for the next 15+ years.

### *We want to finish strong.*

Personally, I don't feel tired. While I am recovering from an injury, I don't feel I need a rest, and I am not burning out. But, if Stacy and I want to finish strong, the best time to step back is before burnout occurs. Likewise, waiting until a crisis occurs before resting would not be a responsible plan for longevity. Longevity in pastoral ministry is rare as data from Fuller Institute, George Barna, and Pastoral Care Inc. shows:



**1500**  
clergy leave pastoral  
ministry each month.

**50%**  
pastors would leave  
the ministry if they  
had another way of  
making a living.

**50%**  
pastors have  
considered leaving  
the ministry in the  
last month.

**83%**  
clergy spouses want  
their spouse to leave  
pastoral ministry.

**50%**  
ministers starting out  
will not last 5 years.



Only 1 out of 10 ministers will  
retire as a minister in some form.

We plan to finish this race well, but we won't unless we walk in wisdom. Christians have an unseen spiritual enemy who labors to see us fail. Discipline and endurance are traits God provides that allow us to press on when we would rather quit. But these same gifts become a detriment if we are not led by the Spirit. Our enemy knows how to exploit our strengths and use them against us. The following illustration demonstrates how strengths can become weaknesses.

In 2014 I decided I was going to run a marathon. I don't particularly like running, but I enjoy pushing myself to do things that require training and discipline. To prepare, I did my research on how to train for running 26.2 miles, and I understood it would require building a cardiovascular base, gradually increasing training mileage no more than 10% each week as the event approached. I also understood that the training phase required building rest into the weekly schedule. I "understood" all of that, but I felt my body did not need as much rest as the running experts seemed to suggest. They "don't know me", I reasoned, and I did not feel I needed rest. As my miles increased each week, I felt great, and I did not feel I needed

the suggested rest. I reasoned that I knew my body better than the experts. I reasoned that I competed at the highest level in the sport of wrestling, and I knew the limits of my body. By the time I had built my weekly long distance run up to 18 miles, my Achilles tendon started to hurt. I was icing it, taking ibuprofen, and stretching, but it was not getting better. With my first marathon only a month away, I reasoned that I could not afford to back off in my training, so I decided to push through the pain.

One Saturday morning, I headed out the door and down the driveway for my 18-mile run. With each step, pain shot through my left Achilles tendon. Each step brought pain and the following mental sequence replayed in a repeating loop, *"This hurts. I wonder if I should stop? No, give it one more stride and it will loosen up."* If you look up moron on Wikipedia, there will be a photo of me running on the side of the road thinking I can take just one more stride. Somewhere around mile ten, my OTHER leg intervened the way a loving family sits an addict down and commits them to rehab. If my right calf muscle could have spoken, it would have said, *"If you are too proud and/or stupid to listen to your left Achilles tendon who is begging you to rest, I am*

*conducting an intervention on behalf of the rest of your body and declaring we are DONE!" I could not take another step. I called Stacy and told her where to find me on the side of the road. Not only did I NOT finish the race I had trained for, I didn't even make it to the starting line. I ignored the experts and I overtrained. I failed to give my body adequate rest and my body rebelled.*

That's how I am wired. It's a combination of a healthy desire to accomplish something worthwhile and an unhealthy pride where I tell myself I don't need rest like other people. The same tendency that knocked me out of a marathon before it started could take me out of a far more important race.

***"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."***

***1 Corinthians 9:24-27***

I memorized this verse before I went into ministry, and I have been running this race as a pastor for 25 years.

But I and others have noticed the signs of "overtraining." I love what I do the way a runner loves running, but I am only half way finished in this marathon as pastor of Grace. The spiritual Achilles is tightening up and telling me that rest is needed. While I don't feel like I need to rest, the signs of overtraining are showing. For me it looks like a Martha complex (read Luke 10:38-42).

Martha is serving the meal for Jesus and His disciples while her sister Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet soaking in His words. For the last 25 years, I have been making the spiritual meal for others through preaching, leading, and counseling. After 25 years, I find it difficult to read the Bible without thinking, "How can I prepare this for others?" There is a danger of finding my worth and identity in how well I prepare the meal for everybody else. Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better portion and it won't be taken from her. I find it hard to sit at Jesus' feet without constantly making it about how to feed the disciples at the table. It is wise to

sit at Jesus' feet before burnout takes me out of the race.

It's strategic for the devil to sideline a pastor. We are not different from any other disciple running after Jesus, but the reward of taking a spiritual leader out of the race makes pastors a bigger target. I entered ministry in the summer of 1997. Within six months, Stacy contracted Lyme disease and my son contracted Wegner's disease. Ryan was healed miraculously in 1997, but Stacy was not. Instead, she went undiagnosed for six more years and suffered immensely. From Stacy,

*"The last time I remember having 100% health was the summer of 1997. Brooks went into ministry in 1997 and my health went down hill. My health declined but the ministry did not stop. I went into survival mode and did my best to raise our kids."*

The message from the enemy was clear – "If you serve Jesus, I will strike the ones you love." The enemy has done his best to hammer us through Stacy's chronic suffering. After her Lyme disease diagnosis in 2004, she improved enough to function and get by, but she never returned to her pre-ministry self. Over the last five years, she has had four

major surgeries, and is in almost constant pain somewhere: head, back, knees, hands, or foot. The physical, emotional, and spiritual cost of chronic pain by itself is high enough, but the cost of chronic pain while married to a man in ministry is an added burden. As she suffers I suffer, but we keep running the race replaying the same thought over and over in our heads,

*"This hurts. I wonder if we should stop? No, give it one more stride and it will loosen up."*

We are under no illusions that if we take a rest, Stacy will stop suffering. Life doesn't work that way. We pray for healing, but suffering will be a reality as long as we are in this life. What we need now is time to rest, reflect, refocus, and align our hearts as man and wife who serve the Lord together under the unique circumstances of chronic pain. Sometimes the physically and spiritually wounded need to step off the front line of the battle. It's not a new or novel concept; it's called a sabbath rest. God told His people they needed rest, the animals needed rest, and the land needed rest. Everything needed rest. Why? Because God designed the universe that way. God created the universe in six

days and then He rested. The sabbath is designed to restore and refresh. The trouble is that since God gave the command to rest, His people have rarely taken His command seriously.

I have heard it said, “the Devil doesn’t take time off so why should we?” If that means we should always be clothed in the spiritual armor then that statement is biblical. We should never take a break from the spiritual disciplines. We never shed our spiritual armor. But if we assume that Christians should not come off the front line of the battle because Satan does not, then it is an ignorant statement. The Devil is our enemy, not a role model. If I am to lead Grace over the long haul, I must do so in the strength and power of the Lord and not some pseudo-macho mentality that is spun from hell and not the Spirit of Christ.

### **What Will Our Sabbatical Look like?**

It will begin January 17, 2022 and end April 23, 2022. Grace will be one year into a complete leadership and staff reorganization and there are no new initiatives starting up. The sabbatical will consist of five phases, and I will report twice a month to Jim Sabin, the chair of

the Elder Board, as my sabbatical advisor, and a sabbatical support group monthly which will be determined later. Each phase is as follows:

## **5 Phases of Sabbatical**

### **Phase 1: Release & Relinquish**

### **Phase 2: Rest & Recovery**

### **Phase 3: Reflect & Refocus**

### **Phase 4: Realignment**

### **Phase 5: Re-Entry & Re-Engagement**

#### **Phase 1 - Release and Relinquish**

Three to five months before the sabbatical, we will draw up a plan for sabbatical as well as a plan for handing off ministry responsibilities for the duration of the sabbatical. This will be done in conjunction with the staff and the Elder Board.

#### **Phase 2 - Rest and Recovery (1 month)**

This is a time for rest. The focus here is to cease from what is necessary (day in and day out ministry needs) and engage in what is life-giving.

#### **Phase 3 - Reflect and Refocus (1 month)**

The focus here is to ask and

expect to hear an answer to the question: Lord, is there anything you want to say to me? This is a time to read, meditate, write, and pray.

#### ***Phase 4 - Realignment (1 month)***

The focus here is to answer the question, "What changes in my life and ministry should we make as a result of the Reflection Phase?" This is a time for rekindling and clarifying vision for ministry.

#### ***Phase 5 - Re-Entry and Re-Engagement***

This is the return to ministry at Grace. Ministry is a marathon. If we are to finish strong and lead well, we must stop running, sit at Jesus' feet, and learn from Him. His yoke is meant to be easy and light. After 25 years of serving Christ, it is quite probable that

we have taken on yokes that were not meant to be ours. Lord willing, we will return to ministry, yoked to Christ alone. We will be refreshed, energized, and equipped to continue to run the race He has for us. 🌿

***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (emphasis added)***

# SABBATICAL

By Elder Jim Sabin



In his article, Brooks has done an excellent job of explaining what a sabbatical is, what it isn't, and the reasons he and Stacy are seeking this sabbatical. I would like to take a few minutes and share with you the Elder Board's perspective.

Starting about two years ago the entire elder team realized that there was significant dysfunction in the leadership structure here at Grace. We settled on the term "stuck" to describe the problem. Styles of leadership, processes, and procedures that worked fine when we were a church of a couple hundred people were not serving very well a church of roughly thirteen hundred people spread across two campuses. Brooks stepped up and took primary responsibility for leading us through a significant restructuring process. Our new leadership structure has been in place now for about twelve months. Under this new structure, Brooks has moved from being our Teaching Pastor to being our Lead Pastor.

If your only or primary impression of Brooks is listening to him preach on Sunday mornings, the difference between a Teaching

Pastor and Lead Pastor may not appear to be any different, but the differences are significant. While he continues to provide the majority of the Sunday morning preaching, he also has responsibility for vision casting for the church, assembling (meaning hiring and firing) and organizing a senior leadership team, and providing high level direction and oversight for this team. These additional responsibilities also involve more frequent and more involved interactions with the Elder Board.

The Elder Board has been very pleased with Brooks' performance in this new role. He has demonstrated wisdom, discernment, and good communication skills in every aspect of his new position. With our new leadership structure in place, Grace is preparing to start the next steps of our spiritual journey. If you have been attending or listening to either the North Liberty or Downtown messages, you are

aware that these next steps involve an increased emphasis on discipleship and outreach ministry. Brooks will have a significant role in equipping and leading senior leadership and staff in this effort. As he states in his article, he and Stacy have been involved in full-time ministry at Grace for 25 years now and they have endured much during that time.

Stacy's name, like the names of our other staff pastors' wives, do not appear on any organization chart. Our pastors' wives have neither titles nor official positions. But that is misleading. A pastor's wife is involved directly or indirectly in most every aspect of their husband's ministry. They carry a heavy, if unseen, ministry burden that is seldom fully acknowledged or appreciated. Their ministry burden becomes even heavier when ministry is hard – and ministry is certainly hard at times. Stacy's burden has been especially heavy due to her on-going health issues. As we prepare for our new outreach and discipleship emphasis, it seems like the perfect time for Brooks and Stacy to have a time of sabbath rest, reflection, and renewal.

As is readily apparent in Brooks'

article, a sabbatical is not to be entered into lightly or haphazardly. It is a strategic maneuver intended to benefit those taking the sabbatical as well as those who are being served. To that end, my wife Peggy and I have been working closely with Brooks and Stacy, and we will continue to flesh out the details of their sabbatical plan. As the purpose of this plan is to maximize the benefit of their time away, accountability is a key aspect. As Brooks has stated in his article, this accountability will include bi-weekly reports to me as his sabbatical advisor as well as monthly reports to his sabbatical support group.

Part of our planning process has included the best way to inform the body about this sabbatical. Anytime there is an announcement of this magnitude there is often a tendency to "read between the lines." While this is a natural temptation, it often leads to unhelpful speculation. In our discussions regarding how best to make this announcement, we have identified some questions that might arise. The remainder of this article is intended to address these questions to help bring better understanding to the congregation.

***Q1: Is Brooks planning to leave Grace? Is this sabbatical intended to give him time to consider a potential career change?***

No, Brooks and I have discussed this at some length and he has no plans to leave Grace or change careers. As he has clearly stated in his article, his expressed desire is to serve at Grace for as long as God gives him the strength. Like many pastors in his age group, he is beginning to focus on his end game. At the end, his desire is to be able to state, as the Apostle Paul did, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:7).

***Q2: Is Brooks being disciplined? Is the board requiring that he take this time away to address some issue or issues in his life?***

No, as I have stated above, the board is very pleased with the way Brooks has stepped into his new role as Lead Pastor. The sabbatical is not a response to any professional or personal shortcomings. Brooks requested the sabbatical for he and Stacy to rest, refresh, and refocus themselves.

***Q3: Who will preach while Brooks is away?***

Grace is blessed to have a number of qualified elders/pastors who can accurately, passionately, and effectively minister the word on Sundays. During this time, the preaching load will be shared between Josh Haveman (Executive Pastor), Jason Blackley (Downtown Campus Pastor), Dave Kirk (Spiritual Formation Pastor), Paul Hansen (Global Outreach Pastor), and Greg Gilbaugh (Elder Emeritus).

***Q4: What if I don't like the others' preaching as much as Brooks?***

I don't want to appear insensitive to this question, but if you are a member or regular attender at Grace, our hope and prayer is that your major concern with the Sunday morning teaching ministry is in its accuracy with respect to the text and its applicability to your life as opposed to a particular person's style of presentation. Each of the men listed above regularly share the preaching load with Brooks and each has amply demonstrated their ability to accurately handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Our desire is that each one of us who calls Grace home be Christ followers and not men followers (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

***Q5: Should I expect to see Brooks and Stacy on Sunday morning, or Sunday evening downtown?***

No. Refer to sabbatical phases 2-4 in Brooks' article. This is a time away. Additionally, unless he and Stacy have made previous arrangements with you personally, do not expect to be in contact with them during this time.

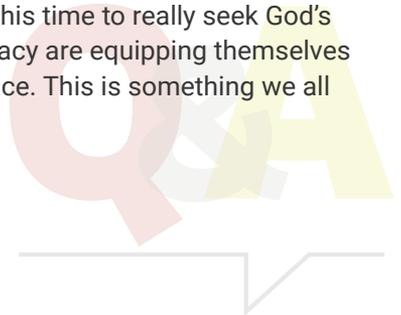
***Q6: Who should I speak with if I have questions or concerns about Brooks' sabbatical?***

Josh Haveman and I are probably the most engaged with Brooks regarding this sabbatical. Both of us would be happy to address any additional questions or concerns you might have. You should also feel free to approach any other member of the Elder Board if needed. Please do not approach Brooks or Stacy directly.

***Q7: How can I pray for Brooks and Stacy while on sabbatical?***

That is an excellent question and reveals a caring heart. There are two basic answers to that question. The first is to very carefully reread Brooks' article. As is his style, he is very transparent regarding his strengths and weaknesses, Stacy's long-term health issues, and their goals and desires for this sabbatical. Pray specifically for those areas in which he has shared his heart. Additionally, I would encourage you to take Romans 8:26 to heart. As Brooks and Stacy come to mind, there will be times when you really are not exactly sure how best to pray for them. Just pray for them anyway and take God at His word that the Spirit will intervene for them on your behalf.

In closing, I would just like to reiterate that we consider this sabbatical to be good news, not just for Brooks and Stacy, but for the entire Grace body. We have a Lead Pastor who desires to minister to this body for as long as God gives him strength. In taking this time to really seek God's rest, renewal, and direction, Brooks and Stacy are equipping themselves for their next phase of ministry here at Grace. This is something we all should be excited about. 🌿



## GENERAL FUND INCOME STATEMENT

April 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021

	General Fund	Focused Giving Fund	Total
<b>Revenue</b>			
Giving	988,461	21,873	1,010,335
Other Revenue	11,057	0	11,057
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>999,518</b>	<b>21,873</b>	<b>1,021,392</b>
<b>Expenses (By Area)</b>			
Payroll	756,354	0	756,354
Senior Leadership	1,142	0	1,142
Communications & Connections	10,360	2,364	12,725
Spiritual Formation	15,436	0	15,436
NextGen	16,360	1,106	17,466
Global Outreach	58,435	2,500	60,935
Downtown	32,287	2,248	34,535
Operations	118,897	425	119,322
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,009,271</b>	<b>8,643</b>	<b>1,017,913</b>
<b>Net Income/(Loss)</b>	<b>(9,752)</b>	<b>13,231</b>	<b>3,478</b>

### FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

*By Pastor Josh Haveman*

#### GENERAL FUND GIVING

September general fund giving was \$161,805, which is a 7% increase over last month. Year-to-date, general fund giving is \$91,500, or 8%, behind budget.

#### FOCUSED GIVING

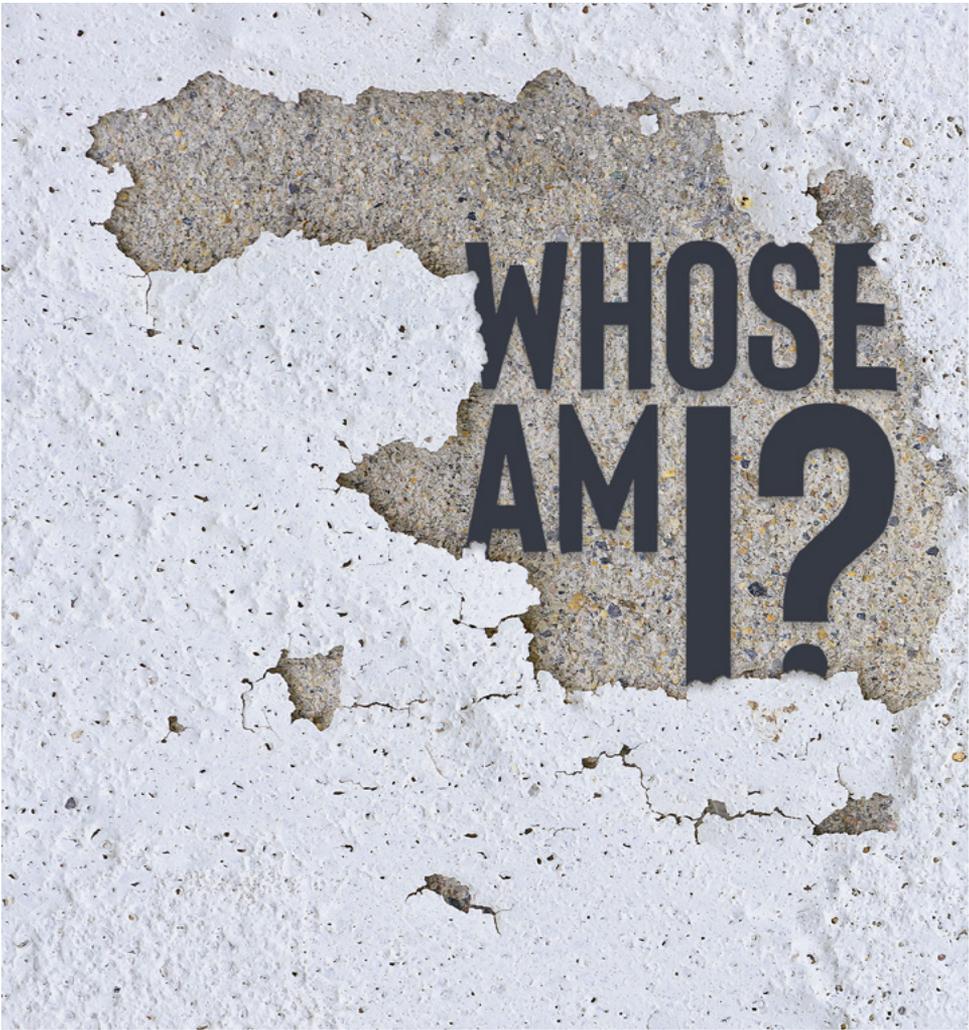
Year-to-date focused giving has brought in \$21,873. This money cannot be put to general fund needs because it has been allocated for specific expenditures.

#### SPENDING

Through September, overall spending is less than our budget by \$174,000, or 15%. 40% of this underspend is in the payroll category. Facilities, Human Resources, and Technology make up another 40% of that underspend as we have held off on some facility improvements, hiring, and computer replacements.

#### CONCLUSION

While we have spent significantly less money than we had budgeted to spend this year, giving still doesn't cover our total spending so far this year. Please consider how you might contribute to the needs of the church in the coming months.



# WHOSE AM I?

*By Pastor Jason Blackley*

**I will never forget being a part of the Downtown Church plant in the Summer of 2013! The excitement. The newness. The mission. The people. I will never forget the endless planning and praying with Dan Bovenmyer, Ryan Simpson and the elders of Grace.**

Churches are planted in many ways and for many reasons, some more biblical

and some less. Even with our Downtown Church, there are things I am so thankful we did, and a few things I would do differently if I could.

Church planting, though seemingly a new phenomenon to Western Christianity, is 2,000 years old. We would not have the New Testament epistles if it were not for church plants. The majority of

the epistles are pastors (mainly Paul) writing letters to churches they either planted or were a part of planting.

Beginning Sunday December 26, we will spend 14 weeks learning about one such church plant. As we read, study, learn from and obey the book of Philippians, we will see not only how God starts churches, but we will see who are as a church. While we often think about who we are as individuals, we can only begin to answer the question when we ask who we are collectively, as the church.

In Philippians, we see a church started by the most unlikely group of characters. In fact, if they attended high school, they would have all been voted least likely to even GO to church! As we read the origins of this church in Acts chapter 16, we see this church started by a former persecutor of the faith (Paul), a wealthy woman from Asia Minor (Lydia), an enslaved girl from Greece (who has some unusual gifts lets say), and a Macedonian jailer.

I often think, "I am not only not fit to lead a church, I am not fit to go to church!" The book of Philippians shows us that the church of God is not made up of the best, brightest, and wealthiest. It is made up of those who have been redeemed.

In 2:2, we read Paul write that the church can and should have "the same mind, and the same love." In a world of such division (which is nothing new), how can you find or become a church like that? We learn how in the whole epistle, but particularly in verse 5, when we read, "Have this mind among you which is yours in Christ..." Paul is saying that if we are in Christ, then we have His mind towards others. We now serve and love others. Not because we are good, but as Paul writes in chapter 3, we can now "press on" to make our faith our own, because, "we are not our own." We no longer belong to our religious affiliation (Paul), our societal standing (Lydia), our occupation (jailer), or by our literal enslaver (enslaved girl). We belong to Christ. A church is a group of people united together in Jesus name... that's it. All other allegiances or identities are secondary and/or temporary. This is where and how we answer the question "Who am I?"

Come along with us through this journey in Philippians to find out who and whose you are. Read, study, ask questions, and "press on to make it your own" because In Christ, we find all we need. 🌿

# WHAT'S MISSING?

By Pastor Brooks Simpson

## Have you ever read the promises that Jesus made and wondered if you were missing something?

When Jesus spoke to His disciples He promised they would be victorious. Jesus promised that His followers would experience:

- Peace and rest. *Matthew 11:28–30*
- Spirit-empowered deeds infused with purpose. *John 14:12–14*
- A loving and victorious community. *Matthew 16:18*
- An intimate and personal relationship with God. *John 17:3*

If we look at the average Christian experience, it does not look like the life Jesus promises. The average Christian:

- Is stressed out, and not at peace.
- Sees their deeds as mundane and not empowered or purposeful.
- Is involved in a community which is neither loving nor victorious.
- Does not describe their

relationship with God as intimate.

Why doesn't the average Christian reality line up with what Jesus promised? What are we missing?

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5*

Think about what Jesus is saying. It's possible – even likely – that those who follow Jesus will attempt to serve Jesus without Jesus. These people may know doctrine. They may know the Bible stories. They may sometimes even know theology, but they don't know Jesus. **Knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus.**

Jesus did not ascend into Heaven leaving His disciples with a list of commands only. Jesus ascended into Heaven with a promise He would give Himself by giving them His Spirit.

*If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help*

*you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14:15-17:15*

Have you found yourself reading Jesus' promises and commands and wondering, "What am I missing? Why is this so hard? Why do I even lack the desire to obey? Why does my worship seem more like duty than devotion? Why does my personal relationship with Jesus seem to lack the personal presence of Jesus?" If so, you are not alone.

Somewhere between hearing the gospel and the command, "go make disciples," we seemed to have missed the *how*. How, not as in what to do, say, or be, but how as in **where are we supposed to derive the courage, the power, the gifting, and the will to do that which we are not able to do in and of ourselves**. Were we not paying attention? Was it too hard to understand? Was the teaching

ignored? I don't know the reason we know so little about the Spirit's work, but this is an area we lack knowledge. I do know that unless we embrace the provision Jesus provides us through His Spirit, we will only know about Jesus without ever really knowing Him.

During Advent we usually celebrate the coming of Jesus, and we will again this December (the word "advent" translates to "arrival"). But as we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, we'll also study the advent of the Holy Spirit—seeking to know Jesus by knowing the Spirit He promises to send to His followers. The first sermon will be on Sunday, Nov. 28: The Introduction, "Who is the Holy Spirit?" The following sermons leading up to the Christmas Eve services will be on:

12/5 | **The Promise, "Be Baptized"**  
 12/12 | **The Command, "Be Filled"**  
 12/19 | **The Journey, "Be Led"**

Join us, drink deep of His Spirit this Advent season, and let Jesus change your life. 🌿

# ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Weekly devotionals on Wednesdays in December.  
Sign up by texting 'Advent21' to 94253.

By Pastor Dave Kirk

# THRIVE CLASSES

## Winter 2021-22

Paul wrote this verse to encourage the church at Ephesus about a couple of things. The first thing is that everyone is a minister of the gospel, and the second is we all must be equipped so there is unity and maturity in the body. This is really the heartbeat of why we offer Thrive classes in the fall and winter. We want to equip everyone with the tools needed to be an effective minister of the gospel in their homes, schools, jobs, and wherever else they may find themselves. While there are a number of ways that we build up the body here at Grace, Thrive classes offer opportunities to get equipped in a focused way where you can have a sense of community with others who are taking the same classes. These classes are designed to be like a tool shed. When you need the specific tools, you go to the class and get equipped with the expectation that you will use those tools in your everyday lives.

*“...To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”*  
**Eph. 4:12**

We want to personally invite everyone to consider taking a Thrive class this winter. The winter semester begins Sunday, January 9th and ends Sunday, March 13th. That is a 10-week semester that finishes right before Spring Break. We offer classes for everyone. Here is the lineup of classes coming this winter:

### 8AM CLASSES

**\*Soul Care (Part 2)** • Learn about the heart and how to minister God’s word to people who are hurting and in crisis.

Teacher: Jim Sabin

Room: 307

*\*Prerequisite: Soul Care (Part 1).*

**Counsel From the Cross** • This class is designed to help

you apply God's word to trials and struggles that people go through. This is a great, interactive class for anyone who is leading others or who desires to help others biblically.

*Teacher: Biblical Counseling Team*

*Room: 306*

## 11AM CLASSES

**New Believers** • This class is for people who have just put their faith in Christ and are wanting to learn how to grow in their relationship with Him.

*Teacher: Ryan Simpson, Andrew Meredith*

*Room: 307*

**Relational Evangelism Workshop - A Toolkit to Help You Share Your Faith** • You will learn how to live out the gospel with intentionality using the acronym BLESS. This will be very interactive and fun.

*Teacher: Wade Summers, Randal Jones*

*Room: Conference Room*

**Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs to Make** • Whether you have been married 1 year or 50 years, every marriage would do well to take time to stop and evaluate how things are going. Join us for a time of reset, refresh, and refocus for our marriages. We will be using Paul Tripp's book "Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs to Make."

*Teacher: Rick Wyss*

*Room: 306*

**Premarital Counseling Class** • This class is for couples who are dating or engaged who want to prepare for marriage. This is a very interactive class where we cover God's design for marriage and what it looks like for Christ to be in the center of all aspects of marriage. This class will encourage, challenge, and motivate you to build your marriage on the foundation of Christ.

*Teacher: Premarital Teaching Team*

*Room: Annex*



HAPPY

New Year

2022

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