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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**September 18, 2016**

**Taking Commitment Seriously**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just want to again thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for the blessing that we have of just being able to come here and gather as a congregation. And Lord part of that blessing each week is that we can open up your book, we can look into it and we can grow from it, and so we pray, Lord, that by the power of your Holy Spirit we can do that this morning. I pray your Spirit's presence and I pray that as we open up your book you may give us something of lasting value and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Our Grace Fellowship statement of faith outlines three different parts of taking a commitment to the body of Christ seriously. It says this, it says: First and foremost you must be a lover of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, you must be in general agreement with our statement of faith; and third, we say commitment to the church should be as serious as commitments to one's job, hopefully more so. And we said that because our jobs have an immediacy about commitment or about the lack of it. You see, flesh and blood

bosses demand commitment and the consequences, they all know, they're sure and they are immediate. The spiritual consequences of commitment or the lack of it are just as sure and certain but they are not immediate. Skip school or work for a week, and I guarantee you you're going to hear about it. Skip your spiritual commitment, God's not going to send you a telegram, in fact nothing apparent is going to happen. And so it's easy to assume that there really are no consequences. But what if that thinking itself is a consequence? What are the consequences of thinking that you are one of God's own if you are not? Every convinced believer in Christ considers himself to be one of Jesus's disciples. The real consequence is whether or not Jesus concurs with that understanding. You see it's easy to overlook Jesus's words of *Luke 14:33*, he said this, he said: *"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."* You know we read those words and we immediately conclude those are way, way too harsh. Jesus can't be serious. You know it's like me saying to one of my kids, "Do that again, I'll rip your lungs out." You know that's -- I'm not serious. It's hyperbole. It's a purposeful exaggeration to make a point. But it's like what Jesus said again in *Luke 14*, he said: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* And so we look at words like this and we just assume Jesus is

exaggerating, isn't he? I mean that was hyperbole, wasn't it? I mean Jesus doesn't really expect us to hate those we love just to show how committed we are. Really? Well, there's a real problem here. You see when I speak like that, I know and everybody else knows that I am basically just blowing smoke. The problem is this: Jesus never, never just blows smoke. In fact it was Jesus who said every single word we say is going to count forever. In *Matthew 12:36* he said: *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak."* So no doubt, Jesus was extremely careful when he spoke. And to be sure, he used idiomatic phrases and hyperbole but he was deadly serious about what he was saying. And he spoke frequently about the cost of commitment. In fact Jesus used every literary device that he could to convince his followers that he demanded everything of them. He told them in *Luke 14* to follow him and he said forsake all or basically forget it. He told them to count the cost ahead of time before they made their decision.

This is what he said in *Luke 14:28*. He said: *"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'* Or suppose a king is about to go to war

against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." You know lest you miss the point of the story, he makes it abundantly clear in verse 33: "So therefore any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." In Luke 16 he says: "You cannot serve two masters." He says you have to make choices between God and mammon and you can't have it both ways. In Matthew 10:38 Jesus says our only hope of finding life is in pursuing our own death, that is the death of self. He says this, he says: "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." You got to know, these are incredibly demanding words. We have a tendency to ignore them. Jesus said -- he went so far to say that he preferred enemies to those who were lukewarm. In Revelation 3 he says: "I know your works: You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." I mean Jesus used extremes to rapidly graphically describe his disgust at lukewarm commitment, he says, "I'll spit you out of my mouth."

See, Jesus takes every choice we face and he bleeds it of its gray areas. He makes it painfully simple. He says you must make a choice. Hot or cold? God or mammon? Life or death? It's the same choice that God gave Israel in Deuteronomy 30. God said in *Deuteronomy 30: I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life.* When you think about it, what kind of a choice is that, I mean, who in the world would choose death and cursing? We all want to choose life. But what God is saying here is it has a price. This is what he says in *Deuteronomy 30*, he says: *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendents may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life.*

Speaking of price, God is saying there to choose life is to choose three things, it's to choose to love God, to obey him and to cling to him. They sound like very lofty choices. To love, to obey, to cling to God is so lofty though, it's very easy to sign on in theory without realizing what that costs in practice. We don't seem to realize how relentless Jesus was about emphasizing the cost of commitment, and Jesus saw commitment extending into every single area of our entire lives. You know, we prefer larger than life examples of people doing extraordinary things to demonstrate their

faith. Jesus instead focuses on faith as a commitment that pervades every single aspect of our existence, even the tiny little parts. Many of Jesus's examples, they focus in on the prosaic, the mundane, the practical examples of how these lofty principles work themselves out in our lives. When Jesus said in *Luke 9:62*: "*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*" He's not making up a set of rules for farmers. He's addressing an agrarian society where everybody knew everything that you needed to know about farming, and so he's taking something that's very mundane, very understandable, very practical, an activity such as plowing, and he's demonstrating that even there his demands are higher and bigger and greater than all others. Jesus is saying the farmer who says, "Lord, Lord, I love you, I cling to you, I obey you, but first, first let me just plow this field." He's saying that farmer doesn't get it. And understand this is Jesus saying this, this is not me. I'm just repeating to you what Jesus says. Jesus says he's unfit for the kingdom. And once more Jesus made that statement to a man who had already said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Now for Jesus it appears to be all or nothing.

In the parable of the great banquet in *Luke 14*, Jesus uses another mundane example in which life just seems to get in the way of

commitment. This is Luke 14:16-24, it says: Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask that you have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, became angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'" This is a scary passage because the invited here, the invited are all the insiders. You know, can we say for practical purposes they're the evangelicals, okay? We, all of us, we are the invited and we all have excuses. I bought a field, I have to check it out. I bought some oxen, I have to check them out. I just got married, I have to check that out. I mean, it's my stuff, it's my job, it's my relationships, Lord, they come

first. Jesus says in verse 24: "*For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.*" Now it should be obvious that none of those activities that Jesus spoke about were evil. I mean there was nothing inherently evil about any of them, but equally obvious though is that those who engage in them would never taste the master's banquet, not because of what they did or didn't do, but simply because they didn't get it. And the fact that they didn't get it was borne out by their inability not to make a commitment but to keep one. Kind of like a Seinfeld show, if you know what I'm talking about.

I want to be very careful here about what I mean about the term "getting it." You see, "getting it" is literally it's a no man's land and it's a no man's land between two extremes. It is the place that God puts you in when he by his Holy Spirit redeems you. It is a place between legalism and easy believism, between the Pharisee and the nominal Christian. You see, the Pharisee, he wants rules, he wants lots of rules covering all of life. He wants rules about fields, about plowing, about oxen, he wants rules about marriage as well, and he wants it written out plainly in black and white. "Jesus, which hand is it that you can't put back to the plow? Is it the right hand or the left hand? We need to know. We need to be specific here." The reason why he wants so many rules is because he just doesn't get it. On the other hand the nominal



Christian sees the cross of Christ as a free ticket with no strings attached. You know, say the sinners prayer, show up at church occasionally, learn something about Christian culture and some of the buzz words and you're in. He, too, he just doesn't get it. What does it mean "to get" commitment to Jesus Christ? Well there's a reason why I say that getting it is no man's land 'cause no man can get you there. God alone has the power to let you "get it." And I'm not talking about some -- some mystical gnostic understanding that only the elite get. It is not that complex. Actually it's very, very simple and it is what defines me as a Christian. You see if you are a child of God, if you are a born again member of the kingdom of God, then "getting it" means nothing other than the fact that God himself is now alive inside you. You see in the Old Testament God dwelt inside the great temple of Solomon within the holy of Holies within the tabernacle. There were these great barriers and restrictions between God and us and those barriers represented our fallenness, our sin, our imperfection. God was perfect and we were not. You know we say in Adam's fall we sinned all. Well that barrier between God and us is why a baby was born at Christmastime. It's why Jesus came to earth to live out his perfect life and then take that perfect life to the cross. That barrier was torn down as the Lord Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross. And in that temple that Solomon built, there's this great veil that stretched some 30 feet from floor to

ceiling and it was supposed to be almost an inch thick, it stood there to physically restrict us from God's presence. And it served as a symbol to say that God and man could not dwell together because God was perfect and man was not. But *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* So Jesus went to the cross so that we, by faith, could appropriate his righteousness as our own instead of our sin. And at the cross, that veil was literally torn in two because now that wall of separation was no longer necessary. Man could stand before God perfect and accepted by claiming Jesus's righteousness as his own. Today God lives in a totally different temple than he did in the Old Testament. Today God lives inside you. You know it's become a cliché to say your body is a temple. Well the fact is God now lives inside flesh and blood instead of living in stone and wood. *1 Corinthians 3:16* says: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* In *Romans 8:9* it says: *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*

It is critical to understand this because what Paul is trying to say here, it's not your denomination, it's not your baptism, it's not even your experience that makes you a Christian. What it is is

simply the Spirit of the living God living inside you. When you are truly born again, God enters your spirit, he inhabits your body, he begins to transform you. Deuteronomy 30, God telling us to choose life instead of death, it begins to become a personal reality. You choose life in Christ rather than the living death that our culture now epitomizes. God places in you the power to love him, the power to obey him, the power to cling to him. To use computer language, your spirit gets a brand new operating system and love and obedience become as it were your new default drives. And the key word is the word "drive," because if you are his child, you will have a drive to love, obey and cling to God. And we call it a drive because it comes from within. It comes from inside you. It's not external.

When Peter wrote his first epistle, he wrote it to those who were suffering persecution, to those who had been dispersed all over the kingdom and yet throughout that persecution they understood that God was living inside them. And because of the Spirit's presence, Peter could make some astounding assumptions about the people that he was writing to and how committed they were to obedience. Listen to how Peter introduced his letter. This is the letter he wrote to his brothers and sisters. This is his introduction, *1 Peter 1:1*. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*

*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. Now you unpack that a little bit and you understand what Peter is saying here. Peter's writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and he places the entire Godhead at work here. And what he's saying is the Father chooses. He says he chooses the elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father. He says the Son redeems. He redeems through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. But then he says the Holy Spirit empowers. And he empowers for what? In sanctification of the Spirit for obedience. The Holy Spirit empowers us for obedience to Jesus Christ. This is the Holy Spirit literally at work changing our very wants and desires to line up with his will. I mean it's the working out of what he promised us in *Ezekiel 36*. God says: *I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

Have you ever asked yourself why is it that believers suddenly find within themselves a desire to obey God's rules? It's because God's living inside you now. God put that in you. That's a sign of his presence. And so obedience is what "getting it" is all about.

Obedience is the identifying characteristic of the new drive that now sits firmly within our regenerated spirit, so much so that if obedience is not a crucial part of your faith, you need to ask yourself: Am I really one of his children? See, when God transforms us, he places within us a new will, a new desire, and a new drive to love, to obey and to cling to him and it comes from inside, from God himself dwelling within us. It's the difference between sunlight and moonlight. You know sunlight is the natural outpouring of the fusion energy that's at the internal core of the star that we call the sun. Moonlight is altogether different. Moonlight has no internal component. Its entire power source is external. It has no light, it has no heat, it has no energy of its own. And no matter how brightly it shines and sometimes it even lights up the night, we all know it really is ice cold, it really is dead and it can only reflect the sun's energy. Well that, too, defines real and false faith and what it means to "get it." You see, when God gives you salvation, he places his Spirit within you. His power, his will and his desires begin to emanate from within you. It begins to make sense that God would demand my all, and it makes sense only because his Spirit is transforming us to begin to think and to act and to respond just like Jesus would. That's the sunlight of real faith.

But there's also, however, a moonlight form of Christianity that is

enormously popular. It has no internal component. There's no energy emanating from within it. It only has the ability to reflect the external pressures that shape it. And if those pressures are legalistic and pharisaical, it will find a huge attraction into making God a legal concept surrounded by countless rules and regulations. I mean if this is your faith, you'll begin to see your goodness as a reflection of how well you keep the rules. You learn the art of making spiritual molehills into mountains just to justify your spiritual existence. Jesus described this type of moonlight faith in Matthew 23. He told the Pharisees that they were blind guides who strained out gnats while swallowing camels, and he went on to describe such people as hypocrites, as snakes, as whitewashed tombs, all white on the outside and rotten inside. They just didn't get it.

A few years back I met a man who had confessed Christ and had attended church for many, many years and had risen to leadership and he did it all on the power of moonlight faith. Now he told me this, he confessed this to me, he said he'd only recently realized that all of the time he had spent serving the Lord he now realized he was never saved. He had never gotten it. And when he finally did get it, he saw how great the difference was between the drive to love, obey and cling to God that came from within and the moonlight faith that he had embraced. See on the outside didn't

look different at all. On the outside we're all -- on the inside where all the change had taken place, he found a passion and a drive to love, obey and cling to God that he never knew even existed before. And he found himself for the very first time hungry for God. In short, he got it.

The opposite side is the same coin of moonlight faith. It's just flipped over. It's those who want to love Christ but they also want to love this world. It presses them and they demand to have it both ways. And we already saw what Jesus thought of that. I mean he told us that no man can serve two masters and trying to have it both ways by being lukewarm to both sides is literally vomitus in Jesus's eyes. These folks also don't get it. And they don't get it because there's nothing to get. There's no there there. I mean they may go to church, they may know the doctrines, they may even be in leadership but there's nothing inside. And the only drive within is the drive to belong or the drive to look good or the drive to get ahead. That's what describes them.

Well, what does all of this have to do with commitment? And what does this have to do with our statement of faith? Well, we're talking about the distinction between people who are and are not hungry for God. And I've said many, many times, one of the distinguishing marks of a great church is that its people are

hungry for God. Its people get it. It's people who seek guidance and direction toward God and not folks who want legal bondage or easy believism. Now having said that, let me just re-read to you our guidelines on commitment from the church statement: First and foremost, you must be a lover of the Lord Jesus Christ; second, you must be in general agreement with our statement of faith; and third, we say commitment to the church will be as serious as commitment to one's job, hopefully more so. These are not high or lofty goals. These are practical, attainable and demonstrable levels of commitment. They are in fact little things. But we know that Jesus, he pays particular attention to little things. Luke 19 is the parable of the talents and one servant is given five talents, he gains five more; another is given two, he gains two more, and Jesus says in *Matthew 25*: "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*" So the question we need to ask ourselves this morning is: Am I faithful over the little things in my life? You know it's easy to say Lord, I'll lay down my life for you and that's great but do you think you could make it to church or to a prayer meeting or to a midweek Bible study or maybe using your gifts and resources to advance the kingdom?

Now I know this is a hard message and this is hard stuff. And I also know that there are three kinds of people who hear this



message in three different kinds of ways. The first kind of hearer is the Pharisee. He hears about the guidelines and he says, "Great, let's make rules for every single part of the love that you have for God." God finds that repulsive. Jesus said in *Matthew 23*: *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."*

Well the second kind of person to hear this message is the nominal Christian. He stops in to church from time to time and Bible studies are probably out of the question because he's way, way, way too busy for that. As far as gifts and resources, it probably depends on how he feels. Jesus's words and Jesus's demands "forsake all," "die to self," "take up your cross," they just don't resonate with him. And they don't resonate because he doesn't get it. His faith is like the moonlight. It has no internal drive mechanism. And he or she often bounces from church to church looking for structures or programs or authority that he can identify with. And the church in turn often restructures its mission so that it's no longer consumed with being the spotless bride of Christ but with attracting new members. Members become in effect customers and the church begins that it quickly learns -- it quickly learns that the name of the game is really attracting new customers. And the reason why the church now expends so much

energy in drawing and attracting new customers is that many of the customers have no internal drive mechanism. There's nothing drawing them to love, cling and obey to God in the first place. They just don't get it. And more often than not we define success today not by the commitment of church members as Jesus did but by your ability to attract more and more members as the world does. And the result is a church that has no idea of what real commitment means.

Listen to what R. Kent Hughes wrote. He had this observation. He says: "Church attendance is infected with the malaise of conditional loyalty which has produced an army of ecclesiastical hitchhikers. The hitchhiker's thumb says, 'You buy the car, pay for the repairs, upkeep and insurance, fill the car with gas, and I'll ride with you. But if you have an accident, you are on your own! And I'll probably sue.' So it is with the credo of so many of today's church attendees: 'You go to the meetings and serve on boards and committees. You grapple with the issues and do the work of the church and pay the bills. And I'll come along for the ride. But if things do not suit me, I'll criticize and complain and probably bail out. My thumb is always out for a better ride. This putative loyalty is fueled by a consumer ethos: A 'McChristian' mentality which picks and chooses here and there to fill one's ecclesiastical shopping list. There are hitchhikers who attend one

church for the preaching, send their children to a second church for its dynamic youth program, and go to a third church's small group. Church hitchhikers have a telling vocabulary: 'I go to,' 'I attend' but never 'I belong to' or 'I am a member.' Pollster George Barna supports this, saying, 'The average adult thinks that belonging to a church is good for other people, but represents unnecessary bondage and baggage for himself.' So today, at the end of the 20th century" -- I want you to understand something, he wrote this 15 years ago. 15 years ago. It's gotten considerably worse since then. He says: "So today, at the end of the 20th century, we have a phenomenon unthinkable in any other century: Churchless Christians. There is a vast herd of professed Christians who exist as nomadic hitchhikers without accountability, without discipline, without discipleship, living apart from the regular benefits of the ordinances. To borrow from Cyprian's idea they have God as their father but reject the church as mother and as a result are incomplete and stunted. The tragedy is compounded because statistics indicate that men are far less committed to the church than women inevitably producing a shriveled leadership."

In other words, they just don't get it. And I'm probably not speaking to them this morning because they're not here. I'm preaching to the choir. And I recognize many of the sacrifices that you all have to get make to get here. I don't think we've

ever known a time when there's been more individuals and families under more intense time pressure than now. It's like the enemy knows that when it comes to people who love the Lord, the usual temptations like sex, drugs and rock 'n roll, they just don't work. And what does work is the incremental theft of time spent in growing the things of the kingdom. See, the enemy knows how to use good things to steal time and energy from the one great thing that matters and it's not a thing, it's a person. It is Christ and his kingdom. Folks say family is important and I'd be the last person to disagree with that, but the enemy also knows that the best way to short circuit a family's spiritual growth is to put them under such a time crunch that they are forced to sacrifice something.

And like I stated at the very beginning of this message, spiritual sacrifices appear to have the least immediate consequence.

Skipping church or a Bible study doesn't have nearly the immediacy of a missed whatever, you fill in the blanks. So it becomes one of the first things to go, and believe me, I am sympathetic. I get it. Let me just give you a counterpoint. I know it's a cliché to say the most important things that your kids get are more often caught than taught, and I believe that's true. You know when you're out in the backyard with your son and you're teaching him how to throw a curveball, you are clearly teaching him something very, very specific. And when the two of you go in the house and

you immediately get into a fight with your spouse, you're also doing teaching. It may not be as specific as you think, it may not be how to throw a curveball but now you're teaching your son how to have a fight with his spouse. See, the teaching never ends. And when we were raising our family, we set some rules for our kids that had to do with placing priorities around certain kingdom activities. One of them was just coming to church on Sundays. It wasn't an option depending on A, B or C, it was simply a given. And believe me, I know what it's like to sit through 45 minutes of a sermon that you have no idea what they were talking about, that made no sense at all and you wonder what in the world am I doing here? Now that I'm on the other side of the pulpit, I'm sympathetic when I hear people say "I can't believe you went on for 45 minutes." I got quite the vantage point up here. I can see every single person who's nodding off. I see that and I think to myself, hey, been there, done that. See, I wanted my kids to catch that church was critical not because you get points for showing up, but because church was the community that Christ had called us to for good or bad. And being part of the community simply meant showing up consistently. And apparently by God's grace that part caught because nine out of the ten of my children are all active members in their local bodies. Three of them go here and the other six are in five different churches in New York, Baltimore and Colorado. They all recognize the importance of commitment and

community. You know, Ken Bontrager made one of the most important observations about church and what he had to say was that one of the most important times in church is the 20 or so minutes that take place after church is over. It's when folks are engaged in multiple pockets of conversations and some are being perhaps anointed by the elders, some are being prayed for by others, other people are simply catching up on what's going on in other people's lives. That's what community is all about. And that's what needs to be fed and nurtured because we're going to need each other more and more as this culture collapses.

So ask yourself these questions: Am I a saint who comes to church driven by the Holy Spirit to worship God? Am I an individual who joins the church, attends faithfully and uses my gifts because I have a burning desire to please God? Have I joined a church because I know it is the vehicle God chooses for me to work through? If you answered "yes," then you're the third type, you are the one who gets it. I just wonder how many of us are out there. You know, Jesus paints a fairly dismal picture when he speaks of the wide and narrow road in *Matthew 7*. He says: "*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*" It's the few who get it, he says.

Now there are four goals that we outlined in our statement of faith and they all come from scripture but they don't stand as hard and fast rules, I mean, I can't give you chapter and verse that says thou shalt attend a midweek small group study because there's no scripture that demands that, but weekly attendance at worship, the use of your spiritual gifts, the bringing of your tithe, they don't need to be commanded if you already "get it." If God has indeed transformed you and now lives within your spirit, these are new and completely natural desires. The church can't manufacture that. We as leaders don't have the persuasive powers to force you to do those things which should come naturally to all believers who are new members in Christ. Hopefully I attend worship, hopefully I pray and read scripture, I exercise my gifts, I give my tithe not because of any external pressure from Grace Fellowship. Hopefully my commitment comes from the internal indwelling Holy Spirit but it's worked out by me. Listen to what God says in *Philippians 2:12*, he says: *Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure.* And so if you've looked inside and you can't seem to find any drive mechanism, anything that's drawing you to God, if you look for this place to be the kind of place where someone's going to pressure you into being a good Christian, if you're here looking for someone

other than God and you sense you have no internal hunger for God, perhaps you have never "gotten it." It is the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. I'm here to tell you this morning it's yours just for the asking. If God's Holy Spirit is tugging on your heart, just ask. God says in *Ephesians 2: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* I realize that I'm preaching to the choir for many of you and I praise God for that, and many of you have already proven your commitment just by the fact that you're here. But it's the start of a new school year and it's in essence it's the start of a new church year and that really means for us a brand new beginning. And for some of us it's time to realize that Jesus isn't getting kidding when he says "forsake all," "count the cost," and "choose who your master will be," God or this world. And if you feel that your faith commitment is more moonlight than sunlight, understand God can change moonlight to sunlight in an instant. All you have to do is ask him. Just ask God for the gift of faith. He's a rewarder of all who seek him. It's time to get real and it's time to get going. It's time to let the enemy know that we're going to beat him at his own game by recapturing the supremacy of Christ in all things, including my time. It's time to start being faithful in the little things. And if God is speaking to your heart this morning, please hear him. Let him who has ears to hear, hear.



Let's pray.

*Father God, again, I know this is hard words and this is a hard message and I want to speak to everybody in this congregation, I don't care if you've been here for years and years and years or you've just walked in, if the Holy Spirit of God is tugging on your heart, if God is speaking to you and saying you need that internal drive mechanism, you need to get it, you need to understand that it only comes when God himself is living within you. I pray, Lord, that you would touch those folks to come forward, speak to one of us, speak to an elder and get this squared away right now here today. And Father, for the rest of us I pray you would give us the wisdom and the drive to continue to understand that you are number one and everything else is secondary to that. Give us the wisdom and the way that we can move forward by putting into practice what we know we must do. Give us this wisdom, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*