



Looking Back and Looking Forward
Selected Scriptures
GCSP – 05/17/2008

In early May of 2005, Connie and I sat down with Kevin and Tricia Lane to discuss the possibility of starting a new church in South Park. The previous Sunday I had resigned as pastor of the Jefferson Community Church after God made it abundantly clear that I needed to leave. I did not resign my position at Jefferson with the intent of starting a new church but having the conversation with Kevin and Tricia seemed right; it seemed blessed and ordained by God.

After we met and prayed, we determined that it was a move of the Holy Spirit for us to proceed with starting a church. We began to spread the word by word of mouth and email that a new church would be born on May 15th in the living room of our home. We had no idea if I would be able to draw a salary or even if anybody besides our two families would show up, but we moved forward with the plans.

With more than a week to go before that opening service, checks began to show up in our mailbox for the new church. Our current sound system and the trailer we store it in were given to Connie and me several months prior to my resignation; well before I had a clue as to how we would use it. God was beginning to show me that He was in this and He would take care of everything if we simply relied on Him and Him alone. I was in shock, in awe, and humbled at the same time. After the year and a half of turmoil at the other church I don't know if I was prepared for the joy and blessing that was materializing before my eyes.

To have an initial leadership structure in place I told Kevin he was an elder – not exactly the biblical procedure for choosing and installing elders, but Kevin graciously, if not reluctantly accepted the responsibility.

May 15th arrived and we waited to see who God was going to bring to our home for that first service. If my memory is correct, it was Connie and I, The Lanes with their three boys, Wayne and Bonnie Heinrich, John and Adrienne Flavia, George and Margaret Trujillo, and Scott and Marie Remy and their daughter, Bray. Fourteen people in all – a church was born.

I stood in the kitchen and used the island counter-top for my pulpit. We turned our couch around and arranged all the chairs we could find in rows in the small living room.

We had a few more show up the second week; I believe an attendance of 17. And then the third week we had 27! Our living room was no longer going to be sufficient for the job. That third week we started the service outside since the weather was cooperative, and we sang songs of praise and worship and let our voices echo through the mountains.

After that service we quickly went about the business of finding a place to meet. We rented the Indian Mountain Recreation Center down by the fire station off Elk Horn Road and Albino. We placed an ad in the Flume and began meeting at that facility the very

next week. God continued to bless. Every step we took and each expenditure we had, was preceded by God's divine supply. We never had to say we don't have the money to do this, or how are we going to pay for that; the money kept coming in through the offerings and through the mail before we had need.

God brought people. Chuck and Judy Schwalier donated money for us to purchase a large banner and some other signage so passers by would know a church was meeting at the Rec Center. And by the way, Chuck and Judy didn't attend our church at the time! We put up the banner every Saturday and took it down Sunday afternoon. More people stopped by the church services each week. I think we had a string of three or four months with at least one new face attending the services.

Kevin and I approached George Trujillo about joining us on the leadership team and we added George as a third elder that fall.

It was at that time that the Indian Mountain Recreational Board asked us if we had any interest in purchasing the building and surrounding land. We thought about it and started the process – depending on God to lead us and supply the funds to do so. By this time Clay and Ginny had joined the church so we put Clay to work on hammering out the details. An official offer was made.

Tricia Lane felt led by the Holy Spirit to tell the leadership that we were settling for a Volkswagen when God had a Porsche waiting for us. God stepped in and stopped the sale. Issue after issue came up that blocked our ability to purchase the building and property at any price. It was even determined that it was not legal for us to even be renting that facility.

So on New Year's Eve, 2005, we moved our services to Saturday evenings and moved our church to the Jefferson Community Center; where we still meet now. We also installed Clay Copeland and John Flavia as the first deacons of Grace Church.

The following spring and summer we started looking for a piece of property to purchase. After many months of no response from the inquiries that were made, Jeff Smith offered to donate five acres to the church. Five acres grew to ten, ten grew to twenty, and twenty grew to 39. By the end of 2006 we had the deed to 39 acres of God's property right across the road from here.

During that same summer, the elders and deacons met to figure out how we would fund a building. I drew up some initial figures along with some possible mortgage payments that would be required for various amounts. In the middle of that meeting, Kevin Lane tore up that sheet of paper and threw it in the air. He then said God wants us to build this building debt free. He already gave us the land, why shouldn't we expect Him to give us the funds to build as well?

After raising about \$20,000 through donations from our people and through \$5 checks coming in from all around the country from an email campaign called, "The Five Dollar Church", the following spring a couple attending their very first service at Grace approached me after the service. After a short conversation, this couple committed \$500,000 toward the construction of a church building.

Over the course of the last year some of our official leadership has changed; Dick Muehlbauer was installed as an elder and Chuck Schwalier has been installed as a deacon, while Kevin and George both stepped down for various reasons. But that brings us to tonight.

God has truly blessed Grace Church. We have an unbelievable past even though it has only been three years. Looking forward now, I believe we need to ask the question: Why has God blessed us so much? For what purpose has God given us all that we currently have?

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Exodus 12**.

Exodus 12:29-32

Let's pray.

The Children of Israel had been in captivity as slaves for several generations. God was now giving them their release; He was now granting them their request for freedom; He gave them the freedom to worship Him. The day of victory had arrived.

We could say that our day of victory was when God started Grace Church. We in essence were released to worship God freely and apart from any legalistic guidelines or rules of conduct. We were given the tremendous gift of being able to follow the Holy Spirit without man confining us to certain styles or modes.

Exodus 13:17-22

God purposely took them into a dead end so He could display His glory and His provision.

You could say the Indian Mountain Rec Center was our dead end. God led us there just like He led the children of Israel to the Red Sea, but our hopes were crushed to a certain extent when we could not purchase that building.

Exodus 14:13-14

God delivered the children of Israel in miraculous ways. There was no denying that God was in control, that God had a plan all laid out, and that God would follow through with His plan.

Wow! God has miraculously intervened on our behalf. God has a plan laid out for us and He will follow through with that plan as well.

Notice **verse 14** again: "**The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.**" Beloved, God was telling the Children of Israel that He did not need their help to accomplish what He was about to accomplish. Don't complain, don't get in the way, don't try to plan things, and don't try to figure out how to take care of things. Just shut up and watch the power of God materialize before your very eyes.

Exodus 14:15-16

Have you ever noticed that God told them to move forward before He parted the Red Sea?

God told us to move forward before we had a piece of land and before He provided the funds to build.

Beloved, I may be guilty of reading into this and I may be guilty of putting our story into the account of Scripture, but there are far too many parallels to deny – there is a distinct message in the account of the Exodus that applies to Grace Church. God had a purpose for delivering the Children of Israel and He has the same purpose for us.

Exodus 19:1-9

Did you catch it? Did you see the reason God gave the Children of Israel their freedom from slavery and their freedom to worship? Maybe you missed it, so let me read the beginning of **verse 6** again: **“And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”**

What was the duty of the priest? The priest and the prophet in this period of time in the Old Testament were the only ones who could go before God – they were the ones who had fellowship and personal intimate relationship with God. God’s purpose for delivering the Children of Israel was because He desired for all of them to have intimate fellowship with Him! He desired an entire kingdom of priests! He desired for each and every one of them to have close personal and intimate relationship with Him!

How utterly awesome is that? The God of the universe, the awesome Creator of heaven and earth desires close, personal, intimate fellowship with you! God wants you to be His closest, most personal and most intimate friend.

And with their lips, the Children of Israel said, **“All that the Lord has spoken we will do!”**

To that I ask Grace Church, “What say you?” God wants that same close, personal, intimate relationship and fellowship with you – what is your response? Can you respond in the same way? Can we say together, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do?”

Exodus 19:10-11

The Children of Israel had to prepare themselves. Just saying the words wasn’t enough; they had to consecrate themselves before they could approach God on this level. For two days they had to search their hearts and repent of any and all wickedness that was within. The Scripture doesn’t give us the details but I can say with a certain measure of certainty that fasting and praying was involved. I can say with that same certainty that sacrifice and offerings were involved.

God desired a kingdom of priests and what? – A holy nation. Holiness and consecrated lives are part of the deal.

So for two days they fasted, they prayed, they offered sacrifices and offerings to the Lord to prepare for this unimaginable privilege to be God’s close, personal, and intimate friends.

Exodus 19:16-18

Put yourself in the sandals of one of the Children of Israel at this point. What's running through your mind? In that very instant I am sure those who merely went through the motions of consecrating themselves are in need of a change of underwear to be blunt. I am sure that those who only half-heartedly made preparations over the last two days are rethinking if they even want to be here. And I am sure that even those who took the call of consecration seriously are intensely aware of their sinfulness and utter unworthiness to be in the presence of God.

Exodus 20:1-17

Just in case they didn't understand what it meant to be holy and consecrated to God, the Lord spells it out for them.

What other gods do we have before the Lord? What idols have you made, that you worship? Before you simply say in your mind that you don't have any gods before the Lord or you haven't made any idols to worship, ask yourself a few questions:

- What gets in the way of my prayer time with the Lord each day?
- What keeps me from reading my Bible consistently and intently?
- What stops me from doing what the Bible tells me to do immediately?

When you honestly answer those three questions you will know the gods that you put before the Lord and you will know the idols you worship.

Do you truly love the Lord your God? Before you answer that question, understand that the only way to prove your love is through obedience to His Word. Your love for God is not expressed by passionately singing during our worship, your love for God is not expressed by showing up to church when the doors are open, and your love for God is not expressed by creating your own legalistic set of rules and standards of conduct. Your love for God is expressed by how much you believe God. If you truly believe Him the natural outflow of your belief will be manifest by complete and total obedience to what He says.

Do you rest in the Lord on a consistent basis? Do you take time out of your week to commune with Him and allow your mind and body and soul to rest?

Do you honor your parents? I know some of you probably did not have the best of parents, but I don't see that loophole here. It simply says to honor your father and your mother.

Are you free from the sin of murder? And remember Jesus expanded meaning of the sin of murder to include hating someone. So do you hate anyone?

Have you committed adultery recently? And again remember, Jesus expanded the meaning of the sin of adultery to include lusting after someone in your mind. If you ever have sexual thoughts about someone other than your spouse you are guilty of the sin of adultery.

Are you a thief? Do you cheat on your taxes? Do you take advantage of financial mistakes made in your favor?

Do you lie? Do you hide the truth when it is advantageous to do so?

Are you covetous? Do you look at the material things other people have and wonder why you don't have the same? Are you envious and jealous of your neighbors and friends? Are you less than satisfied with what God has provided for you?

God spells it out for us. If you are to be consecrated and holy; if you are to be prepared for close, personal and intimate relationship and fellowship with Me; here are the requirements.

Exodus 20:18-21

God desired a kingdom of priests and He got Moses and Aaron. The rest of the people backed off and stood at a distance.

In his book "The God Chasers", author Tommy Tenney says, *"It appears to me that the history of the Jewish people went downhill from the moment God said, 'Come near,' and they said, 'No way.' And it is abundantly clear that this problem isn't unique to the Israelites of Moses' day – it is also a serious problem in the Church today."*

God spelled out what was required for intimacy with Him. God made it plain and clear what the people had to do to be His close, personal, and intimate friends. The God of all creation came down from His heavenly throne and offered the unthinkable, the unimaginable, and the priceless gift of intimate fellowship with Him, and the people walked away, preferring to hold onto their sin; preferring the gods and idols of their lives over the true and living God.

Through the years, Israel has had her shining moments even though they chose to abandon God at Mount Sinai, but those moments have been brief and far outweighed by the dark days – which continue even now.

But God is merciful, God is gracious, God is long-suffering, God is loving, God is caring, God is compassionate, God is patient, and God is so much more. I can say that because God's offer of close, personal, intimate relationship and fellowship is still open to Israel right now. And that same offer is open to the Church right now. And that same offer is open to you right now.

God's purpose for Grace Church is not to have a magnificent building with His majestic mountains as a backdrop. God's purpose for Grace Church is not to have flawless programs, and properly designed worship services, and impeccable music, and precise policies and procedures for ministry. God's purpose for Grace Church is to have a kingdom of holy priests! God's purpose for Grace Church is to have penitent and broken people walking through the cloud of smoke and through the thundering and lightnings, into close, personal, and intimate relationship and fellowship with Him!

God wants you to want Him above all else! God wants you to desire His fellowship above all else! God wants you to desire Him and He wants you to leave all the other details and issues and circumstances in His fully capable hands!

Beloved, I am afraid that we have been so blessed by God that we are in danger of growing comfortable. I am afraid that we have sat down in our easy chairs, raised the foot rest, and you are settling for standing (or sitting) at a distance from God and letting someone else, anyone else, approach God on the mountain! I am afraid that we are going to have a nice little church with a nice crowd of people and nice music and a nice reputation in the community, and we are going to miss our purpose by a country mile!

Each of you is standing at your own Mount Sinai tonight and God is calling you to come through the clouds of thick darkness into personal intimacy with Him. Your choice will determine if you go forward or backward in your walk with Christ.

If you dare take that step, it will require holiness and purity and brokenness. If you walk through that cloud it will be painful. God will have to do some major surgery to cut out all the cancerous sins that are eating away at your soul. God will have to radically alter the course of your life. God will have to change your heart and redefine what you thought your Christian existence was supposed to look like.

But if you do take that step, you will never regret it.

Yes, it is a frightful thing to come before the awesome God of the universe; which is why so few ever take that step.

If you choose to stand at a distance, unfortunately, or better said, fortunately, your life will also never be the same. You now know your true purpose in life. You no longer have the liberty to wander through life not knowing what you should be doing. Choosing to stand at a distance is choosing a life of regret and unfulfilled potential. Choosing to stand at a distance is choosing to reject God's purpose for your life.

Let's pray.