

# Lord, Please Remove What Is Hindering Our Church

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## I. Introduction

Grace Chapel has been the same size for the past 10 yrs and yet God has seen fit to keep the doors open. But unless we grow in numbers, in a few years we'll face a financial challenge. Why haven't we grown? What's our role in growing the church and what's God's? Is there something hindering us from growing and if there is what are we doing about it? Will this financial crunch make us panic or trust God? How did Jesus face a financial challenge?

## II. Who's Responsible for Growing the Church and What's Our Role in It?

**Grace Chapel's financial future:** it takes about \$110,000 to keep Grace Chapel open. We currently have in the bank about \$209,000. We know that the church will not receive the amount of donations it has in the past. The 2017 Budget projects \$70,000 in donations, but the reality is that it may be much less. If this happens, we'll have to use our reserves and in 3-4 years we'll run out of money. In order for us to continue as is, our numbers have to grow or the Lord has to replace the funds we will no longer get.

**Why hasn't Grace Chapel grown?** *First*, who's responsible for the growth of the church? It may sound strange having stated that our numbers need to grow, but growing the church is not our responsibility, it's Jesus': Matthew 16:18. *Second*, what is our responsibility in the church? Our job is to make disciples of everyone around us: Matthew 28:19-20. We're seeing this play out in the book of Acts. The apostles obeyed the Lord's command to make disciples and thousands were added to the church (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14). But they didn't get people to sign a church membership card and then made sure they attended church once or twice a week. No, instead, they showed them what it means to be a Christian, how to walk with Jesus and His Father so that their Spirit guided and transformed them (John 17:3, 20-26). If there's a challenge, they meet it with boldness (Acts 4:5-13). If there's a need, they fill it gladly (Acts 4:32-37). They became a close knit family just like Jesus and the disciples were. When we do this, Jesus takes care of growing the church (Acts 2:44-47). *Third*, is there something hindering our growth? Where are we failing: Is our giving in order? Are we praying for our finances? Are we introducing others to our Lord, taking the Gospel to lost friends and neighbors? Is our walk with the Lord right? The elders, deacons, and rest of the leadership are asking the Lord to remove what's hindering our growth, or reveal to us the reason why we're not growing. And if the Lord reveals that we're not walking properly with Him, then we need to do as king Josiah did so that the Lord will bless us (2 Kings 22-23).

*King Josiah removes the hindrance from Israel:* Josiah was the 18<sup>th</sup> king of Israel (Judah); both his father (king Amon) and his grandfather (king Manasseh) were wicked kings. But Josiah was a godly king. His reign began when he was 8yrs old after his father was assassinated. One of the things Josiah did is remove the hindrance that was keeping Israel from growing and receiving the Lord's blessing: rediscovery of the Law of the Lord (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34-35).

*Grace Chapel's leadership must cleanse what's hindering them,* as Josiah did with the nation, your leadership, starting with the elders, must take inventory of themselves and ask God to show them what is not right in their walk with Him so that we can effectively disciple others.

**But shouldn't we be responsible and tighten our belts when money is tight?** *First*, yes, we always need to know the state of our finances and act responsibly (Proverbs 27:23-24). Thus, if there's frivolous or unwise spending going on, then we need correct this. *Second*, if we're not spending frivolously, but cut our budget anyway, are we following the Lord or a secular business principle? It's made some of us think "We need to cut the Missionary support or the Mercy Fund." Are these frivolous items? If we do cut them, what do we gain? About \$16,000. But what do we lose in the process? We need to act like a church not a business and support missionaries and help those in need, etc., etc.

*Third*, who's actually providing the funds to keep this church open, us or God? Everything we've seen the early church do in Acts was because God empowered them. If they needed money for the needy, widows, or poor, God provided it and grew the church by thousands (Acts 1:1; 2:4, 41, 47; 4: 32-37; 5:12-14). This church stands or falls on one simple fact: will God continue to keep the doors open, which takes us to the heart of our problem: will we trust God or not?

**Do we really trust God?** *First*, is God trustworthy? Yes, He's kept Grace Chapel alive with 20-30 people for 10yrs! The problem is not that God can't provide for Grace Chapel, He's done it with 20-30 people for 10yrs! The question is not, "How can we get our numbers up?" The question is, "Will we remember God's provision in the past, and therefore trust Him for our future?"

*Second*, what happens when we don't trust Him? We start thinking of it as a money problem, which leads us to contemplate cutting things we shouldn't. We even start to behave in an ungracious manner. For example, we start policing the number of bottles of water people take and say things like, "That's not right. The church is not here to give out free water. We need to stop them, after all, 'God helps those who help themselves.'" This language sounds spiritual, but did you know that this phrase is not in the Bible? Is that idea true, that God only helps those who help themselves? You might say, "Yes, look at 2 Thessalonians 3:10! 'If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.'" It's clear that God doesn't condone laziness. But what's the answer if someone is taking bottles of water they shouldn't, what would the Lord have us do? Punish or discipline, i.e., does God care about how many bottles of water we save or the person taking them who shouldn't? How did Jesus address it?

*Third*, how did Jesus face a financial crunch? Did He panic? Did He start cutting this and that? Did He limit people to one bottle of water? Let's see: John 6:1-14. Did He only help those who help themselves? Some of those He fed were freeloaders, 6:26!

*Fourth*, does God help those who don't deserve it? Yes! Matthew 5:45. In fact, God saved us when we were at our worst, when we were His enemies, Romans 5:8, 10. Yet in spite of this, He adopted us into His family (Ephesians 1:5; 2:4-9).

*Fifth*, what's our real problem? Our problem is not our finances, it's "Will we trust Him?" God promises that if we keep our eyes on Him, if we make Him the focus of our life, He'll take care of the rest. What's the rest? Whatever we need (Matthew 6:25-33).

### III. Conclusion

*"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*