

A Call to Serve

1 Peter 2:12, 15-17; various
Ray Anderson--- July 18, 2021

Well, good morning, people of Grace!

A Two-Door Gospel Mentality

Ken Sande, the author of the book *The Peacemaker* and the founder of the Peacemaker Ministries, was speaking at a conference I attended. And he said that most believers live like they believe in a two-door gospel. The first door is when we put our trust in Christ to forgive our sins and to make us acceptable to God. We become children of God at that point. And then we wait. We wait for years until the second door opens and we get to go to heaven ... the two-door gospel.

Fortunately, that's not really an accurate picture of what the Christian life is. Or else we really would be spending the decades of our life in this large waiting room, a holding place, until the next big thing that God wants for us.

But our whole life is supposed to be the Gospel. It's living out that faith in Christ; living daily by faith and directing our steps to becoming like Christ in all of life; and to use our time and talents and treasures and gifts to promote His glory as our God. So, it's not a passive waiting period, but it's an active time to have focus. The in-between time has purpose.

My dad grew up as a farm boy in rural Minnesota. As he got older, he knew that he did not want to stay on that farm. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, he and three of his friends went to enlist in volunteer service. Two of them were accepted and he was not one of those two. He was 4-F, deemed unfit for military service. He went back multiple times to volunteer and each time was rejected for medical reasons. What he hadn't know is that he had a heart defect. And every time the doctor at the processing station heard that murmur he was stamped 4-F, unfit for military service.

He told me that an old country doctor taught him a trick. The stethoscope had to be in a certain place for the doctor to hear the murmur, and if he would just make a slight shift in his

chest, the doctor couldn't detect it. He used that trick to get in to serve and served for twenty-three years.

By the time that he got accepted to the military, the fighting was basically over. Japan had surrendered and they were sending troops. And his first assignment was to be part of those troops that went to Japan as the occupying forces. The troops gathered in Seattle. They were going to take a twelve-day ship—I wouldn't call it a cruise—across the Pacific to go serve.

There were two doors on that ship: one that led them on the ship and put them in a waiting period, a time in between. And they waited until the second door opened and they could disembark and serve their duty.

But my dad couldn't be idle for that long, so he volunteered with four others to collect and dispose of all the trash on the ship. Not a very glamorous job, but he was willing to serve rather than to be idle. As a result, he actually had a better experience on that trip than the other soldiers. See, the trip went from twelve days to actually fifteen because of rough seas. Before they left the harbor, ninety percent of the soldiers were seasick. But my dad, because he volunteered to serve, got to eat with the ship's crew, and they ate better food than the soldiers. The sailors also helped him understand how to overcome the seasickness, so he didn't spend sixteen days losing everything that he'd gotten.

See, he didn't live as if there were only two doors on that ship, when they got on and waiting to disembark. But there was a purpose for that in-between time.

Living by faith includes the call to something greater than cowardly self-preservation.

--- J. R. R. Tolkien

J. R. R. Tolkien says this: "Living by faith includes the call to something greater than to cowardly self-preservation."

A Fall to Serve

Well, today I want to talk to you about a fall to serve. I want to explain a little about the predicament that we're in, the call that is upon all of us, and the opportunities that we have before us.

I. Our Predicament

For the last seventeen months we've been in this in-between time. We changed our normal life back in March of 2020 and have yet to figure out what it looks like to fully resume whatever the new normal will look like, of how we'll live or what we'll become. Many of the things that have come out of us in the past seventeen months have not been very pretty to look at. Think of all that's gone on in our society, our culture, politically, people's personal lives. It's not been pretty.

Mark McClain, one of our elders, told Kevin Maurice, our youth pastor, at the beginning of the pandemic, "People are going to come out of the pandemic either as hunks, chunks, or drunks." Now I might add punks and skunks to that list. But it's not always been very pretty. People have become more fearful, they've become angrier. We've kind of run out of "nice" somewhere in the middle of this. We've become more cynical. I've never heard more adults quote their children: "You can't make me do that!" What are we thinking?

There's going to be endless research on the impact of this pandemic and analysis of it. But we're starting to see things come to light from it. If we didn't already have a weight problem, forty-two percent of the people have reported an undesired weight gain averaging twenty-nine pounds. Eighteen percent have reported an undesired weight loss. I think I understand that—I've never had an undesired weight loss, but ...

[Laughter]

Mental health issues—we've all heard about the levels of depression. Up to a third of Americans are showing signs of clinical depression or high anxiety. Another twenty-five percent are showing signs of mild depression. There's a whole concept—articles have been circulating about a term called "languishing." It's not depression but it's not normal mental health either. To languish means to become weak, or weakness or weariness, a lack of vigor about life. In my mind, it's being tired of being tired. I get that. I understand it. In many ways, I've languished in the midst of this.

All these things are caused by the trauma of widespread disease, fear of getting sick, grief of the losses of life that we've all experienced, financial concerns, loss of community

connectedness; divorce and abuse issues in marriage have greatly increased. It seems like we've all had a front row seat to all the quirks of our family members in the course of this year. It's not been pretty. We're concerned over our children's education, how far they've fallen behind, what is it going to take in order to catch up.

There's a restlessness and a discontentment among people. People are remodeling their homes, they're changing jobs, and they're certainly changing churches. There's a Covid shuffle going on in churches of people who are discontent with how their church handled the pandemic, or how they addressed and responded to social and political issues.

Church attendance on average—in-person attendance—is down sixty percent nationwide. For us it's fifty percent. We're beating the curve, but not by much.

What seems to have happened when we've created our bubbles is that in many ways our world got small, they got local, and they got very self-focused. Even though now we have this freedom to break out of that bubble, people are having a hard time doing that. We've developed what one psychiatrist has called the “cave syndrome.” It's the resistance or reluctance to come out of our homes and re-engage with life.

We have gotten so self-focused and small-world focused, we've forgotten that we're called to be followers of Christ. We're made to be in connection with one another in community. We are made, we are called, we're designed, we're equipped, we're gifted, to serve others.

So, today my role is to call you out and to call you back. We can't change what happened in the last seventeen months. But we can change what we become or how this ends.

We can't go back and change the beginning, but we can start where we are and change the ending.

--- C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis put it this way: “We can't go back and change the beginning, but we can start where we are and change the ending.”

Matt has been encouraging us for the last couple of months to view this time as a *Kairos* moment. It's that moment in life where we get to make unique choices that are going to define how we go forward, who we are, and how we live our lives.

So, give this current predicament, what do we do? What changes do you need to make? How do you give the in-between time purpose?

II. The Call to Serve That Is on Us

We are called to serve.

In the spring, as Matt was teaching through 1 Peter, he and I had a discussion. We were looking ahead at 1 Peter chapter 2. And we began to talk about this: What does doing good look like for us as a church coming out of the pandemic?

Remember in 1 Peter chapter 2, Peter wrote, **“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though you are accused of doing wrong, they see your good deeds and glorify God on the day that He visits.” (1 Peter 2:12)**

“For it is God’s will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. Show proper respect for everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, and honor the emperor.” (1 Peter 2:15-17)

Well, what does “doing good” look like? As we discussed that, that led us to this whole concept of a Summer to Give and a Fall to Serve. See, this in-between time while we’re waiting to fully emerge from the pandemic needs to have a purpose too. So, we’re asking you as a church, as a congregation, to do two things. From the period of May through the end of September, to give—to give generously, financially. Not just for us, but for our community. We’re going to use any excess giving over our budget each month to go toward our community. We want to support things like The Source or Austin Disaster Relief Network or build homes for the homeless at Community First Village. We’re not asking for us; we’re asking for them and on their behalf. So, please give financially. Give generously during this period of time. That’s the Summer to Give concept.

And we’re beginning to shift and look at a Fall to Serve. The second thing we’re asking you is to prepare yourself to engage in service, to serve here and to serve out there.

As I was preparing for this message, I thought, *Let me do a biblical word study of this whole concept of service and serving.* Here is some of what I found out from that, what the Bible has to say.

In Mark 10, we know that Jesus modeled this whole concept of service for us. It says, **“For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)**

We Have Been Bountifully Supplied to Do Good Works

In 2 Corinthians 9, it says that we’ve been bountifully supplied in order that we might do good works. It says, **“You will be enriched in every way.”** The idea is enriched, bountifully supplied. **“ ... so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people”—His church—“but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanksgiving to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourself, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.” (2 Corinthians 9:11-13)**

I wish you could have been in the office reception area on Thursday afternoon. I met with Courtney from The Source to be able to give her the checks that we had collected last week and the funds from our Summer to Give. Some gifts had come in directly, and when we put our notes together, Grace, you had given \$80,000 dollars to The Source. Good for you. Good for us.

I wish you could have seen the joy on her face, the joy of receiving that, and, as she expressed to me, how it was an answer to prayer for their financial needs. See, our generosity results in other people giving praise to God and thanksgiving. We want you to still give. We’re keeping on our website and our Realm app the option to give to The Source through tomorrow. There are envelopes in the lobby. You can give directly to them and tell them you’re from Grace. We want to continue to be generous and give.

You Have Been Gifted to Serve in Some Way

We’re also gifted to serve. We see in 1 Peter 4, **“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10)**

See, we get to dispense God’s grace to other people. He’s given us gifts, richly supplied us, so that we can serve others as faithful servants.

Our Role As Pastors and Teachers Is to Equip Others to Serve

Ephesians 4—we know as pastors and teachers that our responsibility, our role, is to equip you, the ministers, for the good works that God has prepared for us.

We Should Serve with a Whole Heart

There are a number of passages—I can't go through all those—that talk about the heart attitude when we serve. An example is Colossians 3: **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, nor for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” (Colossians 3:23-24)**

We Have Been Called by Jesus to Serve Because the Need Is So Great

We are called to serve because there are needs to be met. In Matthew 9—and we'll camp here just a little bit—there's this experience that Matthew captured with Jesus. It says, **“When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers’” or laborers “‘into His harvest field.’” (Matthew 9:36-38)**

Jesus saw the masses of people and the state that they were in. He uses this shepherding metaphor. And it says that He had compassion for them.

Now biblical compassion is not just sympathy. It's not just saying, “Oh, I'm so sorry you're in that state.” Biblical compassion is a sympathy that compels you to do something about what you see. So, to say I care about something—the homeless or the poor or the uneducated or whatever—the sick—is not compassion unless it leads to action.

So, this compassion moves Him to do this. It says that He spoke to His disciples. Now we know when we turn the page that in chapter 10 He's going to speak specifically to the twelve. So, when He's speaking to His disciples, it's a broader group of people in front of Him. And He tells them, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” In other words, the need is great. It's ready, it's time. But the number of people willing to address the need is small.

See, a laborer—He’s switched now from a shepherding metaphor to a farming metaphor—a laborer is a person who gets his hands dirty, who gets in there with it.

Now it’s interesting that the antonym of being a laborer is to be idle, inactive, unemployed. Now as I studied the concept of serving, there is no biblical concept of an unemployed Christian. It’s not there. I looked for the loopholes.

See, until the Lord returns, there are always going to be needs. There will always be a need for workers or laborers to address those needs. The in-between time has a purpose. That purpose is for us to serve. We’re not serving in order to gain our salvation—let me make that very clear. We serve because of the grace and mercy that we’ve received, and we want to express that in how we live.

A Kairos moment calls us into action. The Lord of the harvest has got the harvest ready. One translation of that says “the Lord who is harvesting.” So, He’s active and involved in this. He’s planted, He’s watered, He needs us to step in and to serve as laborers, to serve Him, to promote His purpose, to promote His kingdom.

Remember the story of my dad on that ship? There were plenty of needs that needed to be addressed, but only five men, five of those hundreds of soldiers, volunteered to serve even when they weren’t required to.

The opportunity is before us. We get to choose to participate or sit idle, inactive, and unemployed. It’s not whether or not you should serve; it’s a matter of where you should serve.

Serving in the past isn’t the same as serving now. You might have some limitations, and we understand that. But you still need to find a way to serve. We’re made to serve. If we don’t serve God, we will serve something or somewhere. And unfortunately, what seems to happen is that we serve our self-interests, our self-focus, what’s important to us, our idols.

We Can Worship God and Still Not Serve Him

Now I came across a very interesting passage, I thought, and debated all week whether to include it or not. And I’ve decided to. It’s in 2 Kings chapter 17. Listen to this. It says, **“They would not listen”**—this is the Israelites, they’re repeating their patterns here—**“however, but persisted in their former practices. Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did.” (2 Kings 17:40-41)**

We can worship God and still not serve Him. Because service is another choice. We choose to worship, but we can also choose to worship. And they were teaching their children that there's a duplicity to their faith. *Yeah, worship God, pay tribute, but do what you want. Serve your idols.*

But we have a choice to serve. It's a choice that we have to make for ourselves. In **Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you"—Paul's appealing to this group of believers—"by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."**

See, each of us have to present ourselves. I can't present you to God as a living sacrifice. As it's been said, the problem with the living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar. We offer ourselves to God for service.

God doesn't want something from us. He simply wants us.

--C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis put it this way: "God doesn't want something from you. He simply wants us."

So, what's your transition plan to come out of the COVID mode? How do you overcome the cave syndrome? How do you break this trap of being self-focused in your life? Will you serve?

Those of us in ministry know that there's an important transition that goes on in the life of a believer as they're pursuing to become like Christ in all of life. It's a transition from being a taker to being a giver. I watch for it in the discipleship process of a person's life. Because there's somethings that happens. The Christian life doesn't make sense over time if it's just about you. The in-between time from the moment of putting our faith in Christ until going to heaven has a purpose also. We're supposed to live by faith. It's an active time to be actively engaged in pursuing Christ, becoming like Him, and serving others.

PEG Illustration

This is a peg, a wooden peg I made from a dowel. Before they had nails and screws, they used wooden pegs to hold structures together. Here's a picture of that.





Those pegs were important to holding that building together. The role that you and I get to play when we volunteer in an organization is to be a peg. We get to hold it together. We get to help build the structure of it so that it delivers the services, the ministry it has for others.

So, I'm asking you to be a peg. As a matter of fact, before you leave, as you go out, there's a bowl with little pegs in it as a reminder for you. Think of it as having two pegs. One is a peg that's going to be your service to Grace Covenant Church to make our church better. And another is for you to serve our community or the world. You get to choose what you'll do.

Now I use the idea of a peg because of the three letters. Here's what you do when you serve. You **Pray**. You **Engage**. You **Give**. **PEG**.

Prayer is no small thing, to pray for a ministry that you're a part of. It is calling upon the power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, to enter that place and use your efforts and the efforts of volunteers to change people's lives. Prayer is a part of your active service.

Engagement is another part. You need to be the hands and feet of Jesus. You need to be the boots on the ground, the laborers in the harvest of that ministry. The more laborers, the more

needs can be met. There seems to be this multiplication that goes on when you have many people working in a common effort. Serving together is a great opportunity, a great equalizer, for our economic class differences, our racial diversity, our cultural differences. When you go and just serve alongside other people those differences fall away.

So, pray, engage, and give. **Give** of your time and your talents and your treasures. Give generously. Don't hold back. Be a PEG.

III. The Opportunities We Have Before Us

We have an opportunity for us as we emerge out of this. A Fall to Serve is that call to consider how you can serve your church and serve your community. We're saying to serve here and to serve there. We're focusing on mobilizing the people of Grace to serve, to serve the Lord in His kingdom. I'm asking each of the ministry leaders to pray and put service projects into their fall plans.

Serve Here

We want you to serve here at Grace on Sundays or during the week. Our "in-person" worship is half of what it was prior to the pandemic. It's easy and comfortable to be at home. I understand that. I did it for months too. But church was never about your comfort level. I hope that's not shocking. It's a place where we can connect relationally to one another, to encourage each other to become like Christ in all of life. It's a place where we can serve others. If church has just been reduced to keeping up the sermon series, we're missing what church was always intended to be. It promotes our growth and it engages us in kingdom work.

Our volunteer corps at Grace has been decimated by the pandemic. I have no better term to use for it. Volunteerism is the biggest challenge that the churches in America and around our city face, for sure, because we're talking to other pastors who are facing the post-pandemic. Pastors all over town—we first talked about how we could get them back to the worship center, and now we talk about how we get our volunteer corps back into service.

I'm calling you back! I'm calling you to serve. Your church needs you. By August 15th, we're calling you back to in-person worship. We're calling you back to engage in volunteer service. We need you to give a peg to us. We don't have enough volunteers to open up our children's ministry for both services. We don't have enough greeters at our front doors at our

worship center, our children's building, our adult communities to greet our guests and welcome our people back. We need people to serve coffee and to help clean up. We need small group leaders in every ministry area. Talking to the staff, we don't know whether to plan for a flood or whether we're going to experience a drought. Your church needs you.

If you go to our website, you can go to our page and scroll down. You'll see a Fall to Serve. There's a way there that you can communicate to us ways that you're willing to step forward and serve.

When you volunteer, you are answering somebody's prayer. I have three granddaughters that are in Grace Kids. I was very tempted to put their picture up there right now and play—who is it?—Sarah McLachlan. I want them to be exposed to other adults who love the Lord, who love them and will teach them about Jesus.

Serving here is good for you. It's good for those that we minister to, and it's good for the kingdom of God. So, do you hear me, Grace, the people of Grace? Your church needs you. We need you to come back, we need you to engage in service here. We've never been this short-handed coming into the fall kickoff.

So, what's your plan to transition from the state you're in, the cave syndrome you're experiencing, to engage in service? There's a big difference between "can't" and "won't." Some people—and we understand—can't serve. There are limitations you have, there are health reasons, any number of things. I understand that. But "can't" is different than "won't." *I just won't serve.* What are you going to do with your PEG in regards to your church?

We're not asking just for us only. It's not just about "get back here to Grace and do our stuff." But we want you to serve here and we want you to serve there.

Serve There

Our missions program went through a change over the last couple of years. Now, we have a great missionary corp. We have ninety-two missionaries that serve around the world. The unique thing about those people is that they either grew up at Grace as a child in our children's ministry, our youth ministry, were here when they were in college, or as an adult spent a significant part of their growing process as part of Grace Covenant Church. Our missionaries are us. We don't send other people's children to the mission field and support them; we send our own.

They are great folks. They are top-notch. They are leaders and trainers of other people in their fields. They have great accomplishments and expertise in their areas of ministry. One received a lifetime achievement award from a very prestigious missions conference. Some have taken the gospel to the end of the world. They were there.

But missions has to be more than us sending people to go on our behalf. It has to be a way to mobilize us for kingdom service. It has to be a way for us to engage in missions. So, if you go to our webpage, you have to look for Grace Mobilization. And when you do, you're going to see a number of opportunities, a list of opportunities, of ways that we want to encourage you to serve, there out in our community, and even beyond that to the world. [Slide} We want to mobilize people to engage in missions, locally and internationally. It's a mix of service project kind of things and what I call relational connection options.

A service project would be for your small group, your community, your family, going to the food bank and packing boxes for food distribution. It's an event kind of deal. So, you can go for a few hours, you'll accomplish much, they are glad to have you there. That's how they get their things done. And then when you end you go home, and you come back whenever you'd like to. That's service opportunities.

Then there are opportunities (and many of them we actually list) that are things where there are relational connection opportunities. Here's what those are. It's an opportunity for you to serve regularly over time, which leads you to have relational connection to those people that you're serving.

An example of that would be Mission Possible. Mission Possible works in east Austin. It was a ministry that was started here at Grace. It's an umbrella of multiple ways to minister to the people in east Austin and central Austin. One of their ministries is Church under the Bridge. If you have a heart for the homeless, Grace Covenant provides the coffee and volunteers to work the second Sunday of each month. You go down there, you get relationally connected and engaged in the population of people that are homeless in central Austin. Last week I found out we're down to about three volunteers. We need people to step up and serve.

Another thing I want to point you to is Education Connection. Research shows that if you can teach a child how to read by third grade, it changes the trajectory of his or her life. Now most of us taught our children and are teaching our grandchildren to read by the time they get into kindergarten. But for many families, they don't even have children's books in the home. And so,

Education Connection is a partnership of the churches of Austin. That's where their volunteers are. They're an educational thing, like ADRN is for disaster relief. They have opportunities to go into public schools, and through that it provides you an opportunity to have thirty minutes each week with the same child to encourage their reading development. It could be the school in your neighborhood or one not too far away. We've had some of our staff go and be a part of that, and some at Grace.

So, every one of the ministries on our website we give financially to and we have had volunteers be a part of. So, it's easy for us to encourage you in this direction. Education Connection—a lot of these ministries are the same way as this. They're trying to figure out what they're able to do in the fall. On August 4th, Education Connection will change their website and open up registration for fall volunteers. So, consider that. Serve here and serve there.

When you volunteer in any of these organizations, you're an answer to their prayers and the prayer the Lord Jesus had to thrust forth laborers into the harvest.

We want you to serve internationally. Belize is going to open back up for us. The week that we shut down for Covid was the week that we were sending our first family group down to the children at San Juan Cow Pen, a little village there in southern Belize. We were going to teach them the Old Testament Walk Thru, those hand signs we learned, and biblical character lessons.



This week we've actually had four people from our congregation down in Belize serving with the medical teams. We need to go back there. It will be good for you. It will be good for them. It will be good in making God famous among them.

So, I want you to pull out your passport. I pulled out mine a couple of weeks ago and found out that it was expired. So, I've gotten in that renewal process. Check your date. If it's coming up on time, renew your passports. There are places for us to go and people for us to serve.

Serve here, serve there in the Austin community, serve there in Belize. In Matthew 9 Jesus said, looking at His disciples, **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."** What's your plan to transition out of your current state? What's your plan to break the cave syndrome and re-engage in life? You can be a PEG. You can offer your prayers, your engagement, and your giving, and help hold an organization together. We think it starts here at Grace, it moves to the community, and beyond that to the world.

At the end of my dad's fifteen-day cruise across the Pacific they reached their destination. The doors opened again and those hundreds of soldiers walked through that second door and got to their destination and served their duty. But for five men, the experience was different on that cruise, because they used the in-between time as an opportunity to serve others. A Summer to Give, a Fall to Serve. We're calling you to serve this fall. Don't just wait around until the Lord comes back, but engage. Give purpose to this time, the in-between time, by giving yourselves to become like Christ in all of life and to engage in service with the gifts and the talents and the abilities and resources that God has given you.

Your church needs you. Your community needs you. The world needs to see a church actively engaged in serving. God is calling you to be a PEG. Where will you serve? Let's pray.

Father God, we love You. And yet, Father, we recognize that we're weak and we're frail, and in many ways we're languishing. So, Lord, will You stir our hearts and make a difference in us in order that we might engage again—engage in bringing You glory by serving You well and having a wholehearted desire to not only worship You, but to serve? To serve here, to serve in Austin, and to serve the world, that Your name would be made famous. In the name of our Savior Jesus, Amen.