

- Good morning Grace Community Church!
- Hey guys, I just wanted to share something with you before we really got going this morning... a little about me
- My folks down at GFF bought me a T-shirt last year for my birthday... and on it they had screen printed something rather unique...
- This, is a squirrel...
- Have you ever seen that Disney movie "Up"?
  
- The one where the talking dog always get distracted by stuff... like squirrels... and he'll be talking along and making lots of sense and then all of a sudden he'll be like "Squirrel!"
  
- Well... that's kind of me... so if I start going off on this tangent which I think is absolutely really amazing but it begins to bore you guys like crazy... somebody yell out squirrel and that will bring me back around
  
- **OK... that being said, Pastor Allen gave me pretty free reign today to talk to you about anything the Spirit led me to talk about**
  
- In an EMAIL he wrote: " Just no heresy please" and then he put a little SMILEY FACE
  
- That is one of the greatest fears of pastors when they aren't preaching and are having someone fill the pulpit... because they love you and they don't want anything that is untrue to be spoken from the pulpit to the people God has given them to love and protect
  
- **So I wrote back to him: "I would rather roll in broken glass and take a lemon juice shower than speak heresy." ... SMILEY FACE**
- And I would... God's Word is pure and true and holy and brings joy and conviction and challenge and peace and it should not be altered or changed to suit anyone...
- God's Word is the thing that does the changing... we don't change it
- And I hope that we, together, are changed by God's Word today
  
- So... back to what I am preaching on today... before somebody yells out squirrel
  
- I have shared with folks down at GFF that there are two SIMPLE things I think that God would have me focus...

**- Number 1 - This is real**

- God is real. Our faith is real. This world is real. Sin is real. Our struggles are real. Joy and peace and salvation IN CHRIST... are real.

- That's a no-brainer, right?

- But churches, you, me, so often... when the rubber meets the road, our first inclination is to look to and rely on... OURSELVES and not the Creator, Lord, Judge and Savior of the Universe Jesus Christ

- This is a real danger...

- Remember the church in Ephesus in the opening chapter of Revelation... they did everything right, but what happened? They lost their first love

- When you lose your first love, that leads to all the other bad things... and you begin to play-act and pretend and be fakers and be legalistic and you start having doctrine without practice...

- And even worse, you start relying on yourself

- And so... that's why I remind you today... this is real!

- God is real! Your faith is real! Your struggles are real, the Enemy is real, spiritual warfare is real...

- But greater than all these things, God is real

- Remember this... especially when the rubber meets the road

**- And the second thing God has led me to teach at GFF is this...**

- To teach people what it is to be "In Christ."

- If you want to do something amazing and REAL... get our your Bible App or get our your concordance or go online and do this search... exact word... "IN CHRIST"

- Now... read through all of those scriptures, there's about 60...

- Find out and see the promises that God makes to those of us who are "IN CHRIST"

- I don't care if you tune out right now and get on your phones or tablets and spend the next 30 minutes ignoring me and reading in your Bibles what it means to be "IN CHRIST"

- For those of you are going to stick with me... put your thinking caps on now... how many of you are "In Christ"?

- If you are a believer out there, you are "In Christ."

- So... again... How many of you are "In Christ"?

- Let's find out some things about YOU who are In CHRIST today... let's look at some of those verses

### **Romans 8:1-2**

*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free **in Christ Jesus** from the law of sin and death."*

- In the world, Outside of Christ we are guilty

- Outside of Christ we are slaves to sin

- Outside of Christ we will die a terrible spiritual and eternal death

- But... IN CHRIST we are changed... that is the REAL reality

- IN CHRIST we are NOT condemned but INNOCENT

- IN CHRIST we are set FREE from sin

- IN CHRIST we will not die, but live with Jesus in an eternal Heaven forever!

- The Gospel of your salvation broken down into two verses... IT'S REAL

- **This is the message that the church, you and me, are to give the world... what it is to be IN CHRIST... remember that, it's important**

- And you also get scriptures like this from 2 Corinthians 2:14

*"But thanks be to God, who **in Christ** always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere"*

- I just told you that we as the church, as those IN CHRIST, are to tell others about what it is like to be IN CHRIST... and now it is proven by scripture... don't take my word for it, seek GOD's Word

- Where does the thanks go? To GOD

- And what are we doing?

- We are spreading the knowledge that Jesus is REAL everywhere!

- And that knowledge that we are spreading is like a BEAUTIFUL FRAGRANCE!

- And as Jesus Christ leads... where does he always lead us? To triumph!

- How often?

- ALWAYS... because for those who God is drawing to Himself the call of Jesus through His people is always effective, whether it is immediate or over a span of time... there is always triumph in Christ

- And some of us plant and some of us water and some of us reap and there is triumph in each of those things for we are part of God's sovereign plan

- **Speaking of that... - Check out Ephesians 2:10**

*"For we are his workmanship, created **in Christ** Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*

- Each and every one of you, from the greatest to the least... YOU ARE PART of God's plan and He brought you into His plan, IN CHRIST

- Can you imagine the actual blue print for God's plan?

- Like if it were all written down on a giant sheet of paper... like the whole plan beginning to end? Like all of the mystery uncovered

- Like a blueprint... right there for us all to see

- Blueprints are a plan on how to build things, right?
- The architect (or the engineer) has it all figured out... He has a plan
  
- Here are the materials we'll need and here is where it all goes and here is what is going to do what
- I bet that you have some sort of blueprint or drawing for your new building right?
- The carpenters are going to carpenter and the plumbers are going to plumb and the electricians are going to electrify and the painters paint and the carpet layers lay carpet and the decorators decorate
- **Everybody, with a different skill has a different job to do... remember this, this is important**
  
- You know what?
- Your name, Believer, is not just in the Lamb's Book of Life... your name is listed on the blueprint of Gods Sovereign plan... and you have a job, a work, to do IN CHRIST
  
- If you realize that before time began, God knew your name and knew you inside and out, because He made you and said, "I think that I would like to have (insert your name here) do this for me. I gave them gifts and a personality and talents and I am going to give them my strength to always triumph..."
- Don't you think it would be silly to not show up for work?
- That would be pretty silly...
- But know king that God has included us is one of our biggest motivators... What drives us
  
- A lot of this that I am talking about is leading up to something specific... but you can take this understanding and apply it to your entire life as a Christian and as part of your church and as part of the whole great big world wide body of believers
  
- This analogy of the blueprint and building the building... well... it does finally lead us to the meat of the sermon
- You folks are just beginning a new step in your journey that God has provided... that is exciting!
- You have a new building...
- I really am very excited for you! I mean... really. i'm not faking
  
- **Because I know what it is like to set up and tear down each week.**

- I know what it is like to want to have an extra service and have to call ahead and get permission

- I know what it is like to get the message from your landlord on Sunday Morning, "Oops. Sorry you are going to have to change you plans because this is our building and not your building and we need to use the building for something else at 12:30 on Sunday morning.

- I know what it is like to leave the place better than you found it but get chewed out because somebody left the light on in the bathroom...

- I know what these things are like because we have been there! We started off in a home, and then moved to a community theater and then God brought us a building...

- And within the last year GFF has just moved in to our new facility... just like you

- And its exciting to finally... be free!

**- I'm no genius, I'm no builder, I'm no architect... but I've been where you guys are now**

- And it seems like God provided for us in much the same way that He provided for you... with an existing building that needed a lot of work

- In like the blink of an eye, God provided us an old warehouse... it was gutted and stinky and messy and dirty... the parking lot was too small... we had to put in a drop ceiling and have a stage built and put in walls and bathrooms and classrooms a handicap ramp and an emergency door and carpeting and electric... chairs... sound system... the list goes on and on

- And God has drawn our congregation closer and closer together through our building project

- People used the gifts and talents that God gave them to accomplish this project

- Two people were saved because of our building project and became part of our church and countless others grew in their faith because of what God has done

- God has a purpose and reason behind everything...

**- Now... before I share my last scripture, I have to ask you all some more questions**

- How many of you love the people here in your church family?

- Ok, that's an easy one because you all know what the answer should be... and you do... you do love the people here in your church family

- You are united IN CHRIST!

- You love them dearly... you've drawn close to them and shared with them and leaned on them and given and received... you are a family... yes, you love them

- How many of you are creative?

- How many of you have gifts and talents that God has given to you?

- How many of you are dreamers and planners?

- How many of you have a vision for what your new building should be and look like?

- How many of you like to get what you want?

- How many of you like to hear the words, "No, I don't think we should do that?"

**- You all see where I am going?**

- Ok... maybe not

- We have elders at GFF and I'm pretty sure that is the way that your church government has been set up as well

- Our elder board has been the same now for 6 years plus

- And we have been through the fire together

- We have stood side by side through thick and thin

- These Elders are the same ones who nominated me to be their pastor...

- We love another, we've prayed for ne another, we've worshipped together and cried together... we trust one another

- My head elder and I are especially close... he has been there for me and I have been there for him

**- He's quite a bit older than I am ... and I think that often he sees me as a son... and I see him... as kind of a crazy uncle**

- But there was one Sunday when we, in our humanness, got into a shouting match, 5 minutes before showtime on Sunday morning within earshot of EVERYONE

- And it just happened... we both got ambushed by it and before we knew it...

- I said something that he thought was an insult to his project management ... and in the high stress of the situation he lashed out at me

- And then I took offense that he would treat me, the pastor, the way that he did and I yelled back
- And it was on... pointed fingers and raised voices
- Hurt feelings and stomping away... wondering if all this were worth it

- And you know what it was about?
- Something stupid in the building project

- So I'm just telling you this... our building project went smooth compared to others
- But there were bumps in the road that we had to get by... IN CHRIST... WITH ONE AN-OTHER

- I think its my job today to be a cheerleader... but also to come before you and say... you may have some bumps in the road
- But you know what? You can do all things in Christ
- God's proven great things to you, He did for us, and He can smooth out those bumps

- God can say it so much better than what I can so I am just going to read our next IN CHRIST scripture... and it's most of Romans Chapter 12
- And the big point of Romans Chapter 12 is the "IN CHRIST" scripture right in the middle

- **There is a part of me, to be seen by you as this great Bible Teacher...**

- There is a little part of me that wishes that I could pull out this incredible and hard hitting piece of scripture from the depths of the Bible and illuminate it in a way that you had never heard before...

But I am going to read to you from Romans 12... and you know this... but we're going to cover it again

- **Here we go... Romans 12:1-21**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that*



*by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

- I don't have enough time to cover everything here... but quickly
- Paul is appealing to the church at Rome the same way that I am doing here today...
  
- How you live your REAL LIFE is how you worship a REAL GOD
- And it ain't always easy to live a holy life... that's why it's a sacrifice that you make
- When you start feeling grouchy, or impatient or frustrated or tired, renew your mind by remembering that God is real! That His plan is real
- That changes your whole mind set right? Paul calls it a renewing of your mind
- And with a renewed mind, a mind set on God... you can begin to find out what the will of God is for you and your church
  
- As you embark upon this building project, or this journey in your faith, there are going to be times when you don't know what to do
- But with a transformed and real and even patient faith, you'll be able to figure out what God's will is... and you start doing stuff in God's will, you'll find out that He can move mountains

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

- Here, Paul is telling us, about us!
- And it's real easy... don't be a know-it-all
- in the previous section we learned that we aren't as smart as God
- In this section... we better start learning that we aren't always smarter than the believers around us either
  
- Let me share with you a quick story... when we were building our church, there was great discussion on how we should design the sound booth

- One of the sound guys wanted to enclose the whole thing and put a door on it and in the front of it there would be a great big open window

- The thought behind it was... well, we have some VERY ENERGETIC children and that's all I'll say about that... but if you enclose it and put a door on it, those children could not get into the sound booth and be energetic

- Well, that's a good idea... but I don't care how big that hole is, if the SOUND BOOTH is enclosed, you can't hear THE SOUND

- So, I said, how about we just build like a half wall with a half door and not enclose everything so you can hear...

- Well, long story short... I lost

- And there are going to be some of you who may feel like that... you lost... oh well, big deal... in the grand scheme of things, the sun is going to come up tomorrow and God is still on the throne

- And sometimes your brother, or your sister, is more important than you always being right

- So... the sound booth was built enclosed... and on the first Sunday, when we were doing sound checks, the same guy kept coming out of the sound booth and listening and then he would run back in and then he would run back out and then he would run back in...

- Ohhhhhh... the temptation

- "And so I say, "What ya doin?"

- And he said, "I can't hear right in there..."

- "Ahhh... well, at least when you get it set just right in a month or two those energetic kids can't get in here and screw it up"

- That's what I wanted to say... But I didn't

- There are not many things more frustrating than really believing that something should be done one way, and you share your reason, and it still doesn't happen the way you think it should happen

- That's a big one... THAT'S A REAL ONE

- One that we don't just face in church building projects but also in church

- Hey, here's the lesson... work with one another, listen to each other's ideas

- Don't be a know-it-all

- And if you have been a know-it-all... make it right... seek forgiveness and you'll get it and don't let it become a huge deal that lasts for forever

- And if you happen to be the person "WHO LOST"... let it go... and IN CHRIST... you can when you renew your mind be seeing the big picture of the REAL reality of Jesus Christ and your and others salvation

- This is what Paul calls being SOBER-MINDED

**- But the biggest point is, if we all have sober judgment and work really hard at not being know-it-alls... well, then the Enemy is not going to have a foothold**

*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, **are one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

- Biggest point... we are one body IN CHRIST

**- IN CHRIST... we are one... IN CHRIST we are united... WE ARE ONE BODY**

- That's the big point here ... as believers and members of the church, we have a special relationship with one another... and the thing that unites us is that we are IN CHRIST together

- In the world, we are adversarial... in the world we are competitive... in the world we look out of number one and that's us

- But IN CHRIST, we look to protect one another... we love one another more than ourselves

- This is huge right?

- Especially when you are entering a great big, high stress project like church building renovation... love covers lots of things

- Love God with everything you got and love your Christian friend as yourself

**- Here's something else**

- One of the things that I am most proud of at GFF is that as new people are coming in and becoming part of us, we don't all look alike anymore

- I've been in churches where everybody looks the same... all from the same social strata... all with the same sense of humor, all with the same hobbies... and it seems like their sameness is what unites them

- But it is a beautiful thing, to be united with a bunch of people ... where the only thing you share in common is JESUS CHRIST

**- That's the only glue you need... Jesus Christ binds us together in salvation**

- And there is a purpose for us all being different

- Let me go back to the blueprint example...

- Just like a building takes all different kinds of people with different skills, the church needs all sorts of people with different skills, talents and gifts

- Every single one of you is needed... every single one of you is part of the plan

- And in the big picture, every one of you has a place and part in this body as you move forward and specifically... every one of you has a part in this building project as you move forward

- I keep going back to this building project that you have... and I think that the reason that I do is that I am so excited for you and our building project was such a blessing for ALL OF US at GFF

- I just so greatly desire to see you blessed and drawn together and drawn toward Jesus

**- Paul gets real specific in his letter to the Romans and we can get pretty specific today about how you can and are involved... and he breaks this down by spiritual gifts**

- All of these spiritual gifts... they come from being IN CHRIST

**- Those of you with the gift of prophecy...**

- Keep pointing people to Jesus... that's what the gift of prophecy is

- Having this keen sense of direction about what we should do in light of the fact that God is Holy and Jesus is our Savior

- Keep showing people the big picture that faith is real, that God is real, that what God is doing here is real...

- And leaders, I challenge you to listen to the wisdom that God can give you through the folks who have this gift

- And if you don't know who they are... start looking for some folks that have built up some trust with you and have history with you and that always point to Jesus

- Listen, I'm not getting all weird on you but we serve a supernatural God who works through His people

- Prophets, keep this place and these people centered on Jesus

**- This next gift is the gift of service**

- This is a gift that we at GFF has been blessed with in abundance

- To be honest with you, we haven't been blessed with a bunch of people who are great teachers or prophets, but we have been blessed in great ABUNDANCE with people with the gift of service

- For those of you with that gift of service... serve, work, do... get your hands dirty...

- You, with this gift, are effective in what you do for Jesus

- When you get a person with the gift of service on the job site... let'em go and see what they do

- And people with the gift of service, I just want to say that I bless you like crazy... because you have been so instrumental and a blessing already here at Grace... you can't have a mobile church without servants...

- And here's some motivation to serve even greater during this sprint... once you get into your new building, life is gonna get a lot easier

**- Teachers... keep teaching... keep teaching amidst all the change and newness and busyness**

- People with the gift of teaching can be pretty single-minded... hey, I'm one of them

- And sometime with everything going on around you, there can be distractions but keep your focus

- We are here to glorify God and teach His people

- And look forward to that day that is going to be very soon when you can teach even more people, more effectively in the new building God has provided

**- And here is something else...**

- As a practical example, I shared with you that during our building project, people came to know Jesus and came to be part of our church family

- We had like a group of 5 guys who were down at the building project EVERY SINGLE day... working with the contractors

- And in our case, we had a number of recently retired people who COULD do that... and these people knew OTHER recently retired people who were just itching for something to do to occupy their time

- And the GFF people called the other people... and the new people worked side by side building that building

- And as they worked building that building, God worked building something in their heart

**- And as they worked side by side with our guys, OUR GUYS TAUGHT THEM what it was like to be part of a church and to know Jesus**

- They taught and they modeled their faith... and those new people began to realize that it was GOOD to be part of a group of believers who cared for them and loved Jesus

- as you embark on this journey, know that it is a great teaching opportunity to reach people for Jesus

- That is specifically how God worked through us, and your situation may be different, but the opportunity remains

**- And for those with the gift of exhortation... you're going to need some cheerleaders**

- Get behind people, encourage them, love them, point to Jesus...

- There will be frustrating times when the world rises up... but this is the time when you rise up

- And in this special gift that you have been given point to Jesus and encourage God's people and help spur them on to the triumph that we are promised in Jesus Christ

**- Let me give you some ammunition for your exhortation...**

- Remember how in the very beginning I told you that GFF needed a bigger parking lot?

- We had an occupancy permit for 149 but then we had to get a permit for parking...

- And when we went to the meeting with the planning commission, everybody but one person looked at our plan and approved it... except for one person

- They were going to try and lower our occupancy number to how many people they thought we could fit into our parking lot... even though you could have parked 100 cars along the side of a very secondary side street that hardly sees any traffic

**- You will run into that "one person" by the way... the fly in the ointment and the gum in the works**

- And that one person said that we didn't not have enough parking area or 149 people... and sitting there in that meeting, **I was pretty sure that I could kill them with my bare hands...** but the headlines would have been very bad

- So we needed a bigger parking lot before we could open our doors to 149 people...

- You know that piece of scripture about faith where God says that He will move mountains and throw them into the sea if we only pray

- **Let me tell you that God moved a mountain for us at GFF**

- He picked it up in 1,000 dumptrucks and dumped it right next to our parking lot so that we had a bigger parking lot and then he spread it out with a bull dozer so we had a bigger parking lot

- You now how much those 1,000 dump truck loads of fill cost us? Nothing

- We had a guy who happened to mention to somebody else that we could use some landfill

- And then that guy started bringing fill and that guy mentioned it to another guy and that started bring fill and then that guy mentioned it to another guy...

- Before you knew it, the Borough of Wellsboro was dumping all of their fill in our parking lot, Delmar Township was dumping all of their fill in our parking lot and Glenn R. Hawbaker, the giant road building crew contracted by the state was dumping all of his fill in our parking lot

- And you go down to GFF and ask them what we praise God for and they'll say "DIRT! We praise God for dirt!"

- God moved a mountain... He's real... God works... and God is the answer when you run into the fly in the ointment and the gum in the works

- **God is even bigger than bureaucracy!** And that my friends is an amen moment if I've ever seen one

- Those of you with the gift of exhortation, you keep point to the reality of Jesus Christ Creator of the Universe

- **Ok... here's the gift that hits us close to home... right in our wallets**

- We are all to give unto The Lord

- But there are some for whom GIVING is A SPIRITUAL GIFT

- And when these people give and give generously amazing things happen... God's work is done

- I don't know what your finances are, I don't know what your budget it... but I know this, you are going to go OVER BUDGET somewhere

- And when you do, don't get mad at your leaders for getting you there... this is probably just a time when God is saying to you... TRUST ME

- Somewhere and sometime, probably soon, you are going to be faced with an unforeseen expense

**- We were at GFF... let me give you a little more exhortation and cheerleading**

- We believed that we were going to have an entire year to come up with an additional \$20,000 for one of the phases of our building project

- But come to find out, we found out that we did not have a year... we had a month... **one month to come up with 20 grand**

- We found out this news at Thanksgiving... how many of you like to give Christmas presents?

- And we found out this news when I figured that pretty much everybody was pretty much tapped out... they had ALREADY given and given and given

- And so can you imagine what it was like for me to stand in front of about 65 people and say, we need 20 Grand in about 30 days... I know it is Christmas time

- And by the way... I am no good at asking people for money

- And so we started praying

- And we had just begun a sermon series on the Book of Luke and if you remember in the book of Luke, that book was written to a guy named Theophilus

- This man named Theophilus was Luke's wealthy benefactor... Theophilus is the one man provided the funds for Luke to write this gospel

**- And so we prayed for a Theophilus to show up at GFF... for a large giver and benefactor to help us**

- And Theophilus showed up and gave... and God's people gave beyond what anyone would have ever expected or thought possible



- But again, we remember that God is real... and being real, God has a huge impact on the people whom he loves and gives them the vision to give more and work harder than they ever would have before

- God owns the cattle on a thousand hills... and God provided

- And so I exhort you... give... and know that God will bless that gift and I pray that God blesses you for the giving

**- And so, as we get a little bit closer here to the end...**

- Leaders, lead... people, trust and follow...

- Leaders... pray! People, pray for your leaders for wisdom

- Be cheerful and merciful toward one another... for you are united IN CHRIST doing HIS WORK that He HAS set before you

**- And let me close simply with some scripture here and then we will wrap up**

*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

- Love you guys... I don't even know you but I do because we are united IN CHRIST

- You and me, you and God's Family Fellowship... united in Christ

- And because we are united in Christ, you let us know what you need... I've shared with you the gifts that we have... and I make them available to you

- And we will pray for you and be there for you... and so, EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY... will the God of the Universe be there for you, LEADING YOU THE WHOLE WAY

- And what happens when God leads you? ALWAYS TRIUMPH

- Stay in His will

**- and so let me tell you again... reminding you because I do love you**

- God is real... your faith is real... your joy is real and your hope is real

- Know what it is to be IN CHRIST! **And never lose your first love!**
- And know that your job is to tell others what it is to be IN CHRIST
- And know this... that led by God... you will ALWAYS TRIUMPH because we have Jesus

- And love one another, you are all part of God's incredible plan, you all have a piece of this... and together... you are greater than the sum of your parts... because GOD is real... and He loves YOU and He has a PLAN and you are part of it