

## **A FLOURISHING FAITH IN A FLOUNDERING CULTURE**

Only a person whose head is buried deeply in the sand does not see that our culture flounders around us. Un-throttled greed, polarizing hatred, and compulsive addiction dictate insatiable appetites that reduce people to two roles in our society – predator and prey. Logical people can no longer distance themselves, pretending to be neutral or above it all. The floundering of the American culture has touched every one of us - in every way; our families, our finances, and our faith. History tells us many things, none of the least being that true followers of Jesus have found not only survived – but flourished amid chaos, confusion, and hostility. This series will connect us with the kind of faith in God to lead our families and community to flourish even while the culture around us flounders.

### **LAYING DOWN THE BEDROCK 4 Essential Truths for the Mind**

(Proverbs) 11:27-30

*If you search for good, you will find favor; but if you search for evil, it will find you! 28 Trust in your money and down you go! But the godly flourish like leaves in spring. 29 Those who bring trouble on their families inherit only the wind. The fool will be a servant to the wise. 30 The godly are like trees that bear life-giving fruit, and those who save lives are wise.*

(Psalm 144:12-15)

*May our sons flourish in their youth like well-nurtured plants. May our daughters be like graceful pillars, carved to beautify a palace. 13 May our farms be filled with crops of every kind. May the flocks in our fields multiply by the thousands, even tens of thousands, 14 and may our oxen be loaded down with produce. May there be no breached walls, no forced exile, no cries of distress in our squares. 15 Yes, happy are those who have it like this! Happy indeed are those whose God is the LORD.*

(Psalm 92:10-15)

*But you have made me as strong as a wild bull. How refreshed I am by your power! 11 With my own eyes I have seen the downfall of my enemies; with my own ears I have heard the defeat of my wicked opponents. 12 But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. 13 For they are transplanted into the LORD's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. 14 Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green. 15 They will declare, "The LORD is just! He is my rock! There is nothing but goodness in him!"*

(Psalm 91:1-16)

*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 This I declare of the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I am trusting him. 3 For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from the fatal plague. 4 He will shield you with his wings. He will shelter you with his feathers. His faithful promises are your armor and protection. 5 Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor fear the dangers of the day, 6 nor dread the plague that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday. 7 Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you. 8 But you will see it with your*

*eyes; you will see how the wicked are punished. 9 If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, 10 no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your dwelling. 11 For he orders his angels to protect you wherever you go. 12 They will hold you with their hands to keep you from striking your foot on a stone. 13 You will trample down lions and poisonous snakes; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! 14 The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. 15 When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honor them. 16 I will satisfy them with a long life and give them my salvation."*

*Note: Memorize one of the four passages! This truth is the bedrock that will steady and secure your troubled mind and crazy thoughts during chaos, doubt, crisis, and unmanageable circumstances!*

**BUILDING THE HOUSE**  
**14 Essentials for Flourishing Faith**  
*(we flourish with - flounder without)*

**[ESSENTIAL ONE -COMMUNITY]**; It is the sense of belonging to, being connected with and united together in. Being identified as, accountable to, believing in and being believed in; to be counted on and to be trusted in. The community is: your people and my people - together.

The spiritual community of Jesus is the family of faith of whom you and I are a part of, regardless of how good or bad we may have been this week. It is fully receiving and freely giving of grace. It is the unity we discover within the truths we hold in common; the liberation of letting go of all hostility, to experience the complete freedom to love and be loved. It is forever and eternally those who are called by the same name to the same journey and purpose. The “to’s” of community are...

***TO SERVE BESIDE – TO EXPECT FROM – TO STRUGGLE OVER – TO UNITE  
 WITH -TO LOVE MUCH AND TO FORGIVE OFTEN.***

This is God's way for His people to flourish and not flounder - it is the way of Jesus.

*Active Word...*

***"How good and pleasant it is  
when brothers live together in unity! For there the  
LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."  
(Psalm 133:1,3). NIV***

**God's Kingdom** – the kingdom of God is community in the highest and purest form. United in love and in the faith and the gospel of Jesus. This community is made up of followers who desire to obey and believer's who refuse to doubt.

- Belonging To – God and one another in Christ. No longer only to ourselves.
- Connected With – In relationship with God's people.
- Identified As – Followers of Jesus.
- Accountable To – Ways of Christ and those we love and have relationship.
- Believing In and Being Believed In – Building hope, promise, and faith in those we love. Strengthening one another.
- Counted On and Trusted In – Allowing for and welcoming expectations and trust to be built in us.

**[ESSENTIAL TWO - LOVE FOR GOD AND ONE ANOTHER];** The two most valued commandments given to followers of Jesus. Love for God and one another remains the most influential evidence for Who God is - and the most logical explanation for our faith in Him. In the end, love is the greatest of the three eternal virtues (faith, hope, and love). Without love for God and each other, we have nothing and simply we are nothing – with it we can flourish. Love is how our faith will flourish when the culture flounders.

***Excerpt from Reunion Beyond Reunion...***

What then does the term “love beyond love” mean? Simply this: ***“We open our heart, mind, spirit, and soul to a person. To remove all distance and hostility that keeps us from connecting with them in the places and moments in life that Jesus intends for us.”*** There is a specific calling and command from Jesus to love people the way He loved. That calling asks us to *go beyond* our own feelings of hostility and broken ideas of love for others and ourselves. It asks us to literally love like Jesus loved. For a true Christ follower loving beyond love is intended to be a daily

function of life – not just a timely gesture or good deed (although they are always welcomed). It is active love that Jesus wants from us! ***Active love that goes beyond love is to share what has been shared with us; love that is open and intentional with hospitality to all that come our way.***” Christians (especially American) will often mistake this for some method or form of personal evangelism – but it is not the same thing. Evangelism is about faithfully *delivering ‘the message’ of Christ’s love to those who need it when they need it most.* Certainly we agree that God has an expectation of all Christians (not just some) to deliver the message of Christ’s love (*Matthew 28*) through various methods and opportunities of evangelism. But God’s intentions for love do not stop there - it is just another place for them to begin. God’s love is intended to be even more personal, more intimate, and certainly more difficult than just faithfully delivering a message (even the greatest message). No, love beyond love in a “Jesus context” most times ***is not easy.*** And to know it is not easy is to discover quickly that one does not always feel good about it. *That is because the way Jesus wants us to love and be loved is intended to continue out beyond us and our huge need to feel good about ourselves.* In the context of Jesus and His love - love goes beyond our feelings about us, and comes about only in Him. Which means, “day in-day out” we are going to love people who will reciprocate our love

- and people who will reject both us - and our love. What we learn then about love beyond love as Christians is that regardless, we keep moving as Jesus did - slowly forward toward people. The idea is that in reality we are creating open space for *living life together in Christ*. It is His idea that with grace we progressively open ourselves to loving anyone who hears or believes His message. In this sense love beyond love is about being on the “same page” as Jesus, and loving people from that place. Without that reality, loving people the way Christians should love is just not possible.

***Active Word...***

(Mark 12:30-31)

*And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."*

NLT

(John 13:34-35)

*"Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples — when they see the love you have for each other."*

(THE MESSAGE)

(Romans 12:9)

*Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. (NLT)*

(Romans 13:8-10)

*If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law. For the commandments against adultery and murder*

*and stealing and coveting — and any other commandment — are all summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to anyone, so love satisfies all of God's requirements. (NLT)*

*(1 Corinthians 13:1-9)*

*If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.*

- *Love never gives up.*
- *Love cares more for others than for self.*
- *Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.*
- *Love doesn't strut,*
- *Doesn't have a swelled head,*
- *Doesn't force itself on others,*
- *Isn't always "me first,"*
- *Doesn't fly off the handle,*
- *Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,*
- *Doesn't revel when others grovel,*
- *Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,*
- *Puts up with anything,*
- *Trusts God always,*
- *Always looks for the best,*
- *Never looks back,*
- *But keeps going to the end.*

*Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit.*

*(THE MESSAGE)*

### ***Active Love...***

***Love is a Decision:*** To love the way Jesus asked us to love is biggest decision we make each day. It determines whether our faith will flourish or flounder.

***Love is a Gift:*** Jesus said, “those who are forgiven much love much” and so we get to love – it is the greatest gift a person can give to another person. The gift of love makes opportunity for the faith of the recipient to flourish.

***Love is Freedom:*** In love, we are free from the bondage of hate, jealousy, judgment, bitterness, and hurt. Love is the freedom to be at peace with everyone and everything.

***Love is Connecting:*** with God at the highest level – with humanity at the deepest level. Love is the touch that does not take, invade, or intimidate. Love is the gentle touch of comfort and ultimate sense of security.

***Love is Being:*** Love is not defined by what we do but who we are. No performances please! Yes, love can be expressed by what we do – but can only truly be known by others from who we have become in Christ

**[Essential Three – Truth];** Jesus said, “*I am the truth*” in that context it is entirely possible for you and I to find the absolute values, morals, and ethics needed to form flourishing faith and strong character. According to His friend and follower John, Jesus also said... “*you will know the truth and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32). – many of us are a witness that indeed the truth sets men free. But defining truth within the context of a floundering culture can seem anything but liberating... it is complicated and at many levels living in a **non-truth culture** is not only addictive and intoxicating but it is like a dehydrated man drinking from a contaminated well – it looks like the well is just what he needs to save his life, but in the end is only poison. There is the point. In a floundering culture the truth has been downgraded in our consciousness to a “whatever I want it to be”

status - ironically that has happened until (like the contaminated well) no one or nothing around us is what it appears to be. In spite of all the hostility and chaos caused by that thinking and behavior no one seems to make the connection (the well is contaminated) – *“we do not know the truth and we do not tell the truth and so poison ourselves and we flounder.”* In all actuality in a floundering culture it is the people who are floundering, so then, what has happened is that it becomes acceptable to the people that truth is not absolute or stable – that it changes from moment to moment, depending what floundering person is telling it - and based on what their floundering circumstance or personal or social agenda is. If a culture continues to flounder in this manner then eventually no one really remembers what the truth is – from they’re you wake up one day and no one really cares anymore what the truth is. That is where we are at and that is why we are floundering.

This is going to hurt... But to have a flourishing faith we have to find and know the truth, and then use truth to dismantle and destroy the lies that we have allowed – causing us to flounder. Down inside of us the truth has been pushed aside, stuffed away, blocked out, or reconstructed. Truth however does not go away. It is in us... deep but present. It has a voice that speaks inside of us while life flounders and goes on around us... it says... *“Say what you need to say – say what you need to say.”* As difficult as that is for us to hear there is good news! In Jesus we have the possibility to reach out and reclaim truth in our life. Listen to what He told Pilate...

(John 18:37)

*"You say that I am a king, and you are right," Jesus said. "I was born for that purpose. And I came to bring truth to the world. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true."*

NLT

He not only reveals truth and is truth – but He destroys and dismantles all lies and everything that is not true. In Jesus we find the flourishing faith for a floundering culture because we find in Jesus the way to truth at every level, in every application, for every

situation. ***There is no circumstance in life where truth is not important or needed.*** This is God's plan for truth and truth is His plan for flourishing faith. And the truth has been will be made available to everyone - so there is opportunity for faith to flourish in everyone. Here is how Paul an apostle of Jesus described it...

(Romans 1:18-32)

*But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves. For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts. From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they became utter fools instead. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people, or birds and animals and snakes. So God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. So they worshiped the things God made but not the Creator himself, who is to be praised forever. Amen. When they refused to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their evil minds and let them do things that should never be done. They refuse to understand, break their promises, and are heartless and unforgiving. They are fully aware of God's death penalty for those who do these things, yet they go right ahead and do them anyway. And, worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too. NLT*

I believe truth in the “God context” is a paradox. And that paradox is oftentimes why people don’t get it. For example, here are two truths... *1/ God loves people – people are His Creation. His love is wide-open and His mercy covers all distance and space. 2/ Jesus is truth – He is the only way to God. Truth is a very narrow way and His grace very specific and intentional with distance and space.* So, isn’t God truth? Doesn’t Jesus love us? How can God be wide –open and also very narrow at the same time? Besides being in complete unity they are the same truth. But this is how many conversations about truth tend to get too judgmental and pious or way too broad and philosophical. The truth is what it is -not what we want it to be. That is why our faith can flourish with truth and flounder without it. If we can understand the freedom and clarity that truth brings to our life we will stop floundering in the bondage and confusion that we currently live. We can by living truth and speaking truth effectively become truth, and thereby avoid the floundering that comes with self-serving, manipulative, vague, unreliable, deceptive, and the ever-changing face of truthlessness. To avoid this train-wreck there are two aspects of the truth that must be heard and responded to so we can begin to put a stop to the floundering trends that exist in our life.

**One** – We must believe in and live completely by core and rudimentary truths that will navigate and decide for us our: ***Our Spiritual Direction and the Natural Law – Our Personal Morals and Social Ethics.***

**Two** – We must use the freedom and clarity that truth provides to become “*truth speakers and truth doers.*” In other words, we... “*Say what we need to say*”, and “*Do what we need to do.*”

As this (with a loving heart and clear conscience) becomes our practice it provides clear direction and clarity to our life and as a result our faith flourishes when in the past we have floundered. But we need to have ***Decisive Responses*** to these two ***Truth Principles*** before we can see that clear path to reclaiming the respect and integrity needed for our faith to flourish in our day to

day living. If we do – our faith will flourish.

**[Essential Four – Order];** And God said, *“Let there be light”* from that moment He set in place a natural and divine order for all of creation to follow. From His order He established a natural rhythm for life that is meant for all of creation live in. We are God’s creation and so this absolutely includes all Human Kind. (Your going to need to read Genesis 1:1-31, 2:1-25) These two chapters gives you an initial feel and understanding for God’s natural and divine order and rhythm for life. In the order of that world His creation flourished and God said this good! The moment that pride stumbled human kind - all hell broke lose... (literally) and there was for the first time the confusion and floundering of God’s creation. Let’s assume for a moment this is a perfect world and that you all buy in to the bible’s story for creation and God’s clear ideas and intentions of natural and spiritual life order for humanity.

How did we get from that point of order to this place of floundering that we are today? How did we get from that place of order to the point that God would at one point (Sodom and Gomorrah) have to destroy His part of His own creation? How did we get from that place of order to the point where men would kill the man sent save and love God’s creation? How did we get from that place of order to the point where Men who claimed to love

God killed other men in the name of God because they would not love Him the way they wanted them to. How did we get from order to the point where a man could hate a different kind of man so deeply that He would kill nearly 7 million of that kind of man? How did we get from order to the point of floundering where simply loving God can get men killed and other men watch it out of intrigue and curiosity on their personal computers while at work? The answer: no natural or divine life order.

*Disease and Symptoms:*

We human beings often suffer from a very self-centric condition that I call “*extreme myopia*.” *Extreme myopia* is a disease of the mind and spirit whose symptoms are ignoring, rearranging, deconstructing or denying God’s natural and divine life order. These symptoms if not treated correctly result in an acute condition of spiritual and social disorientation to the point where one often no longer knows who one is, or worse yet – who God is.

*Cause and Effect:*

*Extreme Myopia* is highly contagious and is caused by selfishness, greed, and pride. *Extreme myopia* creates a constant sense of confusion and imbalance in ones life and can be painfully harmful to those who love the *myopian* most. From that sense of confusion there comes chaotic floundering, and from floundering chaos there

is significant life loss at every level.

*Cure and Prevention:*

Living in God's natural and divine order is the only cure and prevention to *extreme myopia*. To cure personal floundering and to minimize cultural floundering. In Jesus, God's order is made perfect and yet so very do-able and live-able for everyone.

Examples of Jesus bridging God's life order are...

(Matthew 6:33-34)

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. NIV*

(Matthew 20:26-28)

*Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." NIV*

(Matthew 22:37-40)

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." NIV*

(John 15:12-15)

*I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it — the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. You are my friends if you obey me. I no longer call you servants. NLT*

(Matthew 18:4-6)

*Therefore, anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who trusts in me to lose faith, it*

*would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around the neck. NLT*

*Final Case Study:*

Name – Mia Flounders, Age: 35. Occupation: Former corporate executive. *Mia spent the last twelve years tirelessly working to succeed in the business world. In spite of the fact that she was raised in a Christian home as a young girl the demands and compromises she felt necessary for her to succeed included detaching from any kind of Christian community and any of her truly meaningful relationships. These demands and compromises came at a great cost to her emotional and spiritual well-being. Slowly and methodically she shut out friends and family who seemed only to question her obsessive personal and professional path. Over the years her loneliness led her into many physical relationships that confused and lowered her self worth. She maneuvered and scratched her way along all the while distancing herself from the person she was when she came out of college ready to make a difference in the world. Recently she lost the one job she had fought so hard for – her contract not renewed (part of a down-sizing) because plummeting sales in a difficult economy. She had no one to call, no one to listen to her anger and frustration, and fear. The last two weeks she has drank herself to sleep unable to shut out the voices and images of wrong decisions reckless behavior. Her world seems now only to be senseless -without order – she founders in a world gone crazy.*

In Jesus, God's order is alive and well and gives to each one of us the **security – direction – purpose – meaning** we most assuredly need for our faith to flourish in a floundering culture. His life order and daily rhythm for living is eternal and is forever intentional, innovative, compassionate and provisional. Sounds

like flourishing to me.

**[Essential Five – Honor];** Respect, acknowledgement, reverence, admiration, distinction, recognition and tribute are all words that say and bring... honor. When honor is consistently and rightly shared it creates and influences a flourishing mutual environment within any community and culture.

***The Red Letter take on Honor...***

***(Matthew 22:2-14)***

***The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. Many guests were invited, and when the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify everyone that it was time to come. But they all refused! So he sent other servants to tell them, 'The feast has been prepared, and choice meats have been cooked. Everything is ready. Hurry!' But the guests he had invited ignored them and went about their business, one to his farm, another to his store. Others seized his messengers and treated them shamefully, even killing some of them.***

***"Then the king became furious. He sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their city. And he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren't worthy of the honor. Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.' "So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?'(caftan; a celebration garment – provided for every guest by the celebrant/host) And the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind him hand and foot and***

*throw him out...*

**NLT**

***Honor is an essential need of the human soul*** – best described as the unspoken need in every human being to just be acknowledged and recognized for any life accomplishment, participation, or contribution.

***There is nothing shallow about real honor*** - so we are not speaking of gratuitously feeding another persons prideful appetite for recognition or glory. But rather, genuine honor fulfills the basic God -given human need to be recognized as one who is rightly sharing life as part of the human race.

***Honoring God and one another influences and creates*** - an environment of higher standards; and the conviction to live by higher standards that can form strong character and build a good reputation.

***Honor is more than a word*** – it is more of a commitment to keeping ones word, a code of living that both acknowledges and respects the Creator and the Created.

***Honor builds respect and dignity*** - in the human spirit and causes broken and floundering people to have hope that they can flourish.

***Honor is not a gift - it is an essential virtue mutually exchanged between the heart of God the Creator and the soul of man the Creature. Openly sharing this virtue builds flourishing faith and earns unending loyalty and natural reciprocation.***

### **God's Plan For Us to Flourish is Honor**

**GOD THE FATHER - HONORS US**

- **In His Son (John 3:16,17)**

**GOD THE SON - HONORS US**

- **In His Sacrifice (Romans 5:1-8)**

**GOD THE SPIRIT – HONORS US**

- **In His Presence (John 14:16,17)**

**WE HONOR GOD**

- **In Worship and Obedience (1 Peter 2:4-12)**

**WE HONOR ONE ANOTHER**

- **In Openness – Love – Forgiveness (Respect and Dignity)  
(Romans 12:1-16)**

**WE HONOR OURSELVES**

**FAITHFULNESS – HONESTY – SINCERITY (Romans 13:1-7)**

True honor flourishes wherever and whenever it is present – dishonor undermines and discredits all good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.

**[Essential Six – Responsibility];** The book definition for *responsibility* is as follows: *Being accountable to. Taking the blame or credit for. Having the authority to. To be relied or counted on for.* The last definition however is the one most important to us and the one that that God most intended for us to use to help us flourish when see ourselves floundering.

(John 13:34-35)

*So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."*  
*NLT*

(John 14:23-25)

*"All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. 24 Anyone who doesn't love me will not do what I say. And remember, my words are not my own. This message is from the Father who sent me.*

NLT

Having heard that... it is correct to define ***Responsibility*** in ***God's World*** as; ***Expectations Fulfilled.***

### ***Responsibility in Contrast***

Look at responsibility this way... If we can honorably meet or fulfill the expectations we have created and allowed with others, then we with open heart have rightly met our responsibility head on and we can expect to at some significant level see the fruit from that work in the form of faith that is flourishing.

Conversely, if we work to eliminate all of the expectations that others have of us then we in essence have work towards eliminating all of our responsibility with and to others. With this mindset we are eventually cut-off from most of meaningful relationships and real community. And from there only one expectation is left - we can expect to flounder.

### ***Red Letter Take on Responsibility...***

Matthew 25:14-29

*"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a trip. He called together his servants and gave them money to invest for him while he was gone. He gave five bags*

of gold to one, two bags of gold to another, and one bag of gold to the last — dividing it in proportion to their abilities — and then left on his trip. The servant who received the five bags of gold began immediately to invest the money and soon doubled it. The servant with two bags of gold also went right to work and doubled the money. But the servant who received the one bag of gold dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money for safekeeping. "After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of gold said, 'Sir, you gave me five bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!' "Next came the servant who had received the two bags of gold, with the report, 'Sir, you gave me two bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!' "Then the servant with the one bag of gold came and said, 'Sir, I know you are a hard man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth and here it is.' "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You think I'm a hard man, do you, harvesting crops I didn't plant and gathering crops I didn't cultivate? Well, you should at least have put my money into the bank so I could have some interest. Take the money from this servant and give it to the one with the ten bags of gold. To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away.' "NLT

The “red letter” Reality...

There are Expectations that create responsibilities... this is not wrong, unjust, or unfair. It is however God's way of giving us the opportunity to flourish. So we should... Allow Expectations – Build Expectations - Encourage Expectations - Nurture Expectations - Share Expectations - Raise Expectations and Fulfill Expectations.

**Responsibility is not a “to do” list** - but an opportunity to discover and build new expectations with people that can deepen relationships and *\*open the hearts of those we love to Jesus.*

**FULFILLING EXPECTATIONS IS TO MEET OUR RESPONSIBILITIES ...  
MEETING RESPONSIBILITY IS GOD'S WAY FOR OUR FAITH TO FLOURISH**

***Personal Responsibility***

***The expectation is...***

***grow... in mind – body – spirit***

***Spiritual Responsibility***

***The expectation is...***

***seek truth - love as we have been loved***

***Relational Responsibility***

***The expectation is...***

***honor – respect – love***

***Community Responsibility***

***The expectation is...***

***serve – share - stay***

**[Essential Seven – Equality];** We are all the same - yet not all the same; not the same strengths, not the same talents, not the same minds or bodies, not the same capabilities or capacities, not the same understanding or comprehension, not even the same opportunities or resources. But in Christ we are made equal in the eyes and hands of God our Creator the Great Equalizer.

In His Son Jesus, God loves us all equally without prejudice or hostility. His love is a recognition and opportunity that is given equally to all without distinction or distraction – this is the ultimate equality for all mankind. He offers freely to us this ultimate equality in spite of our obvious human inequalities. Amazingly, if we come to Jesus we come to Him equally (in the same condition) each one of us in our sin seeking to be free from the inequality of hate and hostility, pride and judgment. It is there we can be made right and find the way for our faith to flourish.

(Romans 3:22-24)

*We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.*

*For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. NLT*

Every soul seeks this freedom – the freedom of a space and a community where each one can come to the truth and open themselves to one another without the hostility and judgment. ***The unconditional and unbiased love of Jesus is the equalizer*** that God uses to help end our floundering within the bondage of sin. The same limitless love leads us to flourish within the liberty of the forgiveness, mercy, and grace of God. But when we live in the absence of the love of Jesus in our life and in our culture it creates a distinct sense of inequality that is first experienced very subtly until there is enough momentum – and then it becomes openly aggressive and all consuming. Inequality eventually eats one up from the inside out. In a culture where inequality is not remedied with or responded to in true love, there will always be a growing embitterment that leads people who are affected by inequality to hatred - and then on from there to blaming someone or something; it is there in that hostile climate of inequality the people flounder.

***Jesus responds to all inequality with love...***

***His love pulls on the proud, the arrogant, the hater and the judger, to a more humble place of equality.***

***His love lifts on the poor, the cheated, the broken and the discarded, to a more hopeful place of equality.***

***This place of equality can only be found in Jesus, and the value***

***is only understood in His love.***

(Romans 12:1-6)

*So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life — your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life — and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. 2 Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.*

*In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't. (THE MESSAGE)*

## **Beating Inequality – Creating Equality**

Live to Love – Love to Learn

Find Your Value to God – Value Your Neighbor's Value to God

Find Your Place to Serve – Serve in the Place You Find

Be Who You Are – Not Who You Aren't

Count Your Blessings – Bless Those You Count

## ***A Final “red Letter” Take on Equality***

*(Mark 14:3-9)*

*Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had leprosy. During supper, a woman came in with a beautiful jar of expensive perfume. She broke the seal and poured the perfume over his head. Some of those at the table were indignant. "Why was this expensive perfume wasted?" they asked. "She could have sold it for a small fortune and given the money to the poor!" And they scolded her harshly. But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why berate her for doing such a good thing to me? 7 You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But I will not be here with you much longer. 8 She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. 9 I assure you, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be talked about in her memory." NLT*

**[Essential Eight – Obedience]** A common observation from both sides of the Christian debate is that not everyone who believes in God is obedient to God. We need only to look at our own lives to know that there is great truth in that observation. If you are anything like me even before I can get the words completely out of my mouth there is this very clear replay in my mind of having lived that that way (believing and not obeying). I can clearly (without obstruction or excuse) confess that living that way has had everything to do with how my faith during those times has floundered... how I have floundered - and kept me from moving forward and flourishing in my life and in God's kingdom. The concept of obedience is very distinct and clear. We are either obeying or disobeying. It is either obedience or disobedience. I need to be strong in saying this to all of us here today. Thank God there is grace - but with God, there is no gray!

*“I know all the things that you do. You are not hot – you are not cold, I wish you would be one or the other. But since you are like lukewarm water I will spit you out of my mouth.”*

What does that mean you ask? Simply this. For you and I to believe and live in God's grace is amazing. In the end, it will surely be the reason that we finally find our way into the Kingdom of Heaven. But believing and living in God's grace will surely

lead us to obey the God we love and believe in. And if it does not lead us to obey Him then it is surely not grace that we are living in – it only gray.

You see the best we can ever hope to do there in that place is to flounder, because it is not the place God wants us to be. In the Kingdom of God we flounder when we are disobedient to God, and we and our faith flourish when we are obedient to Him. Obedience is the virtue that moves God to increase and flourish our faith. Obedience moves God towards us. He comes to us pleased - and with a promise to flourish and increase our faith. With this flourishing faith even most the difficult and overwhelming circumstances of life do not possess the power to break and reduce us to floundering. We can see in this sequence of devotion and favor that obedience is the activator of flourishing faith. That is God's way – that is Who He is and more importantly - it is who He wants us to be.

(Colossians) 2:6-10

*And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done. Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ. For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in*

*the universe.*

NLT

**A “Red Letter” Take On Obedience**

***(The woman who touched Jesus)***

***(Luke 6:46-7:1)***

*"So why do you call me 'Lord,' when you won't obey me? 47 I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then obeys me. 48 It is like a person who builds a house on a strong foundation laid upon the underlying rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against the house, it stands firm because it is well built. 49 But anyone who listens and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins." NLT*

***(John 15:10-15)***

*When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! 12 I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. 13 And here is how to measure it — the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. 14 You are my friends if you obey me.*

NLT

***Written During a Visitation of  
The Holy Spirit***

**The Spirit of God to us the community of Reunion...** *“Trust in me - and start to walk with your whole heart in obedience. You have floundered now for years walking the way you have desired. This is not the way I want you to walk – walk with your whole heart in obedience. You have floundered for a long time walking the way your emotions have taken you – up and down – back and forth – wanting and taking - until you almost no longer know which way to go – and others can hardly bare to walk with you. This is not the way I want you to walk – walk with your whole heart in obedience. Others of you have floundered because you have chosen to walk alone only giving the appearance that you are walking with Me, and the many others around you. This too, is not the way I want you to walk – walk with your whole heart in obedience. Some of you have floundered for far too long unable to reach the many, many places that you have started towards in your walk, but you never finish what you begin. This is not the way I want you to walk – walk with your whole heart in obedience. There are some of you who year after year flounder in your many explanations, reasons, and people that are the cause as to why you cannot walk the way you know you should walk. This also is not*

*the way I want you to walk – walk with your whole heart in obedience. You can hear Me – now trust in Me – and start to walk with your whole heart in obedience. In your obedience – I will walk with you. Yes, your faith can flourish – but only in obedience. You will flourish – but only in obedience. Look at your floundering feet... stepping on one another – they walk in half-hearted obedience and have no place to take you and so you flounder. Some of you have walked in every direction possible... but to Me. Trust in me - you can flourish – but only in whole hearted obedience. If you will trust in Me, and begin to walk in obedience – I will increase your faith and you will flourish and grow. I will you heal and restore you – I will breathe the breath of My Spirit into your floundering life and give you flourishing faith. You believe in Me, now trust in Me, and walk in whole hearted obedience. This is my promise to all who will walk in Me – it is to those before you and to those who will come after you. But, today it is My promise to you and to your children”...*

**[Essential Nine – Consequences]** Just as a skilled musician or gifted artist can awaken in us a sense of beauty through melody, rhythm, color and canvas - consequences can awaken us to a sense of justice through *recognition, reckoning, reformation and*

### *reconciliation.*

***We have to acknowledge that God in Creation has designed “natural” checks and balances for all who live this life. It is called... consequences. He has directly attached those consequences to how human beings like us think, speak, and act. For example; Is my thinking, speaking, or acting is right or wrong – good or evil – wise or foolish? There are consequences for it all.***

When we continually ignore the natural checks and balances in life that God has designed for how we think, speak, or do (as if they did not exist), we set in motion a “cause and effect” pattern of behavior that will lead us, and anyone close to us, to flounder.

This is not a may be you will flounder but rather when you will flounder. We are more likely to resemble the guy who drives around believing that none of the street signs (stop, speed, yield, school, red, yellow, curve ahead, hazard ahead) apply to him. Or the person who ignores the warning labels on the back of alcohol or tobacco products. And of course we would include the people who never follow the dosage instructions for their prescription drugs! Eventually they all end up facing the consequences for their poor decision and wrong action and then flounder as a result.

Adjusting our behavior and life choices to respect and acknowledge that consequences have been and still are God’s way of teaching us how to surrender (shut up) and to be humble (listen)

to what He wants us to know about what He wants us to be. And yet we need to see that consequences are also His way to show us how to flourish and have faith.

(Galatians 6:7-10)

*Don't be misled. Remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it. You will always reap what you sow! 8 Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful desires will harvest the consequences of decay and death. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. 9 So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time. 10 Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters. NLT*

This passage alone can lead us to flourish and build faith that makes a significant difference for ourselves and for our families. But we first have to embrace and form our little life philosophies, world views, and personal paradigms to becoming thankful for the benefit of consequences and the powerful building blocks they were meant to be for our life. Lets first start with eliminating some stuff about consequences that are just not true.

**Consequences are not...**

God's way of intimidating us.

**Consequences are not...**

God's way of messing with us.

**Consequences are not...**

God's way of playing "God."

**Consequences are not...**

God's way of randomly getting even with people He does not like.

(James 1:13-18)

*And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. 14 Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. 15 These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death. 16 So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows. 18 In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession. NLT*

(2 Peter 3:9-10)

*The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent. NLT*

With the untruths and misperceptions about consequences out of the way we have a clear path to understanding how God in His mercy uses consequences to form and flourish our faith. We can see how He placed consequences by design so that we can build strong character and become whole people who can love Him and one another the way Jesus asked us to. Forming our thinking, our speaking, and our doing within the framework of facing

consequences for the wrong, the evil, and the foolishness of our life; consequences serve as a perfect reminder (truth) and detour (warning) from the very thinking and behavior that cause us to flounder and fail. We should always look at consequences in a constructive and beneficial way...

**Consequences are...**

God's way to focus us

**Consequences are...**

God's way to teach us

**Consequences are...**

God's way to shape and reshape us

**Consequences are...**

God's way to save us

(Romans 6:20-23)

*In those days, when you were slaves of sin, you weren't concerned with doing what was right. 21 And what was the result? It was not good, since now you are ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. 22 But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. NLT*

(Hebrews 12:5-8)

*And have you entirely forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his children? He said,  
"My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you.  
6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves ,*

*and he punishes those he accepts as his children."*

*7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined? 8 If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children after all. NLT*

## **The “Red Letter” Take on Consequences**

(John 3:16-21)

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it. "There is no judgment awaiting those who trust him. But those who do not trust him have already been judged for not believing in the only Son of God. 19 Their judgment is based on this fact: The light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. 20 They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished. 21 But those who do what is right come to the light gladly, so everyone can see that they are doing what God wants."*

## **[Essential Ten – Belief]**

(Matthew 21:21-22)

Then Jesus told them, *"I assure you, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, 'May God lift you up and throw you into the sea,' and it will happen. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."* NLT

Belief is God's introduction to building flourishing faith in us all – without that kind of belief people flounder. Belief is meant to bring

hope, build faith, and give life. Jesus confirmed this when said, *“Whoever believes in Me will live and never die.”* That is the place where we must begin if we wish to flourish in this life. We can define belief so that know what it is – but it is a completely different thing to live in it and to experience how true belief cause us to flourish. Gaining knowledge of a thing is only the place you start – experiencing that thing is how you learn to finish what you started.

be-lief *n*

1. *acceptance by the mind that something is true or real, often underpinned by and emotional or spiritual sense of certainty*
2. *confidence that somebody or something is good or will be effective*
3. a statement, principle, or doctrine that a person or group accepts as true
4. an opinion, especially a firm and considered one
5. religious faith

### **Five Beliefs’ You Simply Must Know About Belief (To Flourish)**

Belief in God – Is *the identity* for our life.

Belief in Jesus – Is *the truth* about how to live our life.

Belief in the Spirit – Is *the navigator* for directing our life.

Belief in our Self – Is *the determination* needed to never give up on life.

Belief in One Another – Is *the hope* we must have that there is good in our life.

Two weeks ago, it is our belief that the community at Reunion had a visitation of the Holy Spirit. So everyone is clear on this... no, there were no shrouds or misty shadowy images, no echoing haunting voices, and there were no bright brilliant lights piercing through the roof of the building. However I do have a very balanced but real belief in all of those things. The point is - the Spirit of God sent a very clear and precise message – a

message that gave us direction and a promise. It is my belief that God personally instructed us and confirmed that instruction through at least two or three supernatural events and then was confirmed again by the elders of our community. It is the same message that God is giving communities like ours around the world. God leading His people on the path He chooses – and God flourishing and healing the ones who faithfully walk that path. The word to us was... “walk in whole-hearted obedience.” We who were here two weeks ago responded in unity and belief to this word by committing fourteen days of “whole-hearted obedience” to God and to one another. We came here today with the same unity and belief that God will faithfully begin in us what He promised in His message to us. We are not at a crossroads here today trying to decide which way to go – or even if we should believe in what we heard. We are a community in unity - who loves God and one another and whose belief is in believing in God. We believe in God, and in Jesus the Son of God; and we believe that the Holy Spirit continually moves us to Jesus, who in grace and mercy always moves us towards God. In our belief in God we find faith that allows us to flourish. But we only flourish when we are moving and believing in whole-hearted obedience. Then we flourish. That is what today is all about....

### ***Two Quick “Red Letter Takes” on Belief***

(John 20:24-29)

One of the disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin ), was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." 26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. He said, *"Peace be with you."* 27 Then he said to Thomas, *"Put your finger here and see my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe !"*

28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. 29 Then Jesus told him, *"You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway."*

NLT

(Mark 9:14 – 27)

At the foot of the mountain they found a great crowd surrounding the other disciples, as some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. 15 The crowd watched Jesus in awe as he came toward them, and then they ran to greet him. 16 *"What is all this arguing about?"* he asked. 17 One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my son for you to heal him. He can't speak because he is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. 18 And whenever this evil spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground and makes him foam at the mouth and grind his teeth and become rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it." 19 Jesus said to them, *"You faithless people! How long must I be with you until you believe? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."* 20 So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. 21 *"How long has this been happening?"* Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was very small. 22 The evil spirit often makes him fall into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us. Do something if you can." 23 *"What do you mean, 'If I can'?"* Jesus asked. *"Anything is possible if a person believes."*

NLT

**[Essential Eleven – Generosity]**

**(Luke 6:38)**

*If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving — large or small — it will be used to measure what is given back to you."*

NLT

Sometimes it just gets to the point when words are not what is needed. There are those times when the value of talk is somewhat diminished and it becomes more beneficial to stop talking and start being. In our floundering culture we have come in part to that point. All of our talk has not helped or changed the fact that we and millions like us are floundering without a clear sense of direction or a genuine hope of getting a shot at a better way to live and a better way to love. But there is an answer to this floundering – it comes from Jesus; and when practiced in the same spirit as His love it is proven to be legit. The answer is called Generosity. Generosity is God’s answer for a floundering culture and the true path to flourishing faith. Generosity is not about the words we speak or even the money we give – it is about who we are and the condition of our heart. So as we move forward into “essential eleven” to discover the truth about generosity be careful – its not what you might think.

**Generosity – A Bible Definition**

**LOVE OPENLY**

...LOVE JUST AS *I* HAVE LOVED YOU

(JOHN 13:34)

**SHARE INTENTIONALLY**

... THE MAN WITH TWO HATS SHOULD SHARE WITH THE MAN WHO HAS  
NONE

(LUKE 3:11)

**GIVE ABUNDANTLY**

...IF YOU GIVE YOU WILL RECEIVE

(LUKE 6:38)

**FORGIVE QUICKLY**

...FORGIVE OTHERS — YOU WILL BE FORGIVEN

(LUKE 6:37)

**(2 Corinthians 9:6-11)**

*Remember this — a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully. 8 And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. 9 As the Scriptures say,*

*"Godly people give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will never be forgotten." 10 For God is the one who gives seed to the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will give you many opportunities to do good, and He will produce a great harvest of generosity in you. 11 Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will break out in thanksgiving to God. NLT*

**(Mark 14:3-9)**

*Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had leprosy. During supper, a woman came in with a*

*beautiful jar of expensive perfume. She broke the seal and poured the perfume over his head. Some of those at the table were indignant. "Why was this expensive perfume wasted?" they asked. "She could have sold it for a small fortune and given the money to the poor!" And they scolded her harshly. But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why berate her for doing such a good thing to me? 7 You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But I will not be here with you much longer. 8 She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time. 9 I assure you, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be talked about in her memory." NLT*

**Reunion  
Say "No" to Floundering  
Come Experience  
"Generosity 30"**

***FOR THE NEXT THIRTY DAYS I WILL...***

**Love Openly** - *someone I have not loved the way I should*

**Share Intentionally** - *something I have with someone who does not*

**Give Abundantly** – *some extraordinary service or offering*

**Forgive Quickly** – *someone or something I have held inside far too long*

**Sunday October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

**"Look at What God Has Done Gathering"**

### [Essential Twelve – Risk]

Definition - 1. To incur the chance of harm or loss by taking action

Meaning – possibility (n.)

Synonym – danger

Risk is the agent of possibility that God uses to activate flourishing faith.

(Mark 8:34-36)

*"If any of you wants to be my follower," he told them, "you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. 35 If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life. NLT*

Matthew 19:27-30

*Then Peter said to him, "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get out of it?" 28 And Jesus replied, "I assure you that when I, the Son of Man, sit upon my glorious throne in the Kingdom, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will have eternal life. 30 But many who seem to be important now will be the least important then, and those who are considered least here will be the greatest then.*

NLT

### The “Red Letter Take” on Risk

John 6:47-58

*"I assure you, anyone who believes in me already has eternal life. 48 Yes, I am the bread of life! 49 Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. 50 However, the bread from heaven gives eternal life to everyone who eats it. 51 I*

*am the living bread that came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; this bread is my flesh , offered so the world may live."*

**52** Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

**53** So Jesus said again, *"I assure you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. 54 But those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them at the last day. 55 For my flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink. 56 All who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them. 57 I live by the power of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, those who partake of me will live because of me. 58 I am the true bread from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever and not die as your ancestors did, even though they ate the manna."*

This is a tough teaching – tough to understand and even tougher to obey.

What is the teaching about?

**NLT**

“Behold the turtle, he only makes progress when he sticks his neck out.”

**[Essential Thirteen – Security]**

**Jesus once said, “whoever believes in Me will never**

**perish.”** What do those words mean to you? It would be quite interesting to hear an opinion from each of us. But since I have the microphone let me share with you what it means to me. To me it means security. It means security because I believe that Jesus is as He said to His closest followers just days before His death ***“I am the way - the truth - and the life.”*** It means security because I believe that when Jesus died - He died for me, and not just a handful of Jewish family, friends, and followers two thousand years ago. It means security because I believe His teachings and His message are not only relevant for back then but they are even more relevant for our floundering culture and world right now. And because the words He spoke have been protected and passed on with some measurable degree of certainty and integrity I believe they were not just for His followers back then, but for anyone who would follow Him from then on – it means security. It means security because God the Creator valued us enough to secure life for us in the sacrifice of His Son Jesus. Having said that the next question would most likely be... “in this context what does security mean”?

In this case it certainly means being safe and protected. It would also mean that if we believe and trust in the Lord Jesus first in what we think say and do - what we value and

love will not be taken away. Security in the context of God and His love is not a surreal ideology. It is a tangible and practical reality. Listen...

- It means we do not have to live in fear, paranoia or high anxiety.
- It means we have a safe place, a place to rest, a place to recover, a place to get everything that is wrong – right.
- It means we can start over if we mess up.
- It means we can be ourselves, we can live freely, we can love openly, we can trust that someone is always watching out for us.
- It means we can share what is ours and not steal what is not ours to have and we can give ourselves away and not fear that we have lost ourselves.
- It means we can actually have less and in all reality have more.
- It means we can stop looking over our shoulder at what lies behind us and start looking down the road at what lies ahead.
- We can stop floundering in our worst nightmares – and begin to flourish in the dreams of a better way to live and love.
- It means we no longer have to flounder insecurely about whether we have what it takes – we can live securely in the way of Christ, knowing we completely have what it takes to flourish.

**(Psalm 91:1-16)**

*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 This I declare of the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; He is my God, and I am trusting him. 3 For He will rescue you from every trap and*

*protect you from the fatal plague. 4 He will shield you with his wings. He will shelter you with his feathers. His faithful promises are your armor and protection. 5 Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor fear the dangers of the day, 6 nor dread the plague that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday. 7 Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you. 8 But you will see it with your eyes; you will see how the wicked are punished.*

*9 If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, 10 no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your dwelling. 11 For he orders his angels to protect you wherever you go. 12 They will hold you with their hands to keep you from striking your foot on a stone. 13 You will trample down lions and poisonous snakes; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! 14 The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. 15 When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honor them. 16 I will satisfy them with a long life and give them my salvation." NLT*

### **Matthew 11:28-30**

**"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. 29 Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. 30 Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."**

### **Matthew 6:31-33**

**"So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. 32 Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already**

knows all your needs, 33 and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

NLT

*John 14:1-4*

*"Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. 2 There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. 4 And you know where I am going and how to get there." NLT*

### ***TEACHING POWER-POINT***

**We cannot find flourishing faith living in our insecurity – but we can find flourishing faith living in Jesus, and He alone is our security.**

### **[Essential Fourteen – Courage]**

*(Joshua 1:9)*

*I command you — be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." NLT*

“Without courage no other virtue is possible” ... C.S. Lewis

“Courage means to stop taking and begin doing” ...Walt Disney

“Courage is the human virtue that counts most — courage to act on limited knowledge and insufficient evidence. That's all any of us have.” ...Robert Frost

“The greatest test of courage on the earth is to bear defeat without losing heart.” ...R. G. Ingersoll

“With courage you will dare to take risks, have the strength to be compassionate, and the wisdom to be humble - courage is the foundation of integrity.” ...Keshavan Nair

“Courage is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm.” ...Winston Churchill

If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't go anywhere. ...Unknown

“Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs. Peace has its victories, but it takes brave men and women to win them.”  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

"My generation's apathy. I'm disgusted with it. I'm disgusted with my own apathy too, for being spineless and not always standing up against racism, sexism and all those other -isms the counterculture has been whinning about for years." Kurt Cobain

“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.” ...[Anais Nin](#)

“A timid person is frightened before a danger, a coward during the time, and a courageous person afterward.”

...[Jean Paul Richter](#)

“Courage is being scared to death - but saddling up anyway.”

...[John Wayne](#)

After fourteen weeks - dating back to where we started on Sunday June 29<sup>th</sup>, our message on flourishing faith for a floundering culture all comes down to this final essential... Courage! Without courage none of the other essentials that we have sorted through during the last three months can be reality. To hear the truth and accept it - to step up in faith and believe it – to follow through and live - it takes courage. Now the bible teaches us that love is the greatest and most enduring virtue (and I completely agree) but I also know that it takes courage to love the way Jesus has asked us to love. In fact, in our world today anything we think, say, or do that dares imitate or represent the thoughts, actions, and words of Jesus will take courage. If we do not have courage in a hostile environment and moral climate such as ours we will flounder and eventually lose our faith. I love the fact that Jesus was courageous. I love the fact that that he did not hide in fear and mediocrity from the mission of His Father. I love that fact that He had the courage to die for me – even when I did not deserve it. And I love that fact that He had the courage to live again so that I would not have to die in my floundering and sin. Finally I love the fact that He had the courage to finish what He started. This helps me and gives me a clear **Path of Courage** to follow...

### ***PATH OF COURAGE***

***WE LOOK AT THE LIFE JESUS AND SEE IN HIM THE COURAGE WE DESIRE FOR OUR OWN LIFE, AND FOR THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE WE LOVE.***

***WE WALK IN THE SPIRIT OF JESUS AND EXPERIENCE IN HIM THE KIND OF COURAGE WE NEED FOR OUR LIFE AND THE CHALLENGES EACH DAY BRINGS.***

***WE TRUST COMPLETELY IN JESUS AND KNOW THAT IN HIM WE WILL HAVE THE COURAGE FOR A FLOURISHING FAITH TO BE THE PEOPLE HE WANTS US TO BE.***

***A “Red Letter” Take on Courage***

***(John 6, 7)***

***Dynamics***

***The Family (skeptical brothers)***

***The Religious Institution (legalism and deception)***

***The Personal Mission (mercy – hope – life)***