

Reunion Church
The “How to Save a Life” Series

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. **19** As the Scriptures say,*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."*

***20** So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. **21** Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. **22** It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. **23** So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.*

***24** But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.*

Introduction

There are people dying and lives to be saved. We (you and I) have been called by Jesus to help. We can no longer ignore His calling or just imagine that it is not so. We can no longer be apathetic or remain uninvolved. We can no longer “stick our head in the sand” and hope for everything ugly and nasty in life to go away. This is our time to be something extra-ordinary. This is the time given to us by God to love our families, friends, and

neighbors, the way Jesus told us to love them... *like we love ourselves, and if you don't love yourself then it is time you learn.* Many of us have stood in the crowd and watched the loss of life in our world until we have become like voyeurs. While the pain and hurt from the loss (in everyway imaginable) dismantles marriages, families, neighborhoods, and communities. We say that we do nothing because we do not know what to say or do. We say we are unqualified. We say that our own lives are too full and demanding. But no matter what we say we have the time to keep watching with a certain intrigue and curiosity that is almost to the point of addictive type behavior. If so, then it is time for that to stop - because the next life that needs to be saved could be much closer to you than you ever thought or imagined possible. It's time for you to do something other than watch. But maybe the problem really is something altogether different for you and me. Maybe, we just do not know where to start, what steps to take, or what it is that we could possibly have to offer.

The "How to Save a Life" Series is all about getting started... taking the first steps. It is also about moving forward to find out what we have to offer and then engaging ourselves in the important journey of sharing those who need it most. This series is an open and honest acknowledgement of the times and circumstances of our shared world, and our common belief that Jesus can save the lives the people in it. The How to Save a Life Series is not just a *knee jerk* reaction or another *let's find another way to feel good about ourselves* scheme. How to Save a Life is a call to action for the people of this community. It is answering the call of Jesus that we have all hear way down deep in our hearts and from within our spirit as we gather together. And finally, How to Save a Life is about the people who are at risk; by at risk I mean that they are emotionally, physically, and spiritually and in danger of losing life. So, we look around at the lives around us, and we count the cost by asking... are my children are worth it, are your children are worth it? We agree together that our answer is **yes**.

To begin this journey together there are some biblical truths that we should embrace and use as a filter for what we think, say, and do, from here on out. We want to be sensitive and available to the “at risk” people in our lives. The truth is that we are all at risk in some area of our life... and we all need others to be aware. But what we are saying is that we want to not only be sensitive and aware – we want to be equipped with appropriate and compassionate responses and action. Bottom line... we want to think, feel, and speak like Jesus to those at risk. To do this we must have a grid of truth to filter our emotions and discernment through. The Bible says that the Spirit leads us into all truth... and this becomes our spiritual GPS or system of navigation. Without this filter we will have a tendency to lose our way and completely miss the point of How to Save a Life altogether.

How to Save a Life – Grid of Truth

- **BE YOURSELF (JUST THE WAY GOD MADE YOU) – JESUS SAVES NOT US. (MATTHEW 18:3-4, 1 JOHN 3:1-3)**
- **THIS IS NOT ABOUT US – IT IS ABOUT JESUS. (MATTHEW 23:8-12,)**
- **RELIGION MUST GET OUT – JESUS MUST COME IN. (MARK 7:6-8)**
- **DON’T BE FEARFUL OF WHAT AND WHOM YOU CAN’T CONTROL – TRUST JESUS. (MATTHEW 6:34, 7:1-5)**
- **SPEAK FAITH, SHARE VISION, AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS (LIFE HAS MEANING) – LOVE THE PEOPLE OF JESUS. (2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21)**
- **STAY FOCUSED, DON’T LOOK BACK – KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS. (HEBREWS 12:1-3)**
- **PRAY TOGETHER – PRAY ALONE, TALK TO GOD - TALK TO ONE ANOTHER – BE SILENT... LISTEN TO JESUS. (JAMES 5:13-16)**
- **IT IS NOT A PERFECT WORLD (THERE IS PAIN, TRAGEDY, AND TROUBLE) – JESUS IS YOUR PEACE. (JOHN 16:33)(EPHESIANS 2:14-18)**
- **BELIEVE THAT GOD IS AT WORK IN YOU AND THE ONES YOU LOVE, (LEAVE NO ROOM FOR REGRETS) – FOLLOW JESUS. (PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6)**

STEP ONE: GIVE A LIFE TO SAVE A LIFE

John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

"The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

In Jesus day a shepherd had many roles and responsibilities. A shepherd in Jesus day was the **owner** (not a hireling) of his sheep, the **caretaker** (always on duty) of his sheep, the sole **provider** (food, shelter, water) for his sheep, the **leader** (sense of direction and use) of his sheep, and the **defender** (battle for life with his life) of his sheep. In Jesus day a shepherd never had or owned much land or big houses. If a shepherd was to was ever asked to describe his wealth or worth, he would respond by saying... "I have X-amount of sheep." His whole sense of value and worth were knit within the fabric of his flock and their well-being. Obviously the example of the shepherd and his sheep was

meant to bring understanding to Jesus followers in His day. It was a very relatable example for Him to use to explain of the depth and intensity of the love that He had for them. The point is that Jesus chose this illustration because He knew it would mean something to those who heard it. But what does this mean to us today? We do not all particularly relate to the unique and isolated life of a Jewish shepherd tending to his flock of sheep. Do you get how much Jesus loves you from this example? Maybe if you were a rancher or farmer; but if you are not then the example more than likely does not have the same effect that it did when Jesus first said it. If Jesus were here today to help us understand how much He loves us and how much He values our lives (remember the value is in people and their lives) what would He have to say? He might say it this way...

"I am the good coach. The good coach sacrifices everything for his players and team. The fans and media will turn on their team. When they lose a game or two they second guess the coach and criticize the players because they don't want to be risk being associated with a loser. And so, everyday in the coffee-room, on the radio, and in the newspaper they talk trash and divide against one another. But the fans and media are just observers... they pay or get paid simply to watch – nothing more. They quickly criticize but clearly don't understand the hard work, the loyalty, love and commitment needed to become a great team. They only care about themselves.

*"But I am the good coach; I know my own players, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice **everything I have** to give and **do whatever is needed** for my team. **What they don't know is that** I have other players, too, that are not on this team. Eventually they will join with us. They too believe in me as their coach, and they take my direction and listen to my strategies. Together we will build one great team with just one coach.*

"The Father loves me because I sacrifice so much for my team and players; He knows I will lay it all on the line when and where it is needed most. No one forces me to make sacrifice like this – I do it because I love my players and because I want to. I have the authority to do what is best for my players and for our team and I am not afraid to do it. For this is what my Father has commanded."

Ok, maybe sports teams are not your thing– but I don't know to many shepherds either! What we really want to know is this... What is it going to take to get you and I to understand just how much Jesus loves us and how great a sacrifice He made to prove it. It really is important that we know the details; such as - what He did, why He did it, and how He did what He did for us. We should know each role that He filled in our life to save our life. Once we get down to the basics and can see clearly that Jesus (with pure love) filled the roles of...

Leader

Owner

Provider

Caretaker

Defender

we can begin to see glimpses of the depth and intensity of such a sacrifice. Once we get it, then we can start to intentionally move on ourselves to filling these roles with and for the people near us who are at risk; the people losing their life spiritually, physically, and emotionally. From these intentional relationships we find meaning and purpose for our own life. So, my next question is... do you want to know how to save a life? If the answer is yes then it starts right here with our acceptance and understanding of this very intense and intentional act of love from God for us. You all know the drill... *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son... that who ever decides to believe in Him will not perish*

(*apollumi*; never completely destroyed – literal and figuratively) but have life that last forever.” How is that bad? Do you need religion to embrace that?

Step One is really where Jesus started - and really it is where we have to start as well. To get there we all have to answer the **big question**. Do we believe that Jesus did what the bible says He did? Before you answer please know this... even non-sympathetic history backs up the fact that a man named Jesus living in the time that the biblical Jesus lived was crucified and buried. From there history even gets more specific and detailed. There were over five hundred witnesses who saw Jesus alive after His resurrection from the dead. That is a fact that was not even disputed by even His worst critics in that day? Fact: a man named Jesus claiming to be the Son of God lived, died, and came back from the dead. His message to the world was basically this...

"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die." Where did we lose that Jesus and His great promise and truth? When and where did we lose red letter Jesus and get stuck in a performance based, self-promoting, prosperity and judgment driven church world? Benjamin Franklin (an well-known atheist) once said, *"A lighthouse is more helpful than a church."* A lighthouse saves lives and I believe that the church of Jesus Christ should do the same. Yes, Jesus saves lives, so where does that leave us? Well we live in a culture that breed's both a subtle and blatant agnostic cynicism. That happens in our world 24/7. So that would mean that there are lots of people that need a lighthouse for their life. When people ask hard questions about God, Jesus and church that we don't want to hear or maybe don't quite know how to answer we must find a way to shine a little light in their life – that light may save them. If they ask us "Why do we need church, or what good does church do me? It is clear that they have not connected the dots between church and Jesus. The light we shine is that Jesus saves lives and in a good

church you can find Jesus. Jesus loves us human beings and in a good church you can find love. Jesus is life and in a good church you can find life. In a good church there are good people who have a healthy sense of ownership and they are leading by serving.

There are good people in good churches gifted as caregivers and providers, and they can and will courageously defend the same people that Jesus defended. We should not be afraid or fail to help people make the connection from Jesus to the church or from the church to Jesus. After all it is true... a church is only as good as its heart, mind, and love for Jesus; and, its heart, mind, and love for the people that Jesus came to save. Another well-known atheist Fredrick Nietzsche, once wrote... *"The most serious parody I have ever heard was this: In the beginning was nonsense, and the nonsense was with God, and the nonsense was God."*

This is where if we are to make that connection we must get on. It is a fact that Jesus gave His life to save our life. He went the distance and He paid the ultimate price. He did the hard things that no one else was willing to do; He did not take short cuts or cheat the system. He did not try to take over. He did not lead the free world, and He did not come for all the fame and glory. No, Jesus was a contradiction... from the bottom in betrayal and abandonment, physical torture, against the worst of circumstances against the worst odds, with nothing but love in His heart He gave His life to save life. What that means is that Jesus went the complete distance and did what had to be done to save life other than His own. Saving a life... any life is not nonsense. So, what Nietzsche said about Jesus being nonsense is wrong and I offer you some truth to wrap your mind around. Based on his own philosophies, whatever Nietzsche did in his lifetime he did for himself and himself alone, and in the end it can only be said that he saved no one and gave his life for nothing.

Step One: Give a Life to Save a Life

Part Two (Layers)

I want to describe to you life that is at risk. This would not necessarily be my own description because I'm really shooting for what Jesus would consider *life at risk*. I picked three people from among the many that Jesus considered "at risk." It is amazing to see the unique circumstances of their lives and then to also see how they each one reacted at a critical moment in their life to Jesus. He gave to each of them life in completely different ways - yet in ways so completely real and effective. He connected directly to the person they really were far beneath all of their life issues and self-posturing. And I might add that He did it with love – even when it seemed hard and abrasive.

(John 4:3-8)

So Jesus left the Judean countryside and went back to Galilee. ⁴ To get there, he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ He came into Sychar, a Samaritan village that bordered the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was still there. Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well. It was noon. ⁷ A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?"

(Mark 10:17-19)

As he went out into the street, a man came running up, greeted him with great reverence, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?" ¹⁸ Jesus said, "Why are you calling me good? No one is good, only God. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat, honor your father and mother."

(Mark 8:27-33)

Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. As they walked, he asked, "Who do the people say I am?" 28 "Some say 'John the Baptizer,'" they said. "Others say 'Elijah.' Still others say 'one of the prophets.'" 29 He then asked, "And you — what are you saying about me? Who am I?" Peter gave the answer: "You are the Christ, the Messiah." 30 Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone. 31 He then began explaining things to them: "It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive." 32 He said this simply and clearly so they couldn't miss it. But Peter grabbed him in protest. 33 Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. "Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works."

One – The Samaritan Woman... Lost under the layers of religious pretension, disastrous relationships, and loneliness was a person who desperately wanted the truth but was so very afraid of the truth.

Two – The Young Ruler... Held down by the weight of layer after layer of possessions, materialism, attached to His sense of self-worth was a good heart - that really wanted to do something with his life that meant something.

Three – Peter the Disciple of Jesus... Beneath the layers of the tough-guy, loud, and impetuous behavior was a passionate man too insecure and uncertain to follow his own convictions.

Be certain this one thing - life (some heaven and some hell) will happen to us; and it will happen to everyone we know and love... even the ones we know and don't want to love. And when it does it covers us with layers of residual.

From the time we are born as this life unfolds it truly does cover us with a residue of death... layer after layer. These layers can be anything at all really, but the one thing we do know – they take life from us. I guess I can better describe these layers as... *the event's, circumstances, actions, consequences, and our reactions to life.* What lies beneath these layers is the faint heartbeat of who and what is left of us afterward. The person that exists beneath the layers is always someone entirely different than the exterior person that is seen by all. In the process of life's layering emotions exist that either overtake us or we shut them down entirely and deny they exist. This is where Jesus met people and made His sacrifice. He could see deep beneath the layers to the person that the Father had truly created. From there He would go the full distance and begin to speak life to those layers. If we want to save a life then we must give a life. Seeing beneath the layers being a part of the long and difficult process of removing them one by one (some of them over and over again) we have to make a decision... Do we want to legitimize our faith and everything we believe in? Do we want to love someone enough to speak life to those life-taking layers that smother them? If we do then we must be willing to sacrifice and go the complete distance... layer by layer, garbage, waste, lies, abuse, insecurity, phobias, rage, shutdown, darkness, destructive, passive, aggressive, manipulative and so on... will you be ready for the friendly fire, the set-backs and the starting all over again with the at risk people in our life. This is the heart of Jesus...

Step One: Give a Life to Save a Life

Part Three - Layers

Remember, when someone is in deep trouble and life at any level is at risk, the person seen on the surface is almost never the same as the person beneath the layers and messy residue of what they have lived through. Life's layers are often used in desperation as

a means to survival by hurting people as an insulation and protection from what and whom they perceive to be most harmful or dangerous at the time. Those same layers can then be mistakenly thought of as some false sense of security or safety - when actually it is a deception from the layers of life's most ugly and painful circumstances raising the risk factor higher and pushing the wounded even deeper beneath the weight of the each layer.

So it is not difficult to make the point; the dark and ugly residue of life's layers can bury anyone and can literally put you and I physically, spiritually and emotionally at risk. But the more difficult task for us will be to help each other begin to peel back, or dig out, and become free of these life threatening layers. This process cuts into the core of God's original plan for "How to Save a Life." Someone this week told me, "Steve, we have to talk about how to dig out from underneath these layers, if we don't he said, nothing will change." He was right of course, and, that is exactly why God sent Jesus to earth. So, in spite of what that must sound like that is the best place to begin if we want to save a life. Because it is the place we can truly face our fears, exorcise our personal demons, and begin the work of digging out; so lets just start right there. In a very revealing conversation with a confused Pharisee named Nicodemus (himself covered by layers of uncertainty, religious pride, and fear) Jesus said, "Those who live by the truth come into the light so that everyone can see that what they are doing has been done by God." If this is true (and we know it is)... then we have to move forward into what Jesus described to Nicodemus as *open and honest relationship with...*

a) God

b) Ourselves

c) Those at risk

Any relationship of this kind has to be completely void of denial, game playing, and procrastination. The relationship then must be completely committed to the process of loving another person like Jesus loved. In this context that would mean... being open and honest, and learning to be more understanding who people are, and where they are at as life adds it's layers. That does not always have to include a reciting of the gory and personal detail. Because most people who find themselves buried under the residue of layers that threaten their life, know full well how they got there. The problem is once they/we recognize the condition of being buried under layers of life's ugly mess there is no longer the will or the strength (by one's self) to get out! The very thought that getting the layers off could be more humiliating and painful perhaps than getting buried by them is unthinkable. And at that point many make the choice to say good-bye to anything that resembles open and honest relationship under any circumstance.

That is why Jesus in saving lives did not stop there. The very next piece to removing layers must be included. Jesus intentionally pushed towards genuine openness and straightforward honesty with who people were and where they were. Play red letter Jesus forward... He never stops there. ***He is never open or honest without being intensely sincere and visibly hopeful.*** He called this whole process **repenting** (open and honest) and **following** (visibly hopeful). And it is absolutely necessary to "excavating" the layers that threaten to destroy our spiritual – emotional - and physical life.

Having said that, I would like for each of you to listen once more to Jesus interacting with some "at risk people." But, I want you to listen, and then make note of any common themes or characteristics that Jesus uses in his dialogue. What is it that He is saying that is any different from what we know and see?

Example One... Jesus, tells a crowd of over five thousand who were covered by layer after layer of false hope, displaced identity, and mistrust... "Hey, let's be honest, you are not following me

because you understand who I am, or because of the miracles you witnessed; you followed me because I gave you all a free lunch. But, if you will follow me as the Son of God who gives life, then the Father in heaven is pleased for me to feed you with food that lasts for an eternity.”

Example Two... Jesus, tells a group of Jewish Scribes covered by layers of religious disobedience, greed, and deception. “Stop grumbling behind my back, and listen to what I am saying to you. You know as well as I do what is in your book... all of your family before you died in the desert – homeless. The truth is they did not have to; each day they were miraculously fed food straight from heaven. They were greedy and disobedient. If you would just stop your disobedience for a moment and believe in me, I will give you the life with the Father that they were supposed to have gotten, but did not.”

Example Three... Jesus, tells His closest disciples still covered by layers of good intentions, dishonesty and selfishness... “There are some seriously dangerous things coming our way, and even though I know that you love and believe in me – when the time comes you are not going to be concerned about me. Trust me, you are only going to be worried about yourselves. The Father will be with me and so I will be ok; and because you will face your unbelief and push on to reaffirm and renew your belief in me, you will have the peace you need, and no matter what happens or how bad it gets you will be ok as well.

What common characteristic or theme runs directly through the heart of each of these examples?

The answer of course is **1) genuine openness 2) straightforward honesty 3) intense sincerity 4) visible hope.** It is the genuine openness of Jesus that is engaging and attractive. It is His straightforward honesty that both liberates and captivates the people who have become use to the dishonesty and hidden life that exists beneath the ugly mess of life’s layers. But it is His

intense sincerity that pulls people into relationship with Him. And finally, it is the visible hope He shares that inspires and gives people the courage to come along and follow Him into a life saving relationship. True, some of what He says is just plain describing who they are and where they are as a result of the living their life beneath the layers. But there is also a prophetic warning and urgency that is clearly specific to the outcomes and certainties for their lives ahead. There is Jesus looking into the face of layer after layer of despair and speaking a visible hope into lives at risk. I seems as if sometimes I can hear him speaking to me. Follow me... Believe in Me... Trust in me... Come to me... Rest in me... Know me... ... I gave my life for your life... Ask me and I will give you life!

Step Two: Trust that Love is Enough

(John 15:9-17)

Red Letter Jesus... “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey the things I have asked of you, you remain in my love, just as I obey what the Father has asked of me and I remain in His love. I have told you this so that you may be filled with joy. So that you will remain completely filled with joy. This is what I want from you... love each other the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to give your life for your friends. You are my friends as you do what I have asked of you. You are not slaves – I have opened my entire heart and life to you... you are my friends and I have told you everything the Father has told me. You did not come looking for me – I came looking for you. I picked you to go and love others the same way we love each other. Then if you ask Him in my name the Father will give you whatever is needed to get that done. Love one another.”

Step two of “How to Save a Life” says - **Trust that Love is Enough**. If we do not believe that love is enough more than likely we do not know enough about love. The bible says, “We know how much God loves us and we have put our trust in God. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect.” This tells us that to truly believe in love – is to believe in God... God is love. Love is not what God does for us or what God gives to us but love is who He is – He is the source of love. So, having said that, we could say with confidence... **“To trust that love is enough is to trust that God is enough.”** Someone who does not believe in God – no doubt would have some problems with that statement. But, of course there is substantial historical and non-sympathetic evidence that Jesus lived, healed, and saved lives. He did this consistently with people who in simple childlike faith believed in Him. So, it is what it is; and, when we too believe in Jesus - love is more than enough to save a life. To help us wrap our mind, body, and soul around that thought we may have to shift and stretch to get there. Today I want to tackle just a little of what that might look like. To trust that love is enough is going to require that we shake-up what we know about God. To do that we have to...

ONE: RECONSIDER - RETHINK - REFORM OUR IMAGE OF GOD...

The old religious image of a vindictive, mean, and jealous God crumbled with the arrival of Jesus on earth. Jesus came teaching a God of faith who loves all people (not just Jews) and that God has made His home with them. Jesus reveals an image of God for His listeners forcing them to reconsider, rethink, and reform their existing image. A God that does not demand but gives; He does not put down but raises up; does not wound but heals. Jesus reveals a God to all men who forgives instead of condemns and whose mission is to save life not take it. Anyone who demands, puts down, wounds, and condemns in the name of Jesus truly does

not know who God is - and they are a danger to themselves and to anyone at risk.

To understand the image of God that Jesus wanted men and women to have He gave the parables to help illustrate that image. It is the image of “the God” that Jesus described to them that became and remains the single most difficult and polarizing truth ever told. I chose two of those parables to explain the image of God that changed everything.

- The Crazy Farmer (Matthew 20)
- The Crazy Father (Luke 15)

FOR THE VERY REASONS REVEALED IN THESE TWO PARABLES THE PHARISEES HAD JESUS KILLED. INFURIATED THAT JESUS WAS PUSHING JEWS TO RECONSIDER, RETHINK, AND REFORM THEIR IMAGE OF GOD, THEY MOVED WITH MALICE AGAINST HIM. IN JESUS THE PEOPLE COULD SEE AND EXPERIENCE A GOD WHO WAS CONSISTANTLY OVERGENEROUS WITH FORGIVENESS AND GRACE; A GOD WHO GIVES HIS LOVE AND ATTENTION TO SAVING THE LIVES OF UNDESERVING, UNDESIRABLE, UNWORTHY, AT RISK PEOPLE.

How can this be right? How can God love people who are sinning equal to people who are more deserving, more desirable, have more to offer, and are generally more worthy (not to mention far less risky)? In spite of what we want to think about God, this is an obstacle to the human mind and reason. And, this is where we need to reconsider, rethink, and reform our image of Him so that we can trust without reservation that **love is enough**. Besides the parables of Jesus, it will help us to study closely our own real life experiences with Jesus and the indiscriminate love of God the Father. Let me share a conclusion I have made from two real life observations of my own.

- Observations of My Love: (Steve’s – natural standard of appeal & attraction)

- Observations of God's Love: (ABC Ministries – The “nothing to give” liability)
- Conclusions from Observations: – Unlike you or I, the Father of Jesus loves people not with what He finds in them, but for with what lies within Himself. It is not because anyone is good that He loves them, or that He only loves anyone who is good. **He loves us because He is good.** He is so good, that He loves all people... good, evil, busy, lazy, ugly, beautiful, healthy, rich, or sick, worthless and at risk. He loves the unlovable, the loveless, and the unloving. He does not detect what is congenial, appealing, attractive and favorable in us and then respond to us with love. I exist – I am loved. Love is not God's response to me, it is who He is for me. God is Love.

The unearned love of God can be disturbing. Coming to grips with a God who loves completely differently than me and infinitely beyond me (without reason or reward) is the beginning of my being able stop second-guessing God - and then my being able to trust that love is indeed enough to save life... even my own. It is the awakening to the fact that I could (if I let myself go there) love someone in a pure untainted, non-manipulative, non-controlling way. Love someone whose very life is seen as a risk! Someone like me who hasn't earned love or forgiveness; nor deserves any kind of mercy or another chance for life. The truth is that God's love is based on nothing other than Himself. The fact that it is based on nothing is what makes a life that is at risk have hope and have a sense of what is safe and secure. If His love were based on “something” or “anything” other than Him and that “something” or “anything” were to collapse and fall apart, then God's love would crumble as well. Because of this reformed image of God that we can only get from Jesus, we can **trust that love is enough** to save a life.

TWO: LET LOVE CALL FORTH LOVE

JOHN 11:25

RED LETTER JESUS – *“I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE. ANYONE WHO BELIEVES IN ME WILL LIVE EVEN AFTER DYING. EVERYONE WHO LIVES IN AND BELIEVES IN ME WIL NEVER DIE.”*

To conclude that God loves us completely... in spite of anything that you or I have or do not have; or anything that we are or are not, means that we have reconsidered, rethought and reformed our image of God, and can begin to trust that love is enough to save a life. But it is also sets in motion the process of reconsidering, rethinking, and reforming our own image of ourselves. Often times it is that horrible and ugly image that we have of ourselves that puts us at risk and threatens to destroy our life emotionally, spiritually, or physically. When the real image of God is formed before our very eyes the big question becomes ... “Won’t the awareness that God loves us no matter what open the door to spiritual apathy and moral breakdown?” Of course that is a reasonable fear – but in reality the opposite is true. Many Christians stumble right here at this point because they do not have a correct image of God or themselves. For example, I know that my wife loves me as I am and not as I should be. She loves me even when I am unlovable. Because she loves me so wonderfully in this way I do not feel the urge to be unfaithful or indifferent to her. In fact, I feel more free and more strongly about loving her in the same ways that she loves me. The love of Jesus opens the door to love, and love calls forth love. Or, put it this way... Jesus loves me without condition or cause. So when He says to me, “love just as I have loved you” – I feel free and alive! Not free to rebel and to go out and do as I please, but free to live more generously and to be more loving with my faith and actions each day.

Having this reformed image of God and His indiscriminate love does indeed open a huge door for anyone at risk. Through that

open door comes Jesus with the very love that is most needed and, when it is needed most. At that point the person at risk only needs to let that love happen. There is nothing to do, nothing else to try, no need to scramble, struggle, or cover up – the person at risk need only “just be loved.” **God, in His love will call forth love; somewhere within the unloved and unlovable from the deep - He creates love.**

When God creates love in us He is creating new life. In that new life a new image is being formed for the person at risk and there is hope and possibility for life and love.

God is love and love is God’s way of giving life. This is what the Holy Spirit wants to teach us. God was showing the world the way to love in the life of Jesus here on earth. Jesus said clearly, “I am the resurrection and the life.” God is love, and He was calling forth love in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. Love calls forth Love. Listen to intensity and depth as Paul the apostle talks about love that calls forth love... “When we were utterly helpless, Jesus came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now most people would not be willing to die for just any common person, although some might consider dying for someone who is a really good person. But God showed His great love for us by sending Jesus to die for us while we were sinners and not good. And since we have been made good in God’s eyes by the blood of Jesus, He will save us from the condemnation and shame of our ugly life. Since Jesus restored our relationship with God in His death (even while we were still calling ourselves His enemy) we can be sure that He has given us life in Him. Now we can celebrate our new life with God, because Jesus made it possible for us to be friends.”

Step Three: Use Everyday – Include Everyone – In Spite of Everything

(Luke 17:26-35) Red Letter Jesus...

"The time of the Son of Man will be just like the time of Noah — everyone carrying on as usual, having a good time right up to the day Noah boarded the ship. They suspected nothing until the flood hit and swept everything away. "It was the same in the time of Lot — the people carrying on, having a good time, business as usual right up to the day Lot walked out of Sodom and a firestorm swept down and burned everything to a crisp. That's how it will be — sudden, total — when the Son of Man is revealed. "When the Day arrives and you're out working in the yard, don't run into the house to get anything. And if you're out in the field, don't go back and get your coat. Remember what happened to Lot's wife! If you grasp and cling to life on your terms, you'll lose it, but if you let that life go, you'll get life on God's terms. "On that Day, two men will be in the same boat fishing — one taken, the other left. Two women will be working in the same kitchen — one taken, the other left."

Step Three begins with two words... Use Everyday. To use everyday means – “to put as much passion, generosity, sincerity, love, and faith that can be put into every moment of every day.” The idea being that there is only so much time available in each day and the time we have must mean something. Since there are people that we know (all around us) dying in each and every one of those days, we must make a difference in someone's life with whatever we have to offer. To help us gain some serious perspective on the idea of “using everyday” and the significance of every moment in everyday, here are a few statistics that I have shaped into a piece I call – Today...

TODAY...

TODAY... EIGHTY-SIX PEOPLE KILLED THEMSELVES

TODAY... ONE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED NINETEEN PEOPLE DIED FROM TOBACCO USAGE

TODAY... ONE THOUSAND TWENTY-THREE DIED FROM POOR DIET AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

TODAY... TWO HUNDRED THIRTY-EIGHT PEOPLE DIED FROM ALCOHOLISM

TODAY... ONE HUNDRED TWENTY PEOPLE DIED FROM MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS

TODAY... TWO HUNDRED FIFTY-TWO PEOPLE DIED FROM MICROBIAL AND TOXIC POISONING

TODAY... EIGHTY-ONE PEOPLE WERE SHOT TO DEATH

TODAY... FIFTY-SIX PEOPLE DIED FROM SEXUALLY RELATED BEHAVIORS AND CRIMES

TODAY... SIXTY-ONE PEOPLE DIED FROM DRUG OVERDOSE

TODAY... TWO THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED TWENTY-NINE DIED FROM HEART DISEASE.

TODAY... ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED FIFTY-THREE DIED FROM SOME FORM OF MALIGNANT CANCER.

TODAY... THIRTEEN PEOPLE DROWNED TO DEATH.

TODAY... FORTY-SEVEN PEOPLE DIED AND UNSPECIFIED ACCIDENTAL DEATH.

TODAY... THREE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED SEVENTY-ONE HOMES (MARRIAGES) DIED.

TODAY... THE MINISTRY OF FORTY-THREE PASTORS DIED.

TODAY... THREE MILLION ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND PEOPLE WILL FIGHT FOR THEIR MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL LIFE (MAJOR DEPRESSION).

TODAY... THE INNOCENCE OF TWENTY-FOUR HUNDRED WILL DIE.

TODAY... SEVEN CHILDREN WILL DIE FROM SOME FORM OF SEXUAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE.

TODAY...

We have agreed on more than one occasion here at Reunion that Jesus saves lives. We also agreed that we too have a passion to become part of that amazing life saving process. We have no delusions of grandeur we just want to be included in what Jesus is doing in the lives of at risk people. To do that, we, like Jesus must become spiritually sensitized to the potential and opportunity that each day holds. We also must have the same sense of urgency that Jesus had when He told His followers about what the last days would look like. His lesson to them was not just a “heads up” to the circumstances and events of “the” last days on earth (or any day or that matter). The truth is in regards to the last days (what is going to happen is probably going to happen) in the reality of the “big picture” you and I can do nothing about life’s circumstances or events. But His impartation and teaching to them (and of course to us as well) is very clear and specific about His followers maximizing the opportunities they have each day to change who they are. When we become who Jesus calls us to be we make ourselves ready to face any circumstances or events that may come in life. You see... it is only who we are in Jesus that gives and saves life. So Jesus taught...

- Live each day with the love and generosity of God the Father, in our heart.
- Shut down self-pride, and maintain clarity of thought and a right attitude in our mind.
- Be filled with the Spirit, and live with the intent and purpose God made us for.

This is how Jesus saves lives; He uses everyday, includes everyone, in spite of everything. The more I study red letter Jesus and consider His model (how He saved lives) I am blown away! I chose five ministry everyday principles that Jesus made Himself accountable to - everyday. I want us to take the time this morning go over these five principles together in small groups and then pray about them as we leave today. I want us to pray that the Spirit of God will fill us with these **everyday** principles that we use **everyday** to save lives. Someone will come to you – to help lead you in this prayer.

FIVE EVERYDAY PRINCIPLES — FOR EVERYDAY

- MY BEING ALIVE TODAY MEANS SOMETHING TO GOD TODAY — HE NOT ONLY LOVES ME, HE LIKES ME, AND WOULD NEVER FORGET ME. (ROMANS 5:8-11)
- I HAVE SOMETHING GOOD IN ME TO GIVE TODAY - I AM GOING TO SHARE IT WITH WHOEVER NEEDS IT. (JOHN 15:9-17)

- I AM NOT GOING TO LOSE A DAY THAT I CAN NEVER GET BACK – I AM GOING TO LOVE SOMEONE THAT I LOVE. (HEBREWS 3:12-15)
- I AM GOING TO SPEAK THE TRUTH TODAY - TO MYSELF TO GOD, AND TO EVERYONE AROUND ME. (1JOHN 1:5-10)
- I AM GOING TO BELIEVE IN SOMETHING UNBELIEVABLE TODAY - I AM GOING TO FOLLOW JESUS AND HAVE FAITH IN A GOD WHO KNOWS WHAT I DO NOT. (JOHN 20:29)

The second phrase of Step Three says... Include Everyone. In the context of “How to Save a Life” that means saving lives (even our own) is not done alone – but rather as a community. For those of us who enjoy word pictures we could say... not isolated but integrated, not self-dependent but inter-dependant, not a “do it yourself - all by myself” but an opening up of ones self, not a turning away but a turning to, not in hiding but in confiding, and building open and real relationships! There is great risk in saving life of any kind, and the responsibility that comes along with it is too big to be done alone. The circumstances are too complex, the need is too great, and there is too much at stake (as evidenced by the statistics we share earlier) for anyone to be in this alone. Two passages from the bible flood my mind and confirm that including everyone is truly the heart of God and the path that He intended for us to take.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do and He will show you which path to take.” (Proverbs 3:5)

“For we don’t live for ourselves or die for ourselves. If we live, it’s to honor the Lord. And if we die, it’s to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Christ died for this purpose – to be Lord of the living and of the dead.” (Romans 14:7-9)

That is why Step Three says... Use Everyday – Include Everyone! As a follower of Jesus how can we possibly qualify and absorb the concept of “including everyone”? To start with we have to intentionally follow Jesus, remembering “Jesus saves” and in saving lives He was the master at **including everyone** (friendly and hostile). Among the many inclusive “red letter” statements and teachings of Jesus there are four that stand out as best representing the heart of God, and the mission and purpose of Jesus. Lets look at them...

“Love others as well as you love yourself” (Mark 12:31)

“You are the light of the world – like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14)

“If anyone thirsts let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37)

“Go out into the world and preach the Good News to everyone” (Mark 16:15)

From these four “red letter” statements there are **three things** that we need to know.

One- Jesus intended (mission) to save lives.

Two – He intended to include everyone in the process.

Finally, to “include everyone” is for us to acknowledge and welcome the gifts, talents, and offering of those around us as valuable and important. It is to acknowledge and use our gifts, talent, and offering as valuable and important to Jesus and the lives He is saving. Inclusiveness such as this requires a kind of openness that works only through being available – approachable – and accountable. Without that kind of openness there is no possibility of including everyone the way Jesus did and certainly how He wants to today. Including everyone is a big piece to saving the lives of those who are at risk. Paul the apostle of Jesus said it best when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians... (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

So in plain language here is the next piece to Step Three: Include Everyone. In this room this morning are the people we must begin that process with. Worshipping together, learning together, praying together, breaking bread together, and serving together forms the visible base of the physical and spiritual community. As the Holy Spirit leads the community to move forward to include everyone - we move forward to save lives. We have lost the true understanding as to why that is important. I'll try to explain it. You see... We (this community) live in a floundering culture with a floundering system of family and social sensibilities. Sadly, it is one of our most powerful cultural paradigms that led us to flounder. That paradigm would be our misguided obsession with *independence*. You see the greatness of pursuing independence is when it directly results in freedom from tyranny or evil oppression. That is good. But when independence becomes a means only to itself for the sole purpose of just being independent, then it directly results in destroying community, family, relationships, loyalty, compassion, and unfortunately the idea of *including everyone*. That is bad. Jesus was not independent He was interdependent (John 5;19-23), and He knew the only way for faith to flourish when people were floundering was to gather a community open to including everyone. Jesus then pointed His followers towards an "interdependent" community. He taught them interdependence by the example of His own relationship with His Father... to be deeply loyal and committed, to mutually love and support, to grow and interact, and to save the lives of those floundering and at risk. Because we are facing tough times we have to get completely "over our independent selves" and what is independently best for only us. God made us to be interdependent and for community. He made us to include everyone – including ourselves. The truth is we cannot have it both ways. We cannot be independent and express it in living private, personal, and unapproachable lives and expect not to be excluded... isolated and disconnected from relationships and community. Of course we understand one's privacy should be respected – but if you want community and

relationship; if you want to include and be included you have to be open, available, and visible. Tough times are coming – save a life – include everyone! We don't have to flounder - we can flourish.

Last week I closed with the comments... *“We live in a floundering culture with a floundering system of family and social sensibilities. Tough times are coming!”* If this is true (and there is overwhelming evidence that it is) then this means that many of us, including those that we deeply love are at risk. Now I am not prophet of gloom and doom, and I certainly do not want to speak a negative confession over our lives, so please hear me out on this. It only takes a little care, concern, and love in your heart to see the reality of our floundering condition. That is why I believe the Lord has given us the “How to Save a Life” message. It is precisely the kind of message God gives to people when they flounder. It is the message that Jesus brought when He came to earth. Step Three of “how to save a life” says... Use everyday – include everyone – in spite of everything. **Because I am not a prophet of gloom and doom and because I have put my full trust and faith in Jesus, here's how I read this...**

*“We live in a floundering culture with a floundering system of family and social sensibilities. Tough times are coming!” So, **use everyday** to love the ones we love – **include everyone** in an open and honest community – **in spite of everything** trust in Jesus and His love.*

Yes, there is difficulty in life. There are times of disappointment and sorrow. There is disillusionment and there is temptation and testing. But as we gather together each week (in Christ) to pray, interact, worship, and love each other, God's plan for us to flourish is uniquely revealed. As a community of faith united in the love of Jesus we overcome together and chip away at obstacles - high risk and losing valuable life day after day. In spite of everything we have these words to live by...

Romans 8:31-39

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse the ones God has chosen to be His own? The answer is no one... for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Again, no one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

John 16:31-33

Do you finally believe? In fact, you're about to make a run for it — saving your own skins and abandoning me. But I'm not abandoned. The Father is with me. I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world."

How to Save a Life (continued)

Step Four: Remember... Never too Early – Never too Late

(Romans 5:6-10)

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7 Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. 9 And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment. 10 For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life.

As we introduce step four of “How to Save a Life” there are two very important points of truth that followers of Jesus must never forget. (One) – it is never too early to save a life; and, (Two) – it is never too late. Those two statements are right on track with what Paul the author Romans was saying in our opening text. Here it is again in language that works – helpless, hopeless, good, bad, young, old, sinning or not sinning, friend or foe, Jesus came for us just at the right time – just to make us right. In spite of our condition or status on the “life-meter” what He does to save lives is completely in realm of the amazing and it is just *never too early* or *never too late* for Him to do it. And so those two points become our *step four of how to save a life*.

Lets start with a couple of very revealing comments Jesus made to his followers that can help us attach to what was in His heart and thoughts. This will gives us a sample of seeing from His perspective. Then we can “play it forward” into our **Step Four of How to Save a Life**.

1) Sitting in the home of friends with a few of His disciples, Jesus clarifies a conversation about who, what, and when was most important in the kingdom. He picks up a small child in His arms and says... *“Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes my Father who sent me.”*

2) Responding to the grief and disappointment of his friend Martha over the death of her brother (He knew she thought He had come too late), He said to her... *“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish.”*

The first statement tells us that Jesus believed it was never too early to save a life. The age, the innocence, vulnerability, and openness of a child are the perfect time to begin to save life. Jesus is saying... Anyone who welcomes and opens their heart to the young, the innocent and vulnerable for love opens for them the door for life and hope!

The second statement tells us that Jesus believed it was never too late to save a life. The way Jesus saw it there were many kinds of death, but life could truly, only be saved in one way – in Him. Jesus didn't see death (of any kind - physical, spiritual, emotional) as we see it. He did not see death as the ending of life, or the finality of living, as we do. He grieved death as we do because of His humanity. But as our Savior, He saw death (in any form) as the necessary passage or transition to new life in Him. He saw death as the opportunity for life. Death to us, signals the end - to Jesus, it signals the beginning. And those who belief in Him, Jesus is the navigation (GPS) through that passage or transition. Remember... Never too Early – Never too Late.

It is important that we not just hear the words of Jesus on this. It is equally important that we see in action the practice of the *Never too Early – Never too Late*, Jesus. And then, it is also important that we look even closer at the outcome opportunities that (NTE – NTL) Jesus created in the lives of ordinary people like you and me. So here are some of those (NTE-NTL) practices and outcomes illustrating Jesus doing what Jesus does...

1]

(Matthew 9:9-13)

Passing along, Jesus saw a man at his work collecting taxes. His name was Matthew. Jesus said, "Come along with me." Matthew stood up and followed him. Later when Jesus was eating supper at Matthew's house with his close followers, a lot of disreputable characters came and joined them. When the Pharisees saw him keeping this kind of company, they had a fit, and lit into Jesus' followers. "What kind of example is this from your Teacher, acting cozy with crooks and riff-raff?" Jesus, overhearing, shot back, "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? Go figure out what this Scripture means: 'I'm after mercy, not religion.' I'm here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders."

Practice: Never too Early – for Mercy and building Relationships

Outcome: Community and Mission

2]

(Luke 23:39-43)

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself — and us, too, while you're at it!" But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you are dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Practice: Never to Late – for Repentance

Outcome: Salvation and Eternal Life

3]

(Luke 8:40-53)

On his return, Jesus was welcomed by a crowd. They were all there expecting him. A man came up, Jairus by name. He was president of the meeting place. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his home because his twelve-year-old daughter, his only child, was dying. Jesus went with him, making his way through the pushing, jostling crowd. In the crowd that day there was a woman who for twelve years had been afflicted with hemorrhages. She had spent every penny she had on doctors but not one had been able to help her. She slipped in from behind and touched the edge of Jesus' robe. At that very moment her hemorrhaging stopped. Jesus said, "Who touched me?" When no one stepped forward, Peter said, "But Master, we've got crowds of people on our hands. Dozens have touched you." Jesus

insisted, "Someone touched me. I felt power discharging from me." When the woman realized that she couldn't remain hidden, she knelt trembling before him. In front of all the people, she blurted out her story — why she touched him and how at that same moment she was healed. Jesus said, "Daughter, you took a risk trusting me, and now you're healed and whole. Live well, live blessed!" While he was still talking, someone from the leader's house came up and told him, "Your daughter died. No need now to bother the Teacher." Jesus overheard and said, "Don't be upset. Just trust me and everything will be all right." Going into the house, he wouldn't let anyone enter with him except Peter, John, James, and the child's parents. Everyone was crying and carrying on over her. Jesus said, "Don't cry. She didn't die; she's sleeping."

Practice: Never too Late – for Faith

Outcome: Healing and New Life

Is there a too early or too late situation or person in your life?

How to Save a Life

Step Four: Never too Early – Never too Late (Continued)

(John 2:18-22)

"What right do you have to do these things?" the Jewish leaders demanded. "If you have this authority from God, show us a miraculous sign to prove it." "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "What!" they exclaimed. "It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can do it in three days?" But by "this temple," Jesus meant his body. After he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this. And they believed both Jesus and the Scriptures.

(1 John 1:1-3)

The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life. This one who is life from God was shown to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and announce to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was shown to us.

We are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

“Culture”

So we can believe with a great deal of confidence based on the outcomes of the message and mission of Jesus here on earth this truth... ***In Him and because of Him it is never too early and never too late to save a life.*** Years later in his biography of Jesus and his epistle writings, John recalls that the followers of Jesus both critics and converts finally realized that about Him. He was who He said He was – the giver of life. In fact, Jesus was saying that this was the mission of the Father who sent Him, and Jesus consistently revealed during His time here (and of course to this day) NTE - NTL heart of God. Consequently, we (you and I) have this great and powerful truth to hold on to. And it is not just a wish – it is the visible and intentional reality of the character and heart of Jesus the (NTE – NTL) Savior. Put it this way NTE-NTL is not just what Jesus did or does - it is who He was and who He is – what He thought and what He thinks – what he said and what He says. Jesus was in fact by nature of His message and mission creating and forming a culture (behavior and beliefs). It was the culture of the kingdom of heaven. It was a culture of NTE-NTL. Think of it in this way as well... It is us (our culture) that too often responds to the day in day and day circumstances of life with the beliefs and behaviors that “it’s too early” and “it’s too late.” *Interpretation:* We can easily box ourselves in with our culture of limited understanding of the NTE-NTL power of Christ

and the heart of God the Father. Here is a quick illustration... many expecting parents have no problem with believing that it not too early to play music, and sing to their unborn babies while they are still in the womb. But do we have the same believe about reading scripture to them or for that matter having them consecrated or baptized at the earliest possible age? Our culture boxes us in. The reality is that we need to intently believe that it is NTE to begin to influence and form our children. It is about formation and creating the culture of Jesus in our children - and it can happen consciously or sub-consciously whether they understand or do not understand. We will talk more about that later. For today however, we give full attention to the revelation of the NTE-NTL culture of Jesus.

Because Jesus is an NTE-NTL Savior we should be NTE-NTL believers. This great and powerful truth reveals the culture of Jesus *should be who we are as well*. So I want us to consider two challenges in becoming NTE-NTL culture of believers. The *first challenge* is in our being able to reform what we think, say, do, and live, to get to the core (DNA) of Jesus the NTE-NTL Savior. *Challenge two* is to welcome into the culture and space of the NTE – NTL community... *real life people - in real life circumstance – seeking real life*.

Note: isn't it interesting that the name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the name "Joshua," which means "the LORD saves." (Matthew 1:21)

Challenge One

- **Think** NTE-NTL thoughts. (Romans 8:5-7)
- **Speak** NTE-NTL language. (Colossians 3:16-17)
- **Do** NTE-NTL things. (1 John 3:18-20)
- **Live** the NTE-NTL life. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Don't kid yourself; meeting Challenge One is a tough process. To learn how to save a life by believing and behaving it is NTE and NTL is an ***active process*** of growing in respect, and the revelation of what the NTE-NTL Savior is truly capable of. Fortunately, we also know there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus was and is capable of saving life at any time, in any place, under any condition. Because of that knowledge, we as NTE-NTL believers connect with Jesus and His culture by... embracing in us the beliefs and behavior and creating the space (hospitality and hope) where saving lives can and should take place. If I believe and see it in that way then Challenge One makes great sense as the plan of action for my day-to-day life. What we are talking about here is overthrowing one culture and replacing it with another. The strategy for this cultural takeover is spelled out in the ***active process*** of Challenge One; Think – Speak – Do – Live.

To meet and succeed at challenge one, we must see the need and have the desire to change. Certainly the power to change is a spiritual movement (2 Peter 1:3-4), according to scripture the Spirit leads to a revelation truth of the NTE-NTL Jesus (John 16:13-15). But once that revelation of truth has come we must change to that truth, or run the risk of losing touch with the life the NTE-NTL Jesus gives. That side of change is practical but can and should be seen as a challenge we must meet head on.

How to Save a Life

Step Four: Never too Early – Never too Late (Continued)

By engaging in the active process of Challenge One, we naturally begin to form *the culture* (beliefs and behaviors) and *the space* (hospitality and hope) needed for NTE – NTL living. If we are thinking, speaking, doing, and living in the ways Jesus taught us, then we will find the life we seek to save. Listen to this story;

in it we can clearly see the formation of the NTE-NTL culture and space Jesus intends for His followers to form in Him.

(Luke 7:36-50) One of the Pharisees asked him over for a meal. He went to the Pharisee's house and sat down at the dinner table. Just then a woman of the village, the town harlot, having learned that Jesus was a guest in the home of the Pharisee, came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet. Letting down her hair, she dried his feet, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfume. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man was the prophet I thought he was, he would have known what kind of woman this is who is falling all over him." Jesus said to him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Oh? Tell me." "Two men were in debt to a banker. One owed five hundred silver pieces, the other fifty. Neither of them could pay up, and so the banker canceled both debts. Which of the two would be more grateful?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one who was forgiven the most." "That's right," said Jesus. Then turning to the woman, but speaking to Simon, he said, "Do you see this woman? I came to your home; you provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on my feet and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she hasn't quit kissing my feet. You provided nothing for freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with perfume. Impressive, isn't it? She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal." Then he spoke to her: "I forgive your sins." That set the dinner guests talking behind his back: "Who does he think he is, forgiving sins!" He ignored them and said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

NTE-NTL Challenge Two

Welcome into the culture and space of the NTE – NTL community... *real life people - in real life circumstance – seeking real life.*

Welcome is the heart and soul of Challenge Two. Welcome says.... Well, come, to the place – where it is never too early and never too late to save a life. We have spent the last two weeks using the practices and outcomes of the relationships and ministry of Jesus to describe the NTE-NTL culture He was forming. Having looked very hard at a NTE-NTL culture, we need to move on and give some attention to how the term “space” should be understood in the NTE-NTL communities Jesus forms.

“Space”

Jesus literally created space for *at risk* people – and in that space He saved their life. That space was an invitation or welcome into the kingdom of heaven (God’s kingdom). So, this was not dead space, taking up space, or just empty space, but rather “God space.” In “God space” there is continuing movement. Continuing movement from “at risk” to “at rest” and from “at rest” to “on-track.” We welcome God, He welcomes us, and we welcome each other. We come to God, He comes to us, and we come to each other. We are welcome into a free and fearless place where there is space for what is most needed to give life. Because of that continuing movement towards who (Jesus) and what (life) happens only in that kind of space, it is never too early or never too late to save a life there – because there is always life there.

Two main movements characterize why this welcome into “God space” is so very important. Jesus knew how important these two movements were and so should we - they are the two most intense threats to life; *loneliness and hostility*. So into the Jesus culture and this God space we welcome lonely and hostile people, needing movement to save their life...

One - The Movement from Loneliness to Solitude...

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. 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. Spend your time with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Loneliness Word Pool: cut-off, shut out, betrayed, scorned, humiliated, misunderstood, awkward, misplaced, excluded and isolated, without companionship

Loneliness – Bottom Line: To be disconnected from one's past, culture, and country, from neighbors, friends, and family, or from one's deepest self and from God.

Solitude Word Pool: down-time, rest and renew, stillness, silence, chill, worry-free, stress-free, no pressure, no push, no performance, me being me

Solitude – Bottom Line: Sometimes alone, but never lonely; sometimes being quiet, but more importantly being still. Seeing but not always looking, and speaking but not always talking. And above all... to love the way Jesus loved and to be who God made us to be.

Two - The Movement from Hostility to Hospitality...

Ephesians 2:14-17 The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. **He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance.** He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with

two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody. Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders.

Hostility Word Pool: fearful, defensive, aggressive, anxious, angry, wounded, bitter, unforgiving, suspicious, possessive, controlling, addicted, greedy, secretive, hidden, unloved

Hostility - Bottom Line: The poisoned DNA of a culture increasingly full of fearful, defensive, aggressive people who obsessively cling to their property - looking at the world with suspicion, always expecting the enemy to appear, intrude and do harm.

Hospitality Word Pool: welcome, movement, life, warmth, sincerity, generosity, love, mercy, forgiveness, rest, healing, freedom and openness

Hospitality – Bottom Line: Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer space where change can take place. Space no longer separated by insecurities, outrage, frustrations, and fears; but rightly united together by the love of Jesus who tears down the walls that divide the space desperately needed to save lives. To (openly-freely) welcome people into a culture and space where it is never too early and never too late.

Getting Movement

- ***Start each day with some form of communication or interaction with God*** – verbalize the desire of your heart for growth and wholeness in you.
- ***List some ways that you can serve someone or something other than yourself.*** Then act on that list. At the end of the day make certain you have something from your list that you can check off as accomplished.

- ***Gather with NTE-NTL community consistently and faithfully.*** In spite of how you feel or your schedule – gather. While there, connect with others in your greeting, interest, and openness for them. Make certain you too have created “God space” where others feel welcomed and safe to connect with you.
- ***Make a goal to learn something new each week.*** Use a variety of topics and interests; God and faith, history, other religions, cultural and social issues, world concerns.
- ***Make a goal to forgive something or someone each week.*** It is never too early and never too late too forgive someone or something that you believe has wronged you. This particular movement of grace sets you and I free at every level of life. Remember... that you yourself have been forgiven. You can save two lives by forgiving – your life and the life of your benefactor!
- ***Tell yourself the truth about life, yourself, and your circumstances.*** Don't let your emotions create your culture and control how you think - speak - and live. “It is never too early and it is never too late.” Be more “outcome conscious” by playing your own culture (beliefs and behaviors) forward. If you don't like the outcome you see then (*the truth is*) you must change your culture.
- ***Give a gift to someone each week.*** This is certainly not about spending money you do not have; or about impressing and manipulating people. It is an opportunity to express the sincere generosity of your heart - to get moving. A small card (with a verse and encouragement), a cup of coffee (with conversation), or maybe some item you have that you know someone can use (go help them use it). Consider giving someone the “gift of attention”... try it, and see what happens!

Its Never too Early – Never too Late...

“Eis Prassos Aleethai” – “To Practice Truth”

In the same way that we studied the circumstances – practice – and outcomes of the relationships and ministry of Jesus, we should study our own. By practicing truth in each area of His life here on earth He was creating the NTE-NTL culture and space for us. By creating the culture of truth there is space where loving freely and openly saves lives. Jesus was welcoming countless lonely and hostile (at risk) people into that culture and space. Within that NTE-NTL space the spirit of genuine love reveals the heart and DNA of the NTE-NTL culture, which eventually causes movement to God or movement away from God - movement to God saves a life. To finish step four: NTE - NTL I want to take one more look at the culture Jesus created (*eis prassos aleethai*) *to practice truth - and the outcome of that practice.*

(John 8:1-11)How to Save a Life – NTE-NTL

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and Pharisees brought a woman they had caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to her, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." NLT

Fifty NTE-NTL People... eis prassos aleethai

[Circumstance-Practice-Outcome]

- Challenge One
- Challenge Two
- Getting Movement

How To Save a Life

Step Five: Grow in Recovery – Move to Discovery

(2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

“Since we believe that Christ died for everyone, we also believe that we have all died to the old life we used to live. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead, they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them. So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun! All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.” NLT

Context: Living as hostiles with God, ourselves, and others. The expectation and realities of the contrast of change in the human condition because of what Jesus did.

Recovery: All people are either dead inside or dying as a result of living and loving in their old way of life.

Discovery: A new life! Because of what Jesus did we can change – we are not the same anymore... we are not the same anymore!

Step Five of *How to Save a Life* says... Grow in Recovery – Open to Discovery. «Recovery is a place to heal – to heal is to change - to change is to open - and to open is to discover.»

As you hear these words take a moment and repeat them back to yourself. See if you can hear and feel in them the sense of the process of life happening. Throughout the gospels we are told by the authors that Jesus claimed **He** Himself was life; In light of the resurrection of Jesus this is an awesome proclamation. But what is even more completely amazing is the historical and living evidence that it was true. Jesus indeed did recover people from old life so they might discover new life in Him. So I am going to say the words to us one more time, see if you can feel and hear the life of Jesus in these words as well this time.

...Grow in Recovery – Open to Discovery. Recovery is a place to heal – to heal is to change - to change is to open - and to open is to discover.

I want to get four things done this morning
in our time together.

- Reconnect with step five.

- Revisit - 4 Critical Bottom Line Points
- Breakdown three key passages that illuminate the whole process of step five: Grow in Recovery – Open to Discovery
- Talk briefly about where this kind of message is leading us

4 Critical Bottom Line Points

One – We are all dead (in one way or another) until we find new life in Jesus – who died for everyone, to recover anyone, so everyone could discover how to live.

Two – We are healed and changed by the power of His life and no longer have to look at ourselves or anyone else in the ways we used to.

Three – We are open to discover a new life that we could never have even imagined for ourselves.

Four – We get to share what we discover with people who just like us are needing to grow in recovery from their old lives’ and who are open to the discovery of a new life as a follower of Jesus.

These are critical and important points
 Needed to help us understand and connect with
 the whole *How to Save a Life* message.
 It is the moment of *no more games* where
 we are actually *committed to and engaged*
*in the struggle of **recovering from old***
life to discovering new life. Today
 I want to describe the life struggle as projected
 in *Step Five*; and then lay the groundwork for
 the recovery and discovery model of Jesus.
 To do this we can use these 4 Critical
 Bottom Line Points from this excellent
 passage of Paul written directly to the believers
 of Jesus in the city of Corinth in the fall 57 A.D.
 The people to whom Paul wrote these letters were
 knee deep in the Step Five struggle to
 “grow in recovery and move to discovery.”
 What Paul tells them is the most complete
 description of the recovery and discovery model
 of Jesus that has ever been written.

(2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

*“Since we believe that Christ died for everyone, we also believe
 that we have all died to the old life we used to live. He died for*

everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead, they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them. So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun! All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.” NLT

Context: Living as hostiles with God, ourselves, and others. The expectation and realities of the contrast of change in the human condition because of what Jesus did.

Recovery: All people are either dead or dying as a result of living and loving in their old way of life.

Discovery: A new life! Because of what Jesus did we can change – we are not the same anymore... we are not the same anymore!

(Colossians 1:18-23)

Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is the first of all who will rise from the dead, so he is first in everything. 19 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and by him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross. 21 This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, 22 yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of

God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. 23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand in it firmly. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed by God to proclaim it. NLT (62 A.D.)

Context: Jesus is head of the church not egotistical men and women. Stand on that!

Recovery: Everyone who finds themselves at a far distance because of their sin and evil.

Discovery: Because of what Jesus did on the cross everyone who had been at a far distance can come right in to God's presence without shame or blame. But you must live in the truth – not just talk truth!

(Ephesians 2:14-18)

4 For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us. 15 By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups. 16 Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. 17 He has brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and to us Jews who were near. 18 Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us. NLT

Context: Cultural (Jew / non-Jew) divisions and exclusivity in Christian community and worship.

Recovery: Real people from every race and culture - beaten down by the hostility of legalism and cultural exclusivity. Rescuing those pushed away from becoming part of God's kingdom.

Discovery: All can come - all are welcome to the Father, by the same Holy Spirit all because of what Jesus did.

Today I would like to ...

- **Wrap up Step Five of How to Save a Life: Grow in Recovery – Open to Discovery.**
- **Re-introduce us to the powerful principles of the 12-Step Program for Recovery.**
- **Add an interesting twist to the 12-Step Program.**

▪ **Clarify the recovery - discovery mission of Jesus.**

(1 Peter 2:4-10)

Come to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by the people, but he is precious to God who chose him. 5 And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are God's holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ. 6 As the Scriptures express it, "I am placing a stone in Jerusalem, a chosen cornerstone, and anyone who believes in him will never be disappointed."

7 Yes, he is very precious to you who believe. But for those who reject him, "The stone that was rejected by the builders has now become the cornerstone." 8 And the Scriptures also say, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that will make them fall." They stumble because they do not listen to God's word or obey it, and so they meet the fate that has been planned for them. 9 But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. 10 "Once you

were not a people ; now you are the people of God. Once you received none of God's mercy; now you have received his mercy."

Grow in recovery - Open to discovery is a significant culture shift from some of the generic or standard beliefs and behaviors that more often than not can leave a person locked into a perpetual *slippery slope* condition. That perpetual condition is identified over and over again in that culture known as the Recovery 12 Step Programs. Grow in Recovery – Open to Discovery leads us to a step beyond 12 steps to what I would call «13.» To explain that lets start by taking a look at the 12 Steps of Recovery.

The 12 Steps Of Recovery

- We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
- Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
- Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

- Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs.

In these very powerful twelve steps there is some real honesty and acceptance of responsibility being suggested. There is also the vehicle and clear support for the change in faulty beliefs and addictive behaviors that are both self-destructive and self-inflicted. In these steps we can see that there is a productive transference from a powerful dependency on substances and behavior that will eventually kill – to a power and a people that want to help us live. The 12-step system has been (since the founding of the original AA Organization in 1935) a life line for many a person. I don't want to minimize or trivialize the dynamic impact that it has had for millions of people who struggle or have struggled with addiction and compulsive behavior. I believe in the 12-Step Program! But within the system itself there remains a lingering absence of hope and discovery for a person to radically change their *life identity* and gain complete freedom from the very culture (beliefs and behaviors) that threatened to destroy the life

that God has given them. There doesn't ever appear to be the place where a person is no longer identified as the *«addict»* but always seems to be forever closely connected to the identity, images, and hostile culture of addiction. It reminds me a little of the old saying... *«Keep your friends close – but keep your enemies closer.»* It is almost like a strategy of fear and suspicion. A recovery that stops the bleeding but never releases the patient from ICU. ***The recovery mission of Jesus however was to open the discovery of new life.*** A life fully made new – complete with a new identity and the new found freedom from the guilt, shame, fear and suspicion of the destruction and power of the enemies from the past. Not denial but discovery! Being made new, thinking something new, doing something new, finding what is new – all in the person, presence, and purpose of Jesus.

«Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.» (Romans 12:2)

Growing in recovery - and being in recovery, are two different things to Jesus. Being in recovery is a place to heal and live.

Growing in recovery is the place where we (the healed) discover that we can go through. Jesus said, *«Follow Me and I will make*

you...» «If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.»

Last week the words from the passage in 2 Corinthians just seemed hit me like a ton of bricks.... *«What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!»*

Over and over again the words... *«not the same anymore... not the same any more... not the same anymore!* This is the discovery of real hope! The kind of hope not quite finished or discovered in the 12 Step Program of Recovery. Complete recovery is open to the discovery of a new culture and a new mind and heart! This is the right place and time then for a new step - the 13th step... the 13th step of the 12 Step Program of Recovery.

Step 13

- Moved forward in the discovery that God's love has a new identity and life for me in His Son Jesus Christ. In His mercy I am forgiven. Empowered by new thinking, new behavior, and the welcome of a new community; each new day His grace sets me free from who I once was.

The Final Step: Believe in Prayer – Pray with Believers

The Final Step: Believe in Prayer – Pray with Believers

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, one of my all-time favorite writers and persons in the faith once said, “To believe in God is to believe in prayer – To believe in prayer is to believe in God.” As we reach the final step of “How to Save a Life” we must take that final step into God’s world of believing; a world of believing in prayer and having faith in Him. We come to believe that prayer is the life-line He (God) gives us to save the life He gave us. That is why Bonhoeffer said... *“To believe in God is to believe in prayer – To believe in prayer is to believe in God.”*

The disciples asked Jesus, “Lord teach us to pray”? So, Jesus taught His disciples *how* to pray, and then taught them *why* they needed to pray. Since Jesus taught believers how and why to pray it makes sense that we understand that “prayer” is not a natural activity but one that must be learned and practiced. We also know that learning to pray and practicing prayer do not always make a prayer profitable and valued by God. Jesus taught that the attitude and condition of the heart were the beginning of any true and right prayer.

With prayers that come from what we call Christian believers, we should understand that all prayer must go to God through a Mediator. That no one no matter how holy or spiritual has direct access to God (without the Mediator) even in prayer. The scripture teaches that Jesus Christ Himself is that Mediator and because of Him we have access and can reach the heart of God the Father when we pray. We pray to God because we believe in Him through the power and authority of Jesus (Colossians 1:15), and so in actuality when we pray we are never requesting direct to God. We have no need to come to Him that way – the Bible says we are privileged in that “God knows our needs before we ever ask.” Some might say, “why pray”? That is simple... because He asks us to. Secondly it is how we become participants in the kingdom of God. And finally, it is the way we can truly learn the heart of God as our heavenly Father – through Jesus Christ. In

prayer we come to Jesus and in Jesus we come to God - that is how we save a life; including our own.

(Luke 18:1-5)

One day Jesus told his disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who was a godless man with great contempt for everyone. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, appealing for justice against someone who had harmed her. The judge ignored her for a while, but eventually she wore him out. 'I fear neither God nor man,' he said to himself, 'but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'" " NLT

Biblical Case for Believing in Prayer

❖ We Need to Pray – (James 5:13-16)

Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord.

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Confess your sins to

each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. NLT

❖ **How we Pray – (Matthew 6:9-13)**

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven.
give us our food for today, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. NLT
(Ephesians 1:1-16)

Where we Pray – (Matthew 6:5-6) And now about *prayer*. *When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.*
NLT

❖ **Why we Pray** – (Mark 14:38)

Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak.

❖ **When we Pray** – (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. NLT

(Ephesians 6:18) *Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.* NLT

(Luke 11:5-10) *Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this illustration: "Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You would*

say to him, 'A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.' He would call out from his bedroom, 'Don't bother me. The door is locked for the night, and we are all in bed. I can't help you this time.' But I tell you this — though he won't do it as a friend, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you what you want so his reputation won't be damaged. "And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.

NLT

❖ **Help in prayer – (Romans 8:26)**

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. (Romans 8:34)

Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us. NLT

❖ **Prayer of Peace** – (Philippians 4:5-7)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. NLT

❖ **Prayer for Others** – (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks. 2 Pray this way for kings and all others who are in authority, so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 for he wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. NLT

❖ **Pray Together** – (1 Timothy 2:8)

So wherever you assemble, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy. NLT

Beleive in Prayer as an Active Reality

“When I see three oranges, I juggle; when I see two towers, I walk.”

...Phillipe Petit

Shortly after 7:15 a.m. on August 7th, 1974, without hesitation, Philippe Petit stepped off the South Tower and onto his 3/4" 6x19 IWRC steel cable. The 24-year-old Petit made eight crossings between the still-unfinished towers, a quarter mile above the sidewalks of Manhattan, in an event that lasted about 45 minutes. During that time, in addition to walking, he sat on the wire, gave knee salute and, while lying on the wire, dialogued with a seagull circling above his head.

[Port Authority Police Department](#) Sgt. Charles Daniels, who was dispatched to the roof to bring Petit down, later reported his experience:

I observed the [tightrope 'dancer'](#)—because you couldn't call him a 'walker'—approximately halfway between the two towers. And upon seeing us he started to smile and laugh and he started going into a dancing routine on the high wire.... And when he got to the building we asked him to get off the high wire but instead he turned around and ran back out into the middle.... He was bouncing up and down. His feet were actually leaving the wire and then he would resetttle back on the wire again....Unbelievable really.... Everybody was spellbound in the watching of it.

He was finally persuaded by police officers to give himself up after he was warned that a police helicopter would come to pick him off the wire. Petit was worried that the wind from the helicopter would knock him off the wire, so he decided it was time to give up. He was arrested once he stepped off the wire. His audacious high wire performance made headlines around the world.

Philippe Petit (born August 13, 1949) is a French high wire artist who gained fame for his illegal walk between the former Twin Towers in New York City on August 7, 1974. He used a 450 pound cable to do so and also a custom made 26 foot long, 55 pound balancing pole. Tight-rope walker, unicyclist, magician and pantomime artist, Philippe Petit was also one of the earliest modern day street jugglers in Paris in 1968. He juggled and worked on a slack rope with regularity in Washington Square Park in New York City in the early 1970s. Petit is one of the Artists-in-Residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. Other famous structures he has used for tightrope walks include that Cathedral, The Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Louisiana Superdome, and between the Palais de Chaillot and the Eiffel Tower. Petit currently lives in Woodstock, New York.

When asked why he did this unbelievable and now **world renown** stunt, Petit would say “*When I see three oranges, I juggle; when I see two towers, I walk.*” His explanation in the context of who Pettit was is the active reality in which he has lived out the passion of his life. He describes the movement of active reality by simply saying, because of who I am – this is what I do. **When we as Christ followers come to see our prayer to God as actual and literal movement towards God, then our prayer can be seen as active reality - not illusion, surreal activity, or meaningless words.** Prayer is the active reality in which we can live out the passion of our shared lives. For beleivers in Jesus we grow in prayer until in the spirit of Philippe Pettit we can say... *When I see a need, I pray; when I sense the Spirit, I pray.*

Jesus prayed to God His Father; this was not an illusion or surreal but very much the active reality of who He was; empowering His mission, circumstances, and provision here on earth. Let me illustrate.

While here, **Jesus prayed for His ...**

Mission – *“May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10)

“I brought glory to you here on earth by doing everything you told me to do. And now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.” (John 17:4- 5)

Circumstances – *“Abba, Father,” “Everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me.”* (Mark 14:36)

“Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, 'Father, save me from what lies ahead'? But that is the very reason why I came! Father, bring glory to your name.” (John 12:27-28)

Provision – *“I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.”* (John 17:15)

“I have pleaded in prayer for you, that your faith should not fail.” (Luke 22:32)

Because Jesus prayed as an active reality (literal movement to God), His mission, circumstances and provision all were empowered by the Holy Spirit and actively reflected the will and heart of God. ***Prayer is the active reality of literal movement to God.*** Because of Jesus, God hears and sees us when we pray. ***In the active reality of prayer, Jesus is God's literal movement to us.*** When Jesus comes to us our mission, circumstances, and provision will actively reflect the will and heart of God.

To actively live in that reality we simply must pray. Pray alone, pray together, pray out loud, pray in silence, pray clean, pray dirty, pray coming in, pray going out, pray in need, pray in doubt, pray strong, pray weak, pray sick, pray healthy, pray early, pray late, pray afraid, pray in peace, pray angry, pray with joy, pray with tears, pray with laughter, pray in chaos, pray in stillness, pray when you want to - pray when you don't, pray with understanding and pray when you don't have a clue, pray with

friends and pray for enemies, pray in your pain and pray when your numb, pray at a certain time, pray anytime, pray for mercy, pray for grace, pray for forgiveness, pray for a miracle, pray for common sense, pray with words, pray with thoughts, pray with emotion, pray with passion, pray hard, pray through, pray in the car, pray in the bar, pray in closet, pray in the yard, pray in the pool, pray on the stool, pray on your knees, pray while you walk, pray while exercising, pray while your ironing, pray doing the laundry, pray taking out the trash, pray at work, pray when your cleaning the pool, pray during the commercials, pray while your golfing, pray for you're your husband, pray for your wife, pray for your children, pray for your mom, pray for your Dad, pray for your neighbor, pray for your friends, pray when you think of me – I'll pray when I think of you, pray with thanksgiving, pray for wisdom, pray for strength, pray for peace, pray for hope, pray for Jesus to come and take us all home... and always pray to save a life.

Every time we pray we actively move towards God and God moves towards us. He moves in our mission, in our circumstances, and in our provision. Now that we clearly have a more logical foundation for believing in prayer we can move on to the last piece of the final step of How to Save a Life... Pray with Believers!

**Saturday – June 21st 9:00am to Sunday June 22nd 9:00am - 24
at the Wall
(24 hours of Believing in Prayer – Praying with Believers)**

Praying with Believers

Now in Christ we have this wonderful gift of connecting with people in prayer. I do believe that it is true that “*we become intimate with those we pray for and those we pray with.*” So we

should pray together. But not just pray together (*with just anyone*) – pray with believers. Listen to the words of Jesus...

"I also tell you this: If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:19-20)

At its core, prayer is belief in the prayer you pray and faith that God hears when we pray. That is why one prays – because (at some level) they believe. But not everyone understands as Jesus described... praying in agreement with others who believe. Jesus is saying that to pray in complete agreement with faith and believing is part of the package. Jesus said that we should agree together and then ask the Father in His name our requests in prayer.

Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy. (John 16:23-24)

Hearing these thoughts from Jesus makes it more clear then why He asked repeatedly for unity among us (agreement) - to be one, as He and the Father are one. It just makes sense; if agreeing and believing make a good prayer better - then we believers should stop disagreeing and move on to agreement and believing when we pray. It was pretty obvious that Jesus put a high premium on agreeing, believing, and having faith in His Heavenly Father. So obvious on this point that he said,

"The world's sin is unbelief in me." (John 16:9)

And when Jesus prayed with people it was also very clear that He was not interested in praying with doubters and those who were filled with unbelief. His disciples sensed early on with Jesus that agreeing with believers, believing in Him, and having faith in God, were the essentials to a good prayer gathering. Their own self-doubts and lack of faith concerned the disciples and so they came to Jesus and asked Him for help... *"We need more faith, tell us how to get it"*! His immediate response to them was, *"if you just*

have faith the size of a tiny mustard seed that would be enough to say to a mulberry tree – be uprooted and replanted in the sea.”

Through this and many similar experiences Jesus modeled for His disciples how **to love** and **pray for** when faith is weak and doubt occurs. He rebuked and confronted their unbelief at times, He challenged their doubts, He praised them for their belief and faith, and He used everyday He had with them to teach them how to believe and not to doubt. And even with a better way to pray and believe the intense and tragic circumstances of His life and their own insecurities still made it hard for them hear His words and remember all that He had said. But He did not let them off the hook, and would not let them live and come to Him in doubt. Even after His death and resurrection, He comes to them challenging their doubts saying... *“The ones who are blessed are the ones who have not seen, yet still believe.”*

Jesus did not pray with people who did not believe. In fact, He always made it a point when praying with or for people to ask them about their believing, doubting, and their openness to faith. Jesus even asked people if they had the desire to change from doubting to believing. I think the idea was to not pray prayers that we doubt can be answered - prayed to a God that we are not always sure we believe in. That is why we pray with believers – to confront and overcome our doubt - to believe in our God, and to have faith in His name.

1] Jesus was called to pray for a young girl who had apparently died. When He saw her Jesus commented to the father concerning the young girl, *“she is not dead, only sleeping.”* Family and friends who had gathered (filled with emotion and grief) doubted and did not believe so they openly criticized Jesus for being so insensitive. He responded to their criticism by sending them all out of the house. He did this because their criticism reflected their doubt and unbelief. Then Jesus asked for only the girl’s father, and a couple of the disciples to enter her room to pray. Once the

doubters were removed, then Jesus prayed with the believers and the girl was raised and given new life.

2] As Jesus faces the night of darkness on the eve of His suffering and crucifixion he gives to us a glimpse of what it means and the need to pray with believers. As He enters the Garden of Gethsemane, He asks only certain disciples to go further with Him (apart from the rest) so that they might pray with Him. He asks them because He wanted them to believe with Him in prayer. When they could pray and believe with Him not He was hurt; and in fact, this was moment and true beginning of the betrayal of Jesus. When we will not pray, when we will not agree, when we will not believe after all He has done – it is betrayal!