



New Series

In this newest series by Pastor Tim—*"Imagine...Life on the Frontline,"* we'll explore how God might use us to make a difference in the life we live in each day. Where we live and work may seem ordinary, and yet it matters deeply to God. Our

everyday life offers extraordinary potential to not only grow in our own faith but to join God in drawing people to himself. In this series, we will imagine what God can do through us on our own frontlines!

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The Frontline Call

(Matthew 28:16-20)

Good morning everyone! We're starting a new Fall Life Lesson series today that I'm calling, *Imagine...Life On the Front Lines*. For the next 6 weeks we're going to dive into what brings the life of the Christ-follower into sharp focus; how God loves to partner with us to make a difference in the lives of people we live and work and play with every day. In a nut-shell, here's the focus: God calls every follower of Jesus Christ to work alongside of him and with one another, to touch the lives of people around us. Something, here at CrossWinds, we call "*Wholife Discipleship*." I'm talking about an all-encompassing way of life where Jesus calls us to use the whole of our lives to help other people know him, love him and follow him. Here's what I mean by that:

We spend about 95% of our time in our homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplace and in our community—about 5% of our time is doing church related ministry or service or activities. So, if Christ-followers restrict our Christian lives only with church related ministry or service or activities, we're missing 95% of our potential to join Jesus in transforming the hearts of people. So, in order to really experience that 95%, we need to own this: I have a front-line call to join Jesus in redeeming this world around me. This is where Jesus engages you and me each day in his plan to transform the hearts of people; where take the whole of our lives are used on the frontline of our daily reality. So instead of asking this question:

"What needs to be done in the world today?" God already knows and He's already moving—instead, we should ask: *God, what are you leading me to do today in my home or neighborhood or workplace; or school or in my community?* That's what our "Frontline" call is about. So, where we live and work and play may seem ordinary, but God sees your everyday life as an extraordinary opportunity to join him in drawing people to himself. That's what we're going to imagine in this series. What God can do through us on our own frontlines each day? I want expand on that this morning, so, first...

1. God's longing is to engage us wherever our everyday lives take us.

Most of us spend most of our time surrounded by people who don't know the joy of following Jesus. Jesus had that in mind when he gave us his Great Commission. So, Listen to this familiar passage of scripture from Matthew 28:18-20 (READ). This represents basic instruction Jesus gave his followers before he left earth and ascended into heaven. It has been the mission of Christ-followers for 2000 years. But I want to break it down in just two ways this morning. First when Jesus said...*"Therefore Go,"* look at the word *"Therefore."* Jesus was transferring his personal mission of redeeming over to his followers—He's saying, *"Church, I did the work; by my authority I laid down my life and took it up again, I made the ultimate sacrifice of death on a cross for the forgiveness of sin. And now, I'm passing the everyday work of that on to you.*

Jesus gave his followers the command to go and reach out to people with his story; his Good News; his truth. And, he gave his authority and power to us to represent him. The Apostle Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:20, *"...we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"* So, Christ-followers not only have the authority of Jesus to impact the lives and souls of people, we have a distinct calling. Jesus said, we are a walking around picture of Jesus through our everyday life. Let me break down the phrase *"Go and make disciples"* from v. 19. It's written in the present imperative—that's an ancient linguistic way of Jesus saying:

"It is vital, crucial, essential, urgent and necessary that you use each (present) day to help others hear about, understand and know me as Savior and Lord."

Now, one of the astonishing things about being a follower of Jesus is that God will take your strengths, personality, your daily situations and availability to make that happen. So, *'Where we are'* matters to God; where live, work, play, is the place God has put you to make a difference for this time and eternity. So, let me ask you: Where's your Frontline? On any given day, where do you spend most of your time? And what's happening there? What are the issues you face? How can you represent Jesus there?

Are you invested in people on a personal level? Are there opportunities to show kindness and respect; to demonstrate patience, self-control, gentleness, or even to forgive? Will a job well done earn you a right to be heard? I don't know, does this sound too overwhelming? I think it's more of a mindset, an attitude; a commitment to love people, to represent Jesus every day and everywhere you go—and if that's your heart you need to know something: God does the rest. God loves the people you talk to each day, he knows them; their needs; and for most of you, he's already using you on your Frontlines, even if you haven't been aware. But how much more will God engage you if you're tuned into his work in the lives of people around you and willing to serve people, work excellently, demonstrate the heart of Jesus to people.

And listen, I'm not talking perfection. In fact, it's not a *holier than thou* attitude, it's more real; where God takes the real you to touch the lives of people on your front-line—and it all begins with a heart for Jesus and for people. Do you see yourself using the whole of your life on the front-line for Jesus? Mark Greene is Executive Director of *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity*. Listen to what he says about a whole-life, frontline presence (**VIDEO—Dots & FTCW's 2:30**). That's what we're trying to change here. So, are you ready to be an ambassador for Jesus; to show others that God is real; to be a person of grace on your frontline? To live God's truth and offer hope for life and eternity? Secondly...

2. Everyone is different, no two Frontlines are identical. Some of us may have difficulty in identifying our Frontline or in seeing how God might use us there, but listen to this: Everyone in this church, from young to old, in paid employment or not, sick or well, has a Frontline, and it matters to God! I think what we need to do is be more purposeful with how God could use us where we spend most of our time. And if we all do that, can you imagine the difference we could make in the hearts and souls of people in the St Croix Valley? For instance, what if we wrote down every Frontline that we represent—we would begin to see how God is positioning CrossWinds to impact in our community and surrounding area.

In fact, I would love to do that—Let’s do something right now. Would you take out your Connection Card and do this: write down for me what your main Frontline is? If you’re an at-home mom, write down, “my frontline is my home” or “my neighborhood” or my “Community” or all three; because I know “at home moms,” you’re involved in all those areas. Or, if you’re in school, write down the name of your school as your Frontline.” If you’re in the workplace every day, write down your place of employment; if you’re retired, write down where you spend most of your time. So, let’s write it down—and then we’ll compile this info and show you where God is putting CrossWinds as Frontline people. Now, let’s shift gears a bit—I really want you to see the example of Jesus in this discussion. Jesus had a frontline.

Three years before Jesus spoke the words of His Great Commission to “go and make disciples” in Matthew 28, he was already living it out in his own life. Listen to Matthew 4:12-17 (READ). So, this is Jesus living out his own front-line mission of making disciples. I want to point out something here. Jesus was living out his Great Commission in his own Frontline of Galilee and it was not in Jerusalem. You may say, “*Well, so what?*” Well, Galilee was where Jesus had lived for 30 years—he was from Nazareth of Galilee. This is where Jesus had lived and worked as a carpenter. It was his front-line; and that’s where he shed his light; where he started to reach people; where he called his first disciples—away from the temple in Jerusalem. Why is this important?

The Jews were Jew-centric and temple-centric but Jesus was “lost people centric.” He was out there, among people, and not spending all his time in the temple. In Luke 19:10, Jesus said, “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost.*” If our example is Jesus, we wouldn’t be ignoring all the people “out there,” thinking that God’s purpose for us is all about what we do here in the church—we can’t represent Jesus “as we are going” if we are completely church-centric. If Galilee was where Jesus started his own mission, if Galilee was his front-line, shouldn’t we see where we live and work and the community we live in as our front-line? Just as Jesus was laser focused with life on his Frontline, so should we. The frontline is the ultimate Jesus-given assignment of life for every Christ-follower—to be used to God

to influence people in our homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and communities. So, what does that look like for you? Are you willing to discover new ways to connect with people you work with or go to school with or socialize with in order to show them Jesus? Now, before I close. I want you to watch another video clip about a person named Anne. Anne is figuring out what it means to live out her whole-life, frontline call. Take a look at this... **(VIDEO CLIP: Life on the Frontline: Meet Anne—5:00).**

So, if you're a Christ-follower, you have a Frontline. It's where Jesus and you and those you see and talk to and work with and socialize with and go to school with and greet everyday, all come together. And in the coming together, it's where Jesus shines through you to touch the lives and hearts of people. So, let's get ready in the weeks ahead to claim our Frontline call to represent Jesus. Let's close here. Locate your Connection Card and find where it says, "My Next Step Today Is..." Up on the screen, I've give you a few suggestions you could write down as an application for today. As you're writing, I ask the ushers to come and receive the morning offering. Please place you offering and Connection card in the offering bag as it passes—let's pray together...

The Frontline Commission

(Jeremiah 29:4-14)

Have you kept up with those 13,000 families out in California this past week who have been displaced by wildfire? People lost their homes, whole neighborhoods consumed by fire; Families exiled to live elsewhere. Their world turned upside down. When it comes to everyday life, stuff happens. And by stuff, I mean crud and by crud, I mean struggle and toil and striving and complexity of life. It's similar to the story we'll read about from scripture 26 hundred years ago, when God's people were torn from their homes in a firestorm of destruction and then exiled in Babylon. As we continue our series, *Imagine...Life on the Frontline*, I want to look at those times when the Frontlines of our life becomes challenging, difficult, unwelcoming, and unrewarding—how do we respond?

And we all experience this stuff at different times and in different degrees of intensity. In those tough times on the frontline of our homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces and community, we need a deep commitment to press on; a resolute determination; a real sense of God-given commission to approach each day representing Jesus, no matter how difficult, so that in good times and in difficult times, people around us see Christ through our lives. Last week I talked about our *Frontline Call*. Today, we turn that call into a rock-solid *Frontline Commission*; to stay there for the sake of Christ and the lives of people. I have two thoughts on that, first...

1. God wants us to not just survive our Frontline but to thrive. Last week I challenged us in this area of living life on our frontline; where God calls us for his purposes wherever we are and wherever we live our lives the majority of the time—that's your frontline. The thing is, when that life is going well and you know you're making a difference in the lives of people you're surrounded by, it feels great. But, what about when things get tough, when you don't feel in control, when relationships are strained, when work is drudgery, when you're being treated unfairly, when life and crud intersect and survival is you're most pressing concern—then what?

How can we survive on our Frontline and even thrive when times are tough? God has an answer to that and see it in the scriptures—specifically Jeremiah 29:4-12. If you have a Bible, turn there—it'll also be up on the screen. But before we read this, let me set up the scene. The year was 586 BC. Israel in the northern Kingdom and Judah in the southern Kingdom were split, and then they were devastated by a war with Babylon. Jerusalem was sacked and most of the Jews were led from their home land to Babylon. All of this was allowed by God because of Israel's rebellion and sin. In our scripture today, God's Prophet, Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem and his 40 years of being God's prophet was coming to an end.

But one of the last things he does is write a letter from Jerusalem to the elders, priests, prophets, and all the people who had been exiled to Babylon. His advice to them was unexpected and unwanted by most. Listen to what God says through Jeremiah in 29:4-7 (READ). Can you imagine how shocking this was? What was this command to '*work for the peace and prosperity of Babylon?*' Hadn't they been swept up in a wildfire at the hands of the Babylonians; exiled in a foreign land; yanked from their homes to live life among strangers. Oh, and to make matters worse, not only were the Israelites in exile, they had their own false prophets who were telling them lies; look at vv. 8-9 (READ).

The prophet Jeremiah confronts the false prophet, who had boldly proclaimed that God was going to free Israel from Babylon in two years—spoiler alert: God doesn't do this. Instead, God calls his people to persevere; to embrace their frontline commission and thrive there. But God also gave them hope, purpose and a plan for those 70 years of exile. Look at vv. 11-14 (READ). So, even though God's people were going through the worst of times, God commissioned them to flourish on their frontline. Not only that, look again at v. 7 (READ). God wanted to use his people to help the Babylonians to thrive and flourish. Does that sound crazy? I think it did for the Jews—they had been conquered by the Babylonians. But this scripture points to the heart of God. He didn't want his people to hunker and bunker down when times were tough.

He didn't want them to hide or fight or just blend in. He wanted his people of faith to transform circumstances and the people they lived among in Babylon; to use all of God's good gifts to bless others, to produce abundance and to help others flourish. God wanted his people to embrace their new frontline where he commissioned them. He wanted them to bring His presence, his love, his will and his ways, his grace and his truth into difficult relationships and trying circumstances; He wanted his people of faith to be his gift-givers so that people who didn't know him would see Him through their everyday lives. And listen, 26 hundred years has not changed the heart of God. That means in our own times of uncertainty and difficulty, even though we may want God to rescue us quickly—and sometimes he does—but sometimes he doesn't.

Don't give up on God or his Frontline call even if life is tough because he has a plan, a purpose for you. Last week, I introduced on video, Mark Greene, Executive Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. In this video clip, he talks about how bewildering living on the Frontline can be—take a look: **(VIDEO Clip—"Bewilderment" 2:15)**. So, here's the thing, if we take Jesus' Great Commission, to "*Go and make disciples*" seriously, our circumstances will not change our commitment to represent Jesus to people on our Frontline. The nature of Christ's commission to us is the long view—it's a way of life; its bloom where God plants us no matter the circumstances—not just survive, but to flourish. I encourage you to have live with an unwavering commitment of Christ's commission on your frontline? Secondly...

2. We're commissioned to serve others so they too will flourish. Does this surprise you? I mean, what is v. 7 about? Why does God want us to pray for the welfare of people on our Frontline? Because God is compassionate; he loves all people, even those who do not yet believe in him. And if you have experienced trouble in life, you know firsthand how tough it can be—the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:4 *God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*

God wants to bless people, because in blessing, they begin to see the reality of God. This is why in vv. 5-7 God says, *build homes, plant gardens, marry, have families, work for the peace of others so they flourish—and in their flourishing, you will be blessed as well.* This is God's commission for us as well—for his people of faith not to hunker down but to keep living for Him and be a blessing to others, to reveal the nature of the one true God through how we live and speak and serve. Those very ordinary things in vv. 5-7, those things we often take for granted—those are God's gifts that he wants us to share with others; to use the good gifts of our homes, and food and family and work to serve others on our frontline, regardless of our circumstances—listen, there will be times when you're exiled in difficulty up to your eyeballs; seasons of life that are rough-going.

But God's commission to your frontline isn't contingent on your circumstances—it's unconditional: v. 7 says "*...work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile.* In other words, regardless of where life takes us... keep living, keep loving, keep serving, keep giving—don't bunker down or bug out; don't control others or try to dominate them; don't give up or give in and just blend in, but serve people so that they experience peace; that they might prosper and then pray that God would do that in their lives. God desires this so deeply that it comes up again in v. 13, "*If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.*"

The long view of serving others on your frontline means that in good times and in bad, you wholeheartedly look to God for daily strength and direction, and continue to put yourself in a place where God will use you to influence people on your frontline. Before I close, let me introduce you to Ed. Ed was a volunteer worship leader in his church. One day after worship, He and his pastor were having a conversation and it turned to Ed's hopes and dreams. Ed explained to his pastor that he hated the job he was in; he wanted to quit and go to Bible School; to learn how to lead worship even better and then go on staff as a worship pastor. Ed said that he was in a job where he felt he was over-qualified and under-motivated; he had nothing in common with his co-workers. Bottom line—he wanted out. He'd been praying for two years

for God to get him out of that situation, and he asked the pastor to pray for him. But the pastor wondered if that was really the right thing to do. So he said to Ed...*"If you've been praying for two years, maybe the reason you're not out of your job is because God wants you to stay."* He reminded Ed about the scripture we're reading about in Jeremiah this morning, where the people of God were effectively saying the same thing as Ed—that they were in the wrong place with the wrong people at the wrong time, doing the wrong things. But Jeremiah reminded God's people that they were in a place where they could make the biggest difference—living out a godly life in the middle of an unbelieving culture. The pastor suggested to Ed that maybe that was his role and his calling.

Three months later, Ed said to his pastor, *"Remember our conversation about how much I hated my job? Well, I decided to start going to work a few minutes early to meet with some of my co-workers, to get involved in their conversations, listen to their jokes, hear what was going on and get to know them better. In turn, they got to know me. Bit by bit they realized I was a Christ-follower. I was amazed when a couple of them began to ask whether I would pray for them and they shared some real tough things that were going on in their lives."* Ed told his pastor, that his whole attitude about work changed. He began to see a bigger purpose of why God had planted him there. I wonder, can you relate to Ed?

God longs for us to do so much more than simply survive on our Frontlines—he wants us to thrive! So, what would help you do that? Let me suggest that you adopt this frontline commission: **First**, PRAY—Pray that people on your Frontline would see Jesus through your life; pray that God bless them, pray that they would thrive and prosper and find peace. Pray and ask God for opportunities to show God's love to people who are not followers of Jesus. **Second**, ACT—Ed went to work early to meet his colleagues. What could you do? Think of something practical and possible. Well, let's close here. Locate your Connection Card and find where it says, "My Next Step Today Is..." Let's write down an application this morning. I've given you a couple possibilities up on the screen. What decisions are you making to be a

blessing to your Frontline and its people? Are there any particular blessings of God for those people that you could pray for? As you're writing, I ask the ushers to come and receive the offering this morning—this offering is for those who regularly attend CrossWinds—as the offering bag passes, please place your offering and Connection Card in the bag—let's pray together...

The Frontline Community

(Colossians 3:12-17)

I want to talk about the church this morning in light of Christ's Great Commission of "*Go and make disciples*" and in light of his Great Commandment to "*Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.*" We're in this series called *Imagine...Life on the Frontline* and we've been talking about how followers of Jesus represent Him on our Frontline—which we have defined as *that place where we live out our lives the majority of our time*—We've been talking about the whole-life call Jesus gave us to take the whole of our lives—our everyday, walking around, working, socializing, neighborhood living, community involvement lives, to represent Jesus to others.

Today, I want to talk about the church as being a frontline community; all of us out there in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces and marketplace, being the church. But at the same time, as we gather together—on days like this—we unite our hearts in worship, we teach and learn and are equipped; we're encouraged and supported and loved. And we do that to prepare us to live on our frontlines, where we spend 95% our time. In comparison, we spend about 5% of our time with church related ministries or service or activities—Let's call this, "The church gathered." This is where we're prepared and equipped to fulfill to be a frontline community of whole-life discipling. I have a couple ideas about that this morning, first of all...

1. The purpose of the church is to help each other live fruitful lives on our frontline. Let's turn to the writings of the Apostle Paul and his letter to the church in Colossae. He gives great insights into the role the gathered church plays in helping each other be spiritually fruitful on the frontline. But, before I read from Colossians 3, let's do this: Listen to the words of Paul, think of how you relate to CrossWinds as a church. Here's what I mean. If we're a frontline community of believers; we spend 95% of our lives on our frontlines and 5% as the gathered church. But that 5% is critical because that's where

we're encouraged, taught, filled up, invigorated, and prepared to live life "out there".

So, think about that as we read Colossians 3:12-15 (READ). That's a healthy church. Paul was teaching Christ-followers how to relate to one another; how to have a healthy reliance upon one another in the church, and here's why it's important: Your everyday frontline life may not have all the life-giving stuff Paul was talking about—How many of us wake up in the morning and say, *"Man, I can't wait to get to work so I can experience some of that tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience I need."* Now, if you get that in your frontline, you're blessed! But what if you don't? What if your frontline doesn't make allowances for your faults or you don't experience forgiveness when you mess up.

What if your neighbor or boss or the kid in your class at school aren't clothed with love towards you. What if, instead of peace on your frontline, you get pettiness, unforgiveness, stress, deadlines, gossip, crude language, relational nastiness, small-mindedness and on and on. If that's your daily reality, you need a place to go where your spiritual, relational, and emotional tank is filled—and that place is the church. Whole-life disciples grow in whole-life disciple-making communities; it's where you get what you need in order to make a real impact where God has planted you. The church is where you learn to be attentive to God's voice when gathered so you can hear him with on the frontline.

The gathered church is where other Christ-followers pray for you; where you're reminded that your call and commission is to be "out there" on your frontline. The gathered church is where you experience God's love, grace, encouragement, and truth as a blessing to you; it's where people not only listen to the things you find difficult on your frontline, but help you discover new ways to move forward. We need each other and that's why we gather together. Let me illustrate this and tell you about Linda. I read about her from an article in the San Francisco Chronicle. She's a metro-transit operator

and she loves the people who ride her bus. She learns their names, and waits for them if they're late and then she makes up the time later on her route. When she gets to the end of her line, she always says, *"That's all. I love you. Take care."* There was a woman in her eighties named Ivy who had heavy grocery bags and was struggling; Linda got out of bus and went to Ivy and carried her grocery bags to the bus. And now Ivy lets other buses pass her stop so she can ride on Linda's bus. Linda saw a woman named Tanya in a bus shelter. She could tell Tanya was new to the area and was lost. It was almost Thanksgiving, so Linda said to Tanya, *"Hey, you're out here all by yourself. You don't know anybody. Why don't you come over for Thanksgiving and kick it back with me and the kids."* And now they're friends. Linda has built a community of blessing on that bus.

Her passengers offer Linda the use of their vacation homes, they bring her potted plants and flowers. When people found out she likes to wear scarves to accessorize her uniforms, they started giving them as presents to Linda. Think about what a thankless task driving a bus could be: cranky passengers, engine breakdowns, traffic jams, tediousness stop and go driving. So, how does Linda have the attitude she does? She says her mood is set at 2:30 in the morning when her daily routine begins with Bible and prayer for 30 minutes. She says, *"There's a lot to talk about with the Lord."* After Linda's story was printed in the newspaper, word got out—she was asked to give her story at a church in San Francisco.

After the worship service a man came up to Linda and was weeping—he told her that tomorrow, Monday, September 23, would be the one-year anniversary of his son's death. Linda's eyes got like saucers, and she said to him, *'I lost my son. My son died, and tomorrow, Monday, September 23, is the anniversary of the death of my son too...'* She told that man that God brought him to church to be healed of his pain. And in that spiritually "electric" moment, Linda prayed for the man while a dozen or more people witnessed that divine meeting. The man put his head on her shoulder and sobbed, and she prayed healing into his life by the power of the Holy Spirit. After she was done praying, She looked at him and said, *"Now do you understand this is*

just the beginning of a journey for you? What you really need is the church." He said, 'Yeah.' Then she said, 'Do you have a church?' He said, 'Well, I suppose that's important.' She said, 'No, do you have a church? Are you part of a church home?' He said, 'You know, that's a really key thing.' She said, 'No, I'm asking you, do you go to church?' He said, 'Well, not really.' Linda then turned to the pastor and said, 'The Pastor here will get you into a church. Smart woman—here's what Linda knew: You don't want to be out there in life without the support and encouragement of a good church community. She knew first hand that she couldn't be fruitful representing Jesus without her own church supporting her spiritually and relationally.

But she could go and bless others on her frontline because she was being blessed herself from the support of her church. She said this: *"I belong to a little church community where I have people I know and love and care about and serve—those people help me grow, and then I go out and bless others."* So, yes, the purpose of the gathered church is to help you live a fruitful life on your frontline. Secondly...

2. The church frees Christ-followers to be effective on their frontline. So, how can we best support one another to live in all the different frontlines we're involved in? How do we find the peace that comes from Christ so that we can be effective in representing Jesus on our frontline? Let's go back to Colossians 3 and look at vv. 16-17 (READ). Paul says that the message and truth of Jesus should fill our lives. Think about that—is the message and truth of Jesus as taught in the scriptures filling your thoughts, fueling your wisdom, feeding your discernment, and stirring your compassion?

And then, are you taking all of that into your frontline so that you're living out v. 17—*whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of Jesus*. Here's the reality, sometimes we struggle to live a consistent Christian life; we can be spiritually fragile and feel like we're not capable of impacting lives on our frontline. The answer is for the church to train up and equip and encourage one another so we're free to love people, demonstrate compassion and kindness, discern truth on our frontlines. Do we agree to commit to help one another to grow so we can make a difference in where God has us?

Let me introduce once again on video, Mark Green, Executive Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. He talks about what this looks like in a local church. Take a look at this **(Show “Agnes and Alan” — 3:16)**. We need the church to be effective on our frontlines. That’s because in today’s world, it’s becoming more and more challenging to live our faith. The pressure on your time and the choices you need to make on what to squeeze in and leave out are more complicated than ever before. And then throw in the fact that the things of God are under siege today, threatened by the values of a growing anti-God world.

But instead of running from the church into that world unprepared, I challenge you today to make choices that include this frontline community here at CrossWinds. But do you know what’s trending these days? Fewer Christ-followers are making a choice not to be involved in the church. But listen to Hebrews 10:25 (READ). I can’t stress it enough that in today’s culture, you need the church to help you make your mind as tough as nails, spiritually capable of cutting through lifeless secularism and materialism. The gathered church will help you with that and the result is what Paul described in v. 15 (READ). So, CrossWinds is here to help you find peace; to receive the message about Christ so that it fills your life; to teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom Jesus gives; to worship together, to sing spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.

Let’s close here. Locate your Connection Card. Find where it says, “My Next Step Today Is... Let’s write down an application. I’ve given you a couple possibilities up on the screen. Are you allowing CrossWinds to prepare you to live on your frontline? Are you taking advantage of ministries here that will strengthen you and encourage you? As you’re writing, I ask the ushers to come and receive the offering this morning—this offering is for those who regularly attend CrossWinds—as the offering bag passes, please place your offering and Connection Card in the bag—let’s pray...

The Frontline Concern

(Acts 3:1-10)

Questions:

- In a world of so many competing demands, what might prevent you seeing the needs that are around you?
- What are the biggest causes of distraction you face? What can you do about them?

Bible Reflection – Acts 3

The story of the lame man is the first account of a miraculous healing in the Book of Acts.

- Why does Luke choose to record this encounter in so much detail? Why do you think it had such repercussions?
- Peter and John distinguish between the crippled beggar's 'felt' need (money) and his real need (healing). How do you distinguish between the two?
- Commenting on this miracle, preacher and theologian John Stott put it this way, 'the power was Jesus', but the hand was Peter's.' Peter shows a readiness to respond in a new way to what must have been a very ordinary moment: a beggar asking for money. The difference comes from his confidence in Jesus' power and purpose.
- What do you think gave Peter this confidence? (You may want to think about other episodes from Peter's life.) What would give you a similar confidence?
- What would help you to be able to take more notice of what God is doing on the Frontline?
- What questions could you ask each other regularly that would help you become more confident about this?

Narrative:

So you know you have a frontline. You know God wants to use you there. You know God can really make a difference where you are. But what do you

do? Maybe the problem is, sometimes there is just too much to do, too many opportunities, where do you even begin?

Or maybe it's difficult because it's really hard to spot what God might actually want you to do. Or maybe it's because life is really busy. And actually, surviving is good enough.

Maybe what God actually wants you to do is to be aware of his Spirit, be aware of the nudges, be aware of the everyday and actually to discern what He might be saying to you in the very ordinary stuff of the frontline of life, just the ordinary everyday encounters. We're called to make a difference there.

It's an ordinary day for Peter and John. They were going up to the temple around the time of prayer to pray. It's what they did, it was just an ordinary day. And for another man, it was an ordinary day. A man who was crippled from birth who everyday was laid by the temple gate to beg. An ordinary day. The account is in Acts 3, it's a story you probably know really well. But listen to how Luke tells the story: 'A man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them'. Just an ordinary day. 'Can you spare some change, can you help me?', and Peter stops and looks and John looks. Peter says to the man 'look at us!' and the man gives them his attention.

It's that look that kicks off everything else because they explain to him that there is healing available to him and life can be different. From that moment, when the man is healed, all manner of things begin. The man is ecstatic: leaping, dancing and singing, he's joyous. He can't believe his luck. And Peter has to explain to the crowd what has happened so he

explains actually it's not Peter and John who have done this but it's because of Jesus that the man is healed. Peter and John are carted off to the Sanhedrin, they have to give an account of what's gone on, and they put them in prison overnight and they're left there.

The next morning they come out and they have to explain again why this has happened. The leaders tell Peter and John 'you're not to mention this man Jesus because He causes too much trouble'. They say, 'Well, we can't promise that'.

Let me introduce you to John. John was an environmental health officer in his city, just an ordinary day doing another ordinary call to an ordinary baker in the city. The bakery had been reported to have had some problems and John found that it had significant issues that needed to be sorted out. It was Thursday and he said 'You need to have this place sorted by Monday otherwise I'm going to have to get you close down, there's nothing else for it.'

So as he left, obviously the guy was upset and so was John. John went home that day and the guy that he'd met at the bakery stayed in his memory. He was used to this, he did it every day of his life, but this case bothered him. So the next morning, John went back to see the baker to find out why he was so upset. The guy said 'I don't think I can do this, I'm going to have to close down. I've got a family wedding this weekend and if I don't go and the family doesn't go, there's an honor thing. I can't not go and I don't know how I can do both'. And John said 'I'll tell you what we'll do, give me your keys and I'll be back on Monday to inspect again'. John went home and rang his house group and he said 'How do you feel about getting involved in deep cleaning a bakery this weekend?' His house group turned up first thing that Saturday morning and they deep cleaned that bakery from top to bottom. It took them all weekend, but they did it.

Monday morning John is there again, waiting for the guy with the keys. And he said to the owner 'I'm here to inspect your premises, but I think you're

going to pass'. He gave him the keys, then he gave him the certificate. The man asked 'why did you do that?' John explained 'well, this might sound a bit odd but I've received mercy and I just wanted to offer some to you'. Well the man understandably wanted to know more about this mercy and so John had a chance to talk about Jesus and he began going to church with him to explore what this faith actually means. With a story like that you would, wouldn't you?

Just an ordinary day for John. But an ordinary day where he took notice of what was happening around him, took notice of the reactions and found in the midst of an ordinary day, a chance for God to reveal something of his grace. Two men, one in the first century, an apostle, got the attention of someone asking for help and in so doing, something remarkable began. Another man in the 21st century, an environmental health officer who just took the time to notice something different and because of that a brand new story began for him and the man he helped. The challenge that each of us have to take is to be aware of what is happening around us, realizing what God is calling us to do, taking notice of the people around us and then getting to grips with what we're supposed to do.

Other thoughts and nuggets you could use:

SESSION 4: THE FRONTLINE CONCERN

How do you know what to do on your Frontline? To explore how we can become attentive to God's voice in the places where we are day by day.

Acts 3:1-10

Guiding Thought

Throughout these sessions, we have stressed the fact that God wants to use us to make a difference where we are. The intention is to help group members know that wherever they are, God can use them to make a difference for him. But all this leads to an obvious question: What does God want me to do?

It's a good question, but it can also paralyze us. We can be so uncertain that we end up doing nothing. And sometimes listening to other people's stories doesn't help either. 'Success' stories can be intimidating, leading to the response: 'It's OK for you. But try walking a mile in my shoes and you wouldn't feel so confident.' And so we go back to paralysis. But maybe working out what God wants us to do is easier than that. Maybe it's trusting that he will lead us where he wants us to go and will make clear what he wants us to do. In fact, maybe he will make things so obvious that we can't miss them. That would be great. Maybe we just need to hear the cries of the world around us to know how best to offer the good news to people. Maybe we need to develop our alertness to the promptings of God, who we believe is at work in his world, bringing new creation out of the spaces where previously there were only signs of despair. There were a lot of maybe's in that paragraph. And here are a couple more:

- Maybe we just need to respond to what is in front of us, assuming that God can use us there.
- And maybe that is what it means to live a life of faith, becoming aware of the Holy Spirit's leading.

THE FRONTLINE TAKEAWAY

Session 4: The Frontline Concern

PRAY

I leave this place of fellowship, to begin my worship. I leave the presence of God, to begin to find him. I enter my week, to discover you before me. I enter my Frontline, to discover you ahead of me. I return to this place next time, rejoicing in having found you.

ACT

Take notice of all the interruptions that happen to you in your normal life this week. Accept them as potential appointments that God is setting up for you. At the end of each day, think about what happened and what you were able to give to the people concerned. Notice what surprised you.

The Frontline Cry (Matthew 6:9-13)

Over the years I've been asked to open or close an event with prayer. The request is usually something like, "*Would you just do a little prayer' before we get started?*" Sometimes those requests for a 'little prayer,' seems like an afterthought, something that's just not that important, something that doesn't count for much, something just to make people feel a little better; you know, a little prayer just to get us by. And there's a part of me that does an inside my head rant: "*Little prayer?!—this is the God of the universe we're talking about. The God who created and order the stars and planets by his word; the God who created humanity; the God who passionately loves us and provided a way for us to live with him for all eternity—a little prayer?—no way!*" But normally, I smile and say a little prayer.

But I wonder, is there such a thing as just a little prayer? I don't think so. As we continue the series, *Imagine...Life on the Frontline*. We've defined *Frontline* as those places you live your life the majority of the time. Today, I want to talk about the deep need for prayer for people in your family, neighborhood, workplace and community. Listen to people these days—there's a cry for help and that's where you and I go to God and cry out to him in behalf of people on our frontline. So, today, we're going to talk about the Frontline Cry and see how Jesus taught us to pray, first...

1. Jesus reveals his heart for prayer. Because prayer is important to Jesus, he gives us an outline of things to pray about, things to ask God the Father for. I think it was great that Jesus didn't assume we know how to pray. In fact he addresses that in Matthew 6:7-8 (READ). So, first, Jesus said, "Don't pray this way." And then in vv. 9-13, he says, "Instead, pray this way..." We know it as the 'Lord's Prayer'—look at vv. 9-13 (READ). These are huge concepts... "*May your name be kept holy; your Kingdom will be done; meet our daily needs; keep us from temptation; rescue us from the evil one.* We need to understand that Jesus is introducing not so much a model for prayer and he

is giving us a list of prayer needs that people have and also what Jesus is passionate about.

The Lord's Prayer falls into two parts: In vv. 9-10 Jesus focuses on God's glory and activity in the world; vv. 11-13 relate to daily needs, relationships, temptations, dangers and threats. Let's think of this as prayer concepts for your frontline. For instance, Jesus said you should pray, *may your name be kept holy*. Do you pray for a person to revere the Lord as being holy? Jesus said you should pray, *May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth*. Do you pray for a person to yield to God's Kingdom will? Jesus said you should pray, *give us this day our daily bread*. Do you pray that God would bless a person or families to flourish in the daily needs? Jesus said you should pray, *forgive us our sins*. Do you pray for a person to find the solution for guilt from their past sins & moral failures?

Jesus said you should pray, *forgive those who sin against us*. Do you pray for a person to have healthy relationships? Jesus taught that we should pray, *rescue us from the evil one*. Do you pray for a person to have the desire to run from temptation and sin? Now, behind the words Jesus gave us in this prayer, is his longing, his passion for a drastically different life than what the world offers. Jesus spoke of the truth, justice, and righteousness of heaven to be seen here on earth—he was calling for the Kingdom of God to come down to the kingdom of man. Imagine what that would look like on your Frontline; in your home, neighborhood, workplace and community, if the realities of heaven were to become real.

Jesus wants the truth of His Kingdom to change your family; to change the neighborhood you live on; to change your workplace, to change your community—to change your frontline. This prayer says, *Jesus, may your will be done on my frontline; Jesus, infuse the Kingdom of God in the people and circumstances on my frontline.* And if this sounds like a long way away from our ordinary lives—it is, because the Kingdom of God is not ordinary! And we need to start believing in the extraordinary! Over the last 50 years our culture has convinced the church to keep the Kingdom locked away within

the walls of the church and we've bought into it. We've kept Jesus away from the real issues of the real world we live in.

God's will and God's Kingdom have been reduced to what happens within the walls of churches. But that's changing. More and more followers of Jesus and more and more churches are seeing that God places his people smack dab in the middle of where life is messy; where people think that they're in charge of their own destinies. And God would have us pray that his Kingdom will be done in those places. Listen, this is spiritually dangerous stuff. What would happen if God answered your Frontline cry for people and circumstances? Maybe it would look like the prayers of Christian college students from the University of Texas as they cried out in behalf of their friend Putti Sok. Putti described herself as a "Cambodian Buddhist girl," even though she grew up in Dallas. She said, *"I figured I was Buddhist because my parents told me I was Buddhist. I thought Christianity was just a religion for Americans."*

One of her goals at school was to build deeper relationships. She succeeded in that, but some of her new friends were Christians who were active in a campus student ministry. After a while, she told her Christian friends, *"Leave me alone and quit praying for me."* During her sophomore year, Putti describes that she "hit a wall" and began to see that everything she was doing was becoming meaningless. She began to think, *"If God is real, he should be able to hear my prayers."* Each night she had begun to ask God to help her understand what she had been hearing from her Christian friends because it seemed like foolishness to her.

One day Putti entered a campus prayer room in the student Union building. Inside she found a bowl filled with pieces of paper that had the names of students to pray for. One after another she looked at the slips of paper and found her own name was written on many of the prayer requests. She remembered how strongly she had urged her friends not to pray for her and yet they had faithfully continued to love her and show kindness and pray for her anyway. She burst into tears in the prayer room. God was softening her heart. The next night she felt that God was asking her for a specific response,

so she finally asked Jesus to be her Savior—the result of Christian students living out a Frontline cry for others.

If we pray for people on our frontline the way Jesus taught us to pray, we're calling for heaven to break into their lives. *You're kingdom come, your will be done...* Are you praying; crying out for people on your frontline—praying that a person experiences the hallowed, holy glory of God and his will for their lives? Secondly...

2. We need to show and tell others about our relationship with God. We need to practice our relationship with God in ways that people realize that what we have with God is real; a relationship with Jesus that's singular, exceptional, and unique—a connection with God that's a whole way of life. We see this in the Lord's Prayer back in v. 9 (READ). Jesus makes our relational with God as being personal. He wanted the world to see God as "Father." That's an intimate way of addressing the God of universe. The Apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 8:15, *"...you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful...Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."*

God wants us to revere him; to have an awe of him, but not an unhealthy fear of him. God isn't unapproachable—Jesus takes away that fear of God. Hebrews 10:19-20 says, *"we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.* Faith in Jesus as Savior, places your sin-stained soul under the cleansing blood of Jesus; you're washed clean. The question is, how can we show and tell people about that experience? What might that look like?

Let me introduce you to Ruth. For years Ruth had been a stay-at-home mom and as her children grew older and independent, she went into the workplace. Ruth took a job working in a college that had some of the most disillusioned young people in her community. The college worked with these young adults to train them and help them find employment. It was a whole new world for Ruth; a world she wasn't that confident about. Some of those

young people were damaged and difficult to deal with. Feeling over her head, Ruth approached her church and said, "Will you pray for me? She asked her church to pray that she would carry the light of Jesus to the students she was trying to help. Many in the church prayed. After a few months some of the students she'd worked with began to say *'Ruth, there's something different about you. You really care, you treat us as real people; what is it about you?'* Ruth had a long conversation with one of those students and told her, *"The reason I'm different is because I'm a Christian."* Ruth told her about her faith, about Jesus and talked to her about her church. The girl said, *'Could I come to church with you, and could you help me understand more?'* Ruth introduced the girl to church. Bit by bit the girl started to get it; to understand what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

And it began because Ruth and others in her church had prayed, *"May Your Kingdom come and may Your will be done on my frontline, through me, where I am."* And the power of that prayer meant another person heard Christ's message of hope and was transformed; another life became far different than she ever could have imagined. So this morning, I wanted to give you an opportunity to think about your own Frontline. As you pray, God will give you opportunities to show and tell people about him. I think you're more than competent to be a Ruth; more than able to pray that God would use you on your frontline. Can you imagine the thrill of God using you to help transform another person's life?

If we're going to take our Frontline seriously, it will shape our prayers. Which Frontline place would you hope to see changed by God? Who do you know who might be able to hear and see the truth of God's actions? Who do you want to stand in awe of God and his work? Who are the people who have gone astray or who are trapped in their cycle of sin? The cry of your heart for these people will be heard by the God who longs for his Kingdom to come to all people. Let's close here. Take out your Connection Card and let's write down an application. I've given you a couple possibilities up on the screen. As you're writing, I'll ask the ushers to come and receive the offering this morning—this offering is for those who regularly attend CrossWinds. As the

offering bag passes, please place your offering and Connection Card in the bag—let's pray...

The Frontline Commitment

(Acts 4:23-31)

What would it look like if as followers of Jesus, we chose to stay in a sort of spiritual kindergarten; if we chose to stay in the safety of our church family and not take our faith with us into our homes, neighborhood, workplace, and community—into the frontlines of our lives? A more mature way of living out a faith in Jesus Christ is to share his love and truth with others and not keep him just for ourselves. If you've been a follower of Jesus for a while, listen to the words of the Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, *Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger.*

As we wrap up the series *Imagine...Life on the Frontline*, I want to talk about what a church looks like that's invested in helping you going beyond milk; beyond a spiritual kindergarten and represent Jesus to people in those places where you spend the majority of your time. We all know we have an active life outside the doors of this church; we know that we're all involved with our families and with people in our neighborhoods and a job and hobbies and life in our community—but we don't stop being the church when we're in those places. So, how can we help one another thrive in those different areas? I have two thoughts about that, first...

1. The church prepares you to represent Jesus on your Frontline. If we have conversations here at CrossWinds that ask, *"Where is God working and moving around you and how can we best prepare you,"* that would be an interesting conversation; a conversation that reminds you that what you do outside the walls of this church is important; a conversation that will impact how we do church on the inside. We have a growing awareness here at CrossWinds that it's not just about all the things we do when we're gathered here as a church family, but it's also about what you're doing where you

spend most of your time on your frontline and how this church can help prepare and equip you for that.

We're here to help sustain each other and nurture one another for life on the outside of these four walls where you're most able to touch the lives of people for Jesus Christ—and our life here is to equip you. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-12, *"...the gifts Christ gave to the church...is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. And in v. 16, Paul writes, He (Jesus) makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.* So, the church is here to help one another to be spiritually and relationally healthy enough to influence people on our Frontline for God.

And, what we're learning is that this is a two way street. It's not just that the church equips you for your experience on the Frontline; but your experiences, both challenging and rewarding, will effect the way we do church on the inside. I want to show you how that works from an actual event that took place in the early church. Let me set the scene. Not long after Jesus died, resurrected and left the earth to go back to heaven, Acts chapter 3 tells us that Peter and John were in Jerusalem and the Spirit of God was moving. As they were walking a man crippled from birth was being carried into the city. Each day he was taken to the Jewish Temple so he could beg money from those going to the Temple. Peter saw the man and said him, *"Look at us!"* The lame man thought he was going to get some money, but something far different happened.

Peter said, *"I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"* Peter took the lame man by the hand and helped him up. Well, you can imagine what happened next. The healed man tested his legs; he walked a bit—and then he started dancing and hoopin' and hollerin' and leaping, and praising God. He ran into the Temple and started telling everyone that Peter healed him in the name of Jesus. Pretty soon a crowd gathers around Peter and John. And Peter, not wanting an opportunity to talk about Jesus to slip by, started

talking to the crowd about Jesus. At the end, many people placed their faith in Jesus, and then, it all hit the fan.

The Jewish religious leaders had already put Jesus to death, they weren't in a mood to hear about his resurrection or healing in his name or miracles or talk about Jesus being the long awaited Savior. So, they had Peter and John arrested, and the two spent the night in jail. The next day, they were hauled in front of the religious leaders who told Peter and John, in no uncertain terms, to stop spreading their propaganda and not to speak or to teach anyone in Jesus' name again. But Peter and John replied, "*Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.*" So, the Jewish council did a little more threatening, and eventually let them go. Let's pick it up when Peter and John go back to the gathered church.

Look at Acts 4:23-31 (READ). Now, we're not going to pick this apart but let it stand as a wonderful and true event of what happened on Peter and John's Frontline and how it shaped what happened on the inside as the church gathered. Let me explain. When the church gathered, it was what was happening on the outside that influenced what the gathered church did on the inside. *First* there was opportunity for Peter and John to tell their story—As an equipping church, CrossWinds needs to hear about what's going on in the different frontlines of people in this church—we want to hear your stories so we have insights into what we teach and how we equip you.

Secondly, that first church responded with prayer specific to what was needed so the church would continue to make a difference on the outside, on the Frontline. So, here at CrossWinds, we need to pray for one another specific to the needs you have on your frontline so you can be fruitful. *Third*, encouragement was given—the church was gathered, they listened to one another, they prayed for one another, there was genuine care and concern for how each of them were doing on the outside. We need to continue to be there for one another at CrossWinds with authentic love, care and compassion—and by the way, I think you guys are great at this! It's one of

the strengths of this church—we care about one another; we show up for each other; we pray for each other.

Fourth, God showed up and that first church was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a church that's committed to love people, who pray for one another and represent Jesus to people on the frontline, God will show up in a big way. And the result of that kind of church? Look again at v. 31, *Then they preached the word of God with boldness*—the church in Jerusalem continued to represent Jesus on their Frontlines with boldness. CrossWinds exists to prepare you in your commitment to represent Jesus on your Frontline. But, I want to look further into this idea that our outside experiences shape what we do here on the inside, so secondly...

2. Our Frontline experiences shape our gathered experiences. There's something about the prayer that first church prayed in response to Peter and John's Frontline story. They didn't pray *"Oh God protect us from those awful, nasty, sinful people who want to harm us."* They didn't pray, *"God guard us from this ever happening again."* And they certainly didn't pray, *"God, we implore your power with a well-placed lighten bolt; destroy them! Get them God!* No, they prayed, *"Lord, hear their threats, and give us great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* They prayed, *"God, change us!"* How cool is that! The church responded to a difficult Frontline by expressing their essential need for God to help them live and speak for Jesus.

And as they tell their story about what's going on the 'outside', their prayer together on the 'inside' is shaped. And their expectation of God is shaped. And their experience with God is shaped. For instance, where have you been this past week? Some of you have been teachers, and you've had to deal with the challenges of a classroom, challenges with other staff members. Some of you in the workplace deal with awkward customers; some of you have tiresome, boring jobs; some of you have been challenged with how you do

your job well. Some of you are in business and deal with justice and fairness with employees.

Some of you have been dealing with older people; caring for them, thinking through how to do that well. Some of you are students and are trying to juggle school work, friendships, extra-curricular activities and home life. Some of you had trouble in your home or a run-in with a neighbor. How are your outside experiences changing your experience with one another here in the gathered church? Are you sharing your experiences with others here? Are you asking for prayer? Listen, everybody has a frontline and the church needs to be shaped by it; to recognize that what you experience on the outside will help define our life together here to be richer—Just to remind you, on your Connection Card, we have a place where you can share workplace concerns—tell us how we can pray for you on your frontline.

And as we pray for one another and encourage each other, the gathered church plays a vital role in shaping your Frontline experience, just as it did in the first church. So, our priority at CrossWinds is to pray for and encourage one another and equip you to succeed in your home, neighborhood, workplace and community. Let's close here. Locate your Connection Card and find where it says, "My Next Step Today Is..." Let's write down an application. I have a couple suggestions up on the screen; if you have your own write that down. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to come and receive the offering. The offering is for regular attendees at CrossWinds—if you're a guest here this morning, we're glad you're here. Please place your Connection Card and offering in the offering bag as it passes.

