



Many Christians today experience a frustrating and confusing disconnect between the story of Scripture and the story of their lives. In this series called *“ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life,”* CrossWinds is unifying this Life Lesson series in Worship with our Fall Small

Group study. In both settings we will state the conviction that the story of Jesus and of Scripture is relevant to all of life: our jobs, our responsibilities, our relationships, and our world. This worship series will help you to see the Good news of Jesus and the Bible with fresh eyes, experiencing the renewing power of Jesus Christ in every aspect of your life.

The Reframing Story (Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 24:15)

Cultural Stories (Romans 12:1-2)

Creation & Fall (Genesis 1:1-5, 1:26-31)

Israel’s Calling (Genesis 12:1-7)

Jesus the King (John 1:1-17)

New Heavens & New Earth (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21:1-4)

The Church & The Spirit (Acts 2:1-4)

Strangers & Exiles (2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Luke 14:34-35)

Ambassadors (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

Joyful Living (Luke 24:30-34)

The Reframing Story

(Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 24:15)

Many people today, including Christ-followers, experience a frustrating and confusing disconnect between the story we find in Scripture and the story of our lives. So, for the next 10 weeks here in worship and in our small group ministry, we're going to dive into a series called "*ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life*," where we'll look at understanding the story of Jesus and the truth of Scripture as being relevant to all of life: our homes, our jobs, our responsibilities, our relationships, and our world. My hope is that this series and our Small Group study will help us see the Good news of Jesus and the Bible with fresh eyes so we can experience the renewing power of Jesus in every aspect of our lives. Today, I want to explain *The Reframing Story*.

By that I mean, if Jesus is the redeemer of all things, how does faith in him reframe every aspect of our lives? How does Christianity connect to the whole of who we are? Is Jesus relevant in an increasingly complex world? These are the types of questions many of us wrestle with today. So, Reframe is about helping us live out our faith in Jesus in everyday life, encouraging us to pursue Jesus in a new and refreshing way and allowing his story to shape our own. So, today, as we begin, I want to hone in on how a fragmented and complex culture can tempt followers of Jesus to either withdraw from, or assimilate into, the culture around us. And what we'll see is that the story of Jesus shows us how to resist these temptations and live an integrated and faithful life to God. So, first...

1. Life is getting more complex and fragmented. We know this right? We feel it. And the more complex life gets, the more we need Jesus to bring order to our lives. It's all very interesting how intricate and involved and convoluted life can get. Let me give you an example that's kind of a small-scale version of a larger issue. Last winter when it was cold season my wife and I would occasionally need to do a sinus rinse—is that too much information for you? You would think that rinsing sinuses would be a fairly straightforward operation. Oh no! Have you seen the instructions on sinus rinses? Diagrams and instructions fill a 32-page manual with introductions and testimonials.

Oh, you can read all about it—physicians and customers rave about rinsing their sinuses; you can read about the warnings of mishandling the device—really? What am I going to do, drink it? Pour it into my ear? There was a full page of instructions for cleaning and disinfecting the unit, and four pages of answers to frequently asked questions about sinus rinses. We got this neti-pot thing—I didn't know if I should put it up my nose or make a pot of tea with it! The manual contained thousands of words, all in tiny print. Was it a manual on launching an intercontinental ballistic missile or a nasal rinse. Things are complicated. In the same way, there are a great number of competing stories in our world about what life is really about; how to make sense of life, how to be happy; what's it all about. And where does God fit into all that?

The Bible tells us that faith in Jesus impacts every aspect of our lives. However, sometimes it's difficult to see Jesus in the different places we find ourselves. Think about the past week. Recall some of the different places, activities, and situations you were involved in. Where did you see Jesus? Where did you feel his presence? Where did you not feel connected to him? If he feels uninvolved, it could be that the multifaceted dimensions of your life and the demands placed upon you are stealing your connection with Jesus.

And if that happens, Jesus is relegated to just another thing in we have to juggle. You need to reframe. Let me read for you some of the most powerful words spoken of Jesus ever written—it comes from the writings of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:15-20 (READ).

The reality of Jesus—from creator, to his human life, death and resurrection—is ground zero for understanding the history of humanity. Jesus is the center attraction of all God has revealed to the world. And it's only in him and through him that we can untangle and put into perspective the complexities of our lives. It's Jesus who helps us make sense of our ordinary, day to day lives and how it connects with God—your marriage, your parenting, your

family, your job, how you interact with your community, your finances, your leisure time—they're all relevant to Jesus.

The whole of your life is important to the reach of Jesus into the world; it all matters to Jesus. But where it all begins is your desire to allow him to rule and reign and order and lead and control all of those areas in your life—in fact here at CrossWinds, we're calling that "wholelife discipleship." Think of it this way: If Jesus created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth; if Jesus made the things we can see and the things we can't see; if Jesus is controlling thrones, and kingdoms, and rulers, and authorities in the seen and unseen world; if everything was created through him and for him and he existed before anything else, holding all creation together; if Jesus is the head of the church, the question is: Are you submitting to him to be all that in your life?

The problem, as I indicated earlier, is that life is getting more complex and fragmented—we are constantly bombarded with competing cultural messages; it's increasingly more difficult to integrate the stuff of life with faith in God. But not impossible. Christianity must become relevant to the whole of your life. Many Christ-followers, are functionally embracing a dualistic life. They're ignoring God's desire to be the center of their life; just enduring life; doing their own thing. Jesus isn't relevant to their marriage and family and jobs and leisure and life. There believe that some things matter to God and most things don't. Some things are sacred but most things are secular and the two never meet.

They think God is only interested in Sunday but not their Monday. But here's the truth...Jesus wants to speak into and reign over every inch of your life: your marriage, your family, you job, your politics, sex, leisure, economics, finances. He wants to be a part of all those things; to help you make sense of all of that. Look, either Jesus is true or he's just a comforting story to help us get by. So, how are you treating him? Is Jesus and the truth of God's Word speaking to the complexities of your life? Look again at Colossians 1:19-20 (READ). The fact is, Jesus offers you real peace with everything in heaven and on earth. No one else can do that. No thing can do that! So, if you desire

peace in the middle of your complexity, Jesus is the answer—but how does he do that, let's explore that. So, secondly...

2. Knowing and being shaped by the biblical story helps you live an integrated and authentic life. I want to give you an example of that from the life of Jesus after he was crucified on the cross and resurrected from the dead. The gospel writer Luke gives us the great privilege of listening in on a conversation between the resurrected Jesus and two of his followers on the road to Emmaus. Turn to Luke 24:13-35 (READ). Now, understand that these two disciples were living in a culture with many competing stories. There were competing stories of the Pharisees and Sadducees and how they defined God. They were steeped in a culture of Greek philosophy and living under Roman power that ruled the land. That reality dominated their world and their lives. They were confused about what was true and what was false.

Instead of the reality of Jesus directing their lives, they were confused by Jewish religion, the Greek understanding of life and the reality of Roman rule and the very real death of Jesus. So, they're downcast, afraid and disillusioned with life. Entering into that context is a "very much alive" Jesus who starts walking with them. He was face to face with those two disciples and yet they didn't recognize him—so powerful was the competing and complexing reality of their culture. We're no different, we also struggle to see Jesus in the reality of our day to day lives. And imagine, if Christ-followers struggle with this, how much more do people who have not embraced Jesus or a Christian worldview.

There are plenty of stories out there: Science and technology have a story; economics, international relations, politics and health care have their stories; the workplace, business and industry tell their story; human philosophies, education, social differences, sexual identity, family and marriage, have a story; race relations, poverty and disease; all have stories. And all these stories have the ability to shape our thinking, our emotions and desires—and they can all stop us from seeing the reality of Jesus. I think this is where those two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus were at. So, what does Jesus do—

v. 27 (READ). Jesus takes them back to the scriptures to explain how God was interacting with people.

Jesus unfolded the scriptures that foretold of a Messiah—a Savior that God would send into the world to make sense of life on planet earth; how to live; what was true what was not; to prepare humanity to live with God in a new heaven and a new earth. What Jesus did was restate his story; the story we find in the Bible. And now today, in a modern culture with so many competing stories and voices, we need Jesus to do the same with us; we need to keep going back to the story of Jesus from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. Because it's the story of Jesus that keeps us oriented and helps us make sense of the world we live in. It's in the revelation of Jesus Christ that God answers the questions of...

"Who am I, why am I here, what do I do? Where do I go, what's important in life, what's reality and what's an illusion; what's true and what's false," and on and on. Jesus stakes his claim upon all of that. What I see with the disciples on the road to Emmaus was that they had lost sight of the true story. I'm not judging them—but that's what happened. They were confused; blinded to seeing Jesus—in fact, they didn't ever expect to see Jesus again. They forgot the part where Jesus said he would rise again on the third day. And so they desperately needed Jesus to once again open their minds to the true story of what he accomplished in his death and resurrection. Oh, how we need Jesus to do that with us—again and again. We too are foolish when we go continually go back to the stories in our culture for answers. We need Jesus every day to tell us what's true. And that's he wants to do!

Jesus embodies the story of the ultimate and grand reality of life as only God sees it. You and I need that voice every day. And the primary voice that speaks that story is found in the pages of scripture. The Bible starts with who God is; what it means to be human and how humanity has ultimate value to God; it answers the question of what happens after this life is over, giving us a vision of where history is going and what it will look like in the end—and in-

between, the bible tells us why we're here, how to live a life pleasing to God and how not to live life. God has told us so much! His story is awesome! So, if we're going to really understand how to live with the complexities of this life and with all the competing stories and voices, we need to know and apply the truth of God's story. So, what do we take from the story of the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus this lesson: When Jesus opened up the scriptures to them, their minds were opened and they were able to sort out the competing stories shaping their thoughts and actions. Are you doing that? Where is your Emmaus Road this morning? What types of complexity and fragmentation characterize your life?

In what ways are they complicating your life? What are some areas of life you are struggling with today that need to be connected with a Biblical faith? Let's close here. Locate your Connection Card and find where it says, "*My Next Step Today Is...*" Let's write down a response. You'll find a couple suggestions on the screen. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to come and receive the offering. Place your offering, and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes. Let's pray...

Cultural Stories

(Romans 12:1-2)

Last week we started the series, *“ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life,”* and we started looking at the different stories our culture tells that are different from the story of Jesus. And if we’re going to connect our faith in Jesus with life in our culture, we need to live and tell the story of Jesus—you just saw the difference that can make in the lives of people as we do that. Here in week 2 we’re going to focus on key questions to ask ourselves, such as: Who am I? How does my faith in Jesus affect that question? How does the culture shape my response to the question of who am I?

And yet, let’s be honest—we all struggle with the tension of a contemporary culture that speaks alternate answers to the question of who am I? So, here’s what I want to do today—I want to look at cultural stories and voices that will shape us in its likeness and why this so often leads to a crisis of identity for followers of Jesus and people in general. I have 3 characteristics of our culture that contribute to a contemporary identity crisis, first...

1. The cultural call today is consumption and the purchase of our identity. There’s a story, a strong voice in our culture that’s been around for many years—the story is this: Success and happiness is found by doing well in school, getting a good education, locking down a great job, making good money and a decent living, buying a home and playing hard. That’s not bad, but if that story is based mostly on consumption and if that isn’t filtered through a Biblical understanding of who we are in relationship to Jesus Christ, we’ll languish. Because, along with our culture’s definition of success, there’s pressure to climb the ladder at work, be self-sufficient, consume more stuff, achieve that next milestone, squeeze hours out of the day to work more, achieve more, own more, and play more. After a while a person’s identity is wrapped up in net worth, the job, what’s contributed to the company, the kind of house lived in, the car driven, and toys owned. And that’s the cultural story so many are living in. But, the real story is this:

Apart from Jesus Christ giving definition and purpose to life, it's all becomes empty and meaningless. So, there's another kind of power that's also real; the power of Jesus who has purchased the hearts and minds of people and infused his nature into the lives of believing people, so, secondly...

2. Cultural trends and fashions need God's counter-balance. A counterbalance is a weight that balances another weight with mass or power or influence so as to act in opposition. Well, we need the story of Jesus and teachings of scripture to act in opposition to the mass, power and influence of all the cultural stories we hear each day. So, if the cultural call today is consumption and it has the power to purchase our identity, then the counterbalance is the teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus. Ephesians 1:7 says that God *purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins*; v. 14 says, *he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.* Consume that! Allow Jesus to speak into every nook and cranny of your life. Now, depending on the prevailing winds of our culture, we are continually battling who we are and who God calls us to be.

The battle is real because we're exposed on every side to cultural stories that tempt us to escape or conform to our culture—the temptation is to escape to our homes and escape to church and see life "out there" as a necessary evil to put up with but certainly not engage in. Or, we're tempted to become so enculturated and accommodating to the prevailing culture that we grow numb from daily exposure and end up living in submission to it. And submission to our culture causes a compromise to Christian integrity, it dulls our Christian story and testimony and purpose; it suffocates our spiritual life so that we become incompatible with the Lordship of Jesus. What we need is a daily spiritual counter-balance. One of the major themes of the Bible is God calling out a people for himself—for his possession, for his glory, for his mission in the world. God summons his people to be different from the world around them. He says, *"Be holy because I am holy."*

That story is a continuing theme throughout Scripture. We find it in the writings of the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the church in Rome, he writes this in Romans 12:1-2 (READ). There are two counterbalancing truths here for followers of Jesus. **First:** Our lives are to be lived each day as an act of worship to God. Paul wrote, *a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable*. So, your day to day life is to be a holy offering of worship to God, as he defines holy and what is acceptable to him. **Second:** We're to *let God transform us into new persons by changing the way we think*. Jesus said *"I am the way, the truth and the life..."* so we know that God has revealed his truth through Jesus Christ. We find God's truth in the scriptures—the very scriptures that God inspired and moved people to put in writing.

So, we have the Spirit of Jesus and God's truth as a counter-balance to help us think right and live God-honoring lives in our culture. But let's take Romans 12:1-2 apart a little more. Paul says followers of Jesus have a double calling: On the one hand Paul understood we live in a convoluted world every day, but on the other we're not to conform to that world. The first is a call to living in the world and the second call is to avoid godless worldliness by living a Jesus-centered life. It's about entering into the life of the world around us without being defined by it; it's about influencing and inspiring the world for God as a holy offering. This is a call to live a life of holiness but also relevancy. So, let's understand this:

We can't respond to one call without the other. I'm saying that we can't preserve our holiness by escaping from the world, and neither can we sacrifice our holiness by conforming to the world. Instead God calls followers of Jesus to combine both callings of involvement and separation. Dr. Alec Vidler, a Biblical scholar, wrote a book and coined a phrase I really like—he called it *"holy worldliness."* It's a great way to understand what followers of Jesus are called to be and to do. We're called to holy worldliness. There's an unbelieving and secular existence, but there's Jesus saying, *"I chose you to come out of the world."* And this is echoed by Paul in Romans 12:2, *"Don't copy the behavior of this world, but let God transform you."*

This is living a life of “holy worldliness;” a radical biblical call to nonconformity to the surrounding culture but involved with that culture to introduce into it the Kingdom of God. But what in our culture can steal that passion? Thirdly...

3. There are contemporary trends that threaten to engulf followers of Jesus. It’s good to be aware of the conflicting stories in our culture that can overpower our identity in Christ. Let me give you a few of those trends. First, there’s *pluralism*. This cultural story says that there is no such thing as objective truth—such as Biblical truth or even the 10 Commandments. The only truth is what seems to be true to each person. Pluralism describes a whole slew of ideas, beliefs, philosophies, religions and practices that our culture says are all true, which means there’s little to no objective criteria to determine right from wrong, good from bad.

To say anyone’s opinion on a moral issue or personal practice is wrong, is said to be intolerant, bigoted, prejudice, racist and small minded. Think of it as “The Culture of Chipotle.” Go to any Chipotle and you’ll find a very simple way to eat lunch or dinner: Step up to the burrito bar, look down at all the food options, and decide how to put together your own burrito. The ingredients are laid out; you design your own meal according to your personal tastes. Well, we kind of live in a Chipotle culture, where people stroll up to the great burrito bar of the world and say...*“I’ll have a little humanism, a dab of materialism, give me a dash of Hindu reincarnation; put on some Buddhism for that calm, detached taste. Throw on some relativism; go heavy on sexual freedom, but light on Jesus—just the heaven sauce, not the hell-fire salsa; and finally, just a smidge of Islam.”*

So, there’s pluralism. Another conflicting cultural story out there is Materialism. Nothing wrong with material—God created material—it’s the “ism” that competes for the affection of your heart. Materialism is a constant concern with meeting my needs through material comfort. So, more is better than little; bigger is better than smaller. There’s always a desire for more. More house, more car, more clothes, more toys, more money, more leisure.

It's consumption—all the things money can buy. Solomon, perhaps the richest man in the ancient world who had amassed riches and land and power stepped back from it all one day and said: *"I have given my life to consumption but it is all meaningless and there's nothing new under the sun."* Listen to Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 (READ). The cultural story of consuming more and materialism, doesn't work. Apart from a God centered life—none of life makes sense. Let me give you one more quick cultural story we see and hear all the time—it's called Relativism. So many people are floundering in today's quagmire of relativism. This is the "if it feels good do it" way of living. It's guided by how we feel and if we feel strongly enough about something, it must be right. It all depends on where you are.

It all depends on who you are. It all depends on what you feel, and it all depends on how you feel. It all depends on your point of view.

So, how should Christians respond to all these conflicting stories? **First**, with humility, state without apology that there is objective truth and it originates from our creator God. God has revealed himself to the world not only in the loveliness of the created universe but more supremely in Jesus Christ and in the full biblical witness to Jesus revealed in his birth, life, death and resurrection. What we're saying in this multi-storied culture, is that Jesus is God and he became human flesh and blood. He lived a perfect and sinless life and in himself, revealed the reality and nature of God. We're saying that Jesus died on the cross to bear the penalty of the sin of the world and he transfers to every believing person his own righteousness, making people of faith acceptable to God.

We're saying that Jesus is alive today. His body was raised from the grave and changed into a new resurrected body. Jesus defeated the sting of death by promising eternal life to all who believe he is the Savior. There is no other faith or religion that makes a claim comparable to that. Other religions look back to their founders and celebrate their teachings. But Christ-followers see Jesus as more than a dead teacher of the past. He is our living, resurrected Lord. He is available and accessible to those who call on him. We not only

claim to know about him, we claim to know him personally. We not only desire to live a meaningful life, but Jesus gives us the power of his resurrection to do it. Only Jesus is uniquely competent to save. He has no rivals. He has no competitors. And he has no successors. **Secondly**, no matter what the cultural stories are out there, lift up your voice without fear and proclaim the uniqueness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Believe in a God who created the material order but reject materialism as a sinful preoccupation with material things. Our supreme preoccupation is with the glory of God, the kingdom of God, the name of God. And listen, since Jesus Christ calls his followers to obedience, any concept of obedience is impossible if there were no moral standards we are called to obey.

Obedience to Jesus point to moral absolutes. Jesus said in John 14:21, *“Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”* The only way to prove we love Jesus is by our obedience. So, are you longing to bring the story of Jesus into your culture, your world? If we’re going to Reframe and connect our faith with life, we’ll need to introduce Jesus into our human experience on our frontline. As you do, he’ll make himself known and real to you.

And the test of your love for Jesus is obedience; the reward of obedience is more of Jesus in your life—consume that over pluralism, materialism and relativism. Let’s close here—locate your connection Card and find where it says, *“My Next Step Today Is..”* Let’s write down an application—you’ll find a couple ideas on the screen. As you’re writing, I’ll invite the ushers to come and receive your morning offering. Place your offering and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes by. Let’s pray...

Creation & Fall

(Genesis 1:1–5, 1:26–31)

INTRODUCTION

Over the next five weeks, we are going to cover the key moments in the scriptural story. This session starts with the beginning—the account of the creation and fall. Genesis tells us why God created the world and humanity, and his purposes for both. God’s creation was good, but this goodness was catastrophically marred through the fall. As the image-bearers of God, we are nevertheless called to cultivate this nevertheless goodness in our relationships with God, others, and creation. Read Genesis 1:1–5, 1:26–31.

Outline

Temple—God created the cosmos and ordered it. The cosmos is like a sacred temple, but it is not itself divine.

Humanity—We are made in the image of God; humans are called to be kings (culture makers) and priests (cultural caretakers).

The Fall—The fall broke relationships, causing alienation and diminishing shalom (fullness of life), but does not negate the goodness of creation. In the brokenness of the world, God is working to redeem creation.

Vocation—We are invited to participate with God in this work of redemption. Shalom is restored in the cosmos through reconciled relationships with God, each other, and creation.

What do Genesis 1 and 2 tell us about who we are and God’s purposes for creation? What does the fall mean for God’s original purposes?

How could remembering the beginning of the biblical story change how we think about our vocations and our culture?

Where do you experience tension between faith and other areas of life? Understanding the creation story helped resolve Hugo’s tension, what difference might this make for the tensions you experience?

Application

Coffee beans provide a tactile reminder of God's good work of creation. Even though a raw coffee bean is good, you probably would not want to eat it. It requires work—roasting, grinding, and brewing—in order to turn it into coffee. Such work, the work of people like Hugo, echoes God's original work and is rightly called "good." Recall those times when you've had good coffee with family and friends (or if you don't like coffee, remember when you've shared a good meal), when coffee has been a gift from God for enjoyment or for fostering friendship. The many moments of making and sustaining are part of everyone's vocation. Think about the times where God's good work of creation is reflected and continued through your work in the world.

Israel's Calling (Genesis 12:1-7)

We're in a 10 week series calling, *"ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life."* It's the same theme our Small Groups are studying this fall. We're looking at different cultural stories we hear on a daily basis that in many cases are different from the story of Jesus and the true we find in the Bible. So, this series is about reframing those cultural stories so they are measured by the Word of God and the person of Jesus Christ. As we continue this morning, we're going to go back thousands of years and focus on the people of Israel and how Israel's story is part of our history as Christ-followers.

The story of Israel helps us see how faith in God makes a difference in a complex and messy world, and how God calls ordinary people to trust and obey him and how he blesses those who do so they might be a blessing to others. So, let's begin by reading Genesis 12:1-7 (READ). Abraham and his descendants are an Old Testament picture of those who follow Jesus today. Let me explain why: God said to Abraham: *go to the land that I will show you.* That land was Canaan and specifically, the area of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. God told Abraham to trust and obey and follow him and influence those with whom he and his people came in contact with—that is, to bless people.

Today, those who follow Jesus are blessed by him for the purpose of influencing others for God by being a blessing to people. Jesus calls his people to, *"Go and make disciples of all nations; to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the world;"* to *"love our neighbor as ourselves;"* to *"be holy because I am holy;"* So, as God called Abraham to follow him and bless others, he calls you and me to love God and serve others. I have 3 insights on how Israel's calling helps us reframe our culture, first...

1. People of faith are to trust and obey God. In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham and his family to relocate from Haran to Canaan—which is modern

day Israel, Lebanon, and Southern Syria)—it was a 400 mile move. And look, Abraham didn't have a car or a U-Haul.

Everything he owned had to be carried by animals. It's scary enough driving a moving truck across the country. Years ago, Valessa and I drove a U-Haul from South Dakota, across Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, around Chicago, to Indiana and to Michigan—to a city we had never been to in order to serve God at a church in. We packed the U-Haul so tight we could barely get the back door closed. I drove and Valessa was sitting on a Kitchen chair next to me and Landon was 6 months old and strapped in the passenger seat. Along the way, Landon spiked a fever and we ended up in an emergency room late at night, in a town we knew nothing about. Just getting to our destination was a stressful experience. But, imagine if we had to do that with a few crazy camels carrying our life belongings and a sick child.

So, if we thought our move was a big deal, relocating a family back in Abraham's day was bigger; and by the way, Abraham was already 75 years old at the time. So, what does this tell us about him? It tells us Abraham risked everything in order to follow God into an unknown land and an unsure future. It tells us that Abraham trusted and obeyed God even when everything God was asking him to do was one big step of faith. It tells us that Abraham had a genuine faith in God. I'm convinced that if we're going to reframe the stories of our culture; if we're going to change the dialogue in today's culture from a secular, God-questioning, humanistic understanding of life, we need to live a genuine life of trust and obedience to God—a lukewarm or convenient faith will not sway anyone or reframe anything today. Second...

2. People of Faith have a great call and a great promise. So, the LORD said to Abraham, *Leave your native country, your relatives, your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others...*" But I wonder, how does God bless Abraham? Several ways actually: First, *God promised offspring.* Through a miracle of God, Abraham and his wife Sarah, who was way past child bearing years, had a child name Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah and they had twin boys, Jacob and Esau.

God blessed Jacob and when he married Rachel and they had 12 sons who also married and became the 12 tribes. They began multiplying into a nation—the nation of Israel. So, God’s promise to make Abraham a nation was a promise fulfilled. We see later in Chapter 15, God tells Abraham, *“Look up at the heavens, count the stars—So shall your offspring be.”* And let’s not forget, it was through the offspring of Abraham that the Savior of the world was born. But God also promised Abraham a second blessing; in the second part of v. 2 we read: *I will bless you and make you famous.* The blessing God was referring to is one of material abundance. How do we know that? In Genesis 13:2 it says, *“Abraham had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.”*

And then in v. 6 it says Abraham and his nephew Lot were so wealthy that, *“the land could not support them, for their possessions were so great...”* God blessed Abraham with an abundance of riches. Third, *God blessed Abraham with the ability to bless others.* Back in Gen. 12:2, it says, *you will be a blessing to others.* So, Abraham would benefit others. He would be helpful, he would assist, defend, rescue and produce the ultimate blessing generations later—Jesus Christ. Now, I suppose the connection we may want to make is that since God blessed Abraham with abundance, influence, power, and fame, he will also bless us in same way. I wonder how many Christian people think God hasn’t blessed them enough! Let’s be careful here.

We can fall into the thinking that we should have it easier than those who don’t know God; that God’s blessings are health, wealth, or prosperity because after-all, we’ve received Jesus as Savior and Lord and God blesses who he saves. True, however, Jesus says, *“The last will be first; the least of these is the greatest; the meek will inherit the earth.”* So, blessings come in various forms. Some of you grew up singing the Hymn, *Count Your Blessings*—in the 3rd verse it says, *When you look at others with their lands and gold, think how Christ has promised you His wealth untold; Count your many blessings money cannot buy; your reward in heaven, and your home on high. Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your blessings, see what God has done.*

Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:9-11 (READ). God knows how to bless—it may not look the same as Abraham, but never doubt that God's children are blessed. Thirdly...

3. People of faith are blessed to be a blessing to others. We need to see this clearly: God had a plan and a purpose for blessing Abraham and his descendants that became the nation of Israel. They were to be God's agents of blessing others. They were to be used of God to rescue nations from sin and separation from God. God's prophet Jonah is a great example of that—He was called by God to go to the nation of Nineveh—who were enemies of Israel—He was to call the Ninevites to turn from sin and turn to God and they did. God used Israel to be redemptive, rescuing agents; they were to seek shalom for others; they represented God's peace in every aspect of daily life. So, what do we have in common with Israel's calling? Plenty!

Increasingly our culture wants to take but not give; wants the blessings without the call to bless others; instead of giving, it's greed. Instead of serving, it's be served; human nature is largely selfish. But there's another voice that we represent. Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 12:13-21 (READ). Sure, we see glimpses in our world of Godly character—where people are willing to open their barns to others, to be a blessing—especially in times of crisis, where we tend to help one another. But we also see the other side of human nature in times of crisis—looting, violence, selfishness.

The world around us tells us to earn money to spend on ourselves. But that's tearing down barns and building bigger ones; that's creating bigger rooms to store all your goods; that's sitting back and saying, *"I have enough stored away for years to come. Now I can take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"* That's greed. It needs to be reframed! The Bible tells us clearly that God blesses us so that we will bless others. If you want the ultimate example of this, it's Jesus. Listen to Romans 5:6-11 (READ). Jesus took his glory and majesty and honor and power and he laid it all down on a cross and nailed our sin there. He emptied himself to fill us up with himself.

Are you willing to do the same? If you look deep within your soul, are you able to say that you are using God's blessings to bless others? If you can answer 'yes' to this, praise God! But if not, ask yourself, *How am I using God's blessings to bless others?* This isn't about guilt. It's about a call to live out genuine whole-life discipleship and stewardship and compassion and the kindness of Jesus. It's about allowing ourselves to be completely honest as Christ-followers—that we're willing to examine every aspect of our lives to see if we are a blessing to others on our frontline—your spouse and children, your neighbors, your co-workers, people you rub shoulders with everyday in your community; or, are you living to fill your barns all for yourself?

So, how you can bless others and reframe the stories of greed and barn filling we see in our culture? One way is being a blessing financially to others in need. To do this, we need to ask ourselves tough questions, "*When are my barns filled enough?*" "*Am I living at a reasonable level as God intended or am I living beyond my means?*" Answering these questions will help you determine your commitment to sharing your wealth. I can't tell you how to spend God's resources. But through prayer and seeking God's will, each of us can think about whether we're living according to God's standards or by the standards of the world. If we always compare ourselves to others, we'll never have enough.

If we never have enough, we'll never give to others and bless them. So, are we living as God intended or how the world teaches us to live? Let me give a plug to something I think every one of us should go through—Its Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. We offer this class once a year at CrossWinds—it's a class where you learn God's way of handling money. There are life changing principles you'll learn, that if you followed, will eliminate personal debt and give you the freedom to bless others with your finances. The class begins on Sunday, October 9 at 9:00 AM. Let me give you another way to bless people. Richard Foster, an expert on spiritual disciplines, tells us that serving others is a way to bless others. He says, "*Service is not a list of things that we do, but a way of living.*"

In the same way that Abraham left everything behind in faith, knowing that God would provide for his every need—we too are called by God to be willing to put aside our own wants, needs and desires to serve others, believing that God will provide for us. I read about a suburban Chicago woman who received a tip of over 1,000%. Nicole Thompson, a teacher who worked a second job as a waitress to help pay the bills, received a \$1500 tip. She told the customer, "I said, 'I can't take this,' and he said, 'Yes, you can.'" The generous man, a friend of Nichole's boss said he had heard that she worked two jobs and thought she deserved it.

The surprising generosity of one man made national news, and has likely impacted one woman's life significantly. But maybe, a good question to be asked is, "why don't we hear more news stories about the overwhelming generosity of Christians?" We can be a blessing to others. Even as a church family. More of us could bring a grocery bag full of groceries or the basic necessities for Valley Outreach. You can drop it off right here at CrossWinds in the entry way of the church. Or you can help serve in our Coats for Kids coming up Thursday, October 27th. Or pack and distribute Thanksgiving meals or sign up for the Christmas Toy Shop.

We have all kinds of opportunities for you serve others here at CrossWinds. 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—you'll find a couple ideas on the screen. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to come and receive your morning offering. Place your offering, Touchpoint envelope and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes by. Let's pray...*God, you called your servant Abraham relocate, to go where you wanted him to represent you. You watched over him in his wanderings, guided your people as they crossed the desert. Now, guide us. Strengthen our faith to trust and obey you; be our companion; our guide at the crossroads, our strength in weariness, our defense in dangers, our shelter on the path, our shade in the heat, our light in the darkness, our comfort in discouragement all so that we may be a blessing to others and point them to our Savior Jesus Christ.*

Jesus the King

(John 1:1-17)

Yes, let God's truth speak through you to the world around you. I read a story of a teenager who went home and announced to his mother that a friend had shared with him the truth of Jesus and he had become a follower. She was immediately skeptical and claimed that her son had joined some kind of cult. *"They've brainwashed you!"* she said to her son. He told his mom, *"If you'd seen what was in my brain, you'd realize it needed washing!"* Of course, he hadn't been brainwashed. In fact, again and again, when people bring their lives, their outer lives and inner lives, into the light of God's truth and Jesus as Savior and Lord, things become clearer. If anything, it's our culture that brainwashes us in a thousand subtle ways so that it's just easier to go with the flow of our culture.

That's brainwashing! But when Jesus enters into the cultural discussion, he administers a sharp jolt, he shines a bright light, he kick-starts the brain and moral sensibilities, and soul sensory into working properly for the first time. That's what we're talking about in our current series called, *"ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life,"* we're exploring how the Biblical story reframes our story the stories of our culture. Today, I want us to focus on Jesus Christ as the climax of the story; the true image of God, the true Israelite, who rescues humanity through his person, work, and words. Jesus is both Savior and King, and his redemptive, rescuing work of people from sin and Satan affects everything in this life. He gives meaning to all of life and culture — including our ordinary day to day activities. So, let's break this down, first of all...

1. Jesus fulfills the Old Testament expectation for a Messiah and a true king. Most Christ-followers I know believe that Jesus loves us and died for us. But we have a tougher time understanding how this same Jesus is connected to all the things we do in life, especially the day to day stuff. What does Jesus have to do with cleaning the house, doing the laundry, cleaning

the bathroom, mowing the lawn, going to work each day, buying groceries, paying bills, and a myriad of other normal things we do.

Part of the problem we have is how we view the story of Jesus. For many followers of Jesus, it's can be a pretty narrow understanding: God loves me. I'm a sinner. Jesus died for me and because I accepted Jesus as Savior, my sins are forgiven, and when I die, I get to go to heaven. And though all of that is true, it's a pretty narrow understanding of Jesus and an almost private salvation story just for you. And it seems to me that when we frame the story of Jesus in this way, it's all over when we accept Jesus. It's like going through baptism or confirmation and saying, I've arrived, I'm in, I've done the religious thing, now I can get on with life. And then it's just kind of holding on or doing our own thing until we die and go to heaven.

There's no plan for living, no enhancement in this world in behalf of God, no purpose, no plan, no calling to influence people in your neighborhood, your job, our culture for Jesus—and we end up living with an incomplete story of Jesus. So, who is this Jesus and why did he come into the world? I want to take you to John 1:1-14 where we hear the ancient words of the Apostle John. Listen to this, beginning at v. 1 (READ). I want us to see that the first person we meet in John's Gospel is not Jesus Christ, but John the Baptist. Why? Because, you can't understand Jesus without understanding John the Baptist and here's why: John the Baptist is the link from Israel to Jesus. John the Baptist is the transition prophet from Old Covenant to New Covenant.

Israel was the nation God was doing his work in and through to change the world. However, years before Jesus came into the world, Israel, was badly on the decline: There was no real King; the Temple was a shadow of its former glory; the city of Jerusalem, that had been called the light of the nations, had lost its spiritual luster; the city on a hill was no longer noticed by anyone. And the Jews began to complain. They said that God wasn't holding up his end of the bargain. They felt that God had abandoned them. So, 400 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Malachi comes onto the scene and he speaks

the words God gave him. God tells the Israelites that they have lost their love for him; that they were bringing blemished offerings to the temple.

They were unfaithful to their marriage vows, their worship was just empty ritual, their spiritual leaders no longer taught God's truth. They were living more like the pagan culture around them than as people of God. And it was because of their continued disobedience that God said he would be silent. And then, God tells the Israelites that he's going to send a messenger. Look how Malachi describes this messenger in Malachi 3:1-5 (READ). That messenger would not come for 400 years and when he finally did show up, the messenger was John the Baptist. The gospel writers tell us John was out in the desert—and yes, he was like a blazing fire; a refiner of silver, burning away the dross of sin; a strong soap bleaching the soiled, sin stained souls; purifying the Jewish keepers of the Temple—the Levites, refining them like gold and silver. He put the nation of Israel on trial.

He called out the sorcerers and adulterers and liars. He spoke against those who cheated employees, he revealed the hard hearts of those who oppressed widows and orphans, and those who deprive the foreigners of justice. No topic was off limits, no person, from greatest to the least, were spared from John's message of God's truth. In Matthew 3:6 we're told that *when they confessed their sins, John baptized them in the Jordan River*. What we see is a strong movement of the Spirit of God, calling people out of Israel and into the dessert, into the waters of repentance and cleansing. 1,400 years before this, the ancestors of these same people were in a massive exodus out of slavery in Egypt and into the Red Sea led by Moses—that water was the way of escape.

And now God was executing a new exodus—a better, more lasting escape from a pagan culture, from slavery to sin. People were once again going into the water, but this time led by John the Baptist; their hearts were cut to the core—they were leaving the captivity of sin and rebellion and disobedience to God and entering into a genuine relationship with the living God. John was the link to Jesus. Jesus started his public ministry, and he goes to the

desert, walks into the Jordan River and is baptized by John. Jesus doesn't confess sin, because he doesn't have any—just the opposite.

He is confessed by God himself. Listen to Matthew 3:16-17 (READ). After 400 years of silence, God not only speaks, but he is present in the world; and there in one place the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit break into the spiritual muck and mire of that ancient culture—The Father declares, *"This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."* Jesus was restoring the character of God. Jesus was God's plan to rescue once and for all the people of this world from sin and Satan. The great rescue would come through spiritual transformation. Listen again to John 1:12-13 (READ).

Jesus came to fulfill Israel, not as a conquering general but as a suffering servant who would break the bondage of sin. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 42:18-21, *"Look at my Servant, whom I have chosen. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not fight or shout or raise his voice in public. He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. And his name will be the hope of all the world."* You see, Israel was the weakest reed, the flickering candle; they were no longer a nation that represented the character of God. Jesus came to change all that!

And then, just as the Israelites left the waters of the Red Sea and walked into the desert, so did Jesus. He was baptized and walked into the desert where he was tempted and tested by Satan for 40 days. Satan tempted Jesus in every way he had tempted the nation of Israel; but where Israel gave into temptation and sinned, Jesus did not. He emerged from the desert victorious—representing God's holy character. And just as the 12 tribes of Israel to be a nation unto God, they were instead corrupted by the world and failed to govern the promise land, but Jesus appointed 12 spiritually transformed people who led a spiritual revolution that changed the world; the life and work of Jesus is rooted in fulfilling the story of Israel. But what about you and me today? Secondly...

2. Jesus calls us with a renewed vision of what it means to be fully human. The church is God's chosen people to represent him to the world and Jesus is our King.

We're appointed to be the new Adam and like Jesus to be image bearers of God to people around us. We are the new Israel. If you belong to Jesus by faith, just as Abraham's faith was in the one true God, Jesus not only lives within you, but he sets you apart as his own to transform our culture. He calls you and me to live our lives in a way that restores the true character and image of God to people around us. The Apostle Paul unfolded this truth in 2 Corinthians 6:16b-18 (READ). If you're a child of God you're called to restore the image of God to the culture and to people around you. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, the Apostle Paul writes: *"...we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"*

Francis Chan tells the story about a man named Vaughn who reflected the character of Jesus Christ to everyone around him. Chan tells how a few years ago, a missionary came to his church and told a beautiful story about sharing the Good News of Jesus gospel with a remote tribe in Papua New Guinea. At the end of the story the missionary said, *"I should really give the credit to Vaughn, my former youth pastor who loved me and inspired me to live for Christ and to share Jesus with others."* The next week another guy came to their church and challenged them to start sponsoring kids living in poverty. He also concluded by saying, *"I'm involved in this ministry because of my youth pastor, a guy named Vaughn."*

Chan said he found out that those guys were from the same youth group! Then the next week another speaker named Dan told Chan's church about his ministry at a rescue mission in the inner city of L.A. After Dan's talk, Chan casually mentioned, *"It was so weird: the last 2 weeks both of our speakers said how much impact their youth pastor, Vaughn, had on them."* Dan looked surprised and then told Chan, *"I know Vaughn. He's a pastor in San Diego now. He takes people into the dumps in Tijuana where kids are picking through garbage. I was just with Vaughn in Tijuana. We would walk in the city, and*

these kids would run up to him. Vaughn would show such deep love and affection for them. He'd hug them and have gifts and food for them. He'd figure out how to get them showers.

And the whole time I was walking with Vaughn, I kept thinking, If Jesus was on earth, I think this is what it would feel like to walk with him. He just loved everyone he ran into, and he would tell them about Jesus. People were just drawn to his love and affection." And then Dan said this, "The day I spent with Vaughn was the closest thing I've ever experienced to walking with Jesus."

Now, I wonder—could someone say that about you and me? When Jesus is King, we become the most powerful force for goodness the world has ever seen; When Jesus is King, God's truth is lived out in and through the church; When Jesus is King, We say "yes" to Him in every area of our lives; When Jesus is King, we love God and love others; When Jesus is King, the world gets better and the hearts of people bend toward Jesus a little more.

And when Jesus is King, every individual is the greatest place to invest our time. And that's how we *ReFrame our culture and connect our Faith With Life*—one person at a time. Let's close here, please locate your Connection Card and let's make an application for this week. Write down an action point for yourself. I have a couple suggestions up on the screen you can use to spur on some thought. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to come and receive the morning offering. Please place your offering and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes—if you're giving with push pay this morning, you can do that now. Let's pray...

New Heavens & New Earth

(1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21:1–4)

We're in a series of Life Lessons called *ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life*. The basis of what we've been talking about is that we're surrounded by a multitude of cultural stories trying to tell us who we are and how we should live. The story of scripture is often viewed as irrelevant, disconnected from the real life we face day to day—Biblical accounts like the resurrection of Jesus and the reality of a new heaven and new earth are discounted or misunderstood. In this series, we're encouraging a transformation of how to live our own stories in light of Jesus. Today, I want to explore the past and the future and how both affect the way we live today.

Now, I want to admit something to you as we begin. I watch HGTV—yes, the Home and Garden TV channel. Am I lesser of a man—maybe! But, I especially like watching the shows that buy homes that are shabby and beat up and have turned into something ugly. But after gutting, rebuilding and putting in the new—homes are transformed—the old has become new. There's something about seeing a transformation. Well, today, I want to look at how God promises to recreate all of creation into a new heaven and new earth and how the resurrection of Jesus is a foretaste of that new heaven/new earth; and how we're to be a living preview of Christ's resurrection and God's rescue. I have 3 insights, first...

1. The resurrection is God's confirmation of Jesus and fulfillment of all His promises. In a complex and sin-stained world, followers of Jesus can feel discouraged—how do we live with hope? God doesn't want his people of faith to escape or detach themselves from our world and somehow endure it while we sit around waiting for heaven. God provided us with a robust understanding of heaven to help us live in hope. Listen to 1 Cor. 15:15-20a (READ). Without the resurrection of

Jesus Christ, there would be no Christianity, no hope for this life or after death.

Without the resurrection, Jesus would have been forgotten. He would be just a footnote in the long history of religious zealots and false prophets. But, just days after the death of Jesus, his followers were telling everyone that he was alive and had risen from the dead. Of course there were skeptics then, just as there are now—people don't like things that mess with their idea of how the world works. That was certainly true 2000 years ago—remember, Jesus lived in a Roman and Jewish culture. For the Romans, resurrection from the dead was not even a part of their worldview.

But, the Jews believed in a resurrection, however, they had a far different understanding of resurrection than followers of Jesus. Ancient Jews believed in one "large group" resurrection of Israel—but only after all the conditions were met: like the defeat of the Romans, and the defeat of all other enemies of Israel, the return of all exiles to Israel, the restoration of Jerusalem under the Jews, the enthronement of a King from the line of David, and restoration of creation—only then would the resurrection of every Israelite occur. So, when Jesus died and was buried, even his closest followers had no reason to sit at his tomb waiting for him to come alive. They were so steeped in their Jewish culture that they couldn't imagine Jesus coming back to life.

So, the only way to understand the radical turnaround of those early disciples of Jesus and their proclamation of his resurrection is that it actually happened. And if it actually happened, everything is different. The resurrection confirms that Jesus is who he said he was—the son of God, Savior of the world. In the resurrection, God was saying "yes" to everything Jesus had said and done. One of the extraordinary stories in the Bible is that of Thomas. It was the Sunday evening of the day Jesus resurrected. Jesus suddenly appears to all the disciples even

though they were in a locked room—except Thomas—he wasn't there. The others later told Thomas they had seen the Lord.

But Thomas says, *I'll believe it when I see the nail wounds in his hands and the wound in his side*. But listen to what happens in John 20:26-29 (READ). No Jew would have said that to another human being and yet here is Jesus in human form standing before Thomas, and Thomas says to Jesus: *"My Lord and my God."* It is the first post-resurrection Christian confession of Jesus as Savior, Lord, and God. So, the resurrection is God's "yes" to Jesus. But, there's more: The resurrected Jesus has a real human body, but it's a changed body. Jesus wasn't a ghost—he could eat and nothing would drop down into his sandals! Jesus wasn't a prototype for the walking dead zombie craze.

No! You could touch the resurrected Jesus; and yet, he walked through inanimate objects; he transported to different locations in a blink of an eye—this isn't sci-fi. It's a new heaven, new earth resurrection body! Here's how the Apostle Paul understood it in 1 Cor. 15:40-44 (READ). With the resurrected body of Jesus, God was giving us a preview of the continuation of our bodies in the world to come. But, there's more. The resurrected Jesus is confirmation of God's re-creation of a new heaven and new earth. Let's look at that more closely, here's the second main teaching today:

2. Jesus' resurrected body affirms God's creation and is a sign of the new heaven and new earth. Think about it: God's plan is for you to have a new physical resurrected body is for you to flourish in his new physical heaven and earth. The resurrection points to the promise of a cosmic shalom—a world-wide peace and harmony that will last for eternity. Let's read Revelation 21:1-4 (READ). So, the Apostle John has a vision. In v. 1 he sees *a new heaven and new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared*. At the end of time, God will do away with this sin-stained world. He'll re-create the earth and bring a new

heaven down to dwell on that new earth. There's going to be a complete transformation and renewal of God's creation.

In v. 3 we read, *"Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.* Christ-followers may die someday, but they will receive a resurrection body when this old earth is re-created; we will live with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Followers of Jesus will live upon this earth in all of its re-created glory, wonder and beauty. In 1 Corinthians 2:9, the Apostle Paul writes, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."* That's an extraordinary thought isn't it?

So, here's the truth; the story of resurrection is counter cultural to today's stories. An unbelieving culture has no idea or the wrong idea of life after death—we need to speak the true story into the culture around us. The resurrection of Jesus was God's down-payment to a future glory for all true believers in Jesus. We have a story to tell—what God did to Jesus in his resurrection, he will do for every person who has placed their faith and trust in Jesus as Savior. And through God's mighty acts, all of creation—including this old sin-stained earth, groaning as in the pains of childbirth, will be set free from bondage and decay and be made new, a home for people of Jesus. We haven't seen nothing yet!

I was watching 60 minutes last Sunday—they ran a story about the progress being made on artificial intelligence—life-like robots acting like humans. The mind of human personalities put into mechanical bodies. Wires and circuitry giving people immortality. Really? Wow, Awesome—No! God has the real deal; God has our eternity in mind; God offers resurrected bodies that will last for all eternity waiting for people of faith. You haven't seen nothing thing yet! This earth will be so radically transformed, so remarkable, so astonishing, that it could only be explained as the old earth disappearing. We flock to our lake

cabins, to the Rocky Mountains, to the Boundary Waters and to the North Shore. We go to the beaches of Cancun, the streets of New York. We marvel at God's creation and human ingenuity—but you haven't seen nothing yet! It's a stunning future God has envisioned for his people of faith. But what about today? What about now? How does all this matter? Thirdly...

3. Christ-followers are citizens of heaven who live their lives as a foretaste of what is to come. Actor Johnny Depp said in Rolling Stone Magazine: *I went around for years thinking, 'Well, what's it all for? All this stuff that I gotta do, interviews and movies and success or not success or this or that. I didn't have a real handle on what life is supposed to mean or be or anything like that. And I still don't. And I'm not sure life is supposed to mean anything at all. I think we're here and that's kind of it. Then it's dirt and worms.'* I'm sorry for you Mr. Depp, because, there is much more to life and what comes after this life. Followers of Jesus are citizens of heaven who live their lives today as a foretaste of heaven.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, *"Your Kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven."* In the middle of this sin-fallen world, Jesus calls his followers to act out heaven here on earth; loving as Jesus loves, helping as He helps, giving as He gives, serving as He serves, rescuing as He rescues, walking with Him each day as he walks with us. We have a story today that says to people: *"God wants you to open your arms, your life, your heart and receive God's gift of eternal life and it begins today."* Listen to what Jesus said in John 10:10...

"I have come to give you a rich and satisfying life." Is that how we come across to people around us in our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our communities? Is that the message our lives are giving to others?—that my transformed life is rich and satisfying and just is a down-payment of something greater that's coming? Do people around you sense that life? Do you bring something refreshing, something hopeful?

Something bigger into your relationships? In Philippians 1:27, the Apostle Paul wrote...

"...live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Being a citizen of heaven is about touching the lives of people around you so they feel more alive after they've been with you than they did before. It's living out heaven on earth. It's living out the hope and expectation of God's glorious future. We live out that hope for our next door neighbor; in the coffee shop; at work; in our schools, parks and marketplace. Followers of Jesus are the most hopeful people on planet earth and others should see that in and through our lives. Know this:

God desires to use your life to point others to Jesus, to be a great hope, to rescue a broken world and to point people to a great future—a new heaven and a new earth. Let's close here. Locate your Connection Card and let's make an application for this week. Write down an action point for yourself. I have a couple suggestions up on the screen. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to come and receive the morning offering. Please place your offering and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes—if you're giving with push pay this morning, you can do that now. Let's pray...

The Church & The Spirit (Acts 2:1-4)

INTRODUCTION

RECAP FROM LAST WEEK

Over the last four sessions, we have explored the story of Scripture—the story of God’s work to redeem people and creation. Last time we considered the completion of this redemptive work, and how the resurrection of Christ is a sign of God’s promise to transform all of creation in the new heavens and new earth. As citizens of this promise, Christians are called to live as a sign, a holy foretaste of this final act of redemption. Today, we will talk about this: How do we enter into the story? In this final session on Scripture’s story, we see how at Pentecost, God gives the Holy Spirit to empower the church. It is not enough to simply know the story; we must also live the story. The Holy Spirit empowers us to participate in the story and God’s work of redemption in the world. Read Acts 2:1-4.

Outline

Participants—The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to be more than observers or spectators of the story.

Renewed—The Spirit gives us a renewed mind, a renewed life, and adopts us into the triune family of God.

The Church—Just as Jesus ascends and the Spirit descends, the church also moves in two directions—the Spirit binds Christians together and missionally sends them out.

Continuation—The Spirit moves the story through the centuries and across geographies.

When have you felt you went from being a spectator to being a participant—from just knowing about the Biblical story to being “pulled through the frame”?

Why was Pentecost significant for the early church? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the early church and today?

What is your experience of the Holy Spirit? How vital is life in the Spirit for living the Christian life?

APPLICATION

The large candle represents the Holy Spirit, the light and life that sustains each of us in our faith. The Spirit empowers and sends us to carry God's light into the world. The tea candle represents your call to be a light—to bring truth and light to the world around you. As your candle is lit, notice that the flame from the large candle is not diminished, rather the light increases. Share with one another where you want to experience more of the Holy Spirit in your life. Pray for the Holy Spirit to fill the group and send you into the world as faithful bearers of God's light. Before the next session, pray each morning for the Holy Spirit to use you as a light to the world in ordinary, practical ways. Then, at the end of the day, pray for God to show you how the Spirit used you as a light. Record what the Spirit reveals to you in your guide or personal journal.

Strangers & Exiles

(2 Corinthians 5:17–20; Luke 14:34–35)

Over the last several weeks, in this series called *ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life*, we've talked about the creation and fall, the calling of Israel, the climax of Jesus death and resurrection, the ending of this life and the creation of a new heaven and new earth. Last week Pastor Isaac talked about how in these days, the Holy Spirit pulls the church through the frame, filling us with the presence of Jesus and then placing us in this culture; on our frontline, to live as witnesses of God's saving work. Along the way, we've been talking a lot about "doing" the work of the Kingdom of God. But, before we go one step more, I want to slow us down and make sure that we "Be" before we "Do."

Our first Core Value as a church is this: *We "be" before we "do" by worshiping and loving God first and foremost.* Your Christian resume of service to God is important to advancing the Kingdom of God, but your referral to God by Jesus comes from an intimate relationship with him. Take a look at this video and you'll see what I mean (SHOW VIDEO). We can't represent Jesus in our culture unless we know him; unless we're spending time with Him; unless we're Bible filled, truth filled, prayer filled, praise filled, and Jesus filled. There's too much pressure to conform to our culture without taking steps to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. But it doesn't end there. We live out a relationship with Jesus. Let's see how that might look, first...

1. We are tempted to either conform to or withdraw from the culture we live in. Conform or Withdraw—isn't that the dilemma for Christ-followers today? Rather than simply conforming to or withdrawing from our culture, we're called by Jesus to represent him with the whole of our lives by loving and serving people; by demonstrating the life of Jesus; by bearing the image of God to people around us. Ask yourself this question: *"What am I more prone to do—withdraw from our culture or conform to it?"* Because once you honestly answer that, you can begin to challenge yourself to live out the truth

of one of our primary scriptures today—take a look at 2 Corinthians 5:17–20 (READ). Jesus has called his followers not to withdraw from the world or to conform to it, but to engage it; to relate to people with his love, truth, and kindness; to expose others to the life-changing power of the Cross. Let me paint a picture for you. Imagine there's a little girl who is growing up with a daddy who loves his job more than he loves his family. He's a workaholic. He finds significance in what he accomplishes at the office. Work becomes his god.

As this man grows further from his family, he becomes angry, withdrawn at home. He takes the guilt he feels and pushes it off on his family. Eventually, this man divorces his wife and because of all the conflict, he doesn't even pay child support. The family is torn apart and the little girl grows up without her daddy. Years later she heads off to college. She wishes that her relationship with her father was different. But she is not going to move toward her father. She doesn't want to get hurt again. There's too much risk. The past is too painful. But, what if one day her dad was invited by a friend to a men's church retreat? And what if he goes to this retreat and encounters the cross of Jesus Christ.

What if God gets ahold of this man's life, and over the next few months, the Spirit of God changes him. What if that changed man begins to reach out to his daughter? The pain, hurt and abandonment she had been using as a filter to look at the world begins to change because she sees her dad's priorities change. She sees that his heart is tender toward her and to the things of God. In fact, he calls his ex-wife and confesses his responsibility for the failure of their marriage. He starts paying child support and makes good on college payments. He does all he can to reconcile this relationship with his daughter.

She sees the cross is at work in him, and because she sees that the cross of Jesus changes people, she now has a greater possibility of moving toward her daddy and his Savior. Yes, anyone who belongs to Jesus has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ and gave us the mission of reconciliation. Here's the thing: If we conform or withdraw from

the world, who's going to invite that broken person to a men's retreat or to a Small Group or to a worship service. Who's going to engage that co-worker with kindness and in a spiritual conversation to point her to the Savior? If God won't withdraw, neither will we. If Jesus didn't conform, neither will we. Secondly...

2. We are called to be ambassadors of God's kingdom. In v. 20, the Apostle Paul gives followers of Jesus a title—he says “...*we are Christ's ambassadors.*” Now, the bible says that followers of Jesus have a dual citizenship. You may be an American, but if you are also a follower of Jesus, a child of God, you are also from a country called Heaven. Heaven is a spiritual country; America is a natural country. Heaven will exist forever, America will not. One day all of what we live in will cease to exist. You become a citizen of Heaven when you accept Jesus as your Savior and spiritually reborn.

Galatians 3:26 says, “...*in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*” The Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:11 *as temporary residents and foreigners...keep away from worldly desires.* So, in many ways, Christ-followers are strangers of this world, exiled here until death and only then face to face with Jesus in a new heaven and new earth. In the meantime, the follower of Jesus is a citizen of earth and of heaven, exiled ambassadors in a strange land. Now, if we're going to be involved as ambassadors for Jesus, we need to understand the message of reconciliation. So, let's review what that is:

First, God initiates a relationship. From a human standpoint, reconciliation to God is impossible. Romans 3:23 says that “*everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.*” There's nothing a sinner can do to manufacture, engineer or design a way to make him right with God. The good news is that God loves you, wants you, and reaches out to you. Again, 2 Corinthians 5:18a (READ). God brings a sinner to himself; he's a saving God by nature. So, if any change is to happen, God has to initiate it.

Secondly, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus makes the way of reconciliation as an act of forgiveness by God—v. 19 says that *God was in*

Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. Jesus took your sin and nailed it to the cross—his body given, his blood shed as punishment for your sin. Galatians 5:24 says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there."

Thirdly, a person's obedience of faith to believe in Jesus as Savior is the only way to be right God. Romans 3:22 says...*"We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes..."* Ok, so that's the story ambassadors of Jesus have for people. If you're a follower of Jesus, you're to plead with others, *"Come back to God!"* This idea of *pleading* has the connotation of passion—a passion for the souls of people; a firm commitment to love people; the ache to rescue people from the a meaningless life, the terrors of hell and eternal separation from God—A lukewarm commitment to being Christ's ambassador will not work. Thirdly...

3. Ambassadors spiritually fertilize their culture. Listen to Matthew 5:13 (READ). Understand that salt was used as a fertilizer in ancient Palestine. According to specialists in environmental science and soil chemistry, salt has been a major method of fertilizing soil for centuries. So, Jesus was not talking about household salt on cooked food, but salt's agricultural use. When Jesus spoke about his followers being salt in their world, he was referring to rock salts.

These dead-sea salts contained sodium, magnesium, and potassium, calcium sulfate or gypsum—do you know what that is? It's the chemical equation for fertilizer. Basically, followers of Jesus are to live as Kingdom fertilizer in the lives of people around us. And when Jesus talked about salt losing its "saltiness" as fertilizer, making it less effective as a fertilizing agent, Jesus was calling his followers not to lose their fertilizing properties, but stay committed to bringing spiritual life and growth to the lives of people long term. By the way, salt in this agricultural sense, means we're going to get messy. Listen to Luke 14:34–35 (READ).

2000 years ago, farmers used salt to preserve manure. Is that messy enough for you? Salt maintains the properties to prolong the fertilizing effect of manure. It's been used as an agricultural preservative for manure for centuries. Salt kept dunghills from rotting and becoming useless as fertilizer, especially in dry places. Salt-treated manure helped soil to retain moisture, destroy weeds, make dry soils easier to till, make sour grass sweeter and more appealing to cattle. Here's my point: Followers of Jesus are Kingdom of God ambassadors and as strangers and exiles we mix into the soil of our spiritually barren, alien culture, planting seeds of Christ's Kingdom into the hearts and lives of people.

The church is called to spiritually fertilize the hearts of the broken; to make barren souls easier to till; to facilitate the absorption of God's spiritual nutrients and to introduce into our culture the abundant and full life only he offers. And you don't have to go far to do that. No matter where God sprinkles you, his presence empowers you to live a salty life. Let's close here. Locate your Connection Card. Let's make an application for today. I have some suggestions up on the screen. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to come and receive the morning offering. Please place your offering and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes—if you're giving with push pay this morning, you can find it on our church app. Let's pray...

Ambassadors (Jeremiah 29:4–7)

We're in this series called, "*ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life*." Last week we talked about Christ-followers being ambassadors for the Kingdom of God—and we do that in the context of being strangers and exiles in this world; The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:18 & 20, "*God has given us this task of reconciling people to him...we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"*" Now, today, I want to continue to talk about being an ambassador of Jesus and we'll hear God's view of what that looks like. First...

1. Christ-followers avoid apathy, animosity, or imitation toward the culture they live in. I said last week, "*don't conform or withdraw*" from our culture, but we can actually expand this into three attitudes to avoid: apathy, animosity, and imitation. When followers of Jesus are apathetic toward the culture they live in, they end up existing in but making no real impact upon their community. And then, when Christ-followers, and by extension the church, actually has animosity toward its community, all they see is sin, immorality, decadence—a mindset that our culture is so evil, it's beyond help. And we become angry at the depravity.

That leads to a loathing toward people, institutions, establishments, businesses, even neighbors. And there's another attitude we may struggle with—it's when Christ-followers and the church *imitates* our culture. The church or individual followers of Jesus can look, feel and sometimes act so much like our culture that you can hardly see the difference between the two. This happens when followers of Jesus, when churches are sucked into bending so far toward the culture that they stop seeing the need for spiritual renewal and restoration in their community. Fortunately, God shows us the right response to living in our community, and we find it in the writings of Jeremiah.

Let's look at Jeremiah 29:4-7, but first some context: God's chosen people, the Israelites, were invaded and taken captive by the Babylonians. They would end up living in Babylon for 70 years as strangers and exiles in a foreign land. But, how did God want them to live? Look at vv. 4-7 (READ). I want us to see this simple truth: God's people were to engage their culture; to live uniquely as people of God in a pagan city—not apathy or animosity or imitation—but Godly people engaged and embedded in their community. Let's see why, secondly...

2. Christ-followers are called to work for the welfare of their community. We need to take our cue from the instruction of vv. 6-7—God said through the prophet Jeremiah—*“Multiply! Do not dwindle away!...work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for... it's welfare...”* Understand that the nation of Babylon, was an entirely evil nation but had achieved a high level of civilization that made an impact on the world. In the area of religion, they had a long system of gods—a god of the air; a god of the sea; a sun-god, moon-god, a goddess of love and war, a storm-god and more. The Bible basically points to all the false systems of religion in the world can be traced back to Babylon.

At the same time, the culture of Babylon excelled—they had homes and farms, irrigation, skilled artisans, manufacturing, trade, families and schools. It was in that setting that God told his people of faith not to decrease. They were to increase; build homes, plan to stay; plant gardens, marry and have children. What was God saying? *“Grow where I have planted you...Change the spiritual temperature of Babylon by being part of the culture—don't be apathetic or have animosity toward Babylon; don't imitate it—engage it, change it; show what it is to know the one true God of the universe.”* If you want a picture of that, read the book of Daniel—he lived as God instructed in the city of Babylon. It's a fascinating story of God's people changing the spiritual temperature of the city. Oh, and see if this seems familiar—The King of Babylon had a specific strategy for taking over another country like Israel. They would overwhelm people with their ideology, enculturate them, absorb them so that after a generation, there would be no more foreign identity, just

assimilated foreigners indoctrinated with all the values of Babylonians. Don't be fooled, we face the same challenge in our culture. But just as God told the Israelites, he tells his people of faith today: *"Don't do it that way."* Just as God didn't want the Israelites to decrease, but to increase; to be a part of the city, to be His distinct people; to get into the middle of it all, and not lose their identity, so it is for the church and Christ-followers today. Jesus said this in Matthew 5:14-16 (READ).

And in speaking of Jesus, the Apostle John wrote in John 6:33, *"The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* In John 10:10, Jesus said, *My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.* So, Jesus came into the world to give abundant and rich and satisfying life to people; to save people from sin and separation from God and he sends his followers into the world with the same message of fullness, forgiveness and salvation. There's only one way to do that: Christ-followers are to be a part of the city, permeating our culture; planted firmly in the middle of it to influence it for God, to save it from sin, to help it find a rich and satisfying life as Jesus defines it.

We're in the city to represent Jesus and to help it flourish. Go back to Jeremiah 29:7 (READ). God wanted his people of faith to pursue the welfare and well-being of the city. God didn't want them to hate or despise or separate themselves, or to leave the city in their own sin; he didn't want them to escape or assimilate the culture or the city. God wanted his people to love the people of that city; to stay there and seek the welfare of the same people who had beaten them down, destroyed Jerusalem and took them captive. This demolishes any idea of harboring animosity toward our culture.

The idea of being light on a hill is that we enter in and pray for and seek the welfare of the culture we live in. The word *welfare* is the key word here. It's actually the Hebrew word *Shalom* which is translated into English as peace. But in Hebrew *Shalom* means so much more. It means *completeness, wholeness, health, welfare, safety, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, rest, and harmony.* It's *the absence of agitation or discord.* Isn't this what Jesus was

offering people in John 10:10—a rich and satisfying life? This was God’s original design from the very beginning—after he created the earth and then Adam and Eve, God says to them, “*Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.*”

God, returned the Israelites to this purpose in Jeremiah 29. And Jesus calls his followers to this in Matthew 5:14-15 (READ). We have people here at CrossWinds in the medical profession and they would likely understand the initials, *FTT*. It could be written down on a chart of a child or an infant. It means *Failure To Thrive*. I know that because I’ve watched *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Chicago Med* and *Code Black*. I could probably diagnose what’s causing your sore back or that rash—and if I got a good look at your face, I could probably tell you how long you have to live. But if *FTT* goes on the chart of an infant, often it’s for unknown reasons, but, the child is unable to gain weight or grow.

Maybe the parent or care-giver is depressed, and the depression seems to get passed down. Sometimes something seems to be off in an infant’s metabolism for reasons no one can understand. So *FTT* is one of those mysterious phrases that sounds like an explanation but explains nothing. In reality, *FTT* explains the human condition. Dallas Willard says we tend to think of the word *salvation* as the forgiveness of sins and the escape from punishment, but it actually has a much more robust meaning in the Scriptures. Willard says a better word for salvation in the NT is the word “life.” Remember what Jesus said in John 10:10, *My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying **life***. That’s thriving only God gives. Ambassadors of Jesus introduce God’s Shalom into our culture. So, if we’re going to be the light of Jesus in Stillwater and the surrounding area, we need to reframe our thinking. It’s the Christian business person that’s to have more than a good business plan. They’re to seek God’s Shalom through the economic flourishing of the community. Christian parents, teachers, administrators, School Board members seek God’s Shalom in educational flourishing. Christian mechanics, don’t just fix cars, they represent the love of Jesus by keeping people safe on our roads.

Christian doctors, nurses, psychologists, and counselors, don't just keep a hospital or clinic going, they bring wellbeing to the community. CrossWinds, we're a church that's for our community. That's why we have a Mobile Dental ministry to fix teeth of those who don't have dental insurance. That's why we do a HarFest where we invite the Sheriff and Fire Department and local businesses to participate. It's why we do Coats for Kids and the Christmas Toy Shop; it's why we support Valley Outreach, providing food for those in need; and why we partner with Young Life to provide meals for young single moms or support Project Life to protect unborn children. It's because we're not leeches in our community.

We're ambassadors of Christ bringing life and Shalom and elevating human flourishing in our community. Let's close here. Locate your Connection Card. Let's make an application for today. I have some suggestions up on the screen. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to come and receive the morning offering. Please place your offering and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes—if you're giving with push pay this morning, you can find it on our church app. Let's pray...

Joyful Living (Luke 24:30–34)

Imagine an eight-year-old boy playing with a toy truck and then it breaks. He cries out to his parents to fix it. But he cries, his father says to him, “A distant relative you've never met has just died and left you one hundred million dollars.” What will the child do? He'll just cry louder until his truck is fixed. He doesn't understand. In the same way, followers of Jesus lack the understanding to realize all we have in Jesus; the spiritual ability to grasp the height, depth, breadth, and length of Christ's salvation. At times, we're like the eight-year-old boy who places his happiness in his circumstances, rather than recognizing all that we have in Jesus Christ. So as we wrap up this series, *ReFrame—Connecting Faith With Life*, we'll look into the joyful life only Jesus gives. I have 3 insights, first...

1. Jesus encounters us in the midst of cultural fragmentation and confusion. We're going to go back to something we looked at in week 1 of this series; an event that occurred in the life of two Christ-followers after Jesus resurrected from the dead. And what we'll see is a pattern develop that we ought seek out in our own lives—that pattern can be summed up in three words: **Encounter**, **Understand**, and **Respond**. Let me set the scene before I read Luke 24:30-32. Late in the day of Christ's resurrection, two pessimistic, discouraged followers of Jesus were walking from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus—a 7 mile trip.

The two were downcast because of the death of Jesus 3 days earlier; but, they were also confused by reports that his body was missing. So, they were walking and talking about these things when suddenly a stranger walks beside them and listens to their concerns, and then gives them a Scripture lesson that explains why the Savior needed to die and that the grave would not hold him. The 3 arrive at Emmaus—the 2 followers of Jesus invite the stranger in to have an evening meal and here's what happens—look at vv. 30-34 (READ). Now, understand that these two disciples were confused. Their idea of Savior was an earthly king who would deliver them from Roman rule

and bondage and bring Israel back to power and regional prestige, much like that of King David. But there were competing stories out there. The Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees rejected Jesus as just another dangerous wannabe savior. So, these two disciples of Jesus watched as leaders of their ancient Hebrew faith, worked with Roman powers to put Jesus to Death. And now, instead of the teachings of Jesus directing their lives, they were confused by their own Jewish leaders, and the harsh reality of a Greco/Roman ideology and power over them.

So, they're downcast, afraid and disillusioned with life. Enter Jesus; a resurrected Jesus, who enters into a deep scripture laced conversation, and he dines with them. Jesus was face to face with those two disciples, and at first they didn't recognize him—so powerful was the competing and complexing reality of their culture. And yet, as the evening progressed, their hearts were transformed by Jesus; their hearts burned within them. The light came on. And the first of this 3-part pattern was experienced—Encounter. They personally encounter the living Jesus. And we need that same encounter today. Our hearts need to burn with the reality of Jesus in the center of our lives. We need Jesus.

In our culture today, when things get confusing for followers of Jesus, he encounters us in the midst of our fragmentation and confusion with the power to set our hearts right. Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church, and his wife, Kay, went through a devastating loss when their 27 year-old son Matthew took his own life after battling depression and mental illness for years. About a year after this tragedy, Rick said, *"I've often been asked, 'How have you made it? How have you kept going in your pain?' And I've often replied, 'The answer is 'Easter.'"* Rick goes on to say, that the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus happened over three days.

Friday was the day of suffering and pain and agony. Saturday was the day of doubt and confusion, misery and fragmentation. But *Easter*—that Sunday—was the day of hope and joy and victory. Rick Warren concludes: *"Here's the fact of life: you will face these three days over and over and over in your*

lifetime. And when you do, you'll find yourself asking—as I did—three fundamental questions. Number one, 'What do I do in my days of pain?' Two, 'How do I get through my days of doubt and confusion?' Three, 'How do I get to the days of joy and victory?' The answer is: the resurrection.

We need to live as Easter Christ-followers; we are resurrection people; we regularly encounter the living Jesus. And we need to, because when this culture begins to confuse you—get back to this: Jesus is alive, he's on the throne; He's the Savior of the World, he's Lord over all, and you can trust him at the core of your confusion. Today, encounter the risen Jesus; tomorrow, and each day reach out to the resurrected Jesus and only then will we live with consistent joy. Second...

2. Jesus reframes our understanding of self and the world, by explaining the biblical story.

I want to take you back to something Jesus said two to the disciples as they walked and talked on the road to Emmaus—look at vv. 25-27 (READ). Jesus called the confusion of his two followers, "*foolish.*" Does that seem harsh? Well, Jesus wasn't chewing them out, he was being honest; he didn't want his followers to be foolish by believing the cultural stories of their day, but to filter their understanding of life through his truth—in this case, what Jesus accomplish through his death and resurrection. He was saying, "*In your times of confusion—when the voices and stories around you are causing spiritual confusion about God and life, understand the teachings of scripture.*" I read this week about the work of a Wycliffe Bible translator who was working among native people in a remote village in Papua New Guinea. The members of this tribe had hard-to-abandon gods.

They had superstitions. One of their practices was to spit on the wounds of the sick. Their medicine men were known as the *spitters*, and they didn't want someone like Jesus to take away their status in the village. But, all that changed as more of the Bible was translated into the tribe's dialect. For instance, when the story of Jesus curing a blind man was translated, and the tribe heard how Jesus spit on the ground, made mud and placed it on the

eyelids, healing the man, they saw that Jesus was not against them, but for them.

Those people in an obscure culture in New Guinea identified Jesus as one of their own, they saw that the Savior of world was also a spitter! And they came to faith in Jesus because of this connection. Here's my point: In any and every culture, Jesus has the power to reframe cultural confusion; he encounters us every day through the truth of scripture; he can help you understand the ways of God; help you make sense of the world around you; He will reveal God no matter what the culture around you is doing. Thirdly...

3. We can live with joy and confidence as Christ's ambassadors. Back in Luke 24:31, we read, *"Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."* Jesus had one thing he wanted to accomplish in this meeting with his two disillusioned followers—he wanted to open their eyes to the reality of his presence, power and purpose—why?—so they would respond and join him in his Kingdom work; because that's where they would find the greatest joy in life. Jesus was raising up ambassadors; calling his followers to continue his story; to change the world—it's no different today—Jesus wants us to respond; to open our eyes to see what he's doing around us; to carry on his good news. So, we **encounter** Jesus, he helps us **understand** life in light of his truth, and then we must **respond**, to make the decision to obey him and that's where we'll find real joy. Let me remind us once again of our identity as ambassadors for Jesus—listen to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:18,20. He writes... *"God has given us this task of reconciling people to him...we are Christ's ambassadors...God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"* What we're saying today is that what brings real meaning and joy to our lives is when we consistently live as God's diplomats, his envoys, Kingdom emissaries of Jesus. And we do that where we live the majority of our life—on our front line—at home, our neighborhoods, the workplace and in the larger community. Think of Ambassadors who represent the United States on foreign soil. I can tell you when they really earn their stripes—it's when the political climate is not going well.

It's when the U.S. is at odds with that foreign nation; it's when there are misunderstandings, trouble, a political mess, unrest, conflict or discord. When a U.S. Ambassador wades through all that and still represents this nation with accuracy and integrity—that's when an ambassador shines. As ambassadors for Jesus, even as our culture is shoving aside a Biblical worldview, or those close to us are rejecting God's truth; or there's confusion, heartache or disappointment, living as an ambassador of Jesus and his Kingdom is when we shine and find joy and meaning to life. Oh, and one more thing, on this side of the election some of us are disappointed.

And some of us are celebrating—but the results of the election changes nothing in your calling to be an ambassador of Jesus. Your faith is not built upon our political landscape, but in the God of the Universe and he's still in control, the Savior and King of the world is still on the throne, and your identity as Christ's ambassador is still your joy and purpose in life. Let's close here. Locate your Connection Card and find where it says, *My Next Step Today Is*—make an application. I have suggestions up on the screen. As you're writing, I'll invite the ushers to receive the morning offering. Place your offering and Connection Card in the offering bag as it passes—if you're giving with push pay this morning, you can find it on our church app. Let's pray...

