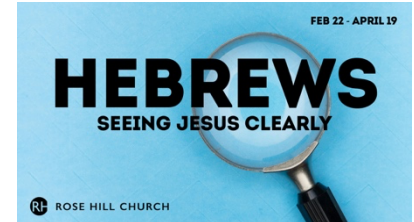




2 Corinthians 5:17-20  
 I Once Was Lost  
 “Living In The Kingdom”

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Before we get into today’s passage, I want to let you know that next week we will start a new series in the book of Hebrews. It will go for 10 weeks, taking us through Lent and beyond Easter. Today, however, we come to the close of our series on the thresholds



people often cross on their journey from unbelief to faith in Jesus. Research involving a couple thousand testimonies from people who moved from non-belief to trusting Jesus shaped the book *I Once Was Lost*, which has provided the framework for this series. These testimonies revealed five common stages:

1. **Building trust with a Christian.**
2. **Developing curiosity about Jesus.**
3. **Opening up to change.**
4. **Seeking after God.**
5. **Entering the Kingdom.**

This fifth and final stage is what many of us think of when we think about evangelism. But notice that, for most people, there are several stages along the way. When we talk about “leading” people toward Jesus here at Rose Hill, this framework reminds us that it really is leading — because it can be a journey. Some move through these stages quickly; for others, it may take years.

But here’s the key: **Confessing sin and trusting Jesus may be the end of a journey of seeking — the point where someone moves from being lost to being found — but it is also the beginning of a new journey as a disciple of Jesus.** It’s a new beginning that is a lifelong journey of living by faith in Jesus.

We are now living in His kingdom under the lordship of King Jesus, seeking His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Anyone who has entered the kingdom through faith in Jesus must be led along this journey of discipleship

— including you and me — even as we help lead others through these five thresholds. We are led in this life of faith, even as we seek to lead others to this life of faith. To help us think about this and live it out, we are looking at **2 Corinthians 5:17-20** this morning. This is God’s Word to us today...

**Paul begins with the word “therefore,” connecting this passage to what comes before it.** In the first sixteen verses, several themes emerge:

- We live in this world, yet we long for the next.
- We live by faith, not by sight.
- Christ’s love compels us to a new way of living modeled after Him.

Verse 15 points to Jesus’ death and resurrection as the ultimate expression of His love and grace. Verse 16 draws an implication: we no longer view anyone from a merely worldly perspective.

Then comes the big outcome of all of this, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).**

This is the result of knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord. The old has gone, and the new has come. The old way of living, thinking, relating and even the old way of practicing religion, are replaced with new life in Christ. And as Paul writes in the next verse, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ” (verse 18). It’s a reminder that this reconciliation to God and the new life we live is not our doing. The sin that breaks fellowship with our creator is overcome not by us, but by him. It’s his doing, not ours.

Verse 19 reminds us that through Christ God does not count “people’s sins against them.” As the hymn Amazing Grace says, “I once was lost, but now I’m found.” **God is the one who finds us and reconciles us to him.** He pays our debt. It’s his grace that makes us new. It’s his work and his gift.

Our response then is faith. Trusting Jesus. But it’s not one and done. Trusting Jesus may be the culmination of a journey through these five thresholds, but it also begins a new life-long journey as a new creation.

That's what Paul gets into in the last few verses. So, he writes in verse 18, 19, and 20: **This is a gift from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ “and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...he has committed to us the message of reconciliation...We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (key points of verses 18-20).** Three times Paul emphasizes that those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus, now take up the very mission of Jesus themselves.

As you are probably aware, the Seahawks won the Super Bowl last Sunday. If you missed that news, well...sorry/not sorry to break it to you. ☺ And while fans of the team may feel connected to the team and excited about the victory, the fact is that the only ones who had any real impact on the outcome of the game were the coaches and players. When you're a fan, you're not on the field and in the game. Some fans practically think they're in the game and that's an identity issue. But fans are not actually in the game like players. There is a difference.

When you become a disciple of Jesus—when you have moved from being lost to being found—when you have put your trust in Jesus and are reconciled to God you are not just a fan. You are now on the field. You are in the huddle, getting the play call, stepping to the line of scrimmage and playing a role in carrying out the mission. **God has given you and me the ministry of reconciliation.** He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are Christ’s ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

Paul doesn't write these words only about himself or church leaders. This letter was written to the church in Corinth and to all the churches in Achaia. Achaia is the larger region around them, comprising of southern mainland Greece. It would be like Paul writing to Rose Hill Church and all the churches in the Pacific Northwest.

**So, this letter and its message is intended for anyone who is a believer. And what we see is that anyone who's put their faith in Jesus is now in the huddle and on the field.** To put it in other terms: you're in the band, the

orchestra, the choir. You're one of the dancers. You're handed a paintbrush to paint, not just a ticket to go to the museum.

Some of us might feel unqualified and ill-equipped to carry out ministry. We might be thinking, "I love being saved by Jesus and following Jesus...but leading others toward Jesus? Carrying out ministry? Becoming one of the players on the team? I'm not sure! Can't I just cheer from the stands?"

The emphatic answer in Scripture is clear: "No." To say "yes" to Jesus is to say "yes" to being part of his mission. As John Wesley once said, and I shared in my annual report article that I'm sure you read, (right?) "The church changes the world not by making converts but by making disciples" (John Wesley).

So, if you feel ill-equipped: **The good news is, God has given you two resources to equip and train you for ministry. The first is the Holy Spirit.** Though not mentioned here, Scripture teaches that the Spirit is the one who guides, empowers, and gives us Spiritual gifts so we can carry out this mission. Some people are gifted in preaching or teaching. Others in leadership, mercy, administration, music, serving, healing, hospitality, and more. If you're a follower of Jesus, God has blessed you with gifts for ministry.

**The second resource is the Church.** While that certainly means the Church with a capital "C", the global church; the fact is, the local church is where most formation and equipping for ministry happens. This equipping process is called "discipleship." Discipleship is not just about Bible knowledge, theology, or personal growth as an end to itself. Discipleship is about being equipped to be God's ambassador and carry out this ministry that he entrusts to us.

**At Rose Hill, we describe discipleship through our vision of "leading people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play."** Not only is this the vision for how and where we carry out God's mission, it has a second

meaning of the discipleship pathway for the people of Rose Hill Church. It describes the process by which disciples are made here at Rose Hill Church.

**“Live” is the first step in discipleship to Jesus and is our worshipping life together.** Gathering on Sundays for worship through music, prayer, Scripture, preaching, and fellowship shapes us as disciples. If you miss worship, you miss one of the primary ways God forms you and leads you toward Jesus and shapes you as a disciple.

**“Work” is the next step on the path of discipleship and focuses on intentional spiritual growth ministries.** Small groups, micro-groups, New Covenant Partner Classes, discipleship classes for kids, youth, and adults, and more...and would include things we might each do on our own like regular Bible devotions and prayer. These are ministries that deepen our connection to Jesus and our understanding of Scripture. In the book, *I Once Was Lost*, the final chapter focuses on mentorship for a couple months for new believers, and our micro-groups are the formal ministry that correlates to that here at Rose Hill.

**“Play” is the final step of our discipleship pathway and is expressed in serving.** Your initial response might be, “Isn’t ‘playing’ fun? How does serving line up with *that*?” If that’s your first response, I would say, that mentality is exactly what we want to change, and why “serve” is aligned with “play.” Serving alongside others in carrying out God’s mission brings profound satisfaction and purpose. There is incredible joy when you help accomplish the mission of the church and lead people toward Jesus. And if you think everything is covered and there’s no place for you and the spiritual gifts God has given you, I promise you there is room. There’s room for you to serve here at Rose Hill, and we can all serve on our own as God gives us opportunity each day where we live, work, and play.

**Spiritual growth does not mean leaving worship or learning behind, but we also don’t want to stop midway along the path.** Maturity of faith and equipping for the ministry happens in all three areas – in fact, studies show that people grow spiritually when they serve. People who never get to the

stage of serving end up stagnating in their spiritual growth. They don't fully become ambassadors for Jesus, and leading people toward Jesus is never realized.

That said, many forms of service don't require years spent in step two along the path. Many opportunities to serve simply take a heart that's been touched by Jesus, a desire to serve, and some training on the specifics of what needs to be done. Those kinds of things are great entry-point service opportunities. Over time we want to make room for other new people to step into them, and we move on to other areas of service that require a little more mature faith. But the great thing is, that serving is the place where you really get to play! It's the enjoyable part when you really begin contributing to something bigger than yourself, getting out of the stands and on the field, actively participating in God's mission!

This pattern is what we see in Jesus' ministry and throughout the rest of the New Testament. Jesus trained up his initial band of disciples, and then sent them to carry on the ministry after him. At the end of Matthew, his final words to the initial disciples are: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Similarly, we see it in today's passage, where Paul reminds us that God has entrusted this ministry to us and we are his ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

So, wherever you are on the pathway of discipleship, the question is simple, "What's your next step?" In the language of our denomination it's: **What's your flourishing next step?** As you move forward in discipleship along this path of "live, work, and play", you flourish — and you help others flourish as you lead them toward Jesus in the places where you live, work, and play. That's what it means to be living in the Kingdom of God as a disciple of Jesus, carrying out this ministry, as an ambassador for Him. It's a life-long journey, and we walk on the path together as we follow Jesus. Let's pray...Amen.