

**DISCOVERING MY LIFE MISSION**  
**C.L.A.S.S. 401**  
**Part 1 of 4**  
**Rick Warren**

This class is the fourth based on our four of five purpose driven classes. Congratulations on making it around the bases. In CLASS 101 you committed to being a member of God's family. In CLASS 201 you committed to the habits for spiritual maturity. In CLASS 301 you committed and learned about discovering your shape for being in ministry through your church family. And in this CLASS you're going to begin to discover your mission in the world.

You're going to find there's a lot already filled in on this class syllabus. I have so much material to share with you, you'd be here 'til morning if we filled it all in.

**THE BASIS FOR THE CLASS:**

\* **I WAS CREATED TO FULFILL GOD'S PURPOSE.** Proverbs 16:4 says "*The Lord has made everything for His purpose.*" God had a purpose for bringing you here today because He wants you to understand better His purpose for your life.

\* **GOD PLANNED MY LIFE MISSION BEFORE I WAS BORN.** Ephesians 2:10 "*God is our maker and in union with Christ He has created us for a life of good works which He has already prepared for us to do.*" Circle "already prepared." God planned your life mission even before you were born. Your life mission has both universal elements and unique elements. There are parts of your life mission that apply to every Christian and there are parts of your life mission that apply uniquely to you, what God custom designed you to do. When you became a believer you were given a new mission in life. That mission is unique. But there is one part of your unique life mission that we do all have in common. The first time I taught this class a while back, it went nearly six hours and I still had about an hour of material to share. So what I've done is split the class in half. Part of it is going to be CLASS 401 and part of it is going to be CLASS 501. In CLASS 501 we're going to look at the unique part of your life mission and in this class we're going to focus on the universal part of your life mission. That way it shouldn't take you until midnight to get out of this class!

\***FULFILLING MY LIFE MISSION BRINGS GLORY TO GOD.** Jesus said in John 17:4 "*I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do.*" I don't know a more important topic than what we're going to talk about this afternoon – Discovering and developing your life mission, your life purpose in the world.

\* **MY PRIMARY TASK IN LIFE IS TO FULFILL MY LIFE MISSION.** The Bible teaches us this. Acts 20:24 "*The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me to tell people the good news about God's grace.*" Regardless of what else God wants you to do with your life, if you are a believer, He has an assignment for you.

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#### **THE GOAL OF THIS CLASS:**

That I commit the rest of my life to being a messenger of God's good news to other people, using my time, talents, and treasures for His kingdom regardless of where it leads or what it costs. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:9 "*We make it our goal to please Him.*" What is our goal? To measure up to God's plan for our lives.

#### **CLASS OUTLINE**

In Session One we're going to look at Discovering My Life Mission, God's Purpose in Creating Us, Jesus' Mission on Earth while He was here, and Why Jesus' mission must matter to me.

In Session Two we're going to look at Sharing the Message. You not only have a Life Mission, you have a Life Message. In part one we're going to talk about your testimony, the story of How I became a Christian/How I began a relationship with Jesus. In part two the good news, explaining how to accept Christ. Then we're going to talk about some communication tips on how to share Christ more effectively.

Then in Session Three we're going to look at what I call Fishing My Mission Pond: Five Keys to Spiritual Fishing. We're going to look at How People Come to Christ. We're going to look at How to Build a Bridge of Friendship to the unbelievers in your life so they might go to heaven.

Finally in Session Four, we're going to look at Becoming a World Class Christian. We're going to look at What on Earth is God Doing? Saddleback's global vision and your passport to the world, How to Get In On What God is Doing and some Acts 1:8 opportunities. And we're going to close with What Does It Take To Be On Mission With God?

Assisting me today, and they'll be taking over this class in the new year, are three of our staff. Our new 401 pastor who preached this weekend, Brad Johnson. And then somebody who's been here on our mission team for many years, Steve Rutenbar. And Lynne Ellis who's also on our Mission Team.

#### **SESSION ONE.**

First let's review: Discovering My Life Mission. To discover your unique life mission you have to first understand two things. You have to understand God's overall purpose in creating human beings and second, Jesus' mission here on earth when He was here.

Then let's review God's purpose for creating us. He never does anything without a purpose. God always has a reason, always has a purpose for everything that He does. The Bible says that we were created for four reasons:

1. We were made to have a relationship with God. In Gen. 1:27 it says "*Let us make man in our likeness.*" Why did He make man in His likeness? We are unlike any other creation.

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We're not like the animals. Human beings are unique in that we're made in God's image. What does that mean? We have a spirit. As a result, we can communicate with God who is a Spirit. You'll never see a dog praying, you'll never see a cow giving thanks for its food. We have an ability to communicate with God because we are made in God's image. If we were ants we couldn't communicate with God. So we have a moral conscious, we have the freedom to choose our behavior and most important, we have the ability to talk with God.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 1, *"Long ago, long before He made the world, God chose us to be His very own through what Christ would do for us. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us."* Even before you were born, God had you in His mind and He planned that He would adopt you into His family. He wants a long-term relationship with you. You were made for relationship. That's why when people don't ever develop a relationship with God, they have missed the very reason they were created. God's plan for you is older than the plan for the earth. Before He even made the earth He had you in mind. That's what I call long range planning! That's how much you matter to God.

2. The second thing the Bible says is we were made to become like Christ. *"For those God foreknew He also predestined,"* the Bible says, *"to be conformed to the image [or the likeness] of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers."* When God made Adam and Eve the very first temptation that Satan gave to human beings was "If you eat the fruit you'll be like God." In fact, he said, "You'll be gods." That has been the temptation ever since. Satan never tempts you to be like him. Satan tempts you to think that you're God. That is the oldest temptation. You are never going to be a god. You are never going to be God. But the Bible teaches that you can become godly. What does that mean? In character, having the love of God, the joy of God, the peace of God, the patience of God. You're never going to be God or even a god. But you can become like God in character and that's what God says His goal is. From the very beginning He predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.

Romans 8:29, Message paraphrase, *"God knew what He was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love Him along the same lines as the life of His Son. We see the original intended shape of our lives there in Him."* The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 *"Just as we are now like Adam, the man of the earth, so we will someday be like Jesus Christ."*

What is that going to be like? Jesus gave a glimpse of it when He came back to earth after His resurrection and we saw Him in His resurrection body. Jesus had a body after the resurrection. But it was different from ours because He could walk through walls (kind of a Star Trek dematerializing kind of thing – like a transporter). They recognized His body but it was more than just a physical body.

On earth, spiritual maturity means becoming more and more like Christ. We're never going to become all the way like Him until we get to heaven. But the Bible says that one day God is going to finish the task of spiritual maturity in your life and He is going to complete the job for us. 1 John 3:2 *"We know that when Christ comes again we will be like Him because we will see Him as He really is."* The moment you see Christ face to face, you're going to be instantly transformed to be like Christ in character.

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So God's first two goals of your life: That you can have a relationship with Him and second, that you become like Him – specifically like Jesus Christ.

3. God's purpose is also this: We were made to serve God's purpose. Ephesians 2:10 "*God made us what we are and in Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.*" At Saddleback we call this the purpose driven life, living a life that is built on the purposes of God that He created us for.

4. Finally, the Bible says we were made to last forever. One day your body is going to wear out and your heart is going to stop. But that's not going to be the end of you. You're going to go on. There's an eternal warranty on your life. Human beings were made to last forever. You're going to last forever one of two places – heaven or hell. Because you know Christ you're going to go to Heaven. We were made to last that way. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 3:10, "*He has planted eternity in the human heart.*" The Bible tells us in Ephesians 1:10, "*This is His purpose that when the time is right that He will gather us all together to be with Him in Christ forever.*" If you want to know how the world's going to end, there it is right there. God tells you clearly. He's going to gather all of His children together to be with Him in Christ forever.

We're made to have a relationship with God, we're made to become like God, like Jesus Christ, we're made to serve God's purpose while we're here on earth; we're made to last forever.

Here's the bottom line: This life is preparation for eternity. It's the warm up act, the dress rehearsal, the kindergarten that lasts 60, 70, 80 years before you go into the real show.

Obviously, if you fully understand this (what we just covered) it's going to dramatically effect how you live. When you realize that this world is not all there is – in fact, this is kind of the get-ready stage, the kindergarten stage – eternity is going to go on for millions and billions of years. You only spend 60, 70, 80 years or so here on earth. A lot of things lose their importance. They just don't seem that important when you put them in perspective of eternity. Who's going to care about who won the word series a hundred years from today? Much less a thousand years from today. And yet it's a big, big issue for people. Who's going to win the Superbowl? Who cares in light of eternity? We're made to last forever.

The second thing we need to look at as we consider your mission in the world is Jesus' mission on earth. The Bible tells us that God sent Jesus to earth because we got ourselves into a mess that we couldn't get out of. We were all made to have a relationship with God but by our own selfish choices we have severed that relationship. By our own decisions to go our own way instead of God's way, we've broken off the relationship. The Bible says that relationship is broken and there is disharmony not harmony between God and man. And sin has caused that.

The problem is our sin has broken our relationship to God. As these verses say, "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God and your sins have hid His face from you.*" But because God planned all this in advance, God already saw this coming. And He thought it through. Before any of us ever sinned, He knew we were going to sin, so He figured out the plan to take care of that too. He knew that in giving you the freedom to choose, you were going to make the wrong choice. So even before you made the wrong choice, He already had the solution. God's solution

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was He sent His own Son to bring us back to Him. He took the initiative to bring us back to Himself. John 3:16, *“For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* 2 Corinthians 5:19, *“God was in Christ restoring the world to Himself.”* This is what Jesus Christ came to earth to do. That was His mission.

Let’s get a little bit more specific. What did Jesus come to do specifically? The good news is, we don’t need to doubt. We don’t need to have any questions in our mind because Jesus spelled out His mission in a large number of circumstances, clearly in a number of ways. Circle the parts of His mission in these next five verses:

*“The Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost.”*

Jesus said, *“This is why I was born and came into the world: to tell people the truth.”*

He said, *“I came to give life, life in all its fullness.”*

He said, *“I have come as a light to shine in this dark world so that all who put their trust in Me will no longer wander in the darkness.”*

He said, *“I must tell the good news about God’s kingdom. This is what I was sent to do.”*

We can see clearly what Jesus came to do: Seek and save the lost, Tell people the truth, give life, Shine in the dark world, Tell people the good news about the kingdom.

You may be thinking, “This is great but what does this have to do with me and my mission?”

Your life mission and Jesus’ life mission are very intertwined once you become a Christian. Let me give you ten reasons why Jesus’ mission on earth has to matter to you.

If I want to be like Jesus, my life mission must include His life mission. If I want to be like Jesus (which is part of the purpose of your life to become like Jesus) then my life mission must include His life mission. Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17 and said, *“In the same way You gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world.”*

Jesus expects me to continue His mission in the world. In fact, this is not an option, this is not a suggestion, this is not a possible good idea if you’ve got any spare time to fit this into your schedule. This is commanded. If you are a Christian, you are commanded to fulfill the mission of Christ.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He had a physical body. Everything God did on the earth, He did in Jesus’ physical body. Today Jesus is not here physically with us. He’s here spiritually. He’s here in a spiritual body. What is that spiritual body of Jesus Christ called? The church. Where is the church today? Wherever Christians are. So Jesus Christ, when He was here on earth, was confined to one space. Today Jesus Christ is here in a spiritual body literally all around the world. Actually, He can be more places at once because He’s not limited to a physical body. He’s here in a spiritual body. Who is the spiritual body of Christ? You are, I am, we are. We are the body of Christ.

When my three kids were very small and I really wanted them to get something, I wanted them to really remember my instructions, I would repeat it several times. Are any of you parents

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familiar with this technique? It's like they don't get it the first time. So if it's really important as a parent you have to say it over and over and over.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He said something that was so important, He stated it five times, in five different situations, in five different ways. In fact, He did it once in each of the four Gospels and once in the book of Acts. These are called the Great Commissions. You may think there's only one great commission. Actually there are five. One in Matthew, one in Mark, one in Luke, one in John and one in Acts. I'd like for you to read these five great commissions with me. Why are they called the Great Commissions? Because they're the greatest thing you can build your life around.

Matthew 28:19-20, *"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 ends of the age."*

Mark 16:15 *"You are to go into all the world and preach the good news to everyone everywhere."*

Luke 24:47 *"With my authority take this message of repentance to all the nations beginning in Jerusalem. There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to Me."*

John 20:21 *"As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you."*

Acts – almost His last words before He went back to heaven. *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."*

Jesus says it five times in five ways in five settings. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Get it?" I really wish we had time to look at these five great commissions in depth. But we don't. If in your own study you go back and look at these you'll find that in these five, they cover where we're to do it, when we're to do it, why we're to do it, and how we're to do it. You will find in these five commissions the mandate for life, the message for life, the method for life and the motivation for life. But the point that Jesus is saying is, "My mission must matter to you." You're commanded. If I am a Christian, my mission is not optional. It's either I'm obedient or I'm disobedient.

3. There's a third reason why Jesus' mission has to matter to me. Because sharing the good news is my responsibility. *"You must warn them that they may live. If you don't speak out to warn the wicked to stop their evil ways, they will die in their sins but I will hold you responsible for their death."* He's saying the people around me that are headed for hell, if I let them go to hell and don't tell them, I'm responsible. The people around me that are headed for hell, if I let them go to hell and don't warn them, guess who's responsible? Me. I can't let somebody else be responsible for the people closest to me. You can't let anybody else be responsible for the people closest to you. They are in your life for a reason. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 9:16, *"Telling the good news is my duty, something I must do. How terrible it will be for me if I do not tell the good news."* If I'm a Christian, it is not optional. My mission is not optional.

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But more than that...

4. Sharing the good news is a privilege. 2 Corinthians 5:18, says *“And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into His favor and be reconciled to Him. This is the wonderful message that He’s given us to tell others. We are Christ’s ambassadors.”* Next month I’m flying to the United Nations where Billy Graham is going to be speaking to all the United Nations’ ambassadors at a banquet and presenting the good news, the plan of salvation, to all the ambassadors from around the world. I’m going and Doug Slaybaugh, our missions pastor, is going with me. We are hosting the delegation from China – Saddleback is. When I go there I could be in awe of all these ambassadors because they represent great nations — China, England, Russia, Brazil, all the major countries of the world. One hundred eighty four different countries will be in that room that night. But I am an ambassador of something even more important. And so are you. I am an ambassador for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ. It is a privilege to represent Him. Paul says in Romans 16 *“I am proud of the good news because it is the power that God uses to save everyone who believes.”* There is no other way.

5. Jesus’ mission must become my mission because I am grateful for what Jesus has done for me. Too often we forget how good the good news really is. In Ephesians 2:12 Paul says, *“Remember in the past you were without Christ and you had no hope and you didn’t know God.”* It was a miserable life. We were hopeless and we did not have God. Today, because we do have God, we do have hope, we do have Christ in our lives. We’re grateful for that. Paul says, *“I have a great sense of obligation to the people in our culture and the people in other cultures.”* What’s the obligation? I’m grateful for what God’s done for me. If I had the cure for cancer and I didn’t share it, that would be criminal. If I had the cure for AIDS and didn’t share it, that would be criminal. If I had the only way to know Jesus Christ and to know God and get into heaven and I didn’t tell it to the people who lived by me, that’s criminal. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:14 *“Christ’s love compels us because we’re convinced that one died for all.”* Circle “Christ’s love”. God has never made a person that He didn’t love. Everybody matters to God. And because God cares about people, we must care too. So we’re grateful for what God has done for us.

6. People are hopelessly lost without Christ. Acts 4:12 (New Century Version) *“Jesus is the only one who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been given to save people. We must be saved through Him.”* It’s the only way to heaven, people are lost without Christ. So we have to share it. What do we do?

As Romans 10:13-14 says *“Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved, but before people can ask the Lord for help they must believe in Him and before they believe in Him they’ve got to hear about Him and for them to hear about the Lord, somebody must tell them.”* Somebody’s got to tell them. God could write the good news in the sky but He’s chosen instead to use you and use me. That is a privilege. And God wants us to share the good news because people without Christ are hopelessly lost.

7. God wants everybody saved. 1 Timothy 2:4, *“God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.”* Circle “all men.” He wants everybody to know Him. Every human

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being. 2 Peter 2:9 says, *“God doesn’t want anyone to be lost. But He wants all people to change their hearts and live.”* God wants us all to know Him in a personal way.

8. I will be rewarded for eternity. *“Remember that you will receive your reward from the Lord which He has promised to His people.”* There are rewards for leading people to Christ.

9. God’s timetable for history hinges around us completing our mission. Last week’s cover of *Newsweek* magazine on prophecy: *“What the Bible says about the end of the world.”* Of course, a lot of people are really interested in the end of the world right now because of this millenium thing that’s coming up. They’re thinking, *“Is Jesus Christ coming back?”* They’re all upset and wondering what they should do. Particularly unbelievers who don’t know the Bible get a little nervous about this.

It’s interesting that Jesus is very clear about when He is and when He is not coming back. First look at these verses.

Matthew 24:14, *“The good news about God’s kingdom will be preached in all the world to every nation.”* Circle “nation”. The word “nation” doesn’t mean a political state like we have today – like the nation of Egypt. In those days there weren’t such things. There were people groups. For instance in the nation of Egypt there might be a hundred different people groups. In American there are thousands of different people groups. For instance, in Los Angeles alone they speak 187 different languages. So this “to every nation” means “ethnic” – to every ethnic group. Jesus Christ is not coming back till the good news has been shared to every ethnic group, every tribe, every language in the world.

Right before Jesus Christ ascended back to heaven, He met with His closest disciples. This subject was on their mind, *“Lord, when are You coming back?”* Obviously they wanted to know when He was coming back. He says in Acts 1 *“Then they asked ‘Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?’ Jesus replied, ‘It’s not for you to know the time and the dates that the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, and in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.’ After He said this He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid Him from their sight. They were looking intently up in the sky as He was going when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said, ‘Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who’s been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go.’”*

This is a very profound passage of scripture. Notice: when the disciples asked Him a prophecy question, *“When are you coming back? When is the Second Coming?”* Jesus didn’t want to talk about that. He said, *“It’s none of your business.”* When they wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus wanted to talk about missions and evangelism. That’s how important this is. They said, *“Lord when are You coming back?”* He’s getting ready to leave so that’s a natural question. He says, *“It’s not for you to know the times or the seasons but go out and witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world.”* He says, *“It’s none of your business so drop the issue. Instead of focusing on when I’m coming back, I want you to focus on taking My message to the whole world because then the world is going to come to an end.”*

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He's saying don't focus on prophecy. Focus on the purpose that I left you here on earth for. What is that? Your mission.

Let me spare you some fruitless speculation – When is Jesus coming back?

In the first place, anytime somebody sets a date you can know that's wrong. Because Jesus said in Matthew 24, *"No man knoweth the day nor the hour, neither the angels nor the Son of man but only the Father which is in heaven."* Jesus said, "Even I, while I'm here on earth, don't know when I'm coming back." If Jesus didn't have it figured out you're never going to figure it out either. If somebody says, "He's coming back on 'this' date," you can know for sure, "That's one day I can be relieved." He's not going to come back on that date because no one knows the day or the hour. But we do know what's got to happen first. *"The good news about God's kingdom will be preached into all the world to every people group and then the end will come."* If you want Jesus Christ to come back, just go out and start witnessing. The moment the last person receives Christ that Jesus knows is going to receive Him, then Bam! It's over. And nobody knows who that person is, or when it's going to be.

10. I will be glad when I see people in heaven. Luke 15:7, says *"I tell you there is much joy in heaven when one sinner changes his heart."* Did you know that every time somebody steps across the line, they throw a party in heaven? Maybe a hundred people got baptized today and they were publicly saying to the whole world, "I'm not ashamed to say I'm a believer in Jesus Christ." Some of them today were stepping across the line. And there were people today who stepped across the line when Pastor Brad was preaching this morning and last night. And the moment they said, "Yes", they were throwing a party in heaven.

When you get to heaven and you see people that you had a hand in bringing there, you're going to be glad you did it. You're going to be glad that you took the time, that you moved against your fear and in love shared the good news with your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your friend, your relative, your neighbor, the person you work with or go to school with and next door and even that stranger that God just brings into your life by chance. When you see them in heaven you're going to be glad you shared with them. They're going to be glad you did too.

Knowing this what should be my response to my life mission?

I should do everything I can to fulfill it. Paul says in Acts 20:24, *"I want to carry out the mission I received from the Lord Jesus, the mission of testifying to the good news of God's kindness."*

## **Part 2**

We need to move from understanding that you have a mission into what is contained in the message of that mission. So in Session 2 let's look at sharing the message.

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One of the most important parts of your life mission is your life message. It's not all of it. But it is a part of it. Your life message is what God wants to say to the world through you. Part of your life message is unique. God has custom designed you for a unique message to the world and if you don't share it, it's not ever going to get shared. We're going to talk about that in CLASS 501 "Living a Purpose Driven Life to the Glory of God."

But in this class I want to focus on the universal part that God says, "You need to worry about this part first." If you don't get this part down first you don't need to know the unique part. This is the part that God has called all of us to share.

God clearly tells us that He has a message for us to give to others. 1 Peter 2:9, "*You are the ones chosen by God, God's instruments to do His work and to speak out for Him to tell others of the night and day difference He made of you.*" Have you had Jesus Christ make a night and day difference in your life? Yes. Every one of us. The Bible says, "*He has given us this message of restored relationships (that's between us and God) to tell others. Therefore we are Christ's representatives.*"

There are four parts to your life message. The first three parts are unique to you. Part one is your testimony, the story of how you began a relationship with Jesus. Part two is your life lessons, the most important things that God has taught you. Part three is your life passions, the values and the issues that you care about most deeply.

We're going to cover part two and three in class 501, which we're going to release in two months. Part one we're going to cover today. Then the fourth part is the universal message that we're all called to share which is the good news, explaining how to accept Christ.

Let's look at two of these parts of your life's message in detail and get you started today on at least crafting your life's message.

#### **1. Sharing my testimony.**

A personal testimony is still the most powerful form of communication today. The most powerful form of persuasion. Madison Avenue still uses personal testimonies. You see it on television all the time. "I've tried Tide. You ought to try it too." "I use this stuff for ring around the collar and I no longer have ring around the collar." Why do they use that? Because it's still the most powerful form of communication, the personal story.

The Bible is full of many, many examples of people sharing their testimony. David says, "*Come and listen and I'll tell you what God's done for me.*" The woman at the well: "*Many of the Samaritans of the town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony.*" The man who was born blind: "*I don't know whether He's good or bad but I know this: I was blind but now I see.*" That may be your testimony – "I don't have it all figured out. I don't know all the ends and outs. I don't have all the theology down. All I know is Jesus Christ changed my life." That then is a testimony. You don't have to have it all figured out. You don't have to be a Bible scholar. All you have to say is, "Jesus Christ made a difference in my life." And tell them what difference He made. Then there is Peter and John. They said, "*We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard.*" Paul, on six different occasions. In Acts 22-26 he uses his

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personal testimony to share the good news with unbelievers. Even Jesus spoke by personal testimony. Notice He says in John 3:11, “*Listen carefully, I am speaking sober truth to you and I speak only what I know by experience.* (Circle “by experience”) *I give witness only to what I have seen with My own eyes.*” There is nothing secondhand here. No hearsay. Even Jesus is speaking from personal experience which is called your testimony.

Not only do we have examples of this in the Bible but we are commanded very clearly to share our testimonies with the world. Psalm 105, “*Let the whole world know what He’s done for you.*” Psalm 96, “*Everyday tell how He saves us. Tell the nations of His glory. Tell all peoples of the miracles He does.*”

What’s the big deal? Why should I have to tell my story? Why don’t we just have professionals do this? Why should I tell the difference Jesus made in my life? There are six values to your testimony that make it unique:

1. There are none others like it. It’s totally unique. You are the only one who can give your testimony. If you don’t tell other people what’s happened in your life, that story will never be heard on the face of this planet. If you don’t tell your unique story of how you came to know Christ, no one will ever hear it.
2. It’s personal and it’s easy to understand. It’s always easier to understand somebody’s testimony, somebody’s story, than it is a bunch of principles and facts and figures.
3. You are the authority on it. It’s difficult to argue with a testimony. You say this is what happened to me. How do I argue with that? It happened to you and you know it happened.
4. People love to hear personal stories. And they remember them. They can relate to them.
5. People relate to stories. It builds a relational bridge. When you tell your story – “This is what I was like before I became a Christian and here’s what happened afterwards. Here’s the thing I’m still struggling with,” they go, “Oh, I see what you mean!” People relate to it a whole lot easier and a lot quicker.
6. In our postmodern world, it may be your most effective witness. A lot of people today aren’t going to listen to the Bible. They don’t accept the Bible. They don’t believe the Bible is completely true. It’s true if you want to believe but it’s not true if you don’t want to believe it. Many people today don’t even believe there’s such a thing as truth. “There’s no absolute truth. Whatever’s right for you...” They may not even accept the Bible. If you start quoting from the Bible, forget it. They don’t accept the Bible. But they’ll listen to your story. And so you can share it.

You are actually far more affective in witnessing than I am as a pastor. When I share as a pastor, I’m considered the paid professional. They say, “We expect him to talk about God. He’s a pastor.” I’m the paid professional. But when unbelievers hear you talk about Jesus, you’re the satisfied customer. Who has more credibility? Paid salesman or satisfied customer? No question about it. You have a stronger testimony than me or Pastor Steve. Why? Because we’re

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paid to do this. We're the professionals. That's what we do full time. They say, "You're a religious person a 'holy man'." See me at night and you'll see if I'm a "holy man" or not! Holy socks maybe... actually no socks!

The Bible says that your testimony is a powerful tool and nobody can say it's wrong because it's your story. There's no such thing as a bad testimony. You are a witness whether you like it or not.

The Bible says in 1 Peter 3:15, "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*" Circle "for the hope that you have". We are to share our hope. Did you know that the Bible never, ever tells you to share your faith? It says share your hope. Why? Because faith is what you believe. Hope is the benefit of it. You're to share what difference it's made in your life. People don't care if you're a Christian or not. They want to know, so what? Before they know how you became a Christian they want to know why you became a Christian. They want to know what difference does it make. Is there any solution to any problem that might help me? Is there any advantage of becoming a Christian? Are there any benefits of becoming a Christian? What's the purpose of it? Share the hope.

In this session, I'm going to share with you how to write out your testimony based on three different scenarios about when you came to Christ. Some of you came to Christ as grown adults. Some of you came to Christ as children and then kind of walked on the wild side and came back to God. Some of you came maybe as a young person or child and you've lived for the Lord basically your entire life. Depending upon where you came from you're going to have a different kind of testimony.

Here are the four parts of your testimony if you became a Christian as an adult:

1. What my life was like before I met Christ. You want to share things like what were the common circumstances that would make an unbeliever identify with me? What were your attitudes that an unbeliever would identify with? What was most important to you before you became a Christian? What substitutes for God did you use to find meaning in your life? Like sports and fitness, success at work, marriage, sex, making money, drugs or alcohol, having fun, entertainment, having parties, hobbies – what was your god before God became God in your life?
2. How I realized I needed Christ. What were the significant steps that led up to your decision? Was there a crisis that got your attention? Or was it slowly, step by step, and you were drawn to Him, attracted to Him, or hammered down? What needs or hurts or problems made you dissatisfied with the way you were living without God and you thought, "There's got to be more to life than this." How did God get your attention? That's a part of your testimony. What motivated you to become a Christian?
3. How I committed my life to Christ. What specifically did you do? Where did it happen? What did you say in your prayer? You want to be specific. You didn't just wake up one day and all of a sudden you were a Christian. When did you step across the line? Imagine a woman having a baby – there was a point of conception. There was a point when you were pregnant or you weren't. After that point you were. You aren't kind of pregnant. And you aren't kind of a

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Christian. You can grow closer and closer to the Lord but there is a day that you step across. You may not know when that day occurred. That's ok. I'm going to tell you how to share your testimony. But there was a point when it clicked in your mind whether you know that date or not. It doesn't make any difference whether you know it or not.

4. The difference (this is the most important part) it has made in my life since. What benefits have you experienced or felt? What problems have been resolved? How has Jesus helped you change for the better? How has it helped your relationships? You want to give an examples.

Here is what I call the testimony pyramid. I'm going to teach you how to give a testimony in 90 seconds to three minutes. It doesn't have to be real long to be effective. You want to spend the least amount of time on what you were like before you became a Christian. Some of these testimonies you hear it's ninety percent of all the big, bad, evil, nasty, evil sins they did before they became a Christian and then "Now I'm saved! Thank you!" That's not a testimony. That's a brag-amony. The whole purpose of the first point is saying you were just like anybody else. You're trying to say you're on common ground, identifying with other non-believers.

Then you spend a little bit more time on Part Two – How I realized I needed Christ. Then you spend a little bit more on Part Three – How I committed my life to Christ. Then you spend the most part of your testimony on the differences it made, the fourth part. That's how you're going to do your testimony.

If you became a Christian as a child but you walked away from Christ and never grew until a deeper recommitment as an adult and many of you have done that, here's what you do. You use the same four steps but you start with the time just prior to your recommitment. What was life like while you were living apart from God? Give some examples of how you were trying to meet your own needs without Christ but it wasn't working. Describe what caused you to realize you needed Christ directing your life and how you made a commitment to Him. Then spend the most time explaining how Jesus is currently meeting the deepest needs in your life. How is He making a difference?

For the third group – those of you who became a Christian at an early age and never strayed. What do you do? You use the same four steps with this modification. Point out some deep need or common problem that you see in other people's lives that people are trying to resolve. Then point how unsuccessful their attempts are to meet that need. Then explain why you never had to experience that problem, by trusting Christ early in life. There are lots of problems other people have that you probably didn't have to go through because you were trying to follow Christ.

Don't say the exact age you became a believer. If you say, "I accepted Christ when I was 21," a 17-year-old kid goes, "Whoopie! I've got four more years!" On the other hand if you say, "I accepted Christ when I was nine years old," they'd say, "You were just young and didn't know what you were doing." Don't tell them the exact time. It doesn't make any difference. What matters is how has it made a difference in your life now.

We're going to look at some suggestions for preparing your testimony. Telling My Testimony Story. Before we work on this I want to take you through some tips. Here are some ways to work on your testimony.

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Pray and ask God to give you the right words. Then write it out on paper because God honors preparation. Keep it short and to the point. Don't lose sight of your goal. Some people start telling their story and they get all these details... "I remember it was about eight years ago, or maybe it was nine. No, it was eight because I remember Judy had gone to get a hair cut that day. It was August or July. It was warm, 84, 85 degrees." Come on! Get with the story! Keep it short and to the point. You don't want to chase rabbits. Avoid excessive, unnecessary details. Try to keep your testimony below about three minutes.

Refer to experiences that most people have in common. If you've been hijacked by a terrorist, don't tell that story. Very few people have been hijacked by terrorists. Share a slice of your life, a story that they will identify with.

Be honest about your continuing struggles. Your life is not perfect. Don't imply that all of your problems ended at conversion. "Now that I became a Christian, my life is perfect. Everybody loves me and I'm wonderful." They don't believe that and you know it's not the truth. Don't imply that all your problems ended at conversion.

Spend most of your time on Part Four, the difference Christ has made.

Emphasize why you received Christ, the benefits of doing it. Always mention the benefit of being certain of your destiny when you die. Why? Because although we have different benefits and come to Christ for different reasons, everybody needs to know for certain where they're going when they die. That's a universal need everybody has.

Don't exaggerate or brag about pre-conversion sins. Don't over exaggerate them, too. Like talking to a drug addict, "I understand. I once put some aspirin in a coke... I took too many Advil once."

Don't make negative remarks about other religions or people. Don't even mention any denomination or church. If somebody comes and you're sharing your witness with them and they say, "I'm a Catholic." Say, "That's great! There are two kinds of Catholics: those who know for sure they're going to heaven and those who aren't. Which are you?" or "I'm a Baptist." "That's great! There are two kinds of Baptists. Those who know they're going to heaven and those who aren't really sure. Which one are you?" You don't get hung up. You don't ever let a religious title close the door. Like, "I'm Jewish!" "Great! There's two kinds of Jewish people, those who know for sure they're going to heaven and those who aren't real sure. Which one are you?" Just go back to that issue.

Don't quote a lot of scriptures. This is a testimony, not a sermon. I'd never use more than about one verse in a testimony. If you ever get called up to be on Larry King or Howard Stern or any other talk show, you don't want to go in and take your Bible. Why? They don't care about the Bible. You need to tell your story.

Don't answer a lot of questions they haven't asked.

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Give concrete examples of the changes in your life. The more specific you are, the more dynamic it will be.

Avoid using dates and names and ages. Why? It doesn't matter to them.

Be prepared. Practice it until it feels and sounds natural. Read it aloud, edit it to make it conversational.

Let a friend read it and make suggestions.

Speak casually and informally. You don't change your voice. Don't dramatize or embellish your story.

Don't share mystical experiences. You may have had a flat out, genuine miracle in your life but if you start with that, people's barriers will go up immediately. Speak to them on their level of spiritual maturity, not your level.

Don't talk down to people. Don't sound preachy. Use the words "I", "me", and "my", not "you". A testimony is about you not them.

Use humor in your testimony. It reduces tension. It relaxes people. Smile!

Most important of all, choose a central theme. (Possible themes are listed in your syllabus)

God specifically allows experiences in your life so you can help other people who need Christ with the same problem. There are all kinds of people with all kinds of problems in the world. Because there are all kinds of people with all kinds of problems, God has Christians who have gone through all kinds of problems so they can relate to the unbelievers and share Christ with them.

One of the hallmarks of Saddleback church is the testimonies. We do this almost every week on Sunday mornings. One of the ways you can gain confidence for sharing your testimony with unbelievers is by sharing with believers first. We're always looking for stories that will help people. Stories that we can use in weekend services, or articles, or mid-week services or the Internet. We're going to build a database so that when somebody calls and says, "I've got somebody who just went to jail. Have we got anybody in our church who's had a jail experience." Yes, probably hundreds. Or people will say, "I've got a friend who's going through infertility. Do you know anybody who's gone through infertility?" Yes, hundreds! Do we know anybody who's dealing with grief, with drugs and alcoholic, homosexuality, being a single adult, with stress, with success or with failure? All these different areas. These are things that God intentionally allowed in your life that He will use to help other people if you're willing to be used. It's ways we can have common ground with other people.

Testimonies can either be about positive things that have happened in your life or negative things. Either one. It could be an adoption, breaking a bad habit, financial gain, raising kids, new friends, new home, new marriage, restored relationship, new job. Or it could negative:

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abuse, accidents, addictions, abortion, bankruptcy, divorce, empty nest, financial problems, surgery...

This is one of the first steps in your life mission, identifying what are the circumstances that God has brought into your life and can use to help other people.

Have you figured out that you have more than one testimony? That was one of the purposes for this. Many people think, "My testimony is how I became a Christian, where I was – a church, a camp, a Bible study, with a friend – I accepted Christ and prayed this. And that's my story." No. You have hundreds of testimonies. How many of you have a financial problem testimony? How many of you have had a relational problem testimony? How many of you have had a health problem testimony? We can go on and on and on. You have lots of different testimonies that God's done in your life.

Different situations require different testimonies. You want to choose a testimony that best matches your listener. You need to realize that you can tell other people's testimonies saying, "I have a friend who..." that relates to a person's life. Your small group could share stories with each other and when you know everybody's story then you can share it. Imagine this: You have a friend who has a story of a motorcycle accident. Then you find somebody who's been in a motorcycle accident. You don't have a testimony in that but you know somebody who does. "I have a friend named Bill. Let me tell you what happened to him.... Then he found Christ." Maybe the person accepts Christ. What a thrill to go back and say, "Hey Bill. I told your story to somebody the other day and they accepted the Lord." Wouldn't that be neat? Wouldn't it be neat if other people were telling your story and people were coming to Christ because of your story? You don't have to be the only one to tell your story. And you can tell other people's story too when we share them together. As a small group, I encourage you to share your testimonies, read them together so you can get to know each other's stories.

Don't use religious terms or clichés or broad generalities. Ask, "If I were an unbeliever would this make sense to me?" After hearing and reading hundreds and hundreds of testimonies in my lifetime, I have discovered that one of the biggest weaknesses of testimonies is that we tend to get lazy and we use over worn, worn out Christian clichés in our stories that unbelievers would never, ever understand.

Cliché-Lexicon, translating Christian words into real words.

Don't ever use, "I was blessed." What in the world does that mean? Can anyone describe what a blessing is? Say, "I was happy."

Don't say, "I was born again." They might say, "Were you reincarnated?" Say, "I was given a fresh new start."

Don't say, "I was saved." They'd say, "Were you drowning?" Say, "My life changed at that moment."

Even to say, "Jesus is my Lord," people don't know what that means. We live in a democracy not a feudal system. We don't have lords and ladies, kings and queens, counts and vassals and

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serfs. We don't go around saying, "My lord." You may want your wife to say it to you, but she's not going to so forget it! Instead of saying, "Jesus is my Lord" say, "He's the manager of my life... He's the CEO."

Don't say, "I repented" because they think of a guy holding a sign saying, "Turn or burn!" Say, "I changed my mind" or "I made a mental U-turn" because that's what the word "*metanoia*" in Greek means – to change your mind.

Even don't say, "I sinned." Why? Because people define sin differently. I had a guy tell me a sin was anybody who doesn't salute the flag. That was a sin for him. Just say, "I knew I'd blown it." Instead of saying, "All are sinners," say, "Nobody's perfect... Nobody bats 1000." If you call somebody a sinner they put their defenses up. If you say, "Nobody bats 1000," everybody agrees with that.

Don't say, "I felt convicted." They'd say, "Did you serve time?" I love that when somebody asked Bill Murray one time, "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" and he said, "Hmmm convicted? No." Don't say, "I felt convicted," say, "I realized that..." That's a non-Christian way.

Instead of saying, "The Holy Ghost," and they say, "Casper?" say, "God's Spirit."

Here are some phrases to avoid in your testimony to unbelievers:

"I just praised the Lord for... Now, I'm so blessed... Hallelujah! Amen! It was glorious. I was convicted... The Lord laid on my heart..." They'd say, "You've been watching too much of those people on TV!"

Steps on what's the best way to lead into your testimony:

Pastor Steve:

Any talk show host will tell you that the lead in or the introduction is really the key to getting the program started right. That's true with our testimonies. What's the best way to lead into your testimony? The answer is there really is no best way. It depends on the circumstances. I can give you lots of suggestions about how not to lead into a testimony.

"Honey, I know you're about to deliver our baby but I feel led by God to share my testimony with you right now." What's the response you're going to get back? "This really isn't the time!"

"Dad, I know this is the fourth quarter of the Superbowl and you love the Dallas Cowboys but God's really laid on my heart to share my testimony with you right now." Response: "This really isn't the time."

"Professor Jones, I know this is the University library but God's called me to give my testimony to everybody here in the library." Response: "It's not the right time."

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Three keys to leading into our testimony:

1. Listen for problems or needs that Jesus has helped you with. Circle “listen”. Some people tend to treat their testimony, less like a testimony and more like a club. It’s not scalps that we’re after but souls. That’s why we have to begin by listening, listening to the problems and the needs that folks are expressing around us.

Here’s a great example: “That used to be a big issue in my life too (or my marriage). In fact I felt pretty hopeless. I felt frustrated. But then I discovered something that made a major difference in my life.” That’s a lot better than just clubbing them over the head with your testimony.

2. Refer to something in the news or something current in TV that deals with a common need or problem. “Did you read about.... I can surely identify with that and how people feel. It wasn’t that long ago that I struggled in that same area too. Then something happened that changed everything in my life.”

Start with a statement that they’d agree with and a situation they can relate to. Examples: “It seems like life is getting faster and faster...” Who can’t agree with that? “Sometimes life just gets so complicated...” “Life doesn’t always turn out the way we planned it or expected it.”

3. You may want to lead in by simply apologizing. Apologizing to people that you’ve known for a long time that you’ve never had the courage or you’ve never had the time to share Christ with. Example: “Bill, I just need to stop and apologize to you. We’ve known each other for a long time and I consider you to be a very good friend. But friends don’t keep secrets and I’ve never told you about the best thing that ever happened to me. I guess I was afraid that you’d think I was some kind of a nut. Anyway...” then start into your story.

Psalm 96:2 “*Each day tell somebody that He saves.*”

### **Sharing the good news.**

Everybody’s testimony is different. All of us have different life experiences. But there is one part of our testimony that we all have in common. That is the good news. If you take the gospel out of your testimony, if you take the good news out of your testimony, it’s no longer a testimony. Just a story about you. And your testimony is much more than just a story about you.

The universal part of your life message is the gospel, the good news. How we can be saved and forgiven and begin a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The moment you trust in Christ, you’re called and commissioned to be a messenger of the good news to people who haven’t heard or responded to it yet. What is the essence of the gospel? What is the good news?

Five Bible truths that if you remove any one of them it ceases to be the full gospel:

1. God became man so that I can relate to Him. Romans 1:3-4, “*The good news about God’s Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord who came as a human baby born into King David’s royal family*”

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*line. By being raised from the dead He proved to be the mighty Son of God with the holy nature of God Himself.” Is that good news to you?*

2. Jesus died for my sins so I don't have to. 1 Corinthians 15:2-4, *“It is the good news that saves you if you firmly believe it, that Christ died for our sins. He was buried and He was raised from the dead on the third day as the scripture says.”*

3. Jesus destroyed death so I can have eternal life. 2 Timothy 1:10, says *“Jesus destroyed death and through the good news He showed us the way to have life that cannot be destroyed.”* Circle “the way to have life.” That's what your family members who don't know Christ need. That's what your neighbors, your co-workers, your friends need. They need the way to a new life.

4. Salvation is a free gift so I don't have to earn it. People are made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift. They are made right with God by being made free from sin through Jesus Christ. *“God gave Jesus as a way to forgive sin through faith.”* Romans 3:24-25

5. It is based on faith so all I do is repent and believe. Jesus said, *“Repent and believe the good news.”* And in Romans 1, Paul said, *“The good news shows how God makes people right with Himself, that it begins and ends with faith.”* As the scripture says, *“Those who are right with God will live by trusting Him”*.

When I left to come to church this morning, I drove past my newspaper. Didn't read anything. So I don't know if it was good news or bad news. But I do know that the good news does not become good news until you share it with someone else.

Rick:

I want to encourage you to memorize these five statements, the gospel in five statements: God became a man so I can relate to Him; Jesus died for my sins so I don't have to; Jesus destroyed death so I can have eternal life; Salvation is a free gift so I don't have to earn it; It's based on faith so all I have to do is repent and believe.

Many people forget how good the good news is. To end this session, I want us to talk about three tools of sharing the good news. We have first in your packet a “Steps to Peace with God” track. Also, “The Spiritual BASE” card which we talked about a couple of weeks ago on Sunday. And also a little illustration that you can draw on a napkin called the Bridge Illustration.

There are different ways to share the good news.

One way is this track, “Steps to Peace with God” by Billy Graham. It's a simple little booklet that you could sit down with a person and hold it next to them and you read through it together with them. I have probably led maybe 500 people to Christ with this little book. And even though I'm a pastor, even though I've got an earned doctorate and two other doctorates – three total – I still use a little booklet like this. It's just helpful. Just pull it out and say, “Let me share with you what it means to have peace with God.” I'd encourage you. We've got plenty of them.

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You can use it to pass to somebody, read to somebody. It's real simple. You just read it through with them. There's a prayer at the back and it's a simple way of leading a person to Christ.

Another way is the Bridge Illustration. What you do in the Bridge Illustration is just draw this out. I've drawn it thousands of times on the back of plane tickets, on magazine covers, on napkins, on blackboards, with chalk on sidewalks. Once you understand this simple little thing you can lead a person to Christ anywhere, anytime.

You just start by asking, "Do you ever feel like you're not very close to God? Do you ever feel like your prayers bounce off the ceiling? You don't know God in a personal and close way?" They'll say yes because there's a gap between us and God. It's kind of like God's on one side of the Grand Canyon and we're on the other."

So what I do is take my little napkin and draw two sides of the Grand Canyon. On one side I put "God" and on the other side I put "Man".

I say, "God's on one side of the Grand Canyon and we're on the other side. The Bible says there's a gap. On God's side, He promises purpose in life, forgiveness, heaven, power and peace. But is that what most people are experiencing? No they're not experiencing purpose in life or forgiveness or heaven. What is it that separates us from God? The Bible says it's our imperfection. God's perfect and man is not. There's a gap between us because God is perfect and man is not. The Bible calls that imperfection "sin". What's the middle letter of "sin"? "I" – I want to be my own god. We've all blown it. We've all made mistakes. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that "*All have sinned and all of us fall short.*" What does that mean? People try to find God in different ways. Some people try to come out and jump across the Canyon – they try religion. But that falls short. Some people think that just being sincere they'll get to God. So they try to jump across the canyon by being sincere. And they fall short. It doesn't work. Some people think, "I think by being good and being moral and keeping rules, maybe that will get me to God." But the Bible says we all fall short. Some people say, "My mom was a Christian." They're trying salvation by heredity. "My uncle was a missionary... Mom was a Christian..." But we all fall short. Why?

Let's say three of us were all at the Grand Canyon and we were going to try to jump across and a world Olympic champion broad jumper goes out 27 feet and falls. You run and jump and you go out 20 feet and fall. I go out and run and jump 4 feet and fall. Steve Rutenbar crumbles off the edge. The point is some people get further than others but nobody is good enough. Because to be good enough to get to God, you'd have to be perfect. Anybody perfect? No. We all fall short. What we need between the gap is a bridge. The Bible says that Jesus Christ is that bridge."

I draw a little cross. Jesus Christ is the bridge between God and man. He's like the bridge over troubled waters. The way to heaven is through a relationship with God.

1 Timothy 2:4, "*God is on the one side and all the people are on the other side and Christ Jesus Himself is between them to bring them together.*" Jesus is the bridge. Here's the cool thing about a bridge. You just have to trust a bridge to get across. That's all you've got to do, trust the bridge. The Bible says in John 1:12 you do two things to get across the bridge, "*But to all*

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*who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become the children of God.”* On my picture I say Jesus is like the bridge between God and man. It says we have to believe and receive (or accept).

First you've got to believe. What does that mean? I believe He's who He said He was. I believe He was Jesus who said He was God. I also believe He'll hold me up. When I walk across a bridge, I have to trust that the bridge is going to hold me up. If I don't trust that the bridge is going to hold me up I'm never going to walk across it. I have to have faith in the bridge. I have to believe.

Then it says I have to receive. I have to accept Him. As what? The leader of my life. The boss, the manager, the CEO of my life.

There are only two things that get you into heaven. Believe and accept. That's what the Bible says.

Here's what you do at this point. You say, "You're probably somewhere along this bridge. Put an X where you would think you are." I've asked this to maybe 1000 people in my lifetime. 99.9% put the "X" right in the middle. I say, "Great. What you're saying is you believe in Jesus, you just don't know if you've accepted Him into your life. Right? Congratulations you're half way there. You already believe in Him. You're halfway across the bridge. All you've got to do is accept Him." Gallup says that 94% of Americans believe in Jesus Christ. You're not dealing with people who say, "I don't believe Jesus is who He said He was." Ninety-four percent according to Gallup will say, "Yes, I believe Jesus was who He said He was." They just haven't done the Receive part.

So you say, "You're halfway there. You believe. Now you need to receive. You say, 'How do I do that?' That's where you pull out the little Spiritual BASE card. You've explained to him why he needs Christ, this card explains how to receive Christ.

I wrote this little card a number of years ago and I've used it to lead all kinds of people to Jesus. You can fold it up and put it in your wallet or purse. This is a simple tool you can lead people to Christ with. I like this because it's non-threatening. It doesn't look like you're carrying your two ton black Bible into your office. It's just a card. You can put this on your desk. It's very inoffensive, very non-threatening thing. It's in understandable terms. It doesn't use words like "repentance" or "lordship" or words they wouldn't understand. It's brief and to the point. It asks four simple questions. The best thing about it is you don't have to memorize anything. What do you do?

Let's say I'm talking with somebody and they've been talking about the stress they're under and I say, "Somebody gave me this card the other day about how to establish a spiritual base for your life. Have you seen it? Could I show it to you? I thought it made sense to me. It's right out of the Bible." You pull it out and hold it where both of you can see it. "Here's how to establish a spiritual BASE for my life from the Bible.

B – Believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and showed He was God by coming back to life. Do you believe that? You're one fourth of the way there.

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A – Accept God’s free forgiveness for my sin. Do you want to do that? I have never had anybody say no to that. You’re half way there.

S – Switch to God’s plan for my life. The Bible word for that is repentance but it just means switch to God’s plan for my life. Do you want to do that? Great!

E – Express my desire for Christ to be the director of my life.

If you’re willing to take these four steps, here’s a simple prayer. Do you want to pray this prayer? I’ll pray it with you. “Dear God, I believe You sent Your Son Jesus to die for my sins so I can be forgiven. I’m sorry for my sins and I want to live the rest of my life the way You want me to. Please put Your Spirit in my life to direct me. Amen.”

Now, you have just helped somebody step across the line. The verses for it are on the back. But it is not necessary all the time to go into the verses.

Here’s what you do. You ask the first question: Do you believe Jesus died on the cross and showed He was God by coming back to life? If they say yes, you go to the next point. If at any point they say no, here’s what you say, “If I could get you information that would help you convince yourself of this, would you read it?” If they say yes, fine. If they say no, don’t worry about it. You ask the question and then you immediately turn the conversation to something else. You don’t ever pressure anybody with the good news. You just share it. When the fruit is ripe you don’t have to yank it. It is God’s job to make people spiritually receptive. He does all kinds of things to do that – problems, difficulties, all things. It’s our job to be there and share the good news when it’s there. You don’t have to be the attorney to convince them. You’re just the witness.

That simple tool which I taught first at 401 a couple of weeks ago, since then I have heard maybe a couple of dozen people – friends who led friends to Christ, brothers who led sisters to Christ, parents who led children, children who led parents, co-workers... Just sharing the Bridge and sharing the BASE. Sharing the Bridge and sharing the BASE.

You can do this. This is not something for some theological genius. Can you read? You can lead somebody to Christ. You don’t even have to memorize anything. Arlene Hood after the 401 class went home saying, “I could do this and I need to tell my dad about the Lord.” She wasn’t close to her dad. She called him on Friday, talked to him over the phone, went through this together. He started crying on the phone. He gave his life to Jesus Christ. Her dad accepted Christ right there on the phone. She said, “If I hadn’t listened to God’s prompting, my dad would still be headed for hell.”

Who in your life may not be around tomorrow?

Today I read the story of Janet, the CBS anchor for the CBS TV station in Atlanta. Her story was one day a guy tried to hand her and her best friend a card like this. Her best friend took it but she said, “I was too cool to take it so I didn’t take it.” She said, “As my friend and I were walking out to get in the car, my friend took the card, ripped it up and tossed it on the ground.”

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She said, “I thought I could either be cool or this could change my life.” She said as her friend walked on she reached down and picked up the pieces, took it home and pasted it back together and prayed to receive Christ.

That is the power of a simple little tool.

Here are some communication tips. Let me just cover the first one: Recognize your personal style of witnessing. Your SHAPE not only determines your ministry in the church but also influences your style of mission in the world. Some of you are kind of right brain witness. That emphasizes personal experience all from the heart. Some of you are kind of left brain witness and emphasize facts and scriptures. It’s all in your mind. The Bible says, “*Love God with all your heart and all your mind...*” Both are needed. There’s many different styles of sharing the faith. Some by serving. Some of you are real intellectual and do the apologetic thing. Some of you are bringers. You like to just bring people to church. Some of you just like to share your testimony. Some of you are good at passing out a book or literature. Some of you are real confrontational. Don’t feel guilty about other people’s styles that you don’t use. Don’t judge other people who don’t use your style. Realize that Jesus never used the same approach twice.

*“A wise mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.”* Never use any putdowns. You don’t expect unbelievers to act like believers until they are. Tell stories, give examples, lighten up. Be yourself, be natural. Don’t try to be spiritual, be vulnerable and authentic. Memorize maybe a verse or two like Romans 3:23. Keep it simple. Most important of all, remember the Holy Spirit is using your words. Quit trying to convince anybody on your own.

1 Thessalonians 1:5, *“For when we brought you the good news it was not only with words but also with power for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true.”*

You never know when somebody is being resistant when inside God is working on them. Somebody who’s often protesting too much, guess what that’s saying? God’s working in their life.

### **Part 3**

Session Three: Fishing in My Mission Pond. Jesus’ very first words to His disciples were Matthew 4:19, *“Jesus called out, ‘Come follow Me and I will show you how to fish for the souls of men.’”* Notice two very important things about this passage:

1. Following and fishing go together. If you’re not fishing, that means you’re not following. He says, “If you follow Me, you’re going to be fishers of men.” If you’re not fishing for men, if you’re not doing any mission, you are not following Jesus Christ.
2. Introducing people to Christ, is like fishing, not hunting. Nobody’s taken more classes on evangelism than me and most of the classes I’ve taken they make witnessing seem like hunting. I have never liked to hunt. If you’re a hunter, great! God bless you! But only about five percent

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of the population like to hunt. That leaves 95% of us who don't understand that motif. Evangelism is not being a salesman. Many of you think, "I'm not a salesman." You don't have to be. The best definition of witnessing is not being a salesman; it's being a matchmaker. You're introducing people to Jesus Christ so they can fall in love.

Jesus already loves them but He wants them to love Him. And when they understand how much He loves them they will. Let me point out some contrasts between hunting and fishing because Jesus intentionally, I think, chose fishing.

Hunting is aggressive but fishing is far more a gentle sport.

Hunting is based on confrontation. Fishing is based on attraction. You attract them through the bait.

Hunting you go and shoot them. And a lot of evangelism training is like that. In fishing you get them to nibble on your bait.

In hunting, it uses a one size-fits-all bullet. You've got one bullet and you shoot it. Fishing allows you to use all kinds of different lures and hooks and baits and things like that.

In hunting you take your best shot and it's over. Take aim and bam and it scares the animal off if you miss. In fishing, reeling in a fish requires give and take and you get more than one chance. If they don't bite on the first nibble they come back around, swim back around and nibble again. Come back and nibble again.

Here's my favorite difference: In hunting the animal has no choice. But in fishing the fish gets a choice. He chooses whether to eat the bait or not.

Also in hunting you have to be a skilled shot to be a hunter. It's not a thing for amateurs because you're never going to hit anything if you're a bad shot. In fishing, anybody can put bait into the water.

In Jesus' day they only used nets for fishing. They didn't use rods and reels. Today we have far more methods to fish than they did in the disciples' day. Now we've got bass boats with sonar on them. All kinds of cool gizmos and gadgets. But thinking about this model of Jesus' fishing and evangelism are in parallel. Five keys to spiritual fishing:

You need to identify your personal fishing pond. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "*You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria and in every part of the world.*" Notice this verse tells us not only what to do but where to do it.

First, it tells us to be a witness. As we talked about a couple of weeks ago, a witness is somebody who just shares from experience. It's a definition of what God is doing in my life. You're not asked to be an attorney. You're not trying to argue or persuade. There are those who are called to do that. But God doesn't expect you to argue anybody into heaven. He does expect you to share what's happened to you. Anybody can do that.

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Then He tells us where. He says, “... *in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria and in every part of the world.*” We talked about this but I want to cover it again. What does this mean? What is your Jerusalem? Where were the disciples? They were in Jerusalem when Jesus said this to them. So He’s saying you start where you are. Your Jerusalem is where you are. You’re not in Jerusalem but your Jerusalem is this town you live in and this sphere of influence and the relationships you have. Your network. You start where you are. Your Jerusalem is your family and friends, your co-workers, the people that are closest to you.

Then you go to Judea. Judea was like the county next door. Jesus says you go to people who are nearby and that means you’re to go to people, like, in Orange County, in Southern California.

Then He says, you go to Samaria. Samaritans were ethnically and culturally different from the Jews. Now Jesus is saying I want you to go to people of different culture who live near you. Maybe they have a different language, a different ethnic background. Do you know anybody who has a different language than you do? You do if you live in Southern California. You do if you use fast food. All you have to do is go to a fast food or cleaner and you are in Samaria. All around us God has brought the world to Southern California. One hundred and eighty six languages are spoken in Los Angeles county. You don’t have to go very far to get to your Samaria. Those are people who speak different than you, are culturally background-different than you. You start in your Jerusalem, your family and friends.

Then you go to your Judea, the people around you in, say, driving distance. Then you go to your Samaria, people who are different from you but who are still in your sphere of influence.

Then He says go all around the world. Of course, with airplanes and the Internet that’s literally possible. God holds you responsible for the people you already have a relationship with.

First you start with the world around you and this is your Jerusalem. In the inner circle is yourself. You’ve got to make sure you’re a believer. Then the next circle out is your immediate family. The next circle out is your relatives. The next circle are your close friends. Then your neighbors and business associates. Finally your acquaintances. Who do you start first with? Those closest to you. God holds you responsible for the people you already have relationship with. First you start with your own family and friends.

Jesus told one man, “*Go home and tell your family and friends. Tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how He’s shown mercy on you.*” Have you noticed the apostles, that many of them were related? Andrew went and got his brother and led Peter to Christ. Philip brought Nathaniel. Brothers were all there together. Then you go to co-workers. Paul converted Priscilla and Aquilla who were fellow tent makers. In Matthew 9, Matthew holds a party for other tax collectors to introduce them to Jesus. He was a tax collector. Some of you could have a party for realtors or accountants or whatever your profession is. Your co-workers. Then the people you work with, your acquaintances and your relatives, your close friends. Then there are people who just cross your path. When Jesus met the woman at the well, He was just going to get a glass of water. He was thirsty. He stopped for refreshment at the fast food place. She was cross cultural. He asked the waitress for a drink and starts up a spiritual conversation with her.

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Have you ever thought about how many people just come across your path on a normal day? People you just bump into – gas station attendants, waitresses, check-out persons, bank tellers, all these people. I estimate maybe five or ten of those a day. These are people you never really get to know but at some moment in your life you have a common ground with them and you could take advantage of it and at least invite them to church. The Bible has a lot of examples of this. Philip was out hitchhiking one day and he talks to the guy and tells him about the Lord.

But it starts with the people closest to you. How many of you came to Saddleback church because you were told about it or invited by somebody else? Basically 100%. Many of you accepted Christ here and many of you are going to heaven because somebody cared enough to tell you.

Question: Who have you cared enough to tell? Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you? You are the only Christian some people know. And God has intentionally put people around you, nonbelievers, intentionally chose them to be around you because He cares about them and He wants them to know Him. We must care because God cares. There are people all around you who need to hear the good news. You need to make a list and invite them. Think of the names of some friends, some neighbors, some co-workers. Two conditions: 1) people you care about, and 2) people who don't know Jesus.

There are five circles there representing your life. If you came up with three people in each of those circles, you would have fifteen people on your prayer list that you can begin praying, "God show me a way that I can share the good news with them. Make them tender, make them soft, make them receptive." If you start praying, you won't even have to plan it. God will provide the way. God has a way of softening hearts of the people you pray for. If each person here had fifteen people, imagine this: In November and December nearly 4000 people here at Saddleback are going to go through CLASS 401. If each person made a list of 15 people to pray for – identified and begin praying and cultivating – that means we would be cultivating 60,000 Orange County residents for Jesus Christ. Do you think that would make a difference? It would.

The starting point – Step One: Identify your fishing pond.

Point two in learning to fish for men: Learn about the kind of fish in your pond. You've got to know what they're like in order to reach them. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, "*To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those without the law I became like a person without the law and to those who are weak I became like the weak so I could win the weak. I have become all things to all people so I could save some of them in any way possible. I do this all because of the good news so I can share in its blessing.*" You have to know the kind of people you're trying to reach. The Bible says, "*Every prudent man acts out of knowledge.*"

Point: The more you know about a person, the easier it is to reach them. That's why you start with those closest to you.

What do you want to know? Two or three things: What are their interests, needs and hurts? The Bible says over and over again that Jesus knew what people were thinking. No wonder He was so effective. He knew their needs. He knew their interests. He knew their hurts.

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If you're going to reach people, you need to understand their needs, their hurts and their interests and then share how Jesus Christ can meet those needs or hurts or interests.

At the base of your brain on the brain stem is a thing called the RAS or the reticular activating system. You can find this in any neurology book. It will tell you there is a RAS at the base of your brain. That is the filter that God has put in your brain that keeps you from having to consciously respond to every stimuli that happens. For instance: Can you hear the air conditioning blowing? Can you hear people coughing? Yes, the moment you focus on it you can. But most of the time you cut it out. Why? Because it doesn't get through the filter. If you had to consciously respond to every sight, sound, taste, smell, feeling, stimulus in life you'd go crazy because you're consciously being bombarded by thousands of stimuli.

God graciously put a filter in your mind that everything that hits you in life doesn't get your attention. In fact, there are only three things that get your attention. If you're a parent, you are interested in this. But if you're a pastor you're interested in it as a speaker and if you are going to share with anybody you're going to be interested in knowing what are the three things that get people's attention. What are the things that pass through the reticular activating system?

1. Things we value. Things we value get our attention.
2. Things that threaten us get our attention.
3. Things that are unique and different get your attention.

I happen to believe that the last two are not legitimate ways of sharing the good news. You don't threaten people into heaven because fear evangelism usually lasts about as long as the fear does. And the things that are unique, if you use a gimmick next week you have to have a bigger gimmick and it keeps going.

So the best way to reach people for Christ is talk about things they value. When I talk about things you value on Sunday morning I've got your attention. If I'm talking about something you don't think has any value, you're thinking about, "When am I going home?" or "What are we going to have for dinner?"

For instance, have you ever decided to buy a refrigerator and all of a sudden you start seeing refrigerator ads everywhere? They were there all along. You just weren't getting them through your filter because you didn't value them. But the moment you value them, all of a sudden you see them everywhere. Have you ever bought a new car and all of a sudden you see that car everywhere? It was there all along. But it wasn't getting through your reticular activating system.

But once you value something it gets your attention. So if you want to reach your friend, your neighbor, your parents, your children, your relative – whoever – for Christ, you must figure out what they value. Their needs, their hurts and their interests. That's what they value.

If you've read the book Purpose-Driven Church you know that we started Saddleback with a community survey and went door-to-door to discover the needs, hurts, and interests of the people I talked to. I talked to hundreds of people over a twelve-week period saying, "What do you need? What are your hurts? What are your interests?" I just listened and I wrote them all down.

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We came up with a typical target called Saddleback Sam and Samantha, the typical south county resident. You've seen these before. They are characteristics of what they're like.

The second thing you need to ask is what do I have in common with them? Once you know their needs and hurts and their interests of the fish in your pond, you want to ask what do I have in common with them?

1 Corinthians 9:22-23, *"Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him. I do this to get the gospel to them and also for the blessing I myself receive when I see them come to Christ."* Circle "common ground". This is the fundamental secret of telling other people about Jesus Christ. Find a common connection. The Bible says that Jesus did this. Mark 4:33, *"With many stories like these He [Jesus] presented His message to them, fitting the stories to their experience and maturity."*

Two principles: Before you can share the good news you must find common ground with that friend, that relative, that co-worker that you know. You've got to find common ground. Two, before you can reach them you must be able to relate to them. That's why you're a better witness at reaching your best friend than anybody else.

You need to know what do I have in common with them. Set down and make a list of the areas you have in common with the unbelievers in your life. Do we like the same hobbies? Do we like the same TV shows? Do we like the same kind of food? Do we like the same sporting events? What do I have in common? Do we have the same kind of job issues? The same problems with our kids? Are we the same age? Do we like the same kind of music? Make a list of what you have in common with the people that God has put around your life and realize why He put them there, so you could get to know them and share the good news with them.

The third principle of spiritual fishing: Remember that fish get hungry at different times. Some are hungry in the morning, some are hungry at night, some are hungry in the middle of the day, sometimes they're not hungry at all. The Bible says, *"Be wise in the way that you act towards those who are not believers."* This is called receptivity. Receptivity is the question "How open are they to the good news?"

Sometimes people are very open to the gospel and sometimes very closed to it. Sometimes they'll talk to you about it and sometimes they don't want to talk about it at all. This changes. Receptivity changes. It's important to realize that people go through a process to receive Jesus. They have to be approached in different ways, depending on how receptive or non-receptive they are.

Here are some verses out of the Bible that talk about spiritual receptivity:

*"Listen to me you stubborn hearted, you who are far from righteousness."* There are some people in your life who are far away from God. They're not very receptive.

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Jesus said to an unbeliever, realizing this man's understanding, Jesus said to him, "*You are not far from the kingdom of God.*" Here's a guy who wasn't so far. He was close to the kingdom of God.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians, "*He has brought this good news of peace to you Gentiles, you who were very far away from Him and to us Jews who were very near.*" Why were the Jews nearer to God than the Gentiles? Because they'd had the Bible for thousands of years. They'd been walking with God. They'd heard the Ten Commandments and those kind of things.

The Bible says, "*Now you belong to Christ Jesus. Though you were once far away from God now you have been brought near to Him because of the blood of Christ.*" People are at different stages of spiritual receptivity.

The parable of the soils is a good example of this. Jesus says in Matthew 13 a guy goes out to sow seed and it lands on four kinds of soil. He says the hard soil represents the defensive heart and the shallow soil represents the impulsive heart and the soil with weeds represents the distracted heart and the good soil represents the receptive heart. If you're a farmer, where do you want to sow most of your seed? In the good soil. You don't want to waste it on people that aren't receptive. God is responsible for making people receptive. You are responsible for scattering the seed on good soil. So here is the fact: Some people are close to making the commitment to Christ in your life while others in your life have a long way to go. Effective evangelism relies on assessing how receptive a person is and then helping them take the next step.

So I've come up with a little diagram: How people come to Christ and then grow. I took a scale called the Engle scale and revised it and then combined it with the purpose-driven process to show the stages people go from total pagan to committed mature believer. It starts with minus six and goes to positive five.

At Minus Six are the people who are self-satisfied. They're skeptical, they're resistant, they're spiritual apathetic. We call that the Resistant Stage. Do you know anybody like that in your life? You probably do. There's people in your life that just don't want to hear about it.

At Minus Five are the people who become aware of an unmet need or spiritual void. You become receptive. Do you know what usually causes that? A crisis. Something happens and their world falls apart and all of a sudden they become aware of an unmet need or a spiritual void in life. And they're receptive.

Minus Four. Some people you know are like this. They begin looking for answers to questions or solutions to problems. I call this the Seeker Stage. They're just checking out. They could be checking out anything, not necessarily Jesus. They're just looking for spiritual truths.

Minus Three. This is what I call the Consideration Stage. They begin to consider the difference between themselves and believers. They look around and they notice that believers are different from what they are and they start figuring out what the differences are.

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Minus Two is the Understanding Stage and that's where they learn why and how to become a Christian.

Minus One is when they're ready to believe and receive Christ. That's the Ready Stage. The fruit is ripe.

People always go through these stages. Everybody in your life who is not a believer is at one of these six stages. Far away, in the middle part, or close to becoming a Christian. Your job is to figure out where they are and take the appropriate response.

Once you become a Christian, that's Ground Zero, then you start a new life in Christ and you start moving around the Baseball Diamond.

Plus One. You get baptized and connected to a church family. Membership and CLASS 101.

Plus Two. You start practicing the habits that are necessary for spiritual growth. That's maturity. CLASS 201.

Plus Three. You start using your God given talents and shape to serve other people. That's Ministry CLASS 301.

Plus Four. When you start sharing the good news with non-believers. That's the Mission class that you're in right now, CLASS 401

Plus Five. When you balance it all in your life and live out one's purpose to the glory of God, which is the fifth purpose, Magnification of worshiping God with your life. We'll share that in CLASS 501.

Quiz: At what stage would a person make these statements?

"I think religion is a crutch for weak people." Minus Six. The Resistant Stage.

"Please show me how I can become a Christian." Minus One. Ready.

"I'm really fed up with the stress I'm under." Minus Five. Receptivity. They've become aware of an unmet need or spiritual void. They're stressed out.

"I think everybody's going to heaven." It could be either Minus Six or Minus Two. They could be self-satisfied, skeptical and resistant. Or they could be Minus Two and just learn how and why to become a Christian. It's an understanding issue. They may not be closed; maybe they're just uninformed, uneducated, ignorant of the true gospel.

"I've been reading a New Age book on spirituality." Minus Four. They're a seeker. A person who's reading a New Age book is a good person to talk to. They're interested, they're open, they're just going down the wrong path.

"Why do Christians seem so happy?" Minus Three. They're looking at the differences between themselves and believers. The Consideration Stage.

Here are some insights:

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Based on what I've just shared with you, you need to understand that evangelism is a process. Sharing your good news with other people is a process of moving people through the stages. You respond in different ways based on the process.

People move through these stages at different speeds. Some move real quickly. Some it takes years. It's different for different folks.

People often require multiple exposures at each stage before moving on. By the way, some of you wonder why, even though week end services are designed for seekers, why don't we give a "come forward" invitation, a Billy Graham styled invitation every week. Or why don't I even lead in a prayer of commitment and really press people to accept Christ every single week? I'll tell you why: We have found it is more effective to draw the net every few weeks than to continually draw it week after week after week. Why? Every time an unbeliever says, "No", their heart gets harder. And if you press them before they're ready to make a decision, if they say "No" ten times before they say "Yes" you're making it more easy for them to say "No" than "Yes". Instead of getting up and saying, "Today is the day of salvation. You must accept Christ today. We're going to lock the doors until you make that decision. We're going to wait and sing 52 verses of 'Just As I Am' and we're going to wait and wait, just one more verse. Somebody's holding out."

If you went to a grocery store and all you went to the store was for milk and every time you went they said, "Here! You must buy steak!" *But I just came for milk.* "No, you must buy steak. Today is the day for steak! You may not have steak tomorrow. It may not be on sale. Today is the day for steak. You must buy steak today." Do you know what you'd do? You'd stop going to that grocery store. But if you present broccoli and mashed potatoes and steak, they'll get hungrier. And if they start coming, I almost guarantee you they'll come to Christ, if they'll just come back. What we've found is if a person comes for the first time to ask somebody to change a forty year lifestyle on the basis of a forty minute message is asking a lot. So we don't. We recognize here that evangelism is a process. A lot of people come and they say, "That makes sense. I like what that guy's saying. It seems logical. I'm not saying 'No', I just need some time to think about it. I'm not saying, "No", I'm just not saying, 'Yes'. I just need some time to think about it." I will often say, "Take the time to make the right decision." I'm confident that if they really think about it, they will make the right decision. God is working in their hearts.

What we do is every week on Sunday morning, is present what it means to live the Christian life. We hold it up. Even when we're not talking about evangelistic things. We're talking about Christian growth things, which was the last eight weeks. They're not all messages for seekers; they were messages for believers on moving around the bases. But even those we present to a unbeliever in a way that they say, "That makes sense. Oh, that's what a Christian is." I pray and wait for God's timing, then about every third or fourth week we'll draw the net. And it may be that we have 30, 40, 50 people come to Christ on one weekend.

It makes it kind of hard for the people out at the New Believer table, cause it's kind of feast or famine. We may have two people go out to the table one week and two people go the next week and then the next week 400. Then two and two and then 50. That is intentional. We recognize that people move through the stages at different speeds and they need multiple exposures to

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make their decision. You didn't come to Christ the very first time you heard it probably. You probably had to think about it a little bit. That's ok.

Here's the problem. A person can get stuck at any stage and the number one reason they get stuck is fear.

Every stage requires a different response by me. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "*My work was to plant the seed in the hearts. Apollos' work was to water. But God, not we, made the garden grow in your heart.*" You need to figure out what stage people are and then take the appropriate steps. Pastor Brad is going to talk to us about what to do at each stage.

Brad:

Do you know what it's like to stand up here after Rick Warren? I feel like those two Native Americans who were out in the Mojave Desert in the early part of this century. They were up on a hilltop and had a little fire and a little blanket and they did a little smoke signal. Just about that time the army tested one of the atomic bombs in the desert and this huge mushroom cloud went out. The two Native Americans looked at it and one said to the other, "It kind of makes you feel insignificant doesn't it?"

When you look at people in these different stages and you wonder, "Is there anything that can be done?" And the good news is yes.

What do you do when someone's at the Resistant Stage? This is Minus Six. They're skeptical, self-satisfied, resistant, spiritually apathetic. What do most people say? "I'll just walk away. There's nothing I can do. That nut's too hard to crack." They just don't believe there's a next step. But there are four.

1. You can pray for them. You can pray for them to become receptive. God has a way of softening hearts when we pray for them. While you're praying for them to become receptive, say a few prayers for yourself that you might have a little discernment about timing, that you might have some patience while they're taking their time to process all this. As their hearts are becoming softer as you pray, your heart will stay soft for them while you pray.

2. Build a relationship through love and service. They'll know you care for them and that they can trust you.

3. Invite them to a fun bridge event like Summer's End. I don't know the exact numbers, but it was way up in the high 30,000s (37,000, 38,000) that came to Summer's End and since that time hundreds of people have come to Christ through the ministry of Saddleback church. A lot of that happened because people came to that safe environment first and they just stuck.

4. What not to do with resistant people. Don't argue. You come across looking bad and worse, the gospel comes across as looking bad. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:23-26, "*Don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. The Lord's servants must not quarrel but be kind to everyone. They must be able to teach effectively and be patient with difficult people. They should gently teach those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change*

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*those people's hearts and they will believe the truth. Then they'll come to their senses and escape from the devil's trap for they've been held captive by him to do whatever he wants."*

Some people that we think are resistant are just simply unaware of the gospel or maybe the gospel has never been communicated to them in ways that they can understand. I've been to lots of church services and heard the gospel presented many ways. Most of the time as a Christian, as a minister, someone who has sort of been educated through the years, I didn't know what the guy was saying. So you know someone far from God, trying to find his way, comes in like a calf looking at a new gate. He just doesn't know what's going on there. It may be that they're not really resistant, they just need clarifying.

What do you do when someone is at the Receptive Stage? They're aware of an unmet need or a spiritual void in their life. This is Minus Five. There are several things you can do here:

1. Offer to help in a practical way. "Can I help you? Would you like to talk about that?"
2. Share a testimony about the same need. We've done a lot of work on developing your testimony and here's a place you can plug that in.
3. Tell them that you're praying for them. In the Resistant Stage, when we are praying for them, we might not say anything about it. But at this stage when we see just a crack in the door, a little openness, this is a good time to say, "I'm praying for you." Watch their countenance, their face. I don't care how hardhearted they've been, how far from God they've been. Just say to someone very tenderly, very sincerely, "I'll pray for you." And you'll sense something that shifts within them.
4. Ask open-ended questions that they can answer. "Would you want to tell me about the spiritual side of your life?" Like what Rick did in the Bridge illustration and he asked the person at the appropriate time, "Where do you see yourself in all of this?" and "How do you see yourself in your relationship with God?"
5. Assess if they're ready to skip to stage negative two or negative one. They're now at negative five and you don't just need to conclude they're not going to come to Christ right now because they still have Four and Three. It may be after all of this they want to come to Christ. You don't say, "You can't. You've got two more steps." Assess, allow God the Holy Spirit to give you some discernment there. They might be ready to move right then.

Definition of evangelism by Sam Williams: "Evangelism is helping people discover how God is already at work in their lives." God's fingerprints are all over your past if you'll just look. Some people just need a little help recognizing that it's been God. God's been up to something in their life. Evangelism is helping them see that. Often these people don't even know that it's been God or that God is the one they're looking for.

What makes people receptive? What will move them from resistance to receptivity? Change. A change in their environment. Change is hard for all of us. It's a necessary part of life. It is a part of life. It's going to happen. It's going to either be positive or negative. Change will come and when change comes there's a level of openness.

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There's a Holmes Stress Scale that's very popular. He attached certain points of stress to this scale so that if a person had a total of 300 points in any given year, they might be in big trouble. They might be ready to crash and burn. You can kind of determine your stress load. This is to help you determine where other people are. "Divorce". You know the startling statistics of divorce in America. It's a sad statistic. But in the midst of that sadness there's a huge opportunity. A huge opening for the gospel. People who are at broken places in their lives are trying to find a way to get the pieces of their life back together. "Gaining a new family member" – having a baby. That's a change. A lot of changing. Those parents are looking for ways to raise these kids well. There's some receptivity. "Change in residence." This is what I'm getting ready to go through. My mom is here this weekend. She said to me, "It just dawned on me. You're going to be moving 2700 miles. You're going to be plugging in immediately to a church family. You have that to look forward to, you know it's there, they'll love you, it's a great place." But what about people who are just moving for a job. They come to a new place, not a whole lot of connection to look forward to, no sense that there will be some support and love and care and encouragement. Don't you imagine those people flounder? Don't you imagine they come in and there's an overwhelming need within them? They might not be able to identify it, but can you see how every new person who moves into your neighborhood is somebody you ought to reach out to, love, give a little care, send them a pizza the day you see the truck unloading. (I'll give you my address as soon as I know it.) Give them a pizza and a Peace With God. The P & P approach to evangelism.

What do you do when someone is at the Seeker Stage? This is a great stage. They are looking for answers to questions or solutions to problems. This is the Negative Four Stage.

1. Invite them to weekend seeker services. There was a national survey that asked about 10,000 church-goers "What caused you to come to Christ and come to this church?" Seventy-nine per-cent said, "A friend or relative invited me." A moment ago almost everybody in this room said that was true for you. Do you understand how fortunate you are to have the kind of weekend services that you do, the kind of place where you can comfortably invite your friends, family members, neighbors, co-workers, fellow students. A safe place to hear a dangerous message. Do you know how fortunate you are?

A seeker service is not to replace your own personal witness. It's to assist you in your own personal witness. Lest you think all we do here is all seeker, this church does so much maturity it blows my mind – how much they do around here to build people up in Christ. There's a lot that they do to build people up in Christ. This whole class is to build people up in Christ. But there is that component that will help you and it's that weekend seeker opportunity and you need to take advantage of that.

2. Invite them to a seeker group. This is a small group setting where their questions are legitimized and there's a forum where they can push back or ask or probe deeper.

3. Give them a tape or reading materials. You don't want to choke them but just parcel those out at a good steady pace.

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4. Open a dialogue on spiritual issues with questions like, “Have you ever considered what Jesus said?” When someone’s at the Seeker stage, they’ll ask you questions. They don’t sound like spiritual questions but if you’re listening they are definitely spiritual questions. Like, “I know you had a death in your family recently and you seem to have so much calm through that.” They’re wondering “How? Why? How can I have that?” Or a job change or whatever. They see you in a tough place and somehow you carry through and they ask you about that. That’s a seeking opportunity. That’s a spiritual conversation. There are far more people around you at this stage than you realize. Our culture is filled with spiritual seekers.

The secular press has utilized the spiritual quest going on in America to sell magazines. *Life* magazine “Who is God?” or “Life After Death: The ultimate mystery.” *US News* “The Rekindling of Hell,” *Time* “Who is Jesus?” The best selling issues of *Time* magazine all featured articles about Jesus. *Newsweek* “The Search for Adam and Eve,” *U.S. News* “In God We Trust,” *Newsweek* “The Search for the Sacred: America’s quest for spiritual meaning,” *Time* “Can We Still Believe in Miracles?” *Time* “Is the Bible Fact or Fiction?” *US News* “Who Wrote the Bible?” “Rethinking the Resurrection,” “Jesus On Line: Who was He?” *Life* “The Search for Jesus”.

Why would the secular press give such cover page prominence to things related to Christianity? Because people are interested in it. It’ll sell magazines. People are interested. Do not believe the devil’s lie that your friends aren’t interested. They are interested. In great numbers they’re interested. They are far more ready to receive a word about the good news that you and I are to share than word of good news. We’re not trying to con people into a bad investment. This is good news and we ought to be eager to share it.

What do you do when someone’s at the Consideration Stage? That’s Negative Three. They begin to notice the real difference between themselves and believers. Here are several things you can do that will help them when they’re asking those kind of questions or making those kind of comments:

1. You can introduce them to other Christians. Get them around other Christians.

2. Invite them over to your small group. Like Matthew’s party. He invited a bunch of people over and there was Jesus. You want to get to know what Christianity is about, hang around some Christians.

What do you do when someone is at the Understanding Stage? This is Negative Two. This is a precious time in someone’s life. They need to understand why and how to become a Christian. Three things:

1. Explain God’s plan of salvation. Pastor Rick already went over the BASE card with you. Keep one of those with you all the time. That just explains, just lays it out, the plan of salvation.

2. Explain how you made your decision for Christ. We call that a testimony.

3. Help them see the benefits, implications and costs of following Christ.

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What do you do when someone's ready to receive Christ? That's Negative One.

Offer to lead them in a prayer of commitment. We need to remember something. We hear those prayers that pastors will lead from pulpits helping people voice, give expression, to their commitment to Christ. There's nothing magical about those words. It's just helping someone acknowledge their sinfulness and their need for a savior. It's quite simple really. You can just give some words to that. Just show them that it's not the words, it's their sincerity. If they say it in faith and trust in Christ, then God will save them. Just walk them through the prayer and don't be real uptight about the words you use.

What do you do after they have received Christ?

It doesn't stop there. Now you have a brand new brother or sister in the kingdom. You need to help them as they take their first steps.

Take them to CLASS 101. You go with them. It's very important to immediately get them plugged into an activity and they're more apt to do it if there's a familiar trusted person next to them. It will help them greatly. And the other side of that coin: It will help you greatly. Some of you have been running through the classes and you have just recently been through 101. But by the time you lead someone to Christ will be time for you again to go back to 101 and it will re-fire you up about what's all included in the life of this church as a member.

Encourage and attend their baptism. After the service today there was a baptism. Over 100 people I understand. People were packed in, they were standing on chairs. There were video cameras. The people getting ready to be baptized are lined up out into the parking lot. It was a beautiful sight to behold. You could tell when someone in the crowd knew someone who was getting ready to be baptized. They're kind of muscling their way through the crowd, getting right there to the front. Not only did they want to see the person they loved being baptized, they wanted the person being baptized to see them so they could say "I'm here. I'm on your team. I'm with you on this."

Get them into a new believers small group. This church emphasizes better than any church I've seen the need to grow people in Christ. Get them into a new believers small group. 2 Timothy 2:4 "*Work at bringing others to Christ.*" Circle "work". That speaks of intentionality. You work. You don't accidentally work. That's an intentional thing. We call that Purpose.

Rick:

We have prepared a little tool to help you in cultivating your friends. "Friendship Evangelism Planning Card: Tool for Cultivating Eternal Friendships." Write their name, assess what stage they are. Then you say, "What's my next step?" There are seven next steps to sharing based on where they are spiritually. Then accountability. Write down who you're going to tell about this person and what you're doing so they can check up with you. Write down the date at which they pass that step. Then a praise report. You could do this with someone in your family, a friend, neighbor, co-worker.

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Take the names off that circle of concerns that you filled out earlier and put them on this card. You can get all of these cards that you want. If you've got any ideas for improving it, go ahead because we're going to keep making it better and better till it's really a powerful tool. We'll have a little check-off list of what am I doing with each person in my life that I care about. Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific.

The steps in a plan for sharing your faith are you become aware, commit to prayer, show you care, be ready to share. Those are the steps. That's how you win a person to Christ.

A guy named Ron Johnson in May, 1974 accepted Christ and as he told somebody else about Christ and as they told somebody else and they told somebody else, it became a great "Amway downlink". These are actual people as a result of one person leading another, leading another... I could tell this story a thousand times over about Saddleback and the people who led people who led people.....Some of you are spiritual great-great-great-great grandparents. That's a great thing.

## **Part 4**

God's Global Plan for Your Life: Becoming a World Class Christian. God's plan has always been global. He's always been interested in the entire world. Jesus said in Mark 16:15, "*Go everywhere in the world and tell the good news to everyone.*" Circle "everywhere" and "everyone". That means no place is off limits. The Bible says in Mark 10:13 a verse about the Second Coming "*The good news must first be made known in every nation before the end time finally comes.*"

Many Christians mistakenly assume that the responsibility for taking the good news to the whole world is the responsibility of missionaries and pastors. But the Bible clearly points out that the Great Commission is for every believer. It is your job and my job to take the Gospel, not just to Jerusalem, but to Judea, Samaria and the whole world. It's not just for super saints or missionaries or pastors but we are all called to be on-mission.

When Jesus told His followers to go to the whole world they were probably overwhelmed. It's a big world especially if your only means of getting there is on foot. Or by donkey. That's basically what they had. Those are the options when Jesus said, "Go to the whole world." You've got foot. You've got donkey. And maybe you've got ships in the Mediterranean. That's it. So it was probably overwhelming when He said I want you to go everywhere, to everyone.

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Today we've got planes, trains and automobiles. On top of that we've got radios and television and fax and cell phones and all kinds of other stuff and it's a small world after all! Now, thanks to the Internet, the world has gotten even smaller. Jesus may have had the whole world in His hand but you, like no other generation in history, have the whole world at your fingertips. You can now literally take the message to millions of people all around the world from your bedroom. We have tools today that no other generation of Christians have ever had. God has never withdrawn the Great Commandment or the Great Commission, but with Internet and digital communication and air transportation to practically every planet - every part of the planet, That's our inter-galactic mission we'll be starting next month! We'll be doing alien immersion and a few other things. *Just seeing if you're listening!* That's 601 - going inter-galactically. This is kind of like the Bates motel - you check in but you never check out! ... 901...! Actually when you finish 401 we're going to give you a little Millennial Member pin, when you finish 501 we're going to give you a pair of jeans!

God has called us to go to every part of the planet, and it's still there but the task has gotten a whole lot easier because our world is shrinking. When you can fly to Tokyo faster than you can drive to Eureka, something has changed. You can actually get to the other side of the Pacific faster than you can get to the Oregon border by car. It's just not that big of a deal going global anymore. You could go globally on some kind of trip, short-term trip expression.

Let me give you three definitions. We define mission here at Saddleback as the overall task of the church to fulfill its five purposes as given in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Those are Worship, Evangelism, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry or as we say here Membership, Maturity, Ministry, Mission and Magnification. The five purposes that are in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Evangelism is introducing people to Jesus Christ, sharing the good news. But Missions (with the "s") is fulfilling the five purposes, the Mission of the church in a different culture than your own. What on earth is God doing? The Bible says in Habakkuk 1:5, "*Look at the nations and be amazed. Watch and be astounded at what I will do. For I am doing something in your day, something you wouldn't believe even if I told you about it.*" If ever there was a time that verse was true it's right now. Our Minister of Training for mission projects, Lynne Ellis, is going to come and give us an overview of the world.

Lynne:

I cannot think of a more exciting time to be a part of this team at this church in this time in history. God has such a call on us to go out and reach and I'm so excited at the place we will be a year from now. God has impact for us as well as the world. Sometimes when we talk about missions it can feel a little bit overwhelming because we think of those far off places and don't really have a picture of where God is in all of that. I want to paint a little bit of a picture where the church is. It's much bigger than you think.

Christians in the world will pass the two billion mark according David Barry, leading researcher in church around the world. The church is growing explosively outside of the western countries. That's not in America. In 1990, 81% of the believers were Caucasian where in the year 2000 40% of the believers will be Caucasian. That means 60% of the church is in third world

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countries. They meet in brick buildings, living rooms, mud huts or by banana trees. But that's where the church is at. In Brazil the church was growing seventeen to twenty thousand new believers a week. In China, growing twenty to thirty thousand new believers every day. That is amazing.

The availability of the Bible in other languages has increased dramatically. In the 1800's it was in only 67 languages but now by the year 2000, twenty-eight hundred languages of the Bible. The Jesus film has been seen by over two billion people and over one hundred million have prayed to receive Christ. This is the most effective evangelistic tool we have today. The "Jesus" film is the story of the life of Jesus and it is written in many, many languages. I've seen it. I've seen it work in Tanzania when I spent some time there a few years ago. We went out into the bush and we showed the "Jesus" film. They were in awe as they saw Jesus speaking in a language they understood and many people came to know Christ.

The number of mission agencies is increasing. In the 1900s there were 600 mission agencies. By the year 2025, 8500 estimated agencies will be happening. The church is cooperating in world missions partnership as never before. That's part of the excitement, that denominations are coming together, church and parachurch organizations are coming together to reach people.

Let's look at the world situation today: With six billion people in the world, four billion are without Christ. There's still over two thousand unreached people groups in the world – 1.7 billion people have no known visible witness for Christ. They're never going to hear about Christ unless someone goes to their culture to tell them. That means one third of the world today couldn't receive Christ even if they wanted to because there are no means.

There are four words that best describe the unreached people group in our world: 1) Asian, 2) Urban (we often think of missions and think of the jungles, but most of the people are in cities and mega cities), 3) Islamic, and 4) Youth under the age of twenty. Our youth are our own mission field here in our Jerusalem as well as throughout the world. I heard a statistic that in Vietnam in a few years over 60% of the population will be youth.

Urbanization will increase dramatically during the next two decades. Probably most of the trips we encourage you to go on, to connect with, you will be going to cities and towns, not jungles. For the first time in history, more people live in cities than rural. And by 2015 there will be twenty-one cities over ten million in size. By 2025 over 25% of the world's population will live in squatter settlements connected to these huge cities. Youth under twenty continue to increase. By the year 2010, there will be 2.4 billion youth under the age of twenty.

Los Angeles is the most ethnically diverse city in the world with over 176 languages spoken there. We talk about some of the next steps you can take. One is taking an urban plunge into Los Angeles. You can educate yourself and experience the cultural diversity we have just in our back door.

The problem isn't the harvest, it's the lack of harvesters. In Matthew 9:37 Jesus said to His followers, "*There are many people to harvest but there are only a few workers to help harvest them.*" People are ready to receive Christ. There's a way to do it. What's missing is our reluctance to take that next step.

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Romans 10, says, “*Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved.*” But before the people can ask the Lord for help they must believe in Him. Before they believe in Him they must hear about Him. And for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them. And before someone can go and tell them, that person must be sent.

The biggest shame would be if we sat through this class and got excited and went out those doors and did nothing. We’re called to go. And I guarantee you your socks will be blessed off if you take that next step in missions. The Bible says, “*Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them.*” At Saddleback we believe in saturation evangelism which means using every available means at every available time to reach every available person.

Rick:

From the very first day of this church it has been our goal to send people out. On March 30th of 1980, we had the trial run service. As I stood up in front of sixty people at that trial run service the week before Easter, I had just turned 26 years old. I laid out the vision for this church to those sixty people. Many of you have read this vision many times. I want to call your attention to what I said to those very first people when we were starting this church: “It is the dream of sending out hundreds of career missionaries and church workers all around the world and empowering every member for a personal life mission in the world. It is the dream of sending our members out by the thousands on short-term mission projects to every continent. It is the dream of starting at least one new daughter church a year (we have over 30 now in our 20<sup>th</sup> year). ... I stand before you today and state in confident assurance that these dreams will be realized because they’re inspired by God.”

The strength of any church is judged not on its seating capacity but on its sending capacity. Crowds don’t impress me. They just don’t. I’ve spoken twice in the Super Dome. That holds about 50,000. Crowds just aren’t that big of a deal to me. What turns my crank is when I see individual lives committed to membership, maturity, ministry, mission to the glory of God. We bring them in, we build them up, we train them for but we don’t keep them here. We send them out to reach the whole world. So it’s our sending capacity that is our strength, not how many people we seat in an auditorium. You don’t judge the health of an army by how many people sit in a cafeteria and eat chow. You judge the health of an army by how many people are out on the front lines fighting the battle.

Saddleback’s theme for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is Psalms 67:2. This is the verse I’ve chosen for this next stage of our church’s life. “*Send us around the world with news of Your saving power and Your eternal plan for all mankind.*” Tonight as you graduate from 401, I want you to be really aware of the three goals that we have for this stage of our church.

1. To have every 401 graduate to go on at least one mission experience in each of the four areas of our Acts 1:8 – in our community, in our country, a cross cultural experience within the US and a project in another country. You may spend most if not the great majority of your life focusing on Jerusalem, the people closest to you, and that is right and correct. But I believe that God wants you to at least experience cross culture and overseas mission so that you can be a

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World Class Christian. Even if you just do it one time for one week, a few days or whatever, so that you experience what it means to see God at work around the world. That's our first goal.

2. Our second goal is to have 25% of our members involved in some type of volunteer on-mission experience every year – either in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, or the uttermost parts of the world. In practical terms: If we have 4000 people go through 401 this month and next month and if we were to send 4000 people on some kind of on-mission experience next year, how does that break down? The international mission board which the world divided into fourteen regions. If we were to send 4000 next year in some kind of experience that would mean 1000 people going every quarter or ten people every two weeks going to one of the fourteen regions. That is doable. And I'm coming after you! If you've made it this far around the bases, you are the cream of the crop. I'm not going to treat you guys like a treat seekers. Or like I treat baby, namby-pamby, weakling Christians. You are the Saddleback army and you're not going to stay in the mess hall.

Every once in a while I hear people say, "I'm just not getting fed." Let me tell you why. It's because they're not involved in mission and ministry. If you have a sponge and you put it in some water, it soaks up as much as it can. You can leave it there a day, ten days or ten years, it can't soak up any more. It's saturated. You must take the sponge out and wring it out. It gives it all out and then it's ready to go back in the water and receive some more. But it can't receive any more until it's given out. You can leave it there for a hundred years but it's not going to receive any more.

Some of you have reached a plateau in your spiritual growth because you're sitting soaking, soaking, soaking... But in 1999, last month, and all of 2000, I'm going to wring you out! Count on it! Then we'll put you back in the water. You say, "Look at all I'm learning!" You can't learn any more because God wants you to practice what you already know.

3. A third goal is to see five hundred career missionaries called by God out of Saddleback church. For many of you this is going to be a second career in the second half of your life. It's going to be a half time career, much like Steve Rutenbar. He was a very successful businessman, owned three businesses here in the Saddleback Valley and there was a turning point in his life when how much money do you want to make. He said, "It's not in a business. God's called me as a messenger." We sent him to Russia for a year.

You may not be going somewhere for a year but you may be. God may call you. You just need to listen to the voice of God and say, "What is God going to do in the second half of my life? The kids are grown, they're out, married."

God is going to do some great things and we're going to talk about those in just a minute. But as Lynne said it would be a waste of time to take this class and do nothing as a result. As the verse says, "*Now that you know these things you'll be blessed if you do them.*" Lynne's going to come talk about some very practical assignments.

Lynne:

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For some of you missions may be a whole new topic and you may feel a little like a deer caught in the headlights. “What am I supposed to do?” I want to make this as simple as possible. We worked really hard at coming up with some easy ideas in here’s how you can take a next step tomorrow or tonight. I want to walk through this “Quick Start to Mission Opportunity”. It is our goal that you would commit to one activity in each of these areas.

First, look in the “Local Jerusalem”.

Bring a friend to the six-week seeker series. That is your first Jerusalem activity you can do.

Be part of the Seekers follow up call team. If you want some opportunities to practice telling your story or listening to someone else and hearing where their heart’s at and what are the needs that God has placed on them. This is a great ministry to get involved in. Seekers who come to our services and are looking for someone to talk to about their questions and spiritual things.

Become a small group missions champion in the Jerusalem box. We need people to be in small groups who will champion the cause of missions. It doesn’t mean taking your group overseas or it might be. But for now what we’re asking is you’ll receive information from us and be the person that educates your small group or puts new opportunities in front of them. Be the person who’s thinking about, “What about the rest of the world? How can we make a difference as a small group?”

The “North America” box:

House a visiting pastor or missionary. What a great opportunity to learn from someone who’s lived or been in another country, another part of the country, another part of the world.

Cross Cultural experience:

Urban plunge. Experience LA’s cultural diversity. We have a program we want to put in your hands. It’s something you can do as a small group. We’ll offer group trips through our Missions Team where you can go down to LA. It might be for an evening, all day or an overnight experience. We’ll experience the diversity of LA. It’ll be educational and we’ll do some service projects. A great opportunity.

Christmas outreach for kids in Santa Ana. December 19<sup>th</sup> we want to take a group of people to Santa Ana to host a Christmas outreach they’re going to do in a park. There’s children in the Santa Ana projects that live in these apartment complexes – whole families live in a one or two bedroom apartment. We want to do a carnival outreach for them so they can get connected to some local Hispanic churches in the community. So we’re going to be aiding the local Hispanic churches of that community to host an outreach. What a great opportunity.

Along with that ministry we’re helping a project site in Santa Ana where they do tutoring for kids after school. If you have an afternoon, a couple of hours once a week you could offer – or

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maybe every other week – that you could spend some time sharing a little bit of your knowledge and a lot of your heart. Just loving on some kids that need some special attention.

Sort and bag shoes for the poor. On December 4<sup>th</sup> in our parking lot from 2-5 we're going to sort shoes. That sounds like a funny thing to do but there are a lot of homeless people walking around with no shoes. And if some Sunday night you want to go with me down to the streets of LA to hand out jackets and food to the homeless with "Jackets for Jesus" you'll see a lot of people with duct tap or something else... rags wrapped around their shoes. We'll sort shoes and take them down to the missions in LA. They get put in containers that go to Russia, in bags to Mexico. It's a great opportunity to provide some things for the poor.

International: Here's some quick start for some mission opportunities.

Fill a shoebox for Operation Christmas Child. Many of you have already done that. If you haven't, throw out a pair of shoes from your own closet and use your own shoebox because we've run out. Fill it full of some stuff for kids and next week turn it in with five dollars and mark what age group of kid you did that for.

They also need help at the processing center. They moved Operation Christmas Child processing center to Irvine. It's closer to us because we were staffing it with the most volunteers. They're always in need.

There's Internet prayer ministries for regions of the world. We've set up an opportunity for you to start praying for the fourteen regions around the world where our Southern Baptist missionaries, our career missionaries are living and sharing with people. They are emailing us with prayer requests that they have. That is a great place to start. Praying.

Sponsor a child in a developing country. That's real easy for you. We have a World Vision table in the back and you can bombard that after this is over. The table will be up at the weekend services every week. Pray about that. Just think if all of us sponsored a kid how many children would be impacted.

I hope God was moving in you as we walked and read through these. Check off a few of these boxes.

Let me tell you about another Jerusalem opportunity that we've had at our church year after year – Holiday Sharing. We take in gifts and food and gift certificates and money, whatever you would like to give, to share out of your abundance and your holiday to share with those that don't have. If you would like to be a part of Holiday Sharing this would be a great place to be involved in.

Rick:

The next page is a page of mission projects you can do on your own. Everyday mission practical opportunities.

Many of you are unaware that since Saddleback has started we have been supporting nearly 5000 missionaries financially through the cooperative program through the International Mission

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Board. We've given to these missionaries for nearly twenty years. But we wanted to do more than just financially give. We reached out to the International Mission Board and said we want to partnership with you in spreading the Purpose-Driven Church paradigm, the strategy and training by providing volunteers, manpower through Saddleback church. Last week the fourteen regional leaders of the International Mission Board and their wives came to Saddleback for a week. You heard some of those testimonies and got to meet some of them.

Here are some practical things you can do in our partnership. Consider which of the fourteen regions of the world you would like to learn about, pray for, study, and eventually serve through an on-mission trip or by being a state side team partner which you could do research and prayer for an unreached people group.

These fourteen regional leaders oversee nearly 5000 missionaries who work with national Christian leaders and the unreached people groups.

Here are the people you can pray for. We now have an e-mail site, [imb@Saddleback.com](mailto:imb@Saddleback.com) where these missionaries from fourteen areas are sending in their prayer requests daily and if you'd like to get them just let us know and we'll put you on the prayer team for getting them too. You can sign up to receive these daily email prayer requests from missionaries.

And use the international missionary signup sheet which we'll talk about in a bit

Get information at the International Mission Board table. We're fortunate. This is a special 401 class. We have Rob and Kathy Haddaway who are regional leaders for all of eastern South America. They are going to be at the table after the meeting is over. You can get information on any of the fourteen regions. They'll be glad to talk with you about South America or any region.

God is doing some amazing things around the world with the Purpose-Driven Church paradigm and as we close tonight I want to give you an update.

Colossians 1:6, *"This same good news that came to you is going out all over the world. It is changing lives everywhere just as it changed yours that very first day you heard and understood the truth about God's great kindness to sinners."* We didn't plan this but Saddleback ended up becoming the mother of a movement. There are literally thousands and thousands of churches copying everything this church does. The book Purpose-Driven Church has sold over a million copies in fourteen languages and most recently it was approved by the Communist party for publication above ground in China. This thing has exploded. I get email, hundreds, daily, literally from around the world. I wish I had another three hours just to share them with you. People are saying, "We're looking at the Saddleback model in Russia... in Kenya... in Brazil... in Hong Kong... Singapore... India... Turkey... Poland... Norway..." Literally all around the world. There are not hundreds of churches but thousands upon thousands of churches that are copying everything we've done to build Saddleback church around the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, around the five purposes producing balance and health. It's grown and grown.

I'm excited for the fact that not only are there going to be hundreds and thousands of people going out, serving in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world through

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Saddleback but there are right now about 8000 different churches just in America that have taught 101, 201, 301, and have been waiting for me to write 401. The moment we release it to their church they are going to be sending out hundreds and hundreds of people from their churches. And a whole new wave of outreach and mission and evangelism is going to take place.

And you can be a part of the greatest movement of the world. You and I have the privilege of being in at the mother church. That is not something we should be proud of or arrogant about or boastful or egotistical. I'm humbled by it. Everyday I get up and say, "God, You let me be in on this!" I'm not smart enough to lead a church this big. But God allowed us at this point in time to make a movement that is influencing, really, all around the world. You don't even realize it but quietly, behind the scenes, in the last ten months of this year we've trained 69,000 pastors and church leaders from all around the world. Over 150,000 total.

Last February I went into a studio over here in Santa Ana and taped a two-day version of the five-day seminar we do on the Purpose-Driven Church that has trained all these people and did an international version. We took out all the Americanisms and all the American references and made it very international. As many of you know, we're translating it and putting it on little DVDs for DVD players and disks and we're translating it into thirty major languages of the world, which will cover four billion of the six billion people of the world. We've already got fifteen languages almost finished. We took the Spanish version and in July took it to Mexico – Marcus and Doug and a few others went down there and took ten peasant pastors and gave them little DVD players and the Purpose-Driven Church training in their own language and we trained them how to be digital circuit riders, to take it village to village and in July and August in just sixty days those ten men trained over 3100 leaders in Mexico. Peasant pastors.

I wish I could tell you all the things that are happening. Country to country. The stories would be mind boggling to you. You know how we've been working in China and how it's opened up. In March we're going in with the blessing of the government to the eighteen seminaries that are above ground there and present the Purpose-Driven Church book to each of them and a DVD player so that all the seminary students in China will be trained in the Purpose-Driven Church.

Then we got a call from Billy Graham on the internal conference he's holding next year in Amsterdam 2000. He's inviting 1000-1100 church leaders from all around the world, about 184 countries, for ten days of training. He did it twice before. In 1986 I was involved in that training – Amsterdam 86 and in that conference I helped do some of the teaching. At the end of that conference we gave them a copy of my book on Bible study methods. Billy Graham bought 10,000 copies of that book and gave one free to everybody. This time when we go in, we're going to give every one that we can, if we can raise the money, a DVD player and the Purpose-Driven Church training in their language. All 10,000 of them as they go back home to their 184 countries.

Some of you know I'm a country boy. I was raised in a town of less than 500 people. My home, our back yard had a pond. Lilies in a lily pond are real beautiful. But did you know that lilies can multiply in about 24 hours. They can double. You've got two lilies in the pond, then it goes to four, then eight, sixteen, 32, 64, 128, 256 and on and on. When a pond is completely covered there's no oxygen in it and all the fish die. It's pretty when it's small. But people like lilies in a

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lily pond. Once it gets about half covered people will say, “We’ve got to do something about this. We’ll work on it tomorrow.” They’ll go to bed and wake up the next day and the pond is covered. And it’s too late.

Two months after we deliver this Purpose-Driven Church seminar to those leaders of 184 countries in Amsterdam, then 2000 next August, within two months the lily pond is going to be covered. This is one enormous wave. As Lynne said we practice saturation evangelism: every available time, every available place, every available way.

Here’s God’s challenge to us. Habakkuk 1:5, “*Look at the nations and watch. Be utterly amazed for I’m going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told.*”

In the Bible, Paul says of the church of Thessalonica, “*Your faith in God has become known throughout the world.*” From the bottom of my heart, that is my prayer for you. My prayer is that the same will be true for Saddleback in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that it was in Thessalonica in the first century. That our faith will be known throughout the world. We intend to become a great mission sending church.

Acts 17:26, “*God determined the times set for everyone and the exact places where they should live.*” You are not here by accident. God determined the time set for you, the exact place where you should live. God put you here and God put you now because He wants you to be a part of this movement that He’s going to do around the world. If He didn’t want you in the movement, he wouldn’t have put you here and now. God determined when you’d live. You didn’t choose it. And God determined where you’d live. And guess what? You ended up in a church that means business about the Great Commission. And you are not here by accident. God had a destiny in bringing you here and taking you through these classes. The big question really comes down to this: Am I willing to be used by God? Or am I just going to sit on the sidelines and say I finished the classes. Whoopppe! I got my pin.”

God didn’t bring you to Saddleback to get a pin. God brought you here. He determines the times and the places where you’d live before you’re even born. And you’re here and now. So you’re here to be a part of this movement. And you ought to have a sense of destiny about it.

You can either get on and have the greatest ride of your life or be left behind. I don’t think God brought you here to get left behind. God is looking for people to use. The Bible says, “*The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth that He may show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards Him.*” God is looking for people who will say, “Me God! I’ll volunteer! I’ll be used in my Jerusalem, in my Judea, my Samaria and in my uttermost parts of the world.” We have a plan for you. And God is going to use you.

We’ve created a little tool to help you remember. It’s your passport to the world. This is your life passport. On the inside there’s going to be a place for a picture of yourself, your name, your address, your email, your phone, sign the missions covenant: “I commit the rest of my life to be a messenger of God’s good news to other people and using my time, talent and treasure for His kingdom regardless of where it leads or what it costs.” Then there’s a message from me, and our theme verse for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And then everyday there’s a different Bible verse. Every time

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you go on a mission exposure whether it's here in Orange County, cross culturally or in Mexico or a community event – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria or the uttermost parts of the world – every time you go on a mission exposure, we're going to stamp your passport with a record of where you've been. You've been to an orphanage or you've been helping with a project or whatever. We're not only going to do this with you but we're going to do this with your kids. Can you imagine a child getting his first stamp on his first project he goes on? Maybe he goes to Mexico to pass out shoeboxes. Or maybe he goes with the youth group into inner city LA to help in a disadvantaged area. As that child he or she will get more and more stamps. She can look back on a lifetime of being on-mission for God. What a spiritual heritage! That's better than a diary. That's an eternal diary. That's the one God says, *“Well done thou good and faithful servant. You were faithful in little things now you'll be faithful in much.”*

God is on the move. This is your passport to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. God is doing all kinds of great things around the world. What's it going to take to get in on what God's doing? What we're talking about today in this 401 CLASS is something that's been bottled up in my heart for twenty years. I have been waiting for this moment patiently year after year. I've waited for this because all my life I wanted to be a missionary. Kay and I really thought when God called us and when we were married we were going to go to Asia to be missionaries. We took out a map of the world and said, “God, we'll go anywhere in the world. Just show us where.” And God gave a real clear, “No, you're not going.” And that was the biggest disappointment of my life. God said, “Instead of going and being a missionary you going to go to Southern California and you're going to build a church there that is going to be a great, great missionary sending church that will go to far more places than you could ever go yourself.” And you are the answer to that prayer that God gave a 25-year-old kid twenty years ago. And you are sitting on holy ground. Before I knew it and before you knew it, God knew it. God knew it!

What does it take to be an On-Mission person? To say “I'm going to be a messenger wherever God puts me – in my business, in my school, in my neighborhood.” What does it take? We're going to have to make five major shifts in our thinking. Everything starts in your mind. If you want to change your behavior you've got to change the way you feel. If you want to change the way you feel you've got to change the way you think. As we close, these are the five things you're going to have to change in your mind in order to get in on what God's going to do in the greatest movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

1. We must shift our thinking from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. There's nothing more important than being in love with Jesus Christ. That's what I'm talking about here – having a relationship with Him. We need audio-visual Christians who walk the walk and talk the talk. We need to say, “God what could You do in my life if I were dead to my own desires and alive and totally committed to Your purposes for my life in the world.” And move it from self centered – my goals, my ambitions, my dreams, my needs, my thoughts, my ego, my plans to “What, God, did You put me on this earth for?” I'm going to live the rest of my life and make it the best of my life by living for God's agenda.

*“When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you'll receive power and you'll tell people about Me everywhere.”* The number one proof that you have God's Spirit in your life, the number one proof that you are filled with the Spirit, controlled by God's Spirit is not your gifts. It's are you sharing? You will receive God's Spirit in your life and you will be sharing with others. The

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Holy Spirit, God's gift, doesn't want you to be afraid of people but He wants you to be wise and strong and love them and enjoy being with them. If you'll stir up this inner power you'll never be afraid to tell others about our Lord. If you're afraid to tell others, you don't have a problem with people. You have a problem with God. You don't love Him enough. You don't realize how much He loves you.

2. We must shift our thinking, not just from self-centeredness to God-centeredness but we must shift our thinking from local orientation to global orientation. The 1980s of Saddleback church were our "local" decade and this church grew from seven people in a little Bible study to about 5000 people in the 1980s. At the end of the 1980s I said, "We've got a base. Now we're going to reach out nationally." We kept growing here locally in the 90s, but in the 90s we also began to reach out beyond our church and tried to help other churches. As I just told you, in the 1990s we trained a total of over 150 thousand pastors and church leaders. We still kept growing locally at the same time. In fact, we tripled. We went from five thousand to fifteen thousand in the 90s here at Saddleback. We didn't give up. We still have all of Orange County to reach. But we also went national.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are going global. We're going to take it around the world to these fourteen regions and the 184 countries and all the different places. Because that's what God wants us to do. You may spend your life focusing on your reaching the people in your family and your business and your area but I do believe God wants you to have at least one experience cross culturally. Psalms says, *"If you ask Me the nations. All the people on earth will be yours."* So pray. Say, "God, which nation do You want me to pray for. Which one do You want to give me? Which nation do You want to give to me?" Pray.

3. We must shift our thinking from temporary values to eternal values. One of the statistics that haunts me the most is the following: In the next year (365 days) 231,000 Californians will die. In the next year 2.3 million Americans will die. In the next year 54 million people in the world will die. There is no second chance after death. There is no purgatory. There is no limbo. You're either in or you're out at that point. You don't get a second chance and the good news is only good news if it gets there in time. The good news is only good news if the 231,000 Californians hear it before they die in the year 2000. It's only good news if those 2.3 million Americans hear it before they die in the year 2000.

When we start talking about the eternal destiny of millions of people a lot of stuff that has seemed important kind of become irrelevant. It's just not that important any more. People need the Lord.

The Bible says, *"Anyone who lets himself be distracted from the work that I plan for him is not fit for the kingdom of God."* What has distracted you from your life mission? Your career? Your girlfriend? Your hobby? Your retirement plans? What is it that distracted you? *"What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* I am begging you: don't trade your life for temporary things!

*"No soldier in active service entangles himself in affairs of this everyday life so that he may please the one who has enlisted him as a soldier."* In CLASS 101 we talk about the church as a family. In CLASS 201 we talk about the church as a school, a place to grow. In CLASS 301 we

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talk about the church as a team in ministry. But in CLASS 401 we also let you know that it's also an army. And God says nobody who serves in the army worries about civilian matters. All they want to do is please the commanding officer.

The Bible says *"The thing you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things will be given to you."* I love it in the Message paraphrase, *"Steep your life in God reality, God initiative, God provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find your everyday human needs and concerns will be met."* We shift from temporary values in our thinking to eternal values.

4. If you're going to be an on-mission Christian, if you're going to get in on what God wants you to do with your life, make a difference, have a life of significance, we must shift our thinking from security to service. You'll never amount to much for God if you're worried about security. The Bible says in Mark 8:35, *"Only those who throw away their lives for My sake and the sake of the good news will ever know what it means to really live."*

Do you know what is the dearest thing to the heart of God? The death of His Son Jesus Christ who shed His blood for you and for me. The second dearest thing to the heart of God is when His children tell others about why Jesus Christ died on the cross for you and me. The Bible says, *"Let us strip away anything that slows us down or holds us back and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us."*

Question: What is it that stands in the way of you fulfilling your life mission? Whatever it is, get rid of it. We have to live in a way that demonstrates God's love. The whole strategy of a defense attorney is to discredit the credibility of a witness and if Satan can discredit your lifestyle you're ineffective. You need to be living in a way, realizing that you're being watched by your boss, your neighbors, your relatives, your friends who don't know Jesus Christ. I shudder to think that I will stand before God one day and explain why somebody went to hell because they looked at me and used me as an excuse – "If Warren's a Christian, forget it!" Jesus said, *"If you want to be great, be the servant of all."* He said, *"I didn't come to be served but to serve."* So we shift from security being our focus to service being our focus.

5. If we're going to be all that God wants us to be, if we're going to fulfill our life mission, we must shift our thinking from comfort to sacrifice. *"Since God has shown us such great mercy, offer your lives as a living sacrifice to Him."* In light of all that God's done for you, you can never out give God. Jesus paid the supreme sacrifice for you. Since God's done this for you, let me ask you a very important question. Are you willing to do for the truth what cults are willing to do for a lie?

In 1938 a group of people in brown shirts formed with their bodies a sign for a fanatical man behind a podium in a stadium in Munich Germany, "Hitler, we are yours." A hundred thousand of them. They nearly took the world.

In the mid sixties a group of young Chinese took a book called The Sayings of Chairman Mao, they committed it to memory and said, "Mao, we are yours," and they turned the greatest country in the world of nearly a billion people upside down in a cultural revolution. It doesn't take a lot of people to make a difference. It just takes commitment.

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The Bible says, *“Give yourself completely to God.”* Every part of you. You want to be tools in the hands of God to be used for His good purposes. I want to remind you that Jesus Christ called grown adults to leave their businesses and follow Him. When He said, *“Follow Me and I’ll make you fishers of men,”* He said it to men who owned fishing businesses. He didn’t say it to teenagers. He didn’t say it to 20-something people. He said it to people who were already actively involved in their careers. *“Drop your nets and follow Me.”*

I believe we should teach our young people to go on-mission as much as the Mormons. I’m not going to let any Mormon out witness me! I do believe we should be doing for the truth what people will do for lies. The word “witness” in Greek is the word *martus* where we get the word “martyr”. There is no sharing without sacrifice. And if you get serious about fulfilling your life mission you’re going to have to sacrifice. I’m telling you now. But look at what Jesus said, Mark 10:29, *“Jesus said, ‘Let Me assure you that no one has ever given up anything for the love of Me and to tell others the good news who won’t be given back a hundred times over all these will be his here on earth and in the world to come he shall have eternal life.’”* Circle “a hundred times”. That’s ten thousand percent interest. You think you’re making money on the Internet. There’s no investment like the returns on investing in the kingdom of God. God promises ten thousand percent interest. One hundred times reward when you give it up for Him and His kingdom and the good news. That’s the greatest investment.

I want to close with a little self-evaluation. My life investment guide. Where are you right now and where do you want to be in six months?

Estimate the amount of time each week that’s invested in building relationships with unbelievers. Invested in mission and ministry and maturity.

What about your talents? Am I using all my talents on my career or my hobby? Am I using any of my talents in ministry and mission?

How about your money? Am I investing my treasure in God’s kingdom? What percentage of your money is going to the kingdom of God?

Some of you were here two years ago when we started the “Building for Life” campaign and you committed to giving a “Building for Life” gift, every week over a three year period. Some of you have forgotten why we’re sacrificing. You’ve forgotten the reason we’re doing this. So you’ve stopped giving. You’ve forgotten why we’re sacrificing. We’re not doing this for the fun of it. We’re doing it because people without Christ go into a Christless eternity and everybody needs Jesus and we need a place to fill for them. You need to recommit to your “Building for Life” commitment. It is going to take a sacrifice to do that. But it matters and it counts. I want to challenge you to use as much as you can of whatever you’ve got of time, talent and treasure to prepare for eternity. The best investment you’re ever going to make isn’t going to be Internet stock. It’s when you stand before Jesus Christ one day and He says, *“Well done thou good and faithful servant. You were faithful in a few things. You’ll be faithful in much.”*

*“Store your treasure in heaven where they cannot be destroyed by moths or rust and thieves can’t break in and steal. Your heart will be where your treasure is.”* How do you send your

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treasure to heaven? You can't take it with you but you can send it on ahead. How? By investing it in people who are going there. That's how you store treasure in heaven. Investing your money in people who are going there.

This is probably the most strange verse and most misunderstood in the Bible. Luke 16:9, *"I tell you, use your world wealth to benefit others and make friends..."* What is He talking about there? *"In this way your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven."* He's not talking about making friends for here. He's talking about making friends for eternity. He's saying when you take your money and invest it in evangelism and missions so that people go to heaven, then you're investing it in them and they're going to heaven and when you get there your generosity has stored up a reward for you there.

Two things you can't do in heaven: sin and witness. God did not leave you here to sin. He left you here to tell others.

Question: What are you going to do with the rest of your life now that you know better? The choice is yours. One of my life verses is Acts 13:36, *"David served God's purpose in his own generation."* That's my prayer for you, that you will serve God's purpose in your generation. And together we will serve God's purpose in our generation. How do we do it?

*"If you keep yourself pure you will be a utensil for God that God can use for His purpose. Your life will be clean and you'll be ready for the Master to use for every good work."* What do you need to clean up in your life so that God can use you for His good purpose? My prayer is that you will be like Paul who says, *"I want to finish the race that I'm running. I want to carry out the mission I've received from the Lord Jesus, the mission of testifying to the good news of God's kindness."*

There is no greater joy, there is no greater purpose, there is no greater meaning in life. The greatest thing you can do for anybody else is get them in heaven. You can't do anything more important for another person than seal their eternal destiny for eternity. Paul says, *"For this is what we live for. It is what we live for that gives us hope and joy. It is our proud reward and crown. It is you. Yes, you bring us much joy as we stand together before the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes back again for you our trophy and our joy."*

I told you in CLASS 301 about God's two questions on His final exam. I didn't tell you the last question I told you the first two but there's a third one.

The first question when you stand before God one day is, "What did you do with My Son Jesus Christ?" You know the answer to that one, "I received Him into my life. I made Him my Savior, I trusted Him for salvation. He is the Lord of my life."

Then God's going to ask the second great question of your life, "What did you do with what I gave you?" I had a great time.... I retired.... That's the ministry question.

There's a third question God's going to ask you when you get to heaven, "Did you bring anybody with you? Did you care enough about anybody to bring them with you?"

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Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you? Are you willing to say, “Lord, whatever it takes I want You to use me in my fumbling, stumbling way”? You don’t have to be a theologian. You don’t have to be a Bible scholar. But you do have to share what God’s done for you.

The Bible says that one day, *“Every knee’s going to bow and every tongue’s going to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”* Everybody’s going to be there and they’re all going to be saying, “Jesus is Lord.” Some in praise and some in judgment. If you’d say tonight, “I really, more than anything else, want to fulfill the purpose God made me for. I want to fulfill the life mission I was put on this earth to do. I’ve wasted a lot of years but I’m not going to waste any more. I’m saying God, anytime, anywhere.” I want to invite you to join me in prayer.

Prayer:

The 401 covenant says that, “I commit the rest of my life to being a messenger of God’s good news to other people and using my time, my talent and my treasure for His kingdom regardless of where it leads or what it costs.” If you’d make that your prayer say it aloud with me as I lead you in it.

Father, I want to thank You for these people. I love them so much. I am not worthy to be the pastor of this church with so many wonderful folks. I thank You for these who’ve come and even sitting through this class represented well over 16-18 hours of training in classes. I thank You for their commitment and their desire and their joy and their love. Lord, You’ve put us all together for a reason. As we look at Your word, You decided the time and place we’d be born and where we would live. You put us all here in this church. We want to say Use us. Use us in ways we’ve not even imagined. We want our lives to count. We want our lives to matter. We want our lives to have significance. We want them to count for Your kingdom. And we do want to be Your messenger in the world to those closest to us and to help take the message all around the world any way we can. Father, I know that there are some here that You’re going to call out to short time service. Others, will go for a year or maybe longer – two years. Others will go and begin a whole career. Others you will call to stay here and you’re going to bless to make a lot of money to fund it all. We all have our role to play. But use us. You said that You’re looking for people to use and we say to You, Here am I send me. We want to be used. In Jesus’ name, Amen.