

OUR MESSAGE

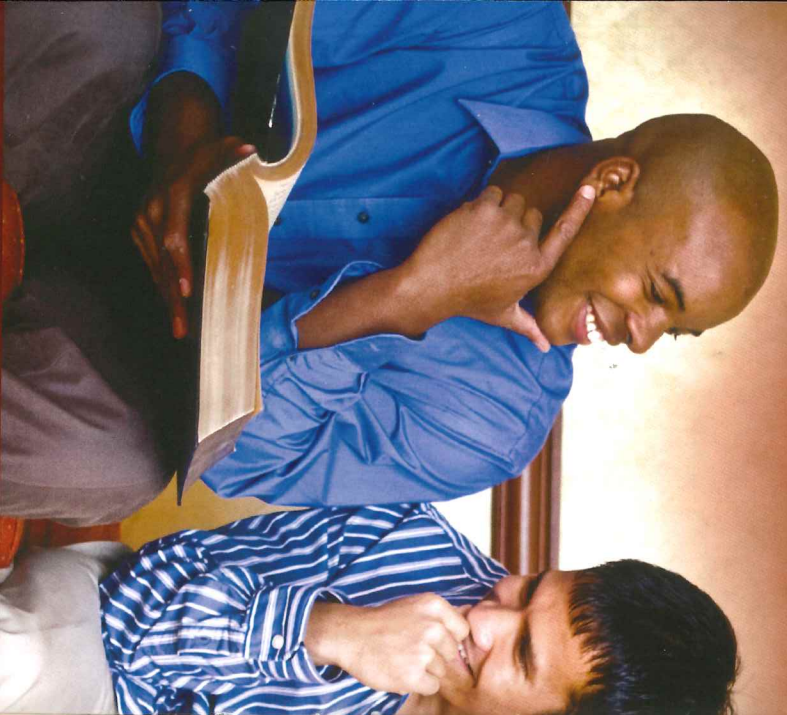


At the Heart of it All





If you're new to our church, you may be watching all the activity, the buzz of special groups and programs, people rushing here and there, unfamiliar names and labels ... it can all get a little confusing.



You may find yourself wondering, "Who are these people and what's their message?"

Is it basically a social club that gets together once a week?

Is it some kind of group that's trying to change the world?

Or is it simply about maintaining a tradition that has been passed down from parents and families?

WHAT'S THE POINT?

If you peel back all the wrappings, you'll eventually come down to four basic core truths at the heart of our church. They weave in and through all the teaching, music, preaching, discussions, and everything we do.

It's important that you know where we got these beliefs. We didn't randomly think them up on our own. They come straight from the Bible. While some people say the Bible is mystifying or irrelevant for today, we find it to be a wealth of wisdom and insight. The longer we study it, the more impressed we are with what God has given humanity in this book. In fact, we believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, containing His very thoughts and ideas for mankind. It is in essence a guide for everyone concerning the way we should live. That's why you'll find four key truths at the very core of our message and everything we say and do as a church.

HERE'S WHAT'S AT THE HEART OF OUR CHURCH

First, and most important ...

1. ORDINARY, IMPERFECT PEOPLE (LIKE YOU AND ME) CAN BE FRIENDS WITH GOD.

The Lord is holy, true, and loving. He's the ultimate ruler of the world with authority over all things in it. The Bible proclaims that God is ever present—not limited by time and space; all knowing—with knowledge of all things—past, present, and future; and all powerful—able to accomplish anything within His will.

Yet, He takes notice of each individual on this planet and wants to have a relationship with us. Does that seem unbelievable? Surely the creator of the universe wouldn't be paying attention.

AMAZINGLY, HE IS.



With remarkable sensitivity He says through one of the ancient prophets, "I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.... I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed" (*Isaiah 46:4; 49:23*).

But what does He mean, "I will rescue you"? Rescue from what? The answer is: God will rescue us from our own follies, our mistakes and sins, our talent for shooting ourselves in the foot. That, in fact, is why He embarked on the greatest "rescue mission" of all time by sending His Son, Jesus, to our world more than 2000 years ago.

Jesus came to show us what God was like and how life should be lived. Some gladly welcomed Him, while others rejected His message and pushed Him away. Eventually, His jealous critics framed a lie in order to have Him put death. And though He didn't want to die, Jesus knew this was His mission ... to become a sacrifice so we could be forgiven and receive eternal life. The Scriptures declare, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (*Romans 5:8*).

Naturally, this leaves each one of us needing to make a very important decision—whether to reach out and accept Christ as Savior, or to reject Him. Relationship is a two-way street. When we ask to be forgiven and respond in repentance to God, He forgives us and brings us into a wonderful relationship with Him where we can flourish and grow.

... More about how to start this relationship later. Meanwhile, let's go on to the second major truth.



Second important truth ...

2. GOD CARES ABOUT YOUR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Why wouldn't He? If He made your body in the first place and gave it the breath of life, it's not unthinkable that He would want it to be healthy. This is not a minor thing to Him. After all, He's a loving God. The pain of your body is important to Him just as the hurt in your soul.

Granted, there's a lot we can do, and we should do, by ourselves to stay healthy, or to regain our health after we get sick. And we should. But when the natural healing process falters, Jesus, the Great Physician, is able to provide for our needs.

Jesus spent a great deal of His time here on earth healing the sick. It was an important part of His ministry just like His teaching. His disciples quickly took up where He left off. The Bible says, "they went out 'speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders' (*Acts 14:3*).

James, one of the apostles was very explicit in writing: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up ... The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (*James 5:14-16*).

We take these Scriptures at their word and openly follow them in our church. Though not everyone is always healed as we would like, we persist in asking God to show His love and concern in tangible ways when people are suffering.

AND HE DOES!





Third important truth ...

3. A WHOLE EXTRA DIMENSION OF GOD'S POWER CAN BE YOURS

When Jesus returned to heaven after His mission on earth was complete, God sent the Holy Spirit to help and strengthen His followers. Don't let that name throw you; He is a real Person, the third member of the Trinity—not just a “force” or an “it.” As Jesus explained shortly before He ascended to heaven, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... he lives with you and will be in you” (*John 14:16,17*).

That promise quickly came true in the days and years that followed, as the Holy Spirit quickened the hearts and minds of the early Christians, often in dramatic fashion. The early believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in unknown languages as the Spirit gave utterance (*Acts 2:4*). Timid disciples became bold and empowered, willing to endure persecution in order to witness and share the message of Christ. Christians of both high and low status began taking the gospel across ethnic, gender, and geographical lines, ready to lay down their lives. Special gifts of the Holy Spirit flowed through them in miraculous demonstrations—

**THINGS THAT
ONLY GOD
COULD DO.**

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This empowerment to do more and reach farther for God is available to all Christians, not just those first century believers. It is for everyone. Jesus' disciple Peter in speaking of the Holy Spirit said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (*Acts 2:38*).

Here in our church, the Holy Spirit is not just theory or history. He's active and moving in our lives. This infilling does not imply that we're better than other Christians. It only means that the Spirit has been allowed more opportunity to interact and have influence over us.

**WE'RE EAGER TO RECEIVE
ALL THAT GOD HAS FOR US.**



4. SOON GOD'S SON WILL RETURN TO EARTH!

Living in today's culture it seems difficult to imagine that Christ will come again. But He will. We know this because the night before Jesus died on the Cross, He said "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (*John 14:3*).

Later after Christ ascended to heaven, the angels who were there gave these details: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (*Acts 1:11*).

Christ's soon return isn't a myth, a metaphor, or merely a figure of speech—it's a coming reality. This visible event will shock the world when it occurs. History will abruptly come to its climax with the second coming of Jesus.

Naturally, everyone asks, "When?!" People have been curious about this for over 20 centuries. While the Bible gives no specifics and says we won't know the day or the hour in advance, it does describe the times. Jesus said to His

disciples, "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains" (*Mark 13:5-8*).

Of course without a specific date in view, many dismiss the truth of Jesus' return as improbable. But sadly, they will face the Lord with regret and great sorrow on that day, as they witness the overwhelming joy of believers who are physically united with Christ. As the apostle Paul explained, "We will all stand before God's judgment seat ... Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (*Romans 14:10,12*).

The main question on that day will not be how much money we made, how many good deeds we chalked up, or how many times we warned a church pew. The all-important question—the one that will make the difference between heaven and hell—will be what we did with God's offer of peace and forgiveness. Which brings us back to the first truth, the possibility of us being reconciled to God.

CHOOSING YOUR PLACE IN ETERNITY

IT'S UP TO YOU!

The door to forgiveness is open ... but walking through it is a personal choice. To ignore the opportunity to accept Christ, or to procrastinate, may not seem all that significant today. But on that future day, it will trump all other decisions you've ever made. So the question is ... have you accepted Him?

If you haven't, beginning a relationship with God is easy:

1 ADMIT that all is not well between you and God. Not that you're necessarily a bad person, but still ... His standards are higher than you can reach. As the Bible says with some bluntness, "There is no difference ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (*Romans 3:22,23*).

2 BELIEVE that there's still an opportunity to remedy your situation. Thanks to the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ who willingly died as an appeasement for our sin, He offers us a new and better life. Jesus took the punishment we deserved. He stepped up on our behalf. We know this from reading His Word, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless [to sin], Christ died for the ungodly [us].... For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Romans 5:6; 6:23*).

3 CALL out to the Lord and request His forgiveness. Be honest, tell Him you want to change on the inside. Ask Him to accept you as one of His own. He won't reject you. He'll welcome you. In the words penned by the ancient prophet Joel, God made an all-inclusive promise. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (*Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13*).

You can talk to God about this anytime, anywhere, in your own words—by simply expressing the longing of your heart. No formal speech is needed. Just be honest and tell God your desire to follow Him.

Here's a short prayer you can pray to get started.

DEAR GOD, *I'd like to make things right with You. I admit I haven't always lived the way I should, and I've broken Your rules. Please forgive me of my sin and accept me based on what Jesus did on my behalf. I want to change and learn to live right. I now recognize You as the new leader of my life, and will do my best to follow Your direction. Help me live for you, Lord. Amen.*

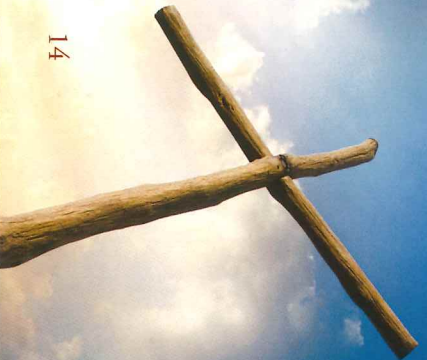
To get moving on a whole new path, share what you've done with one of the leaders of our church. They'll help you find a copy of the Bible you can understand, and show you how to begin living your new life in Christ. They'll also introduce you to others who have made the same decision to follow Jesus.

HERE IS A PASSAGE FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS THAT SAYS IT WELL:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel (Colossians 1:19-23).

WELCOME TO YOUR NEW LIFE!



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