

# *This Week at the Creek*

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## the Church at Dyers Creek

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Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

### Send the Light

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

June 1, 2008

New Year's Day and the Tournament of Roses parade! A beautiful float suddenly sputters and quits. Why? It's out of gas. The whole parade is held up until someone rushes back with a can of gas. The funny thing was that this was the float of the Standard Oil Company. With all its vast oil resources, its truck ran out of gas. Sometimes we're like that float: With all of God's vast renewable resources at our disposal, we sputter and quit. In the meantime, there's a world out there full of people who need the same type of fresh start that every Christian has experienced.

And that's really what the whole of this passage is about. It's about our remaining both convicted and energized to live out and offer our faith to others. Notice I said "offer" and not "force." The best that we can do – and all that God requires of us – is to offer the faith we've already accepted and are living out ourselves. In this letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul gives us three reasons or convictions that should energize us toward telling others about salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The first conviction we have that leads us to introduce Jesus to others is that we were once lost. Like those who aren't Christians, we once regarded Jesus from a worldly point of view. We were like the local hunting guide who got himself into a real fix. His party became hopelessly lost in the mountains and they blamed him for leading them astray. "You told us you were the best guide in Colorado!" they said angrily. "I am," he shot back, "but I think we're in Wyoming now." He was completely lost. Can you remember how lost you were without Christ? Our lives were so different, but we forget the past so easily. We used to operate from a worldly, secular point of view, but now our perspective is the cross of Christ. The old is gone; the new has come. Where once we wandered,

we now have been set on the right path. And we need to send the light on to others we care about.

The second conviction we have that leads us to introduce Jesus to others is that we were **changed**. Our lives have been transformed by Jesus Christ. There's been a grand severance from where we were before. But it's not a change that is done once and for all. We're in a continuing state of newness, and it will continue on that way. Our newness increases day after day. We are ordinary people with an extraordinary life-changing story. We have been reconciled to God. Before, we were at war with Him, and we didn't even know it. Nevertheless, we were. But to make peace for us, Jesus died on the cross and satisfied the penalty of our sin. As a result, we've been given the ministry of reconciliation. We're made right with God. And we need to send the light on to others we care about.

The third conviction we have that leads us to introduce Jesus to others is that we are **ambassadors**. We are God's spokespersons, championing His cause. The Greek word used for ambassador here means "one who speaks for the emperor." It was through the ambassador that a message was delivered or a request communicated. The ambassador reflected the agenda, convictions, truths, and causes of the one he represented. In the same way, we must proclaim what God has done in our own lives so that people can respond. We need to live it out so as to point people to a life-changing and soul-changing relationship with Jesus. As ambassadors, we direct others to the possibility of reconciliation with God. The price has been paid by the One who had no sin, and we need to send the light on to others we care about.

Of course, a good **ambassador** does a lot more than just proclaim the agenda of the Lord; he also does it by the way he **lives**. While we're in this world, we represent God's character and nature. One Sunday as they drove home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, there's something about the pastor's message this morning that I don't understand." The mother said, "Oh? What's that?" The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. He said God is so big that He could hold the world in His hand. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, honey." "But Mommy, he also said that God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Is that true, too?" Again, the mother assured the little girl that what the pastor had said was true. With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?" Well, shouldn't He show through? Yes, God should show through in the way that we live our lives!

As Christians, we're brand-new people on the inside. The Holy Spirit has given us life, and we're not the same anymore. We're not reformed, not rehabilitated, not even reeducated. Paul says we are re-created — new creations — living in vital union with Jesus Christ. Our conversion experience is not merely the turning over of a new **leaf**; it's the beginning of a new **life** under a new **Master**. It's a fresh start. God brings us back to Himself — reconciles us — by

blotting out our sins and making us right with Him. We're no longer God's enemies, nor are we strangers or foreigners to Him. And because we've been reconciled to God, we have the privilege of encouraging others to do the same, and thus we are those who have been given the task of reconciling people to Him. Think about this way: If you know where the food is, shouldn't you point out the way for people who are hungry?

Another way to look at it is that we are like a lighthouse on a rocky coast, providing a guiding light for ships on the stormy sea to make it safely into port. Indeed, living a lighthouse lifestyle is probably the most effective way of naturally introducing others to Jesus so that they too can experience a fresh start. This lighthouse lifestyle is a non-threatening and simple approach with three basic steps.

The first you can do easily: **prayer**. Pray for those you know who don't know the Lord. Pray for God's blessing in their lives. As you drive through this county, pray for your neighbors. Pray for your coworkers. Pray for your friends in school.

Pray that God will move in their heart and show them their need for Him.

After praying, show that you **care**. The old adage has never been more true: No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. By caring, you're tangibly preparing the way for the Lord to work in their life. In fact, when you pray for God's blessing for them, remember that you can be that blessing! Look for the opportunities to demonstrate God's love in their lives. There are many ways it can be done. Be thoughtful and considerate and creative and show that you care.

Then at some point comes the time when you can **share**. When you pray, ask the Lord to give you opportunities to be an ambassador – for opportunities to share the good news of salvation through Christ. And if you've been demonstrating God's love, then the seeds have been sowed and maybe the time is coming for them to take root. It is a simple method – prayer, care, and share.

You could say that when we trust in Christ, we make an exchange: He takes our sin and makes us right with God. Our sin was laid on Christ at His crucifixion. His righteousness is given to us at our conversion. This is what we mean by Christ's atonement for sin. In the world, bartering only works when two people exchange goods of relatively equal value. But God offers to trade His righteousness for our sin – something of immeasurable worth for something completely worthless. That's how He reconciles us to Himself, and that's also how He transforms our lives.

Transformation is always grace. We sometimes think that although we're saved by grace, we're supposed to change by effort. Either that, or we become passive. One of the analogies that's been helpful to me is the difference between a motorboat, a raft, and a sailboat.

In a motorboat, I'm in charge. I determine how fast we're going to go and in what direction. Some people approach spiritual life that way. If I'm just

aggressive enough, if I have enough quiet times, I can make transformation happen on my own. Usually that results in people becoming legalistic, then pride starts to creep in, and things get all messed up.

Some people who have been burned by that kind of approach go the opposite extreme and say, "I'm into grace." It's like they're floating on a raft. If you ask them to do anything to further their growth, they'll say, "Hey, no. I'm not into works. I'm into grace. You're getting legalistic with me." And so they drift. There are way too many commands in Scripture for anybody to think that we're called to be passive.

On a sailboat, however, I don't move if it's not for the wind. My only hope of movement is the wind. I can't control the wind. I don't manufacture the wind. Jesus talks about the Spirit blowing like the wind. But there's a role for me to play, and part of it has to do with what I need to discern. A good sailor will discern, *Where's the wind at work? So how should I set the sails?* Our life in Christ is most like sailing.

Good advertising always begins with "Don't keep it to yourselves!" So take delight in introducing Jesus to others – with your **words** and especially with your **life**. For you were once as lost as they are, you too were a hungry beggar looking for food, but now that you've found the food, it's time to let others know. Take delight in introducing Jesus to others, for you've been transformed by the power of God; you're not the same as you were; you are a new creation. Take delight in introducing Jesus to others, for you are an ambassador who's had a fresh start that's worth passing on to others. Send the light! Let it shine from shore to shore!

Let us pray: Lord, as thankful as we are for being reconciled to You, for being given a fresh start, help us and give us opportunities to pass this new life in Christ on to others who are so desperately in need of salvation. We pray in Jesus' name.

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