

He Seeks to Send
The God Who Seeks
2 Corinthians 5:10-6:2
02/14/2024

Introduction

Pray. Tim. Pastor. 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

LENT GUIDE.

- Before we jump into our passage this morning, I wanted to make sure you didn't miss picking up one of our Lent Guides out in the lobby. We've put a ton of work and money into this resource that is going to correspond to our sermon series starting next week
- And let me just explain a little bit of how this guide is meant to work:
 - This is meant to be a sort of "catch-all companion" for our next sermon series on the spiritual practice of **Mission – demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel to people who don't yet know Jesus**. What others call "evangelism" or "sharing your faith".
 - **So each week we've got:**
 - The teaching text for that Sunday
 - A page for you to take notes during that week's sermon
 - A weekly practice that you will do on your own during the week to help take the sermon from good ideas to lived out in your life
 - And then the Community Group discussion guide for that week's group time.
 - So I know last week when I said this is available online some of y'all were like – sweet, I'll just grab that. Books are lame. Let me strongly encourage you not to do that. It's online as sort of "oops I lost or forgot my book", but our hope is really that this will travel around with you as you participate in the life of our church over the season of Lent.
 - Bring it on Sundays, use it in your time with the Lord, take it to Community Group, all of that.
- So pick that up, as next Sunday we jump into 6 weeks on joining the mission of God.

Now, my job this week is to help connect some dots over why 6 weeks focusing on the practice of mission makes a ton of sense coming out of our series *The God Who Seeks*. I more or less want to build a bridge between these two sermon series.

Now to help us begin to begin thinking about our theme today, I want you to think back to a decade ago... the year 2014.

- Parents everywhere are losing their minds listening to the new hit song "Let It Go" for the 10 millionth time.
- We all dump ice water on our heads to raise awareness of ALS.
- Kim K and Kanye have a \$12 million wedding in Italy.

And most importantly for us today...

- 378 people in St Petersburg, Florida bring back a new nationwide trend of paying for the person behind you in the Starbucks Drive Thru.

It was called "Pay it Forward". You remember this trend? It didn't start in 2014, but it definitely had its viral moment in 2014. The whole idea was that the person in front of you paid for your Starbucks, and in response you would then turn around and pay for the person behind you.

It sounds like a wonderful idea... But full disclosure – I hated this trend. Call me a curmudgeon that's totally fine. Pay it Forward is not fun for people like me. Because when I go to Starbucks, I'm getting what I get at every coffee shop – a small black coffee. Do you know how much a small black coffee costs at starbucks? \$2.87 after tax.

So it's not an enjoyable experience to be in the Starbucks drive thru and get my \$3 coffee covered, knowing that now I have to pay for someone's venti double shot triple quadruple sugar free vanilla pump crap that's like \$15. That's not a win.

And you can call me mean, that's fine. But I'm not alone in my distaste for this trend. In fact, most starbucks employees, according to one survey, really dislike it as well because it makes everything more confusing for them. So I'm just on team starbucks employee, ok?

Now, what does that have to do with anything we're talking about today? A lot actually.

You see, the Starbucks "pay it forward" trend is a small, sort of silly example, of what is actually a prominent theme in the Scriptures.

The whole christian life is a type of paying it forward. Or I'll say it this way – **All of the Christian life is lived in response to God.**

Everything God commands and calls and directs us to do, is always grounded in first what He has done for us.

God first does his initiating work for us, and then calls us in response to then live for Him.

What God Does (The Why)

And that includes, as we'll see today in 2 Corinthians 5, stepping into the practice of mission.

You see over the past 5 weeks we've been trying to highlight from the Scriptures this beautiful truth that our God is the God who seeks.

- He seeks the runaway.
- He seeks the broken.
- He seeks the prideful and the downcast.

Story after story reminding us that our faith is grounded in this reality – not us seeking God, but God seeking us.

But what I want us to see today is that that seeking that God does with us is never meant to stop with us.

But rather, and here's the one sentence summary of my point today – **God seeks to send.**

Let me show you this from our text...

– READ THROUGH 1 Corinthians 5:11-19 –

Alright just pause for a moment with us and look at everything Paul says God has done for those of us who are Christians. For those of us who are in Christ Jesus, followers of Jesus – look at what God does...

1. Christ controls us with His love (5:13-14)

The word Paul uses translated as “control” here is so fascinating – it is the word “συνέχω” which elsewhere in the NT is translated as suffering, or crushed, or pressed in from all sides. **Which seems not all that positive.** Christ is crushing Paul with his love?

But the picture Paul is trying to paint is that the way Christ’s love has gripped his heart is so strong – **he has no choice but to willingly and joyfully lay down his life for the sake of the gospel bearing fruit in the lives of this church.** It controls me, Paul says.

Not in a way in which he has given up his free will, Jesus just takes control of his body, some weird AI robot Paul. But in a sense the love Christ has for him has had such a shaping affect on his heart – he must minister to others.

“Honeymoon-Stage” analogy. You’ve probably seen this before if a friend starts dating someone. Especially during those first few months, we used to call it “being whipped”. Idk if that’s offensive now, everything is offensive in 2024 so sorry if it is, but that’s what we called it.

Buddies of mine would start dating girls in high school or college and for the first few months you’d be hanging out, and then they’d say something like “sorry fellas, I have to go pick up some taco bell for Jessica.” And you’re like “you don’t have to.” And you’re right – he literally doesn’t have to.

But we also all know – he’s saying “sorry” but he’s not sorry at all. He wants nothing more than to go do this act of service for this girl. He doesn’t care what we’ve got going on, he doesn’t care what the original plan was for that night.

He joyfully skips his way down to taco bell. He’s so overwhelmed by these feelings of infatuation he feels like he has no choice – He has to do what she asks him to do – but he also would have it no other way.

In a greater, more powerful, more glorious sense – that is what Paul is saying here – the love of Christ has so taken a hold of his heart, he has no other choice but he doesn’t want any other choice. It’s his greatest most compelling joy to now be a servant of Christ.

2. Christ died for us (5:14-15)

Christ Jesus, Son of God, 2nd person of the trinity. Takes on flesh, enters into humanity, walks on the earth. Perfect – never sins. Never goes against the will of the Father in thought, in word, or in deed. And yet, at 33 years old is betrayed by one of his 12 closest friends, is unjustly put on trial by both the Jews and the Romans, and dies the most horrific and brutal of deaths on the cross reserved in that time for the worst of the worst criminals.

The only one who was ever perfect, died the sinner’s death.

And in dying, he gives life to all who trust in Him. That’s how this whole thing works – **Christ dies the death we deserve, and gives us the life we don’t.**

Why, Paul says? So that now we who live in this world might no longer live for ourselves but live for Him. **Christ died, to give us His life, and in response we die to ourselves, to give Him ours.**

Christ died for me, so now I die to myself (my desires, my wants, my preferences, my comforts) and I live for Him. I surrender to Him. I do what He tells me to do, I go where He tells me to go, I share the gospel with who He tells me to share the gospel with – my neighbor, my family member, my coworker, my friend.

3. Christ makes us new creations (5:16-17)

Christ not only dies to forgive us our sins. He also re-creates us into a whole new person. When you become a Christian, it is so much more than just a legal transaction between you and God. You gain so much more, it is so much more profound and glorious than simply – God won't punish you anymore.

The Scriptures teach us that before we start following Jesus, we are, what's called "the old man" or "the old self". We live according to what is called our "flesh" – our sinful desires that keep us enslaved to our every whim and passion.

And so when Christ comes, dies, rises again, and we trust in Him – He doesn't just say "I see all that, but now you're forgiven!" ... **WAY BETTER! He completely remakes us into a new creation.**

God the Holy Spirit now lives inside of you such that you can actually live to glorify God.

- We can actually choose to say "no" to sin and "yes" to God.
- We can actually walk in obedience to God's commands.
- We can have courage to step into what He calls us to step into.

We can actually live for God – we are made new. He has made us new creations – the old self is dead, hung on the cross with Jesus ... the new self has come.

4. Christ reconciles us to God (5:18-19)

To reconcile is to set two parties back into right relationship, as it originally was designed to be.

God's original design, back in Genesis 1+2, the garden of Eden – was you and I and all of humanity living in relationship with Him. Communion, intimacy, closeness, loving relationship between us and God.

- What is lost in Genesis 3 when sin enters the world, if you remember back to week 1 – what is lost because of sin is our communion with God.
- We can no longer, in our natural state, walk with Him, be in relationship with Him, know Him, be close to Him – now OR in eternity.

Without Christ, we are God's enemies. But Christ comes, lives, dies, and rises again to do something about that broken relationship.

We need, and are offered, in Christ – a way to be brought back to God. To be brought into His family. To receive once again in salvation the commune with God that was lost in the garden. We need reconciliation.

And it is offered to us in the person and work of Jesus.

So just look, in these 9 verses, how much Paul says Christ has done for us:

- He loves us and draws us close with His love.
- Though perfect, he dies a sinner's death that we deserve on the cross to pay the penalty for sin.
- He recreates us, from our old self enslaved to the flesh, to become new creations – free to worship God.
- He reconciles us and brings us back into loving relationship with the Father.

I mean this is incredible!! It should make your heart sing. Fight to not grow cold to the most beautiful and certain of realities. You deserve nothing. I deserve nothing. We deserve nothing but wrath and condemnation.

And yet by the love of Father, and only by the love of Father and through the work of the Son, and only through the work of the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit and only through the power of the Holy Spirit – our sins are paid for, we are made new, and we are reconciled to God.

So We (The What)

And then you get to v20...

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

In light of all of that beauty and glory,. In light of God seeking you when you were lost, prideful, downcast, broken. Here's your new identity – we are ambassadors for Christ.

God seeks to send.

That's the connection between what we've been discussing over the past 5 weeks and where we're heading over the next 6.

God sought us to send us. We now go because Christ first came.

This is what God does – He seeks to send. His reconciling work, his miraculous, powerful, glorious seeking – was not and is not meant to stop with us.

He seeks us out and then He sends us out in power to those around us.

And if we're able to step back, we see this thread all over.

We see this seeking to send in each one of the stories we've looked at over the past 5 weeks. There's a bigger work of redemption God is doing.

- **Adam + Eve** – Seeks them out in their sin and shame and hiding in the Garden.
 - Calls them back to Himself and makes the promise – through the offspring of Eve, this very woman who 5 minutes ago was rebelling against me, through her descendant King Jesus I will crush the head of the serpent so all who live under sin can be set free.
- **Moses** – Murderer, on the run in the desert of Midian. God seeks him out, burning bush – boom! Moses, go back to Egypt.
 - I'm going to use you to redeem my people from slavery and lead them out of Egypt towards the promised land. I'm seeking you because of this bigger purpose I have for the redemption of my people.
- **Rahab** – A broken life in a broken place. God seeks her out through the stories of his power and glory.
 - And in seeking her, he uses her as a key central point in the story of giving Israel the long awaited Promised Land.
- **Samson** – In all the mess and brokenness of his pride, God keeps seeking Him.
 - And even in the broken and messed up ending, God uses Samson's life to redeem Israel from the Canaanites.
- **Elijah** – Downcast and depressed, God seeks Him with His presence.
 - And through Elijah raises up Elisha, the next in the great line of prophets who call God's people back to repentance.

Do you see how God worked in all of these stories? On the one hand, it's about God seeking them. But on the other hand it's about God seeking so many more.

- I'm seeking you, to bless them.
- I'm seeking you, to redeem them.
- I'm seeking you, to deliver them.

We see this in what is known as the Great Commission.

Jesus has called these men to follow him. He sought them out when they were tax collectors, and fishermen, and zealots. He sought them. Called them to be his disciples. And his last words to them on earth are this, Matthew 28:18-20:

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

I've sought you, trained you, welcomed you, shown you how to follow me...now – Go. Go and do the same. Make disciples – baptizing them, teaching them how to follow me.

I'm seeking you, because in seeking you I am also seeking them.

We know this from these stories in the Old Testament. We know this from the life of Jesus. We know this is true even in our own stories.

I'm a Christian today, God sought me out, because...

- In 1981 my mom and dad, newly married, 22 and 19 years old, moved from Okabena, Minnesota to Aiken, SC.
 - And my dad became friends with a man at work who loved Jesus, who had been sought by God and reconciled to Him through the work of Jesus
 - That man became friends with my dad. Gave him a book, *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell, and agreed to read it with him.
 - My dad read the book, this man was patient to walk with him, be his friend, challenge him on his beliefs... willing to push against his own discomfort, fear, and you name it to be used by God as an ambassador...and God got a hold of my dad, he put his faith in Jesus. Led my mom to the Lord shortly after that.
- They got involved in a local church. Prioritized us being with God's people for worship more than all these other activities. When I was 6, they led me to faith in Jesus.
 - They pushed against their own discomfort, fear, you name it to be used by God as ambassadors. God used them to teach me what it means to be a Christian, how to follow Christ.
 - God sought me out, through the work of Christ brought me back to Himself.
- Fast forward 20+ years, I get the incredible privilege to be a part of a group of people uprooting their lives and sacrificing so much to be a part of this new church called Citizens, with a bunch of other people who at some point or another God got a hold of their heart and sought them out through someone else.
 - And some of you in this room today are Christians because of this church. God sought you out through these people and your entire life – both now and into eternity has been completely changed.

So, track with me here, some of you are Christians because:

- A man in 1981 is so gripped by the love of Christ that he shares the gospel with my dad.
- Someone shared the gospel with Garrison.
- With Tyler. With Janessa. With (keep going).

This is all of our stories. This is how the Kingdom of God spreads. This is how the gospel spreads. This is how it has always spread. Faithful, ordinary, men and women have their lives changed by Jesus, become gripped by His love, take seriously their new identity as an ambassador for King Jesus – put their neck on the line to tell others about Him

If you are a Christian, it is because someone lived out 2 Corinthians 5 – a pastor, a parent, a friend, a coworker.

- God sought someone else, drastically and dramatically chased them down, captured their heart with the good news of Jesus. Changed them and made them a new creation. Reconciled them to Himself.
- And then sent them into your life, as the means by which He was going to seek you..

And church here's the call – we cannot let the gospel stop with us. We are a conduit for the gospel, not a cul-de-sac.

“Awesome, I'm a Christian now. Glad I got my life with God squared away, time to go enjoy all the blessings. Glad I can pray. Glad I can have peace. Glad I can walk with Jesus and have my eternity secured.”

If that's where it ends for you...very simply – you're missing it.

God seeks to send.

D Elton Trueblood – “Evangelism is not a professional job for a few trained men or women, but is instead the unrelenting responsibility of every person who belongs to the company of Jesus.”

The mission of God is not optional.

- It is not solely for the extroverted, “people-person”.
- It is not solely for those “gifted in evangelism”.
- It is not something you leave till you “have time” or are “in the right season”.

It is for every person who has been caught up in the glorious, wonderful, redeeming, seeking love of God.

Application + Conclusion

Let me close with this – over the next 6 weeks, we are going to give you so much missional training. It's my explicit goal by the time we reach Easter that no one will be able to say “I don't share the gospel because I don't know how.”

That's the whole goal of the next 6 weeks – to take away that excuse.

But here's what this means for you today – **You will never want this. You will never desire to step into the mission of God. You will never learn to live a missional life of demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel to people who don't yet know Jesus...if your heart doesn't become gripped with the beauty of the gospel.**

I did not like or want to participate in the starbucks “Pay it forward” trend...because I did not think that what someone had done for me was really all that great. There was no desire in me to do an act of service for the person behind me because I didn't think what was done for me was all that great. A \$3 coffee? That's it. Why would getting that paid for compel me to want to serve someone else?

But do you know who's eager to participate? Who has no problem turning around and being generous to the person behind them in line? The one who got the \$150 catering order covered. The one who had the 8 drinks for the bridal party order. The one who can't believe how generous someone else would be to cover the cost of their items.

Church, do you see what I'm saying? Until we grasp just how much God has done for us to seek us and save us, we will not join His mission in the world.

This is why Jesus Himself in Luke 7 says – “The one who knows they have been forgiven much, loves much. But the one who thinks they’ve been forgiven little, loves little.”

If you don't learn or aren't willing on a consistent basis to get floored by the work of Christ in your life, how God has sought you and won you to Himself, you will never consistently step into joining Him in seeking others.

But here's what I also know – **myself, Garrison, Dan, our ministry team, your CG leaders, your spouse** – we are completely helpless in making you care.

I've been in ministry long enough to know – **I cannot make anyone care.**

The Spirit of God has to work in power to break your heart, to wow you with the love of God, to overwhelm you with what he's done for you, and then to compel you to go share that news with others.

Extended time of prayer.

- Cold hearts
- Fearful hearts
- Despondent hearts