

Helping **Others** Follow Jesus
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

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REVIEW: February's sermon series answers "**WHY?**" do we exist as a church. I answer in 4 words: We are "**HELPING OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS.**" **WHY** is this so important? Because we believe that **Jesus is The Way, The Truth and The Life.** Jesus **forgives** us, gives us **eternal** life and gives us a **purpose** in this life. Following Jesus is not "**a**" key to life but is **THE** key to life. We want everyone to know Him.

In the book, *Hillbilly Elegy*, a NY Times non-fiction bestseller, there is a description of the benefits of truly living a Christian life. He describes the change in his father's life. "**Dad embodied a phenomenon social scientists have observed for decades. Religious folks are much happier. Regular church attendees commit fewer crimes, are in better health, live longer, make more money, drop out of high school less frequently and finish college more frequently than those who don't attend church at all.**" An MIT economist found that the relationship was *causal* – it's not just that people happen to live successful lives also go to church, it's that church seems to promote good habits."

We can go to church & have all of these benefits associated w church attendance. However, it's possible to read Bible, fast, pray, give money, attend worship services yet not follow Jesus. Some of His biggest critics did these things but didn't follow Him. While good, they are merely means to an end. Our "end" isn't a nice, well-maintained building or a big budget or wonderful programs - like "**wineskins**" holding wine. Last week these things were "**the mat**" the paralyzed man was let down thru roof to meet Jesus. **Everything we do here is intended to help people follow Jesus.** That's why we will always be switching out wineskins or using new mats. It's possible to love structures rather than God.

1 Peter 4:7-11

*The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can **pray.***

⁸ *Above all, **love** each other deeply, because **love covers over a multitude of sins.*** ⁹

*Offer **hospitality** to one another **without grumbling.*** ¹⁰ *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to **serve** others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.* ¹¹ *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things **God may be praised** through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Peter emphasizes: *so that you can **pray***. He learned to pray from following Jesus. Peter **begins with prayer**. He ends in vs. 11b saying that we must *do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen*. All that we do should be steeped in prayer and praise.

The basis of the word “prayer” in the Greek (prosecho – “pro-say-co”) means “to pay attention to.” We pay attention to what’s important. It’s how we show respect, interest and affection. That’s why it’s a big turn off on a first date to take calls on your cell phone. It indicates a lack of interest. What we pay attention to is what we treasure. Jesus kept saying over and over again in His speeches: “Verily, verily” or “Truly, truly” or “I tell you the truth” (depending upon which version you read) but what he was really stressing was “Hey! Pay Attention! What I’m about to tell you is very important. Listen.” We become what we pay attention to. That’s why we are supposed to pray. Prayer is simply paying attention to God. God deserves our respect.

He offers short, simple, easy to understand and apply directions. Others have helped us – now we help others. It’s not “either-or” (we are only helped, or we are only helpers – but both/and). We surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ so our sins are forgiven, we have eternal life, and also find purpose in life. That purpose revolves around the “Great Commission” (“Go into all the world and make disciples”). This is about “Helping Others Follow Jesus.” It’s not just about “Helping Myself.” Too many Christians have only one side of our message (receiving grace). We are to pass it on to others, too.

Peter tells us something we are to do and something we are to avoid:

1.) **love each other deeply**. “Deeply” is not superficial. It also means “constantly.” “Keep love constant.” It is a word which means “**stretching**.” Love “stretches” us both “deep and wide.” It doesn’t quit. “Love never fails.” He adds a warning: **because love covers over a multitude of sins**. Whenever around people, be aware there will be sin. It’s not just an occasional imperfection, but a multitude of them. Peter had a track record of imperfection. It’s easy to let little things annoy us. We’ve must overlook those things. It doesn’t mean that we ignore them, but that they are dealt with in a loving way. There are also some major things which are violations of covenant. We are called to act in agape love – to deeply and truly forgive.

2.) **Offer hospitality to one another**. “Hospitality” has the idea of “hospital” – of taking care of sick people. This happens in physical ways, but it also happens in emotional ways. The early church didn’t have nice, big buildings – they met in homes. If someone didn’t open their home they couldn’t meet. At the center of the meeting would often be a meal. Someone had to open their home and serve a

meal. The warning is to do it “**without grumbling**” to offering hospitality. (Martha) People show up at inconvenient times and sometimes can act in inappropriate or awkward ways.

There are so many ways this is done, but I must commend those who have opened their homes to foster children and who have adopted children.

3.) Use whatever your gift is to: **serve others** – the warning is that we not just **serve ourselves**.

Who are “**others?**” In this context, “each other and one another” refers to other Christians.

Galatians 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

1 Corinthians 10:24 *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

The Founder of The Salvation Army, William Booth, when he was very old, was preparing to send his annual Christmas message to Salvationists around the world. In those days, communication was by telegraph, and you paid for each word that you sent. Times were tough and the Army was short on money, so William Booth sent a one-word telegram. The word he sent was: OTHERS.

“Others” are inclusive and relational. The reach of our congregation through the places we live, work, study and play is vast! Sometimes we’ll reach out to people we don’t know, but primarily we are an example to those we **already** know. Any action we take or decision we make, or conversation we have, or comment we post - we ask ourselves, “Will this help my friend/relative/neighbor/coworker/classmate/etc. follow Jesus, or create a hindrance?” We have an incredible responsibility because we are people with influence.

Less confusing, and more concerning is that it may come across as presumptive, as in, suggesting we know what people need or that we have all the answers.

Where do we start? We start by following Jesus ourselves. We worship Him and we grow in Him. We connect with those who are ready and willing to come alongside us and to help us. Helping Others Follow Jesus is *dynamic*—it will never be static because we are all always in the process of growth and transformation. And it’s not one-size-fits-all because we have diverse backgrounds, experiences, abilities, passions, gifts, circles of influence, etc. – we are all uniquely equipped to serve in the specific ways God has called us to, and even that may change over time as we age, or our situation changes, or we experience new (perhaps very difficult) things. This statement should be empowering and liberating because it allows us to help, serve, lead and love in differing ways—each as God directs us.

Last week I mentioned that someone helped US to follow Jesus. They took “OTHERS” seriously. At the end of my message I went through a series of people, starting with Edward Kimball leading Dwight L. Moody to Christ in 1854, and ended with Billy Graham 102 years later in June of 1956 which average 15,000 people in attendance. One of those, a man who’d just celebrated his 28th birthday, was Bill Mason. He gave his life to Christ at that event and 8 years later, became the pastor of a congregation in south Tulsa which had started in 1962: Asbury Methodist Church. Had it not been for Edward Kimball leading D.L. Moody to Christ in 1854 and all that happened over that century...none of us would be here today.

Sean Groombridge told us this week about a man he’d met recently through our “Asbury Singing Ambassadors” named “**Roy Paxson.**” I got to meet and visit with Roy on Thursday. He told me he had a very unpleasant childhood – he was an unwanted child who never felt loved by his mother. He let me read a 10-page article he wrote about his life and how he began to follow Jesus. He was about 22 when he went to a revival at a church and saw a beautiful woman at the church. The sermon was great but he couldn’t get the woman out of his mind so he went back the next night. There was an altar call after the sermon that night. Roy felt convicted of his sins and his need for forgiveness but he wouldn’t go down front. He felt a little hand on his right hand and heard a little voice ask: “Mr. can I go down front and pray with you?” It was a little boy of about 9 years old that Roy had never met. He took Roy by the finger and led him to the front of the church. On Jan. 5, 1950, Roy asked Jesus into His life. I asked Roy what happened to the little boy and he said that he later became a missionary. Oh, and Roy and that beautiful girl dated for 2 ½ years and he and Marilyn have now been married for 64 years. Some years after that his mother received Christ and for the first time, Roy heard her tell him: “I love you.”

I was at Memorial Park cemetery on Wednesday and conducted a graveside service for Sam Page, who was the choir director at Rose Hill Methodist Church while I was a kid. Two of his daughters, Cathy and Lisa, are Asbury members. I’ve known the family all of these years. But what I didn’t know was what Verla Richardson, also a Rose Hill person, shared. As we were at the graveside she said: “Sam Page invited my husband, Larry, to come play on the Rose Hill softball team. Larry wasn’t really interested in going to church but he was interested in playing softball. But that’s how we started going to church. One thing led to another and we became youth sponsors at Rose Hill.” Larry and Verla made going to church fun for me as a kid. It was when I was 14 ½ years old that I gave my life to Christ. So did my sister, my mom & dad. So did Larry & Verla. So as I’m at Memorial Park cemetery on Wednesday morning listening to Verla speak, Sam Page is right

behind me in his coffin. I didn't realize it until then – but he helped me follow Jesus through a simple invitation given to Larry Richardson to follow Jesus.”

We're not all going to be Billy Graham's, preachers or evangelists, but we can all Help Others Follow Jesus. A 9-year-old boy. An invitation to play softball.