

This weekend we are starting a new series called “Get A Life.” It really gets at the core of why we exist as a church, what the church is about and what this world desperately needs.

Many people live by the illusion that if they could just somehow get the things we want in life then we would be deliriously happy. If I could lose that 20 pounds or get that higher paying job or find the right mate then life would be great. You can count on a year of promises of presidential candidates telling us that if we elect them America will be great again. Here’s an important question to start our series: If you get the president you want in the next election, if you get the job you want, the spouse, the car, etc. would you be the man/woman God created and called you to be? You may be thinner but would you be godlier? We may work our way out of debt as a nation but will we be more responsive to God? Would the hearts of the fathers be turned towards their children? Would every marriage be a model of faithfulness and love? Would we at last be able to master our impulses regarding sex and anger and narcissism?

Jesus said He came to bring life, abundant life, zoe life. But how do I experience the life God wants me to experience and how do I offer this life to others?

1. Life happens when we follow Jesus. When Jesus called His first disciples all He said was, “Follow me.” I think that if you would have asked one of Jesus’ twelve disciples what their strategy was they would have given you a blank stare. They might have said, “Ask Him, we’re just following Him.” Years later, one of those men, looking back on all that happened, wrote, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.”**

Let’s never forget that our mission as a church is to follow Jesus. “To lead people in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ” means I go first. How can we lead people to a place we are not willing to go? We have to experience spiritual transformation or we will have nothing to offer.

“Jesus’ invitation (“follow me”) is a call to spiritual transformation, to bring new life and a change of the heart. “Jesus’ plan was not to start a church full of people who call themselves Christians, but remain cranky, egotistical, judgmental, deceptive, greedy, lustful, gossipy, self-righteous, religious people until they die and go to heaven. His plan was to begin a society of the transformed heart.” Ortberg

What a great description for the church – “the society of the transformed heart” - not the society of the modified behavior or the sin management society. We are followers of Jesus who are pursuing a transformation of the heart. The invitation of Jesus is “follow me.”

In Mark 1, right after Jesus begins to proclaim the good news, the Gospel of the Kingdom we read, “**As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”** (Mark 1:16-17)

In Matthew 8: “**Another man, one of his disciples, said to Jesus, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me. Let the dead bury the dead.’”** (Matthew 8:21-22)

In Matthew 16 Jesus said to His disciples, “**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.**” (Matthew 16:24)

John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life.” That’s a vision statement. That is His dream. It is also what everybody’s been waiting for.

Jesus’ invitation is still, “Follow me.” “If you want this kind of life,” Jesus says, “then you come and learn from Me how to live.”

2. Life (zoe life) is lived inside out. We often try to live outside in. If I take my cues from the world I will be **conformed**. If I look to others for life I will be **informed**. Jesus wants us to be **transformed** and that happens only as I surrender my life to Him. We look out there all around us and think that there is something out there that will give us life. But what I need is not out there but in here as I knit my heart together with God’s heart. Without a vital connection with God I cannot expect to experience life. That is where life begins. It’s an inside job...see graphic.

This pattern of *life in Christ, life in community and life in the world* can be observed in Jesus’ behavior. He spent time alone with the Father. He invested in twelve apprentices. He went from place to place offering life to those who were helpless, hopeless, clueless, lifeless.

3. Life requires VIM. (Dallas Willard concept). Vim is a word we don’t use much in our daily vocabulary. It means vitality. I want to use this little word to hang some big thoughts on because we are going to start out in 2012 in search of spiritual vitality. Only God can transform a life, but we are not passive in the process. We can open ourselves up to it and we are going to learn together over these next few weeks how to pursue it. It involves three components.

Vision – We all dream about a world that gets it right. Where there is no crime, injustice, war, poverty, etc. There is no place on earth like that. That’s why Jesus was obsessed with “the kingdom.” Jesus calls us to be part of a kingdom movement. Can you envision what His kingdom is like? **Luke 4:14-21**

Intention – Do we truly want life with God? God wants an active partner in relationship. Have you decided that you want the kingdom of God more than anything else? Have you decided that

more than success, more than a great house, more than applause or security—have you decided that you want this most of all? **Mt. 13:44-46**

Pianist – “I wish I could play like that.” No you don’t. If you truly did you would spend 8 hours every day at the piano. Michael Jordan was a good free throw shooter not because he was a great athlete. That helps, but MJ also shot a hundred free throws every day from the time he was a kid!

This vision, that the only way to life worth having for you and me and for our whole world is through Jesus must become something that you believe with unforced conviction. No one can believe this for you. No church can hype it up, spin it out. It’s got to get lodged inside me. And then, when that happens, it will naturally lead to intention but there must be intention. There must be a decision somewhere along the line. You have to say, I have to say, I know I will be wayward, I know I will forget, I know I’ll get off track, but I’ll keep coming back to this. This is what I want and I will have it and whatever it takes to do this I will do.

Method – what is the method or the means by which I cultivate my relationship with God?

Jesus came to bring up there down here. God, our Father who art in heaven, your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10). He launched this Kingdom movement and now the society of the transformed heart can spread around the world. That is why we exist as a church, not to have buildings, not to run programs, not to create services; although those are all good things... Taste of Community...

We have to ask as a church what’s our plan to pursue it? How are we doing? How could we do better? This is hard work. It’s not just how many people are coming or what kind of programs we are running. How are we doing at actually pursuing spiritual transformation?

If you are new to FBCD or wish to further explore the mission and vision of Fellowship in a conversational environment, then our next connecting point will be Jan. 22nd at 11am in the Fellowship Hall. **To find out more, please visit either (1) the Connecting Point table located on the north end of the 2nd floor or (2) our newcomer table down in the HUB. (there will be a sign-up sheet available in both locations.)**

If you’ve already been to a connecting point and/or you know pursuing authentic community is the next step for you, then check out all of our group options at Taste of Community today!

I have a friend who owns a German short-haired pointer whose parents were Grand Champion hunters. Last week we were talking about his dog and he said apologetically, “It’s kind of sad that all he does is chase tennis balls.” When I think of all that God has done for me, the heritage of this church, the resources God has given us, I don’t want to be caught chasing tennis balls when Jesus returns.”