

April 12, 2015  
Life Worth Giving  
1 Peter 2:5-9

Gary Brandenburg  
Following Jesus...Just for the fun of it.

Last week we talked about resurrection. This week I want to talk about reformation. The Protestant Reformation refers to a period of history when men like Martin Luther attempted to correct the growing corruption in the church. The mission and message of Jesus had become twisted and complicated by ambitious priests drunk with power and privilege. Love for Jesus was replaced by loyalty to an institution. Luther risked his life to get the church back on track. One of the ways he did that was by reminding people what the NT says about the priesthood. The Bible is clear; we are all called to be priests.

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may PROCLAIM the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (ESV) 1 Peter 2:9*

*“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father-- to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.” Revelation 1:5b-6*

Luther concluded from scripture that, “Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things. These are the functions of priests, and they cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in Him, to be not only His brethren, co-heirs, and fellow-kings, but also His fellow-priests. Therefore we may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith and cry ‘Abba, Father!’” Martin Luther

When Jesus said, “I will build My church,” He envisioned a kingdom of priests, an army of citizen soldiers enlisted to beat back the darkness and set people free. Spiritual warfare cannot be won with a professional army alone. So Jesus put together a ministry militia, citizen soldiers recruited for a great cause, like the citizen soldiers of WWII. “War brings out the best in many men...A large majority of the GI’s in Northwest Europe in 1944-45 did their best at whatever they did, and in most cases they discovered that they were capable of doing far more than they had ever imagined possible. **“Thousands of men, between twenty and twenty-five years of age responded to the challenge of responsibility magnificently. They matured as they led and, if they survived, they succeeded in their postwar careers. In one way, they were lucky: only in the extremity of total war does a society give so much responsibility for life-and-death decision-making to men so young.”** Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, ch. 14

You are a priest, a minister, a soldier in God’s army, called to follow Jesus and assist Him in building His church. You have been called to full time ministry. You’re day job is simply how you put bread on the table. You have been strategically placed where you are in order to represent Jesus and YOU CAN DO IT.

My dream for Fellowship is that when someone becomes part of this family they understand that they are joining a ministry militia dedicated to building the church by setting people free. God created you, Jesus called you and the Holy Spirit gifted you to be an essential part of God’s program here on earth.

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“You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Pe. 2:5. Jesus said, “On this rock I will build My church.” There is only one kind of building material to build this church – living stones. God enlists us to grow His church and expand His kingdom. To do that we need a personal reformation.

The first step in a personal reformation is to **overcome the usual objections**. You have to excuse the excuses, and they are legion. “I don’t know how. It’s too hard. I’m too busy. I’m not smart enough, spiritual enough, talented enough. I have a past that disqualifies me. I tried to serve God and got burned.” You have to believe that God is bigger than your objections. I can provide you with 66 books that support that notion that God delights in using ordinary people to accomplish His extraordinary work. Life is a series of ordinary moments full of seemingly insignificant decisions made by normal people having unremarkable conversations and serving in unremarkable ways. If your faith is grounded in radical experiences then you will spend your life looking for repeat performances.

Once you get past the objections you need to **get on the right path**. The Bible refers to our faith as a "spiritual walk." Paul says, “For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Col. 1:9-10

The reason Paul prays for the Colossians to be filled with “the knowledge of His will” is because the Christian walk is an **INTENTIONAL** walk. The church has suffered from a lot of flawed, short-sighted, ineffective approaches to spiritual development. Let me offer a little recent church history. Back in the 70’s and 80’s churches began to make changes in programming to appeal to Baby Boomers. Boomers were bored with church so to make things more interesting, more attractive, the organ was out, the electric guitar was in. Boomers could praise the Lord to tunes that were more like the ones we were listening to on our eight-tracks. (If you ever owned an eight track then you’re a Boomer!).

Eventually, every church had a “house band.” A new millennium arrived and the grandchildren of Boomers were suspicious if not disgusted by a self-focused consumer-driven approach to church. These Millennials weren’t content with having a better life, they want to change the world. They wanted to be radical not relevant. The gospel is not just about getting people saved but we should also save the rain forest and save the whales. (Jesus might say, “What does it profit a man to save the whales and forfeit his own soul?”) The Boomers produced the attractional church while the millennials have produced the missional church. But here’s the problem – an unhealthy dependence on these forms can lead to seriously flawed approaches to discipleship. These approaches to discipleship are like two extremes in parenting – the permissive parent and the shaming parent. Both are counterproductive.

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Invitational	Challenging
Attractional	Missional
Narcissus	Prometheus
Bribing culture	Shaming culture
Permissive parents	Scolding parents
Exhibitionists	Prohibitionists (the use of alcohol)

We need a different approach, a third way. I suggest the INTENTIONAL church. There are no accidental disciples. No one wanders into spiritual maturity. Those who discover the joy of participating with Jesus in His mission follow a well-worn path.

The intentional walk is composed of four essential practices of a disciple...these are the irreducible minimums of the Christian life.

Experience 1 – Worship. Worship is the first priority of the church. "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate." John Piper. I dream of a church where people aren't mired in meaningless forms but they are finding new ways to express their worship; not just on Sunday but every day, not just corporately but privately. Reformation is fueled by a devotion to God expressed through worship.

Experience 2 - Abide in the truth. I dream of a church where people discover new ways to learn. A reformation requires a learning community so that we are "not conformed to this age, but transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2).

A couple of people have asked me what I have learned through my heart attack. I wish I had something profound but here is one thing I know – a heart attack can be the result of a series of bad choices over a long period of time. Spiritual maturity is the favorable consequence of a series of good choices over a long period of time. Growth is the result of a patient commitment to daily routines, routines that often seem dull, and boring and trivial. Let's face it, the thrill of winning the lottery is a lot more appealing than the discipline of putting aside a little money over a long period of time.

Experience 3 – Love. Jesus said, "Love one another." Life is not a solo performance. God never intended for us to fight this war alone. He chose twelve men to share His life with. He did not offer them a correspondence course. You cannot obey the Great Commandment apart from community. I dream of a church where everyone can identify someone they are doing life with. Calling is discovered over time and in community.

Experience 4 – Kingdom commitment. I recognize that life is bigger than my story. There is the story I live and the story I live into. And the story I live into is the story of God's kingdom described in the Bible as the place that God is preparing for those who love Him. I dream of a church where people are so excited about their ministry that they can't help but recruit others to join them, especially the next generation. A church grows strong when old men and mature women plant trees whose shade they will never sit in.

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If you want to find Life Worth Giving:

1. Overcome the objections. Excuse the excuses. Get rid of them.
2. Get on the right path. Walk intentionally.
3. Enjoy the journey. Follow Jesus...just for the fun of it. There is great pleasure in following Jesus. Knowing God is supremely satisfying. Nothing is more enjoyable than living a Life Worth Giving. I was recently reminded of that in the aftermath of the death of Dean Smith, legendary coach of the N.C. Tar Heels from 1961-1997. Smith died at his North Carolina home on Feb. 7 at age 83. After his passing 180 of his former players received a letter in the mail with a check enclosed. The letter read:

“Each player was important and special to Coach Smith and when he prepared his estate plan, Coach wanted to reach out to each of his letterman. Accordingly, Coach directed that following his passing, each letterman be sent a two hundred dollar (\$200.00) check with the message “enjoy a dinner out compliments of Coach Dean Smith.” Enclosed is a check in the amount of two hundred dollars (\$200.00) with the notation “Dinner out.”

Jesus was right wasn't He? It is more blessed to give than to receive. It is also more inspirational. Wouldn't that be fun? To be given the authority and the resources to just give them away to bless some stranger. Well that is what you were called to do. So I want to invite you to follow Jesus...just for the fun of it! Join me in leading a church dominated by delight rather than drab, dull duty; a church where people serve because they want to and not because they have to, a church where love for Jesus is so contagious that when people walk in this building they catch a disease and can't help but spread it to the whole community. Once you find and follow God's central purpose for your life you not only contribute to building God's kingdom but you experience a level of joy and satisfaction that is unsurpassed by any other pursuit.

Last Christmas I saw a video commercial where some people were given gifts to give to others. Check it out. J.C. Penney video...

When you give you grow. You can do this. You have been given everything you need. All you have to do is give what you have been given. And that makes Life Worth Giving.