

## Backwards

Sent Message Series

September 11, 2011

Do you ever have the sense that something's backwards; it's not working for you and you don't know why?

If you will go with me I want to take you back in time to the beautiful Caribbean ocean. Picture with me a sky with no clouds in sight. There are tropical breezes blowing and the ocean is an incredible color of blue. It almost looks unreal it is so perfect. The surf is up and it is another day in paradise.

Only life wasn't working so well for me, nor for my wife Belinda. We set out with eight other couples to kayak along the coast of an island and to enjoy a leisurely day surrounded by absolute beauty. What could be better than that?

I'm sure I listened to the details of how to get the kayak off the beach and avoid capsizing when the first set of waves crested near the shore but we couldn't agree on what we just heard. The surf was loud and adrenaline was pumping. Belinda was nervous because she didn't swim well. I felt overconfident because I grew up in Alaska where I spent a lot of time in a canoe. I knew we would be just fine.

As we pushed off from the shore I said, *You paddle on the right* (her strong side) *and I will paddle on the left*. The first big wave came at us and she paddled frantically on the right and then switched to the left. I tried to correct her verbally and offset her choices by padding opposite her only that didn't work so well because she kept changing and I didn't know which way she was going next. I tried desperately to guess and keep us headed straight into the first big wave. Do you want to guess what happens if you are sideways to the wave as it crests near the shore?

We hit the first wave and the bow went straight up in the air. The surf splashed in our faces. We went down the other side with incredible speed and somehow we made it past the first wave upright. We were off on a great adventure! Life is good! We could do this!

Then the struggle for control set in. We argued about how to steer the kayak and who should take which role. I complained that everyone else seemed to have it figured out and notice--they were cooperating. They were even smiling and enjoying the experience. That didn't help. We were falling to the back of the line which was a problem for me. After some animated discussion Belinda decided she had enough and quit paddling altogether. I think she said something to the effect that if I was so great I could just do it myself. And I said something like that would probably be an improvement!

### **Dead in the water**

Dead in the water; that's what happens if you don't paddle. Then the sea takes you where it wants you to go. This was not good!

We made apologies and started again. We tried harder. We tried a LOT harder. It was hot now. The

sky was a beautiful but there were no clouds. The fun factor was fading fast. We were far from shore and Belinda kept reminding me the water was deep. What if we capsized? Belinda doesn't swim. That's what life jackets were for I reminded her. We couldn't go back now anyway and our guide was way out ahead of us. If we didn't find a way to keep up we would soon lose sight of everyone else. Besides finishing last wasn't an option in my book! What do you do when you are dead in the water?

We started working together, quit complaining and worked up a good sweat. Practice makes perfect right? Not so much! But we did improve enough to steer in the general direction. Over time we began to catch up with the others. We were probably the oldest couple but this was a hour and a half trip and some of the younger ones were not as motivated as we had become. I started counting how many were ahead of us. If we made it a race it could be more fun right? Belinda wasn't buying.

Given that there was plenty of time we did eventually catch and pass every kayak except one and I was pretty proud when we caught that last wave and coasted onto the beach. The guide grabbed the front of our kayak to steady it so we could get out and with an astonished look on his face exclaimed, *In all my years I've never seen that before. You made the whole trip going backwards!* How did you do that?

Good question! No wonder it was so hard! Just so you know both ends of the boat came to a point. Evidently we were supposed to get in the kayak facing the shore and when we pushed off turn toward the waves. We just got in facing the waves and took off. I guess we should have listened to our guide more closely! There is a lesson here I'm sure. Suddenly the struggle for the last 90 minutes began to make a lot more sense.

### **Life seems harder than it should be**

Perhaps you know the feeling that life sometimes seems harder than it should be. Maybe you missed the details or someone else in your world isn't cooperating but what appeared to be a rather simple and fun exercise of living has turned into an unexpected ordeal.

Can anyone relate?

What if you got it backwards? What if you think you are supposed to be leading in life and in reality you were designed to follow?

It's normal to live your life believing you were born to be in control. We start out from the cradle forward thinking that life is all about me. And that serves us well in the beginning. Life is about having what you want and the freedom to do as you please right—that's what brings happiness?

*Have it your way*, that's what the commercial says.

*You can't please everyone so you got to please yourself* the song says.

We live in a *me first* world.  
How's that working for you?

Not so well! Because when everyone thinks that way before long you find yourself arguing, competing, and complaining with others who believe the same thing. And after you've BOTH tried harder AND threatened to quit in life you eventually come to the place where you are dead in the water.

### **Made for More**

I'm not the fastest or brightest student of life, or kayaking, but I've come to an astonishing discovery **I am made for more** than that! And you are too. There is a better way!

Life, like the kayak, works better when you turn around and go the direction the Guide advises. You slice through the water. Steering is incredibly easier. Your efforts are more productive, you get along with others better and you enjoy the journey.

### **Repent**

The Greek word for *turn-around* is *mataneo*. This is what Belinda and I needed to do in the boat. And ultimately it is what we need to do in life. We turn around and go the other direction. We turn from living a Self directed life to live a life that is Sent. The old English translation of that word is *repent*. Literally it means to turn around, one hundred and eighty degrees, and go the other way.

The disciples said this about finding your way back to God. *Repent of your sins and turn to God so that your sins will be wiped away.* Acts 3:19 NLT

### **Sent**

**Today we begin a four week series that describes life as God intends it to be. We are calling the series Sent.** I hope that you will turn around from the self directed life to discover you are made for more. I pray that you will embrace the life God always intended for you. I want you to discover purpose and meaning and in the process to live Sent.

You hear us say nearly every Sunday at Indian Creek that our mission is to help people find their way back to God and to be like Jesus. But what does it mean *to be like Jesus*? You probably aren't going to walk on water, feed 5,000 from a couple fish and loaves and raise the dead so **in practical terms what does it mean to be like Jesus?** It means to live a life that is repurposed to live Sent.

I talked earlier about the reality we all live in where we are tempted to act like *it's all about me*—that is a life directed by **Self**. But the life Jesus lived and the one He invites us to follow Him into is a life that is **Sent**.

### **The Tug of War**

**There is a tug of war that goes on in our lives to decide whether we will live for Self or whether we will live Sent.** That is a tug of war you need to win or it will ruin your life.

It is certainly true that from the cradle forward we wake up every day thinking of self but it is also true that every one of us carries inside us the very breath of God. In Genesis 2 the Bible says God breathed

into Adam the very breath of life. And since every child gets its' first breath of oxygen through the umbilical cord—you have the breath of God within you.

And the breath of God leads us to lead a different kind of life a life that is other-focused, a life that is SENT. This series is about living for this higher purpose.

It might sound and feel backwards to you BUT *what if this is how it was meant to be and when you go your own way that is what's backwards?*

### **Roger Swanwick**

One of my best friends in the early days of Indian Creek was a guy named Roger Swanwick. He would tell you he gave the Self directed life a go. He fought in Vietnam and lived to tell about it. He got out, grew his hair long, turned to drugs, dope and sex. He lived with his girl friend out of the back of his van and he thought life was good. Until he ran out of money, his so called friends started stealing from him, he woke up in places and didn't know how he got there and his girl friend was ready to leave him. The Self directed life always has a way of unraveling.

I met him shortly after this and got to watch an amazing transformation. Roger and his wife Donna found their way back to God and 2 Corinthians 5:17 came true in their lives.

### **2 Corinthians 5:17**

*This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun.* NLT

Roger and Donna discovered that what they couldn't do on their own the presence of Christ inside began to change them from the inside out. They not only chose to be faithful in attending church. They loved it. They wanted to grow and couldn't get enough. They found something that satisfied their souls. They started serving with me in the youth group I was leading. Before long Roger was appointed manager of a finance company and still later he became president of a bank. Now their lives had purpose and meaning. They went from living for Self to living the life that we are calling SENT.

### **The Diagram**

Maybe a picture will help. When we say *become like Christ* this is what we have in mind. A person loves God, loves people and lives out the love of Jesus. This is how we become like Christ. It is a framework for living. There are beliefs and behaviors that are characteristic of each one of these descriptions.

### **Love God**

This top left circle describes the life of one who loves God.

### **Matthew 22:37**

Jesus said the first Great Commandment was to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.* NLT

When you love God all of life is an act of worship because everything is dedicated to Him. It is about a relationship not a religion. Loving God is not a list of do's and don'ts it is about getting to know God better and better—not just know about Him. We will talk more about this next week.

### **Love People**

The top right circle describes the life of one who loves people. This is a person who lives life in community. They understand that we are created not to live life alone but that we are better together.

*The second Great Commandment is equally important Jesus said: Love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 22:39 NLT*

There is a lot more to that and we will explore it in two weeks but let's move on to the third circle.

### **Live Out**

The bottom circle describes the life of one who lives out the love of Jesus. They believe Jesus when He says things like:

*It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35 NLT* And

*When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me. Matthew 25:40 NLT*

This person allows Jesus to live through them to impact the lives of others.

### **SENT**

You've heard us talk about the three circles before but what we HAVEN'T talked about before is this part in the middle where the three circles converge. This is the place that best describes the life that is *like Jesus*. This is the place we call Sent.

The person who lives Sent has all three circles working in unison. It is not unusual for someone to have one circle working but be a little deficient in the other two. Or you might even have two going most of the time but there is one where you need to grow. And if we took a poll today we would probably find that it would be a different one or two for each of us. I know some people who are exploring faith who place a high value on living in community or even serving.

But when a person is living the life that is SENT this is the place where Jesus shows up! It is here that the kingdom of heaven kisses earth and earth becomes more like heaven.

Jesus said this when He invited people to follow Him, Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

**Matthew 4:19 NLT**

*Jesus called out to them, 'Come follow me and I will show you how to fish for people.'*

This is a life that is outward focused. This is a life that is sent. And there is an encouraging part of this I don't want you to miss. Our part is to *Come, to follow*.

His part is to change us and enable us to live a life that is Sent. You can't do it on your own but if you allow Him He will give you both the want to and the how to so you are new from the inside out.

My good friends, Jon and Glynis DeWitt, are great examples of two people who turned from living for self to living lives that are *SENT*.

When I first came to know my friends I often saw Jon and Glynis at my neighbor's pool. Jon was the life of the party. He'd play pool volleyball with a beer in his hand and a quick quip that kept everyone laughing. Every time I talked with Jon he was kind but it was clear that he didn't think he needed God.

What looked like fun and success on the outside was actually eating him up on the inside. He later admitted that much of the chasing after good times, women (before Glynis) and money was a cover up for the emptiness he felt inside. Jon and Glynis hit bottom when their relationship deteriorated to the point that the future for them looked bleak. Life is all about relationships, isn't it? When they aren't working we are miserable. Jon and Glynis were miserable.

Jon found his way back to God. One night he spent several hours on his face in his basement crying out to God for forgiveness and for help to reconcile with Glynis. God met him there with open arms and relationship with God was reborn. Jon was a new man inside and out. He's still the life of any party, but the party that is his life now has a new purpose.

I'll never forget the Monday morning when I heard a knock at my front door at about 8:00 o'clock. It was Jon. *What am I supposed to do?* He asked?

I too was confused because I didn't know the back story yet. I invited him in and he began to describe the changes that had occurred in his heart. He wanted everyone to know the new life he found in Jesus. He was ready to go door to door telling everyone.

We prayed together to seal his commitment and then we asked God for direction. I wish you could have seen us. We were two grown men hugging and wiping tears of joy! I encouraged Jon to start by telling his own family before he went door to door.

That is not the end of the story, Glynis, Jon's wife, was skeptical. She wanted to see if the change was real. Would it last? She kept her distance for weeks but the change was so deep and profound that she wanted to find her way back to God too. She found my wife Belinda one Sunday and poured out her heart to God. She experienced forgiveness so profound it overwhelmed her. She accepted amazing grace and received a peace all at once in a time she will never forget. Glynis now finds joy serving alongside Jon leading an Alpha group. But perhaps her greatest joy is mentoring other young women to turn around and find what she found in

relationship with Jesus.

Jon knew he was sent to tell others but it wasn't by knocking on doors in our neighborhood. He started putting together a daily devotional he sends out to anyone interested. The last count I heard he had over 1,400 people receiving the *devos* as he calls them. Many of them pass them on to a network of friends and the chain reaches around the world.

You can discover the relationship Jon and Glynis found if you'll admit you can't do it alone. I say it this way, *I can't but He can!*

Will you say that after me?  
*I can't but He can.*

He won't wrestle control away from you. If you will reach for Him you'll discover He was already there reaching for you.

Closing

I wonder if today isn't the day where you decide to turn your back on the Self directed life and put your life in the hands of the One who says follow me, *I'll show you a better way to live. I'll show you how to become all you were meant to be. I'll teach you how to live a life that is Sent.*

Jesus said, *As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.* John 20:21 NLT

Start by turning around, turn away from self. If you find yourself saying things like, this is harder than it was meant to be. You are right. Or if you ever wonder, is there something more—there is! You were made for more.

Take a step toward god today. It is not complicated, it is as simple as the ABCs.

- A Admit you need God
- B Believe Jesus is the Son of God and invite Him to be your Savior
- C Confess you've sinned and ask for forgiveness

Prayer

Next Steps: Commit to all six weeks.

Join a small group

Read the book backwards

Sign up for the devos

