

“Be-Live It”

Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 3:18

Series: Believe

The Woodside Church

September 18, 2016

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

That’s a question we often ask children. Sometimes you hear: doctor, police officer, teacher, football player, astronaut. Think back to when you were a child. What did you want to be when you grew up? I remember wanting to be President. I was fascinated with the Presidents. I read and memorized facts about them. Back then I even wrote to the current President and asked him what it was like to be President. Unfortunately at the time it was Richard Nixon.

Now I don’t want to shock any of you but – I didn’t become President. And frankly, I frequently thank God for that. The truth is: many of us do not become what we aspire to be as children. How many of you actually do the job you dreamed about in elementary school?

Perhaps a more interesting question is: *Who* do you want to be when you grow up? The answer to that should be easy: me. I want to be me. Isn’t that what all those corny after-school specials taught us: be yourself? Don’t try to be like the cool kids. Do your own thing. That’s all true. Be the best version of you. Yet here’s something they didn’t tell us in those after-school specials: the best way to be the best version of you is to become like the best Person who walked the earth: Jesus. Why? Well, He is the One who created you, who knows you best, who knows how you work best. He is the One who saves you and sets you free for the sins that are hurting, harming, and holding you down. He is the One who put the Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit in you and He is the One who knows the best way to bring those out of you.

I can testify to this in my life. After I grew a little and discovered I didn’t want to be President (since there was no way that would ever happen), I went on to dream about many other careers: a lawyer, an inventor, an engineer, an author, a counselor, an artist, and, of course, a rock star. Notice pastor was not on the list. Yet when I met and surrendered my life to Jesus, when I decided to follow Jesus, everything changed. He took ingredients from each of those occupations and stirred them into my calling. From the lawyer He took reasoning and public speaking, from the inventor and engineer He gathered problem solving and project design, from the author He selected writing and from the counselor empathy, listening, and guidance. From the artist He threw in a dash of creativity and from the rock star one wicked guitar. The more I follow Jesus, the more I become like Jesus, the more I am the best version of me. So who do I want to be like when I grow up? Jesus.

Now please don’t hear what I’m not saying. You do not have to be a pastor to be the best version of you. Anyone can become the best version of themselves. The secret lies in two little words that appear in all four Gospels: “Follow me” (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:27; John 1:43). “How can I stop worrying?” “Follow me.” “How can I let go of anger and forgive?” “Follow me.” “How can I get rid of stress and receive peace?” “Follow me.” “How can I be more joyful and content?” “Follow me.” “How can I break the power of this addiction?” “Follow me.”

“How can I be a better spouse, parent, student, coworker?” “Follow me.” “How can I have more faith, hope and love in my life?” “Follow me.”

They have a name for people who are followers of Jesus. It’s “disciple.” The Greek word will sound familiar to you: *mathete* – we get our word mathematics from it. It literally means a student, a *learner*. A disciple is anyone who learns from Jesus the best way to live. Let me clear up a great misconception about this. When we think of students we picture pupils sitting in classrooms, listening to lectures by the teachers, and typing notes. This is not how Jesus teaches his students. Sure, there were times when Jesus gave a lecture or sermon as in the Sermon on the Mount. Yet more often He taught them using those two magic words: “Follow me.” They learned by following Him. They watched Him care for the sick, cast out demons, comfort the needy, confront the officials. Then He told them, “Go, do likewise, and tell me how it went.” He did not want to simply fill their heads with information. He wanted to change their lives. It was not easy. But by following Him, they became like Him. And in the process, Jesus brought the best out of each one of them.

Our goal is to be like Jesus. The mission of Woodside is to help everyone be like Jesus. That’s what it means to “Love God, Grow in Grace, Share with Others.” Yet I can’t help you to be like Jesus if you just sit in a class, if you just sit in a pew, if you just sit in a Growth Group or Sunday School or Adventure Club or Youth Group. In school you get an A if you prove on a test you know the information. That doesn’t work here. It’s not enough to just know about the message. You and I need to BE the message and LIVE the message. A disciple, a follower of Jesus needs to BE LIVE It.

Today, we embark on what I consider one of the most essential journeys in the history of Woodside: BELIEVE. I was so thrilled in 2015 when hundreds of people hungered to know The Story of the Bible. I hope you feel more comfortable finding your way around Scripture and understanding where David, Moses, Sarah, Ruth and Paul fit in the grand scheme of things. Yet we can’t stop there. It is good to know the message of the Bible but it’s not enough. You and I have to BE the message of the Bible and we have to LIVE the message of the Bible. And that is exactly why we are doing BELIEVE. During the entire 2016-17 school year we are all going to be disciples of Jesus. BELIEVE will help us discover how to BE like Jesus and LIVE like Jesus.

Why is this so essential? Because Christians aren’t being or living like Jesus. This weekend, seven years ago, the late George Gallup, Jr. of the Gallup Poll spoke on the stage of our Vineyard at the dedication of our new expansion. Not only was Mr. Gallup the foremost authority on surveys, he was also a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. He longed to help the Church be the best it could be. Unfortunately, his surveys of Christians revealed we are not Being or Living like Jesus.

There's little difference in ethical behavior between the churchd and the unchurchd. There's as much pilferage and dishonesty among the churchd as the unchurchd. And I'm afraid that applies pretty much across the board: religion, per se, is not really life changing. People cite it as important, for instance, in overcoming depression--but it doesn't have primacy in determining behavior.¹

¹ George H. Gallup, "Vital Signs," Leadership, Fall 1987, p. 17

George Gallup didn't wish to just report this. He desired to do something about it. So he teamed up with Randy Frazee to create the basis for the BELIEVE series. Randy says,

The first thing I did, with the help of George Gallup, Jr., was to create from scripture a profile of Christ. As we studied the scriptures we looked at his life. How did he think, how did he act and what were the driving virtues of his life? 30 total items were identified. You will find them in the Table of Contents in your Believe book. This is what we seek to move people towards. The end objective is "to be like Jesus."

Then Randy put these 30 items in a self-survey. If this is what Jesus is like, how do I measure up in each area? In some areas you may be right up there with Jesus while in others you need work. Randy's goal is to help followers of Jesus turn their weaknesses into strengths.

So Randy started with himself. He evaluated himself on the 30 items. Then he asked a fellow pastor, his wife, and his twelve-year-old daughter to evaluate him as well.

The strangest thing happened. When they each gave me back the assessment it was in a sealed envelope. I didn't give them an envelope. Huh...As I went to open the first one, I noticed that my hand was shaking. Why? Then it dawned on me – this is the first time I ever asked for feedback on how much I was like Jesus.

As I tallied the responses I was encouraged on a number of points. There was evidence that Christ was in me and I was growing. Yet, there was this one category they all agreed was my greatest growth opportunity.

At first I thought it was a conspiracy. Then, I moved to denial (and) anger – "Who do they think they are? The last stage was finally acceptance. These are three people I chose. They actually love me. Oh my God, maybe this is true about me. Right there in that little private prayer closet I whispered my confession to God. It was a very cathartic experience.

Next Randy had to share the results with his Bible study. It was the first time ever there was perfect attendance – everyone came to hear the pastor's confession!

The place was dead silent. I then just said it. "I, Randy Frazee, am trusting God to help me grow in Christ in the area of humility. Actually, it is one specific area. Apparently, I am known as a braggart." I put my head down thinking to myself, my life as I know it is over. Then to my surprise, the whole room broke out in laughter.

I looked up and said, "Why are you laughing?" One guy said, "We all came here tonight to hear you confess something we didn't already know." I said, "You guys already know this about me." "Yes, everybody knows this about you," they said. "Then why didn't you ever tell me," I said. "Because you never asked," was the reply.

Then it dawned on me. They already knew this about me and yet still love me. Everything is going to be all right! Do you know that the area you need to grow in the

most you likely do not see? It is a “blindspot.” I can attest to that, because when I looked up my score on that one statement, I had given myself a perfect score!

So Randy is not perfect. And neither am I or you. Yet by the grace of God we can all grow up **To BE Like Jesus**. That is God’s hope for everyone in the Woodside community. That is our goal for this school year. That is why we are doing BELIEVE. Paul writes,

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

A visitor to Michelangelo’s studio once asked the master how he created such life-like sculptures of Jesus from a block of marble. Michelangelo replied, “I just chipped away everything that didn’t look like Jesus.” That’s how God transforms us into the image of Jesus.

If you look at the Table of Contents of BELIEVE you will see the thirty topics are divided into three sections of ten each. The last section, what we will cover starting next Easter, is called BE: Who Am I Becoming. These are virtues or the character of a follower – qualities like love, joy, peace, patience and humility. How do we BE that type of person?

The process starts with you. Do you want to BE like Jesus more than any other goal in your life? More than being well-off, successful, influential, intellectual, powerful, physically fit? More than being right, than being politically conservative or liberal, more than being safe, comfortable or happy? If this is not your #1 goal, it won’t work. If this is not your #1 goal ask God to show how much better your life can be when He brings the best out of you. Randy says,

Truth is, I despise being around a braggart. Now, I am admitting I am one and it is distasteful to me. I’m that guy! I don’t want to be that way anymore. I want to be like Jesus. Now what do I do?

You can’t BE like Jesus by simply trying harder. It doesn’t work to say, “I’m going to be more patient today. I’m going to be more joyful or humble.” That’s because there is a belief system inside you that drives what you become. If you want to grow up to be different on the outside you have to change your belief system on the inside.

To BE Like Jesus You Have to THINK like Jesus. Paul says to the Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

The key to BE like Jesus is have Jesus LIVE in me. Once Jesus came to live in Paul, all his judgmental, vengeful, prejudicial personality traits were put to death. They were crucified. That could not happen until Jesus came in. When Paul had his conversion on the road to Damascus, the old Paul died and Jesus came alive inside Him. To put it 21st century terms, Jesus became the operating system of Paul’s life. Everything in his life was now based on a new belief in Jesus, on his faith in the Son of God, on the life of Jesus within him.

If you look again at the BELIEVE Table of Contents you see the first ten topics are titled: THINK: What Do I Believe? Next week we will start with these 10 key beliefs of the Christian faith. If you will, these are the operating system of the Christian faith. This is not just dry abstract theology. Time and again I find that what people think in their minds and believe in their hearts drives who they become in their lives. The trouble is, the world is working overtime to change your operating system away from Christ. A few months ago I came into my office early on a Sunday morning to discover my computer had been hijacked. It was still sitting there. An alien operating system took it over: the dreaded Windows 10! It so locked up my computer that I could not get my sermon or power point slides out of it. I had to call in computer savior Mark Uhlmann to resurrect it.

The world is constantly trying to take over your operating system. Paul said don't let it: Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

In the messages and the Growth Groups we will help you understand these ten key beliefs of the Christian faith so you can use God's operating system. Yet that's not enough. It's not enough to simply think like Jesus.

To BE Like Jesus You Have to ACT Like Jesus. There was a group of people in Jesus' day who knew a lot of theology about God but many of them didn't seem to act on it. They were called the Pharisees. Jesus had his own special name for some of them: hypocrites. Their actions didn't match their words or beliefs. What we think must come out in what we do and how we act. That's why the middle ten topics of BELIEVE is entitled: ACT: What Should I Do? In the beginning of the New Year we will launch into these ten key actions of a follower of Jesus. Just as physical exercise strengthens the body, these spiritual exercises will strengthen your spirit. Every one of the Spiritual Practices helps me to accomplish God's will. As I practice this way of life little by little it starts to form me from the inside-out into a different kind of person – like Jesus. What I THINK leads to what I ACT which helps me grow up into who I will BE. And the cycle repeats.

Now, one more thing you need to know. You do not have to pull this off with your own strength. When you became a follower of Jesus, Jesus came into your life to help you live it.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:3)

This is all well and good. But it won't mean a thing if you don't stand up and do something. Jesus Himself said,

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Thinking about it, talking about it, knowing about it, even agreeing with it is not enough. If you want to BE like Jesus, you have to stand up and start to LIVE like Jesus. As a sign that you want to stand up and live like Jesus, I will invite you to come forward and pick up one of these little

crosses. Carry it around to remind you to think, act and be like Jesus. It will not be easy but it is the best way to live. In fact, if only a few people lived like Jesus it would change the world.

I experienced a very powerful moment this summer that sent chills down my spine. I have already mentioned to you that Lisa and I visited the home of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Montgomery, Alabama. Dr. King was pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church when the bus boycott and the Civil Rights Movement began in December 1955. By January 1956 he was receiving 30 to 40 threatening, hate-filled phone calls a day. One night, after receiving a death threat that sounded more than credible, he couldn't sleep. He got up, went into the kitchen and started to brew a pot of coffee. On our tour, Lisa and I sat at that kitchen table while our tour guide played a clip from one of his sermons. Dr. King confessed his courage was faltering and his fear growing. He worried about his baby girl. He feared for his dedicated and loyal wife. He wondered how he could leave town without appearing a coward and without stopping the movement.

And I got to the point that I couldn't take it any longer. I was weak. Something said to me, "You can't call on Daddy now, you can't even call on Mama. You've got to call on that something in that person that your Daddy used to tell you about, that power that can make a way out of no way." With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory: "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think I'm right. I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now, I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage.

It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you. Even until the end of the world."

I tell you I've seen the lightning flash. I've heard the thunder roar. I've felt sin breakers dashing trying to conquer my soul. But I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me alone.²

The world needs disciples who are willing to stand up and follow Jesus.

Will you stand up today and follow Him?

² *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. Clayborne Carson, (New York: Central Publishing, 1998) 77-78.