Hit the ground running!

Week #1: Be a bridge, build a bridge

What does it mean to hit the ground running?  We kind of know that it means **getting off to a good or fast start.**  You might also say get off to a **flying start**, start **with a bang** **or come out of the gate strong**.  These all mean the same thing but **there’s always a story behind** phrases or euphemisms like hit the ground running.

**But that’s not where it came from originally**.  The phrase was penned in an article in the Evening News in 1895; the piece was called king of all the liars and the excerpt reads, “I turned to run and figured to a dot when he shot as he cracked loose and I jumped way up in the air and did a split, just like these show gals do only mine wasn't on the ground by 6 feet. The bullet went under me. I knew he had five more cartridges, so I hit the ground running and squatted low down when the gun barked a second time.”

**In this the original usage of the phrase hit the ground running, the principal is the same**. In this case, not hitting the ground running did not end in a face plant, it ended in getting shot.

**In both cases, hit the ground running is necessary to avoid something bad happening so that something good can happen.** If you don't hit the ground running, **you will not be able to accomplish what you were sent for**. Back to The U.S. military, if the soldier jumping out of the moving vehicle does not hit the ground running, but instead simply hits the ground. Then he will **not be where he needs to be to affect the battle**. Also, his failure to hit the ground running could **very well affect the people behind** him who are also jumping out of the moving vehicle because they will stumble over his prostate body.

**What does this mean for Eagle Ridge Church of God in the fall of 2023**. Fall is when everything **ramps back up** at **school,** maybe at your work, but also at church. **After the summer of** love, with vacations, sunshine, going to the lake, relaxing, we **turn the corner into fall where everything starts moving again**.  **If everything is moving and taking you with it, then you definitely need to hit the ground running so that you don't face plant.**

**At Eagle Ridge, after being scattered quite a bit this summer, we restart all of the different programs that are a part of our goal of making disciples** who make disciples to the third and fourth generation. That means children's ministry, youth ministry, bridge groups, Sunday morning classes, like **come and see,** get moving again.

**Again, if the vehicle you are in is moving and you are deployed out of it, then you must hit the ground running or you will miss what God wants to do this fall**. Eagle Ridge **is moving, even picking up speed in the direction of making disciples** as well as starting new platforms from which disciples can make disciples.

**This is where our guiding phrase, be a bridge build a bridge, comes from.**

**16**So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! **17**This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

**18**And all of this is a gift from God, who **brought us back to himself** through Christ. And God has given us this task of **reconciling** people to him. **19**For God was in Christ, **reconciling** the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of **reconciliation.** **20**So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!” **21**For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,[[e](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3D2%2BCorinthians%2B5%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28859e&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643720235&usg=AOvVaw1rnXcav-NDX1ZapMne2yYI)] so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Now that you have heard it read out loud, **look for words, phrases, or ideas, that are repeated**.  Using your outline, **mark all the words** that are repeated. What is the word that is repeated?  **Reconciliation** or some form of the word.  But there are also words describing the same idea.  Look at this.

**18**And all of this is a gift from God, who **brought us back to himself** through Christ. And God has given us this task of **reconciling** people to him. **19**For God was in Christ, **reconciling** the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of **reconciliation.** **20**So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “**Come back to God**!” **21**For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,[[e](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3D2%2BCorinthians%2B5%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28859e&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643721454&usg=AOvVaw3-1wGKcUovwnR6M1LnL460)] so that we could be made right with God through Christ.  18-21

**Paul is using political terms here**.  Whether that was his intention to take their minds here or not, it is what some would have thought.

**Reconciliation** = harmony established between enemies by a peace treaty.

**Ambassador** = the ambassador is the one sent to announce the peace treaty.

**We will come back to these terms later**.  It’s enough to say at this point that Paul is making **Jesus the one who creates the peace treaty**, the reconciler, and **Paul himself is the one who announces it is the ambassador.**

**Back to our soldiers jumping out of that moving vehicle**. If his or her feet hit the ground and they are running the question is; **“where are they running to and why?**” The phrase ‘hit the ground running’ implies that you know the answers to the last two questions. **“I am heading toward that hill** just to the north, yeah to set up Vantage point for surveying enemy troop movements in the valley below.” Without this direction, these soldiers may head in the wrong direction, **taking more time to get to their spot**. They may also **not have the gear that they need when they arrive** at the designated location if they don't know why they're there.

To hit the ground running with direction and purpose we need…

**So how do we as a church hit the ground running in this new season we are heading into?**

**This series will help you answer the question of direction and purpose.**  But to really know in a meaningful way **where God is taking Eagle Ridge and why** we are going there, you need to take our class that just started this AM called **Come and See.**

To hit the ground running with direction and purpose we need… A new lens for seeing clearly.

**It’s like an eye exam** when an optometrist is trying to get your glasses or contact prescription right, she puts different lenses in front of your eyes with different powers of magnification.  Then asks**, “is that better or worse?”**

**Remember what it feels like when you answer an emphatic “Yes!”**  Everything looks so **crisp and clear.** It’s better than just read it, there are **clear clean lines between** the white background and the black letters.

**Prior to his conversion, Paul saw Jesus’ mission as a failure because the Jewish Messiah would not suffer and die.**  This was seeing it without a spiritual lens.  Then on the road to **Damascus,** he saw with spiritual eyes.

**When you can see better, you can evaluate better.**

Remy and the dog cut out…

**Paul’s opponents want people to believe that Jesus came and suffered so that his people, Israel, wouldn’t need to suffer anymore and would be free from Rome.  It was nationalism.**

**Are you seeing Jesus** with your flesh or for what he can do for you in this life making it better and happier?  You need a new lens!

**Are you viewing other people that way?**  Without the correct lens?

**This is what Paul refers to as the new covenant or the new creation.  In this new creation, we live for Jesus by living for others.**

**16**So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! 

**Let’s look at the rest of the passage by dividing it up between what it says about God and what it says about people**.  This is a **simple tool** to use.  Here are all the verses that Paul talks **about God.**

**18**And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them.

**21**For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,[[e](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3D2%2BCorinthians%2B5%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28859e&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643725854&usg=AOvVaw3vTyONdc-1l1M8B2EqA-EJ)] so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

 To hit the ground running with direction and purpose we need… A new lens for seeing clearly…Jesus as **The** bridge back to God.

Back to ambassadors and reconciliation…

For those with a Hebrew background, it comes directly from the **Jewish law and prophets, the idea of atonement or Jesus taking our place as a substitute** for us and our punishment for sin.

Jesus is the substitute for the sin offering within the covenant made with Moses.

**3**The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature.[[a](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3DRomans%2B8%253A3%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28081a&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643727047&usg=AOvVaw3x34_nrqsuNUTa9za0Cg0-)] So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.  Romans 8:3

**Our sin created separation** between us and God.  **He couldn’t just let that go or he wouldn’t be just and fair.**  He had to punish it.  Jesus took our punishment.

This is probably what **Paul had in his mind** being well trained in the Jewish scriptures.

He had done no wrong  
    and had never deceived anyone.  
But he was buried like a criminal;  
    he was put in a rich man’s grave.

**10**But it was the Lord’s good plan to crush him  
    and cause him grief.  
Yet when his life is made an offering for sin,  
    he will have many descendants.  
He will enjoy a long life,  
    and the Lord’s good plan will prosper in his hands.  
**11**When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish,  
    he will be satisfied.  
And because of his experience,  
    my righteous servant will make it possible  
for many to be counted righteous,  
    for he will bear all their sins.  
**12**I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier,  
    because he exposed himself to death.  
He was counted among the **rebels**.  
    He bore the sins of many and interceded for **rebels**. Isaiah 53:9-11

**Jesus provided a way for those who had rebelled against his loving rule to be made innocent and back in relationship with God**.

“In our day of self-help and age of technology and technique, it is important to keep in mind that God is both the **initiator and object** of this reconciliation.  Our propensity to view the gospel as our opportunity to reconcile God to us by showing him how much we love him, rather than seeing it as God’s act in Christ by which he reconciles us to himself by demonstrating his own love for us.  **The gospel is not our chance to get right with God, but God’s declaration that he has already made us right with him**.  The gospel **does not call us to do something for God that he might save us; it announces what God has done to save us that we might trust him.”**  256

To hit the ground running with direction and purpose we need… A new lens for seeing clearly…Jesus as **The** bridge back to God…We are the path to the bridge, Jesus’ ambassador.

What does it say about people?

And God has given us this task of **reconciling** people to him.

And he gave us this wonderful message of **reconciliation.**

**There is a separation between God and people whom he loves and Jesus is the only one who can bridge that gap, but Jesus wants people to guide others to the bridge.**

**Paul is using the political term “ambassador”.**  What it means is that this person **speaks on behalf of a leader or king** who is separated from the people he is to lead and protect.

**Let’s say there has been a rebellion** and part of the kingdom has pulled away.  There is a war that the king’s army has won.  **The ambassador in Paul’s story is sent to announce peace and complete amnesty for anything the people did during the rebellion**.  Nothing will be held against them.

**Back to Isaiah.  Jesus was the one who was treated like a rebel so that rebels wouldn’t need to get what they really deserve.**

The reconciliation with God Paul is talking about, “For Paul, reconciliation is an expression of God’s ‘new creation’ by which he transforms his people’s motivations and hence their way of life.”  254

Listen to what he says earlier in verses 14-16.

**14**Either way, Christ’s love controls us.[[c](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3D2%2BCorinthians%2B5%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28852c&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643730599&usg=AOvVaw0AtRyYu3iLJMqFH1rZcZim)] Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life.[[d](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3D2%2BCorinthians%2B5%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28852d&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643730819&usg=AOvVaw3TU7rfiDIoSIKNXf8Df_JB)] **15**He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.  2 Corinthians 5:14-16

**You and I being ambassadors like Paul, the task and message are something we are given as a part of God transforming us.**  This is what it means for us to be his new creation.  **We think and act like we represent him and his message that people can come back to God.**

**He turns former rebels into the people who represent him as ambassadors!**

**You don’t make yourself into an ambassador, Jesus does.  Trusting him means we think about ourselves and view ourselves that way.**  This isn’t just people like Paul.  That means you **don’t have to do it like Paul** or like someone, **like me,** with the calling of pastor.

**But do most church going, card carrying Christians** in America view themselves like ambassadors who represent Jesus?  The hustle and bustle of daily life prevents many people who see themselves as religious, and who acknowledge the significance of religion in their lives, from consciously thinking of themselv3s as a representative of Jesus Christ.  One-quarter of adults (27 percent) say they “always” are mindful of being Christ’s representatives; one-sixth (17 percent) say they are “often” aware or that mantle; and one-fourth are “sometimes” conscious of the privilege.  The remaining 30 percent of the nation claim they rarely or never think of themselves in this light.  George Barna, *Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators (Dallas:  Word, 1996)*

As God’s partners,[[a](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3D2%2BCorinthians%2B6%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28860a&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643732125&usg=AOvVaw06HZIuF6anU4Gm5JPN8_7h)] we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God’s kindness and then ignore it.  2 Corinthians 6:1

**To understand what Jesus did for you in your rebellion and then refuse to view yourselves as his representatives to other rebels, is to ignore his kindness**.  We don’t really think it’s that marvelous and we don’t think we could ever be that.

To hit the ground running with direction and purpose we need… A new lens for seeing clearly…Jesus as **The** bridge back to God…We are the path to the bridge, Jesus’ ambassador. …To build into people’s lives…up close and personal.

**You demonstrate the way by being an example of someone who is being transformed.  But this can’t be done from a distance.**

**If you just want the content and not the relationships, the experience and not the relationships, the programs and not the relationships, then you are missing the point.**

Clothes closet at Meridian…

To hit the ground running with direction and purpose, we need… A new lens for seeing clearly…Jesus as **The** bridge back to God…We are the path to the bridge, Jesus’ ambassador. …To build into people’s lives…up close and personal…. To together build bridges into the culture.

Some of us need to start volunteering at Cultivate at the Mall or in Sanford.

Tammy Skully has started a mobile coffee shop that will build bridges into the LGBTQ community.  She’s Jesus' perfectly designed ambassador.

I’m working with elders and Matt to create an opportunity for us because of what God has done in us to share and help other churches.

Sending Josie Pizzi to Sears.

With other churches starting a nonprofit to help the ministry in Uganda to continue to thrive.

Hit the ground running…

1. Begin or end the day with Paul

**18**And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. **19**For God was in Christ, reconcilingthe world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. **20**So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!” **21**For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,[[e](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3D2%2BCorinthians%2B5%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-28859e&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695061643734998&usg=AOvVaw2iGOBTNeJuoR1reZWgPKID)] so that we could be made right with God through Christ.  2 Corinthians 5:18-21 NLT

1. Pray this way.

Jesus, you reconciled me with God through your death and gave me new life through Your resurrection.  Transform me into the kind of person who can represent You as Your ambassador to the people I am near today.  Help me to view myself the way You do as reconciled and empowered to be Your representative even with all my brokenness and faults.  Help me to recognize those to whom You are already speaking who want to find their way back to God.  To You go all the honor and glory for saving, transforming and using someone like me.

There is some space after the phrase “person’s of peace” where you can write a name or two of people to whom you believe God is sending you as his ambassador.

Join the Come and See class.