

Fresh Start
Week 2: Be a bridge, build a bridge

This is our theme verse for this series. ¹⁷ **This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!** This is the ultimate fresh start verse. We can start fresh because of what God has done for us through Christ. It's his love and grace. I can start fresh even with all of my failures and missteps and sin. **I can go back to the starting point, the beginning, and that is Jesus.**

Here's the center of our target, or the foundation for everything we are and everything we do. **"Be a Bridge, Build a Bridge."**

This saying seems repetitive, but let's take a closer look. **You have to be before you can build.**

The first thing you want to do is just to be present. I'm not going to try to do anything. **I'm just going to be who I was created to be in this present situation or context.** There's a sense that **your presence is what is needed**, not something that you decide needs to be done there.

It's a "get the lay of the land" kind of thing before you start trying to bring some agenda into the situation. **See how you just being there changes things** before you try to change things.

"Be" comes first, then "build" is second. Personal "be" that leads to Kingdom building!

Jesus is our example. What did he build? The greatest movement the world has ever seen. He built the church. He changed the world. **But, that all started by him simply being the obedient Son of God, Messiah, and rightful King. He had to be the King to initiate the Kingdom of God here on earth.**

This whole thing began with God's Word. This part of Paul's letter to a group of new believers in the city of Corinth is what **is the engine for my new "being" and the foundation upon which kingdom building is happening.**

Bible study rule #1: Look for repetition. If mom says it more than once before she goes out the door, then it's probably important. ¹⁷ **This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!** He begins with the definitive statement about new life begins with Jesus. Then, ¹⁸ **And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.** There was a separation between God and people and that was our sin. **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!" ²¹For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Reconciliation is the key idea. **What did you learn about what Paul means by reconciliation?**

It has an **accounting definition**...all the accounts with money going out and coming in now add up. **A bill was collected** and recorded, now it all adds up.

It has a **relationship definition**...a marriage to the Hatfield's and McCoy's coming together after someone brings them to the same place to discuss what separates them.

- **Two enemies, two groups with something that separates them. There is something keeping them apart that seems insurmountable.**

Paul is saying that all those who have had what separates them from God, **reconciled (accounting, we owed something) and what separates, removed (relational) through Christ's death and resurrection, now Paul is to become reconciler.**

Since this has been done for you, now go, because Jesus wants to continue what He did for you through you to others.

We are to be used by God to create a bridge for someone who is separated from the love, purpose, peace, and hope we have in Christ. "Be a Bridge!"

How do we truly become bridges that people walk across to meet the one who loves them and created them and wants to be in relationship with them?

It's not natural in our culture to be a bridge. **It's more natural to be a wall.**

The culture of the **American church** doesn't naturally produce ambassadors or human bridges.

I've got to change as the pastor of a church that produces human bridges, or ambassadors for Christ.

There are **2 key changes** that we need to make if we want to become bridges.

To be a bridge we make **2 key changes**.
Change the way you view yourself.

You were an enemy, whether you knew it or not, separated from God. Only reason you aren't is because of what Jesus did.

You are created to be an Ambassador... One who is sent by his leader to represent him, to speak on his behalf, to people who he wants to have a relationship with.

To be an ambassador, one who speaks for God, is like **going on behalf of a king to the king's enemies** to tell them that they are no longer enemies. **He announces amnesty** to all the rebels fighting against and resisting the king. **An ambassador is a human bridge, get it?**

Here's the problem; we just don't view ourselves as representing 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 themselves as a representative of Jesus Christ. One-quarter of adults (27%) say they "always" are mindful of being Christ's representatives; one-sixth (17%) say they are "often" aware of that mantle; and one-fourth are "sometimes" conscious of that privilege. The remaining 30% of the nation claim they rarely or never think of themselves in this light." George Barna, Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators

I don't want you to do anything. Don't take action. Don't make an action plan. **Don't start building anything.** View yourself differently.

Here's a phrase we use around here that may help..."**I am one in whom Christ dwells...**"

I was an enemy and now I have been reconciled. Since I have been reconciled, Christ lives in me. That makes you someone that **this world desperately needs**. Your **presence is significant** if you view yourself as representing Christ as his ambassador before you do anything. **Be, before you do.**

Viewing myself differently means I must view my context/situation differently.

- “and I live in his unshakable Kingdom.”

I was an enemy, now I'm reconciled and he lives in me and I live where his loving authority is acknowledged. His Kingdom.

Forgetting who we are and where we live is deadly.

Give an example...Living with amnesia.

Here's another verse that we tend to read as the responsibility or calling of a select, elite few. You know, people like me with a seminary degree and a title. **Christian black-ops or navy seals.**

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! ¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:16-20

We struggle with this in 2 ways.

1. **We struggle seeing ourselves as disciples.** If that word is a problem, then just **use apprentice.** It means the same thing.
2. **We have a hard time seeing ourselves as the ones who make disciples or show people how to follow Jesus.**

We have been taught that being Christians is about what I think is true about Jesus. Yes, believing the right things about Jesus is important, but we have taught people that it stops there. Jesus is about His Kingdom, which we are a part of and that is going on right here right now and it continues into eternity. **What we have thought is only about eternity and denies the power that is within us when we view ourselves properly, as Jesus views us.**

It's like asking a stranger to go out by the road and dance around with a sign pointing to Eagle Ridge Church of God. That's not being a bridge, that's being a guy on the road **dancing with a sign** trying to get people to come into a business. **Doesn't have to know the product.** Don't talk or ask people what they are looking for, **just point them to the door.** **Don't get involved with people,** leave that to the salesperson. Just get them into the store.

Let me say it again. I don't want you to do anything. I'm not going to ask you to make a commitment to anything. I'm not asking you to quit your job and go to seminary, or Africa. I'm asking you to view yourself as someone who has within the raw materials that are necessary for, not only being an apprentice of Jesus, but also what is necessary for helping other people follow Jesus.

Doing and building come later.

Here's my warning. If you start viewing yourself that way, your heart will change, your desires will change and you will look up and realize, "Wow, I'm acting like a disciple."

Change the way you view the church.

We, together, have to be before we do. We have to view ourselves as a community in the way we operate in this town and this world represents Jesus.

A church can be a bridge or it can be a castle with a moat around it.

Just think about how powerful and spirit filled and empowering our worship on Sunday morning could be if we believed that when it was over we were going to go out there and represent Christ. Talk about worshipping with desperation. Talk about celebrating that we are no longer enemies of God, but now his ambassadors. It would not matter what songs we sing, how clever the sermon is, and if we use the media flawlessly. Those things would be irreverent to the outcome. We will worship together and fellowship together differently because we know we leave as ambassadors.

Surrender to what he wants you to become.

"I want to make sure I've crossed the line of faith."

I am going to build either a bridge or a wall. Those who know they are disciples and ambassadors will build bridges that others can walk across to meet Jesus.

Now it's time to build something that people can walk across.

Where do we build bridges? **Look for people separated from God and can't find their way back.**

That separation is either because of broken wounds that have impaired or there's just a huge chasm, distance to be spanned. (Understanding, fear, bias...)

Listen to this story from the Book of Acts. This takes place after the church has spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and then into the province of Asia. **11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. Acts 16:11-15**

To understand what is happening in this verse, we use two terms. The terms are important to know as we go, but also the order in which they are presented.

- **The bridgehead and then the "person of peace."**

A bridgehead is a strong position, secured within enemy territory from which to advance/attack.

That's what Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke were looking for when they went to the place of prayer by the river. They were looking for that secure place where there just might be people who God has prepared to hear the message of Jesus. This was a place where Jews and god-fearing gentiles would go, probably because there weren't enough numbers to make up a synagogue. This place of prayer was behind enemy lines, secure and, therefore, a place from which the movement could spread.

If you are a part of Eagle Ridge Church of God, you know **the story of Cultivate**, the coffee shop that we opened in our local mall. [Pics of Cultivate out front and inside](#)

- **This was about going where we saw a need and a place where God's presence was needed.** The people who work in and around the mall have needs. Many of them are **struggling economically and relationally.**

Cultivate is a bridgehead, is a secure position within territory that has been stolen by the enemy from which love, service, relationships can

advance the mission of Jesus and the advance of God's Kingdom.

Remember, Jesus wasn't a military leader, he was a revolutionary of a different kind. **We don't view the people of the mall as our enemies;** no, they are our friends, our mission, and God's beloved. **The enemy is the one who has so distorted this world we live in,** that many of them have been separated from the one who loves them and died for them.

That's what a bridgehead is. But at the bridgehead, they needed to meet someone like Lydia, who God had prepared to hear the message.

That is who we call the **"person of peace"**. Here's where this comes from.

Carry no money bag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. Luke 10:4-6

That person, or son of peace, is someone who is **open to you and what you bring**. If they are open to you and what you bring, then that means that the Holy Spirit is already at work drawing this person to God.

And do you notice what happens when the bridgehead is found and the person of peace is spotted? That's where the movement spreads. **It says that her whole house trusted in Jesus.** That probably meant servants, workers, and any family members in her house. **And from that spreading, a church is planted there in her house.**

Examples of building bridges together...

Cultivate.

Beaverton.

Online presence.

Examples of building bridges as individuals...

Terry coaching...player getting baptized, returning from Miami to come to Alayna's grad party.

Tammy 2...at Cultivate.

Evonne.

Marie...jail ministry.

Bruce Vickey...jail ministry in Florida.

Norm Neher...friendship with.

Challenge to go to cultivate, get a cup of coffee or tea, sit, take it all in, watch and pray. Here's how I stay in the game, Burger King and coaching tennis. **These are my bridgeheads; from there, I look for persons of peace.**

That brings us to the very important question...What keeps us from going and building?

That brings us back to the beginning. **We don't see ourselves as ambassadors, apprentices of Jesus and those who make disciples.** If it's just Bill who makes disciples or the programs at ER that makes disciples, then there's really no reason to build a coffee shop at the mall.

It's a wrong view of the church. We see it as a warehouse, not an airport terminal. The really important stuff happens here, through the professionals and the programs that they produce.

It's fear that God doesn't have enough.

That's a temptation for a church with building debt and a history where people left. But here's what you did.

- Building friendship park when we were broke.
- **Hiring a new staff person** with owing so much on our building and who will spend half of his time somewhere over there, that will not immediately impact us and our needs.
- Starting a new campus from an existing church in a pandemic.

"...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:17-19 (NIV)

We are to build bridges, He builds His Church.

This is the picture of the Kingdom of God moving forward in such a relentless, unstoppable way that the gates of hell have no chance.

Listen to these words one more time..." 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!"

Our mission is to make disciples who operate as reconcilers, bridge builders, ambassadors for Christ wherever they are. Our vision is to strategically build bridges into our culture where there is brokenness, and people who are separated from the love, forgiveness, and purpose we have in a relationship with God.

Steps to a fresh start.

✓ 5 days to own it

There are 5 verses in the passage. What I want to challenge us to do is live in the verse for the next week. That means to focus on each verse for one day. Keep it in front of you. Memorize it. That gives you 2 days off if you forget or get super busy.

A good way to read it and dive into it each day is to read it over and over emphasizing each word in order.

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As you read and feed on each verse, use these 2 questions to focus your mind on hearing God's voice.

1. What does this verse say about God?
2. What does this verse say about me?