Hit the ground running.

Week #2: What’s your next move?

This is week two of our series “Hit the Ground Running.”  What does that phrase really mean?  The idea is self-evident.  It’s about **getting a good start**, **moving forward**, **coming out of the gate strong**…

This phrase was **first used in a fictional piece** in a newspaper talking about a man dodging bullets.  He jumped into the air and did the split, like those show gals, and then hit the ground running.

This phrase was made a part of our language by the **U.S. military** to describe soldiers being deployed out of a moving vehicle or plane.  In this case, because the vehicle was moving, the soldier needed to hit the ground running at the pace of the vehicle or he would end up face first into the dirt.  And if this was the first player to exit, then there would be a pile up.

**Hit the ground running, in this case, implies direction and purpose.**  The soldiers need to know **where they are heading to** stay in sync and be able to arrive on time at the designated location.  They need to hit the ground running with purpose, in that if they don’t have the equipment they will need to do the job when they get to the designated location, then **the mission will be a failure**.  They are to head north toward a high point where they will set up an observation post to watch for enemy troop movements.  To do this, they must have their communications information to relay what they see and they need **binoculars and night vision equipment** if they want to have anything to relay.

**In essence, this series is about forward, positive movement**.  Listen to Jesus’ reply to those who want to **put conditions on following him** to where he is going.

**61**Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” **62**Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”  Luke 9:61-62

**Life is moving and God has Eagle Ridge on the move; therefore, we must hit the ground running to avoid a face plant.**

There is so much that God is calling us to do to join him in **moving his kingdom forward.**  His **boundaries are pushing outward**, and we are a part of that.  We have a **culture that is really off base with what life is intended for**.  People are going after the **American Dream** with the good high paying job, a spouse, dream house, vacations someplace warm, retirement building, kids in every sport and activity while getting straight A’s, on track for getting into the best college…**And yet, there is more depression, anxiety, disillusionment, despair, broken relationships, blaming, division, and suicide then ever before**.

**If ever this community needed a church that would hit the ground running on mission for Jesus, it's now.**

Not only is there **the mission, but** we need to **learn to be his disciples so that we aren’t tempted to find these false God’s of success**, self-fulfillment, and hedonism that our world continually offers.

**What would it look like for us to hit the ground face first instead of running with direction and purpose?**  It would be like us **settling in and doing church in a way that meets my needs and wants and preferences**.  The church becomes the producer of spiritual goods and services and we become the **consumers.**  Then the church and God himself is here to make me happy and give me eternal life.   **That’s what a face plant looks like and that ultimately leads us to becoming ineffective as disciples of Jesus and a church.  After becoming ineffective we become unnecessary and after that, we look just like the culture.**

**This is why we must hit the ground running**.  Here’s another way to say it.  We cannot stay where we are as we are and follow Jesus.

**Jesus’ kingdom is always moving forward, which means I must move and I must change.**

1. This demands effort.

**Our third doubles in tennis** were losing and I came out and read them the riot act.  It wasn’t because of the score, **it was because of their effort**.  They were better than the team they were playing, of that there was no doubt.  But they thought that was enough for them to win.  No, **winning demands effort**.

**What can keep us where we are, as we are, is a cheapened watered down gospel that says you just have to say a prayer, ask Jesus into your heart, and because it is all grace, there can’t be anything that you do.  It’s a transaction**.  You believe certain truths about who Jesus is and what his death does to take away your sin and, on Jesus’ side, he brings forgiveness and a path to heaven.

**But what does that leave out**?  Following and obedience to what Jesus said and did.  It leaves out any need for a **holy lifestyle and attitude**.  It leaves out **Jesus’ mission** because if we have to do stuff, then it really isn’t grace.

“Grace is not anti-effort, it's anti-earning.”  You don’t do anything to earn or demand from God.  **You do it out of love for him and because he is good**. It’s a **response** to what he has already done.  We don’t do good things, religious  things, righteous things, **in order to get closer to God**.  You **can’t get any closer** than Jesus being in you. We are brought close to God through Jesus.  **Our efforts are the only reasonable response.**

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. **Work hard to show the results of your salvation**, **obeying God** with deep reverence and fear.  Philippians 2:12 NLT

**Our efforts demonstrate that we have been, and will continue to be, objects of God’s powerful grace.**  This grace is not **just for the purpose of forgiveness,** that is to sell Jesus’ grace short.  His grace toward us not only forgives us, **but allows us to be transformed** into new people that start looking, acting, and loving like Jesus.

**5**For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; **6**and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; **7**and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. **8**For if you possess these qualities **in increasing measure**, **they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive** in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9**But whoever does not have them is **nearsighted and blind**, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.  2 Peter 1:5-9

Without the effort it takes to move away from where we are to where Jesus wants us and to move away from who we have been to the person Jesus wants us to be, keeps us from being ineffective and unproductive.  **When we don’t make the effort to move forward, we become stagnant.**

We cannot stay where we are, as we are, and follow Jesus…This demands effort..…Because healthy things grow and produce fruit.

**The opposite is true.  What is unhealthy, doesn’t grow**.

**But when something does grow, it then can produce something that benefits others**.

The Bible talks a lot in **agrarian or farming examples**.  “**The kingdom of God is like”** is used over and over in connection with something growing that then produces something that nourishes others.

Jesus talks of himself in these terms.  “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. **2**He cuts off every branch of mine that **doesn’t produce fruit**, and he prunes the branches that **do bear fruit** so they will **produce** even more. **3**You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. **4**Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot **produce fruit** if it is severed from the vine, and you **cannot be fruitful** unless you remain in me.

**5**“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. **6**Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. **7**But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! **8When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples.** This brings great glory to my Father.  John 15:1-8

**This isn’t one of those, “you had better do \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because that’s what a real Christian does”** verses.  It's really describing how those who stay connected or remain in Jesus **cannot help but grow and produce something that nourishes others**.  Yes, it takes effort to refer to the previous section, but that effort is focused on remaining in him, remaining connected to him.  Our effort is about **creating capacity** for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

**Then what comes out of our lives, that is produced out of a healthy connection with Jesus, is not only natural, it is proof that we belong to him.**

There are two kinds of people in the world.  Those with a **Growth mentality and those with a fixed mentality.**

We cannot stay where we are as we are and follow Jesus…These demand effort and…Because healthy things grow and produce fruit…Because accepting Jesus isn’t the finish line, it’s the starting line.

**This goes back to the false transactional gospel or forgiveness, only gospel** as we call it.  Because **forgiveness is the only thing that matters and unlocking the door to heaven,** it becomes the finish line.  Now we just live the rest of our life **trying to manage our own sin**, do some good things, **do some religious things,** like coming on Sunday and even tithing.

**If accepting Jesus is the finish line, not the starting line, then this stuff from Paul isn’t going to make any sense.**  Paul is just that kid in school who **tries really hard to impress the teacher,** even when it doesn’t matter.  We used to call this person a **“try hard.”**

**12**I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. **13**No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it,[[d](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3DPhilippians%2B3%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-29395d&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695658364215337&usg=AOvVaw1zZAJX5TqjTLQMxfoB1ImE)] but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, **14**I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.  Philippians 3:12-15

**Here's what it looks like to take the next step to hit the ground running with Jesus.**

Bridge picture

Because our guiding statement is **“Be a bridge, build a bridge,**” our image for moving forward is crossing a bridge.

To start, let’s look at how **we enter the bridge and how we exit it.** We begin this journey with Jesus, **not because it was our idea**.  Jesus gets to us, not the other way around.  **We are always the responder,** Jesus is always the initiator in this relationship.

In the gospel of **John 6:44-45** Jesus says this:

**44**For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up. **45**As it is written in the Scriptures,[[a](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search%3DJohn%2B6%253A44-45%26version%3DNLT%23fen-NLT-26268a&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1695658364217136&usg=AOvVaw1dP3wyxx_N6-Cg1PSmbCbL)] ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

Jesus himself is looking for the people who are already being drawn to him by God.  And that is no different now.  **When we start wanting more of God in our lives, it's because that desire is put in us because God is drawing us toward his son, Jesus**.

**The other end of the bridge** is the entrance into the world where we are to be salt and light, where we are to make the Kingdom present for other people.  We are being poured out into the culture to represent Jesus as his ambassadors and make disciples as we go.

This should sound familiar to many of us:

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!”  2 Cor. 5:19-20

Keep in mind, we are always being drawn by God to where he wants us to go and what he wants us to be, and we are always being released into the world to be his ambassadors.  **This is more of a circle than it is a checklist.**

**The first invitation that Jesus gives us as he draws us, is the invitation to explore.**  Here at Eagle Ridge that takes place on Sunday mornings.  **We gather in a situation where you can connect with God through worship**.  It's meeting him to **get to know him**.  The offering is an opportunity to **worship him** by **giving back to him** out of what he gives us.  **And the sermon is intended to prompt us to obey** God in some small way, to taste and see that he is good and that he loves you and wants to transform you into someone more like Jesus.

**But what do you do when you discover something about God** and his designs on your life?  Do you just sit back and say, **“Well, that’s interesting. So, what’s for lunch.”**  No if you make a discovery, you want to start to try it out, dig deeper, ask how this changes my life.  That means that this large group where **you can’t really ask questions** or **hear how other people are living these same things you are discovering**.  The sermon was never intended by Jesus to be the **be all and end all**.  Jesus does **his best work in relationships with people not in crowds.**

**That brings us to the first of four pillars to the bridge**.  These pillars are vital if we are going to avoid staying where we are as we are.  **This brings us to the next invitation that Jesus gives as he draws us, this is the invitation to learn**.  We learn not by lecture, but in the lab.  We do this through what we call…Bridge Groups…enter a relational environment where Jesus does his best work.

**Jesus spent 80-90 % of his time with 12 men and others who were a part of his band of disciples**.  This is where they could sit around a meal after Jesus has just **preached to the crowd** or **did something miraculous,** like healing a blind man.  They would ask for more from Jesus.  **They could ask questions and reflect** with one another and with their master about what it would mean to be like the way he wanted them to live.

In bridge groups, we take the **same topic from the sermons and land in a relational environment** where we can reflect together, encourage one another, keep one another accountable, and challenge one another.  **The theory of the sermon lands where it can better become practice.**

**Moving from the anonymity of the large gathering on Sundays to a relational environment where we reflect together is the most important step in the whole journey.**  It can be the scariest because you can come and go and not get involved on Sunday mornings, but in a bridge group you start sharing a little bit of your life with someone.  **This step can create momentum**.  But that’s why it is the most growth producing step.

**Somewhere along this section of the bridge** you will want to know just how this congregation is going to help you become the person God created you to be, a disciple or apprentice of Jesus Christ.  That is when it’s time to take the  Come and See Class…Understand our mission as a church is and how God wants us to help people learn how to follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus, and commit to Jesus’ mission.

We talk about how we want this bridge to be the path to becoming a church of disciples who make disciples to the **3rd and 4th generation**.  This is a **one-time thing**.  It’s not a group, like bridge groups, that are a regular part of your life.  **We do little reminders on Sundays, like this series hit the ground running,** but these are not meant to replace sitting down for a couple of months of Sunday mornings in a small setting where we can learn and reflect together.

**Let’s say as you are discovering on Sunday mornings and learning in bridge groups, there are words that keep coming up that others seem to know** what they mean, but you aren’t sure.  Or there are some **basic things about the bible** that make it intimidating for you, which makes it hard to access.  When you start asking these questions, it’s to go back and get a better foundation.  This is our Foundations Class…this is where you get to say ”I can’t understand you.”  **You get to ask that question that you feel like everyone else knows the answer to**.  By the way, **everyone else doesn’t know.  I don’t even know what I mean sometimes.**

This class is just getting **started in Beaverton**.  If you are in Midland, this could be a **good excuse to drive to Beaverton** and experience that part of our church for a while.  Not to mention that you could stop at the **Beaverton Tavern for one of their world-famous wet burritos**.

When we are discovering more about God and what he wants for us, and we are learning how that looks in the real world, usually there is a desire building to act more like Jesus.  Remember, Jesus was the one who said, **“I have come not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.”  This is where Jesus asks us to join him in service to others.**  The Holy Spirit is giving you a desire to Serving others…Your design and shape.

**This is where we give our lives away on behalf of others**.  The best way to do this is to try some things out.  Serving is **not one size fits all**.  You have a **design or shape** that fits a very real need in this world.

You must do two things to find where God wants you to serve.  The **first is to experiment** and the **second is to find out better how God has created you** for good works as the bible says.  Both of those can come through our **director of mobilization, Tammy Naffie**.  She can suggest ministries that are inside the church or outside in the community, for you to test out.  But also, she has a tool called **true wiring**.  It is a group of **online assessments** that help you better see God’s design in making you his masterpiece for service.

**This is the perfect time to begin serving (Cultivate).**  This will put you out in the community, making relationships that become disciple making relationships.  This is also the perfect time because Deb, our director of Cultivate Midland and Sanford, is **going to Italy with Dave,** so there is a need for people.  **Someone here is going to choose to try this, and it is going to change their life.**

**The final pillar is where Jesus invites us to multiply**. Builder Cohorts…How to disciple.

**This is where regular people learn how to help someone else learn to follow Jesus.  This is what Jesus called making disciples.  It’s where we learn how to do this.**

**Again, this is a smaller relational environment**.  These are usually **3-6 people**.  It’s intended to be **more intimate than a bridge group**.  We share our lives with one another with the understanding that we are to pay this forward.  **We are to do for others what has been done for us**.  We learn how to **open ourselves up to the life changing power** of the holy spirit so we can help someone else do the same.  **You also learn how to take someone through the gospel of Mark,** focusing on understanding what the gospel is and what God’s call on our lives really means.  **We don’t have all the “right answers,” we are just passing on what has been passed on to us.**

**We are in our fourth generation of these and the kingdom is multiplying**.  I have been blessed to disciple three groups of men and a few of them have already multiplied.  And yes, because of the intimate nature of these cohorts, we have **men with men and women with women.**

**This is where things can go viral.  The growth can be exponential**.  This means you couldn’t stop it if your tried because it’s going in all different directions and is out of your control.

**This next amazing life changing experience can happen anywhere on this bridge and that’s when we realize that what is mine isn't really mine, it’s Gods and he just put me in charge of it**.  Tithing & generosity…Releasing.

**Releasing what we want to hold on to because of fear and pride**.

There’s no fluff here.  This is all a vital part of the process of being a disciple who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and committed to Jesus’ mission.  **This is how we become a church that releases people into this culture, who are ready to make the kingdom present for others and help people learn to follow Jesus.**

Let’s hit the ground running.

1. Take the Hit the Ground Running Challenge

This is the card from last week.  Do you have anyone you are praying for who is a person of peace?  Put this card where you see it in the morning or the evening, ideally both.

1. What is your next step across the bridge?

Remember who is leading you?  Jesus, the one who is on the move transforming people and pushing into all parts of our culture and the world.  Go to that list I’ve just worked through and mark where you are.

**We are to continue going over this bridge and continually release into a culture that is making disciples of people, promising them the world, but then leaving them empty. As his ambassadors, we have something better!**