

Embrace the Journey Created to Live SENT, Message Series Week 2

Welcome

Good morning! I heard some great stories this last week about the launch of the *Created to Live SENT* series. Did you know that several couples have their own *backwards* stories? One couple changed drivers and made a pit stop only to later learn the other driver got on the Interstate and drove the wrong way! Another story involves a driver who didn't know the spouse had gotten out of the vehicle. She had been asleep in the backseat. Her spouse returned to the car and actually left without her. Thank God for cell phones! I wouldn't be surprised to learn we all have our own *backwards* story. Life has a way of keeping us humble!

Welcome to Indian Creek! I'm glad we can share this part of our weekend together. If this is your first message in this series it is not too late to participate. We launched a new series last week, *Created to Live SENT*. The Big Idea last week was that all of us begin by thinking that living life is all about serving ourselves. We are discovering that God has something better for us—He wants us to uncover our true meaning and purpose so we can live on mission. We are created to live SENT.

Living SENT is essentially *living the Jesus' life in today's world*. It is a life full of meaning and vitality. It is what Jesus meant when He said:

John 10:10

My purpose is to give life in all of its fullness. John 10:10 NLT

This is the life we hope to live! Let's jump in today and see what God has for us together!

Introduction

The Big Idea for today is that **the plan God has for us is very much a journey**. We don't arrive there overnight. So let's embrace the journey! As with any journey we must make a commitment to begin. Have you ever heard this quote?

The journey of one thousand miles starts with the first step. Lao-tzu. Chinese philosopher

Let's join the rest of this community and go on the journey to live SENT. We were created for this and we'll be glad we took the trip. Let's embrace the journey and get started!

Traveling (I'm assuming each speaker will use his/her stories) This is on pages: 36-39.

I grew up in Alaska, the son of a missionary couple, Paul and Ruthie Kendall. We spent two of our summers before I was sixteen crisscrossing the lower 48 to raise funds. I was still a young man when I could say I'd been to 49 states (Hawaii had to wait). That adds up to a lot of time in the car together!

My dad was old-school when it came to traveling. In his mind you drew a line from where you were to where you wanted to go. Everything was focused on the destination. We learned to "hold it"—you know what I mean. When we did stop, we attempted to set a new record for the fastest pit stop. We got gas, food, and "did our business" in record time. Occasionally, we even timed our stops. We took time to relax when we arrived at our destination; until then it was full speed ahead.

One summer we were traveling on the Alcan Highway just outside Dawson Creek, Canada, when I received a strange prompting. It was a thought that seemed to come out of nowhere. We had just stopped to eat lunch at an A & W Root Beer Drive In. Afterward, we had piled back into the car and when we did, I traded seats so that I was sitting in the front seat on the passenger side.

A few miles down the road we saw a sign that said, "Buckle your seat belt. Someone loves you."

Being a young teen I was squarely in the middle of adolescence. I immediately countered with the thought, "No one loves me."

Of course that wasn't true! However, since I didn't have a girlfriend, I concluded that no one loved me. I was convinced that I was not loved therefore, I didn't need to buckle my seatbelt!

*Then another thought invaded my mind!
Buckle your seatbelt! God loves you.*

I was so surprised that it motivated me to action! So I buckled my seatbelt.

Before long we passed a pickup truck with four teens jammed into the cab: two guys and two girls. They were poking along like they had something other than driving on their minds. The next thing we knew, they had stepped on the gas and sped past us.

When they did they all turned around and stared at us. We thought maybe they saw our Alaska license plate and they wanted to see if we looked like Eskimos. Or perhaps the teenage driver was just filled with testosterone and wanted to show off by passing the family in the slow station wagon.

Once they had passed us they slowed down again. Assuming that they made their point, my dad pulled up beside them to pass them back. We were about a foot ahead of them when they made a left-hand turn directly into the front quarter panel of our car. They struck our vehicle literally a foot from where I sat. The contact drove us off the road into

a ditch. We hit the ground without the benefit of time for my dad to hit the brake. We were probably traveling nearly 70 miles an hour at impact. The sudden impact propelled my brother forward from the very back of the station wagon where he had laid down to sleep on top of the suitcases.

Miraculously, my dad caught him before he hit the windshield! It was a reflex action, but it saved my brother, Brad's life. The car was a wreck but we survived—all of us. My dad had bruises from the steering wheel. My mom was bruised from hitting the back seat. Brad was sore from his flight through the air which came to an abrupt stop. I survived without bruises or injuries. I didn't even have any bruises to prove that I had been in the wreck.

When I climbed out my door I remembered the sign we had passed a few miles earlier. I recalled that I had put on my seatbelt because I had been reminded that God loves me. At that same moment a thought dropped into my mind. That thought was this, "I have a plan for your life." I think the thought came from God.

My family had an unexpected stay in Dawson Creek, Canada. But eventually we got our car fixed, and we continued our trip. That accident greatly affected us all. We decided that life isn't just about getting from point A to B. We would still have to travel, but this was a huge reminder that there was more to life than just passing through. We decided we wanted to enjoy the journey.

Life is too short and relationships are too precious just to get from here to there. For the purpose of full disclosure my dad still found a way to average just short of 700 miles a day, but we did learn to enjoy the journey. We played games in the car. We prayed. We sang. We read stories. We had fun being together. We listened to ballgames and books on tape. (I'm dating myself but you get the point.) We changed our focus and we've never been sorry! It seemed like the time went faster. And guess what? We still made it on time!

What about you?

If you had to pick between the two ways to travel which would you say best describes the way you presently take family vacations or business trips? Are you a straight line to point B from point A person?

Q. How many of you draw the line from A to B and don't stop unless absolutely necessary?

Q. How many of you just enjoy the trip and soak up the joy of the journey?

We aren't physically racing through life. But

How many times do you approach life as if the clock is ticking to accumulate as many possessions and experiences as possible?

Have you learned to embrace the journey of life? That is a bigger challenge, isn't it?

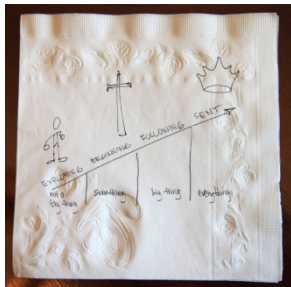
Q. Would you agree that the journey through life should be embraced and enjoyed?
How can we do that?

Spiritual Growth is a Journey

Life is a journey. Growth often involves a process where one insight needs time and space for the next one to make sense.

Spiritual formation is like this too. Many truths need to sit on top of another to be fully grasped. Often there is a stepwise manner in which the lessons unfold. Usually it isn't linear and it is uniquely different for each of us. However, growth in maturity follows a predictable learning process.

This spiritual formation diagram may be helpful. It depicts four different places on the spiritual journey. (I suggest you place this inside the worship folder and on the screen)



1. Exploring

Look at the left side of the napkin. Whether you are nine or ninety we all start here at Exploring. We don't know what we think about God. Maybe we've never heard God's story before. Or perhaps this is the first time we've considered the fact that we are spiritual beings.

At this place the person exploring might think, *I am not sure what I think about God and Christianity.* They are exploring the idea but haven't made a decision to choose God's way. This person might describe their spiritual journey like this: *Faith is not a significant part of my life.* God is **nothing** specific to this person.

Think about it. Could this be you? I'm not asking you to raise your hand but I do hope you will decide today which of these steps along the journey best describes where you are today.

If this is you and you are Exploring I'm so glad you are here. This is a safe place to explore faith and to ask questions. None of us have it all together and if we ever did we'd forgot where we put it! This is the fellowship of the forgiven. No perfect people exist! So if you think you are...guess what? You would be the only one. That includes me! I'm just one beggar telling another beggar

where to find a piece of bread. I'm spiritually bankrupt without the saving grace of Jesus. That is also true for you and for all of us. But thankfully that is not the end of the story!

Watch the lives of others closely. Can you identify where they are in their spiritual journey? Everyone of us who is now at Beginning or Following or SENT started out by Exploring. So don't feel pressure. **I do hope you feel invited into a life greater than yourself.**

2. Beginning

The next place in our journey and in our diagram is the place where a person says, *I believe in Jesus, and I am learning what it means to get to know Him.* This person has made a choice to identify with Jesus and accept His invitation to forgiveness and grace.

Notice a cross is over this stage of the journey. That is because the person who is Beginning, has admitted he doesn't want to do life without God. They've accepted the invitation Jesus made when He died on the cross to forgive the sin of the world—that's my sin and your sin. He covered it by His death on the cross.

The Good News is that Jesus didn't stay dead. The life in Him was too strong for death and the Father raised Him from the dead. Because He paid the price for sin He can offer those who trust in His atoning act, grace. Grace for the sin and grace to live the rest of life in relationship with Jesus. God is a part of this person's life. God is now **something** in the life of the one **Beginning**, but it is early enough that it is not yet clear exactly what this choice means to those making it.

This person is excited about the journey, but they are just beginning. Is this you? The book we are studying, *backwards: Created to Live SENT*, was written with you in mind. The audience is those considering Jesus, those who are just beginning.

3. Following

The third place in the journey is where we welcome Jesus into our daily life and ask Him to influence the direction of it. We ask Him to lead us and we are willing to follow. This person says, *I depend on Christ for daily guidance. I get closer to Him through regular spiritual practices. I'm learning what it means to be in relationship.*

At this time in a person's life, God is not just something, God is a **BIG** thing. Because of Him they are gaining ground in learning to love God, love people, and live out the love of Jesus.

4. SENT

The next stage in our spiritual journey is where we make a very significant decision. We could say it like this, *I will not only follow Christ, but I will dedicate myself to allow Him to replicate His life in mine.* This is like going ALL IN when playing, Texas Hold 'Em. There is no holding back. At this point those engaged are beginning to live *SENT*. God is **everything** to the person living *SENT*.

Although we reach the place where living *SENT* best describes our relationship with God, we never quit growing as long as we live—at least that is the plan. It is always sad to see a person who has one experience with God and then just repeat that over and over again when God has so much more in store for us.

Each day is God's gift to you! What you do with it is your gift to Him. T.D. Jakes

Which Best Describes You?

Which of the four stages best describes you and your spiritual journey?

Where do you want to be? Our prayer is that we will set some spiritual goals during this *Created to Live SENT* series.

No one gets anywhere without setting goals. We don't arrive at a vacation location by wandering around. If we get to go on vacation, we must chart a course and stay on it!

Vacation

I'm curious. This is just for fun. We can have fun in church, right? If you could go anywhere on vacation—money is not a factor in this—I'm wondering where you would want to go. I'd like you to vote for the options I put in front of you today just so we can know each other a little bit better.

How many of you would say:

- Hawaii?
- Oklahoma? (I'm joking! Oops! Now I made all the Sooner fans mad!)
- Europe?
- Cancun?
- Florida's beaches?
- A lake house, somewhere?

Okay, that was fun. This is interesting information. But here is what I do know, to get to any one of those places and have the kind of fun you want to have, you have to make a plan.

Am I right? And to get where you want to go spiritually you need to make a plan.

Set a Goal to grow spiritually

Many people wander through their spiritual life as if the destination wasn't really up to them. I'm hoping and praying that during this six week series we will set our sights on spiritual growth.

- First figure out where you are on your spiritual journey.
- Next determine to make a move spiritually.
- Set a goal and go for it.

Created to Live SENT has multiple opportunities for growth in the next six weeks. A place to start is to join a Community Group. The groups meet and discuss what we are learning on Sundays. Will you make it your goal not to miss a week and to get in a group?

Many are reading the book, *backwards: Created to Live SENT* and reading the daily devotions online.

Let's mark the **Celebration Service** and the **Serve Day** on our calendars so we can all do this together. The dates and a brief description are in today's worship folder.

This is the best way to grow as individuals and as a church is to apply what we are learning!
Let's do it together!

Just like children go through a maturation process as they grow, our spiritual life grows. The rate of spiritual growth is personal and unique. But most of us go through a spiritual formation that resembles the diagram depicted earlier. It requires cooperation with the leading of God's Holy Spirit. It is important to note that, unlike children who grow naturally over time, followers of Christ, don't grow unless they cooperate with God. The longest lasting growth comes when you connect in community and accountability through a group.

You and I were created to live in community. We will learn more about that in two weeks.

We travel through the various stages at our own speed and sometimes it may even seem that we skip one. Unfortunately, it may also seem like we take a step backwards at times. No illustration perfectly replicates spiritual formation. However, we can use the diagram as a point of reference to where we are today and compare it to where we want to go.

Application

Let's make some personal applications.

Ask God if He is real to reveal Himself to you in some way that you can't manufacture.

It is amazing how God shows up when we least expect Him! Expect Him to validate His presence to you and He will!

Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you", says the LORD. "Plans for good and not for disaster. Plans to give you a future and a hope" Jeremiah 29:11 NLT

Steve Papa

My friend, Steve Papa, told me he didn't want to ever talk about spiritual things again. This was after we'd been friends for seven years. That hurt! In order to preserve the relationship, I agreed to never talk to him about spiritual things, IF he would do one thing for me.

What is that? He asked.

You don't believe in God because you've never given Him a chance. You say you don't believe in the Bible, but you've never read it. Let me give you some scriptures to read. Read them and pray to the God you don't believe in (but play along) and ask with sincerity that if He is real He will reveal Himself to you. If You do that and you don't believe God reveals Himself to you I will never talk to you again about spiritual things. I proposed.

To which he replied, *You're on!*

We met a few days later to start the challenge. I assigned Steve several scriptures to read including **John 3:16**.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **John 3:16 NLT**

I wanted him to know the best news the world has ever heard. I gave it to him not knowing that God had a surprise for both of us.

When Steve and I met again, he greeted me with this question, *How did you know?*

This launched a comical conversation where I tried to convince him I didn't know something he thought I knew. Finally, I got it out of him. He wanted to know how I knew that he was really upset with his brother. They had traded harsh words and nearly fought.

I didn't know that, I attempted to reassure him. *But why do you think I did?*

Because of what you told me to read, came the answer from Steve.

In my mind I did a quick review of the text of Scripture I had asked Steve to read. However, I could not understand why he would be so upset. John 3:16 contained nothing about brothers or anger! What was Steve referring?

Show me what you read, I had to know!

Steve retrieved an old, tiny, hand-sized King James Bible and turned to a totally different text. However, the address of the text looked very similar. It was 1 John 3:16. Steve had read from a book titled 1 John when I intended for him to read the one simply entitled, John. Suddenly, I felt stupid.

Why had I not prepared him better to find scriptures in the Bible? I should have at least given him a Bible he could read and understand. This wasn't going so well! Or so, I thought.

I should have covered that when I gave him the assignment. How did I forget that? For a moment I beat myself up. He read the wrong scripture! Or did he?

Here's what he read in **1 John 3:16**, *We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters.* **1 John 3:16 NLT**

The next verse went on to say:

But if anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help—how can God's love be in that person? **1 John 3:17 NLT**

Did Linda (his wife) put you up to this? Steve demanded.

Obviously, something between he and his brother was troubling him. (Later I learned that Steve had felt guilty for the way he was treating his brother.)

Linda didn't put me up to this, I promised him. Steve believed me.

I can't believe it! This book is full of scriptures and you chose the exact one that I needed to read and you didn't even know the story! Steve was flabbergasted!

He was giving me way too much credit!

Steve, I interrupted, Don't give me credit for that. I gave you a different scripture. You are the one who read the wrong one. But I think I know Who chose that scripture for you.

I let the truth hang in the air for some time.

Then I continued, God knew exactly what you needed to hear and He led you to that verse to prove He exists.

I love the way God works.

He's revealing Himself to you right now through these events, I continued.

Don't you see, I gave you one verse but you looked up a different one?

I didn't have a clue about your brother, but obviously you are feeling guilty.

God knew how and where to speak to you. He wants you to let Him lead you.

You could have heard a pin drop in the room. I was hoping at that point Steve would get down on his knees and ask God to forgive him right there but evidently he needed to process what just happened.

A few weeks later Steve's wife, Linda, had the privilege of helping Steve find real life in Jesus. For the next seven years or so, Steve and Linda worked with the student ministry in their church helping others find what they had found.

In his conversation with Linda, Steve discovered Jesus had done everything that needed to be done for us to be in right relationship with God.

That is God's gift to us. But to receive it we must do what only we can do, which is to accept God's forgiveness and grace. We do this by acknowledging we went our own way through selfishness and sin. Next we must repent of going our own self-directed way and invite Jesus to lead our life.

Conclusion

God knows exactly what you need. He knows how to meet you where you are. You could be at any one of the three stages and God knows how to lead you to the next step.

Will you trust Him today? Will you turn to Him and ask Him to reveal Himself to you?

Will you determine that with His forgiveness and grace leading you, you will accept His invitation to step up today? Will you step into the live He has for you?

Just like God knew the best scripture in the whole Bible to reach Steve, God knows you inside and out. He loves you unconditionally and He wants you to step into the good plans He has for you.

Let today be the day you let go of what is holding you back and you take hold of God's grace and purpose for your life.

Prayer

Ps 139:17, 18 *How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!*

You are on a journey. Where is it headed? Are you cooperating with God's plan?

Who wins?

You and God are a majority but you've got to pull with Him.

Jesus said "Follow me." The goal is to be "like Christ"

Illustration of Rick Keaton

I'm committed to grow to be like Christ. You can do it!

USE the SENT circle

Love God, Love People, Live Out – together these produce a life that is living SENT.

Do you want to try to remember the directions or do you want to walk with the Guide?

Landing Place: You grow to be like Christ by inviting Him to live in you and live through you. Enjoy the journey. Take the next step

Prayer

Next Steps

1. Visit the web site
2. Participate in a small group. They are tracking along with the messages
3. Read the book, *backwards*.
4. Sign up for the daily devotionals.