

RESIDUE

MESSAGE GIVEN TO SUNRIDGE COMMUNITY CHURCH
BY GREG SIDDEERS ON NOVEMBER 22, 2009

This past week I was getting ready to move boxes of books and files from my office to my garage—and in preparation for that, I had to clean the garage floor—because my car has been parked where the boxes are going to go, and my car leaks oil. I haven't always put cardboard underneath the car, so there are a bunch of oil spots on the floor.

I got out some detergent and I scrubbed the concrete—and the spots didn't come up. You see, the oil has been there long enough to seep deep down into the pores of the concrete. My next step is to find some kind of magic oil lifter at Pep Boys, but I don't think anything is going to get all the oil out. I think my garage floor is permanently stained. The residue will remain forever.

And I think my soul is kind of like my garage floor, in that it has been indelibly “stained” by the 14 years I have been at Sunridge. It's the longest stretch of time that I been in any one place—and wherever I go for the rest of my life, I will carry the residue of my experiences here. I'll never forget the times and places where I saw God at work. But most of all, it is the people of Sunridge who have marked me for life. Every staff member, every elder, every Life Group leader, every person on every ministry team that has worked behind the scenes to make Sundays at Sunridge happen, every person who has shown love to my family, every person who has opened up their life to me, and every one who comes to church week after week with an eagerness not only to hear but also do what God wants—all of you have helped me feel the love of God and have revealed to me more of who Jesus is. For the rest of my life I will carry with me the residue of our relationship. You have marked me indelibly.

What I hope is that I have done the same for you. I hope to leave some residue behind—as every leader does.

This week I read in my Bible the farewell messages of four leaders—Moses, Joshua, Paul and Peter. They're all unique, but what one thing they have in common is that they are more serious than they are sentimental. They have more of a tone of exhortation than of encouragement.

Moses' farewell was long and drawn out. He recited to Israel all of God's laws, 22 chapters worth, and he ordered them to read those laws out loud every seven years. Then he read the lyrics of a long, sad song to them—a song about how they would turn away from God and incur His judgment. And only after all that did he offer them his blessing.

Joshua goaded the Israelites by telling them there was no way they were going to continue to follow the Lord after he was gone.

They said, “Oh, yes, we will.”

He said, “No, you won't.”

They said, “We will.”

And Joshua basically said: “Fine. Swear to it.” They did, and his last words to them were, “Don’t you dare ever break your promise.”

When Paul said goodbye to the elders of Ephesus, he warned them about the savage wolves that would arise and distort the truth to build their own little kingdoms.

Why didn’t these guys just take a nostalgic trip down memory lane? I think it’s because anybody who has been entrusted with God’s flock cares deeply that when his ministry ends, the people are going to be OK, that they’re going to keep making progress rather than regressing or becoming stagnant. A departing spiritual leader wants his people to be kept safe, not to be vulnerable after he leaves. And he wants them to remember the most important things God taught them through him. He wants to leave some residue behind.

When the apostle Peter was about to die, he wrote the Book of 2 Peter, and he embedded in his teaching these words: *“I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory ... I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.”*

I can so relate to that. There are some things that I have taught you so many times that you could finish my sentences for me—but I’m going to remind you of them one more time, because I don’t want you to ever forget them. I want them to stain the floors and walls of this building, and I want them to be indelibly stamped on your soul.

I’ve been writing lists of things I wanted to say, and they’ve differed in length. At one point it was a Top Ten list, then I whittled it down to seven, and then to five, and finally to three. And I couldn’t make it any shorter than that, because there are three things I just have to say one more time. Of all the things I have taught you over the years, these are the three things that I believe God has most wanted me to impress upon you. That’s why they’re going to sound so familiar. I’m hoping you’ll write these things down in your Bible, so that you see them again and again and again, and that they will shape the way you live the rest of your earthly life.



First, I want to exhort you one last time to **love beginners**. I want you to always have the heart of Jesus toward those who do not yet have what God has given you. I want you to never stop reaching down to help others up—because no matter where you are in your personal spiritual climb, there is somebody in your world who is lower. There is always somebody in your relational web that is either a younger Christian or a non-Christian—and there is nothing you can do that is most Christlike or more fulfilling than to help that person up.

Sixteen years ago, when I began to pray about becoming a senior pastor, I told the Lord, “We will go anywhere in the world, if only you will let us serve people who don’t already know everything we want to teach them. Please send us to a group of beginners.” And God led us to Sunridge—a church that, in 1996, was filled with beginners. It was so fun and so satisfying to share with those people truth they had never been taught before. I remember going to a pastors’ convention not long after I came to Sunridge, and in one of the sessions there was a vignette in which a guy said to his friend, “I feel like I am understanding the Bible

for the first time.” I wept when I heard that—because I had such a passion to teach people like that. And I got to do that at Sunridge.

At the time, my definition of a “beginner” was a new Christian—somebody who had already made the decision to follow Christ but was still at the base of the mountain. But then in 1999 we studied the Book of Acts. And through that study God gave us His heart for lost people—for those who had not even begun to follow Jesus. He essentially expanded our definition of “beginner” to include not just new Christians, but also non-Christians. And He start using our church services to bring people into His family.

So when we outgrew Temecula Middle School, and we found this building, with twice as much space as the school, we agreed that all the sacrifices we would have to make to get a place of our own would be worth it only if we filled those new seats with beginners. Our vision was to add one new Christian to every existing Christian in our church. At the time we had 1,000 adults, so our goal was to lead 1,000 people to Christ in this building.

We had prayer meetings in this vast open space before walls even went up, and we wrote, with permanent markers, the names of people whose salvation we were praying for. After we moved in and the carpet was laid, we began to write the names of lost loved ones on a prayer wall. There are probably 1,000 names on that wall now, and we have little red heart stickers next to the names of those who have become Christians. There are well over 100 stickers on that wall now.

So we’re off to a great start in fulfilling our vision. But I have to be honest: The hardest thing about leaving, for me, is that we’re not done yet. There are still hundreds of people in this valley that God wants Sunridge Church to lead to Christ. There are hundreds of people who, right now, are on their way to hell. And God wants them in heaven. From now on I’m not going to be here to partner with you in reaching those people. So you’ve got to do it without me. You have to finish what we have started.

So let me just say it one last time: Don’t ever lose your passion for beginners. Maintain that wonderful blend of pre-Christians, new Christians and older Christians that makes Sunridge so unique.

I want these words to echo through this building. I want this charge to stain these carpets. I want this commitment to seep deep down into your heart: *Love beginners.*



The second thing I want to say to you one last time is to **live for the line**. Just in case you have never heard me use that phrase before, let me explain what I mean. If you could draw a line that started on our worship center platform and went straight through the back wall and through our parking lot, and then through Murrieta, past the California-Oregon border, to the Canadian border, and if that line kept going straight as the earth curved, and it went out into space to the edge of the universe, and kept going even beyond that, that line would represent eternity.

On that line, how much space will our earthly life take up? Almost none. It’s just a tiny little dot.

What I’ve tried to teach you over the years is that living for the line beats living for the dot. Living for ultimate gratification is better than living for instant gratification.

I can’t tell you how many times the words DOT and LINE have been repeated back to me—and in so many different situations.

Some of you have used that imagery to describe choices you have made—choices to make an eternal investment that carries an earthly price tag. Jesus said, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth—but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”* When you do that, it costs you something. You make an earthly sacrifice for the sake of an eternal reward. I want to urge to continue to do that—to choose, not a comfortable life, but a purposeful life.

I’ve also heard many of you talk about the dot and the line when you are going through really hard times. And that eternal perspective has helped you to cling to hope in the midst of suffering. The apostle Paul said that *our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* I want you to remember that—because troubles are inevitable. And when you find yourself in the midst of darkness and anguish and disillusionment in the future, I’m not going to be here to remind you of the endless line that follows this agonizing dot. I’m not going to be here to pray that God will give you hope in the face of despair. But maybe, during really hard times, you’ll see that picture of the dot and the line, and that will give you the perspective you need to persevere.

But there is one time in the future in particular, when I most want you to hear my voice, saying to you, “Live for the line”—and that is when you are most tempted to stop following Jesus.

I don’t know how many of you remember this, but the time I first started using the phrase “Live for the line” was when we studied the Book of Revelation, back in 2003. And that’s because we learned that Revelation was written, not to give us a crystal clear picture of how the world is going to end, but to exhort us to overcome the temptation to bail on Christ when the world becomes increasingly hostile to Him and to those who follow Him. To live for the line means to keep following Jesus no matter how uncomfortable that commitment becomes on the dot—because, as so many passages of Scripture tell us, only those whose faith in Christ endures to the end will be saved. Temporary faith—fair-weather faith—is not enough. Only enduring faith is saving faith.

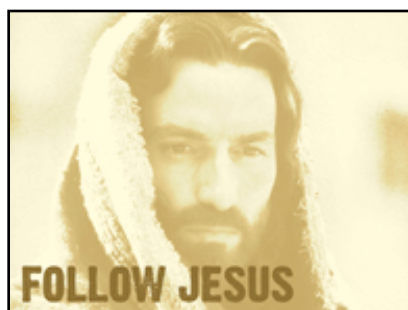
Over the years I have come to realize that part of my calling is to help you stay on the road that leads to life—because salvation is not just a narrow gate that we go through, but also a narrow road that we travel. And to make it to our desired destination, we have to stay on the road.

Now, when I came to Sunridge I had no idea that God would want me to say that to you so often—because, theologically I believe that once a person is truly saved, they can’t lose their salvation. But God has taught me that part of what He uses to keep us saved is biblical warnings not to fall away. I think I have been faithful to give you those warnings during the years I have been your shepherd, but now I’m leaving, and I know the time will come in your life when everything within you will say, “It’s not worth it to follow Jesus.” You will be tempted to bail—because of persecution, because of temptation, because of a relationship, whatever. But you won’t bail—because on that day you will remember this day when I spoke the words of Scripture to you:

- *By the gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.* (1 Corinthians 15)
- *You are holy in God’s sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel* (Colossians 1).
- *We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first* (Hebrews 3).

➤ *He who stands firm to the end will be saved* (Matthew 10).

Listen to me, friends: I want to see every single one of you in heaven. So don't ever quit. No matter how hard it gets on the dot, *live for the line*.



And there's one more thing that I want to say to you one last time before I go: **Follow Jesus**. You might say, "Well, what else would I do? After all, I'm a Christian."

I know. That's what concerns me. There is so much more to Christianity than Christ. With Christ comes an imperfect church and mysterious doctrine and unwritten rules and flawed leaders and cultural wars—and all that extra stuff can so easily eclipse Jesus and makes us forget that a Christian is just someone who follows Someone—Jesus. That Man who lived the most compelling life anyone has ever lived. That Man who called us His friends and then laid down His life for us. That Man who proved to be more than just a man when He rose from the dead. He said to us, "*Follow Me*."

I'll never forget the night He said it to me personally. I was a 20-year-old college sophomore, and I was lying in bed at about 11 o'clock at night, when I heard the voice of Jesus, not audibly, but unmistakably. He said, "Greg, you've been running away from Me long enough. Now, turn around and follow Me." At that moment I didn't choose to believe certain doctrines or join a certain church or hold certain political views; I just chose to follow a Person. And it was the most adventurous and thrilling thing I've ever done.

But it wasn't long before I stocked up on the accessories. I discovered churches and Christian book stores and campus Bible studies and retreats and conferences and contemporary Christian music, and got into all that extra stuff.

Then at a certain point it occurred to me that I wasn't really following Jesus anymore. I decided to read all the words in red in my Bible, because those were the teachings of Jesus. Well, that didn't last long—because I discovered that His teachings are radical. In fact, when I first read them, I was sure I had gotten a defective Bible. I borrowed my friends' Bibles to see if they said the same thing, and sure enough, they did. I couldn't understand why my friends weren't as disturbed as I was. I decided to stop reading the words in red. There was period of time in my Christian life when I avoided Christ at all costs.

Finally I decided I couldn't call myself a Christian if I didn't follow Christ. And I took the risk of immersing myself in red letters. And it was there that I really got to know Jesus. I grew to love Him. And when I became a pastor, I did so to help other people know and love and follow Jesus like I did.

I don't remember exactly when it was that we came up with the wording of our mission statement, which is *to help people find and follow Jesus*. I just remember that His name had to be in the statement—because what I wanted Sunridge to be about more than anything else was connecting people with Him. At one point we talked about putting some kind of artwork above the four doors in the hallway that lead to the worship center—and nobody on staff had to ask me what I wanted to put there. They all knew: I wanted a picture of Jesus. Not a pious-looking, religious Jesus with a halo around His head, but a real, flesh-and-blood man. I wanted everybody who comes into this room to leave loving Jesus just a little more.

One of my favorite Bible verses is John 3:30, where John the Baptist says about Jesus: “*He must become greater; I must become less.*” That’s my heart. I don’t care what you think of me or what you say about me when I leave; all I care about is what you think of and say about Jesus. If you love Him more now than you did when you came to Sunridge, then I have done what He sent me here to do.

There’s a scene in a movie about Jesus called *The Visual Bible* that I have watched so many times that I had to get a DVD to replace the worn out video tape. It is a silent, slow-motion shot of Jesus walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It begins with a close-up of his sandaled feet, and then it gradually widens to show him walking away from the camera. Then, suddenly, Jesus stops, looks toward the camera, and, with a slight smile, he stretches out his hand—and then his index finger—and he beckons the viewer to follow him. Then He turns away and continues to walk. He stops again, turns around, and, with a broad smile on face, waves his arm as if to say, “Come on!” Then the picture freezes.

If I could stain your soul with one image, that would be it. And if I could say only one thing to you before I go, it would be, “Follow Jesus.” Fix your eyes on Him. Adore Him. Obey Him. Imitate him. Never stray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

And if you have never begun to follow Jesus, this is my last opportunity to invite you to do that. So let me tell you the good news: God sent Jesus to die on the cross for your sins, so that you could be forgiven, and given a fresh start, and so that you escape death and live forever with Him and all who love Him. And all it takes to get all those free gifts is faith. You just have to believe that Jesus died for you and rose again. Hear His voice this morning: “You have been running away from Me long enough. Now, turn around and follow Me.”

Before I step off this platform for the last time, let me give you my blessing: May the Spirit of God fill your heart so full that you *love beginners* like He does. May He empower you to *live for the line* even when you are most tempted to opt for the dot. And may He give you the grace to *follow Jesus* until that day when, together, we see Him face-to-face. Amen.