

Series: *LIVING BEYOND MYSELF*—November 19, 2006

MAKING WAVES
Ephesians 2:8-10; Matt. 5:13-16

I. INTRO

- A. One TV show I find myself continually moved by is the one, ***Extreme Home Makeover's***. Anyone else identify with that? A few weeks ago we watched an episode where a family had moved to a farming community in Iowa to escape the city—and then had their home burn to the ground. The parents were living in a travel trailer, and the boys slept in a tent—for something like 9 months, if I'm not mistaken.

-Enter the Extreme Makeover team! They saw their story, rallied a whole town, built them a new house, renovated their barn, and filled it with cattle. And, of course, the family was totally overwhelmed by the love of this town, the sponsors, and their neighbors who showed up day after day to do the work. I can't imagine anyone who helped regretting the time and effort they gave, can you? They had an experience they will never, **ever** forget!

- B. We have this drive in us to be ***difference makers!*** John Ortberg writes, "Nobody ever gets picked for a team—and then wants to sit on the bench. Nobody ever gives a gift, and hopes it never gets opened. Nobody dreams of dying and having an unattended funeral. Nobody hopes for a 2-line trivial obituary....Nobody hopes that at their memorial service, someone will stand up and say, "He worked hard to be successful. He did a good job of acquiring power and money. He was anxious and driven and self-pre-occupied and polite and respectable."
1. We want people to stand up, when our life ends, and say, "Wow! What a person! I brushed up against her with my life—and I will never be the same!" We want people to be able to say, "My life is richer, brighter—bigger—my faith in a God who runs the universe is stronger because **he** lived; because **she** lived!"
 2. Why? Because you and I were **created** to make a difference! Our lives were not created to drop like pebbles in the ocean of humanity and disappear with a blip; we were created to **make waves!** We don't want to be space-takers and resume builders; we want to be **difference makers!** Do you agree with that? That is primary evidence that you were created in the image of God.
 3. But the reality is that if we don't **choose** that and orient our **lives** around that—we can burn down through our years here on this planet serving mostly ourselves and the little circle of family members around us.
-I want more. You do too. When I'm done this morning, you will have to make a conscious decision about living **beyond** yourself—and what you'll do about it.

II. GETTING TO VERSE TEN

- A. There are several verses that describe in really broad strokes precisely what God has in mind for us—and what the foundation is for that. Let's read some verses together—and then talk about them.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:8-10 TNIV).

1. Earlier in this same passage, Paul, the author, uses a word to describe our lives apart from Jesus and what He's done for us on the cross. That word--used consistently throughout the New Testament--is **dead**. Initially, this doesn't make sense to us. We feel our bodies, look in the mirror—and say, "I don't look dead to **me!**" But this is a problem that goes much deeper; it's in our spirit. When it comes to our responsiveness to God, the **receiver** is dead. And we can't change that on our own—no matter how talented and competent we are.
 - a. I just talked a few nights ago with my Dad—who's home, now, by the way. Talking with him feels like a miracle. Some of you may remember me telling how he fell while in the hospital and needed emergency surgery for a blood clot on his brain. We saw him and talked to him the day after the surgery—and then the next morning he went into cardiac arrest. I've seen people go into cardiac arrest—and friends, there's **nothing** a person in cardiac arrest can do to save their own life.
-It took about 10 minutes of CPR to get my Dad's heart started again—and **that's** why I feel like it's a miracle every time I talk to him.
 - b. This passage is very clear—and it's absolutely foundational to everything else I'm going to say this morning—without Jesus we are in **spiritual cardiac arrest**.
And unless something radical happens—unless we allow outside intervention, we will **die** in that state; it's just as inevitable as my Dad's death would've been without the intervention of doctor's and nurses. **We need help, and that's precisely why Jesus came and died in our place and paid for our sin!** Are we tracking—does everyone get this?
2. When you read this passage, it become crystal clear that our whole world system has it backwards. When people are asked if they end up in God's arms in Heaven after they die, their answer is absolutely predictable: "I'm really not a bad person; I think I'll be okay! In fact, I've done a lot of good!"

-The Bible says here, **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.** Anyone know what **grace** is?

***Justice** is when you **get what you deserve**. Eg, you have to pay the traffic fine (by the way, anyone notice a common theme with me?)

***Mercy** means you **don't** get what you deserve—or get less than you deserve; eg., you don't have to pay the fine.

***Grace** means you get what you would **never** deserve. Not only does the officer not give you a ticket, the OPP gives you a paid vacation to the Caribbean for being their 1 millionth customer, or something weird like that.

-Because of God's outrageous love for us, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin by dying on a cross in my place and yours.

Not only are we forgiven, we are set free from the power of sin so we can live a meaningful, difference-making life here—and walk into eternity hand-in-hand with God.

-I want you to notice what this passage says: ...**And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph.2:9 TNIV).**

Let's say it together, **a gift, not works.** I've said it before—**religion = D-O!**

Christianity = D-O-N-E! Jesus died so we wouldn't have to. Our responsibility is to put our **trust** in Him and invite Him to take up residence in our hearts and transform us.

3. This is the total opposite of what most people think. It means that instead of trying to work and do good things to impress God enough to allow us into Heaven, we **receive** the gift of life God made possible—and then His Spirit transforms us and gives us power to follow His instructions and do the good works He's called us to do.

B. So, when we receive Jesus, the issue of whether or not Heaven awaits us after this life is settled once and for all. So...if God's main point is to just get us into Heaven, why doesn't He just take us out—kill us--after we put our faith in Him? **Why are we still here?**

1. As I see it, there are two basic schools of thought. One of them is that the main reason we stay on this planet is to shine up our own lives even more so that we can be a little more presentable when we walk into God's presence. In this system, life is basically about becoming a **better person. Avoiding evil**—and therefore, **avoiding the world system.**

-People who believe this tend to have a fortress mentality—with the fear that the world system will overtake them, penetrate their defenses, and corrupt them. "Build the walls higher!"

2. I don't think the Bible teaches us **anywhere** to do that. It does teach us to be proactive. Jesus never told his followers to build little Christian forts; he said, "Go out and do for others what I've done for you!" It's the teaching that God is powerful in Jesus; that it's the world system that needs to be on the defensive. -Why? Because Jesus said that the church would be unstoppable—that the very gates of hell wouldn't even slow it down! Because when Jesus gets turned loose through our lives, the kingdom of darkness is in jeopardy, **not** the Kingdom Jesus died to establish! **Jesus kingdom is unstoppable!**

- a. So, **how?** Is it a political thing, where we try to gain power in different arenas and play moral police?

-No. I don't think the kind of change God wants to bring can be shoved down people's throats. I believe God starts in a heart—and over time crumbles people's defenses. Change happens one person at a time. And I believe that transformation comes when we choose to do the good works we were created to do. That God prepared way in advance for us to do.

- b. Notice what it says in verse ten of this passage.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10 TNIV).

-Here's the deal. We are a demonstration of God's artwork, God's power, God's love at work at the core of a human life. We were **created** to serve, re-created through the power of Jesus to do good work on this planet.

-When Jesus goes on the road on Monday morning, when Jesus gets turned loose in our homes, our neighborhoods, our offices, our stores, our hockey arenas, our soccer fields—there's no telling what He'll do—but it will be subtly powerful and life-changing!

C. Jesus used a great analogy for this kind of influence; **salt** and **light**. Let me read what He said:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16 TNIV)." (on screen in 3 chunks)

1. In our world, salt is cheap—57 cents a pound at **Food Basics**. We try to avoid putting too much of it in our food and getting too much of it on our cars.

-But in the world Jesus was talking to, it was a totally different story. Without salt, food—particularly meat—rotted very quickly. But salt was almost magic; it preserved and brought out the flavor in food and purified things from bacteria.

-In a book entitled, **Salt: A World History**, Mark Kurlansky writes: "In the ancient world, salt was one of the most common factors that provoked and financed wars." Salt was prized. Romans used it to pay soldiers. In fact, the Latin word for salt is **sal**—and we get the word **salary** from it.

-So, when Jesus told his followers, "You are the **salt of the earth**," it was like saying, "**your** influence is more important than any other influence on this planet!"

a. One of the defining qualities of salt, though, has huge implications for you and me. **Salt does not exist for its own sake.**

-Anyone here ever gone to someone's house and said, "Wow! We don't have salt like this. We need to switch brands!" No one ever invites you over for a bowl of salt. Salt doesn't call attention to itself! The calling of salt is to lose itself in something more profound than itself!

b. Now, let me tell you the implications of this. Remember the two mindsets I talked about above; one is to build walls and protect yourself from the world system, and the other is to turn Jesus loose through you **into** the world system? Which mindset do you think salt fits into best?

-Jesus has called us to be a flavoring, preserving, purifying influence wherever we are. When we are salt, **that** is when we become difference

makers. And I just need to tell you—We are not here to just hold religious services. We are not here to run programs for ourselves. We are not here to just meet in little classes and little groups that feel safe and comfortable. Salt does *not* exist for its own sake. We have been redeemed by Jesus—His handiwork—to do **good works which He prepared in advance for us to do!**

2. But Jesus didn't just stop with calling us salt. He said, **But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (Matt. 5:13b TNIV).**

-I'll tell you why Jesus said that. It's because the culture we live in will *always* try to seduce us into serving it rather than God; too busy, too pre-occupied with money, work, and raising kids, too stressed out to be **salt**, and then turn the church into a "stress-management" tool. Ever seen the phrase on a bottle of Solarcaine or aspirin, **Fast, soothing temporary relief from pain**. That's what we are tempted to turn the church into—as opposed to being the salt of the earth—Jesus turned loose!

-And the culture's seduction seems to be working for some. I see people who go to church year after year and stay on the same crazy treadmill—over-worked, over-committed, over-extended financially—all the while praying a prayer that goes something like this: "Oh God, please relieve my pain and stress and problems while I keep chasing after the same stuff in the same crazy way I always have."

-Friends, I can guarantee you that is *not* the plan God had for us to make a difference. And if we're going to follow His plan, we will have to recognize the craziness of our culture—and make some changes.

3. How does that happen? When we read on, we find out that Jesus uses another very flattering image. **You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matt. 5:14 TNIV)**

-In other words, the power God has placed in our lives can help us bring clarity and color and direction to a world system stumbling along, trying one thing, then another, then another to find peace and happiness and order and health. Jesus says, "Hey—**you're the light! Be the light!**"

-History tells us that the church went from 1/1000th of one percent of the population of the Roman Empire in 40 A.D. to 56 % in 300 years. How? Well, it **wasn't** through politics or jihads or mass media. It was by following what Jesus said at the end of his salt and light talk: Don't **hide** your light; **In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16 TNIV).**

-Notice specifically what Jesus said, **that they may SEE your good deeds**. Jesus isn't talking about parading what you do—he's talking about choosing to do enough good deeds that it makes a difference. That it sheds light. And history tells us this is what happened. The church could be summarized by the world **love**.

-The stories of how they lived are astounding. In their communities, there was no such thing as people with needs. They could be counted on to be honest. When

trouble hit, they were the first ones to help. Some early believers actually took the places of slaves so they could be freed. This was no, “Shove a tract in the mailbox and run” deal. They actually did what Jesus said—if they had two coats and saw someone who had none—that person got a coat. It was **Good News** in that culture to have a leader, a customer, a worker, anyone close to you who was a follower of Jesus way.

-I don't know about you—but that's the kind of person *I* want to become! That it's **Good News** for anyone who comes close to me and rubs up against my life!

III. THE POWER OF GOOD!

- A. Most of you remember the tsunami that hit a significant portion of the world on December 26, 2004—and took over 229,000 lives. Some of you are way better at geology than I am, but the surface of the earth is made up of a number of large tectonic **plates**. When these shift, there's an earthquake. Two plates under the Indian Ocean shifted about 50 feet for a length of 1200 kilometers—creating an earthquake that registered anywhere between 9.1 and 9.3 on the Richter Scale. It displaced over 7 cubic **miles** of water—and **that's** what created the 100 foot high waves in some parts of that area. The damage was staggering.

1. Imagine a tsunami of a different kind. Imagine what would happen in this world if there was a massive shift in the tectonic plates at the core of hundreds of thousands of lives—displacing selfishness and self-centeredness—and unleashing massive waves of love and good in this world.

-Jesus made the statement before he died that it wouldn't be because of Bible knowledge and correct doctrine and cool worship services and prayer in schools and rich, healthy lives that everyone would know we were his people—Good News people, **Jesus' Way** people. Nope. It was by our love. Love for God—and, especially, loving our neighbors like we love ourselves.

-Anyone here ever do a good deed for yourself? Feed yourself when you're hungry? Treat yourself to shelter when it's cold? Plan for your retirement so you don't have to live in a trailer on Old Age pension? Shovel your driveway when it's clogged with snow? Go out occasionally for a night of entertainment? Get yourself medical treatment when you're sick? Anyone here do that for yourself? That's good—and right.

-Here's the shocking statement Jesus makes in light of that: “It's okay to love yourself in that way; now try something different and **weird**. Try loving your neighbor in some of those ways. If you treat them the way you would like to be treated, you'll never go far wrong. Right before He died, Jesus informed us that this is on the final exam—that whenever we do this—give someone a drink, a meal, a home, a loving visit—**we're doing it for Him in disguise!**”

2. Now, let me just tell you a little secret about me. I kinda congratulate myself when I don't do any **damage!** I hold my tongue, when I could say something nasty; I hold off on honking my horn when my honker is within easy reach. And that's the way most people judge themselves of being worthy of heaven, isn't it? “Well, I've been a good person; I've never really **hurt** anyone—not badly anyway.” And we kinda expect because we didn't **damage** people too bad, God oughta give us a hero's welcome into Heaven!

3. But the Good News message makes it clear that when we are transformed by faith in Jesus Christ, there is a seismic shift at the core of who we are that is intended to unleash...first ripples, then waves, then tsunamis of good through us; that we should be one of our world's **most valuable asset!**

-Imagine what that would be like if we broke ranks with a **good time world** to be **good works people?** There are some great examples of that. See if you can guess who this is:

- a. "She was born the youngest of three children in the form Yugoslavia in 1910. She joined a youth group, and by age 17, she knew that she wanted her life to be God-guided. She became a high school geography teacher, and was promoted to high school principal in 1944. But her career there was ended because she contracted tuberculosis. In 1948 she started an unofficial school for young children in the slums, and she combined teaching and medical care to nurse them toward health.
-In 1950 she rented a house with her own money so that people who were dying in the streets could be transported there and die with dignity. She was one of the earliest pioneers in treating people with AIDS before the disease even had a name. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. She died a household name in 1997 (Hybels, *The Power Of Doing Good*, p. 1)." Any guesses who this was. Mother Theresa!

-As you know, Mother Theresa's impact on this world had nothing to do with power, money, education, position, or success. Just doing good. She decided that her job, every day, was to do good. And her life has inspired millions upon millions of people.

- b. Now, you maybe thinking, "Ken, you've gotta admit; that's **extreme!** How do you expect me to compare **my** life to Mother Theresa?" Well, I don't. But listen to what she said: "**We are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. The good He wants to do, He does through people like us.**" Albert Schweitzer, another example of a person who accomplished tremendous good with his life wrote, "**Keep your eyes open for the little tasks, because it's the kind little tasks that are important to Jesus Christ.**" How about some illustrations from a church—a lot like ours, with people just like you and me.

*A family on tough times doesn't have enough food. Someone from the church finds out about it—and brings in **bags** of groceries.

*A girl is in trouble—pregnant out of wedlock. A friend recognizes her going into an abortion clinic. She calls her, gets put off. She calls again—and again. She finally gets through, says, "You deserve better than this!" and walks with this friend through her entire pregnancy, is there when the baby is delivered—and now helps her care for the baby.

*A single Mom with kids is getting evicted from her house and has no place to go. Another family finds out—arranges to meet her, and says, "We'd like to show you your new home." It happened to be a home this Mom had driven by every Sunday—and they **bought** it for her.

-Question: How many of you think the persons who did these good things ever thought, “Wow. I think I went too far. I shouldn’t have done that!” Know why they don’t? Because doing good is what we were made for; we cry when we hear about it—because we **crave** it. And **that** is what makes the Good News of Jesus credible in a very cynical world.

- B. I would have to say that one of the most powerful learnings I’ve been processing over the past few years has to do with the Kingdom of God. I knew it wasn’t about palaces and thrones—that it had to do with ordinary people like me allowing Jesus to be their King—to **lead** their lives.

-My most recently learning has been about how Jesus wants God’s Kingdom **up there** to somehow **down here**. That’s why He told us to pray for that to happen. Understand, God isn’t going to send #1 and #2 angel to do it **for** us while we sit in church and sing **Cum Ba Yah**. The Good News of the Kingdom is that the Almighty Power of God has been unleashed through ordinary people so that they love in irrational ways and do the good works that have been prepared in advance for us to do.

1. As I see how people respond to shows like Extreme Home Makeovers; as I see the people respond to what people like Bono from U2 and Bill and Melinda Gates are doing to fight poverty and AIDS, I would have to agree. Friends, it’s how we were made. It’s how we’re wired. To **not** do good is to fight against the rhythm, the DNA of this planet. And as believers, **we need to reclaim it’s power**. If **anyone** on this planet needs to stop the narcissism and the self-preoccupation and **live beyond ourselves**—it’s **US!**
2. And it’s extremely contagious! Lee Strobel writes about the effect selflessness had on him as an atheistic. Lee, legal editor for the Chicago Tribune, had written a story about one of Chicago’s neediest families—the Delgados. Sixty-year old Perfecta and her grand-daughters, Lydia and Jenny—had lost everything in a fire in their roach-infested tenement. When he visited them, they had no furniture or pictures—just a small table and a handful of rice.

-In fact, that winter, the two girls had only a short-sleeved dress each and shared a single sweater between them as they walked the half mile to school. In the middle of their poverty and Perfecta’s need to work, despite her arthritis, was their confidence in God.

Strobel writes, “I never sensed despair or self-pity in her home; instead, there was a gentle feeling of hope and peace (The Case for Christmas, p. 7).”

-One day before Christmas, Lee decided to pay them a visit. This is what he writes:

“When Jenny opened the door, I couldn’t believe my eyes. *Tribune* readers had responded to my article by showering the Delgados with a treasure trove of gifts—roomfuls of furniture, appliances and rugs; a lavish Christmas tree with piles of wrapped presents underneath; carton upon carton of food; and a dazzling selection of clothing, including dozens of warm winter coats, scarves, and gloves. On top of that, they donated thousands of dollars in cash.

“But as surprised as I was by this outpouring, I was even more astonished by what my visit was interrupting: Perfecta and her grand-daughters were getting ready to give away much of their newfound wealth. When I asked Perfecta why, she replied in halting English: ‘Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. ***This is what Jesus would want us to do.***’

“That blew me away! If I had been in their position at that time of life, I would have been hoarding everything. I asked Perfecta what she thought about the generosity of the people who had sent all of these goodies, and again her response amazed me.

“‘This is wonderful; this is very good,’ she said, gesturing toward the largess, ‘We did nothing to deserve this—it’s a gift from God. But,’ she added, ‘it is not his greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is Jesus.’

“...And at that moment, something inside of me desperately wanted to know this Jesus—because, in a sense, I saw him in Perfecta and her granddaughters.

...Something made me long for what they had (Case, p. 8-9)”

-It was a combination of this experience and Lee’s wife, Leslie, coming to faith in Jesus that took him on the search of a lifetime—and led him to Jesus. It’s this book, ***The Case for Christ***, that tells the story of Lee’s 2 year investigation. Lee Strobel’s life has had—and continues incredible impact. And one of the major influences was a poor woman who knew how to be Jesus where she was—and do good.

3. Doing good is what Jesus did; it’s the power of doing good that enabled that first little church to turn the world upside-down. And doing good—doing the works God prepared in advance for us to do...whether it’s in cubicle-land; on business trips to L.A., in our neighborhood, in Pickering, Oshawa, Stouffville, Markham, Scarborough, Richmond Hill, Quito, Ecuador, Nicaragua—wherever we go. That’s our calling—and it has ***immense*** power.

IV. CLOSING

Jesus, after he had finished washing everyone’s feet—and talked to them about serving—living beyond themselves—said these words:

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed IF you do them (John 13:17 NIV)!

-Next week, we’re going to get very specific about the good we can do. Let me give you two hints. It has to do with ***love***—like, not just feeling love—but the kind of love that does things for others that you would do for yourself. Basics. Water, food, shelter, care, compassion—for those in need. And it has to do with it being ***Good News*** that you’re in the neighborhood, or restaurant, or office, or in this world with others.

-And that, my friends, is our challenge. To commit ourselves, with God’s help, and with His power, to live the lives we were ***meant*** to live. And with absolutely no shame or hesitancy or reservations—that’s what I’m going to ask all of us to commit to. That’s the ***Jesus way of life.***