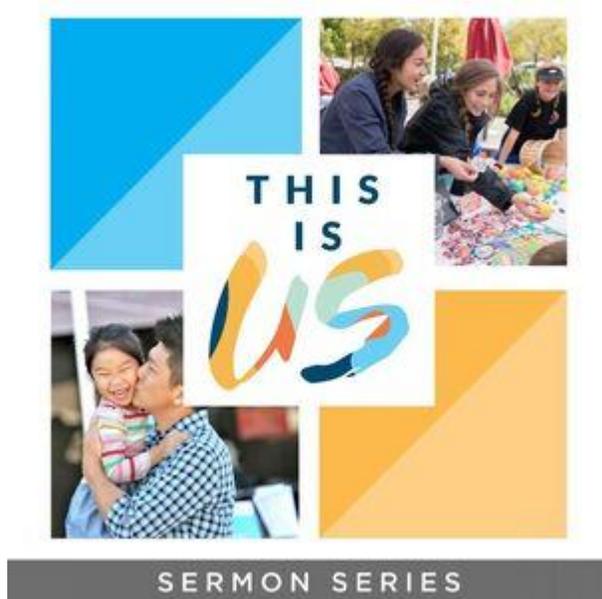


THIS IS US

Part 3: THE VALUES THAT MATTER MOST TO US What's Unique About C.R.O.S.S.R.O.A.D.S.?

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Words of Encouragement Days 155-159



At different times in our lives, it is good to pause, stop what we are doing, and ask the question 'why'. Why am I doing this? What am I doing? Why am I doing it? The answer to the question 'why' always determines 'how' and 'how long'.

THIS IS US, the first series of the brand-new year, will help us pause and ask what is 'church' and why do we do it?

Join us as we investigate 'church' and remind ourselves what church is really all about.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**"And without faith it is impossible to please God,
because anyone who comes to Him
must believe that He exists and that
He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."
Hebrews 11:6**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 155

"Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest . . . passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, . . . passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."

'Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'

The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.'

Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'" Luke 10:30-37

"Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all – it is all dead and useless." James 2:17

SOUP AND SALVATION

"**FIXING** houses?" Ethan frowned as he looked at the brochure for the family mission trip offered by his church "How could a fixed-up house help someone learn to love Jesus? If I'm not knocking on doors to talk to people about Jesus from dawn till dusk, it's not a mission trip."

You know you are supposed to love other people. That is a foundational teaching of our Christian faith. But how are you supposed to love? Many Christians think the only part of people we should care about is their soul—the part that will live forever. Their only concern is to make sure people are on their way to heaven. God, however, wants us to do more. God made people, and He wants us to love the people of our world in all the ways they need love. In Jesus' parable about the Good

Samaritan, that kind helper did not preach to the wounded man. He patched up his wounds and took him to an inn to be cared for. Jesus did not just talk to people about spiritual bread to fill their spiritual hunger for God (John 6:35), He also gave them physical bread for their physical hunger (John 6:5-11).

Suppose you have an opportunity to work in a poor neighborhood, presenting a church service and then serving a hot meal to the homeless. Which activity is more loving—sharing "soup" (or whatever is on the dinner menu) or offering "salvation"? The answer is, they are equally loving activities because each shows love by meeting genuine needs. Food, clothing, and shelter alone will not bring people into the kingdom of God. People also need to hear about Christ and trust him as Savior and Lord. But it is tough for people to listen to a Bible lesson when their stomachs are growling with hunger or their bodies are aching from disease.

Taking care of physical needs often flings the door open wide for us to meet spiritual needs. Besides that, the world is watching us. Non-Christians are not impressed by our passion to introduce people to Jesus if we neglect painfully obvious physical needs. Every Christian has the privilege of showing love to the whole person—soul and body—because those parts are equally valuable to God!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, We have a world around us that is hurting. People have physical needs and spiritual needs. When you walked on earth, You showed us what it means to meet both types of needs. Today, Lord, help me to see people as whole human beings. Open new doors of opportunities this year for me to reach out with the love of Jesus to people who need you and need to know you love them. Give me the strength and resources to meet both their physical and spiritual needs. Thank you for the ways you will use me, even today, to touch a life in Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 156

"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

LOVE'S RIPPLE EFFECT

IT wasn't until a few days after her mom came home from having heart surgery that a truth tiptoed through Amanda's brain. With her mom recovering for the next couple of months, things wouldn't magically get done around their apartment. So Amanda pitched in and made cooking and cleaning part of her daily routine.

The evening before Amanda's mom started back to work, she took Amanda out to dinner. "I couldn't have made it after my surgery without you," she said. "I have something for you that I hope will always remind you of how well you took care of both of us." Her mom made Amanda close her eyes and hold out her hands. When Amanda opened her eyes she found a delicate gold necklace. Right then another truth tiptoed through Amanda's brain, and Amanda suddenly understood how cool it was to truly help people—not to get a gift, but to see the real difference she could make. She also realized many more people could use her help!

Now consider this: Let's assume you have figured out what it means to love yourself and that you've got your family covered. What comes next? Loving people is like aiming at a bull's-eye. The inner circle is loving yourself and your family. The next circle is loving other Christians. Maybe you haven't thought of your Christian friends as people who need your special attention, but Paul meant for you to pay special attention to them when he wrote, "Whenever we have the opportunity, we should

do good to everyone, *especially to our Christian brothers and sisters* (Galatians 6:10, emphasis added). God wants you to love the believers with whom you spend time worshiping, learning, serving, and fellowshiping. Your care can extend to missionaries and even to Christians you will likely I not ever meet—believers in other churches, cities, and countries.

There's one more circle to think about, however: all of those neighbors you are to love as you love yourself. This huge ring includes everyone, from the people who live next door to your classmates to remote tribes in faraway countries you can't even name. Whoever and wherever they are, you need to love them. Like a pebble tossed into a pond, the big splash of your love will be at the center, to those nearest you—family and fellow believers, but as you love others, a wave ripples outward, ultimately reaching out to needy unbelievers all around you.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You said in Your Word that loving people is a top priority. Show me how I can be an influence of Your love to every person with whom I have contact. Help me to be sensitive and understand how You desire for me to love my neighbors – those near and far – in a way that meets their needs and shows You, Jesus, to them in ways they have never seen or experienced before. Thank You for including me in Your work of reaching all with Your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 157

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:8-10

YOU WERE MADE FOR THIS

HERE is a fundamental truth from God's Word. You were created by God with His purpose in mind, and until you discover His purpose for you—and follow through on it—there will always be a hole in your soul. The Apostle Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

It's easy to gloss over those words, but do not let this important reality slip by. Say it out loud: "I am God's workmanship." Now, do you know what it means to be God's workmanship? It means you are the product of God's vision. God has decided what you could be and should be, and through Christ He has brought about, and continues to bring about, changes in you in accordance with His picture of what you could and should be. His vision for you, however, is not complete simply because God has the vision. It has to be made into a reality, and you have a crucial part in it. As Paul states, you have been crafted to do good works. The particular works God has in mind for you are important and are different from the ones He has in mind for me or anyone else to do. You were created for something unique!

Honestly, when I think about it, I cannot get over the fact that the God of the universe has something in mind for us to do. After all, doesn't He have other things to think

about? But the apostle Paul assures us that God has prepared something specific for us to do. This means you and I have no right to live our lives without a vision. If God has a vision for what we are to do with our allotment of years, we had better get in on it, don't you think? What a tragedy it would be to miss it! God's vision for you is what you were made for, and more than that, His individual vision for your life is a small part of a grand plan for the universe that He envisioned and put in motion long before you or I came on the scene. If you are unsure of what your vision is, just ask Him to show it to you, then listen and watch for His answer. He will answer that prayer! I am not exaggerating one bit when I say that His vision for you came from eternity past, and fulfilling it will have effects lasting into eternity future.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Your word is clear. It says that I am Your workmanship, and as such I have value and a purpose that You created me to do. Thank you for the good works You planned for me to do. I realize my size, age, status, or any other limitation I may put on myself does not change this fact. You have something for me to do and I want to be doing it. Help me this week to understand more and more of what that means and to discern the purpose that You have built into me. I want to do all that You designed for me to do and to do so in a way that is pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 158

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.'"
Jeremiah 29:11-13

IN GOD'S SCHOOL

IF you saw *The Empire Strikes Back*, you may remember the scene in which Luke wants to rescue his friends before he has finished his Jedi Knight training. Yoda begs him to wait. "Luke, you must complete the training."

But Luke has seen the future, and he knows his friends' lives are in danger. He says, "I can't keep the vision out of my head. They are my friends; I must help them."

Yoda finally issues a dire warning. "If you leave now, help them you could, but you will destroy all for which they have fought and suffered."

Still, Luke is determined to go. He is so locked in on what could and should be that he feels compelled to leave immediately. So he does. And do you remember what happens? Everything works out great!

But that's in a galaxy far, far away. Back here where we live, action before preparation usually spells disaster. In the case of your divinely ordered vision, God goes to work in you to prepare you for what He knows lies ahead. Just like Luke Skywalker, you may feel the need to act so urgently that it seems foolish to wait. But God is sovereign. You need to keep that in mind. Your vision is simply an extension of His vision, and His timing is

perfect. For a while, God will be working in you to prepare you to act on His purposes, and I think we can assume His purposes are in accordance with His timetable. All of this can be hard to hear, can't it? Yes, it can. In fact, the complaint most associated with the process of visioning is about God's timing. Once the vision is clear, we assume we are ready. Otherwise, why would He have given us the vision in the first place? Don't be impatient, and don't move before God leads. Delay is not denial. Accept His training and His timing. Meanwhile, your vision, though it may burn inside you, will enable you to endure the wait, because you know it's worth it to get it right.

Vision always precedes preparation. Initially, your vision will exceed your competency, and within the context of that tension, God will go to work on you. *To the extent that you can, identify now how God is preparing you to effectively fulfill your vision later on.*

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for your promise to give me a vision and a hope. I want to fulfill the vision You have for me. Help me not to be impatient and not to move before you lead me. Give me the ability to wait because I realize waiting is worth it so I can act on Your vision for me at the right time. Show me how You are preparing me now to fulfill the vision You have for me later on. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 159

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. . . . Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."
John 15:1; 4-5*

CONNECTED TO THE SOURCE

SEVERAL years ago, Sandra and her friends felt a burden for the young women in their church. Sandra asked if they could begin a women's ministry built around the idea of older women mentoring younger women. Her Pastor thought it was a great idea and asked her questions about how she was going to go about setting up this ministry. She didn't have answers to any of his questions, but she did have a great response for her pastor. She said, "We would like to take a year to pray and plan." A year? They wanted to wait an entire year before launching the women's ministry? In church work, that is unheard of. Customarily, you start before you are ready, and you publicize it before you have staffed it.

For twelve months Sandra and her team prayed and planned. At the end of the year, they went public with their plans, and from day one, it was evident that God had given them a strategy. The pastor later said, "I sat back in amazement as this team mobilized and trained the older women in our congregation. Then with what had to be divine guidance, they paired younger women with older ones. We heard story after story of how the women they put together were a perfect match." God knew how to launch a women's ministry in a church. He just needed somebody to step up to the plate and wait for the right pitch.

A divine vision is not dependent upon us making something happen. It is dependent upon God making something happen. Jesus explained it to His disciples in terms of the branches of a vine abiding in the vine in order to bear fruit. We are often tempted to respond to this by saying, "Now, wait, certainly I can do *something*." That's true, you can do something, but not something as big and with the eternal consequences that God has planned to do. God's vision for your life and mine is chock-full of eternal consequence. When left to our own ingenuity, we can fall short and often become frustrated, but God's work, done in God's way, in God's time, is always successful, and it comes off in such a way as to point back toward God as the source and give Him all the glory.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that You have a vision for my life. Help me to seek You more and more and learn how to be dependent upon You for the vision You have created for me. I know that Jesus explained it to His disciples in terms of branches abiding in the vine in order to bear fruit. Thank You that I can fulfill that vision You have for me when I am connected to You. God, Your vision for my life has eternal consequence so I don't want to jump ahead of Your perfect timing. If I do, I may mess it up or miss something that is a part of Your plan. So teach me how to wait on You and what I am to do in the meantime to get ready for Your timing so that everything comes together perfectly. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve