

**THE FORGIVEN LIFE ... THE LOVING LIFE:
THE CONTINUAL WORK OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH
The Vision of Christ and the Church
John 4:23-24**

John 4:23-24~ ²³ But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

I. Introduction

Good morning, Brothers and Sisters. It truly is a good morning to see you here at Forgiven Life. I love our Church and I would not want to be anywhere else this morning than right here with you. And I hope it is the same for you, that as you come here, you feel this is YOUR home and that you rather not be anywhere else this morning than right here.

As I drove to Forgiven Life this morning, I passed a few churches on the way over here, taking the inner route instead of the freeway. And it took me a little over 30 minutes to get here. For some of you, it took longer opting to trek all the way over here instead of a church that is closer to home.

But why Forgiven Life? Why come here of all places? There are many good churches around (and there are some that are not so good). But you and I have specifically choose this church to spend your Sunday morning.

If you would allow me, I would like to take today as a general introduction to Forgiven Life Community Church ... who we are as a Church. Then the following weeks, we will dig deeper into the “Continual Work of Christ and the Church”.

Last year when I planted this Church, I knew it would not be easy. I knew it would be a difficult, but fun road to travel on. After all, there are so many churches here in the Greater Houston area already, why do we need another one?

But I had a vision ... not the supernatural vision that comes from God as describes in the Bible. Not that kind of vision. It is more of a desire ... a deep desire to have a biblical church absent of all the politics and unbiblical traditions and institution organization. To me, these are heavy burdens that are placed on Believers, leaving some hurt, dissatisfied, and overwhelmed. Jesus came to remove one kind of burden that weighted people down from worshipping God. And we, generically speaking, placed a different kind of burden on the worshippers that are just as heavy and just as painful. It is religiosity. I am not saying that we, as pastors and teachers, intentionally place these heavy burdens. Some of these are just religious traditions that are passed down, which we were taught, thought they were biblical, and implementing them with a sincere heart.

I wanted something different. I just want a Biblical Church. That is it. I just want a Church that follows the teaching of Jesus ... where the Bible guides our thoughts and our practice. Not some institutional, man-made reasoning that is meant to place us in bondage.

I just want a loving church ...

1. Where people can come and feel safe and not scared ...
2. Where there is healing and not hurting ...
3. Where we can encounter the Savior and not elevate the Self.

Forgiven Life is birthed from this desire, this vision. And along the way, we here at Forgiven Life need to take a step back to see if we are still on the right road because it is so easy to step off the pristine path for some vain things that will one day will vanish.

II. The Vision of Forgiven Life

When Forgiven Life was birthed, there are four values that I wanted to guide this Church ... four values that would show us the way forward. You see, values are so important because they affect our behavior and our performance.

One author of a national leadership building company wrote, “The more you believe in your values, the more you will become them ... But if you’re not sure of what you value, you’re in a vulnerable place.”¹

I want Forgiven Life to be built on these values. There are four of them that I call the ACTS ... A.C.T.S ... of Forgiven Life. The four values that Forgiven Life ACTS upon.

1. Authenticity

I would like for us to be genuine and real ... to be authentic. The things that we do here at Forgiven Life must be genuine and not hypocritical. It must be real and not fake.

Jesus says in John 4 that ...

John 4:23~²³ ... an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

When we come to Forgiven Life on Sunday, we want to worship in “spirit” ... that is, being real instead of being a ritual. And we want to worship in “truth” ... not hypocritically. These are the kinds of worshippers the Father seeks. And this is the kind of worshipper Forgiven Life want to be.

¹ Angie Morgan, Courtney Lynch, and Sean Lynch, *Spark: How to Lead Yourself and Others to Greater Success* (Boston; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p. 44.

When we say that we love God and we love the Bible because it reveals the character of God, people should see it in our action. Our Bible is torn up from much usage. It is marked all over with years of studying. And there is a strong, nagging desire to follow Jesus' teaching where we cannot rest until we obey. That is authenticity.

And when we say that we love our brothers and sisters, people should also see that in our action and our doing. That when a brother is sick, we would cook for him. Not just one time for show and tell ... hypocritically, look how spiritual I am ... but for days and weeks and months if need be to cook and care for our sick brother.

Or when a sister is hurting or struggling, we would visit her or call her or take her out for coffee or lunch or just to extend a listening ear. Or we would stay up late at night and forgo sleep, just be there for the hurting sister and be a comforting ear.

This is being authentic ... that we actually do what we say. And if we have something against someone, we reconcile and make it right instead of ignoring and pretending to like them.

Being authentic is so liberating as well. Last week, Mark and I stayed back to clean up the Church. And afterward, we spent hours sitting here talking and sharing and fellowshiping with each other. We had a great time just getting to know each other, sharing our dreams, our desires, and just encouraging one another. We had a few great laughs, just joking around, being ourselves. And as we left, I turned to Mark and said, "You know, Mark, I really enjoy talking with you. You why? Because you are not impressed with me." I don't have to pretend to be someone I am not. I don't have to pretend to be spiritual and have all my stuff together because I don't. I can just be myself. That is very liberating.

So if you come and ask me, "Hi, Pastor, how are you doing this week?" I am not going to say, "Oh, I am blessed. Praise God, I am blessed." I am just going to be honest, "Brother, I am stressed and struggling. But I love life."

I can only stomach hypocrisy for so long and then it starts to get to me. And I think it is so with you too. So let's be authentic. Let's be real.

2. Compassion

Along with love, compassion is used to describe Jesus many times in the gospel. When Jesus saw a multitude of sick people coming to him, the Bible says in Matthew 14:14 that he had compassion on them.

Matthew 14:14~ ¹⁴ When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

When the two blind men came crying and calling to Jesus to open their eyes, the Bible says that Jesus was ...

Matthew 20:34~ ³⁴Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

The Bible says that when Jesus saw a widow whose only son had died, he had compassion for her and raised up her son from death.

Luke 7:13~ ¹³When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”

And I can go on and on about Jesus’ compassion. And if we want to be like Jesus ... to be God’s chose people, we too must have compassion. Paul, writing to the Believers in Colossi, pens:

Colossians 3:12-13~ ¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Emphasis is mine).

As a chosen people of God, we are to put on a heart of compassion. What is compassion? Compassion is understanding and sympathizing with each other. Compassion really comes from two words: *Passion*, meaning “suffer” and *Com* meaning “with” or “together”. Compassion literally means “to suffer with” someone who is hurting ... to see beyond the complaints to the pain.

One time, I received a nasty text from a person who wrongfully accused me of something, and then proceeded to talk bad about my wife. It was a nasty text. (And by the way, if you have something negative to say, do it in person. Don’t send some nasty text and then hid behind the text.) When I read that text, I was angry. How can you think that way of me? You don’t even know me. You don’t even know my wife. In my rage, I went to read the text to my wife because it involved her as well. The text surprised me, for sure, but I was more surprised by Dawn’s action. Tears started to form in her eyes ... not because the text hurt her; it was something else. Through her shaken voice, she said, “That person is hurting. We need to pray for her.” She had compassion on someone who unjustly complained and criticized her.

I was taken back. Here was a person who had compassion on someone who just insulted her. Who saw behind the complaints and notice the pain. And I thought to myself, that is Christ-like character ... that is who I needed to be. I needed to be that kind of person who has compassion and would even shed tears because I felt the pain of the other person. So right there and then, Dawn led us in prayer for that person. And throughout the weeks, she would send prayer texts to me and invite me to join her in continuing to pray for this hurting person. The end result? Jesus got the glory.

Forgiven Life is about Compassion.

Compassion is “suffering with” someone who is hurting. It is being there, lending a hand, and extending an ear. It is also celebrating with those who are joyful. It is rejoicing in other’s success. The love that we share with each other comes from a place of compassion and not of judgment.

3. Team Work

The “T” in “A.C.T.S.” is for team work. It is our third strong value. Team work is joyfully working together. “JOYFULLY” working together. The Church, the way Jesus desires His Church to be, is a loving, dynamic, exciting place where EVERYBODY participates and serve. The goal is to build each other up in love so that we all can be the best version of ourselves for Jesus.

There is an African proverb that said, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Everybody has value at Forgiven Life, and as long as we do things together, we can go far. Jesus describes the Church as a Body ... as His Body that has many members or parts.

1 Corinthians 12:14-18~ ¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

The Church is not a one man show. I personally do not want to do this alone. It is boring. It is lonely. I want to be in a Church where we all minister to each other. You to me and I to you and you to each other. Yes, I am the pastor, but I need to be ministered to as well. I need to be encouraged like you need to be encouraged.

We must do things together. Now when I say that we do things together, I do not mean that we do the exact same thing together. Not everybody is an eye, the Bible says. Not everybody is an ear nor a mouth or a hand. We have our different passion and tasks that when work together, it becomes a beautiful tapestry that paints a beautiful picture.

Tragically, the history of the Church shows us how quickly the Church degraded from a body ministry to a single man ministry. It was as early as the second century that the rise of a single bishop, or the single pastor, became predominate in the Church. The only person who could really serve or minister in the Church is the pastor. He gets a salary. He is the professional minister. No longer does Jesus tells you want to do, the pastor will tell you what to do.

This view still influences our time and our age. I had a brother who told me a story of how he was serving in a “Helps Ministry” where he helped feed and clothe the poor in his community through his Church. He told me that he loved serving and never wanted to

stop serving in the Church. There were several little elderly ladies there that told him if he wanted to really serve in the Church, he should be a pastor. Why? You see, in people's mind, the only real service in the Church is the pastorate.

It is time that we reclaim back true intent that Jesus has for the Church. The Church is to serve together. It is about team work.

4. Simplicity

Forgiven Life is about simplicity, trimming away the unnecessary excess. Our worship is simple. Our love for God is simple. Our love for one another is simple. It is real people doing real things in simple ways.

A friend from another church came to visit Forgiven Life about a month ago. After the worship service concluded, he came to me and said how much he appreciated the simple worship. He said it was a blessing to him because he could hear other Believers worshipping and singing to God. The instruments did not drown out the voices lifting up God in praise from the congregation. He then told me that he about the worship in his church. There were light shows and artificial smoke rising to the ceiling. The instruments played so loud that one cannot hear anything. He could not worship God in that condition.

But for us here at Forgiven Life, it is about simplicity. Less truly is more.

III. Conclusion

So there you have it ... the A.C.T.S. of Forgiven Life ... the values that shape our behavior and our practice.

1. Authenticity ... be real.
2. Compassion ... be caring.
3. Team Work ... be helpful.
4. Simplicity ... be simple.

Now that we know our values (how we should behave), what do we do? What is Forgiven Life about? What is the Mission? We will open the Bible and take a look at that next week. If you want to get a head start, read John chapters 15 through 17 several times this week, and let's see if you see the same mission as I do. It will be fun.

But in the meantime, let me conclude with two practical points to ponder on this week.

1. First, Forgiven Life focuses on being a Healthy Church, not a Huge Church.

I am not against having a huge church. It will be nice to have a huge church. I will praise God for the opportunity to help more people if our Church is huge. But that is not

our value. We want a health church that practices authenticity and compassion ... a health church that values team work and simplicity.

If we constantly focus on being a huge church, we may become disappointed or disillusion. We may start to compromise our values so that we can bring in the crowds. You see, being a huge church is out of our control. It is the Lord who brings about the growth. What is in our control is how we do things. What is in our control is holding on to our values.

Huge is not necessary better. Health is always better.

2. Second, Forgiven Life is about Practicing the Faith, not only Preaching the Faith.

While preaching is necessary, we must never think that preaching is the same thing as practicing. It is not.

Knowing these values and agreeing to these values is one thing. Doing these values is another. Holding on to these values require grit and tenacity.

IV. The Blessing

Presider: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be unto you.

Congregation: And also to you.

V. Forgiven Life Living

In this section, it is time to meditate on the message. Look at the four values of the Church again and reflect to see if we do hold on to them. Answer the questions honestly and be authentic in your response.

1. Authenticity

John 4:23~²³ ... an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

- a. What does it mean to worship God in spirit and truth? _____

b. What are church practices that are rooted in tradition or ritualistic (man-made rather than through God's Word) that you don't think are necessary? _____

c. How do we share our love and ourselves genuinely with others without being judged or hurt by one another? _____

2. Compassion

Colossians 3:12-13~ ¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

a. Why is it important for a church body to show compassion towards one another? ____

b. What are some practical ways we can show love and compassion towards church members? _____

c. How do we overcome our busyness and limitations, and make time for our fellow brothers and sisters? _____

3. Team Work

Ephesians 4:11-16~ ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

- a. What are the essential teams that you see at church? - Children's ministry, small group, worship, ministry? _____

- b. Which teams do you see yourself serving, actively participating in or leading? _____

- c. What gifts and skill sets do you see yourself having that will help you contribute towards a particular church ministry? _____

4. Simplicity

Micah 6:6-8~ ⁶ “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” ⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

- a. Do we worship and serve with simplicity at Forgiven Life? _____

b. Are there any activities we could forego or remove at Forgiven Life so that we focus more on our spiritual walk? _____
