

# The Shape of our Journey

## Good Friday Service

04/10/09

Music Up  
*Instrumental*

### 1<sup>st</sup> Saying

#### Narrator

It is full dark now and the rain is still falling. The Sabbath has just begun, and we've run to this house to get dry and to talk—and to hide. At first, no one speaks. What is there to say? We were all there—from a distance—as Jesus was killed. We saw it. After all the years and miles we traveled with him—what do we do now? What will the Romans do? Are they after us, too? It's pretty tight in this little house; everyone is pressed around the table with a few oil lamps throwing tall, black shadows back against the walls. People start talking, quietly at first—memories mostly, some old ones, but mostly about this day, about Jesus' last words. What was it he said? Did you hear? What does it mean?

In the first three things he said from the cross, we find Jesus dying just as he lived—full of concern for others. In these first three sayings, Jesus, in his caring for those around him, is modeling God's behavior and attitude toward us. Do you remember the verse at 1John 4:19: "We love, because he first loved us?" This is Jesus, in these first three sayings, showing our God reaching out for us in love. We love him and everyone else because he first loved us. Because he first reached out to us and showed us who he is. Without his first move in our lives, there is no way that we can love at all. This is the first saying of Jesus from the cross at Luke 23:32-34...

#### Reader 1

Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."

#### Narrator

Isn't that just like Jesus? He spends his whole life focused on others, and now he's dying and doing the very same thing. Jesus is right in character, integrated, unified. And that's exactly what the number one means. To the ancient peoples of the middle-east, one meant unity. And in the language of the Jews, unity didn't simply mean one person or thing, it meant multiple, distinct persons or things that *functioned* as one and the same.

This distinction is important, as Jesus is all about unity: Jesus and the Father are one, that is, a unity—two distinct persons functioning as the same person. We see images like this all throughout Jesus' teachings because Jesus is also one, in unity, with everyone he encounters. How does Jesus achieve this state of being in unity? Well, that requires an action word, a verb to go with the noun. And the first action word Jesus gives us from the cross is *forgive*. Before unity with someone can even be approached, there must be forgiveness, because to the ancient Jews the word for forgiveness was also the word for release. Forgiveness was literally a release from captivity or bondage. Listen to this story from Mark 2:1-5...

#### Reader 1

When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

### **Narrator**

Son, your sins are forgiven. That word, son, means that Jesus now considers him part of his family—it's the same word he used for his closest companions. And what did the paralytic need to do get this forgiveness, this release? Nothing! Jesus declares him forgiven before he heals him, before anything else happens. The ancients believed that healing, being made whole, had to come first, before forgiveness from God was possible. Jesus turns that on its head and says, Father, forgive them, before they even knew they needed to be, or wanted to be. *Forgiveness before healing*. Before any outward sign of approval. That's how you forgive, Jesus style.

### **Reader 2--Prayer**

Father, it just seems so good to be true. And in all our experience, if something seems so good to be true, it usually is. Help us in our doubts and unbelief. You tell us that we are forgiven. You show us that you forgive first and ask questions later. Show our hearts that you have released us from our own bondage and captivity—before we do anything to deserve it, and in spite of anything we could do to lose it. Help us to start living like freed people. Amen.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Saying**

### **Narrator**

And now the second saying also from Luke 23:39-43...

### **Reader 1**

One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

### **Narrator**

Now is this even fair? Here this guy gets to break every rule in the book, and then with seconds to go in the game, *with one line*, Jesus promises to be with him, in *Paradise*, no less? This is Jesus taking the next step in reaching out to us as implied in the number two. To the ancients, the number two signified generation or production. Male and female produce the next generation—in scripture we see the animals going into the ark by twos and Jesus sends out his disciples two by two. The promise of a prosperous future.

Generation, production—moving from one level to the next. Jesus is showing us how he and the Father move from simple forgiveness to something deeper. Have you ever considered that you can forgive someone, but then remain distant, separated from them? The difference is contained in the second action word *accept*. Here's a great story from Mark 2:13-17...

### **Reader-1**

And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

### **Narrator**

You couldn't go any lower than a tax collector in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. Who's at the bottom of our social ladder today? Prostitutes, drug addicts, maybe pedophiles? That's where a tax collector lived in Jesus'

time. Bottom feeders, hated as cheats and extortionists as well as collaborators with the occupying Roman army. Try to imagine what Levi was feeling when this healer and holy man of God looks at him, and instead of spitting, says, "Follow me." Try to imagine the surge of excitement, the tears threatening to overwhelm you, the automatic impulse to leap up and follow this man who has showed you something no one else ever has. And what did Levi do to earn this acceptance? Nothing! He didn't need to stop tax collecting, or to promise to be a good tax collector or anything else. *Jesus accepts without repentance.* Before any behavior is changed. Do you think this is easy?

Here's Jesus now drinking and eating with a house full of these low-lives, when the Pharisees object. How could he sit at table and party with these people? It's easy to read this passage from a distance of two thousand years and shake our heads at those rascally Pharisees. But do this: think of someone you really admire—someone you consider holy, a role model, a mentor, a pillar of our faith. Now, imagine you're going to a really nice restaurant for dinner, and you pass one of those side rooms for full parties. You glance in as you go by, and there's this person with a cigarette in one hand and a scotch and soda in the other in front of a sumptuous meal, head thrown back, laughing with whom? Well, to you they look like prostitutes, maybe pimps, drug traffickers, porn stars, maybe Hollywood producers, you pick the company. Now what are you thinking? What is the first thing you want ask this person that you had up on your pedestal?

Who are we really more like in this story, Jesus or the Pharisees? Jesus is showing us how to accept. Fully, completely, with abandon. And even without repentance.

### **Reader 2--Prayer**

Father, how does this work? How can you accept us so blindly, so completely. How can you really not see who and what we are. How can you comfortably sit at table with anyone, look them in the eye and laugh and enjoy your time with them? With us? With me? Help me to see as you see—across all lines and barriers. Thank you for accepting me and enjoying me. Help me to accept and enjoy everyone you put in my path. Amen.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Saying**

### **Narrator**

The third saying from John 19:25-27...

### **Reader 1**

...standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

### **Narrator**

Psychologists may call this "getting our affairs in order," but for Jesus it's much more than this. The number three to the ancients was the number of completion or perfection. We see it all over the Scriptures, in the Trinity, Adam's three sons, Noah's three sons, Jesus' three days in the tomb, Jesus' three closest friends... Jesus is bringing to completion the cycle of his, and God's, reaching out to us.

And what is the completion of Jesus' cycle of care and concern for us? The first action was to forgive, then to accept, and now to *nurture*. Our third action word. Nurture. Do you see how each action is deeper than the last? Just as forgiveness can be accomplished without acceptance, acceptance can be accomplished without an ongoing, long-lasting relationship—to *nurture*, as one would nurture and love an infant. Jesus is now turning the nurturing relationship he had with his mother over to one of his closest friends. But nurturing your mother, who nurtured you, is one thing. How about nurturing those who could never nurture back? Listen to Mark 10:13-16...

### Reader 1

The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Understand this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them.

### Narrator

Children were property in this culture. They were a sign of wealth, health, and promise for the future, but they held no place in society. They were women's work. Jewish men had more important things to do, especially holy men like Jesus. It's so important to see how Jesus has time for everyone and anyone. He truly sees everyone around him just as a child would, with no concept of stature or wealth or of any ability to give back to him. Of course, let the children come to him—he's even angry that they would be prevented. And can you still hear that last line? "Gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them."

As beautiful as that image is, if you merely see Jesus smiling beatifically at the children and patting them on their heads, you're missing the whole point. Jesus was fully committed, fully involved. I see Jesus wrestling and tickling, laughing, rolling on the ground with kids climbing all over him, squealing and pulling on his beard. This business of nurturing is not dignified. The cycle of forgive, accept, and nurture is not for the faint-hearted or those who don't want to get their uniforms dirty. But it can be a lot of fun.

### Reader 2--Prayer

Father, I need to see you as a laughing God. A running God. A jumping God. A God not afraid to be undignified for me. For anyone. I need to know that it is your pleasure to care for us, to spend lazy hours with us, even to play with us. I need to see you having fun with me, so I know it's alright for *me* to have fun—with you and everyone around me. From the most intimate to the most casual, Lord help me to take care of my relationships to see them as precious and worth the time and effort and dirty uniforms. Amen.

### Music

## 4<sup>th</sup> Saying

### Narrator

Forgiveness before healing. Acceptance without repentance. Nurturing without reward. All this has been given to us. Jesus shows us how. Now we are at a crossroads, in more ways than one. Here at the exact center of the seven sayings, right in the middle between the three ways God reaches out to us and the three ways we reach out to God, there is a moment of decision. And the decision is this: at a difficult time in our lives, after all the forgiving, accepting, and nurturing God has done with us, will we remember that He is still there? Will we reach back out to him? Or will we lose hope? One of the ways we deceive ourselves is in thinking that we make this decision to reach out to God just once and for all in our lives. A single event, over and done. In reality, we have to reach out to God every day, sometimes every moment—over and over—whether circumstances are good or quite difficult. Here is Jesus at the edge, at extremes, and here is the fourth saying...

### Reader 1

Matthew 27:39-46 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words. Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (pronounced: ay-lee' ay-lee' lam-ah' sab-akh'-than-ee')

**Narrator**

For many people, this is the hardest saying in the entire Bible. How could Jesus say this? How could he, of all people feel abandoned by God? It seems unthinkable, until you realize what he is really doing. Jesus was steeped in the Scriptures—knew them by heart, lived them. Turned to them in good times and bad. And here, even in this most excruciating moment, he is quoting them once again. Listen to Psalm 22 and its poetic interplay between despair and hope...

**Reader 1**

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my groaning? My God, I cry in the daytime, but you don't answer; all night long I call and cannot rest.

**Reader 2**

*Yet, Holy One, you who make your home in the praises of Israel, in you our father put their trust. They trusted, and you delivered them. They cried to you, and were delivered. They trusted in you, and were not disappointed.*

**Reader 1**

Yet here am I, now more worm than man, scorn of mankind, jest of the people, all who see me jeer at me, they toss their heads and sneer, "He relied on the LORD, let the LORD save him!"

**Reader 2**

*Yet you drew me out of the womb, you entrusted me to my mother's breasts. Placed on your lap from my birth, from my mother's womb you have been my God.*

**Reader 1**

I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. A pack of dogs surrounds me. They pierce my hands and my feet, and leave me lying in the dust of death. I can count every one of my bones, and there they glare at me gloating. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothes.

**Reader 2**

*But don't be far off, LORD. You are my help: hurry to help me. I will declare your name to my brothers. In the midst of the assembly, I will praise you. For he has not despised nor disdained the poor man in his poverty. Neither has he hidden his face from him; but has answered him when he called. Of you comes my praise in the great assembly. I will pay my vows before those who fear him. The humble shall eat and be satisfied. Those who seek the LORD will praise him. Let your hearts live forever.*

**Narrator**

So the full quotation gives us the full meaning of Jesus' words. Did you hear how David, the writer of Psalm 22, flipped back and forth between his despair at his circumstances and his trust in God? He feels abandoned, yet God always rescued his ancestors who never lost their trust. He is being scorned, yet from his mother's womb he has always rested in God's lap. He is at the point of death, yet God has always answered, and he will praise God and be satisfied forever. Jesus is at the edge, everything and everyone seems against him at this moment, yet he is reaffirming his trust and his commitment to reach out to his Father.

To the ancients, the number four was the number of the earth. It signified the four seasons, the four winds, the four rivers of Eden, and of course the four cardinal directions: north, south, east, and west. At our lowest points in life, the points closest to the earth, to the dust, we stand at the center of a compass that radiates out in the four primary directions and every direction in between. Jesus' state of being, our state of being at such moments is earth...dust.

If the noun is earth, then the verb, the action word is: *choose*. We must choose every time we get to the end of ourselves as Joshua instructed his people in Joshua 24: "...choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amori,

in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Listen to this little story from Mark 10:17-23...

### **Reader 1**

As he went out into the street, a man came running up, greeted him with great reverence, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?" Jesus said, "Why are you calling me good? No one is good, only God. You know the commandments: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat, honor your father and mother." He said, "Teacher, I have--from my youth--kept them all!" Jesus looked him hard in the eye--and loved him! He said, "There's one thing left: Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come follow me." The man's face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go.

### **Narrator**

We choose every day. We remember the big crises and struggles of our lives, and the choices we made then that have brought us here—for better or worse. But there is another choosing today as well. Even if, like this rich young man, we can say we've been following all the rules, coloring inside the lines, there's still something we're holding on to that's weighing us down, keeping us from the fullest expression of our lives. Maybe we know what it is and maybe we don't, but until we're asked to choose, how *will* we know? But God is asking right now—is always asking. Will you lay it down and follow me? Will you move beyond where ever you are and look for more? What will we choose this day?

### **Reader 2--Prayer**

Oh Father, you know me better than I know myself. You know what I can and can't handle. I resolve today to choose you. To choose life and love. To go deeper. And I resolve to keep choosing you no matter what happens. But Lord when *it* does happen, when I find myself back out on the edge, remind me of this choosing, of this moment when I can feel your presence. And in that moment when you seem so far from me, remind me of Jesus quoting your Word to remind himself that you are always there. No matter what. Amen.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Saying**

### **Narrator**

Jesus chose. He chose his Father. He chose to remember the unity between him and his Father. He chose to continue on as if that unity was reality, even if it didn't feel that way at that moment. How do we know? Because after reaching out to all those around him, he chooses, and then begins the cycle of three of reaching out to his Father. Listen to his fifth saying from John 19:28...

### **Reader 1**

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty."

### **Narrator**

I suppose that's just about the most natural remark in the world. How good is a cool drink on a hot day—after running or working out? How much do we need it and want it? How much more would Jesus have thirsted at this moment? But there's much more here below the surface. The number five, to the ancients meant initiation—to be brought into a community through some sort of time of testing or ritual. It could also mean redemption, again, the bringing back into the community from the outside. What was Jesus really thirsting for?

The action word here is *desire*. The aching, craving, earnest, seeking, searching, thirsting for something or someone. Water? OK. But listen to Psalm 63...

### **Reader 1**

O God, you are my God. I am seeking you. My soul is thirsting for you. My flesh is longing for you, a land parched, weary, and waterless. I long to gaze on you in the sanctuary and to see your power and glory. Your love is better than life itself. My lips will recite your praise. All my life I will bless you--in your name, lift up my hands. My soul will feast most richly, on my lips a song of joy and, in my mouth, praise. On my bed I think of you. I meditate on you all night long, for you have always helped me. I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings close to you. Your right hand supports me.

### **Narrator**

No doubt Jesus was desperately, deadly thirsty. But he desired, craved the unity, the oneness, the relationship with his Father. The unity that his circumstances had clouded; the unity that he chose to make real, and so was real. This is Jesus' first step back from the abyss, back from the edge of his extreme circumstances. Desire. Desire for more of his Father's touch, more of his Father's life and love. He chose unity with his Father. And having chosen, acts. With desire, with thirst for more.

### **Reader 2--Prayer**

My Lord, as the deer pants for the cool water, may my soul always pant for you. Let there never be a time when I don't desire more of you. When I don't have that breathless sense of excitement, of adventure in turning the next corner with you. Let there never be a time when I don't realize that you are endless and inexhaustible. That I can never get to the bottom or the sides or the top. That there is always something new and fresh and exhilarating to be discovered and enjoyed in You and with You. You are a God of surprises. Surprise me, Lord! Amen.

## **6<sup>th</sup> Saying**

### **Narrator**

What's beyond desire? What's the next step in reaching out to the Father? Listen to the sixth saying from Luke 23:44-46...

### **Reader 1**

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

### **Narrator**

It's like that moment in the film where it all goes slow motion. The couple is falling together, the car is in the air, something's almost happening, it's about to happen—it's that moment of suspended animation—the moment before the next moment, telegraphing that another moment is coming. A significant moment. The moment of resolution, of completion. This moment, this number six, is what the ancients understood as incompleteness or as preparation. It's the number right before the perfect number seven; the moment right before the complete moment.

And in this moment Jesus gives us the action word, *surrender*. Here's a story from Luke 5:4-11...

### **Reader 1**

He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." When they had brought their boats to land, they *left everything* and followed Him.

### **Narrator**

How much does it take for us to finally get it? How much did it take Simon? How much will it take each of us to finally see that God loves us and is caring for us and provides for us. I'm at home with my family and I watch my kids playing, eating, laughing, sometimes fighting or complaining, but never worrying about taxes or nuclear proliferation. They assume that the car will start and the refrigerator will be full, and that Mom and Dad will always take care of it. Whatever *it* is.

This is finally the moment that Simon and James and John become kids again. After all they'd already seen of Jesus, it took a big pile of smelly fish to allow them to finally leave everything, lay it down, and follow him. They could finally see Jesus as a caring provider, in whom they could trust. Let down their guard. Remember the game we played as kids where your friend stood behind you, and you would just fall back and let them catch you? Trusted them to catch you? Total trust. Complete surrender. It's like that.

### **Reader 2--Prayer**

Father, what *is* it going to take? How many times am I going to make you prove your trustworthiness before I actually begin to trust you? Well, maybe just one more... Lord thank you for being so patient with me. For allowing me to take my time, to gather evidence of you, slowly and methodically. Cataloging and cross referencing, trying to reach my conclusion. But Lord, help me to understand that ultimately, at some moment, I will just have to let down and let go. Fall back with my arms out and eyes closed and see what happens. Lord, I trust, I trust. Help my lack of trust. Amen.

### **Narrator**

Communion

### **Music**

## **7<sup>th</sup> Saying**

### **Narrator**

*No greater love can we ever express than to lay down our lives for a friend. But the presence of love in our lives is confessed when we get up and live again.* Do you want a good, quick understanding of the cross and the resurrection? There it is. God is love. There is nothing he wouldn't surrender, lay down, for us. Love is life. God is life. Jesus lives because love and life are in him and he in them. And this brings us to the seventh and final saying from John 19:29-30...

### **Reader 1**

A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

### **Narrator**

Finally, mercifully, it's over. The whole ordeal. The pain, the humiliation. It is finished, it is complete, which is just another way of saying: it is *seven*. Seven meant, as did three, completion or perfection, and is probably the most widely used and understood of the ancient number-symbols. The seventh saying on the cross is the completion of everything Jesus needed to communicate to us.

It is also the completion of the three steps of Jesus', and our, reaching out to God, and of the completion of the shape of our spiritual journey. The action word, the verb Jesus gives us is *identify*. What does that mean? Listen to John 14:5-12...

### **Reader 1**

Thomas said, "Master, we have no idea where you're going. How do you expect us to know the way?" Jesus said, "I *am* the Way, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you



really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you *do* know him. You've even seen him!" Philip said, "Master, show us the Father; then we'll be content." "You've been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don't understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, 'Where is the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren't mere words. I don't just make them up on my own.

The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act. "Believe me: I am in my Father and my Father is in me. If you can't believe that, believe what you see--these works. The person who trusts me will not only do what I'm doing, but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I've been doing. You can count on it.

### **Narrator**

Jesus is in unity with the Father. That is, two persons, distinct, but functioning as one. In other words, Jesus is completely identified with the Father. What the Father is about, he is about. This is what he means when he says things like "no one can come through the Father but through me," or "I can do nothing by myself, but only what I see my Father doing." He is saying, "The Father and I function as one and the same. If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. There is nothing else you need to see or know. It's all right here. We are identified, identical with each other." Think about it, people identify with all sorts of things in life, their country, their schools, their churches, clubs, or even sports teams. Just look at a person's license plate or the stickers they put on the backs of their cars, and you will see what a person identifies with. Jesus is identified with the Father, and when we identify with the Father, with Jesus, we will be about what he is about. We will be complete, we will be perfect, we will be *seven*.

### **Reader 2--Prayer**

Lord, you said to be perfect, just as you are perfect. To be complete, mature, whole, balanced. In other words to be just like you. Lord, at the end of all our searching, may we end up right where we began, but know the place for the first time. We came from you, help us to return to you. To know you so well, that we begin, more and more, to look like you. To act like you, to think like you. Help us not to have to ask what you would do in every situation, because we already know. Our hearts and minds know, our muscles and bones know. Our every response, knee-jerk reaction is squarely in the center of your will, because we are in you and you in us. Unified. Identified. Amen.

### **Music**

## **Epilog--8**

### **Narrator**

Is there anything after the number seven? Well, yes there is. It's the number eight. Can you guess what the ancient meaning of the number eight is? On the eighth day, the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the grave. The number eight means rebirth. The action Jesus takes is simply to *live*. Jesus lives. Right here, right now. Jesus said that as believers and doers, as both nouns and verbs of God, we can do what he did—we *will* do what Jesus did. With the number eight, the cycle starts all over. With the number eight, we are reborn, born again of the spirit, and all things are made new, all things are possible. With the number eight, we begin to do for others what God has done for us, to forgive, accept, nurture, and then if we choose to go deeper still, to desire, surrender, identify, and live all over again.

Two perfect cycles of three with a choice in the middle and life all around.

We need to understand that the Gospel is a verb. It's a living, breathing way of life. It's not enough to ask yourself *what* you believe. You need to ask what *difference* it makes that you believe. We look around and see all the things in this world that remain undone. We see the brokenness and injustice and poverty and abuse. And we pray that God will change things, that he will change the circumstances of our lives—to make them better. We say that prayer changes things, and we hunker down to pray more and more fervently. Well, some prayers are answered in the ways we expect and other aren't, and we go round and round trying to figure out why. But even if there's some question whether prayer changes things, there's

one thing you can take to the bank: prayer changes *us*. And then, changed by God, we have the power, as Jesus showed us, to change *things*.

Let's roll around on the floor with our children; let's throw our heads back and laugh with whomever we find ourselves; let's find ourselves with people we'd never have imagined finding ourselves; let's get our uniforms dirty and love it; let's just love each other and kid around a little and enjoy this moment. Let's look at the cross and see perfect love and not just another burden to carry; let's choose to love life more than we fear death; and let's start really living, maybe for the first time since *we* were children.

It's almost daybreak. The lamps are just about dry, and we really need to get back to our own homes. It's still Sabbath, the seventh day. But tomorrow is the eighth day. The day of rebirth. Let's wait and see what God has for tomorrow. Let's praise and thank our Lord for this breath, for this life, and the life and the love that he has for each of us, forever. Amen.

**Music**

**Narrator**

Let's go love each other—and kid around a little...

**Music**