

**“The Family Tree”**  
*Galatians 3:26-4:7*  
**Scott Burgess**

**The Woodside Church**

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Good morning. My name is Scott Burgess. I am a member of the sermon team as well as the Director of Woodside’s Prison and Recovery Ministry. I’d like to welcome you to today’s service, whether you are here in the building or watching online.

This is God’s word.

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,<sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 3:26-4:7

May God bless this reading of the Word.

It was September of 2019. I was on Facebook and I was looking at a post by Michelle’s cousin, Joyce. Then I noticed a friend of ours posted a comment which ended with “Aunt Joyce”. Expecting her to tell me she was a good friend of her parents, I asked her how she knew Joyce. I was shocked when she told me Joyce really was her Aunt. Her father and Joyce were siblings. I replied that since her grandfather and Michelle’s father were brothers then she and Michelle are related.

She then messaged me saying, “Hey- yes my dad IS Joyce’s brother- his name is Edward after his dad- but when he was small they called him Ward. I did not really know much about my grandfather’s family- I thought he only had a sister who I met at his funeral; but guess I was wrong. I don’t ever remember getting together with the extended Marx family...”

Guess there is a lot I really don’t know exactly. But I am an original Marx- for better or worse”

We had become friends here at Woodside, and she and the kids had even attended one of our Patio Worship Services. But it was through Facebook we learned Michelle Marx Burgess, and our Celebration Service worship leader, Laura Marx Ruland are first cousins, once removed. There are probably other people here who have similar stories. Many people enjoy finding details of their family, current or historical. A quick internet search revealed Americans spend

hundreds of millions on genealogy - much of it on DNA testing and subscriptions to historical databases. I have a family tree put together with input from both my father and mother's families. We trace my dad's side of the family to William Brewster, the Senior Elder in the Plymouth Colony. My mom was descended directly from Mary Dyer, the Quaker martyr who was the first woman executed in the colonies for her religious beliefs.

As much as I enjoy discussing my own family tree, there is another lineage which as Christians should be even more important to us. The family tree of Christ Jesus. I used the opening scripture reading for a specific reason today. Before Jesus came, we were the same as slaves. Slaves to idol worship. Slaves to false gods. Slaves to legalism, or the Law. But Jesus came to set us free.

...to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:5-7

As slaves we served at the table. As children of God, we sit at the table. "This is the Lord's Table. Our Savior invites all who trust in Him to share the feast He has prepared for us." We hear this every month when Pastor Doug offers the sacrament of communion.

Then why, if we have been given this great gift, do we turn from God and want to go back to being slaves? Paul writes,

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

Galatians 4:8-11

Before Paul introduced the people of Galatia to Jesus, they probably worshipped many different Gods. There were probably some Jews among them, but Paul spent more time teaching the Gentile Christians. Galatia had a strong Celt presence at the time so there were surely pagan gods, as well as followers of Roman and Greek Gods. Idol worship would have been normal as well. Paul taught them the Gospel. He most certainly shared his transformational experience with them. He helped to lead them from being slaves to false gods, to being children of God. And yet now he finds they have been returning to their old habits. Not the same ones as before. They are being led by false teachings from Jewish Christians. Earlier in this sermon series, we learned how followers of James came and shamed Peter from eating with Gentiles. They began to teach the Gentiles circumcision is necessary in order to be true to God. They might not have been turning back to the pagan gods they followed before, but they were becoming slaves again. Slaves of idols, law, traditions, and rituals.

A strong faith does not revolve around rituals. Our faith is based on our relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Is he in your life every day, or just a few days a year. All of these actions and activities are counter to what Jesus offered. They have been adopted by God and given the wonderful gift of grace. Let me repeat that; they were given the gift of grace. They didn't earn it and they sure didn't deserve it. Why would they give that back, and go back to their old way of life and leave a family filled with love?

Don't we do the same thing? We have been given the same gift, and yet sometimes we ask the chains to be placed back upon us. Why do we do that? There are many reasons which come to mind.

I Can Do It – We want to be in control of our lives. Leaning on others, trusting others to get things done, causes us to relinquish power. When we are young, we have to trust our parents completely because we don't have the ability to care for ourselves. As we grow we are taught what we need for our lives and our parents encourage us to do for ourselves, to think for ourselves. After all, they won't be there forever, so we learn to be self-sufficient. At some point, usually in our teenage years, the pendulum swings and we rebel against the control our parents exert in our lives. We stop listening to them because they don't understand us, and what we are going through. We make mistakes and hope the mistakes aren't too damaging and we can learn from them. As we become more mature, many of us realize our parents weren't complete idiots and we begin asking for their advice again. Mark Twain's famous quote is based on those years of our lives: "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."- Mark Twain

For those who don't know my faith story, since 2007 I have been part of Conquering Life Prison and Recovery Ministry, Inc. For 14 years I went several times a month to Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia to lead and/or participate in worship services and disciple inmates. I learned a very interesting fact along the way. The recidivism rate in Philadelphia prisons is crazy. Within three years of their release, 85% of the men return. 85%! Want to know what the main reason is for that? Because they go home. They are often going home to where they got into trouble in the first place – with their old friends, the drugs, and in many instances the gangs. Even with counseling, probation and parole, it is just too easy to slip back into old habits. It's what they know. On the plus side, for an inmate who accepts Christ while incarcerated the rate drops to around 35%. If they find a home church and accept discipling, it drops to 10%.

There are no guarantees in our life journey. But having Christ beside us sure gives us hope. I Should Do It – Obligation: something one is bound to do : [duty](#), [responsibility](#) There is always a danger when you are doing something strictly because it is felt as an obligation. If the only reason you go to worship every week is because you feel you have to go, then there is something missing. When I came back to Woodside 20 years ago, it began as a matter of curiosity. I was impressed by Doug when he helped us say goodbye to my father. After I attended off and on for a few months, I found myself wanting to be here every week. After a while I began volunteering to help in various ways. I soon found myself offering to help at almost every request. It was my own fault, but I began to feel I had to accept every request presented to me. My faith was

becoming more focused on doing things, rather than on my relationship with God. Shortly after I started getting these feelings, there was a sermon, or a sermon series, on the power of no. To sum it up; while saying yes to needs is good, sometimes we should say no. I even do this as a member of the sermon team. Sometimes there are times I want to volunteer for a particular passage, or theme. Sometimes I volunteer because nobody else is available, and I can. And sometimes I tell the team I need to pull back for a few months because work, or family issues have to take precedence.

Everyone Should Do It – A few weeks ago, Linda Marr preached about pleasing others. While there is nothing wrong with trying to make people happy, it shouldn't cause pain in our own lives and most certainly shouldn't interfere in our relationship with Jesus. I once knew a couple who were active in a church and also in the Recovery Ministry. And then they came out with a Facebook post one day which bothered me. I can't recall the exact phrasing, but they stated they were foregoing all relationships with people who didn't accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. I didn't agree with the idea, but the second part of their post really got to me. "We are also requesting all of you make the same commitment. If you refuse to do so, please unfriend us." I could not do that. I have friends and family, whom I love, who are not currently following Christ. There are plenty of other people out there who don't know Christ. Jesus' final commission was,

<sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

How can I possibly follow his instructions if I never interact with non-believers. I tried to explain this to them. A few days later they unfriended me.

I Need To Do It - Our comfort zone can be a good thing, but it can also be a negative. When a baseball player is in his comfort zone, it usually means he feels good. He sees the ball well and gets good swings. Up here on this stage, while everything is going well, the clicker is working, my mic isn't fading in and out, I'm in my comfort zone.

But what happens when our comfort zone takes us away from God? What is your response when life gets difficult? Do you reach out to God, or fall back on your old ways?

When you get upset with your spouse, or your children, do you step back and pray or lash out in anger?

After a rough day at work, do you come home and pull out the bible, or the gallon of ice cream from the fridge?

It's been a long week. I need some "me time". It won't hurt to miss service this week. But the next week is just as long, and the following week is too. The next thing you know you haven't worshipped in a month.

Michelle and I have been involved in the Recovery Ministry for almost 20 years now. We've seen some amazing success stories over the years. People who have turned their lives around by accepting Christ. But we've seen pain and sadness as well. Men and women trying to break free of the chains of addiction, falling back to old habits for one reason or another. As many of you know, we had personal experience as well. Our son Jimmy battled his addiction for years. He would be clean for a time and then, due to a problem, a troubled time, or just a weak moment, would slip back. It's been almost ten years now since we lost him, and while the pain lies dormant at times, it is always there. Whenever it does awaken I do my best to turn to God for strength, comfort, and love to get me through the moment.

I Want To Do It – Probably the most unexplainable reason for a backslide – wanting it. There is a selfish, entitled side in most of us, probably in all of us to some degree.

I'm a type two diabetic and I know I need to keep my sugars, and my weight down. I know I shouldn't have that Hershey bar, but it's just one little piece of chocolate, right?

If it helps us get more business, then a little flirting should be ok. It doesn't mean anything. It's something I heard, so there isn't anything wrong with sharing it. It isn't really gossip.

We make decisions based upon what we want, regardless of how it affects others, or even ourselves.

Last week Dave Richards gave an inspiring Father's Day message. In it, he shared the story of the Prodigal Son. Despite living in a prosperous household, with a loving family, the son insults his father by selfishly demanding his inheritance now, while his father was still very much alive. "Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living." Luke 15:13

Later, poor, starving, and ashamed, he goes back to his father asking to be accepted back to the household as a servant. But his father accepts him back as his son and celebrates his return. That is what the Father does for us when we stray. I am not suggesting it is a good idea to turn away from God and go back to your former life, knowing God will forgive you. There is too great a risk of wandering too far and not finding your way back to him. But if you do wander, have hope. He accepts us. He loves us. And he forgives us. That's grace.

So, what steps can we take to avoid falling into a situation where we backslide.

1. Make worship service a weekly event, not just when it is convenient. If you look at worship as a place to go on Sunday morning, listen to music, and hear a message I challenge you to make a change. Number 1: take some notes. I've noticed I tend to remember the sermons more when I take notes. You don't have to transcribe the message. Just note a few key points. Number 2: Step out of your comfort zone and WORSHIP. Sing, clap, raise your hands. What the heck; do the full Burgess. Let God see how much you love him.
2. Are there things you like to do, or want to try? Contact Lisa Gayle, the Director of Sharing and have a conversation with her about what you would like to do, or at least consider doing. It doesn't need to be an international mission trip, or going to Kensington, or into a prison (although it could be...). It could be on the worship or tech team, helping with the children, serving that amazing spread we have after weekly services, or just greeting or ushering on a Sunday morning. It doesn't need to be a weekly commitment. You sign up and serve when you are available.
3. Trust God – Don't know what to do next? Trust God. Recently lost a friend, or a family member? Trust God. Struggling at school? Trust God. Is everything going well? Trust God. Sometimes we seem to want to make things complicated when all we need to do is...Trust God. It doesn't mean God will make things easy for you. But difficult or easy, he will be there for you and with you. Recently, our men's group – THE Friday Morning

Men's Group (thank you for the photo Dave Richards) was studying a book called, "The Cure". In the book, the main character is walking down a road when he comes to a fork in the trail with two signs. One says Pleasing God, the other Trusting God. The Pleasing God sign leads to The Room of Good Intentions. The Trusting God sign leads to The Room of Grace. I don't want to give away too many spoilers so let me just give you a hint – Trust God. It leads to Grace.

If you met Enrique, Rick, Cartagena today, I could almost guarantee you would leave that meeting with either a smile as wide as the ocean, or your jaw dropping down to your feet. It would depend on whether he was talking about his faith, or his past. I've known Rick for around 16 years now and he still amazes me. In May of 2015 Rick shared the message at the quarterly Recovery Service and Luncheon here at Woodside. He also included his testimony. He opened it with, "I am going to share some stories today my wife does not even know, and I apologize to her for that."

I am just going to summarize his testimony now. He was a 16- or 17-year-old kid on the streets of Philadelphia, heavily involved in drugs. I don't mean a petty street corner dealer. He was involved in manufacturing, delivery and transportation of the drugs. And even at this young age, he was managing the dealers in his neighborhood. Among a dozen or more other crimes he committed, he was involved in a aggravated assault. He was arrested and charged with the drug charges for everything I mentioned, but the DA held off on charging him with the assault. Not because he didn't have a case, but because they were so sure the man was going to die they held off. Fortunately for everyone involved, he didn't die and Rick was charged with the assault. The trial didn't last long, and in October 1989 Rick was sentenced to 15 to 30 years in prison. Two weeks after entering prison he heard a call for a chapel service. He had no experience with church but was bored. He and his buddy, Tiger, had heard women from the outside sometimes came to chapel services, so they thought they would see if that was true. They both sat in the back and waited to see what would happen. By the time the service was halfway completed, Rick and Tiger were both openly weeping with joy. They learned in that short period of time how much God loved them.

A week or two later, Rick received a letter from a bible correspondent program. With the letter was a two-part bible study guide. What was amazing to Rick was the letter was addressed to him, not to inmate number 100629. He completed both studies and at the end of the second study, he saw what is called "The Sinners Prayer". On the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of November, once again in tears, Rick recited that prayer and gave his life to Christ. From that day forward, Enrique Cartagena was a changed man. He was labeled a "model prisoner" and after only 5 years of his 15-to-30-year sentence, he was paroled in 1994. He never looked back. He began sharing his story wherever he could – in prisons, recovery meetings, wherever. He became a Pastor, eventually moved to California, and when his mother got sick came home to tend to her. Thirty-two years later Rick and his beautiful wife Brenda are still following the Lord and spreading the good news. Don't ever try to tell me God's promises are too good to be true because I will insist his promises are too good to ignore.

I invite you to say the sinner's prayer with me.

Dear Lord, I acknowledge that I am a sinner, and I need Your forgiveness. Thank you Jesus, for dying for me and giving me eternal life. Transform my life so that I may bring glory and honor to you alone. Amen.