

## **You've Got a Friend in Me: 4. Who Am I? What Am I Doing Here?**

**Ephesians 2:4-10**

**June 28, 2020**

**Pastor Steve Richards**

Today, we conclude our series based the four Toy Story movies. What I like about the movies is that they are made for children but they also have a message intended for adults. The toys come to life the moment people leave the room, and in these toys, we see ourselves and in Toy Story 4 we find the existential question that we all will face at some point in our lives: Who am I? What am I doing here?

Toy Story 3 ended with Andy going off to college and so he takes all of his toys and gives them to a little girl named Bonnie who lives around the corner. As Toy Story 4 begins, Bonnie is now a few years older and ready to start Kindergarten, but she is nervous about going, so Woody, the cowboy doll, hides in Bonnie's backpack so he can go with Bonnie to make sure she has a positive experience. Bonnie is so shy that she does not interact with the other children but sits all by herself. Woody retrieves several things from the trash – a spork, pipe cleaners, and a popsicle stick – and when she is not looking, Woody places them in front of Bonnie. From these items, Bonnie makes a toy for herself that she calls Forky. Once Forky is put in her backpack with Woody, Forky comes to life. [video #1]

Forky has just been made by Bonnie from things found in the trash, but to Bonnie, Forky is not trash, he is the most important thing in the world. In Genesis 2 we are told that God took dust from the ground – something that had no value – and breathed life into that dust and it immediately had value. If you are living and breathing, you have value – not because I say you do, but God does. You are important to God because God gave you life. Now Forky doesn't understand that he has value. For the first part of the movie, he keeps trying to return to the trash. He doesn't know who he really is. And sometimes we don't know who we are. We can live as if we have no value or treat each other as if life has no value, but God says, you are mine. There have been a few times through the years when I've been asked to do someone's funeral and as I met with the family they could not provide me with any positive words about the person who died. And I remember one time when the only people to show up for the service were the funeral director and me. What I know is that God always shows up. God wants a relationship with you. In the movie, Forky is confused – who am I? – what am I doing here? And in this scene, Woody tries to give Forky an answer. [video #2]

Who am I? What am I doing here? When I went to Google and typed "What's the meaning of life?" I got over 1 billion hits. There's no shortage of answers, so what's your answer? The movie attempts to provide an answer by introducing us to a toy named Gabby Gabby. She is a doll with a pull string that makes her talk, but when a child pulls her string it's gibberish. Her voice box is defective – and as a result, she is not wanted. Gabby Gabby ends up in an antique store, not claimed by anyone. One day, Woody and Forky come into the antique store and meet Gabby Gabby. [video #3]

Gabby Gabby wants to be loved, but she believes she cannot be loved as long as she is defective. She wants Woody's voice box, because then a child will want her. And when she has a child, she will have a purpose/why. So Gabby Gabby holds Forky hostage until Woody gives up his voice box. Something Woody ultimately lets her keep. Every one of us wants to be loved. And God does that for us.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says, **God is rich in mercy... You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift.** Salvation means we have been rescued from the fate we would otherwise incur if left on our own. What God does in Christ is to prove you have worth, you have value, you are loved. Without knowing that, there will be days when life seems too hard and we are ready to give up – like Forky, back to the trash. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl says, **Those who have a "why" to live can bear almost any "how."** Frankl survived a concentration camp in WWII and what he observed was those who survived the longest in the concentration camps were not those who were physically strong but those who had a why. They had hope even in the worst possible circumstances.

What is your why? If we believe there is a God and that God created us, then God must have a purpose for us. And what we learn from scripture is that God is love. God's nature is to give love away. And of all the creatures on the earth, you and I were made with the ability to understand that love – to understand what God has done for us. **God made us to be recipients of God's love [slide] and to reciprocate that love.** Who are we? We are recipients of God's love. What are we doing here? We were made to pass God's love to others. Paul says: **You are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things.** When you know your why, you can bear almost any how.

For Brian Dreibelbis, something happened 50 years ago today that would change his life but not in the way he thought it would. I invited Brian to tell his story.

BRIAN: June 28<sup>m</sup>, 1970 was the official date I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes at the age of (7) years old. It was a Saturday, it was an early morning doctor appointment, and lab work registered a morning blood sugar over (1200 mg/dl), normal is 80-120.

I was taken to the hospital, spent a week there (back in the day ☺), and the outlook was not good for me – a 4<sup>TH</sup> generation diabetic diagnosed at Age 7 with very bad diabetes, my life expectancy was given to mid-30's.

I struggled for a bit, my parents did the best they could, but at Age 11 (1974), they asked our church (a United Church of Christ Church my father has attended for (84) years, and 4 generations of our family), if at Age 11, I could join the Youth Group one (1) year early to help me cope with my diabetes. Our Lead Pastor agreed (Dr. Wayne Lutz), and his brother, Herman Lutz was the Youth Director. After the first Youth Group Meeting I attended, on a Sunday night, September 14, 1974), Herman Lutz took me to our sanctuary, we sat in the front pew and talked about a life WITH Jesus Christ. The front pew faces a two story stained glass window, as the church was built in 1735, and still exists and functions today. The stain glass picture is of Jesus, with his hands out, and the scripture at the bottom is from Matthew 28:20 – "Lo for I am with you always, until the end of the ages" Pastor Herman Lutz told me, and promised me that if I served Jesus by serving others, I would be ok, I'd live a long life, if I trusted Him and served Him.

At Age 16 I became the President of the Youth Group, for (3) years, joined the Christian Crusaders while at Penn State University for (4) years, and have tried in my professional and personal life to be a BRIGHT LIGHT to all, and SERVE each and every day, no matter what, and ALWAYS LOVE FIRST!

Every day, I wear two wristbands on my right wrist:  
Philippians 4:13 RED – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me  
Matthew 28:20 BLUE – Lo I am with you always until the end of the ages

I thought June 28, 1970 was a “death” sentence...but September 14, 1974 sitting with Reverend Lutz, in front of that stained glass window, and accepting God and Jesus Christ changed my life...FOREVER into a LIFETIME of discipleship and service to others. I am (57), just had my lab work for my quarterly Endocrinology Appointment, and everything remains normal, my doctor emailed me, and claims in his (30+) plus years, he’s never seen a Type 1 diabetic at this stage of T1D and age, in this physical condition. Giving my life to God and Jesus, and serving each and every day, to make where we are look more like heaven, has proven the doctors wrong and THE POWER of JESUS CHRIST! I walked into the church on September 14, 1974 as a wondering lost sheep, and left that evening feeling the awesome love of God and Jesus Christ, I was confident, and found my purpose in life!

STEVE: Who am I? A child loved by God. What am I doing here? I am here to pass on as much love as I can as long as I am here on this earth. You can either run away from that, like Forky or live into that, like Woody, even if it means sacrificing yourself for another. There is a scene near the end of the movie where Gabby Gabby now has her voice but still she goes unwanted. Thinking she has no value, she is ready to give up – until she discovers a little girl who is lost in an amusement park, and watch what happens. [video #4] What’s the most noble thing she could do? What’s her why? Give love away. How to do that is what we hear in this reading that Brian shared with me a few days ago.

*My child, I’ve often heard your question, this message is my answer:*

*You’re concerned about the hungry in the world, millions who are starving, and you ask, “What can I do”? – FEED ONE*

*You grieve for all the unborn children, murdered and abused every day, and you ask, “What can I do”? – SAVE ONE*

*You are haunted by the homeless, the poor, who wander lost in city streets, and you ask, “What can I do”? – SHELTER ONE*

*You feel compassion for those who suffer pain, sorrow, and despair, and you ask, “What can I do”? – COMFORT ONE*

*Your heart goes out to the lonely, the abused, and the imprisoned, and you ask, “What can I do”? – LOVE ONE*

*Remember then my child, two thousand years ago, the world was filled with those in need, just as it is today, and when the helpless, the homeless, and the oppressed called out to ME, I sent a SAVIOR. HOPE BEGAN WITH ONLY ONE*

**Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 28, 2020**

**Weekly Prayer:** God of grace and mercy, fill our spirits with your love and place upon our hearts your call to serve all in the name of Christ. Amen.

**Monday, June 29**

**Scripture: Romans 12:1-2**

So, brothers and sisters, because of God’s mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

*"I am not a toy. I was made for soup, salad, maybe chili, and then the trash." – Forky unwilling to change his identity.*

**Observation:** In *Toy Story 4*, one main theme is that Forky, who Bonnie made in class, has a hard time understanding that he is now a toy, not trash. The apostle Paul invited Roman Christians to a new identity maybe even more dramatic than Forky's—a "living sacrifice." In an animal sacrifice, the animal died. Paul said it serves God's purposes much better when we are "living sacrifices," an active, vibrant "body of Christ" living God's principles in the world.

**Application:** Which was worse in your family: to think too highly of yourself, or to underrate your true strengths? How does that early influence shape your ability to correctly assess what you have to offer God? As we let God transform us we become agents of change in our workplaces, homes, schools or neighborhoods. What steps, large or small, have you taken to change attitudes or practices in your settings? Where do you have a chance today to transform things for the better?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, someone said you love me just as I am, but you love me too much to leave me just as I am. Teach me how to make my life a "living sacrifice" to your loving purposes. Amen.

**Tuesday, June 30**

**Scripture: Ephesians 2:2-10**

You used to live like people of this world. You followed the rule of a destructive spiritual power. This is the spirit of disobedience to God's will that is now at work in persons whose lives are characterized by disobedience. At one time you were like those persons. All of you used to do whatever felt good and whatever you thought you wanted so that you were children headed for punishment just like everyone else. However, God is rich in mercy. He brought us to life with Christ while we were dead as a result of those things that we did wrong. He did this because of the great love that he has for us. You are saved by God's grace! And God raised us up and seated us in the heavens with Christ Jesus. God did this to show future generations the greatness of his grace by the goodness that God has shown us in Christ Jesus. You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

*Forky: "Why am I alive?"*

*Woody: "You are Bonnie's toy. You are going to help create happy memories that will last for the rest of her life."*

**Observation:** You don't have to be a spork glued to a popsicle stick to ask, "Why am I alive?" Asking that, and wrestling with possible answers, is central to a fully human life. The apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Ephesus that God saved us FROM a broken, self-seeking life for a very specific purpose. God's mission, "the kingdom of God," is to restore not just individuals, but this whole broken world to its divine purpose. God saved us FOR a new life, joining in God's work to reclaim our broken world. We are God's accomplishment (Greek poema) living out the quality of life God created us for.

**Application:** Ephesians 2:10 stated, in general terms ("to do good things"), every Christ-follower's life purpose. Spend 5-10 minutes today to write down the specific ways in which you

live out, or intend to live out, your life purpose rooted in Ephesians 2:10. Keep that list handy. If the answers are hard to think of, or more limited than you'd like, spend time in prayer and thought this week asking God to guide your thinking.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to be your accomplishment, to be an example of what your spiritual craftsmanship can do in a human being. Please keep shaping and guiding me in all I do today. Amen.

### **Wednesday, July 1**

#### **Scripture: Philippians 4:10-14**

I was very glad in the Lord because now at last you have shown concern for me again. (Of course you were always concerned but had no way to show it.) I'm not saying this because I need anything, for I have learned how to be content in any circumstance. I know the experience of being in need and of having more than enough; I have learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance, whether full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor. I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength. Still, you have done well to share my distress.

*Woody: "I was made to help a child. I don't remember it being this hard."*

**Observation:** In the *Toy Story* movies, Woody generally had (and shared with other toys) a clear sense of mission. But he learned that "helping a child" isn't always just sweet, happy times. The apostle Paul certainly learned that serving the God who loved and saved him could be hard. From a prison cell (Philippians 1:13), Paul expressed thanks for sustaining gifts from Christians in the city of Philippi. He showed how he distinguished "needs" and "wants," in good times and bad. In Christ, he said, he had "learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance."

**Application:** Paul did not glorify or glamorize poverty or hunger in these verses. (It's true that money does not guarantee happiness. But neither does poverty!) Paul's gratitude for the Philippians' gifts was heartfelt. How did those gifts represent God's care for Paul's needs? In what ways are you able to be God's physical presence to bless someone else in need?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, keep growing in me the awareness that you are the secret to a contented life in all circumstances. Guide me toward a life of gratitude rather than grasping for more. Amen.

### **Thursday, July 2**

#### **Scripture: Romans 7:7-10, 7:14-8:3**

So what are we going to say? That the Law is sin? Absolutely not! But I wouldn't have known sin except through the Law. I wouldn't have known the desire for what others have if the Law had not said, *Don't desire to take what others have*. But sin seized the opportunity and used this commandment to produce all kinds of desires in me. Sin is dead without the Law. I used to be alive without the Law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died. So the commandment that was intended to give life brought death.

We know that the Law is spiritual, but I'm made of flesh and blood, and I'm sold as a slave to sin. I don't know what I'm doing, because I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do the thing that I hate. But if I'm doing the thing that I don't want to do, I'm agreeing that the Law is right.

But now I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it's sin that lives in me. I know that good doesn't live in me—that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do. But if I do the very thing that I don't want to do, then I'm not the one doing it anymore. Instead, it is sin that lives in me that is doing it. So I find that, as a rule, when I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me. I gladly agree with the Law on the inside, but I see a different law at work in my body. It wages a war against the law of my mind and takes me prisoner with the law of sin that is in my body. I'm a miserable human being. Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then I'm a slave to God's Law in my mind, but I'm a slave to sin's law in my body.

So now there isn't any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin.

*Assembled from a plastic spork, a broken popsicle stick, a few globs of modeling clay, two googly eyes, and a pipe cleaner, Forky is a sorry specimen of a toy, but Bonnie's love for him brings him to instantaneous if utterly befuddled life. (From an online review of the movie)*

**Observation:** It's hard to dispute the reviewer's conclusion that Forky is "a sorry specimen of a toy." But no less a figure than the apostle Paul wrote "I'm a miserable human being." Ever shared that feeling? As Paul described clearly his own struggle with inner good and evil, he said gritting his teeth and resolving to do better didn't fix the problem. Only in trusting Jesus' love and grace did he find God's power setting him free from evil's grip. As The Message rendered Romans 8:1, "Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud."

**Application:** Paul's picture of our inner struggles was not unique. The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote of "our helplessness in necessary things." But Paul did not end with despair. "Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" When have you felt Christ's power, not wiping out the struggle, but enabling you to increasingly come out on the right side of it?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as a member of your family, I choose to focus on you and the power of your reconciling love, rather than on myself and my feelings of shame and despair. Thank you, Jesus, for making this new life possible. Amen.

**Friday, July 3**

**Scripture: Galatians 5:25 - 6:4**

If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.

Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won't be tempted too. Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are important when they aren't, they're fooling themselves. Each person should test their own work and be happy with doing a good job and not compare themselves with others.

*“Forky is the most important toy to Bonnie right now. We all have to make sure nothing happens to him.” – Woody to the other toys*

**Observation:** Woody, committed to Bonnie’s happiness, realized that this now meant looking after Forky. That is the kind of spirit we need to truly be the kind of Christian community God calls us to be. In Galatians 5:26, Paul wrote, “Let’s not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other,” three attitudes that will tear any relationship or group apart. Instead, he said, “with a spirit of gentleness” help each other all along the way. Be the best spouse, parent, neighbor, friend you can possibly be—not just for other people, but for God.

**Application:** Paul stated the obvious about community at the start of today’s passage: it won’t hold together if members are arrogant, make each other angry, or are jealous of each other. Are there places where you need to release arrogance, anger or jealousy to more fully follow the Spirit? Have you built relationships with people who will carry you when you hurt, when your burdens become too much to bear alone? Who are you ready to come alongside in a time of need?

**Prayer:** Lord God, I need the people around me, and I realize that they need me. I pray that each day you will more fully live out your loving, serving spirit through me. Amen.

#### **Saturday, July 4**

#### **Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 21:3-6**

Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. 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, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look! I’m making all things new.” He also said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring.

*Randy Newman lyrics: “And as the years go by, Our friendship will never die, You’re gonna see it’s our destiny, You’ve got a friend in me.”*

**Observation:** The lyrics of the movie’s theme song remind us that God promises us that God is always our friend. In Matthew 28, we read that Jesus promised his followers he would be with them “every day until the end of this present age.” And Revelation’s sweeping vision carried the promise even farther—throughout eternity it said “God’s dwelling is here with humankind.” At times we seem to try to convince people of heaven by listing the benefits—golden streets, no death, even mansions. But the Bible’s promises said the greatest reason to choose to spend eternity in God’s kingdom is...God’s eternal presence with us, God’s friendship. Truly, “our friendship will never die.”

**Application:** Every day natural disasters, illnesses, some large or small part of the economy going south or our city, state, nation or world getting more chaotic and conflict-filled can make us feel the news is trying to snuff out all hope. But when we repeat that “the worst thing is never

the last thing,” that’s not some abstract, churchy idea. It is based squarely on promises like the ones we read today, on whether we find the idea of being forever with God credible and desirable. Do you trust that Jesus spoke the truth when he promised to prepare a place for us so that we can be with him forever (John 14:1-3)? How do you nurture a friendship that makes the promise of being forever with Jesus appealing to you? Can you live in hope that, in the end, God’s love will defeat all hatred and death?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for the offer and promise of a friendship that will truly last forever. I want to walk with you every day in this life, and dwell in your presence forever. Amen.