



Dear Family,

Recently I've become aware that a few people are questioning what The Well represents. Jeff and I want to be perfectly clear about our beliefs and welcome every occasion to speak with any of you about our faith in Jesus Christ. The Well is both a name and a metaphor. The Well looks different from many traditional churches. In their book, The Shaping of Things to Come, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch write the following that illustrates some of the differences.

*"In some farming communities, the farmers might build fences around their properties to keep their livestock in and livestock of neighboring farms out... But in Australia, ranches are so vast that fences are superfluous. Under these conditions a farmer has to sink a bore and create a well, a precious water supply in the Outback. It is assumed that the livestock, though they will stray, will never roam too far from the well, lest they die..."*

At The Well, we see the gospel as so refreshing that lovers of Christ will not stray too far from Him and outsiders will be drawn into the community like thirsty people seeking water. The Well will always be a place where it is **safe to ask questions** that couldn't be asked at other places; a place where even though people may not understand everything that is going on, they will be drawn to drink from the well. Because we are so confident in the gospel of Christ, we can confidently proclaim the existence of the Well (that is Jesus) in our midst, right here and right now. At The Well, we agree with Paul when he says, <sup>1</sup> "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, ... <sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of **first importance**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve."

At The Well we believe in a way that allows people to **belong before they believe**, but where they will also be challenged to continually move closer to the Well. People can come as they are, be welcomed and accepted just as Jesus accepted tax collectors and prostitutes. However, we will not water down the gospel and leave out the fact that Jesus ultimately asks people to commit themselves to him; to repent, to pick up their crosses and follow him. In other words people will be continually challenged to draw closer to the Well, but will also enjoy being part of the community as they journey closer.

At The Well we have settled on four words that define our core commitments as a church of Jesus Christ. They are: **Gospel – Community – Mission – Shalom**. We want to make sure that these four words are at the heart of everything we do. They are the DNA that defines us; whether meeting in a large gathering, or a small group or on a serve day, these four words can be found.

We've recently started an adult Bible study using a book by Rob Bell titled Love Wins as a backdrop to ask pertinent questions about our own salvation, heaven, and hell and how our beliefs form us into the kind of people that Christ wants us to become. This has caused some confusion in the minds of people that have read or heard things about this book. So Jeff and I wanted to clarify a few things about what The Well represents and what we personally believe:

- Though we **don't** agree with much of the theology in Love Wins we **do** encourage engaging in a safe, Biblically centered conversation that asks many of the questions posed in the book; which is what our Wednesday night Bible Study is.
- To add a counterpoint to Love Wins we have added another book by Francis Chan titled, Erasing Hell. We will use both books to study (in many cases) the same scriptures quoted by both authors.

The genesis of this letter was a conversation with a young man that was confused about what I believe personally because he trusts me as his pastor. I wanted my personal beliefs to emerge during the study so that people could wrestle with the questions without bias. The value of that however pales in comparison to letting someone stumble in their faith. So after prayer and discussion Jeff and I decided to write this letter describing our beliefs in this area.

- First of all people are saved by trusting their lives in Jesus Christ; the only begotten Son of God, fully God and fully human, who came to live with us, was crucified on a cross for the sins of the world was buried and rose again on the third day. He will come again to judge the living and the dead and to reign as Lord forever.
- We believe that we can enter into the eternal life that Jesus promises us here and now and that life will continue on with him forever. We believe that the Kingdom of Heaven is both already and not yet. Already in that we can experience glimpses of God's Kingdom here and now. Not yet since this eternal life won't be fully realized until Christ returns; at which time we will experience Christ face to face. At The Well we are committed to helping people realize that this eternal life can be experienced here and now because we faithfully believe that Christ will continually draw them into a deeper relationship that not only impacts them but will impact the world for Christ.
- We do not believe that everyone will choose this life, that some unfortunately will choose to be eternally separated from Christ in a place we call hell.
- We believe that many things about how God saves and judges individuals cannot be known. Those things are reserved for God; as I like to say, "Who gets in and who doesn't is above my pay grade." However, we do believe that every individual can know they are saved, even though I can't know without doubt about anyone else, I can know without doubt about myself.

Some think the most important question is "where do I go after I die". Although that is a good question, at The Well we believe the most important question is "What do I believe about Jesus now". We believe that life with Jesus is the best possible life and since that life can be lived now, why wait. Why would anyone want to?

In his book *The Gospel According to Moses*, Dickson says that Christians have to be comfortable with paradox. The Christian life is made up of paradoxes; the first shall be last, free will and predestined, fully human and fully God. Even though we aren't comfortable with paradox, God seems to be... all of these paradoxes and many more point us to a God that is beyond the paradox, a God that is greater than the paradox. So Jeff and I say we believe in the paradox that there is always hope in Christ even after death and at the same time we believe that our gift of choice is for this lifetime only, so our choice to trust Christ is both urgent and necessary.

At this point some might say, to believe in both is a cop out... that we have to choose; which is it going to be... where is the line. To which we would say we have chosen... we choose Christ, we choose him now and ten years from now and 10,000 years from now. Our prayer is that you won't wait but will make the same choice and live life now and into eternity.

In His service together

Jeff and Larry