

THE SINGLE GREATEST GIFT

CLIP: JWATR 1C

It's the short rather accessible little steps or walks or deeds that we do?

If we would all do just the small thing we can do, we would touch people!

To be effective Jesus followers, isn't this what you want most ... to touch the lives of the people you know, and possibly love, who live without God? Or have you got a better idea?

The 'just walk across the room' metaphor comes out of the experience of someone who did just that. It's the story about a man whose entire world got upended because a Jesus' follower touched his life. I told that story at Breakfast church this morning. There's not time now. It all began with a walk across a room.

The greatest gift we can give to people around us is to introduce them to the God who created them, who loves them, and who gives purpose to their days. Nothing beats it — money, success, public recognition or accolades. And when we boil it all down, this is what evangelism is: constantly watching for ways to give this single greatest gift to someone living far (or maybe not so far) from God.

Today, we begin the process of understanding how to get 'usable' to God. I hope that's something you desire ... being used by God. And the first step in getting usable to God is being willing to extricate ourselves from our Circles of Comfort and stretch out a hand to a person who needs the hope we alone can offer. But how does this happen?

ENTERING THE ZONE OF THE UNKNOWN

Mostly we spend our days in what might be called our Circle of Comfort.

Here it's easy for us to relate; easy to converse, no threats – this is indeed a safe place. And we have every reason to want to stay there – and by and large we do! In many respects there's nothing wrong with this. BUT!

Across the room there's someone standing alone and perhaps in need of a little encouragement or friendship. Something that really upsets me as a pastor, who after 33 and a third years still longs to be part of a welcoming community, is when I come into the hall and see a newcomer standing alone while most are engaged in conversation.

But change in us isn't going to happen unless we're open to being used. To see is one thing, to be able to say 'excuse me for a minute, 'I'd like to talk to that person standing alone' is another.

Of course one of the reasons we come to worship is to get with those we know, like and even love and that's great. But standing near you or across the room is someone.

You've no idea what's going to happen when you cross the room, and hold out your hand. You don't know what the conversation will be like and how it will develop. You don't know what reaction there will be, BUT, you leave your circle of comfort and there's no turning back.

And you walk.... You're probably breaking into a sweat, hopefully you're praying fervently (under your breath of course) because you've entered the 'zone of the unknown.'

I think we need to understand that the day people who know and seek to serve Jesus stop walking across rooms, the day we stay glued to our Circles of Comfort, the day we refuse to enter the Zone of the

Unknown, in some respects, save for sovereign acts of God, it's the slow death of a church, any church and ultimately **the** church.

So this is why we're spending four weeks looking into this. Doesn't the Holy Spirit of Jesus long to turn us into people who are walk-across-the room Christians?

Regardless of our age, gender, ethnicity, personality type, spiritual gifts, Christian experience this is the call. If we're living, breathing followers of Jesus then this is the invitation. He asks us to walk – anywhere and everywhere – work, school, home, in social settings, at the gym, at our kids' sport, in the midst of our busy lives, wherever, whenever.

In order for us to be effective in the Zone of the Unknown we have to listen to the Spirit's prompting. I'd like to hear some testimonies about how this works for individuals in the community here. Sometimes we hear about these evangelists who lead everyone they meet to Jesus - seems to happen to people who travel a lot – the taxi driver, the person at the counter, the flight attendant, the prisoner held captive in the next seat, the family across the aisle – the whole plane is converted before they land. All stories like that do is to discourage us, we feel we'll never measure up.

Fundamentally being a walk-across the room person means that we walk when the Spirit urges us to and don't walk when we feel we should stay. It's about being discerning and learning to listen to his voice.

As Wally Driver reminded us so powerfully a few weeks ago we are to be salt – to have savour **and** to have proximity – you've got to get salt on something if it's going to be affective – you've got to get close to people if they're going to be affected by you.

There are possibly some here who are thinking this isn't me – this is for spiritual superstars with the right training, the right confidence, the right skills, a quick mind, a relational aptitude and the right gifts. There is a fear to be overcome; there is anxiety – goes with the territory but don't you want to be on the Lord's team?

If, at least some of the time you:
Commit yourself to being salt in your world
Get near people who need grace
Listen to the Spirit,

Who knows what God can and will do?

And this is what Jesus did! Jesus demonstrated the love of God by taking a walk.

At a specific time in history Jesus walked across the cosmos from heaven to earth and reached out his redemptive hand to people like us. In a way Jesus left his circle of comfort and walked across the universe for us – we're spending this month in the hope that we will start seeing what God sees, act when we see and gain anew found sense of confidence

On March 26, I spoke about the woman at the well, a classic case of Jesus walking across the room to use our metaphor; in his case he simply walked to where the woman was drawing water. As you know Jesus crossed barriers a mile high to do this – that's encouraging – and the other observation I'd make is that Jesus let her dictate the conversation. And in the years to come the families of the people of that town and their descendants could trace their involvement in Christian faith to when Jesus walked across the sand to speak with the woman.

It's safe to stay in our circle of comfort, whether it's in the hall after church or in another social setting or in our communities. And it's not just us. I went to visit a couple whose son's funeral I'd taken 6 years ago. I

thought I knew the house but there was nobody at home. I walked across the street and ask the woman if that was the house. Her reply said it all, 'I'm not sure; we've only been here for two years.'

Jesus knows that fulfilling his mission will be excruciatingly difficult, risky and sometimes fruitless. He may say to us though that if you persevere, the potential is colossal.

The single greatest gift we can give to another person is to introduce them to the God of the Universe as he has revealed himself in Jesus, to 'find the lost in Jesus' language and to bring them home.'

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the model Jesus set for us when he left his Circle of Comfort in heaven; when he took on human flesh and dwelt among us. If Jesus hadn't come where would we be – it's unimaginable what our days would be like. But because he walked into our lives, it's now our opportunity to walk into other lives; it's our turn. Lord I pray that you will anoint us in your supernatural way, not just for these four weeks but on into the future too – that you will turn our timid hearts in bold hearts; our shaky legs into strong legs and that you will point us in the way we're to go – to people who need the touch of the Saviour