

JUST WALK ACROSS THE ROOM II

14/5/17

I'd like to think we're in this together. The reason for our four-week focus isn't so that we can tick the evangelism box. The real reason we're doing this is so that we can all become walk-across-the-room people. Although when I was at BMF on Thursday with a number of people with walking difficulties I did wonder if 'Just Walk across the Room' was the best metaphor we could have chosen. And of course that got me thinking about the song Some Enchanted Evening and the line 'across a crowded room' – I digress.

Walk-across-the-room people are those who get to be used in pointing people who are not yet Christians to faith.

The reason we want to point people to faith is because that's what's close to God's heartbeat. He gave his one and only Son to reach lost people, to enable lost people to be found! And if we desire to become more like Jesus I've good news for you: we become most like him when we work with Him to find lost people.

Summary of last week

1. Be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown (by voluntarily extricating ourselves from our Circles of Comfort)
2. Listen for the Spirit's promptings
3. Walk

What comes next? This week, we're exploring what's called 'Living in 3D.' 3D Living is a framework for operating successfully in the Zone of the Unknown. It's made up of three 'D's,'

1. DEVELOP FRIENDSHIPS/RELATIONSHIPS WITH NOT YET CHRISTIANS

If we're going to reflect the Father's heart, as individuals and as a community then we must be in continuous search mode. Jesus reflecting the Father's heart said at Zacchaeus' party:

'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

Somehow we need to get into the habit of developing friendships or relationships with 'not yet Christian' people around us. And that's the heart of a true Jesus' person. When we live this way — when we operate in continuous 'search mode' ... watching for ways to connect with people, looking for friendships in the making — maybe all of heaven holds its breath. And this is the way it should be - relationships that eventually might lead to something spiritual unfolding.

But things don't always pan out this way, do they? Consider this:

'Jane' has been a Jesus' follower for ten years. She came to Jesus, and was radically changed, redeemed and renewed by the King of the universe, and she thought it was about the best thing she'd ever experienced. Her Christian walk thrived. She found she had a new care, compassion and concern for the people around her ... more than anything, she wanted those people to experience the same acceptance she experienced from Jesus Christ. And so she embraced them and walked with them along their own journeys toward faith.'

Over time, Jane saw friends and family members come to faith —and Jane started hanging out with them with greater frequency, just to chat about how much they loved Jesus ... how much they loved the new lives as a result of Jesus' intervention in their worlds.

Then things turned ... not so good; after many months, then many years, Jane's life is nearly totally consumed by her friends who love Jesus — 'it's all good' as Noah would say ... except that Jane no longer

reaches out. She no longer feels that initial enthusiasm for sharing Jesus with people outside the faith. She no longer embraces unconvinced friends ... mostly because no 'unconvinced friends' exist in her warm, safe Circle of Comfort.

This is the ugly underbelly of Christian discipleship that exists if we're not diligent to keep it at bay. If you think about it, this is what makes the Circle of Comfort so comfortable. Almost all of us find it easy to love some people — maybe a spouse or parents or kids or extended family... then friends at work and friends at church. We see them, and our initial reaction is warmth and affection. We want to bless them. We crave time with them. We're filled with joy when these people come to mind. **Do you relate to this? I do!**

But here's what may not be so easy to admit. While almost every person has a loving heart toward some people, almost every person has a list of people they can't stand.

At one level it might be someone who ripped you off; it might be a spouse who walked out. It might be someone who wounded you with words.

But, it gets even more complex. Some of us don't like entire groups. Some don't like people who vote for the other side. Some don't like to be around certain ethnic groups and other religions. Some try hard not to associate with people who aren't like us. We don't talk about this very often - especially in mixed company. It's uncomfortable. But it remains true: many of us have a 'list' ... and on that list are people we wish we could put on a ship headed permanently out to sea.

Ask me to love some people outside of my 'circle,' and seemingly out of nowhere, a whole host of qualifiers and filters rise up in me. 'All right then, if you're asking me to love people outside of this circle, they'd better be nice, they'd better not hurt me, they'd better be safe, they'd better be stable, they'd better be deserving!'

Maybe I'm not alone here. You may have your qualifiers too. I don't want to be standing here in my sinfulness all alone!

In Luke chapter 15, it's possible Jesus was in a marketplace setting conversing with irreligious people — people who were far from his Father, people who'd made lots of mistakes, painted outside the lines, used terrible language, drank too much, slept in the wrong bed, cheated others ... the list goes on and on.

'Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'

He interacts with them ... talking, listening and enjoying the company. And as the scene plays out, we notice that the religious leaders—the scribes and the Pharisees—become troubled. Actually, they think the whole deal is utterly scandalous because the people Jesus is interacting with are the exact people who are on their list!—these are the people the scribes and Pharisees hate! And Jesus of all people hangs out with them!

Somewhere along the way, they'd convinced themselves: 'surely God has a heart that looks like our hearts. He has people he loves and bestows blessings on, thinks good thoughts about, and answers prayer for. God has a certain number of people who he loves.

But he also has a list of people who absolutely disgust him. He disdains them ... and he's just waiting for the chance to send them to hell.'

So the Pharisees reasoned this way: 'If God is like this — some people he loves, some people he hates— then it's perfectly okay for us to be like that — some people we love, some people we don't. So they looked at the irreligious people who were immoral and ungodly in so many ways, and they muttered because they didn't really know God.

Soon enough, Jesus hears their grumbling. He sees their hearts and springs into action.

He tells three well-known stories - a lost sheep, a lost coin and a wayward boy.

I'd like to imagine that at least one of the Pharisees who heard the stories that day just couldn't shake Jesus' words. 'Could it be that Jesus was saying, 'God the Father doesn't even have a hate list'? Could it be that the love of the Father is love of another kind—love at such a higher, broader, deeper and wider level—that every man, woman, and child who has ever breathed on this planet is the object of his great affection? And maybe there's not a single person who ever lived that God wants to consign to darkness?'

Developing friendships/relationships is where living in 3D must begin. Once we're willing to view every interaction as the first step in developing a new, God-honouring friendship/relationship, we'll find that some pretty interesting doors swing wide open. We'll have unprecedented opportunities to discover people's stories.

2. DISCOVER STORIES

Circle of comfort leavers must be patient in discovering the other person's story.

If they provide someone with spiritual solutions before they fully understand the person's situation, they could inadvertently do more harm than good. **Faithfulness, patience and genuineness are the keys.**

Maybe our goal should be to engage in the lives of the people around us, developing friendships where we can. Then, once we truly understand their unique needs, we may be able to help meet them.

Some are looking at me with glassy eyes. You've no idea what I'm talking about; maybe it's been a long time since you stepped outside your Circle of Comfort and engaged the people around you with arms of acceptance and friendship. Strike up a relationship with a not yet Christian and start hanging out with them, start praying and seeking to have a spiritual conversation, just to see what God might do.

Discovering stories of people not yet Christians; with people who may be one prayer away from knowing the God you know. Be the one person in their world who takes a genuine interest in their story so that you will know how best to serve them ... which leads us to our third 'D.'

3. DISCERN NEXT STEPS

In small groups this week, we'll discover something called 'divine forks in the road'—intersections where we can either listen to a person's story and then pray that God would show us what to do next ... or where we abdicate any responsibility and just walk away.

Once we've risked walking across a room to stick out a hand of friendship and unearth what another person's journey has been like, the very best thing we can do is lean way into the whisperings and nudging of the Holy Spirit.

During every moment of our conversation with the other person, simultaneously seek the Holy Spirit for direction, for guidance, for insight, for wisdom, for creative ideas and for appropriate next steps to take.

I want to show you a short clip that I think illustrates this idea of taking appropriate next steps in situations that may be turning spiritual. Just highlight some of the next steps Bill took with Dave – talked about his life, probed a little, gave him the book.

NEXT STEPS

I'd like us to spend a few moments thinking about some of the 'next steps' that people took with us — steps that helped us come to understand God's grace-filled love for us; steps that helped us grow in our desire to have God lead our lives; in other words, the 'next steps' that really mattered to us!

Just Walk across the Room campaign graphic

A new week is about to unfold in our lives. And like all new weeks, there are commitments, responsibilities and deadlines – and lots of challenges. With what's left we can choose to invest it in things that glorify and satisfy us ... or we can choose to invest it in things that glorify and satisfy God. Here's the challenge.

This week, let's commit to 'living in 3D':

- Developing relationships ... with all sorts of people, in all sorts of ways
- Discovering stories ... remembering to keep the focus on the other person
- Discerning next steps ... letting the Spirit guide our every action

This week, let's be alert to the Spirit, asking him to lead us toward the people with whom we may be able build bridges of friendship.

Your prayer — 'lead me, Holy Spirit' — may not take you to wild encounters with estranged dads, alcoholic gang members or even white powder sniffing Rugby League players; but it might! Wherever it takes you, if you choose to follow the Lord's leading, you'll be able to look back and say, 'This was a week well-lived.'

Prayer