

ONE MORE

A 30-DAY JOURNEY TO ALIGNING YOUR
LIFE WITH THE MISSION OF JESUS

ADAPTED WITH PERMISSION FROM INTENTIONAL CHURCHES



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Introduction

The Radical Choice

The Great Disconnect

James has been a Christian most of his life. He attends church faithfully, serves on a volunteer team, and even leads a small group in his home. People would say he was a “good Christian.”

Yet as he sat across from his longtime friend David over coffee, he felt that familiar knot in his stomach. David had just shared how his recent divorce had left him questioning everything—his worth, his future, even his purpose for existing.

“I’ve tried therapy, dating apps, even meditation,” David confessed, his eyes searching James’ face. “But I still feel empty.”

It was the perfect opening—a God-orchestrated moment. But instead of sharing how Jesus had become his anchor through life’s storms, James nodded sympathetically and said, “I’m so sorry.”

Later that night, James couldn’t sleep. Why had he stayed silent? Why was it so difficult to bring Jesus into that conversation? He believed in Him. Loved Him. Knew the difference He had made in his life. So why the hesitation?

Perhaps you’ve been there too.

Every day, we brush shoulders with people who are searching, hurting, wondering—our “Ones”—people within our relational reach who don’t yet know Jesus.

They’re your neighbors, co-workers, family members, baristas, and gym partners. They’re living their lives without the hope, peace, and purpose that comes from knowing Jesus.

Yet like James, you hesitate.

Something holds you back. Maybe it's fear of damaging the friendship. Or doubt about whether you'll have the right words. Or a nagging voice telling you you're not qualified, not spiritual enough, not the right person for this conversation.

So, you sit there, caught between your desire to share Jesus and all the reasons your mind generates for staying silent.

Then ... the moment passes. The conversation shifts. And you're left wondering if you just missed an opportunity that may never come again.

The Mission We Forgot

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gathered His followers and gave them their marching orders—what we now call the Great Commission:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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 28:18-20)

Jesus also told them:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

These weren't suggestions for religious professionals or especially gifted evangelists. They were commands for every follower of Jesus—including you.

Yet somewhere along the way, we've outsourced this commission to pastors, missionaries, and professional evangelists. We've reduced our participation to writing checks or occasionally inviting someone to a church event. We've convinced ourselves that our silence is somehow more loving or respectful than offering the greatest gift we've ever received.

The result? A world full of people like David—searching, hurting, empty—while Christians like James sit across from them, holding the answer but keeping it to themselves.

What Radical Alignment Looks Like

What if it could be different? What if your life could be so radically aligned with the Great Commission that living out and sharing your faith in an attractive and compelling way became as natural as breathing?

What is “radical alignment”?

Radical alignment is a fundamental, far-reaching, and thorough commitment to the Great Commission. We become One-aware, activated, and aligned.

- One-aware means you are concerned and well-informed about the lost, proactively keeping them top of mind.
- Activated means you’re actually doing something about it.
- Radically aligned means this awareness and action becomes fundamental, far-reaching, and thorough. Your heart, mind, and actions all point in the same direction—toward the mission Jesus gave us to make disciples.

This alignment isn’t just for church leaders or “professional Christians.” It’s for *every* follower of Jesus. Including *you*.

Picture waking up each morning with an acute awareness of the “Ones” God has placed in your path—the checkout clerk at your grocery store, your next-door neighbor, your child’s soccer coach, your aging parent’s caregiver. Imagine seeing each of them through Jesus’ eyes—not as conversion projects, but as people He deeply loves and died to reach.

Radical alignment means your calendar reflects this awareness. Perhaps you schedule coffee with a coworker who’s going through a tough time. Maybe you arrange your morning routine to allow for a conversation with that neighbor who’s always walking their dog when you leave for work. You might choose a gym class not just based on the workout but on the relationships you’re building there.

Your spending habits change too. You become more intentional about creating environments for relationship-building—whether that’s upgrading your patio furniture to host neighborhood gatherings or budgeting for extra meals out to deepen friendships with those far from God.

Your prayers transform from generalized requests for “the lost” to specific intercessions for the “Ones” in your life—by name, with their specific struggles and joys in mind. You begin to ask God daily for wisdom and courage in how to be His ambassador in their lives.

Your conversations take on new intentionality. You become a better listener, genuinely curious about others' lives and perspectives. You learn to recognize spiritual openings and respond with authentic, non-preachy insights from your own journey with Christ.

Even your home reflects this alignment. It becomes a place of hospitality, where those far from God feel welcomed and valued. Your bookshelf might include resources that address common spiritual questions. Your walls might display art that sparks meaningful conversations.

Radical alignment touches everything—how you spend weekends, what you talk about at dinner, even how you process current events. It doesn't mean turning every interaction into a gospel presentation, but it does mean living with such purpose that nothing is wasted in God's redemptive plan for those around you.

This kind of alignment isn't burdensome—it's *liberating*, infusing everyday moments with eternal significance and transforming mundane routines into divine appointments.

My guess is ... you want that.

But, at the same time, perhaps you haven't been living that way.

Maybe you've been unmotivated or feel ill-equipped to start a spiritual conversation or share your faith.

And so, even though you know Jesus' command, His purpose for your life, like James, you don't open your mouth when you have the opportunity. Instead, you stay silent and tell God, "I'm so sorry."

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way.

Breaking the Silence: Your First Step Toward Alignment

If reading this has stirred something within you—a mixture of conviction and longing—you're experiencing the gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit. He's inviting you and it's time to make the decision to radically align your life with the Great Commission.

This decision requires courage—the willingness to step outside your comfort zone. Good news: This courage doesn't come from self-confidence but from a deep trust in the One who promised, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

It may also require a new vision of success. Sharing your faith effectively isn't measured by how many people you "convert" but by your faithfulness in

planting and watering seeds that God will ultimately grow (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Some will respond immediately to the gospel; others may take years. Your job isn't to force results but to faithfully represent Jesus in your actions and with your words.

You might be thinking, “I want to make the decision but ... I don't know what to say,” or “I'm afraid I'll push people away,” or “I'm not qualified enough.”

Those concerns are exactly why this book exists. In the weeks ahead, we'll address our hesitations and equip you with practical tools for sharing your faith naturally and effectively. You'll discover that effective evangelism doesn't require theological expertise or persuasive eloquence—just an authentic relationship with Jesus and a willingness to share that relationship with others.

Perhaps what will surprise you the most is *joy*.

What if evangelism isn't just a duty but a pathway to the most profound joy you can experience?

When Jesus told the parable of the shepherd who goes after the one lost sheep in Luke 15, He describes how, after finding it, he “joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home.” Jesus then declared, “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

The joy of heaven becomes *your* joy when you participate in God's search-and-rescue mission.

Ask anyone who has had the honor of seeing a friend, family member, or co-worker come to faith. They'll tell you about:

- The indescribable thrill of witnessing someone cross from death to life.
- The deep sense of purpose that comes from knowing they played a role in an eternity-altering decision.
- How their own faith was revitalized through the process.

This joy isn't just for “natural evangelists” or extroverts. It's available to every follower of Jesus who chooses to align their lives with His mission—including you.

The journey can begin with a simple prayer: “God, I'm available. What would you have me do today to align myself to your mission?”

I have to believe God will never let that request go unanswered. Pray it and He will answer—in big and small ways.

This book is *not* about adding another “should” to your Christian life,

becoming someone you're not, or forcing yourself into uncomfortable situations. It's about discovering how God has uniquely positioned and equipped you to share the greatest news ever told.

Think about it: You have access to circles of influence that no one else has. Your unique combination of relationships, experiences, and personality creates opportunities that are specific to you. The coworker who trusts you enough to share their struggles, the neighbor who waves to you each morning, the family member who respects your opinion - these aren't random connections. They're divine appointments waiting to happen. When you start embracing them, it won't be a "should" or a burden; it will be an adventure you are living with God.

That may sound beyond you, but God will partner with and empower you, and part of His doing that will be through you engaging with this study.

This is not just another book about evangelism techniques or memorized presentations. It's about rediscovering the joy and privilege of introducing others to the One who has transformed your life. It's about moving from anxiety to confidence, from obligation to opportunity, and from silence to natural, meaningful conversations about what matters most.

Each week we will explore biblical truths and practical tools that will equip you to build relationships and share your faith with the people God has placed in your life.

You'll learn how to:

- Identify your "one"
- Build genuine relationships with people far from God
- Recognize and respond to spiritual openings in conversations
- Share your personal story in a compelling way
- Explain the gospel clearly and simply
- Invite others to take steps toward Jesus

Perhaps most importantly, you'll discover that evangelism isn't just something you do—it's who you are, not just a task on your spiritual to-do list but a natural expression of your identity in Christ.

Reflection Questions:

Who are the specific “Ones” God has placed in your life right now? Take time to write down their names and start praying for them, by name, every day.

What aspects of your life (time, resources, attention, energy) need to be realigned with the Great Commission? Be specific about areas where misalignment exists.

What fears or hesitations keep you from sharing Christ with others? Bring these honestly before God in prayer.

Describe what radical alignment might look like in your specific season of life and with your unique personality, gifts, and relationships.

What is one practical step you can take this week to become more “One-aware” in your daily life?

Think about a time when you missed an opportunity to share your faith. What would you do differently if you could relive that moment?

A Prayer to Begin the Journey:

Lord Jesus, I choose to align my life with Your mission. Give me eyes to see the “Ones” around me, a heart that breaks for what breaks Yours, and the courage to speak when You open doors. Use me as Your ambassador, for Your glory and their good. Amen.

Day 1

Aligning Your Life with the Great Commission

Bible Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

From Going Through the Motions to Living the Mission

Do you ever feel like you're just going through the motions—working to pay bills, scrolling through social media, waiting for the weekend? That nagging emptiness isn't accidental. It's because you were designed for something more.

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave His disciples—and us—a mission. It wasn't a suggestion. It was a calling big enough to fill your life with purpose and meaning:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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 28:18-20)

These weren't just words for a select few. They're for you. This is your mission. The real question is: *Have you aligned your life with it?*

From Outsourcing to Ownership

Many of us have unintentionally “outsourced” the Great Commission. We appreciate pastors, donate to missions, pray for missionaries, and think we've done our part. But Jesus didn't say, “Support those who go.” He said, “Go and make disciples.”

The early church didn't change the world because they were exceptionally talented. They changed it because they were exceptionally committed. Aligning

your life with the Great Commission means taking ownership of it. It's not someone else's job. It's *yours*.

Stewardship for Mission

Think of everything in your life as a resource for God's kingdom work:

1. Your Time

We tend to think we don't have any time to give, but the average person spends about 7 hours a day on "screen time." What if you redirected some of that time toward intentionally building relationships with people far from God?

Small shifts in how you allocate your hours can make a big difference. This might mean:

- Inviting a coworker to lunch
- Joining a community sports team or club to build relationships
- Creating margin in your schedule to respond to unexpected opportunities

Time isn't something to spend. It's something to *steward*.

2. Your Talents

Your skills aren't just for making a living. They're tools for making disciples.

A teacher can mentor students beyond academics. A business professional can demonstrate Christ-like leadership. An artist can create work that prompts spiritual conversations. A stay-at-home parent can build relationships at the playground.

Instead of compartmentalizing your "church life" and "work life," ask: "How can my career become a platform for mission?"

3. Your Treasure

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

Your spending habits reflect your priorities. What does yours say about your heart for reaching the lost?

Kingdom-minded stewardship might look like:

- Budgeting for coffee meetings with non-Christian friends
- Simplifying your lifestyle to increase generosity
- Setting aside money to support mission opportunities as they arise

Giving is more than a financial act—it's a spiritual declaration of what matters most.

4. Your Attention

What captures your attention shapes your heart's desires.

Want your heart to beat for the things of God? Start here:

- Read books that fuel your passion for the lost.
- Follow stories of what God is doing around the world.
- Have conversations that center on eternal matters.

Your attention is like a spotlight—point it towards God's mission, and your heart will follow.

Practical Steps to Align Your Life

How do you align your life with the Great Commission?

Start Where You Are. You don't need to move overseas or change careers. Just see your current circumstances through mission-minded eyes:

- Pray daily. “Lord, help me see the people around me through your eyes today.”
- Build genuine relationships with non-believers (not as projects, but as people).
- Look for natural opportunities to share your faith story.
- Invite people to experience Christian community.

Your mission field is your street, office, gym, and coffee shop.

Overcome Your Fears. What holds most Christians back isn't lack of opportunity—it's fear. We fear rejection, awkwardness, or not having all the answers.

In Acts 4, Peter—who once denied Jesus out of fear—stood boldly before the authorities who threatened him. What changed? Acts 4:13 tells us the authorities “recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.”

Want to grow in boldness?

- Deepen your convictions about Jesus and the gospel.
- Spend more time with Jesus through reading the Bible and prayer.
- Pray specifically for courage like the early believers did: “Give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word” (Acts 4:29).

Boldness is not a personality trait. It's a byproduct of presence.

Use Your Unique Position. No one else has your exact combination of relationships, experiences, and opportunities. This isn't accidental—God has purposefully put you exactly where you are.

- Who in your life doesn't know Jesus?
- What unique access do you have to people others can't reach?
- How might God use your story to connect with others?

You are strategically positioned. Own it.

The Promise That Powers the Mission

Don't miss the bookends of Jesus' commission. It begins with "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" and ends with "I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

You're not doing this alone. The One with all authority promises His presence as you step out in obedience. His power makes the impossible possible.

So, is the Great Commission something you support, or something you own?

Jesus' final earthly words weren't a suggestion. They were a commission—a divine assignment meant for *you*.

Transforming My MIND:

How have you previously viewed the Great Commission—as something primarily for others, or as your personal mission?

What difference does Jesus' promise "I am with you always" make to how you approach sharing your faith?

Transforming My HEART:

Which area of stewardship (time, talent, treasure, or attention) do you find most challenging to align with the Great Commission? Why?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

Look at your calendar and spending from the past month. What do they reveal about your priorities? What one adjustment could better align with making disciples?

Lord Jesus, thank You for trusting me with the greatest mission—making disciples who make disciples.

Forgive me for treating this call lightly or leaving it to others. Today, I take ownership of the Great Commission as my life’s purpose.

Help me steward my time, gifts, and influence for Your Kingdom.

Show me how to use my unique position to share Your love.

Draw me close, so others see I’ve been with Jesus.

Give me courage to speak truth, even when it’s hard.

And remind me that You are always with me—empowering every step.

In Your name I pray, amen.

Day 2

Love-Driven Mission: The Great Commandment Meets the Great Commission

Bible Reading: Matthew 22:34-40

When Mission Flows from Love

Why does the same task sometimes feel like a joy and other times like a burden?

The answer lies in *motivation*. Whether you’re doing chores, finishing a work project, or sharing your faith—*why* you’re doing it makes all the difference.

A young missionary once confessed to Mother Teresa years of service left him feeling dry and ineffective. Her response was simple but profound, “You’ve forgotten that it’s not about the work. It’s about Jesus. It’s about love.”

When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment, He answered without hesitation:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

A few years later, He gave what we now call the Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

These weren’t separate calls—they’re deeply connected. The Great Commission flows naturally from the Great Commandment. When we truly love God and people, sharing the gospel becomes less a religious obligation and more the natural overflow of a heart transformed by love.

Love: The Missing Element in Modern Evangelism

Too often, our evangelistic efforts suffer from a fundamental disconnect. Could it be that love—the very heart of the gospel—is missing from the way we share it?

We approach the Great Commission as a task to be completed rather than an expression of the love that defines us. The results are predictable:

- We share the gospel out of obligation rather than delight.
- We focus on techniques rather than genuine relationships.
- We count conversions rather than valuing people.
- We communicate information without embodying grace.

If the Great Commission seems burdensome, or people seem closed off, the problem may be in your motivation. As missionary Hudson Taylor observed, “The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed—but it is a command from a lover to the beloved.”

Rediscovering God’s Motivation

To recover love as the foundation of mission, we must first understand God’s heart.

Why did God send Jesus? Scripture is clear, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). Love was the motivation behind the greatest mission the world has ever known.

This tells us something profound: Mission isn’t just something God *does*; it flows from who God is. The Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has existed eternally in perfect self-giving love. Creation itself was an outflow of this love, an invitation for others to share in His goodness. And when we fell, God’s redemptive mission wasn’t a desperate reaction—it was love continuing its pursuit.

In Jesus, God stepped into our brokenness to bring us back into relationship.

It’s all about love.

The apostle Paul got this. After laying out the gospel to the Corinthians, he revealed his motivation, “For Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Not guilt. Not fear. Not even obedience for its own sake. *Love* was the compelling force behind Paul’s tireless evangelism.

When we reconnect the Great Commission with the Great Commandment, everything changes. People are no longer projects—they’re precious souls

made in God's image. We're no longer selling a religious product but sharing the greatest love story ever told.

And when love compels us, the world can't help but notice.

Love Speaks Their Language

Love doesn't just feel—it moves. It crosses barriers, steps into unfamiliar territory, and learns to speak someone else's language.

Jesus didn't just tell us to love—He showed us. He entered our world, adopted our customs, spoke our language, and felt our pain.

That's the Incarnation: God putting on flesh to reach us.

And it's the model for how we reach others.

Paul followed this pattern. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, he describes becoming “all things to all people” so that he might save some. This wasn't about being disingenuous—it was about loving people enough to enter their world.

Dr. Don Everts, author and campus pastor, once said, “I used to prepare presentations to deliver. Now I prepare questions to ask and ears to hear. I'm less concerned with having all the answers and more concerned with truly understanding the person in front of me.”

When love leads the way, evangelism looks different:

- We learn what matters to them before sharing what matters to us.
- We discover their story before telling God's story.
- We find common ground before highlighting differences.
- We address real needs, not just religious solutions.

The Great Commission's Two-Part Harmony

If you look closely, the Great Commission is about more than conversion. Jesus didn't say, “Make converts.” Jesus commanded us to “make disciples” who are “baptized” and “taught to obey” everything He commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

That kind of lifelong transformation can only happen in the context of deep, consistent love.

People don't entrust their hearts to someone they don't trust. And they won't trust someone who doesn't genuinely care.

Pastor Francis Chan captures it perfectly, “The world doesn't need more doctrinal presentations; it needs living demonstrations. When we love each other with the sacrificial love of Christ, we're not just supporting the message—we're becoming part of it.”

This is why Jesus told His disciples, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Love isn’t a strategy. It’s the signature of a true disciple—and the clearest evidence that our message is real.

Practical Steps for Love-Driven Mission

So, how do we shift our hearts and habits toward a love-driven approach to evangelism?

Here are four practical steps to begin living out the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment:

- **Deepen your love for God.** Spend time each day experiencing His love for you through Scripture, prayer, and worship. You can’t give what you haven’t first received.
- **Prioritize genuine relationships.** Commit to loving people well, whether or not they ever respond to the gospel.
- **Ask more questions.** Love is curious. Create space for people to share their stories, beliefs, and doubts.
- **Practice hospitality.** Open your home, share meals, and create environments where people feel valued and welcome. Love creates belonging before it asks for believing.

The Great Commission wasn’t given to an institution. It was entrusted to people—ordinary disciples who had walked with Jesus, been changed by His love, and simply couldn’t keep it to themselves.

Their power wasn’t in polished arguments, but in transformed lives.

And the same is true for us. When you align your mission with God’s love, evangelism doesn’t just become something you *do*—it becomes part of who you *are*. A person so deeply changed by love, you can’t help but invite others to experience it too.

Transforming My MIND:

How does seeing the Great Commission through the lens of the Great Commandment change your understanding of evangelism?

How does Jesus' incarnational approach (becoming human, entering our world) provide a model for effective evangelism?

Transforming My HEART:

Think about someone who played a significant role in your faith journey. How did their love for you impact your receptivity to the gospel?

How might your evangelistic effectiveness change if you were more deeply rooted in God's love for you?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

How could you enter into the world of and better understand and love people God has put in your life who might be far from Him?

What specific questions could you ask to better understand the spiritual journey of someone who doesn't share your faith?

Father, thank You for loving me even when I was far from You.

Fill me so deeply with Your love that it overflows into every relationship.

Give me eyes to see people not as projects, but as precious to You.

Turn my evangelism from duty to delight—a joyful invitation rooted in love.

May the way I love others draw them to You.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Day 3

The Heart for the One

Bible Reading: Luke 15:1-7

When One Matters More Than Ninety-Nine

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4)

In a world obsessed with numbers, Jesus tells a story that makes no sense—unless you understand the math of love.

While our efficiency-driven world prioritizes strategies that help the most people and yield the highest returns, Jesus presents a radically different economy—one where a shepherd would leave 99% of his flock to search for a single lost sheep.

Why?

Because Jesus isn’t speaking the language of efficiency; He’s speaking the language of love.

And love has always been terrible at math.

The Mathematics of Heaven

Imagine the conversation between the shepherd and his business advisor: “You’re risking 99% of your assets for 1% return? That’s terrible business!”

Yet in Jesus’ parable, the shepherd doesn’t reluctantly go after the lost sheep or delegate the task to a hired hand. He goes himself, searching “until he finds it,” then joyfully carries it home and throws a celebration as if he’d discovered buried treasure.

This isn’t just a nice story—it’s a window into the heart of God. He doesn’t pursue humanity in the abstract; He pursues individuals by name.

We see this individual focus throughout Scripture:

- God calls to Adam in the cool of the Garden (Genesis 3:9).
- Jesus stops for blind Bartimaeus despite the pressing crowds (Mark 10:46-52).
- The Creator of galaxies notices when a single sparrow falls and counts every hair on your head (Matthew 10:29-30).
- The Good Shepherd “calls his own sheep by name” (John 10:3, 14).

In heaven’s mathematics, you are never just one among many.

You are the one worth everything.

The One in Everyday Life

This principle isn’t just for missionaries or ministry leaders. It’s for all of us, in the middle of our ordinary, busy lives.

In the Workplace: James, a manager overseeing thirty employees, noticed Aiden—a new intern struggling to fit in. Despite his busy schedule, James sets aside time each week to mentor him—asking thoughtful questions, offering guidance, and eventually inviting him to a church event. That relationship becomes the doorway for Aiden’s spiritual journey.

In the Neighborhood: Sarah, a busy mother of three, felt inexplicably drawn to Eleanor, an elderly neighbor who rarely has visitors. Despite her packed schedule, Sarah begins bringing over a meal once a week and sitting to talk for fifteen minutes. Those brief encounters blossom into deep conversations about faith, purpose, and eternity—conversations her neighbor has never had in decades of life.

These aren’t extraordinary people with unique callings. They’re ordinary believers who took seriously Jesus’ example of stopping for the one.

Finding Your One

The principle of “stopping for the one” challenges how we approach evangelism. Our culture values scale, efficiency, and metrics. We celebrate reaching thousands while often missing the person right in front of us.

But what if our primary call isn’t to reach the masses but to notice the individual God has placed in our path?

This shift changes everything:

- *From general to specific:* Focusing on the one person God has positioned

you to reach

- *From programs to relationships:* Investing deeply in genuine friendships, not just participating in structured events
- *From hurry to presence:* Slowing down enough to truly see the people around you
- *From many surface connections to deep investment:* Prioritizing depth over breadth

Who is your “One”?

Who has God placed in your life that needs to experience His love through you?

Identifying your One doesn’t minimize your care for others—it focuses your immediate attention where God is already working.

The Shepherd’s Search Strategy

How do we search for our One with the same relentless love the shepherd showed in Jesus’ parable?

Here are four guiding principles:

1. ***Recognize value beyond utility.*** People matter not because of what they can offer us, but because they bear God’s image and are deeply loved by Him.
2. ***Be willing to leave your comfort zone.*** The shepherd didn’t wait for the sheep to wander back. He stepped into danger, inconvenience, and unknown terrain. Pursuing the One often means stepping beyond familiar spaces and familiar people.
3. ***Search until you find.*** The shepherd didn’t search half-heartedly or temporarily. He searched until the lost sheep was found. Loving our One requires that same kind of steady, patient pursuit—even when progress feels slow.
4. ***Celebrate each restoration.*** When the sheep was recovered, the shepherd didn’t quietly move on—he threw a party!

When we celebrate individual transformations, we align our hearts with the priorities of heaven, where every return sparks a feast of joy.

From Theory to Practice

What does stopping for the one look like in real life?

Here are four practical steps you can take this week:

Pray specifically. Ask God to place one person on your heart. Write down their name and commit to pray for them daily until they're found.

Create margin. Examine your schedule and identify where you might create room for unhurried conversations and spontaneous invitations.

Take initiative. The shepherd actively searched. Be intentional about building relationship with your One through regular meetups or simple check-ins. Don't wait for them to come to you.

Listen deeply. Create space where they feel safe to express doubts and questions. Listen for both spoken needs and unspoken longings. Often, the greatest gift you can offer is the rare experience of being fully heard.

The Power of One

A powerful contemporary example of stopping for the one comes from the life of Mike Yankoski.

In 2012, Mike met a homeless man named Leroy on the streets of downtown Portland. Instead of just giving him spare change or walking past, Mike felt God prompting him to stop and genuinely engage.

“Something about Leroy’s eyes held me there,” Mike shared in his book *Under the Overpass*. “I introduced myself, and then just listened as he shared his story.”

Mike began visiting Leroy weekly, bringing coffee and simply spending time with him. Despite busy graduate studies and other commitments, Mike prioritized this one relationship, learning about Leroy’s struggles with addiction, his estrangement from family, and his deep sense of isolation.

Over months of consistent friendship, Mike earned the trust to share his own faith journey. Eventually, Leroy agreed to attend a recovery program at Mike’s church. Through that program and Mike’s continued support, Leroy not only achieved sobriety but also embraced faith in Christ. Today, Leroy helps others experiencing homelessness find the same hope.

This is the quiet, unstoppable power of stopping for the One. Like a pebble creating ripples across a pond, our focus on one person can extend far beyond what we imagine.

Remember the lost sheep didn’t find itself—it was found. It didn’t carry itself home—it was carried.

Your role isn’t to save anyone. That’s God’s work. Your role is to participate in His search-and-rescue operation, to be His hands and feet to the one He’s already pursuing.

Today, ask yourself: “Who is my one?”

Then, with the shepherd’s determination and heaven’s joy in your heart, go find them.

Transforming My MIND:

How does Jesus leaving the 99 sheep to find the one challenge our cultural emphasis on efficiency and productivity?

How could understanding that God values each individual person change your approach to evangelism and outreach?

Transforming My HEART:

What specific name is God placing on your heart to be your “One” to pray for and pursue in this season? What feelings arise when you think about focusing on this person?

What fears or hesitations do you have about investing deeply in one person who is far from God?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

When you look at your schedule, where could you carve out time to be more intentional in building a relationship with your One?

Which of the four practical steps (pray specifically, create margin, take initiative, listen deeply) do you find most challenging, and how will you address this challenge?

Father, thank You for being the God who leaves the 99 to find the one.

Thank You for pursuing me, knowing my name, and loving me beyond what I could ever offer.

Open my eyes to those around me who need Your love.

Give me courage to step out, patience to persist, and joy to celebrate every step they take toward You.

Show me who my “one” is in this season—and help me love them like You do.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Day 4

One Aware

Bible Reading: Mark 5:24-34

The Touch That Changed Everything

The Galilean sun beats down, scorching the crowded streets. Dust swirls, kicked up by hundreds of sandaled feet. Voices clash and rise—questions shouted, children crying, merchants hawking their wares. The smell of sweat and perfume clings to the air.

The disciples yell over the chaos: “Make way! Let the Teacher through!”
In the middle of it all, Jesus walks—calm, focused, undeterred.
Until He stops.

Can you feel it? In the swirl of a thousand demands, Jesus senses one silent plea. One touch—hidden in the crush of the crowd—stops Him in His tracks.

He doesn’t just notice it. He pauses. He searches. He listens.

He acknowledges her. He draws out her story. He affirms her faith.

The disciples are baffled. “You see the people crowding against you,” they protest, “and yet you ask, ‘Who touched me?’” To them, it’s just a mob. A press of bodies. No single touch could possibly matter.

But Jesus knows better.

He feels the difference between the careless jostle of the crowd and the trembling touch of faith. And He will not move on until He finds the one who reached for Him.

Because Jesus isn’t overwhelmed by the crowd.

He is always aware of the one.

The Difference Between a Crowd and a Person

Again and again in the Gospels, we see the difference between how Jesus

and His disciples viewed people. The disciples often saw crowds—nameless, faceless, overwhelming. But Jesus always saw the one:

- When religious leaders saw a sinful woman, Jesus saw faith and devotion (Luke 7:36-50).
- When the disciples tried to send children away, Jesus welcomed them each one (Mark 10:13-16).
- When others saw a despised tax collector, Jesus saw Levi and called him to discipleship (Mark 2:13-17).

Jesus was “One Aware.”

He saw beyond the crowd to the person. His awareness wasn’t passive—it prompted action. When the woman touched His cloak, He didn’t move on. He stopped. He searched. He listened. He blessed.

What Prevents Our One-Awareness?

Jesus’ awareness in the chaos invites us to ask: What keeps us from seeing the one in front of us? Several common barriers can block our vision:

The Tyranny of the Urgent. Jesus was on His way to save Jairus’ dying daughter—an urgent mission. Yet when one woman reached out, He stopped.

How often do we rush past people because our calendar feels too full? What divine appointments have we missed in the name of efficiency?

The Bias of Familiarity. The disciples had seen so many crowds, they stopped seeing individuals.

We do the same. The barista. The coworker. The neighbor. We interact with them daily—but do we really notice them?

The Assumption of Insignificance. The bleeding woman was unclean, invisible, excluded. But Jesus didn’t pass her by. He stopped. He honored her.

We may not say it aloud, but we often act as if some people matter less—the quiet student, the difficult colleague, the awkward neighbor. Jesus calls us to see their worth.

The Focus on Methods Over People. The disciples were managing the crowd. Their priority was the plan. How often do we focus on strategy and systems, forgetting that people *are* the mission?

These barriers are real, but they can be overcome. As we learn to cultivate One-Awareness—intentionally seeing and valuing the person in front of us—we begin to love more like Jesus. It’s not instant, but it is possible. And it changes everything.

Building a One-Aware Mindset

Being One Aware isn't just a nice idea—it's a transformative way to live out our faith. It means developing a lens through which we filter our decisions, priorities, and actions. Here's how we begin to build this mindset:

1. Pray specifically.

Before major decisions, Jesus prayed—sometimes all night. If the Son of God needed prayer to stay aligned with His mission, how much more do we?

Start by identifying your *One*—someone God has placed on your heart—and pray for them daily.

And each morning, ask: “Lord, who is my One today? Who is reaching out, unnoticed by others?” Imagine the divine appointments He might arrange when you pray that with expectation.

2. Pay attention to interruptions.

Henri Nouwen once said that what we see as interruptions may actually *be* the path.

Jesus' most powerful moments often came during disruptions. When someone unexpectedly crosses your path or a conversation takes a surprising turn, pause and ask: “Is this the One God wants me to notice today?”

3. Practice presence.

In our distracted world, undivided attention is a gift.

Put away your phone. Make eye contact. Ask deeper questions. Listen—really listen.

Author Malcolm Gladwell notes that exceptional doctors spend, on average, three minutes longer with each patient than their peers. In those additional minutes, they discover critical information that leads to better diagnoses.

The same is true spiritually—taking just a few extra minutes to truly engage can reveal deeper needs and opportunities.

4. Persist in love.

Being One Aware isn't a one-time event; it's a way of life. Your One becomes part of your thoughts, prayers, and choices.

This doesn't mean pressure or pushiness—it means steady love. You remain available, prayerful, and faithful, trusting God's timing and doing your part.

Examples of One-Awareness in Action

What does One Awareness look like in everyday life?

Jason, a software developer, noticed Raj, a new co-worker from overseas who struggled to fit in. While others stayed polite but distant, Jason made Raj his One. He invited him to lunch regularly, explained American customs, introduced him to local spots, and included him in family gatherings. Their friendship deepened, creating natural opportunities to share his faith. When Raj's father fell ill, Jason prayed with him and helped raise funds for travel. These simple acts of love opened the door for honest conversations about faith.

Mark and Sarah welcomed Trent and Lauren, a new couple across the street, with more than a friendly wave. They helped move boxes, shared meals, and occasionally babysat their toddler. Through these acts of friendship, trust developed naturally. When Lauren mentioned feeling lonely, Sarah invited her to a women's group at church—no pressure, just community. Trent and Lauren have since begun attending services occasionally, asking questions about faith they say they'd never felt comfortable exploring before.

In each of these stories, someone chose to see the One and to move beyond general awareness to specific action.

From Awareness to Action

The woman with the issue of blood could have remained anonymous. Jesus could've kept walking—He was, after all, on His way to heal a dying child. She was already healed when she touched Him.

But Jesus stopped. He looked. He searched.

Why?

Because Jesus knew something we often forget: Being seen, acknowledged, and valued is itself a form of healing. By stopping to identify her publicly, Jesus not only healed her physical affliction but restored her dignity and place in the community.

That's the power of One-Awareness.

It's not just naming a One—it's *engaging*. It's not just noticing—it's *responding*. When we live this way, everyday moments become sacred. Interactions become invitations. And life becomes a Spirit-led adventure.

Transforming my MIND:

What strikes you most about how Jesus responded to the woman in the crowd? How does this challenge your usual way of relating to people?

The disciples couldn't understand why Jesus would ask, "Who touched me?" in a pressing crowd. What "crowds" in your life might be causing you to miss individual needs and opportunities?

Transforming my HEART:

What obstacles to One-Awareness do you struggle with most? How does this affect your ability to see the One God has placed in your path?

What holds you back from fully investing in a One? Is it fear, busyness, or something else?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Who is your One? If you haven't chosen a One – pause to pray and choose one now.

Look at your calendar for the next week. Where could you create space to invest in your One? What specific action will you commit to taking?

Jesus, help me to choose a One and to pursue that person in the same way You pursued me.

Help me to show that person Your love and please give me opportunities to share You with them.

May my life reflect your heart for the One.

I pray in Your name. Amen.

Day 5

When We Weep, God Works

Bible Reading: Luke 19:41-42 and Romans 9:1-3

Jesus Wept – and So Should We

When was the last time you cried—really cried—for someone far from God? Not out of guilt, but out of love?

It's easy to feel busy, distracted, or even frustrated with a broken world instead of being brokenhearted by it.

As Jesus crested the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem spread before Him like a tapestry. Instead of admiring the stunning Temple complex or the city's ancient beauty, He stopped and began to weep. Not quiet tears, but heaving, audible sobs that startled His disciples:

“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.’” (Luke 19:41-42)

This moment reveals something profound: the heart of God breaks for those who don't know Him. The omnipotent Creator of galaxies weeps over human lostness.

The Apostle Paul, transformed by an encounter with the weeping Savior, developed the same heart:

“I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race.” (Romans 9:1-3)

These sacred tears of Jesus and Paul remind us that genuine transformation begins not with strategies or methods, but with a heart broken by what breaks God's heart.

The Disappearance of Holy Tears

When was the last time you cried over someone's spiritual condition? For most of us, such tears are rare.

We've developed what psychologists call "compassion fatigue"—emotional numbness from prolonged exposure to suffering without the power to make significant change.

The prophet Jeremiah, often called "the weeping prophet," understood this ministry of tears. He lamented, "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" (Jeremiah 9:1). His tears were not signs of weakness but channels of God's compassion flowing through a human heart.

How to Cultivate a Weeping Heart

While we can't manufacture emotion, we can ask God to break our hearts for what breaks His. We can also position ourselves to see people as God sees them.

Here are practical steps to develop a heart that weeps—and prays—with compassion:

1. Immerse Yourself in Reality

Abstract knowledge rarely moves our hearts. Proximity to real suffering does. Consider spending time:

- Volunteering at a homeless shelter or addiction recovery center
- Walking through neighborhoods unlike your own
- Reading first-person accounts of those wrestling with purpose and meaning
- Visiting places where spiritual darkness feels palpable

Proximity to brokenness opens our hearts to God's compassion. As James reminds us, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27).

2. Pray with Your Imagination

Scripture often says Jesus was “moved with compassion.” The Greek word literally means “to be moved in the intestines”—a visceral, gut-level response. To pray with this kind of compassion:

- Picture specific individuals as you pray for them
- Imagine their daily struggles, fears, and hopes
- Consider what their life without Christ means eternally
- Ask God: “Help me feel a fraction of what you feel for them”

The Apostle Paul prayed this way. He wrote, “For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people” (Romans 9:3). His concern wasn’t theoretical—it was so deep he would experience eternal separation from God if it meant others could be saved.

3. Fast from Numbness

Our culture has mastered the art of emotional insulation. To counter it:

- Take periodic fasts from news and social media
- Build silence into your daily rhythms
- Keep a prayer journal specifically for those who don’t know Christ
- Invite prayer partners to share and carry the burden with you

The Psalmist models this vulnerability: “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. (Psalm 56:8, NLT).

God values our emotional honesty and collects every tear we shed in intercession.

Pray. Weep. Move.

Tears are not the end. They are the beginning.

Holy tears must lead to holy action.

The prophet Jeremiah didn’t just cry over Jerusalem’s spiritual collapse—he spent decades calling people back to God. His tears watered the seeds of his prophetic ministry.

Here’s how we can turn sacred sorrow into Spirit-empowered mission:

1. Identify Your Three and Pray Specifically

- List three people in your sphere of influence (reach zone) who don’t know Christ.

- Commit to pray for them by name daily.
- Set alerts on your phone to remind you to pray for each person at different times.

Specific prayers prepare us for specific opportunities.

2. Build Authentic Relationships with Purpose

- Find natural ways to deepen these relationships through shared interests and genuine care.
- Schedule monthly coffee dates or walks with individuals on your prayer list.
- Look for ways to serve them during challenging seasons—expecting nothing in return.

As Paul wrote, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Sharing the gospel begins with sharing life.

3. Create Sacred Spaces for Spiritual Conversations

- Regularly invite friends into environments where faith conversations can happen naturally—shared meals, outings, service projects.
- Host a monthly discussion group exploring life’s big questions.
- Organize community service projects that open doors to discuss faith.

Jesus frequently used meals as contexts for spiritual discussion, recognizing that open tables often lead to open hearts.

4. Prepare and Share Your Story with Confidence

- Be ready to share how Christ has transformed your life in concise, compelling ways.
- Write down your spiritual story focusing on before Christ, how you met Christ, and life with Christ. Refine it for clarity and impact.
- Practice telling your testimony.

5. Pray Together in Moments of Need

- When appropriate, offer to pray for them. Ask if they are open to you praying for them right then and there.
- Create a prayer group specifically focused on reaching those who don’t know Christ.

These practical steps transform our tears from mere emotion into channels of God's grace. Like rain that softens hardened ground, our compassionate engagement prepares hearts to receive the seeds of the gospel.

Transforming My MIND:

How do Jesus' tears over Jerusalem and Paul's willingness to be "accursed and cut off from Christ" for others challenge your typical emotional responses to those who reject God?

In what ways have you potentially developed "compassion fatigue" toward the spiritually lost?

Transforming My HEART:

When you consider specific individuals who don't know Christ, what emotions arise? Ask God to reveal any numbness, indifference, or judgment that needs transformation.

Transforming My STRENGTH:

Choose one space you regularly occupy (a neighborhood, workplace, gym, or social setting). How could you carve out 15 minutes this week to walk through it, praying by name or face for those you encounter?

Where in your daily rhythm could you set aside a consistent five-minute window to pray with deep compassion for those far from Jesus?

Father God,

I admit that I've grown numb to the spiritual needs of those around me. Please soften my heart and help me care about what matters to You.

Show me how You see my neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family who don't know You. Let my compassion grow and use my prayers to break through hard places.

Give me courage to step into messy situations and love without expecting anything in return. Use me—even when I'm unsure—to be Your messenger of hope and reconciliation.

In Your powerful name, amen.

Day 6

Love the Sinner

Bible Reading: Romans 2:1-4

When Sinners Want to Be Around You

Here's something fascinating:

Jesus was the only sinless person to ever walk the earth—yet He was a magnet for the most sinful people.

We're told in Luke 15:1-2:

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

Why did the worst of society flock to Jesus? Because He didn't make them feel worse—He made them feel loved.

He didn't pile on shame—He offered grace.

He didn't ignore their sin—He saw beyond it, to their worth as image-bearers of God.

Jesus didn't condone their behavior, but He didn't condemn them either.

He loved them as they were—and invited them into the life they were created for.

That's the kind of love that draws people to God and transforms them. As Paul writes in Romans 2:4, it's God's *kindness* that leads people to Him.

It's the kind of love the world still needs today.

We've Got a Problem

Fast forward two thousand years, and something's gone wrong. Too many Christians today resemble the Pharisees more than Jesus. We avoid “sinful

people,” forming holy huddles where we feel safe—but outsiders feel unwelcome.

We do need to be wise, but if we’re truly following Jesus, fear won’t keep us from places the sinful and spiritually curious frequent.

Too often our fear of the appearance of evil keeps us from offering the presence of grace. We avoid those far from God, and in doing so, we also avoid the mission He gave us.

Jesus didn’t play it safe. He stepped into dark places—not to blend in, but to bring light.

What Keeps Us from Loving Like Jesus

Let’s be honest—building relationships with “sinners” can make us uncomfortable. Three primary barriers often hold us back:

We forget our own sin. And when we do, grace fades from our memory. We start to feel superior, and superiority makes us judgmental and unapproachable. But that’s the opposite of Jesus.

Jesus may have been the most approachable person who ever lived. Lepers, prostitutes, and tax collectors came to Him freely.

Why? Because Jesus never forgot the mission of grace.

When we remember how much we’ve been forgiven, our hearts stay soft. Gratitude replaces pride, and we become quick to extend the same grace we’ve received.

We don’t know how to clean up the mess. Many Christians feel overwhelmed by the brokenness in people’s lives. We see the brokenness. We see the need for change but feel unequipped to help. So instead of stepping in with love, we step back in fear.

But here’s the liberating truth: *It’s not your job to clean up the mess.*

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:5–9:

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

We plant. We water. We love. But only God makes people grow.

Our calling isn’t to fix people. It’s to love them.

When people feel truly seen and loved, they become open to God’s transforming grace.

We’re afraid grace will look like approval. We worry that showing grace might be mistaken for endorsing sin. And yes, some will misinterpret grace. But

God knew that—and offered it anyway.

God's grace has always been misunderstood. In Paul's day, some thought grace gave permission to sin (see Romans 6). But God never toned-down grace to protect His image.

God doesn't ask people to clean up their lives before coming to Him. He welcomes them as they are, trusting that His love and truth will do the transforming work.

That's our model.

We're called to create spaces where people feel seen, safe, and loved—regardless of their story. Grace isn't compromise. It's the environment where transformation begins.

Create a Welcoming Space and Step into Uncomfortable Places

How can we love like Jesus and build relationships with people who might be far from God?

Create a welcoming space in your life. Be intentional about including people with different backgrounds and beliefs in your daily rhythms. Share meals, invite them to events, participate in their celebrations when appropriate.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 5:9–10 that we're not to isolate ourselves from nonbelievers: "In that case you would have to leave this world." We're meant to engage the world—not retreat from it.

Step into uncomfortable spaces—but do so wisely. Jesus associated with sinners but never compromised His values. Here are some practical guardrails:

- Prioritize your own spiritual health. Like flight attendants say, "Put on your own oxygen mask first." Stay rooted in Scripture, prayer, and Christian community so you have spiritual strength to offer others.
- Be clear about your own boundaries. Decide in advance what situations you'll avoid and which activities you won't participate in. Having clear boundaries actually makes you more effective in ministry, not less.
- Know that proximity is not participation. Jesus ate with sinners but never joined in their sin. You can be present in someone's lives without compromising your convictions.

Grace invites. Truth guides. Love bridges the gap.

Create space in your life where all three can flourish—and watch how God uses it.

The Goal is Love, Not Arguments

We're not called to win debates—we're called to love well.

Apologetics has its place, but love opens hearts. When people encounter genuine, selfless love, they become far more open to the One who is the source of that love.

Jesus didn't say, "By your logic and persuasion, all people will know you are my disciples." He said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Love speaks louder than words.

When people encounter real, selfless love, they become open to the One who is the source of that love.

In a culture where people often think they have to clean up before they belong, authentic love says, "You're welcome here—just as you are."

That kind of love reflects Jesus. It draws people to Him.

Jesus crossed boundaries, entered messy spaces, and trusted His Father with the results.

Now He's calling us to do the same.

Let love lead the way.

Offer grace.

Trust God to do what only He can do.

Transforming My MIND:

How does Jesus' approach to sinners challenge you? What misconceptions might you have about godliness and relationships with those far from God?

Transforming My HEART:

What fears surface when you consider close friendships with people whose values differ from yours? How might your hesitation reveal areas where you don't fully trust God's work in your own life?

How does knowing that transformation is God's job, not yours, free you to love people more genuinely?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

How are you actively loving people who don't know Jesus? Are you moving toward them? Creating space for friendship? Or more worried about what religious people think than what lost people need?

Who have you kept at a distance because of lifestyle differences? This week, reach out and invite them to coffee—just to listen.

Heavenly Father, forgive me for the times I've been more concerned with being right than being loving. Thank You for the grace You've shown me despite my many failures. Help me to see people as You see them—not defined by their sins but as Your beloved creation in need of grace.

Give me courage to build authentic relationships with those who are different from me, and wisdom to know the difference between loving people and endorsing choices that harm them.

Remind me that transformation is Your work, not mine.

May those who meet me feel one step closer to meeting You.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Day 7

If Christianity Were a Person

Bible Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-9

When Christianity Wears a Human Face

“If Christianity were a person, that person probably wouldn’t like me.”

These words from Penny, shared in Donald Miller’s *Blue Like Jazz*, capture what many outside the faith feel. People often form an image of Christianity based on stereotypes, political figures, or judgmental encounters. In their minds, this “composite Christian wouldn’t approve of them—especially if they have a messy past or beliefs that challenge traditional Christian views.

Penny had plenty of reasons to stay away from faith. Her parents divorced. Her mother struggled with addiction, eventually becoming mentally unstable and homeless. From Penny’s perspective, Christians were narrow-minded hypocrites who opposed her deeply held humanitarian convictions. If Christianity were a person, she was convinced, it wouldn’t like her.

Then she met Nadine.

The Power of Genuine Connection

On a three-week trip to France, Penny encountered something unexpected—a Christian who didn’t fit her stereotype.

Nadine showed genuine interest in Penny’s complicated past. She asked questions. She listened. She created space for Penny’s story without judgment or agenda.

This simple approach—asking questions and truly listening—created something powerful: reciprocity. Because Nadine showed interest in Penny’s story, Penny became interested in Nadine’s.

One evening, walking along a beach in southern France, Nadine shared why she followed Jesus. She described Him as “a revolutionary, a humanitarian of sorts, sent from God to a world that had broken itself.”

This created cognitive dissonance for Penny. She had always dismissed Christians as “insensitive nuts.” But Nadine’s kindness and acceptance contradicted everything Penny thought she knew about believers. How could someone this compassionate be Christian?

Living Faith Makes Faith Livable

What happened next reveals a profound truth about sharing Jesus: our lived faith often speaks louder than our spoken faith.

This echoes precisely what Paul celebrates in our passage from 1 Thessalonians: “Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.”

Paul knew that effective evangelism requires both message and model—words and a life that embodies them.

Over the following year, Nadine continued to invest in her friendship with Penny. No agenda. No pressure. Just authentic relationship. She didn’t hide her faith, but she didn’t force it either. She simply lived it consistently, allowing Penny to observe Christianity through her life rather than through abstract arguments.

The result? Penny began to reconsider her assumption that “Christianity wouldn’t like her.” She started to wonder if perhaps she and Christianity might actually have things in common.

This shift didn’t happen through confrontation or debate. It happened through consistent presence. Their conversations about school or relationships would naturally drift toward discussions about God—not because Nadine forced the topic, but because her faith was so integrated into her life that it emerged organically in conversation.

From Religion to Relationship

Eventually, Nadine invited Penny to read through Matthew’s gospel together. This was a crucial step—moving from discussing Christianity in the abstract to encountering Jesus directly in Scripture.

Penny’s response is revealing: “I found Jesus very disturbing, very straightforward. He wasn’t diplomatic, and yet I felt like if I met Him, He would really like me.”

This realization was transformative: “I can’t explain how freeing that was, to realize that if I met Jesus, He would like me. I never felt like that about some of the Christians on the radio. I always thought if I met these people they would yell at me.”

As she read, Penny kept identifying with the people Jesus loved—“broken people...the kind of people who are tired of life and want to be done with it, or they are desperate people, people who are outcasts.”

Ultimately, Penny came to believe Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be—God Himself, come to earth because of love, to bring us to God.

She decided all she wanted was to follow Him for the rest of her life.

Like the Thessalonians Paul describes, she “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

The Irony and the Invitation

Here’s the beautiful irony:

Penny believed that if Christianity were a person, that person wouldn’t like her.

But Christianity *is* a person—Jesus Christ.

And to discover that, Penny needed a follower of Jesus close enough to reflect His heart to her.

Paul describes this same pattern among the Thessalonians: “You became imitators of us and of the Lord...so you became a model to all the believers.”

Faith spreads through imitation—one life reflecting Christ to another.

Our lives authenticate our message, giving it credibility.

Practical Lessons for Sharing Jesus

What can we learn from Nadine’s approach to sharing Jesus?

1. Ask Questions and Listen First

Nadine didn’t begin by sharing what she believed. She started by asking about Penny’s life and listening to her story. This created trust and opened the door for reciprocal sharing.

In a culture where everyone is talking but few are listening, simply creating space for someone’s story can be revolutionary. James encourages us to “be quick to listen, slow to speak” (James 1:19)—advice that applies powerfully to evangelism.

2. Live Your Faith Authentically

What impressed Penny wasn't Nadine's arguments but her consistent character. She saw Christianity embodied in a way that contradicted her stereotypes.

Paul told the Thessalonians, "You know how we lived among you for your sake."

People are watching how we live far more than listening to what we say. When there's alignment between our words and actions, when we demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), people notice.

3. Invest in Relationship Without Agenda

Nadine spent time with Penny over more than a year, without pressuring her toward conversion. Their relationship wasn't a project with a deadline but a genuine friendship where faith emerged naturally in conversation.

True influence flows through genuine relationship.

4. Introduce People to Jesus Directly

At the right time, Nadine invited Penny to meet Jesus through Scripture. This was crucial: moving beyond discussions about Christianity to an actual relationship with Christ.

Our role isn't to convince people to accept our version of religion but to help them meet Jesus. Often, the Gospels are the best evangelistic tool—letting people see Jesus up close, making their own observations and drawing their own conclusions.

5. Be Patient with the Process

Penny's journey from skepticism to faith unfolded over more than a year of friendship, conversation, and gradual exposure to the gospel.

In our microwave culture, we want immediate results. But transformation rarely happens in a moment.

Reframing Christianity Through Relationship

Often, the problem isn't Jesus—it's people's perception of Christians.

They see judgment. Hypocrisy. Harshness.

We have the opportunity to show them something different.

When we embody Christ's character—love, patience, authenticity—we create cognitive dissonance with their stereotypes. We open doors for them to

reconsider not just Christianity, but Christ Himself.

When Christianity wears your human face, what do people see?

Are they more or less likely to believe that Jesus would like them?

Today, consider:

- Who in your life needs to experience Jesus' love through your presence?
- Who needs you to listen to their story without judgment?
- Who might be waiting for an invitation to discover Jesus for themselves?

Paul reminds us: the gospel rings out through transformed lives.

May it ring out through yours.

Transforming My MIND:

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, what came alongside the gospel when Paul shared it with the Thessalonians?

How did Penny's view of Christianity and Jesus evolve throughout the story, and what caused these changes? How does her story reveal the difference between religion as an abstract concept and Jesus as a person?

Transforming My HEART:

How do you feel about the patience required in Nadine's approach—investing in relationship over more than a year without pressuring conversion?

What aspects of your story might help others connect with Jesus if you were willing to share them?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

What steps could you take this week to better embody Jesus' character in your everyday interactions?

How can you shift from abstract discussions about Christianity to helping someone encounter Jesus directly?

Jesus, forgive me for times when I've misrepresented You to others. Help me to embody Your character so authentically that people experiencing me get a glimpse of You. Give me patience to invest in relationships without agenda, courage to share my own story, and wisdom to know when to simply listen. Thank You that You don't just tolerate broken, messy people—You deeply love us. Help me to give that love to someone who needs it today. I pray in Your name. Amen.

Day 8

The Ministry of the Table

Bible Reading: Luke 5:27-32

Open Hearts, Open Homes

Think about the best meal you've ever had—not just the food, but the whole experience. Who was there? What made it memorable?

Now imagine what it would feel like if you were never invited. If you only saw the gathering from the outside, never welcomed in.

That's exactly how the religious leaders viewed Levi's dinner party in Luke 5. They stood on the outside, criticizing.

But Jesus? He was at the table.

"Later, Levi held a banquet in his house with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi's fellow tax collectors and other guests were there. But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus' disciples, 'Why do you eat and drink with such scum?'" (Luke 5:29-30)

Jesus Used Dinner as a Ministry Tool

Levi—also known as Matthew—had just left his job as a tax collector to follow Jesus. And the first thing he did? He threw a dinner party.

But this wasn't a safe, sanitized gathering.

It wasn't a neatly curated dinner for "respectable" people.

It was a raucous celebration filled with tax collectors, sinners, and outsiders.

The Pharisees were horrified. In their culture, to eat with someone was to accept them. Surely no true man of God would associate with people like that.

But Jesus wasn't concerned about appearances. He wasn't trying to impress the religious crowd. He came for the people who knew they needed Him.

"Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." (Luke 5:31-32)

For Jesus, the dinner table wasn't just for eating.
It was for loving, listening, and transforming lives.

This Isn't a New Strategy—It's an Ancient One

Hospitality isn't a trendy new evangelism tactic.

It's how the early church changed the world.

The Roman Emperor Julian, frustrated by how many people were converting to Christianity, once complained, "It is their benevolence to strangers ... that has done most to increase atheism [Christianity]!"

Determined to compete, he launched a government-led kindness campaign. It failed miserably.

Why?

Because you can't manufacture genuine love.

You can't program radical hospitality.

The early Christians weren't just kind because it was strategic. They were kind because they were transformed.

Saint Patrick modeled the same spirit centuries later in Ireland. When he arrived as a missionary in the 5th century, he didn't storm in with arguments or threats. He didn't try to coerce belief.

Instead, Patrick built communities of belonging.

He created places where locals could come, watch, question, experience, and slowly be drawn by the tangible love of Christ. He addressed real needs. He fostered real friendships. He lived the gospel long before he preached it.

And the result? A nation transformed.

We can do the same.

Who's at Your Table?

Hospitality isn't about impressing people with Pinterest-worthy meals. It's about making space and inviting people in.

Who in your life needs an invitation? Maybe it's:

- A coworker who's always eating lunch alone
- A neighbor you've been meaning to get to know
- A family member who feels disconnected
- A friend who's struggling but afraid to say it

You don't need to have all the answers. You don't need a perfectly clean house. You just have to be willing to open your door.

Jesus was called “a friend of tax collectors and sinners”—and it wasn’t meant as a compliment. But he wore it proudly. He understood: Relationships are the bridge where grace walks in.

So, who will you invite this week?

Whose life might be changed—simply because you made room at your table?

Transforming my MIND:

Why do you think Jesus chose to do so much of his ministry around the table, during meals?

In verses 31–32, how does Jesus explain the purpose of His ministry? What metaphor does He use, and why is it so impactful?

Transforming my HEART:

What fears or hesitations do you feel about inviting people into your home—especially those who don't share your faith or lifestyle? Be honest about any discomfort.

How open are you to forming real friendships with people who believe or live differently than you? Why might a shared meal be one of the best ways to start?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Look at your calendar for the next month. Who could you intentionally invite to share a meal—someone currently outside the faith community?

What simple steps could you take to make your home feel more welcoming to guests who might be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with Christian culture?

*Father, thank You for Jesus, who welcomed those the world rejected.
Forgive me for keeping my distance—whether out of fear, judgment, or distraction.
Give me courage to open my table as a doorway to Your love.
Help me see each meal as ministry, each seat as sacred.
May my home be a place where barriers fall, stories are shared, and hearts are drawn to You.
Use me to introduce others to Jesus—not through arguments, but through friendship and welcome.
In His name, amen.*

Day 9

Everyday Glory

Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:31-33

Sharing Christ Without Saying a Word

On a sweltering summer afternoon in rural Alabama, Marcus, a delivery driver, pulled up to the Henderson farm. As he carried a heavy package to the porch, an elderly man stepped out with two ice-cold lemonades.

“You look like you could use this,” the man said with a gentle smile.

Stunned, Marcus gratefully accepted. The man asked about his day, family, and dreams. What began as a routine delivery became a refreshing fifteen-minute conversation.

As Marcus was leaving, he turned back. “Sir, why did you do this?”

The elderly man simply said, “Jesus taught us that how we treat others matters to God. I saw you working hard in this heat and wanted to honor both you and Him.”

Marcus nodded. “I’ve heard about Jesus my whole life, but this is the first time I’ve wanted to know more.”

In that moment, a simple glass of lemonade opened a door that a thousand sermons couldn’t.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ... I try to please everyone in every way. Not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.”

Beyond Sacred and Secular

Many Christians divide life into two categories:

- Sacred: Church, prayer, Bible study
- Secular: Work, eating, chores recreation

Paul erases this line. “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do” includes *everything*. Even the most routine moments and ordinary actions can glorify God.

This revolutionizes Monday mornings, daily commutes, meal prep and homework. There is no “just secular” for Jesus’ followers.

The mundane becomes meaningful when every moment offers an opportunity to magnify God’s character.

The way you respond to frustration, treat workers, or perform when no one’s watching—each becomes a chance to reveal Christ.

The Outward Focus of Glory-Giving

Paul connects glorifying God with how we impact others: “Do not cause anyone to stumble... Not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.”

This reveals something profound: Glorifying God is inherently others focused.

Mark worked at a construction company where crude language and cutting corners were the norm. Without preaching, he simply did excellent work, spoke with integrity, and treated everyone respectfully.

When a coworker finally asked why he was “so different,” Mark shared how Jesus transformed his view of life and work. That conversation led to a Bible study with several crew members—some previously hostile to Christianity.

Mark didn’t aim to start a study. He simply lived to glorify God—and others noticed.

The Stumbling Block Principle

Paul warns “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.”

This includes three groups, covering everyone we might encounter:

- Jews (religious people with strict moral codes)
- Greeks (secular people with different worldviews)
- Church of God (fellow believers at different stages)

Each group has different sensitivities. Paul calls us to be mindful of all of

them—not to compromise, but to be considerate.

Being a witness doesn't mean being a chameleon. It means being intentional in how your actions affect others' ability to see Jesus.

The Pleasing Principle

Paul continues, "Even as I try to please everyone in every way."

This isn't people-pleasing. It's gospel-centered love.

Paul's not suggesting we dilute truth. He's urging us to remove unnecessary barriers, adapting our approach to different people (see 1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

True "pleasing" is about pursuing others' best—especially their salvation.

The Salvation Motive

Paul's end goal is "so that they may be saved" (v.33).

When we truly care about someone's eternity, we think differently:

- We let go of preferences.
- We choose words with care.
- We consider how our conduct shapes their view of Christ.

This doesn't mean we can avoid all offense—the gospel itself is offensive to pride (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). But it does mean we avoid adding to that offense through insensitivity or selfishness.

Everyday Evangelism in Action

What does it look like to live this out in your life?

In the Workplace: Michael, an accountant, consistently produced exceptional work. When unethical shortcuts were suggested, his gentle refusal got attention. A colleague later approached him: "You're different from other accountants I've worked with. Why?" That question opened the door to share his faith.

In Failure: When Thomas' business failed, he spoke openly about his mistakes rather than hiding his bankruptcy. "How can you be so transparent about something so painful?" someone asked. Thomas explained how his identity wasn't in success but in being loved by God. His vulnerability created space for others to share their struggles, and eventually to three people coming to Thomas' church.

In the Neighborhood: Sarah and her kids helped an elderly neighbor

maintain her yard for months. When they finally invited her to church, she replied, “I’ve been watching your family all this time. If your church produces people like you, I want to know more.”

Making It Personal: Five Questions for Everyday Evangelism

Before you speak or act today, ask yourself:

1. Will this glorify God? Does this action reflect God’s character?
2. Will this help or hinder others spiritually?
3. Am I considering different perspectives?
4. Is my motive love?
5. Could this open doors for the gospel?

Beyond Compartmentalization

Many Christians live divided lives—behaving one way at church and another elsewhere. This compartmentalization destroys our witness.

Paul calls us to an integrated life where every action becomes an opportunity to glorify God and draw others to Him.

This week, look for ordinary moments to make Jesus’ love visible:

- How you treat a cashier
- Your response to a family member’s mistake
- Your attitude toward challenging work
- Your conduct when no one is watching
- Your response to unexpected interruptions

When you tear down the wall between sacred and secular, consider others, adapt without compromising, and value their salvation above your comfort—you become a living testimony to the power of Christ.

Transforming my MIND:

How does Paul's view of glorifying God in everyday tasks challenge your view of "sacred" versus "secular"?

What's the difference between unhealthy people-pleasing and Paul's approach to pleasing others?

Transforming my HEART:

Think of a time when someone's actions positively influenced your view of Christianity. What made it powerful?

In what area of your life might your actions be creating a barrier rather than a bridge to the gospel?

Transforming my **STRENGTH**:

What ordinary routine could become an opportunity for extraordinary witness if approached with greater intentionality?

Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege of representing You.

Forgive me for the times I've contradicted my words with my actions, or divided life into compartments.

Help me see each moment as a chance to glorify You and reflect Christ. Make me mindful of how my conduct affects those far from You.

Give me courage to live an integrated life and use my ordinary actions to accomplish Your extraordinary purposes.

May my life tell Your story faithfully.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 10

The Power of Plausible Community

Bible Reading: Acts 2:42-47

When One Voice Becomes a Symphony of Truth

Have you ever tried to convince someone of something obvious to you, only to watch them dismiss it as absurd?

Why does the gospel—so compelling and life-changing to us—often sound like an implausible fairy tale to others?

The answer may lie in what scholars call “plausibility structures”—the invisible framework that determines what people find believable. This insight could transform how you share Jesus with others.

In Acts 2, the early church created a new plausibility structure for the gospel through their shared life. They didn’t just proclaim Christ individually; they embodied him collectively. Luke tells us they “devoted themselves” to fellowship, and the result was extraordinary: “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Their authentic community made the message of Jesus credible.

Beyond Solo Evangelism

Most Christians feel tremendous pressure when it comes to sharing their faith. We believe we must personally answer every question, counter every objection, and present the gospel flawlessly.

Not only is this burden overwhelming—it also limits what our friends experience of Christianity.

You have specific gifts, perspectives, and limitations. Your understanding of faith is shaped by your unique experiences and personality. While authentic,

your witness offers just one facet of the diamond that is the body of Christ.

What if evangelism was never meant to be a solo performance, but a symphony played in community?

The Divine Design of Community Witness

Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs (Luke 10:1). Paul always traveled with companions. Even Jesus himself gathered a community around him.

God designed evangelism to be communal. Each of us reflects a unique aspect of God's image, but none of us reflects it completely. Together, however, we present a fuller, more compelling picture of God's character and love.

The Three Sources of Plausibility

Plausibility structures are shaped by three primary sources: (1) community, (2) experience, and (3) facts, evidence, and data.

Which factor has the strongest influence on what we find plausible?

Though we might assume it's evidence, research consistently shows that *community* has the greatest influence on what we find believable. The beliefs of our trusted friends and family profoundly shape what seems plausible.

The Exponential Power of Multiple Witnesses

When we engage in community evangelism, we:

1. Offer multiple perspectives and complementary gifts
2. Demonstrate authenticity across different personalities, ages, and backgrounds
3. Create support during the transition to faith
4. Lightens the individual burden of witnessing

Together, we paint a richer, more believable picture of the gospel.

The Merging of Universes

Many Christians live in two separate worlds: their Christian friends and their non-Christian friends. These worlds rarely overlap.

What if we intentionally merged them? What if we created environments where our Christian friends and non-Christian friends could meet, connect, and build genuine relationships?

When a room is filled with trusted friends—many of whom believe in Jesus—the plausibility structure shifts dramatically. The gospel no longer feels alien. It becomes believable, and eventually compelling.

Creating Natural Connection Points

Here are a few ways to intentionally merge your worlds:

- Host informal gatherings like dinner parties or game nights where friends from both worlds can mingle naturally. These settings allow your non-Christian friends to observe authentic community without feeling targeted for conversion.
- Connect people through shared interests—sports teams, book clubs, or volunteer projects. Common interests create immediate bonds that transcend religious differences.
- Invite friends to join you in service opportunities where they'll meet Christians putting faith into action.
- Develop regular rhythms of hospitality that create ongoing opportunities for relationships to form.

Building Bridges Between Worlds

One key principle is reciprocity: if you want your friends to come to your events, first go to theirs.

Attend their birthday parties, children's concerts, fundraisers, and sporting events. Show up consistently. Build relational capital.

Then they'll reciprocate when you invite them to a barbecue, game night, or even a church event. It won't feel awkward—it will feel normal, because it flows from the authentic relationship you've developed.

Dr. Gloria Sampson's Return to Faith

Dr. Gloria Sampson, a linguistics professor and former atheist for 52 years, offers a powerful example.

Initially, she accepted a neighbor's invitation to a church event called *Discovering Christ* out of sheer curiosity. But what impacted her most wasn't just the discussions—it was the authenticity, warmth, and intellectual engagement she found within the community.

Gradually, through friendships and honest conversations, her barriers broke down.

Over time, the plausibility of Christianity grew stronger than her objections, leading her back to faith after more than half a century away.

Her story reminds us: authentic community can open hearts where arguments alone cannot.

From Implausible to Inevitable

When we intentionally merge our social worlds, we aren't manipulating people—we're restoring a more natural, integrated approach to relationships. We're moving away from the false dichotomy between “church friends” and “other friends” toward a more authentic wholeness in our social lives.

This approach removes the crushing pressure to be someone's sole witness. It acknowledges our limits while trusting God to work through the diverse gifts of His people.

Transforming My MIND:

In Acts 2:42-47, what elements of the early church's community life would have made the gospel more plausible to others?

Transforming My HEART:

Think about your journey to faith. How did the beliefs of your community influence what you found plausible about Christianity?

How do you feel about merging your Christian and non-Christian friend groups? What fears or hesitations arise?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

Look at your calendar for the past month. How much time have you spent with Christian friends compared to non-Christian friends? How separate are these worlds?

What gathering could you host in the next month that would naturally bring together friends from your Christian and non-Christian circles?

Father, thank You for designing faith to flourish in community.

Forgive me for the ways I have kept my “church life” and “regular life” artificially separated. Teach me to see opportunities to build authentic bridges between my worlds. Give me courage to introduce my friends to one another, trusting You to work through these relationships. Remove any fear that holds me back.

Use the unique combination of voices and lives around me to make Jesus more plausible—and more beautiful—to those who don’t yet know Him.

Let my friendships reflect Your kingdom, where truth is not only proclaimed but embodied in the love of community.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Day 11

Signing Up for the Great Adventure

Bible Reading: Acts 16:6-15

Divine Detours

Have you ever had your plans completely rerouted?

You thought you knew exactly where you were headed—only to watch the road vanish before your eyes, replaced by a path you never would have chosen.

That's exactly what happened to Paul. He had a clear mission and a strategic plan: take the gospel throughout Asia. But at times the Holy Spirit blocked his way, closing doors that made perfect sense. Then came the midnight vision—a call that would send him not east, but west.

This wasn't a minor course correction. It was a divine detour that would change the course of history, bringing the gospel to Europe for the very first time. Paul's willingness to follow God's unexpected redirections led him to Lydia—a businesswoman whose conversion planted the seeds for the first European church.

Paul couldn't have scripted it. And that's exactly what made it an adventure.

The Adventure of Divine Appointments

One of the greatest thrills of living on mission is the adventure of divine appointments—those God-orchestrated encounters we could never arrange ourselves.

Paul's meeting with Lydia wasn't in a synagogue or city center. It happened by a river, with a group of women gathered for prayer. Lydia wasn't a religious scholar or a prominent male leader (the type the culture would have expected God to use) and yet she became the first European convert and church host.

God often works in unexpected places with unexpected people.

And sometimes the impact reaches far beyond anything we can see.

Lee Strobel shares a true story that illustrates this beautifully:

“One average and routine day I was packing up my briefcase and getting ready to leave the newspaper when I felt a gentle nudging of the Holy Spirit. I sensed God wanted me to go into the business office and invite my friend, who was an atheist, to come to Easter services at my church.

I walked into the business office and looked around. The place appeared empty except for my friend who was sitting at his desk. Perfect! I reminded him that Easter was coming and asked if he would want to come to church with Leslie and me. He turned me down cold. I asked if he was interested at all in spiritual matters, and he emphatically said no. I asked if he had any questions about God, and again he said no. I talked to him about why the resurrection was important, but he clearly wasn’t interested.

With all of my evangelistic overtures being instantly shut down, I was beginning to get a little embarrassed. Finally, I stammered, ‘Well, uh, if you’ve ever got any questions, um, I guess you know where my desk is,’ and I walked out.

Fast forward several years. By this time I was a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church. After I spoke one Sunday morning, a middle-aged man came up, shook my hand, and said, ‘I just want to thank you for the spiritual influence you’ve had in my life.’

‘That’s very nice,’ I said, ‘but who are you?’

‘Let me tell you my story,’ he replied. ‘A few years ago, I lost my job. I didn’t have any money, and I was afraid I was going to lose my house. I called a friend of mine who runs a newspaper and said, ‘Do you have any work for me?’ He told me, ‘We need some tiling done at the newspaper. If you can do that, we can pay you.’ Well, I had tiled my bathroom once, so I said, ‘Sure.’

So, one day, not long before Easter, I was on my hands and knees behind a desk in the business office of the newspaper, fixing some tiles, when you walked into the room. I don’t think you even saw me. You started talking about God and Jesus and Easter and the church to some guy, and he wasn’t interested at all. But I was crouching there listening, and my heart was beating fast, and I started thinking, ‘I need God! I need to go to church!’

‘As soon as you left, I called my wife and said, ‘We’re going to church this Easter.’ We ended up coming to this church that Easter, and my wife and my teenage son, and I all came to faith in Christ. I just wanted to thank you.”¹

¹ Strobel, Lee, and Mark Mittelberg. *The Unexpected Adventure: Taking Everyday Risks to Talk with People about Jesus*. Zondervan, 2009, 14-16.

What if Strobel had ignored the Holy Spirit's nudge? He would have missed the chance to be part of this family's redemption story—and missed the adventure God had planned.

Why We Resist the Adventure

If the mission-driven life is so exciting, why do many Christians hesitate to embrace it? Several barriers often hold us back:

Fear of Failure. What if we share our faith and get rejected? What if we can't answer their questions? What if we make things awkward?

These fears can paralyze us—and rob us of the adventure God has waiting.

Here's some good news: Faithfulness in evangelism is not measured by outcomes but by obedience. That means if you share Jesus ... you can't fail.

Comfort Addiction. Real adventures are rarely comfortable. They involve risk, uncertainty, and stepping into the unknown. Our natural pull is toward predictability and ease, but that's not where adventure is found.

Paul could have stayed where it was familiar when the doors to Asia closed. Instead, he remained open to God's redirection—even when they led him across the sea into unfamiliar territory.

Hudson Taylor, the pioneering missionary to China, once wrote: "Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith."

The comfort-driven life and the adventure-filled life rarely overlap.

Misplaced Priorities. Sometimes it's not fear or comfort that holds us back. It's busyness. Our calendars are full, but are they filled with what matters most?

Jim Elliot, the missionary martyr, famously wrote in his journal: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

When we reorient our priorities around God's mission, ordinary days become extraordinary adventures.

Saying Yes to the Adventure

How do we embrace this great adventure of living on mission?

Here are four ways to begin:

1. Be willing to follow divine redirections.

Like Paul, we need to hold our plans loosely and stay responsive to the Spirit's guidance—even when it doesn't make sense to us. The adventure often begins when we let go of our carefully mapped routes.

2. Look for God in unexpected places.

Paul's story in Acts 16 shows us that God often works in the places—and through the people—we least expect.

Each day, ask God to open your eyes to see divine appointments in ordinary places—like your workplace, neighborhood, gym, or coffee shop.

3. Take the next small step.

Adventures unfold one step at a time. You don't need to have the entire conversation mapped out before you start. You just need to take the next step God is showing you.

4. Celebrate the journey, not just the destination.

We often think success in evangelism is measured only by the moment someone trusts Christ. But the adventure is in the whole journey—the relationships built, the conversations had, the seeds planted.

When we learn to find joy in the journey itself, every step becomes part of the adventure, whether or not we see immediate results.

Your Life's Greatest Adventure

Imagine your life if you truly embraced this mission-driven adventure.

Ordinary commutes could become divine appointments.

Regular conversations could open doors to eternal impact.

Predictable days could be transformed by holy interruptions.

Christians who align their lives with the Great Commission experience the deepest kind of joy with God. Their day might start out routine, but there's always the chance God will orchestrate a life-changing conversation, a divine appointment that alters someone's eternity.

That's the real adventure.

Transforming my MIND:

How does God's pattern of redirecting people's plans in Scripture challenge your expectations of how He works?

Which barriers to embracing adventure (fear of failure, comfort addiction, or misplaced priorities) resonates most with you? Why?

Transforming my HEART:

What changes when you see evangelism as an adventure instead of an obligation? What emotions surface when you think of it that way?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

What habit could help you slow down and notice the Holy Spirit's nudges during your day?

Where in your daily routine (gym, office, coffee shop) might God be setting up divine appointments? How can you stay alert to them this week?

God, thank You for inviting me into the adventure of Your mission.

Forgive me for settling for predictability when You've offered me divine surprises.

Help me recognize your redirections, give me courage to follow your Spirit's nudges, and open my eyes to the divine appointments around me. I want to experience the thrill of being used by You to impact eternity.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Day 12

Your Reach Zone

Bible Reading: Acts 1:1-9

Power to Be Witnesses Everywhere

What if Jesus' last words weren't just a command to follow, but a promise to live out?

When Jesus said His followers would be His witnesses, He wasn't only speaking to the first disciples crowded around Him that day. He was speaking across generations—straight to you.

This wasn't just a prediction about the spread of the gospel; it was a pattern for how God's kingdom would keep moving forward. Ordinary people, carrying an extraordinary story, stepping into their everyday worlds.

The word for "witness" in Greek simply means someone who tells what they've seen and experienced. It doesn't take a professional preacher or a polished platform. It just takes someone willing to share what Jesus has done in their life.

And that changes the way we see our everyday moments. Lunch breaks, family dinners, casual texts, quick conversations in grocery store aisles—none of it is random. It's all full of possibility. God has already placed you within a sphere of influence. The question is: Will you step into it?

Witnesses Belong Where They're Needed Most

Jesus didn't stay in safe spaces.

He went exactly where His light was most needed—and where it was often least welcomed.

- He crossed cultural and gender lines to speak with a Samaritan woman who was used to being rejected.
- He sat down at tables with tax collectors and outcasts, even when the religious leaders looked on in disgust.
- He touched the untouchable. Spoke with the overlooked. Defended the condemned.

From heaven's beauty to earth's brokenness, Jesus willingly entered uncomfortable places because that's where love is needed most.

And now He sends us to do the same.

Somewhere along the way, we've forgotten this. We build circles that are comfortable, safe, familiar—mostly surrounded by people who already think like us.

But Jesus said: "No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." (Matthew 5:15)

Your light was never meant to be hidden.

It was meant to shine—right in the middle of a world that needs hope.

Mapping Your Reach Zone

What if your mission field was already mapped out—and you just needed to see it?

Jesus' parting words called His followers to be witnesses not only near home, but across boundaries and around the world (Acts 1:8). That mission still shapes us today.

Think of your life as four expanding circles of influence—your Reach Zone.

Take a moment to map it out: the people God has already placed around you, waiting to experience His love through you.

1. Your Jerusalem (Family & Close Friends)

Your "Jerusalem" is your starting point: the people closest to you, the ones woven into your daily life.

Think about immediate family, extended relatives, and close friends whose relationship with Jesus is uncertain.

Take a moment to write down their names.

2. Your Judea (Friends & Regular Contacts)

Think about neighbors, coworkers, and acquaintances you see regularly—the barista who knows your order, the teammate you chat with, the family friend you catch up with at gatherings.

Trust already exists here. And that trust can become a bridge for conversations about faith. Who are the people you see again and again?

List their names.

3. Your Samaria (People in Your Path Who Are Different)

Your “Samaria” invites you across boundaries.

These are the people who are culturally, socially, or ideologically different from you—people you might not naturally seek out, but who reflect the beautiful diversity of God’s world.

Maybe it’s the coworker whose values seem opposite of yours. Maybe it’s the neighbor with a different background or belief system.

Jesus crossed into uncomfortable spaces with compassion, not condemnation. When you engage in love across differences, you showcase a gospel big enough to embrace everyone.

Write down the names that come to mind.

4. Your Ends of the Earth (Distant Connections & Global Impact)

Your “Ends of the Earth” represents your furthest reach.

These might be distant acquaintances, social media connections, people you rarely see but still influence.

It also includes opportunities to impact lives globally through prayer, generosity, missions, and advocacy.

God’s reach through you may extend farther than you realize. Think creatively: where do your resources, skills, or passions ripple out to places you can’t physically go?

Jot down those names or opportunities.

From Mapping to Witnessing

Mapping your Reach Zone is just the beginning. Now comes the sacred work of engaging.

Here's how you can activate your influence:

Pray Specifically. Move beyond general prayers for “the lost.” Pray by name for each person in your Reach Zone. Ask God for open hearts, divine conversations, and courage to speak when the moment comes. Prayer not only prepares them—it prepares you.

Embody the Message. Your life is speaking before your mouth ever does. In each part of your Reach Zone, ask: Are my actions making Jesus more believable? Your authenticity—how you live, love, and handle struggles—either paves the way for your words or undermines them.

Listen Actively. People share their spiritual journeys when they feel genuinely heard. Practice asking thoughtful questions: “What shapes your perspective on life’s big questions?” “How do you find meaning during difficult times?” “What experiences have formed your view of faith?” Then listen attentively without defensiveness or judgment.

Recognize Divine Appointments. The Holy Spirit loves setting up unexpected moments. Stay alert for conversations that seem to happen “by accident”—often during life transitions, struggles, or celebrations. Those moments aren’t random. They’re invitations.

Speak Naturally. You don’t need fancy words. You’re simply sharing your own experience. “Here’s what I’ve found to be true...” “This is how Jesus has made a difference in my life...” Simple, honest stories have a power that scripted speeches never will.

Cross Boundaries Intentionally. Samaritan conversations don’t happen by accident. Accept invitations you’d usually decline. Engage with people you naturally wouldn’t. Choose love that reaches across divides.

Leverage Unique Opportunities. You may have influence you haven’t fully seen yet. Your career, your gifts, your passions—these can open doors locally and globally. Ask God: “Where have You uniquely positioned me to make an impact beyond what I can see?”

Where Impact Happens

Your greatest spiritual impact doesn't require a brand-new strategy. It happens when you weave your witness into the life you're already living—right in the heart of your Reach Zone.

It looks like a teacher who doesn't compartmentalize her faith but lets it shape her classroom. She cares deeply for her students, partners respectfully with their parents, and handles challenges with grace. Over time, her consistent character becomes a quiet invitation—and when hard seasons hit, conversations about hope naturally emerge.

It looks like a business professional who sees his culturally diverse coworkers as part of his Samaria. Instead of retreating from differences, he leans in—asking questions, listening carefully, sharing lunches. Trust forms. And in moments of workplace stress, spiritual conversations find their way to the surface.

It looks like a college student who keeps showing up at the same coffee shop, remembering the baristas' names, asking about their lives, and following up with genuine care. One day, the questions start coming back her way—and she finds herself sharing about the faith that shapes her.

None of these people followed a complicated program. They simply recognized their Reach Zone, embraced their identity as witnesses, and engaged intentionally with the relationships God had already given them.

From Intimidation to Anticipation

Something shifts when you see your existing relationships as your Reach Zone.

Sharing faith no longer feels like an intimidating obligation. It becomes an exciting opportunity woven into the fabric of your everyday life. Ordinary interactions take on eternal significance. Daily routines become divine appointments.

And the pressure? It lifts.

Witnessing isn't about adding a new task to your schedule. It's about bringing sacred purpose to the schedule you already have.

Remember Jesus' words: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8).

You are not sent alone.

The same Spirit who empowered the first witnesses empowers you today.

Transforming my MIND:

How does Jesus' progression in Acts 1:8 (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth) provide a model for our own spheres of influence today?

Transforming my HEART:

Which names on your Reach Zone list stir the most emotion in you? Why?

How does seeing your current circumstances as a mission field change your perspective?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Who in your Reach Zone could you invest in this week? What small step could you take?

How could you repurpose your routine activities for mission?

Lord Jesus, thank You for entrusting me with the privilege of being Your witness. Open my eyes to see my Reach Zone—the people You have placed around me. Forgive me for overlooking the opportunities You've already provided. Give me courage to step into relationships with purpose, wisdom to recognize divine moments, and love that draws people toward You. Use my everyday life as a witness to Your grace and truth.

In Your name, Amen.

Day 13

Being an Ambassador for Christ

Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Your Identity as Heaven's Representative

At 3:00 AM, the shrill ring of a phone pierced the silence, jolting Brian Whitson from sleep. As a newly appointed U.S. diplomat stationed in a tense Middle Eastern region, Brian was soon racing through dark streets toward a local police station where an American citizen had been detained.

When he stepped inside, Brian wasn't just an individual anymore—he was an embodiment of a nation. Every word he spoke carried the full weight and authority of the United States government. Surrounded by armed officers in unfamiliar territory, he simply said, "I'm here from the U.S. Embassy." Instantly, the atmosphere shifted. His presence meant something far greater than himself.

This is the kind of identity Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 5:20: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

Let that sink in.

The God who spoke galaxies into being, who could proclaim His message through thunder or write it across the sky, instead chooses to speak through ordinary people—through you and me. In every conversation, every act of kindness, every moment of courage, *we represent Him.*

The Original Ambassador

Before calling us to be ambassadors, God sent the ultimate Ambassador—Jesus. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Jesus

was God's perfect representative, the exact imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3).

He said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

What made Jesus the perfect ambassador?

- He fully represented His sender
- He delivered His message with perfect clarity yet adapted to different audiences
- He balanced grace and truth in every encounter—even hostile ones

Jesus didn't just give us a message to deliver—He showed us how to deliver it.

What Ambassadors Do and How They Do It

Being Christ's ambassador is more than a title—it's a calling that shapes everything we do. Here's what it means in practice:

1. Represent Your King, Not Yourself

Ambassadors don't speak on their own behalf. They carry the voice and authority of the one who sent them. As Christ's ambassadors, we enter rooms, conversations, and conflicts not to share our personal opinions—but to bring His compassion, His truth, and His wisdom.

2. Live as a Foreigner with Loyalty to Home

Peter reminds us that we are "foreigners and exiles" in this world (1 Peter 2:11). We understand the language and customs of our culture, but our allegiance belongs to another kingdom. We live here—but we don't belong here.

3. Deliver the Message You've Been Given

Paul makes this mission clear: "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them."

We don't invent or edit the message.

We faithfully deliver it.

4. See People Through God's Eyes

Paul writes, "From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."

As ambassadors, we learn to see with heaven's perspective—not through the lens of status, appearance, or past mistakes. We see people as Jesus does: beloved, pursued, worth dying for.

The Radical Message We Carry

Today's passage describes a breathtaking divine exchange: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

This message transforms everything:

- Our *past* is no longer defined by our failures but by Christ's victory
- Our *present* identity is a "new creation," with divine purpose
- Our *future* is secure regardless of circumstances
- Our *view of others* shifts from temporary categories to eternal worth

Ambassadors in Action

People actually live this out every day.

The Executive

In the 1970's, Norm Miller, chairman of Interstate Batteries, lived a double life—successful businessman, private alcoholic. His colleague, Jim, became an ambassador of Christ not by preaching sermons, but through steady, unpressured friendship.

Jim consistently extended invitations—never forceful, always sincere. He introduced Miller to another businessman whose testimony of overcoming addiction through faith resonated deeply. That single connection, combined with Jim's ongoing support, marked the beginning of Miller's transformation in 1974.

Jim didn't argue or push. He built bridges—and walked across them with love and patience.

The Scientist

Dr. Rosalind Picard, founder of MIT's Affective Computing Research Group, discovered faith through rational investigation.

Now she naturally engages colleagues in conversations about ethics, meaning, and belief—showing that Christ's ambassadors can thrive even in skeptical environments.

The Peacemaker

Immaculée Ilibagiza survived the Rwandan genocide by hiding in a bathroom for 91 days while her family was murdered.

While hiding, she prayed constantly, feeling called to forgive.

Later, when facing one of her family's killers, she said, "I forgive you," and in that moment felt something heavy leave her. Through her work at reconciling, she embodies Christ's message of forgiveness in contexts where such concepts seem impossible.

Ambassadorship in Challenging Contexts

Representing Christ isn't always easy. Jesus made that clear: "*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first*" (John 15:18).

Still, He sends us as ambassadors—into a world that sometimes resists, often ignores, and occasionally opposes.

When Facing Hostility

Not everyone will welcome your message. But how you respond can say as much as what you say.

- Stay grounded in gentleness and respect, even when under fire (1 Peter 3:15-16).
- Look beneath hostility for the pain or misconception often driving it.
- Respond to heat with light. Bless those who curse you (Luke 6:28).

When Facing Indifference

Often the greatest challenge isn't opposition but apathy. When people seem indifferent:

- Create curiosity through thoughtful questions rather than pushing for immediate decisions.
- Follow Jesus' lead: connect to felt needs (like thirst, hunger, or meaning) as gateways to deeper spiritual truth.
- Show how faith speaks into real-life issues—not just the afterlife, but everyday life.

When Doubting Your Effectiveness

Even faithful ambassadors sometimes feel discouraged.

Remember: Results aren't your responsibility. Paul reminds us, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Draw confidence from your Sender's presence: "*I am with you always*" (Matthew 28:20). Your authority doesn't come from results—it comes from who sent you.

Practical Ambassador Skills

What does an effective ambassador do?

Know Your Message Deeply. Can you explain the gospel clearly, simply, and compellingly? Practice articulating reconciliation with God in everyday language that connects with real people.

Cultivate Credibility Through Character. Your life should reinforce your words. Paul urges, “Live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). Credibility grows when your character matches your message.

Listen Before Speaking. Great ambassadors are great students of culture. Take time to understand others’ worldviews, questions, and objections. Listening builds bridges that speaking alone cannot.

Balance Truth and Grace. Paul writes of “*speaking the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15). Truth without love wounds. Love without truth withholds. But together, they bring transformation.

The Divine Invitation

Notice Paul’s intensity: “We *implore* you on Christ’s behalf...”

There’s an urgency here that comes from understanding what’s at stake—eternal reconciliation with God.

As you move through your day, remember your diplomatic status. In every conversation—whether at work, in your neighborhood, with family, or among strangers—you are Heaven’s official representative.

You may be the only ambassador of Christ some people ever meet.

What if you saw the cashier, your difficult colleague, your neighbor, or the person who cut you off in traffic as someone God longs to reconcile with? How would that change your words, your tone, your patience?

You carry Heaven’s credentials. Your diplomatic pouch contains the most valuable message in human history. And the One who commissioned you promises His presence with every word you speak and every step you take.

Ambassador of Christ—what will you do with this sacred trust today?

Transforming My MIND:

What would it look like to stop viewing people “from a worldly point of view” (v.16)? How might that change your conversations, assumptions, or reactions?

How is being an “ambassador for Christ” a richer, more relational image than being a salesperson, debater, or teacher? What are the implications for how we share our faith?

Transforming My HEART:

When have you truly felt the honor—and weight—of representing Jesus to someone? What made that moment so meaningful?

What fears or doubts keep you from embracing your role as Christ’s ambassador? What truth in this passage speaks to those struggles?

Transforming My **STRENGTH**:

What's one intentional way you can train your eyes this week to see people as God does?

In what area—integrity, humility, compassion, or patience—might God be calling you to grow so that your life better reflects the message you carry?

Lord Jesus, thank You for being the perfect Ambassador who revealed the Father to us.

Thank You for the extraordinary privilege of continuing Your mission.

Help me see people as You see them—not through worldly categories but as precious souls You long to reconcile to Yourself.

Give me Your heart for both the hostile and the indifferent.

When I fail as Your ambassador, restore me quickly.

Give me both courage and compassion as I represent You today. May those I encounter see something of You in me. Amen.

Day 14

Season to Shine

Bible Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

When Ordinary Christians Create Extraordinary Impact

Most of us don't expect life-changing encounters on a city bus. But in San Francisco, one bus driver turned an ordinary route into a moving sanctuary—and the city couldn't help but notice.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* once ran a front-page story about Linda Wilson-Allen, a city bus driver whose love for her passengers made her bus feel like a second home. Linda learned the names of her regulars. She waited if someone wasn't quite at the stop. She carried grocery bags for the elderly. She invited lonely newcomers to her own family's Thanksgiving dinner.

In a world accustomed to indifference, her radical kindness sparked a ripple effect. Passengers brought her gifts, celebrated her birthdays, and even offered up their vacation homes for her family. At the end of each route, Linda would smile and say, "That's all. I love you. Take care"—often to the sound of spontaneous applause.

When a puzzled reporter asked where this extraordinary spirit came from, Linda simply said, "It starts at 2:30 a.m. when I get down on my knees to pray." Later, she told Pastor John Ortberg: "When I'm driving, I'm ministering... God shows me who needs a little extra care. He just shows you. So, you let your light shine that others might see your good works."

Linda didn't stand on a stage. She didn't lead a movement. She simply lived as salt and light on a city bus—and an entire city took notice.

This is exactly what Jesus envisioned when He said, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." Ordinary people, making an extraordinary impact through everyday faithfulness.

The Profound Metaphors of Influence

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses two powerful images to describe how His followers are meant to shape the world: salt and light.

In Jesus' day, salt wasn't just a flavor enhancer—it was precious enough to serve as currency. Light wasn't taken for granted either; in a world without electricity, light meant safety, direction, and life itself.

Notice: Jesus doesn't say, "Try to be salt and light." He says, "You are salt. You are light." It's not an aspiration—it's our identity. It's not reserved for the spiritually elite—it's the calling of every believer.

Let's dig deeper into what these metaphors reveal about how we're meant to live.

Salt: Subtle But Significant Influence

Salt works quietly, but its impact is profound. It reminds us that even small, faithful acts can hold back the decay and bring out the beauty God intended.

1. Salt Preserves

In a world before refrigeration, salt kept food from spoiling. Similarly, Christians help preserve what is good and true in society. Research even shows that when church engagement rises, rates of crime, divorce, and teen pregnancy fall. Your very presence can slow decay.

2. Salt Enhances

Salt doesn't dominate food—it draws out its best flavors. As Christians, we're called not to overpower culture, but to bring out its God-given beauty through excellence, compassion, and integrity.

3. Salt Creates Thirst

Salty food makes people thirsty.

Our lives should provoke a spiritual thirst in others—a longing for the hope, peace, and purpose we have in Christ.

4. Salt Must Make Contact

Salt in the shaker is useless. It must touch food to do any good. Likewise, faith that stays isolated can't transform anything. Real impact happens through real engagement with people and culture.

5. Salt Can Lose Its Effectiveness

In the ancient world, impure salt could become worthless. When Christians blend in with the world so much that there's no distinction, we lose our preserving, enhancing power. The world doesn't need more sameness—it needs salty, grace-filled difference.

Light: Visible and Transformative Influence

If salt works quietly, light works visibly. Jesus moves from unseen influence to unavoidable visibility.

1. Light Dispels Darkness

Even a small candle can drive back a roomful of shadows.

Our lives are meant to shine truth, beauty, and hope into the darkest corners. As Paul writes, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

2. Light Provides Direction

Before GPS, travelers relied on light to find their way.

When people watch your life, they should glimpse a better path—one shaped by grace, wisdom, and courage.

3. Light Exposes Reality

Light shows things as they are, exposing both brokenness and beauty.

Christians are called to lovingly reveal the truth: that while the world is deeply broken, God's redemption is breathtakingly real.

4. Light Cannot Be Hidden

A city on a hill stands out—so does a life lit up by Christ. True faith naturally draws attention, not for our own glory, but for God's.

5. Light Must Be Deliberately Displayed

Jesus said no one lights a lamp only to cover it.

Similarly, we must intentionally place our lives where they can have maximum impact.

The Ultimate Purpose: Pointing to God

Jesus sums it up: “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

We don't live salty, radiant lives to be admired—we do it so people are drawn to the Source of our goodness. Our influence should spark wonder not about us, but about Him.

We must be distinct enough to be noticed but humble enough to point beyond ourselves to God. This requires both courage (to stand out) and humility (to point upward).

From Metaphor to Mission: Practical Application

How do we live as salt and light in practical, everyday ways?

Embrace Your Identity. Before you do anything, embrace who Jesus says you already are. You ARE salt. You ARE light. This isn't about striving to become something but living consistently with who Christ declares you to be.

Develop Christ-like Character. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) sketch the qualities that make your influence irresistible.

Engage Thoughtfully with Culture. Stay engaged but distinct. Neither isolation nor compromise fulfills your calling.

Perform "Visible Good Deeds." Jesus specifically mentions "good deeds" as what people will see. Serve in ways that reflect God's justice, compassion, and love.

Prioritize Relationships. Genuine connections—like Linda's with her passengers—carry the deepest influence.

Speak Words That Build and Bless. Let your speech be "full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6).

Accept the Cost. Jesus warned that light-bearers would face opposition (Matthew 5:11-12). Don't be surprised when your distinctive values or choices are questioned or criticized.

A World That Needs Both Salt and Light

Our world doesn't need more noise. It needs more flavor.

It doesn't need more outrage. It needs more light.

The question isn't whether you have influence—you do. The question is: what kind of influence will you exert?

You are the evidence that God's kingdom is already breaking into the world.

Transforming my MIND:

What does Jesus mean when he talks about salt losing its saltiness? What might that look like today?

How does the context of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) shape our understanding of what it means to be salt and light?

Transforming my HEART:

When have you most clearly felt your “saltiness” or “brightness” making a difference in someone’s life?

In what environments or relationships do you find it most challenging to maintain your distinctive Christian witness?

Transforming my **STRENGTH**:

What specific “good deeds” might God be calling you to perform this week that would point others to Him?

Father, thank You for declaring that I am salt and light in this world.

Forgive me for times when I've hidden my light or lost my saltiness by blending in with the world around me.

Help me to live with such authentic love, integrity, and compassion that others are drawn to You. May my words and actions create spiritual thirst and provide illumination that points clearly to You.

Give me courage to stand out when necessary and humility to ensure You receive the glory. Use my life today as both salt and light in every relationship and situation where You place me.

In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

Day 15

The Gospel You Live

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-17

When Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Have you ever noticed how quickly people tune out when they detect a disconnect between what someone says and how they live? The health coach who sneaks fast food. The financial advisor drowning in personal debt. The parent who demands honesty while telling white lies.

In a world flooded with empty words, people crave authenticity. They look past what we say to how we actually live.

That's why your most powerful tool for sharing Jesus isn't a polished gospel presentation—it's your everyday life.

Peter offers a radical strategy in today's reading. He urges believers to "abstain from sinful desires" and "live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:11-12). He even claims that such lives can "silence the ignorant talk of foolish people" (v.15).

What if people's main obstacle to believing in Jesus isn't intellectual doubt, but the disconnect between our message and our lifestyle? And what if the clearest proof of the gospel isn't our arguments—but our transformed lives?

The Witness That Cannot Be Ignored

Jennifer Fulwiler wasn't merely indifferent to Christianity—she was convinced it was intellectually bankrupt. Raised on logic and science, she saw faith as wishful thinking. Christians, she thought, checked their brains at the door.

What changed her mind? Not arguments, but authenticity. When Jennifer was overwhelmed with a newborn, her Christian neighbor Julie stepped in. She didn't try to convert her—she just showed up with meals, offered to help, and listened.

Julie's consistent care earned her the right to gently challenge Jennifer's assumptions. Through a combination of lived faith and honest conversation, Jennifer eventually came to believe in Jesus in 2007.

Julie's witness reflected Peter's wisdom. Writing to believers under pressure, Peter didn't tell them to sharpen their debating skills. He told them to live with such integrity that even skeptics would take notice.

This kind of lifestyle witness works in at least three ways:

1. It sparks curiosity.

When you respond to hardship with peace, forgive the unforgivable, or live with joyful simplicity, people notice. Your life raises questions.

2. It builds credibility.

Words fall flat when they're not backed by character. But when your neighbors see your kindness, honesty, and patience—your words gain weight.

3. It makes the gospel attractive.

The word "honorable" (v.12) can also mean "beautiful." A life of quiet integrity is not just right—it's compelling. Like great art, it draws people in.

When the Sequence Gets Reversed

For centuries, evangelism followed a logical pattern: (1) What I say is true; (2) If it's true, then you must believe it; (3) If you believe it, you must live it.

Traditional evangelism often followed this sequence:

Truth → Belief → Changed Life.

But in a skeptical culture, the sequence often flips:

Changed Life → Believability → Interest in Truth.

Before people consider Christianity's truth claims, they want to see that it leads to a life worth living. Your neighbor is unlikely to consider Jesus seriously until they've seen His impact in you.

When Hypocrisy Nullifies Words

The opposite is also true: inconsistency kills credibility. Hypocrisy can cancel even the most eloquent gospel explanation.

This doesn't require moral perfection. It means honest alignment between what we say and how we live. When we display Christian symbols but behave rudely, talk about grace but act selfishly, or preach love but gossip freely, we send a confusing message.

Peter reminds us that we live “in full view of people who are not yet Christians” (v.12). Every interaction broadcasts something about Christ, whether we realize it or not.

The Testimony of Small Things

Lifestyle witness often shows up in quiet, daily moments—not grand gestures:

- **Integrity in routine transactions.** Returning extra change when the cashier makes a mistake. Honoring commitments even when inconvenient.
- **Kindness to those who can't benefit you.** The way you treat service workers, elderly neighbors, or socially awkward colleagues speaks volumes.
- **Patience in frustrating situations.** How you respond to traffic delays, long lines, or others' mistakes demonstrates whether your faith truly shapes your reactions.
- **Generosity beyond obligation.** When you give not just your tithe but your time, not just your duty but your delight, you reflect the God who “so loved the world that He gave” (John 3:16).
- **Forgiveness when wronged.** Nothing demonstrates the reality of grace more powerfully than extending it to those who've hurt you—especially when they don't deserve it.

Becoming a Spiritual Chaplain

Lifestyle witness doesn't just protect your credibility—it invites deeper conversations. As you consistently live with Christlike care, people begin to trust you with their struggles. You become a kind of “spiritual chaplain” in their lives.

When crisis hits, people look for a non-anxious, compassionate presence. If you've lived with integrity and interest, you'll be one of the first people they call.

A key part of this role is asking good follow-up questions. “How are things at home?” might be followed with, “No, *really*—how are things at home?” That second question shows you care about what's beneath the surface.

A Life Worth Questioning

Peter gives a similar charge later in his letter: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

Notice the order: first, a life that provokes questions. Then, the opportunity to give an answer.

If no one is asking about your hope, your life might not be displaying it. If your peace looks like everyone else's panic, what would make them curious?

This doesn't mean trying to act weirdly spiritual. It means living in such a Christlike way that people can't help but wonder why.

Transforming My MIND:

According to 1 Peter 2:11-17, what aspects of "honorable living" might silence critics and attract interest in the gospel?

What connection does Peter make between personal holiness and evangelistic effectiveness?

Transforming My HEART:

In what areas of your life do you feel the greatest disconnect between what you say you believe and how you actually live?

How does it feel knowing others are forming impressions about Jesus based on your life?

Transforming My **STRENGTH**:

What habit might be undermining your witness? What one step could you take this week to bring greater alignment?

In what relationship or environment has God positioned you to be a “de facto chaplain”?

Lord, forgive me for the times when my life has contradicted the message of Your grace. Help me live each day aware that my actions speak louder than words. Make me so loving, patient, and kind that others are drawn to the source of these qualities. Guard me from hypocrisy, and shape me into someone others can trust with their questions. Let my life create a curiosity that leads to conversations about Jesus—and may I respond with gentleness and respect. In Jesus' name, amen.

Day 16

The Engagement Pathway

Bible Reading: Luke 19:1-10

Beyond Small Talk: Navigating the Engagement Pathway

Have you noticed how some conversations remain perpetually shallow while others dive into life's deepest waters?

The difference rarely happens by accident.

Meaningful connection follows a strategic progression—an *engagement pathway*—that moves from surface-level exchanges to heart-level sharing, ultimately opening doors for spiritual impact.

In today's passage, Jesus masterfully demonstrates this principle with Zacchaeus. Notice the progression: first, Jesus initiates connection by acknowledging Zacchaeus, calling him by name when others only saw a despised tax collector.

Then, instead of preaching at him, Jesus says, "I must stay at your house today"—an invitation to shared time and deeper relationship.

This intentional engagement leads to a transformational encounter where Zacchaeus' entire life changes direction.

What's remarkable is how Jesus bypasses the expected religious approach. He doesn't begin with Zacchaeus' sins or a theological lecture. Instead, he creates relational space through a meal in Zacchaeus' home—a context where authentic connection can flourish.

The result speaks for itself: "Today salvation has come to this house."

What if the key to spiritual influence isn't primarily about having the right words but about cultivating the right relational context for those words to be heard?

The Engagement Pathway for Connection

Think of relationship development as a strategic pathway with three distinct stages we navigate as trust grows:

Stage 1: Casual Contact — This is the entry point. Conversations at this stage revolve around surface-level topics—interests, activities, observations: “What did you do this weekend?” “Have you seen that new movie?” “How about this weather?” These exchanges feel safe because they’re descriptive, factual, and rarely controversial. We’re simply exchanging information.

Stage 2: Meaningful Dialogue — As trust builds, conversations naturally shift toward values and opinions: “Why did you choose that career?” “How do you approach parenting?” These conversations reveal principles, motivations, and deeper convictions.

Stage 3: Spiritual Conversations — When the relationship deepens further, we’re able to explore faith and ultimate questions: “What gives your life meaning?” “Do you believe in God?” “Do you ever think about spiritual things?” At this stage, the gospel can be shared in a natural and relational way, rooted in trust.

Most relationships get stuck at Stage 1.

We exchange pleasantries with neighbors, discuss sports with coworkers, and never venture deeper.

But genuine influence grows as we intentionally build trust and journey through all three stages, creating space for God to work in powerful ways.

The Coffee-Dinner-Gospel Sequence

How do we navigate this engagement pathway with wisdom and respect? In his book *How to Share Jesus (Without Being That Guy)*, Sam Chan suggests a simple progression:

Start with Coffee. A brief, low-commitment meeting in a public space where conversations focus on activities and shared interests – Stage 1 of the pathway. Here, you’re laying relational groundwork.

Move to Dinner. A longer, more personal setting where people naturally open up about deeper topics. Sharing meals fosters trust and leads to value-based discussions – Stage 2 of the pathway.

Create Space for Gospel Conversations. After multiple interactions and trust-building, faith conversations emerge organically. Having listened well, you’ve earned the right to share your beliefs with authenticity.

This progression isn't manipulative—it reflects how healthy relationships naturally develop. We save our deepest stories and beliefs for those who've proven trustworthy through progressive levels of connection.

Asking Questions That Advance the Pathway

The secret to guiding conversations forward? Thoughtful questions that respect comfort while inviting openness.

To move casual contact to meaningful dialogue, try questions like:

- “What drew you to that career/hobby/activity?”
- “What do you enjoy most about that?”
- “How did you decide to pursue that path?”
- “What was the biggest challenge you faced?”

To transition from values to worldview, consider questions like:

- “What shaped your perspective on that issue?”
- “Has your thinking on that changed over time? How?”
- “What do you think gives people purpose in life?”
- “Has faith played any role in your life journey?”

These questions signal genuine interest, creating space for deeper connection without forcing the conversation.

Creating Safe Spaces for Vulnerability

People only go deep when they feel secure. Here's how to foster that trust:

Demonstrate Authentic Interest. Listen to understand, not just to respond.

People can tell when they're a project versus when they're truly valued.

Honor Their Pace. Some open up quickly; others take time. Allow trust to build at its own speed.

Reciprocate Appropriately. When someone shares vulnerably, respond with similar transparency. Resist the urge to change the subject or outshine their story.

Respect Boundaries. If someone signals discomfort with a particular topic, don't press. Their reluctance likely isn't permanent rejection but a sign they need more time.

Practice Non-Judgment. People reveal their true selves only when they know they won't be rejected or criticized. This doesn't mean abandoning your convictions, but it does mean creating space where differences can be explored with respect.

From Transaction to Transformation

When we rush straight to gospel presentations without building relational foundations, we reduce evangelism to a *transaction*—a mere exchange of information. But Jesus modeled a *transformational* approach that honored the full humanity of those he encountered.

Consider how Jesus engaged Zacchaeus. He didn't immediately confront his corruption or launch into a sermon about honesty. Instead, he created context for relationship through a shared meal in Zacchaeus's home. The result? A changed life.

Abdu Murray's journey from Islam to Christianity powerfully illustrates this principle. As a devout Muslim and skilled lawyer, Abdu prided himself on dismantling Christian arguments. When he befriended Tim, a Christian attorney, Abdu viewed him primarily as an intellectual sparring partner.

What shifted his perspective wasn't primarily Tim's theological arguments, but his consistent friendship over *nine years*. Tim invited Abdu to meals, maintained relationship through disagreements, and demonstrated genuine care during family crises. This sustained progression along the engagement pathway created space for Abdu to reconsider his objections to Christianity without losing face.

Today, Abdu is a speaker and author who shares his testimony about his journey from Islam to Christianity.

Practical Steps for Navigating the Engagement Pathway

Want to engage people along this pathway? Try these strategic steps:

Map Your Relationships. Identify where each of your relationships fall on the engagement pathway. Are most of your connections stuck at Stage 1? Which relationships show potential for deeper development?

Create Consistent Rhythms of Connection. Regularly meet for coffee, meals, or shared activities to cultivate deeper relationships.

Upgrade Interactions Over Time. After establishing coffee-level comfort, extend dinner invitations or suggest activities requiring more time investment. These extended contexts naturally facilitate deeper conversation.

Ask Thoughtful, Progressive Questions. Move deliberately from surface-level inquiries to values-based questions—and, when the time is right, to faith-focused conversations. Always match the pace to their comfort level.

Pray About Timing. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you on when to shift gears toward spiritual topics.

Be Patient with the Process. Transformation takes time. The goal isn't to rush but to walk alongside people as they journey toward Jesus.

The Discipline of Strategic Engagement

In an instant-gratification culture, slow relational investment can feel frustrating. We long for immediate results—quick conversions, powerful testimonies, visible fruit.

But Jesus, who had only three years of public ministry, still took time to build relationships before revealing His deepest truths. He understood that lasting transformation happens in the context of growing trust.

The engagement pathway isn't merely a tactic; it mirrors how human hearts open over time.

Remember: the goal isn't merely to create an opportunity to speak about Jesus, but to embody His patient, respectful love in the process. When we do, we don't just make the gospel plausible, we make its power visible in the way we relate to others.

Transforming my MIND:

How did Jesus' approach to Zacchaeus differ from what other religious leaders might have done? What does this teach us about building relationships?

How can understanding the engagement pathway help us be more intentional in building connections?

Transforming my HEART:

When has someone taken time to truly know you before sharing important truths? How did that affect your openness to what they said?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Think of a relationship that could go deeper. What specific next step could you take this week?

What questions could you have ready to help you shift a casual conversation into something meaningful?

*Father, help me walk with people at their pace, loving them as You do.
Teach me patience in building trust and wisdom in knowing when to speak.
May my relationships reflect Your grace and may those I engage experience Your love
through me.
In Your name. Amen.*

Day 17

Questions That Transform

Bible Reading: Luke 10:25-37

The Power of a Well-Asked Question

Picture yourself in a conversation about faith.

Instead of rushing in with an answer, you pause—and ask a question.

What happens next?

Often, the most transformative moments don't begin with information—they begin with invitation. Not with explanations, but with thoughtful questions that create space for reflection.

Which do you think is more powerful: having all the right answers, or asking the right questions?

In our information-saturated world, we're trained to believe that knowledge is power. But Scripture tells a different story. Some of the most life-changing moments start not with certainty, but with a question that opens the door to discovery.

Jesus: The Master Question-Asker

No one modeled this better than Jesus.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus was asked 183 questions—yet He directly answered only three of them. Instead, He asked 307 questions of His own.

It's been said that Jesus didn't hold Q&A sessions.

He had Q&Q sessions.

In today's reading, a religious expert asks Jesus a pointed question. But instead of giving a quick answer, Jesus responds with His own: "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (Luke 10:26)

Jesus knew the real issue wasn't the man's question—it was what lay beneath it. Self-justification. A desire to define love on his own terms.

Through a series of questions—and a powerful story about a Good Samaritan—Jesus led the man to confront his assumptions and see love in a whole new way.

Questions aren't just tools for gathering information. They're gateways to revelation—and relationship.

When someone asks us a direct question about faith, our instinct is often to launch into answers. But Jesus shows us a better way: Sometimes, the most loving response isn't to answer, but to ask.

We tend to think questions are for acquiring knowledge. Jesus shows they can be used to invite conversation—and to show we care.

This is profound.

When you ask a good question and listen with real attention, you say something powerful:

You matter.

Your thoughts matter.

Your story matters.

Jesus' approach looks very different from how we often think about evangelism. We feel pressure to defend, explain, and persuade. But Jesus didn't treat people like projects. He treated them like souls to be loved.

Questions That Led an Atheist to Faith

Holly Ordway's journey to faith beautifully illustrates the power of well-asked questions.

As a professor of English and critical theory, Holly was proud of her intellectual framework. To her, religion was outdated at best—and oppressive at worst. She believed smart people outgrew belief in God. And she considered herself far too smart to ever become a Christian.

When Holly cautiously raised her objections to Christianity with her fencing coach, Josh, she expected the usual defensiveness. Maybe a quick apology. Maybe a debate.

But Josh did something surprising. He didn't argue. He didn't preach. He asked questions.

Genuine, thoughtful questions that honored her mind while gently nudging her to think more deeply: "What makes you so certain that material reality is all there is?" "What do you find most compelling about your current worldview? What questions does it leave unanswered?"

These weren't traps. They were invitations.

Josh's questions created safe space—where Holly could explore ideas she had never dared to examine. And slowly, brick by brick, the intellectual walls she had built began to crumble.

Questions In a Hot Tub

Jan and her friends had come to learn how to share Jesus more effectively.

While staying at a hotel for an evangelism conference, they decided to relax in the hot tub one evening.

That's when two teenage girls joined them. Almost immediately, one of the girls, Brittany, began excitedly telling her friend about an upcoming Wicca gathering she planned to attend.

Normally, Jan's first instinct might have been to retreat—maybe get out of the hot tub or at least warn Brittany about the dangers of witchcraft.

But she remembered what she had learned earlier that day: Effective evangelism often starts not by speaking, but by asking.

So instead of reacting, Jan simply said, “Wow, you really sound excited about this.”

That one question opened a floodgate.

Brittany launched into a detailed explanation of why she was drawn to neo-pagan rituals. And as Jan listened—and kept asking gentle questions—the deeper story began to surface.

Brittany hadn't just stumbled into Wicca. She had been through deep trauma during high school. The Wiccan community had accepted her when no one else would.

“I've gone through so much junk just trying to make it through high school,” Brittany confessed, “that I'll probably be in therapy for the rest of my life.”

Jan leaned in with compassion and mirrored back what she heard, “It sounds like it's hard for you to even imagine a future where you'd be free from all that pain.”

Brittany's response stunned her.

Tears welled up in her eyes. And she said, “Sometimes I wish I could be born all over again. I'd really like to start from scratch.”

Because Jan asked questions and truly listened, Brittany felt safe enough to voice her deepest longings—longings that led naturally into a conversation about Jesus, the one who offers new birth and new life.

No forced transition.
No awkward pivot.
Just a heart, opening wide.

Overcoming Our Hesitation

If asking questions is so powerful, why don't we do it more often?

Sometimes it's fear: Fear of not having all the answers. Fear of looking foolish. Fear of opening a can of worms we can't handle.

But here's the beautiful irony: Asking questions actually reduces these fears.

Questions take the pressure off you. They shift the conversation from what you know to what they think and feel.

And they remind us of an even deeper truth: Conversion is God's work, not ours.

When we ask thoughtful questions, we prepare the soil. We plant seeds. We create space.

But we don't have to force the harvest.

That's liberating.

If someone wanted to change your mind, wouldn't you rather they first listen to your story and understand your heart?

When we show that same courtesy—when we slow down, ask, and truly listen—we create the conditions for real dialogue.

People cannot hear the answers to questions they haven't yet asked.

Good questions help people discover what they're truly seeking—and once they are seeking, they are ready for the Answer only Jesus can give.

This week, try it.

When you feel the urge to give an answer, pause—and ask a question instead.

Pay attention to what happens. See how a conversation you thought would be routine—or maybe even difficult—becomes something deeper, more honest, more sacred.

Remember: The goal isn't to win an argument. The goal is to invite a real conversation—to invite meaningful dialogue.

When we ask thoughtful questions, we mirror the way Jesus engaged with others, and we create space for the Holy Spirit to work.

Transforming my MIND:

In the passage from Matthew, how did Jesus use questions to help the rich young man understand his own spiritual condition?

How does asking questions differ from the typical evangelistic approach many Christians have been taught? What advantages does it offer?

Transforming my MIND:

When has someone asked you questions that made you feel truly seen and valued? How did that impact your openness to that person?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

What is one relationship in your life where you could practice asking more thoughtful questions this week?

How might you create more margin in your schedule for unhurried conversations where deeper questions can naturally arise?

Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus, who showed how powerful questions can open hearts.

Give me courage to let go of needing all the answers and the patience to truly hear others. When I'm tempted to defend or explain, remind me to ask questions that honor and invite.

Make me a better listener. Let me hear not just words, but the longings beneath them. Holy Spirit, guide my conversations. Show me where questions can open doors to faith. Remind me that transformation is Your work—I simply prepare the soil through love.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Day 18

Listening with Love

Bible Reading: James 1:19-25

When Silence Speaks Louder Than Words

Think back to a time when someone truly listened to you—not just waiting for their turn to speak, but giving you their full, undistracted attention. How did that make you feel? Valued? Understood? Known? That kind of listening is rare in our noisy, fast-paced world. Yet it may be one of the most powerful ways to share the gospel.

Before people care what you know, they need to know that you care. And nothing communicates care more clearly than genuine, attentive listening. It's the missing ingredient that can transform awkward religious debates into life-changing encounters with God's love.

James makes a striking connection between listening and righteousness:

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” (James 1:19–20)

What if representing Christ faithfully isn't about always having the right answers—but about having the right ears?

The Sacred Art of Listening

In a culture addicted to noise and self-expression, true listening is a rare and sacred gift. We prize speaking, posting, and being heard. Social media amplifies voices but rarely cultivates patience or understanding.

Yet James shows us that listening isn't just good communication advice—it's a spiritual discipline. Listening well is an act of humility and love. It's not about being polite; it's about reflecting Christ.

Think about it: When was the last time you felt drawn to someone who talked over you, dismissed your ideas, or rushed to correct you? Likely never.

The same is true in spiritual conversations. People are not persuaded by arguments alone. They are drawn through relationships—and relationships are built through listening.

Perhaps one of the greatest evangelistic tools isn't a perfectly polished gospel presentation—but the simple, powerful act of listening with love.

Holly's Story: How Listening Opened the Door

Yesterday, we saw how asking good questions can open hearts. But without attentive listening, even the best questions fall flat. Asking without truly hearing communicates that we care more about our agenda than about the person before us.

Remember Holly Ordway—a proud atheist and English professor who once considered herself “too smart” to believe in God. Her journey toward faith began not through heated arguments, but through the patient listening of her fencing coach, Josh.

Instead of rushing to counter Holly's objections to Christianity, Josh demonstrated real curiosity about her perspective. He listened without defensiveness, even when she expressed anger or frustration toward religion.

“He didn't act as if my objections were stupid,” Holly later wrote. “He took them seriously because he took me seriously.”

As trust grew, Holly shared deeper struggles—her disillusionment with materialism, her hunger for meaning, her hidden fears that something vital was missing. Josh listened without judgment, creating a safe space for her to wrestle.

The Patience That Breaks Down Walls

Josh's impact wasn't just in his answers—it was in his patience. He knew Holly's objections weren't purely intellectual; they were tangled with emotional wounds and past disappointments. He understood that change wouldn't happen overnight.

Rather than forcing conversations, he invited Holly into authentic Christian community—dinners with believers who lived out a vibrant, thoughtful faith.

He asked open-ended questions and listened carefully, giving her space to process.

“What struck me most,” Holly later reflected, “was that he never rushed me. His willingness to sit with uncertainty showed me that his faith wasn’t fragile.”

Over time, Holly’s defenses crumbled. After months—and many patient conversations—she surrendered to Christ, a journey she recounts in her memoir *Not God’s Type*.

Her story is a living testimony: listening is not passive. It’s profoundly transformational.

The Three Layers of Listening

When we look at Jesus’ interactions, we notice something fascinating: He often moved through different layers of conversation. And good questions helped Him do it. Here are the three layers we can learn to recognize:

Interests Layer: Surface Level Topics

This is where conversations usually start—safe, everyday topics like the weather, sports, or weekend plans. We might ask:

- Where did you grow up?
- What do you like about living in this area?
- What do you do for a living?
- What do you do for fun?

These questions build connection. They’re like laying down stepping stones.

Values Layer: Significant Topics

Once trust grows, we can gently move deeper—into what people care about and why. We might ask:

- What are you looking for in life?
- What happens if you don’t find what you’re looking for?
- What’s important to you?
- What values do you want to instill in your kids?
- How did you come to that conclusion?
- Do you have faith?

These kinds of questions uncover hopes, dreams, struggles, and beliefs.

World View Layer: Soul Topics.

Finally, we can reach the heart—questions about God, meaning, and eternity. It might be questions like:

- What did your parents teach you about spiritual things?
- Do you ever pray?
- Do you think there's more to life than you can see?
- What do you believe happens after we die?
- What do you think God sees when he looks at you?

When someone responds, the most powerful follow-up is simple: “Wow. Tell me more.”

And then—really listen.

Not to fix. Not to debate.

But to understand.

Listening Like Jesus

Jesus was the master of holy listening.

When blind Bartimaeus cried out for mercy, Jesus paused and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51)—even though he already knew the answer.

When two disciples on the road to Emmaus poured out their confusion and despair, Jesus listened first (Luke 24:17–24), only later revealing deeper truth.

True listening doesn't diminish truth—it dignifies the person. It prepares the heart to receive.

Listening Without Losing Conviction

Listening with love does not mean agreeing with everything. Jesus dined with sinners and listened to outcasts, but he never compromised holiness. He met people where they were, honored their stories, and then gently invited them into transformation.

We can do the same.

Listening without judgment isn't weak—it's Christlike strength under control.

We don't affirm every belief, but we affirm every person's worth.

Seven Ways to Become a Better Listener

If we want to listen like Jesus, we must be intentional. Here's how:

1. *Be Fully Present*—Set down your phone, make eye contact, and focus entirely on the other person.
2. *Practice Reflective Listening*—Summarize occasionally: “So what you’re saying is...”
3. *Resist the Urge to Interrupt*—Don’t rehearse your reply while they’re talking; stay centered on their words.
4. *Ask Clarifying Questions*—Draw them out: “Can you tell me more about that?”
5. *Honor Emotional Content*—Listen for feelings beneath words.
6. *Be Patient with the Process*—Trust that deep conversations take time.
7. *Pray as You Listen*—Ask the Holy Spirit to help you hear both words and heart.

A Listening Revolution

When we listen this way—with patience, love, and holy attentiveness—we mirror the heart of God. Our listening becomes a living testimony: Christianity is not just a set of propositions; it is a relationship to be experienced.

As James reminds us, being “quick to listen” isn’t just about better conversations—it’s about embodying the righteousness God desires.

What if the evangelistic breakthrough you’ve been praying for doesn’t hinge on having better arguments, but on becoming a better listener?

Maybe it’s time to start a listening revolution—one conversation at a time.

Transforming my MIND:

What listening techniques did Josh use to open Holly’s heart to faith?

Transforming my MIND:

What emotions arise when you hear views that contradict your beliefs? How do those feelings impact your ability to listen?

How can remembering God's patience with you fuel your patience with others?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Identify one person you struggle to listen to. What specific step can you take with them this week?

What "nudge questions" could you pair with attentive listening to go deeper?

Lord, forgive me for the times I've been quick to speak and slow to listen. Thank You for patiently listening to my prayers, doubts, and questions.

Shape me into someone who reflects Your heart through listening. Help me create safe spaces where others can be heard without fear of judgment.

Use me to begin a listening revolution—one conversation at a time.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 19

The Power of Story

Bible Reading: Acts 17:16-34

When Facts Fall Flat: The Art of Story

Have you ever noticed how quickly people's eyes glaze over when bombarded with religious facts, but how they lean in when someone says, "Let me tell you a story"?

We're wired for narrative—it's how we make sense of our world and remember what matters.

When Paul entered Athens—the intellectual capital of the ancient world—he could have launched into a theological lecture. Instead, he began with a story. He referenced the "Unknown God" the Athenians already worshipped and invited them into a bigger narrative: "From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth... so that they might seek God, and perhaps reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

Paul didn't just adapt to his audience; he understood that truth travels best when wrapped in story.

Could it be that our evangelism today falters not because we lack information—but because we've forgotten the power of story to awaken hearts?

Why Stories Matter

When we reduce the gospel to a list of propositions or benefits, we drain it of its richness. The Bible isn't a theology manual—it's the epic story of a personal God relentlessly pursuing relationship with humanity.

When we present the gospel as a list of theological or benefit statements,

we make it sound impersonal. The gospel, and the Bible we learn it from, is the story of a living, personal God seeking relationship with His lost and wandering children.

This perspective changes everything. Evangelism becomes less about persuasion and more about proclamation—faithfully retelling the greatest story ever told and helping people see that they’re already part of it.

The Master Storyteller’s Example

Jesus was the ultimate storyteller. When asked abstract or difficult questions, He often responded with narratives: a shepherd searching for one lost sheep, a father running to embrace his wayward son, a Samaritan rescuing a wounded stranger.

Stories were His primary teaching method. Through them, Jesus made the kingdom of God tangible, memorable, and deeply personal.

Take the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus didn’t respond with a theological definition—He told the story of the Good Samaritan. That parable didn’t just answer the question; it reshaped how people understood love, compassion, and community. Two thousand years later, it still does.

The Gospel as Story

At its heart, the gospel is a sweeping story filled with drama, beauty, and hope. The basic plotline:

- God, through Jesus, created people and a place for them to live.
- He designed us for relationship with Him because He loves us.
- We separated ourselves from God, bringing brokenness into our world.
- In Jesus, God entered our story to rescue and restore us to a relationship with Him.
- Through His death and resurrection, Jesus made a way for us to be reconciled to God.
- He invites us to participate in His ongoing story of redemption.

Sharing the gospel this way is about offering people a framework that makes sense of their longings and struggles—and inviting them into the true story of the world.

Your Story Within God's Story

Between God's grand narrative and someone else's life is a vital bridge: your story.

Your personal testimony is a living example of how God's story still transforms lives. People may argue theology, but they can't dispute your experience. When you share:

- *Keep it simple:* "This is what my life was like before Jesus."
- *Be authentic:* "This is how I came to have faith in Jesus."
- *Show transformation:* "This is what Jesus has done in my life."

The Samaritan woman at the well didn't quote Scripture or explain doctrine. She just said, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did." And that testimony led many to faith.

Finding the Right Bible Story

Beyond the overarching gospel and your own testimony, particular Bible stories often connect with specific needs:

- For those burdened by guilt, the story of Jesus and the tax collector (Luke 18:14) resonates deeply.
- For those struggling with shame, the woman with the bleeding condition (Luke 8:48) offers hope.
- For those feeling far from God, the prodigal son's father running to embrace him (Luke 15:21-24) paints a vivid picture of God's eager welcome.
- For those exhausted by life's demands, Jesus' invitation to rest (Matthew 11:28) speaks directly to their need.
- For those feeling worthless, Jesus blessing children when others dismissed them (Mark 10:13-16) demonstrates their value in God's eyes.

With simple, understandable words, tell a story from the Bible that applies to your friend and connects with their situation, struggle, or emotional state.

Tell these stories simply and with compassion. Afterward, invite conversation with gentle questions like:

- What stood out to you in the story?
- What questions do you have?
- What does this story reveal about Jesus and us?
- If this story is true, what might God be saying to you through it?

From Information to Invitation

The beauty of sharing your faith through story is that it shifts evangelism from information transfer to genuine invitation. You're not trying to win arguments—you're inviting others to explore whether this story might be their story too.

Think of it like offering a food sample at the mall. You're not forcing anyone to buy a full meal—you're simply offering a taste of something you've found delicious. We offer a story that hints at the goodness of God and let people decide if they want more. No pressure, just an invitation to discover what we've found to be life-changing.

Becoming a Better Storyteller

To grow in sharing the gospel through story:

- *Read the Bible as one big story:* Trace the big story from Genesis to Revelation.
- *Identify your pivotal stories:* Which Bible stories have most impacted your understanding of God?
- *Refine your personal testimony:* Work on articulating your faith journey concisely without religious jargon.
- *Listen for connection points:* Note which biblical stories might speak to others' situations.
- *Start with “Can I tell you a story?”:* This simple question creates openness far more effectively than “Can I tell you about my religion?”
- *Release the pressure:* Your job isn't to convert anyone—that's God's work. Your responsibility is to faithfully retell the story.

When you tell the gospel as story, you invite people into something bigger than themselves—a redemptive reality where their own stories finally make sense.

This week, think about someone whose story you need to hear more fully. Ask yourself what story from Scripture—or from your life—might speak to their need. Then ask simply, “Can I tell you a story that's meant everything to me?”

You might be surprised how often the answer is yes.

Transforming My MIND:

In Paul's approach in Athens, how did he connect the Athenians' existing beliefs to God's story? What can we learn from his method?

How does viewing evangelism as "storytelling" rather than "argument-winning" change your approach or give you more confidence?

Transforming My HEART:

Which biblical stories have most powerfully shaped your understanding of God? Why do these narratives resonate with you?

When has someone's personal testimony of faith impacted you more deeply than formal teaching or preaching? What made it powerful?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

What “chapter” of your faith story needs more reflection so you can share it more effectively?

God of the great story, thank You for writing me into Your narrative of creation, redemption, and restoration.

Thank You for revealing Yourself through Scripture—and most clearly through Jesus. Help me see how my story fits into Yours and give me courage to share both with faithfulness.

Make me a better listener to others’ stories, and a better teller of Yours.

Give me wisdom to know which biblical stories might speak to the hearts around me.

May the story of Your love flow naturally from my lips as the deepest truth I know.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Day 20

When Truth Wears Skin: How Your Story Bridges Hearts to Jesus

Bible Reading: Acts 22:1-21

When a Life Changes Everything

Kyle was seated at a Broadway show when it happened. During intermission, the man next to him mentioned he was with his daughter celebrating her high school graduation. Kyle shared that he and his wife were celebrating their anniversary.

When Kyle said he had three young daughters, the man smiled, looking at his teenage daughter, and said, “I remember when she was six.” Then, with unexpected openness, he asked, “Can I tell you what happened to me when she was six? It totally changed what kind of father I was.”

This complete stranger shared how he had been an absent father and struggling husband until a friend invited him to church. “I didn’t want to go at first,” he confessed. “I’ve never thought too highly of organized religion. I still don’t. But I discovered a *relationship* with Jesus—and it changed my life.”

His eyes lit up. “He was what I had been looking for. He totally changed my family. I’ve experienced so much joy as a father and husband. It was the best thing I ever did.” Then he leaned in, “I know we don’t know each other but... I just wanted to tell you how glad I am that I made that decision when my daughter was six. It has made all the difference.”

Before Kyle could tell him he was already a believer, the show resumed. He had tears in his eyes—not because of what was happening on stage, but because of what had just happened in the audience. This stranger had courageously

shared his story in hopes it might change someone else's life.¹

When was the last time you shared your testimony with someone? What if your story is exactly what someone needs to hear today?

The Testimony That Silenced a Mob

In Acts 22, Paul stands before a hostile mob that had just tried to kill him. He doesn't launch into a theological defense. Instead, he shares his story.

"Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense," he begins in their native Aramaic. The crowd falls completely silent.

Paul shares his testimony in three parts: his life before Christ as a zealous Pharisee who persecuted Christians, his dramatic encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, and the transformation that followed.

Paul frames his story in terms his Jewish audience would understand—his upbringing, training under Gamaliel, and zeal for tradition. He finds common ground before describing his transformation.

Eventually, the crowd erupts again when Paul mentions his mission to the Gentiles—but not before his testimony captures their attention. That's the power of a personal story: it disarms and engages in ways arguments cannot.

Why Stories Break Through When Arguments Fall Flat

We live in a skeptical age. People are weary of being sold to and argued with. They grow defensive when confronted with arguments—but stories stir curiosity. Arguments trigger resistance. Stories lower defenses.

Research shows that when we hear facts, the language processing parts of our brain activate. But when we hear stories, the sensory parts of our brain light up—as if we're experiencing the events ourselves. God designed our brains for story.

Why are testimonies so uniquely powerful?

1. **Stories are undeniable.** People may debate theology, but they can't refute your lived experience. Your story makes truth tangible.
2. **Stories create connection, not confrontation.** When the Broadway stranger shared his testimony, he didn't say, "You need Jesus!" He simply shared how Jesus transformed his fatherhood. This approach feels like an

¹ Idleman, Kyle. *One at a Time: The Unexpected Way God Wants to Use You to Change the World*. Baker Books, 2022, 184-186.

invitation, not an indictment.

3. *Stories show transformation, not just information.* Paul didn't explain Jesus in abstract terms—he described how Christ turned his life around.
4. *Stories engage imagination, not just intellect.* Your testimony allows others to imagine how *their* lives could change with Jesus.

Your Story Matters More Than You Think

You might be thinking, “But my testimony isn't dramatic enough. I wasn't knocked to the ground by a blinding light like Paul or rescued from addiction.”

That's okay. Testimonies don't need to be spectacular to be effective. Sometimes the most powerful testimonies demonstrate Jesus' faithfulness in ordinary circumstances.

Some Christians grow up in believing homes and choose to follow Christ early. Others come to faith after years of searching. Some experience dramatic conversions, others grow gradually. Each story showcases a different aspect of God's character and work.

Your story matters because it's uniquely yours—a testimony to how God works in individual lives. The Broadway stranger didn't share how Jesus saved him from religious extremism or committed atheism or drug addiction; he shared how Jesus transformed him from a disconnected father into a present one—a testimony countless people can relate to.

Two Powerful Ways to Share Your Story

There are two primary types of personal testimony:

1. *Your salvation story.* This is the account of how you came to trust Jesus as your Savior—similar to what Paul shared in Acts 22. It typically follows a simple structure:
 - *Before:* What was your life like before Christ? What were you seeking or struggling with?
 - *How:* How did you encounter Jesus? Who influenced you? What circumstances led to your decision?
 - *After:* How has knowing Christ changed your perspective, priorities, and peace?
2. *Your situation story.* These are stories of how your relationship with Jesus has helped you navigate specific life challenges. When someone shares struggles with relationships, purpose, or anxiety, you can respond

with how Jesus has guided you through similar circumstances.

For example, when a colleague expresses work dissatisfaction, you might say, “I went through a similar season. Would you like to hear what helped me find purpose in my work again?” This opens the door to share how your faith influences your approach to challenges.

The Courage to Tell Your Story

The Broadway stranger had no idea how his testimony would be received. He risked rejection and awkwardness to share what Jesus had done for him—but shared anyway because the stakes were too high not to.

Paul did the same in Acts 22. He stood before enemies who wanted him dead, risking even greater hostility. But he knew: transformed lives speak louder than polished arguments.

Sharing your testimony requires vulnerability. It means revealing your needs and struggles. But in that vulnerability lies incredible power. When you testify how Jesus met you in your mess, you offer a bridge for others to meet Him too.

Preparing Your Story

How can you prepare to share your testimony effectively?

- ***Write it out.*** Reflect on your journey with Jesus. Practice a short version (2–3 minutes) you can share in everyday conversation.
- ***Keep it simple.*** Paul used everyday language. Avoid Christian jargon. Make it understandable.
- ***Make it relatable.*** Emphasize common struggles and desires—meaning, purpose, peace. Like Paul, speak to your audience’s context.
- ***Be authentic.*** Paul didn’t hide his past. Be honest about your struggles and real about God’s grace.
- ***End with an invitation.*** Rather than concluding with “And that’s what happened to me,” consider ending with an open question like, “Have you ever experienced anything like that?” This invites dialogue rather than signaling the end of conversation.

The Ripple Effect of One Story

Paul’s testimony still changes lives today. The Broadway man’s story moved a pastor to tears. And your story? It could be the spark that changes someone’s eternity.

This week, get ready. Reflect on how Jesus has changed your life. Practice telling your story clearly and simply. Then pray for open doors.

We live in a world drowning in information but starving for meaning. Your testimony can be the beacon someone is searching for. Don't underestimate the power of truth wearing skin.

Transforming My MIND:

How did Paul tailor his testimony in Acts 22? What can we learn from his approach?

Transforming My HEART:

When has someone's testimony deeply impacted you? What made it powerful?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

What aspects of your testimony might most directly apply to people in your current circle?

What one step could you take this week to feel more prepared to share your story?

Father God, thank You for writing Your story of redemption into my life. Help me see the power of my testimony—not because my story is spectacular, but because You are. Give me courage like Paul and the Broadway stranger to speak, even when it feels risky. Help me recognize divine appointments and trust that You'll use my words. Let my story always point beyond me to You—the true author and redeemer of every life.

Day 21

The Most Loving Thing You'll Ever Do

Bible Reading: Romans 10:13-15

When an Atheist Challenges Christians to Share their Faith

In 2009, outspoken atheist Penn Jillette (the talkative half of the comedy/magician duo Penn & Teller) shared a surprising encounter.

After a show, a businessman respectfully approached him and offered a New Testament. Though Penn remained an atheist, he was deeply moved by the man's concern and recorded a video defending the man's actions:

"I've always said that I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward... how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize?"

He continued with a piercing comparison: "If I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that."

An atheist was saying what Christians sometimes forget: If we really believe what we claim, our silence toward unbelievers isn't respectful—it's profoundly unloving.

The Question That Changes Everything

Penn's challenge forces us to confront a hard truth: If the gospel is real—if Jesus truly is the only way to eternal life—why do we hesitate to share it?

We often have quick, familiar reasons:

- “I don’t want to offend anyone.”
- “I’m afraid I won’t have all the answers.”
- “It’s not my responsibility—that’s what pastors are for.”
- “I’m waiting for the perfect opportunity.”
- “I don’t want to damage my relationships.”

These concerns feel valid. But in light of eternity, they begin to look more like excuses than reasons.

Today’s reading makes it plain: people can’t believe in Jesus unless they hear about Him. And they can’t hear unless someone speaks.

The gospel moves through people—ordinary believers like us—who care enough to open their mouths.

What Penn’s Story Teaches Us

The man who approached Penn did several things worth noting. He was:

- **Respectful.** Penn described him as “very, very kind and nice and sincere.” He didn’t argue or condemn. He simply offered a gift with care.
- **Bold.** He knew Penn’s reputation and still stepped forward—because he cared more about Penn’s soul than his own comfort.
- **Clear.** He didn’t disguise his intentions or try to trick Penn into a conversation. He was honest and direct.

This is exactly what Peter encourages in 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be prepared to give an answer... but do this with gentleness and respect.”

The Love Behind Our Message

At its heart, evangelism is love in action. The New Testament word for love—agape—describes a self-giving, sacrificial love that seeks another’s highest good.

When we share the gospel, we place someone’s eternal welfare above our momentary discomfort. We risk awkwardness or rejection because we care.

Paul said, “Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). When we grasp how deeply God loves people—enough to send Jesus to die for them—we’ll find strength to speak up.

Love isn’t always easy. Sometimes, it means stepping into uncomfortable places because someone’s soul is worth it.

What Holds Us Back

If sharing the gospel is such a loving act, why is it so hard?

Fear of Rejection. No one likes to be mocked or dismissed. But Jesus warned us: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18). Rejection doesn’t mean failure—it often just means faithfulness.

Lack of Urgency. Despite what we profess to believe, many of us live as functional universalists—acting as if everyone will be fine in the end. That’s not what Jesus taught. He said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Confusion About Methods. Many have seen evangelism done poorly—pushy, manipulative, or cold. But bad methods don’t cancel a good mission. We don’t need to imitate poor examples to faithfully share our faith.

The Silent Tragedy

Penn Jillette’s challenge highlights a painful reality: Many Christians believe in heaven and hell but live as if neither exists.

What if we took his words seriously? What if silence felt more unbearable than social discomfort? What if we loved enough to risk awkwardness?

Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is power. When we believe that deeply, silence stops feeling like love—it starts feeling like neglect.

Like the man who approached Penn, we’re called to offer the greatest gift we’ve received. Even if it’s rejected, love will be seen. And who knows? Today’s rejection might plant the seed for tomorrow’s awakening.

The most loving thing you’ll ever do isn’t keeping quiet to keep peace—it’s caring enough to speak the truth, even when it costs you something.

Transforming My MIND:

How does Penn Jillette's perspective challenge your thinking about evangelism as an act of love rather than an imposition?

According to Romans 10:13-15, what is your role in the process of someone coming to salvation? Why is it essential?

Transforming My HEART:

What fears arise when you think about sharing your faith with someone who doesn't believe? Bring these honestly before God.

How does the businessman's approach to Penn demonstrate both courage and respect? Which of these qualities do you find more challenging? How can you grow in it?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

How can you prepare yourself to share your faith more effectively?

*Father, forgive me for times I've stayed silent out of fear instead of speaking from love.
Help me see evangelism not as duty but as love in action—an overflow of Your heart in me.
Give me courage to care more about others' eternity than my own comfort.
Help me speak with gentleness, respect, and boldness.
And when I'm tempted to shrink back, remind me of Penn's words: "How much do you
have to hate someone not to tell them about eternal life?"
Thank You for Your Spirit, who empowers me.
In Jesus' name, amen.*

Day 22

No Ordinary Conversion

Bible Reading: Colossians 4:2-6

When Everyday Words Become Eternal

The restaurant was buzzing with the lunchtime crowd when Lisa noticed their server's hands trembling slightly. "Everything okay?" she asked gently.

The young woman, whose nametag read "Amber," hesitated. "Just a rough morning. My car broke down, and I'm worried about how I'll get to class tomorrow."

Lisa and her friend exchanged a glance. "We'd be happy to pray for you," Lisa offered. "Anything else we can ask God about?"

Amber's eyes filled with tears. "No one's offered to pray for me in years," she whispered. "Could you ask Him to help with my mom too? She's really sick."

After praying, Amber asked, "Why would you care enough to pray for a stranger?"

This opened the door. Lisa replied, "My relationship with Jesus has taught me that everyone matters deeply to God—including you." She briefly explained how God's love had transformed her view of people and life's challenges.

This wasn't some extraordinary moment. It was just a Christian noticing an opportunity and responding with compassion.

It's exactly what Paul describes in Colossians 4:5-6:

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

The Message That Matters Most

Saying “I believe in Jesus” can sound vague, while long theological speeches feel overwhelming. So, how do we talk about the life-changing message of Jesus in a way that connects?

At its core, the gospel involves four key truths: God, humanity, Jesus, and response. Understanding these helps us adapt to different people and moments while staying true to the heart of the gospel.

1. God: The Loving Creator

The gospel begins with who God is and what He desires. You might say:

- “God isn’t distant or indifferent. He’s deeply personal and loving, and He created us for relationship with Him.”
- “Behind everything we see is a Creator who designed us with purpose and meaning, not just to exist but to know Him.”
- “God is love. He created us not because He needed us, but because love always gives.”

When speaking with someone who doesn’t believe in God, you might begin differently:

- “Even if you’re not sure about God, what would it mean if there’s a Creator who loves us and made us with purpose?”

2. Humanity: The Beautiful Broken

The gospel names our condition—created with dignity yet broken by sin. Try saying:

- “We all carry deep worth, but also a bent toward doing things our own way. The Bible calls that sin.”
- “We all long for meaning, love, and purpose, but we also contribute to the very brokenness we wish would go away.”
- “The gap between who we are and who we want to be shows we need more than self-help. We need restoration that we can’t do on our own.”

For someone burdened with shame:

- “Your mistakes don’t define you. They show a need for forgiveness—a fresh start only God can give.”

3. Jesus: The Divine Solution

At the center of the gospel is Jesus—who He is and what He did. You might say:

- “Jesus lived the life we couldn’t, died in our place, and rose to give us new life.”
- “What’s unique about Jesus isn’t just His teaching—it’s that He claimed to be God and backed it up by rising from the dead.”
- “The cross shows the depth of our need and the depth of God’s love. Jesus’ resurrection shows He conquered sin and death.”

To someone familiar with Christianity:

- “Jesus didn’t come just to make bad people better—He came to bring dead people to life.”

4. Response: The Personal Decision

The gospel always invites a response: turning from self and sin and trusting in Jesus. Here are ways to express this invitation:

- “This gift of forgiveness and new life is available to anyone who receives it. That means acknowledging our need, believing in Jesus, and choosing to follow Him as the leader of our lives.”
- “This new life is a gift to receive—not something we earn. It starts by trusting Jesus and surrendering to His leadership.”
- “Becoming a Christian isn’t about religion—it’s a relationship. It starts with forgiveness and leads to transformation.”

If someone is open, you might gently ask:

- “Would you like to start that kind of relationship with God? I’d love to help you take that first step.”

Putting It All Together: Gospel Conversations

These four truths flow naturally in real conversations. For example:

Friend: “You seem so calm in the chaos. What’s your secret?”

You: “I haven’t always been this way. What’s changed is realizing I’m loved by God. That’s what helps me handle the hard stuff.”

Friend: “I wish I could feel that way. I’ve tried spiritual stuff before, but it never sticks.”

You: “I get that. But what changed for me was realizing Christianity isn’t

about us reaching up, but God reaching down in Jesus. That's what Jesus did—God Himself entering our broken world to restore the relationship we couldn't fix ourselves."

Friend: "So what exactly did Jesus do?"

You: "Jesus showed us who God is. Then through His death and resurrection, He made a way for us to be forgiven and to experience God's life within us. When I finally understood that God wasn't just offering religious rules but relationship through Jesus, everything changed for me."

Friend: "How would someone even begin that kind of relationship?"

You: "It starts with a simple decision to trust Jesus with your life—acknowledging you need Him and choosing to follow Him. Would you be open to exploring what that could look like?"

The Art of Gracious Conversation

Paul says our speech should be "full of grace, seasoned with salt" and that we should be ready to "answer everyone."

Conversations "full of grace." Grace-filled words create space for safety and connection—even before there's agreement.

Graceful conversations listen, seek to understand, and honor people—even in disagreement. We don't see people as projects but as God's beloved.

Conversations "seasoned with salt." Salt preserves, enhances, and creates thirst. Our words should:

- *Preserve truth*—staying true to the gospel.
- *Enhance flavor*—showing joy, authenticity, and transformation.
- *Create thirst*—provoking curiosity about our hope.

Too much salt is overpowering; too little is bland. We need the right balance of boldness and grace.

Gospel conversations aren't one-size-fits-all.

Knowing the gospel matters—but so does knowing the person you're talking to.

Practical Approaches to Sharing Jesus

Different settings call for different styles. Here are five helpful approaches:

1. The Story Approach

Stories reach both the mind and heart. You could say: "Can I share something

that changed my life?” and tell your personal story of coming to faith, focusing on how Jesus addressed your specific struggles and questions.

Or you might share a parable of Jesus that connects with their situation: “That reminds me of a story Jesus told about...” (The Prodigal Son for someone feeling distant from God, the Good Samaritan for discussions about compassion, etc.).

2. The Question Approach

Strategic questions can open doors to meaningful conversations:

“What’s your spiritual background? Is that still important to you today?”

“If you could ask God one question, what would it be?”

“Do you ever think about what happens after this life? What are your thoughts on that?”

These questions show genuine interest while creating natural openings to share your own faith perspective.

3. The Need Approach

Connect the gospel to universal human needs and longings:

- For someone seeking purpose: “Jesus gave me a sense of meaning that’s bigger than success or failure.”
- For someone struggling with guilt: “I’ve found freedom in experiencing God’s complete forgiveness through Jesus.”
- For someone facing mortality: “Knowing Jesus has taken away my fear of death—it’s a doorway now, not the end.”

4. The Worldview Approach

For intellectually oriented conversations, show how Christianity addresses life’s biggest questions:

- “Christianity offers a compelling story about why we’re here and what’s gone wrong. Want to hear it?”
- “Jesus’ teachings shape how I handle relationships, anxiety—really everything. Would you want to hear more?”

5. The Invitation Approach

Sometimes the best move is a simple invite:

- “My church is doing something special—want to come?”
- “I’m in a group that talks openly about faith. Interested in checking it out?”

From Awkward to Natural

Our hesitation often comes from fear—of awkwardness, rejection, or not knowing enough. That leads to two extremes: being too forceful or staying silent.

But gospel conversation is a skill—and skills grow with practice.

Start small. Mention your church. Share how your faith shapes you. Offer to pray. Simple steps lead to deeper moments.

And remember: most people come to faith through a series of conversations. You might be planting, watering, or harvesting. Every step matters.

Making It Personal

David, a high school teacher, decided to live out Colossians 4 by asking thoughtful questions and truly listening to his colleagues. He offered prayer when they shared struggles and occasionally spoke about how his faith helped him.

At first, it felt awkward. But with time, it became natural. Relationships deepened, and spiritual conversations began to happen.

One day, a coworker asked, “You’re always so positive. What’s your secret?”

David smiled. “It’s not really a secret—it’s a relationship. My faith in Jesus gives me perspective and peace, even when things are hard.”

“That sounds more personal than religious,” she replied.

“It is,” David said. “Christianity isn’t about rules—it’s about a relationship with God. Jesus offers forgiveness, purpose, and hope. I’d love to share more if you’re interested.”

That’s how most people meet Jesus—through ordinary conversations made extraordinary by grace.

So, speak with kindness. Ask good questions. Let your words reflect Christ’s love. They might just echo into eternity.

Transforming my MIND:

How have you viewed evangelism as separate from everyday conversations?
How does Colossians 4:5–6 challenge that mindset?

What fears hold you back from spiritual conversations? How might understanding the gospel more clearly ease those fears?

Transforming my HEART:

Does your motivation for evangelism come more from duty or compassion?
What shift might God be inviting you into?

Which of the five ways to share Jesus (story, question, need, worldview, invitation) best fits your natural style?

Transforming my **STRENGTH**:

What's one step you could you take this week to grow in sharing the gospel in everyday language?

Who in your life needs Jesus? What aspect of the gospel might speak to their particular struggles or questions?

Lord, help me understand and share the simple beauty of the gospel.

Give me wisdom to adapt it for different people without losing its truth.

Turn my anxiety into confidence—not in myself, but in Your power through my weakness.

Let my words be filled with love, wisdom, and respect, even in disagreement. Remind me that You use ordinary words for extraordinary purposes.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Day 23

The Art of Spiritual Conversations

Bible Reading: John 4:1-42

The Encounter That Changed Everything

The midday sun blazed down on the ancient well where Jesus sat alone. Most Jews avoided Samaria altogether, but Jesus chose this path on purpose. When the Samaritan woman approached, she expected judgment, not conversation. Instead, she encountered someone who would change her life—and sparked one of the most powerful spiritual conversations ever recorded.

Maybe you've hesitated to start spiritual conversations, worried you might say the wrong thing. Or perhaps you know someone who seems far from God, and you wonder if they'd even listen. Jesus' encounter at the well shows us a better way—one that is natural, personal, and transformative.

Start with Common Ground

Jesus begins with something disarmingly simple: "Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:7).

He didn't start by announcing, "I'm the Messiah—repent now!" Instead, he opened with something normal, based on their shared circumstance: thirst on a hot day.

Many Christians either don't know how to start a spiritual conversation—or they jump in too fast with religious language that creates immediate resistance.

Jesus models a better way: start naturally, based on the common ground right in front of you.

You might start:

- With a neighbor: “Have you tried that new coffee shop on the corner?”
- With a colleague: “How are you managing with the new project deadlines?”
- With a fellow parent: “How’s your child adjusting to the new school year?”

Maria noticed her coworker looking stressed for weeks. Instead of immediately offering prayer, she simply asked about the stress they were both feeling from looming deadlines. That simple question opened a 30-minute conversation about family struggles—eventually giving Maria a natural chance to share how her faith had helped her face similar challenges.

Bridge to Deeper Matters

Starting naturally is key—but don’t stay superficial forever. Jesus transitioned to spiritual matters: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst” (John 4:13-14).

He used something from everyday life—water—to point to a deeper spiritual reality. Jesus connects the tangible with the transcendent in a way she can understand.

You can do this too:

- When someone mentions feeling unfulfilled despite career success, you might ask, “Do you ever wonder what could satisfy that deeper longing?”
- When discussing the news, you could ask, “With all the division in the world, what do you think brings people genuine peace?”

Listen More Than You Speak

Notice something else: Jesus gives her the opportunity to talk. In fact, the Samaritan woman speaks just as much as Jesus does.

Sadly, Christians sometimes get a reputation for preaching at people instead of talking with them. Jesus shows us the power of dialogue—not monologue.

Spiritual conversations should involve genuine exchange, where listening is as important as speaking.

Remember some ways to practice this:

- Ask *open-ended questions*: “What do you think has shaped your view of God?”
- *Practice active listening*: “It sounds like you’re saying...”
- *Follow up thoughtfully*: “You mentioned your grandmother’s faith was important to you. How did that influence you?”

Approach Personal Matters with Grace

Listening builds trust, but what happens when the conversation gets personal? Jesus shows us how to approach tough topics with both truth and grace.

He doesn’t shy away from the woman’s messy story. He says, “Go, call your husband and come back” (John 4:16).

When she admits she has no husband, Jesus gently reveals he already knows about her five past marriages and current situation. Yet he doesn’t shame her. He honors her honesty—and treats her with dignity.

When conversations get personal, we’re called to the same approach: truth wrapped in grace.

You can do this by:

- *Acknowledging pain without judgment*: “That sounds really difficult.”
- *Offer perspective without condemnation*: “I hope you know you’re not alone.”
- *Share your own struggles when appropriate*: “I’ve wrestled with that too.”

Share Your Experience, Not Just Information

One of the most beautiful moments in this story is what happens next. The woman—someone seen as an outcast—becomes the first missionary to her people: “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39).

She didn’t have a polished speech. She didn’t quote any Bible verses. She wasn’t even 100% certain yet! She simply said, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” (John 4:29).

She shared her story and invited others to discover Jesus for themselves. You can do this too.

- *Share specific ways God has worked in your life*: “When I was facing depression, I experienced God’s presence in a way I never had before.”
- *Use “I” statements instead of declarative claims*: “I found that prayer gave me peace” instead of “Prayer will solve your problems.”

- *Invite rather than insist:* “Would you be interested in checking out my church sometime?”

The Power of Your Unfinished Story

God doesn't wait for you to be perfectly equipped before using you. The Holy Spirit empowers ordinary people—just like you—to have extraordinary influence.

The Samaritan woman didn't have it all together. She had no formal theological training. Yet her simple, unfinished story pointed an entire village to Jesus.

Evangelism at its most basic is: “This is what happened to me. Come and see for yourself.”

Your story is powerful. People might argue with your beliefs, but they can't argue with your experience of Jesus.

This week, ask God to give you an opportunity for a spiritual conversation.

Start with common ground.

Listen well.

Share your story, even if it's still being written.

You never know how one conversation could change everything.

Transforming my MIND:

What do you learn from how Jesus transitioned the conversation from ordinary to spiritual topics?

Transforming my MIND:

What fears or hesitations do you have about starting a spiritual conversation?
How can Jesus' example help you?

How does the Samaritan woman's example of telling people about Jesus encourage you that you can do this too?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Think of three people in your life who don't know Jesus. What natural, circumstantial conversation starters might you use with each of them?

This week, focus on asking thoughtful questions and truly listening. How might this prepare you to have deeper spiritual discussions?

Lord Jesus, thank you for showing me how to have meaningful spiritual conversations through your example with the Samaritan woman.

Give me the courage to initiate, the wisdom to listen, and the discernment to know when and how to transition to deeper matters.

Help me to see people as you see them—not defined by their past or mistakes, but as precious souls you deeply love.

Use my story, even the messy parts, to draw others to you. Like the woman at the well, make me bold enough to simply say, “Come and see.”

In your name. Amen.

Day 24

Divine Interruptions: When God Breaks into Your Schedule

Bible Reading: John 3:1-21

Embracing Holy Interruptions

You're racing through another packed day—meetings, deadlines, endless tasks—when your phone buzzes. A simple text: “Got a minute? Can I call?”

You hesitate. You don't have a minute. But something inside whispers, “Say yes.”

What if the interruption you dread is actually an invitation from God?

Some of the most sacred moments in life arrive disguised as inconveniences—opportunities not found in our plans but in God's. Jesus modeled this beautifully. His greatest conversations, healings, and moments of ministry often came not by appointment, but by interruption.

And in John 3, we glimpse one of the most profound: a late-night knock on the door from a man named Nicodemus.

The Midnight Visitor and His World

“Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night...” (John 3:1-2).

Imagine it: the streets of Jerusalem silent under a canopy of stars. Jesus, perhaps preparing for rest, hears an unexpected knock.

Nicodemus was no ordinary visitor. As a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, he carried weight, influence, and risk. Visiting Jesus in daylight

would have cost him dearly. So he comes under cover of night—curious, cautious, searching.

Nicodemus begins politely: “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God...” (v. 2).

But Jesus sees beyond the compliments. He hears the ache beneath the words: Is there more? How do I find it?

And so, bypassing small talk, Jesus dives to the heart: “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (v. 3).

It’s not the conversation Nicodemus expected. But it’s the conversation he needed.

Jesus’ Blueprint for Life-Changing Conversations

Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus offers a masterclass in spiritual dialogue. Notice these elements:

1. ***Jesus Prioritizes the Person.*** Despite the late hour, Jesus gives Nicodemus His full attention. He doesn’t rush, check the time, or signal impatience. The person before Him matters more than His schedule or comfort.
2. ***Jesus Listens for the Real Question.*** Nicodemus begins with a statement about Jesus’ identity, but Jesus hears the unspoken question behind it: “How do I enter the kingdom?” Jesus addresses what Nicodemus is truly seeking, not just what he says.
3. ***Jesus Speaks Truth, Even When It’s Challenging.*** Jesus doesn’t water down the message: “You must be born again.” He doesn’t avoid difficult truths to make Nicodemus comfortable. Yet He delivers these truths without harshness or contempt.
4. ***Jesus Uses Familiar References.*** He speaks of wind, birth, and the serpent in the wilderness—all imagery Nicodemus would understand. Jesus bridges to spiritual truth from common ground.
5. ***Jesus Balances Challenge and Invitation.*** Notice how this conversation contains both loving confrontation (“Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?”) and incredible hope (“For God so loved the world...”). Jesus challenges Nicodemus’ thinking while offering him breathtaking grace.

The Message That Changes Everything

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (v. 16).

Originally, John 3:16 was not a verse in the Bible (or a message on a cardboard sign at a football game). It was whispered to a searching soul in the middle of the night.

In this single sentence, Jesus distills the entire gospel:

- God’s motivation: overwhelming love
- God’s action: giving His Son
- Our response: belief
- Our alternative fate without Christ: perishing
- Our destiny in Christ: eternal life

This wasn’t just theological information for Nicodemus—it was an invitation to transformation. An invitation that apparently took root, as we later see Nicodemus defending Jesus before other Pharisees (John 7:50-51) and ultimately helping to prepare Jesus’ body for burial (John 19:39).

That night encounter didn’t just change Nicodemus—it gives us a blueprint. What if we began to view our own interruptions the same way? What if divine appointments are all around us but we’re too busy to notice?

Sometimes heaven’s most significant invitations arrive disguised as inconvenient interruptions.

How to Spot a Divine Appointment

How can we recognize and embrace divine interruptions?

1. *Hold Your Schedule Loosely.* We all have important things to do and deadlines to meet. But what if we started each day saying, “God, I’ve made my plans, but I’m open to Your interruptions”? What might we experience if we viewed our calendars as drafts subject to divine editing?
2. *Slow Down.* If we move too fast, we can zoom right past the people and opportunities God puts in our path.
3. *See People as Eternal Beings.* That person who just interrupted your flow—the cashier, coworker, neighbor, or family member—is an eternal soul whom God deeply loves. They’re not just an obstacle between you and your next task. They’re someone Jesus died for.

4. ***Listen for Spiritual Openings.*** People rarely begin with “Can you tell me how to be saved?” Instead, they mention a struggle, express a doubt, share a loss, or ask about your peace. These moments are doorways—invitations to deeper conversation if we’re attuned to hear them.
5. ***Ask Permission to Go Deeper.*** When someone shares something personal, a simple, “Would it be alright if I shared some thoughts about that from my faith perspective?” or “Can I tell you how my faith has helped me with that kind of thing?” demonstrates respect. This approach is more effective than launching into unsolicited spiritual advice.
6. ***Release the Pressure of Results.*** Your role is obedience, not outcomes. Seeds planted now may bear fruit you never see.

Practical Conversation Starters

Here are practical ways to initiate or deepen spiritual conversations when the opportunity arises:

- “Tell me about your tattoo.”
- “That’s an interesting perspective. I’ve been thinking about that from a faith viewpoint lately...”
- “I’ve gone through something similar. What really helped me was...”
- “That reminds me of something I read recently in the Bible that changed how I see this...”
- “I’m not sure if this would interest you, but my faith has given me a different way to approach that...”
- “I’ve been praying about a situation like that. Would it be okay if I prayed for you too?”
- “Have you ever felt like God was pursuing you?”

Good questions create space where declarations often slam doors shut.

When Divine Appointments Come at the Worst Times

Divine appointments rarely fit neatly into our plans. Nicodemus came at night. The Samaritan woman met Jesus when He was exhausted from traveling (John 4). The bleeding woman touched Jesus’ cloak while He was hurrying to heal a dying girl (Mark 5).

When interruptions come at the “wrong” time, remember:

- Jesus consistently prioritized people over efficiency.
- What feels like an interruption to you might be an answer to someone else’s prayer.
- Your willingness to be interrupted might be the only opportunity someone has to encounter Jesus that day.
- The kingdom impact of a conversation usually outweighs the temporary cost to your schedule.

In the economy of eternity, a divine interruption is never a waste of time.

From Conversation to Transformation

The goal of embracing interruptions isn’t just to have nice spiritual conversations—it’s to participate in God’s transforming work.

Nicodemus’ journey didn’t end with one late-night discussion. That conversation was the beginning of a transformation that eventually led him to stand publicly for Jesus, even when doing so cost him his reputation and perhaps his position.

One conversation can change a life. One interruption can change eternity.

When you choose people over plans, when you prioritize souls over schedules, you walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Transforming My MIND:

How does Jesus balance grace and truth in His conversation with Nicodemus?

How could you use John 3:16-17 to communicate the gospel with someone?

Transforming My HEART:

How do you typically respond when your agenda is interrupted by someone who needs your attention?

How might your perspective on “interruptions” change if you viewed them as divine appointments?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

What one change could you make to your daily routine to become more available for divine interruptions?

What conversation starter from today’s reading feels most natural for you to use? Why?

Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times I’ve seen people as interruptions instead of invitations.

Train my heart to hold space for sacred moments, even when they crash into my plans.

Help me to listen for whispers of eternity in the middle of my busy days.

Fill me with Your love, patience, and discernment so that I can speak Your truth with grace.

Make me ready—at all times—to offer the hope You entrusted to me.

Interrupt me for Your glory.

I pray in Your name. Amen.

Day 25

Overcoming Our Excuses

Bible Reading: 2 Timothy 1:7-8

The Excuses We Make

“It’s just not my gift.”

“I don’t know enough about the Bible.”

“I’m afraid I’ll mess up and push them further from God.”

“Isn’t that my pastor’s job?”

Sound familiar? Most of us have said—or at least thought—something like this. These excuses feel reasonable. They help us rationalize our reluctance to step into the uncomfortable space of spiritual conversations.

But what if there’s something deeper going on? What if our hesitation says more about our spiritual insecurities than our actual ability to share the gospel?

The Fear Behind Our Excuses

Behind almost every excuse is a common thread: fear.

Fear of rejection.

Fear of not having the right words.

Fear of looking foolish or offending someone.

So, we stall. We convince ourselves today isn’t the day, this person isn’t ready, or we’re not the right person for the job.

But Scripture cuts through the noise: “God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity...” (2 Timothy 1:7).

That voice telling you to shrink back? That’s not God.

It's the enemy, whispering lies designed to keep you silent—because he knows how powerful it is when even one believer courageously shares how Jesus has changed their life.

When Jesus said, “Go and make disciples,” He didn’t add, “as long as you feel confident, comfortable, and properly credentialed.”

He also gave a promise to go with the command: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

The Excuses We Make

Let’s be honest: most of us have a ready-made list of reasons why we don’t share our faith. Here are four of the most common—and why they don’t hold up in light of Scripture.

1. “It’s just not my gift.”

This might be the most spiritual-sounding excuse of all. While some are especially gifted at evangelism, sharing the good news is a command for every follower of Jesus.

Saying, “Evangelism isn’t my gift,” is like saying, “Loving my neighbor isn’t my gift” or “Integrity isn’t my calling.”

If you have the gift, great—you’ll likely be especially effective. But the Great Commission wasn’t given to the spiritually elite; it was given to all of us.

2. “I don’t know enough about the Bible.”

You don’t need to be a Bible scholar to share what Jesus has done in your life. The man born blind didn’t know much theology. But when questioned about Jesus, he simply said, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25).

You may not have all the answers—but you have your story. And that story—how Jesus has changed your life or faithfully guided you through your life—may be the most compelling testimony someone ever hears.

You’re the expert on *your* transformation.

3. “I’m afraid of being rejected or making things awkward.”

We worry we’ll offend someone, be rejected, or come off as weird. But here’s the surprise: surveys consistently show that many non-Christians are open to spiritual conversations.

The resistance we imagine often isn’t there.

Even if it is, discomfort isn’t the worst thing that can happen. Jesus reminded us, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18).

The real question is: are we more concerned with someone being momentarily uncomfortable, or with them never hearing the message that could change their eternity?

4. “That’s the pastor’s job.”

This mindset misses the point of the church. Pastors aren’t called to do all the ministry—they’re called to equip God’s people to do it (see Ephesians 4:11–12).

The early church exploded with growth not because the apostles did all the evangelism, but because *everyday believers* shared their faith.

Acts 8:4 says, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.”

It doesn’t say, “Those with seminary training” or “Those on staff.” Just *those who had been scattered*.

The most powerful evangelism happens through relationships—and you have access to people your pastor may never meet. That makes you the most strategically placed messenger in their life.

Navigating Today’s Cultural Context

Sharing our faith today comes with unique challenges. Cultural shifts, workplace policies, and spiritual diversity demand more than boldness—they call for discernment, empathy, and creativity.

In the workplace, professional boundaries can make faith conversations feel risky. Yet principles like respect, relationship-building, and genuine care still open doors. Like Daniel in Babylon, we can maintain our integrity while serving with excellence, allowing our distinctive lives to prompt questions rather than starting with declarations.

In educational settings, campuses often champion relativism and celebrate diverse perspectives. Absolute truth claims can feel out of place. Yet Paul’s approach in Athens (Acts 17:22–31) is a masterclass in cultural engagement. He began where they were—recognizing their spiritual hunger, quoting their poets—and reasoned with humility. He didn’t compromise truth; he contextualized it.

Within families, especially those with mixed beliefs, faith conversations can be especially tender. We need patience and sensitivity while remaining faithful to truth.

In our post-Christian society, biblical literacy can no longer be assumed. Many people know of Jesus, but not much about Him. Like Philip with the

Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30), we need to ask honest questions: “Do you understand what you’re reading?” Before offering answers, we must listen and discern where someone truly is.

Sometimes, the best evangelism starts not with a sermon—but with a question, a story, or a simple act of kindness that opens a door to conversation.

From Excuses to Empowerment

So how do we move beyond our excuses? How do we overcome the fears that keep us from sharing Christ?

Identify the real source of your fear.

Fear doesn’t come from God. When we feel anxious or hesitant about sharing our faith, we’re facing more than discomfort—we’re encountering spiritual resistance. The enemy wants nothing more than to silence your witness.

Recognizing fear as a spiritual attack helps you resist it more effectively. James 4:7 reminds us, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Fear may whisper that you’re not ready or will fail, but God’s Word gives you the authority to push back.

Remember who goes with you.

The Great Commission doesn’t begin with a command—it begins with a claim: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” and ends with a promise: “...And surely I am with you always” (Matthew 28:18, 20).

Evangelism is never a solo mission. Jesus is with you. You’re not alone, and the results don’t depend on you.

Start small and build confidence.

You don’t need to start by preaching on a street corner. Begin with this simple prayer: “Lord, give me eyes to see opportunities to share the gospel today.” That posture alone can shift your whole perspective.

Share naturally—mention your church service in a Monday morning conversation, reference a helpful idea you heard in a sermon, or talk about how your faith helped in a hard moment.

These small steps build your confidence and often lead to deeper spiritual conversations.

Trust the power of the gospel itself.

Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of

God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

It's not your eloquence or arguments that change hearts—it's the gospel itself. That should give you confidence. You don't need to be impressive. You just need to be faithful.

The Adventure Awaits

Here's one of the great spiritual surprises: what we fear most—sharing our faith—often becomes a source of deep joy.

When we finally push past our reluctance and open our mouths for Jesus, something powerful happens.

Our own faith comes alive.

We start praying with greater urgency for the people around us.

We dig into Scripture with fresh eyes, searching for truth that will help us answer real questions.

Our worship deepens as we see God at work in people's lives.

This is not a duty—it's a divine adventure.

So, what excuse has been holding you back? What fear keeps your lips sealed when your heart wants to speak?

Today, name it. Face it. And ask God to help you rise above it.

Because the world around you is full of people who need hope. And God has placed you in their path—not by accident, but with purpose.

And the next time fear whispers or excuses creep in, remember: "God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord." (2 Timothy 1:7-8, NLT)

Transforming My MIND:

If sharing the gospel makes you nervous, what does that reveal about how you see it? How do Romans 1:16 and Isaiah 55:11 challenge or encourage your view?

Where is it hardest for you to speak about your faith—work, school, online, etc.? What biblical truths could guide you to be wise and bold there?

Transforming My HEART:

What fear most often holds you back? How does 1 John 4:18 (“Perfect love drives out fear”) speak to your specific fear?

If you truly believed that those without Christ are eternally separated from God, how would that change your approach to evangelism? What does your current approach reveal about your actual beliefs?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

Who is one specific person in your regular routine (a coworker, neighbor, friend, or barista) you feel led to pray for this week? Ask God for a natural opportunity to have a spiritual conversation.

Father, forgive me for the times I've made excuses instead of disciples. Too often, fear—not faith—has kept me silent.

But You've given me a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.

Give me courage that outweighs comfort and love that outlasts fear.

Help me see people as You do and care more about their eternity than my ease.

Open my eyes to the opportunities You give—online or in person—and make me bold to walk through them.

I will not be ashamed of the gospel, for it is Your power to save.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Day 26

Before You Speak: The Secret Weapon of Evangelism

Bible Reading: Acts 4:23-31

When Sharing Feels Impossible

Have you ever felt your heart race at the thought of sharing your faith? Maybe you've rehearsed what to say, only to freeze when the moment comes. Or perhaps you've convinced yourself evangelism is for "other Christians"—the natural talkers or trained pros.

But what if the greatest barrier to sharing your faith isn't ability or opportunity—but something much simpler?

In Acts 4, the early believers faced real threats for speaking about Jesus. Their response? "After they prayed... they spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31).

The difference between those who share their faith and those who don't often isn't personality.

It's prayer.

Evangelism Without Prayer is Evangelism Without Power

Jesus never intended evangelism to be done in our own power.

When He gave the Great Commission, He ended with a promise, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

Before His ascension, He instructed His disciples to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Evangelism is a divine partnership. Yet we often try to do God's work without God's help.

When we neglect prayer, we're essentially saying, "I've got this." But real evangelism has never been about our eloquence, cleverness, or persuasiveness. It's always been about God's Spirit working through us.

The Battlefield Beyond What We See

Sharing the gospel means stepping into spiritual warfare. Paul writes, "We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against... the unseen world" (Ephesians 6:12). The real opposition isn't just human skepticism—it's spiritual resistance.

The enemy works to distract, divide, and discourage us from speaking truth. That's why Paul urges, "Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion" (Ephesians 6:18).

Before you speak, the battle has already begun. Why walk into a war without your strongest weapon?

Four Prayers That Transform Evangelism

1. Prayer for Open Doors and Eyes

Paul asked believers to pray "that God may open a door for our message" (Colossians 4:3).

A simple daily prayer might be: "Lord, help me see people through Your eyes today."

This transforms how you see the grocery store clerk, difficult neighbor, or resistant family member. Instead of obstacles, you see people Jesus loves.

Sarah began praying this during her commute. Soon, she noticed the barista she'd ignored for months—and discovered a young woman searching for meaning. A simple conversation became a gospel opportunity.

2. Pray for Divine Appointments

God is already working in people's hearts long before you arrive (see John 16:8). Our role isn't so much to create interest in God but to recognize where God is already creating interest.

Try praying, "Lord, help me recognize the opportunities You're placing in my path today."

When we pray this way, seemingly random encounters take on new significance. The person seated next to you on the plane, the neighbor who

unexpectedly asks for help, the coworker who shares a personal struggle—these aren't coincidences; they're divine appointments.

3. Pray for Courage in the Moment

When threatened, the early church didn't pray for safety—they prayed for boldness: "Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (Acts 4:29).

Fear is evangelism's greatest enemy. But courage is found on our knees.

Before a hard conversations or opportunity to share, whisper a prayer like: "Lord, I'm nervous, but I choose to trust You. Give me Your words and Your courage."

David, a small group leader, would feel his heart race whenever tough questions came up. He began praying for courage before each meeting. One night, when a visitor asked about suffering, David didn't deflect; instead, he vulnerably shared his own journey through pain and how God met him there. It was that authenticity that drew the visitor to explore faith further.

4. Pray Persistently for Specific People

Jesus said to pray "to the Lord of the harvest" (Matthew 9:38). This prayer isn't just about global evangelism; it's about specific people in your life who need Jesus.

Make a habit of praying by name for friends, family members, colleagues, and neighbors who don't know Jesus. Persistent prayer softens your heart toward them—and invites God's Spirit to move.

George Müller, the renowned man of faith, began praying daily in 1844 for five unsaved friends. After eighteen months, one came to Christ. After five years, another. Six more years, a third. The final two? Müller prayed every day for fifty-two years before they came to faith—after his death.¹

Prayer isn't a task we check off. It's an act of fierce, faithful love that endures, even when we can't see results yet.

From Theory to Practice: Starting Today

How can you start integrating prayer into your evangelism today?

Begin with one minute. Before leaving your home, pray for opportunities and for the people you'll encounter.

¹ "Basil Miller, George Müller: Man of Faith and Miracles (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1972), 146.

Create a prayer list. Write down the names of people God has put in your life who don't know Jesus. Commit to praying for them every day.

Pray before you speak. In the moment before a spiritual conversation, offer a silent prayer for wisdom and the other person's heart.

Pray with expectation. Trust that God is moving, even when you can't yet see it.

Remember prayer isn't just preparation for evangelism; it's an essential part of evangelism itself.

So, before you speak, speak to God.

Before you talk about God, talk to God.

Then watch what He does through you—an ordinary person connected to extraordinary power.

Transforming My MIND:

What strikes you about the early church's prayer in Acts 4:29-30? What did they pray for (and not pray for) after being threatened? What happened as a result?

Transforming My HEART:

How might a lack of prayer be affecting your confidence and effectiveness in sharing the gospel?

Who are the people in your life that you've stopped praying for because you haven't seen results? What would persistent prayer for them look like?

Transforming My **STRENGTH**:

What specific conversations, meetings, or situations this week could be opportunities to ask God for boldness in sharing your faith?

*Heavenly Father, forgive me for trying to share Your gospel without relying on Your power.
Apart from You, I can do nothing that lasts.*

Before I speak to others about You, I choose to speak with You about them.

Open my eyes to see people not as projects, but as beloved souls You cherish.

Give me courage when I'm afraid, clarity when I'm unsure, and compassion when I'm tempted to judge.

Thank You that I never walk alone.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Day 27

Winning Hearts, Not Arguments: Focusing on What Truly Matters

Bible Reading: 2 Timothy 2:23-26

The Argument That Backfired

“So, you’re saying I need to believe the Earth is 6,000 years old to be a Christian? That’s why I can’t take this seriously.”

Mark’s words landed heavily. Sarah winced. What had started as a casual lunch conversation about faith had veered into a debate about creation timelines. Sarah had only meant to share her personal convictions, but it came across like a condition for salvation. Now, instead of being curious about Jesus, Mark was walking away from faith altogether.

Sound familiar?

In today’s divided culture, conversations can quickly turn into conflict—especially on topics like politics, theology, or social issues. As followers of Jesus called to make disciples, we have to ask: Are we winning arguments but losing souls?

The Battle That Truly Matters

Paul’s advice to Timothy speaks directly to this issue. He doesn’t say, “Be right about everything and make sure everyone knows it.” Instead, he warns against “foolish and stupid arguments”—the kind that stir emotions but don’t reveal truth.

But how do we live this out? How do we stand firm in faith without getting sidetracked by debates that drive people away from Jesus?

When Secondary Issues Become Primary Obstacles

Pastor Tim Harlow captures the challenge well:

“I don’t think the Bible says, ‘Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus—and in a six-thousand-year-old planet—and you will be saved.’ It’s just not a salvation issue. I’m still confident that God created, that he created on purpose, and that creation was an act of love. Don’t get me wrong. I just decided to not have an opinion on the age of the earth. Because most of the people I know who do, use it as a war cry instead of a motivator for acts of love.”

He continues:

“Is someone’s salvation tied to my understanding of a certain doctrinal stance on the beginning of the world? No. The end of the world? No. The gifts of the spirit? No. Which party to vote for? No. Which baseball team to root for? No. We’re not going to get to the pearly gates and hear Peter ask, ‘Answer me these questions three, ere the other side you see! What is your name? What is your quest? What is the timeline for Genesis 1?’”¹

While Christians can and should have convictions on a wide range of issues, we must distinguish between what is essential to salvation and what is secondary.

When we elevate our positions on debatable issues to the level of gospel requirements, we place unnecessary obstacles in people’s path to Jesus.

Think about it: How many faith conversations have derailed over evolution or political views? These topics matter, but they aren’t the gospel. And if we require people to adopt our positions on them before meeting Jesus, we’re fighting the wrong battles—and losing the war.

Through the Eyes of the Unconvinced

Hemant Mehta, an atheist who visited churches across the country, offers this sobering observation:

“As I read Christian books and spent months attending an amazing variety of churches in different parts of the country, I kept running across a consistent and troubling truth about American Christianity.

¹ Harlow, Tim. *Life on Mission: God’s People Finding God’s Heart for the World*. Pastors.com, 2014, 68

It is clear that most churches have aligned themselves against non-religious people... The combative stance I have observed in many churches and for many Christians on an individual level is an approach that has caused people to become apathetic, and even antagonistic towards religion as a whole."

Mehta's perspective should give us pause. If our approach to sharing faith feels combative to those we're trying to reach, we're likely doing more harm than good. No one is argued into loving Jesus.

What Effective Faith Conversations Actually Look Like

Conversation #1: The Argument Approach

Alex: So, what do you think about church?

Jordan: Not really my thing. I can't get past all the science contradictions.

Alex: Well, actually, there are no contradictions if you understand Genesis correctly. The Bible is completely accurate about everything.

Jordan: So, you believe the Earth is 6,000 years old despite all the evidence?

Alex: The evidence is interpreted wrong by secular scientists. If you start with the Bible...

(Conversation spirals into debate; relationship damaged)

Conversation #2: The Relationship Approach

Alex: So, what do you think about church?

Jordan: Not really my thing. I can't get past all the science contradictions.

Alex: That's interesting—what specific issues have been obstacles for you?

Jordan: Well, like the age of the Earth and evolution vs. creation.

Alex: Those are big questions that thoughtful people wrestle with. I know Christians who have different views on those topics. What matters most to me is that God loves us and sent Jesus to connect us with Him. Would you be open to exploring who Jesus is, regardless of where those other questions lead?

Jordan: I guess I might be able to separate those issues and learn more about Jesus himself.

(Conversation opens door to further exploration)

A Real-Life Example: Faith Beyond the Evolution Debate

Dr. Francis Collins, the renowned geneticist who led the Human Genome Project and later served as director of the National Institutes of Health, provides a compelling picture of focusing on what truly matters.

Once an atheist, Collins began a spiritual search after seeing how his patients' faith sustained them through suffering. That journey led him to Jesus.

As a scientist committed to evidence, Collins found he could embrace both faith and science.

One of the most powerful examples of Collins' approach is his relationship with Karl Giberson, a physicist raised in a fundamentalist Christian environment. Unlike Collins' journey from disbelief to faith, Giberson was moving in the opposite direction—drifting away from Christianity because his scientific studies conflicted with his church's insistence on young-earth creationism.

The turning point for Giberson came when he encountered Collins' work. Rather than demanding Giberson choose between evolution and Jesus, Collins offered a different path. Giberson later wrote, "Collins provided a safe harbor for me to maintain my faith without denying the scientific evidence."

What made Collins' approach effective wasn't that he won a debate. It was that he didn't make it a debate. He kept the focus on essentials—God's existence, Jesus' resurrection, and the life-changing power of grace—while creating space for conversation on secondary issues.

This is exactly what Paul urged Timothy to do: be "kind, able to teach, not resentful," and gently guide people toward truth. Collins' posture helped Giberson escape a false choice—and helped preserve his faith.

Learning from Jesus' Approach

Jesus consistently modeled a focus on what mattered most.

- With the Samaritan woman (John 4), Jesus could have debated proper worship locations or ethnic tensions. Instead, He offered living water and addressed her deeper needs.
- With Zacchaeus (Luke 19), Jesus didn't condemn tax collection practices. He invited Himself to dinner, and the relationship led to transformation.
- With the woman caught in adultery (John 8), Jesus didn't lecture on sexual ethics. He defended her, extended grace, then called her to a new way of life.

In every case, Jesus chose relationship over arguments, grace over condemnation. He met people where they were, loved them as they were, and then called them to follow Him into something better.

Practical Steps: Which Battles to Fight?

How do we apply this wisdom in our everyday conversations? Here are four practical principles:

1. Focus on Jesus First

The gospel is ultimately about a person, not a set of positions. Before tackling controversial topics, center on Jesus—His life, death, resurrection, and love. Everything else flows from knowing Him.

Try saying: “Whatever questions we have about [controversial topic], what would help most is getting to know who Jesus is and what He taught.”

2. Distinguish Between Closed and Open-Handed Issues

Some matters are essential (the deity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith). Others leave room for disagreement (the age of the earth, politics).

Focus on Jesus instead not debatable matters.

Try saying: “That’s an interesting question about [secondary issue]. Christians actually have different perspectives on that. What’s central to faith is [essential truth].”

3. Ask Questions Rather Than Making Pronouncements

Jesus often responded to questions with questions. This approach invites dialogue rather than debate and helps uncover the real issues.

Try asking:

- “What experiences have shaped your thinking on this?”
- “What would make faith in Jesus more approachable to you?”
- “What’s the biggest obstacle you see to exploring Christianity further?”

4. Remember the Ultimate Goal: Relationship with Jesus

Every conversation should be evaluated by this question: Is this helping move them toward Jesus or pushing them away from Him?

The Power of Focusing on What Matters Most

Choosing relationship over argument doesn’t mean abandoning truth. It means embodying truth *in love*.

People rarely come to faith through debate—but often do through authentic relationships—with Christians who care more about their hearts than being right.

Paul told Timothy that kindness and gentleness create the soil where repentance can grow. Our job isn't to win every point—it's to make space for people to encounter Jesus.

In the end, the question isn't, "Did I win the argument?" It's, "Did I help them take a step toward Jesus?"

Transforming my MIND:

Which phrase from 2 Timothy 2:23-26 challenges you most and why does it hard to follow in today's polarized world?

What secondary issues are you most passionate about? How can you stay grounded in your convictions while still creating space for those who see things differently to encounter Jesus?

Transforming my HEART:

When you get defensive in faith conversations, what deeper emotions might be at play—fear, insecurity, pride, or concern for others?

How does it feel to consider that your approach might be pushing people away from Jesus? What would it look like to hold your beliefs with both conviction and humility?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

What specific question do you find most difficult to answer without becoming defensive? How could you prepare a gracious, Jesus-centered response to this question?

Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times I've made secondary issues primary and created unnecessary barriers for people seeking You.

Give me wisdom to know when to speak and when to listen, when to stand firm and when to extend grace. Remind me that my ultimate goal isn't to win arguments but to win hearts—not to my opinions, but to You.

In your name I pray, amen.

Day 28

When Questions Leave You Speechless

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-17

The Panic of Being Unprepared

We've all felt it. The conversation is going smoothly when a friend suddenly asks, "If God is good, why does He allow suffering?" or "What about people who've never heard of Jesus?" Your heart races. You scramble for words.

These moments aren't failures—they're invitations. They are opportunities for deeper connection, honest reflection, and spiritual growth. Even when we feel unprepared, these questions open space for authentic faith.

Peter himself, who once promised never to deny Jesus, later found himself speechless when questioned about his faith. Yet he wrote, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

How we answer matters as much as what we say.

When Questions Lead to Faith: C.S. Lewis's Story

C.S. Lewis, once an atheist, became one of Christianity's most influential voices. In 1931, he took a long walk with his friend J.R.R. Tolkien, voicing intellectual objections to Christianity—especially how Christ's death could save others.

Tolkien offered thoughtful insights but didn't resolve all Lewis' questions. Yet days later, while riding in a motorcycle sidecar on the way to the zoo, Lewis surrendered to Christ.

He later reflected that it wasn't the answers that won him over, but a new understanding: faith wasn't just intellectual assent. And ironically, Lewis—the apologist—first came to faith through a friend who couldn't answer everything.

The Freedom of “I Don’t Know”

Here's a freeing truth: you don't have to know everything to share your faith. Pretending you do can hurt trust.

You are a Christian—and you still have questions. That means full understanding wasn't a requirement for your salvation. So when someone asks something you can't answer, remember it might not be essential for theirs either.

Try one of these honest replies:

- “That's a great question. I'm not sure.”
- “Can we come back to that? I'd like to think about it.”
- “I'll look into it and get back to you.”
- “I don't have a perfect answer, but here's how I've wrestled with it...”

These responses show that Christianity isn't about having every answer but about knowing and following a Savior. Humility may speak louder than any polished reply.

The Holy Spirit: Our Guide in Conversation

Jesus promised, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). That includes our conversations.

The Holy Spirit doesn't rely on flawless arguments, but uses honest, Spirit-dependent people. We can pray before conversations, listen for His nudges during, and trust Him afterward to keep working.

Of course, we should still study and prepare. Paul urged Timothy to “correctly handle the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). But ultimately, it's the Spirit who convinces and transforms—not us.

Understanding the Heart Behind the Question

Not every hard question is purely intellectual. Sometimes, there's pain behind the words.

Intellectual objections deal with logic—science, suffering, inconsistencies. Emotional barriers may sound intellectual but come from disappointment, fear, or hurt.

Ask yourself:

- Is their tone emotionally charged?
- Is there a personal story behind their question?
- Are they open to dialogue—or just venting?

If it's intellectual, offer thoughtful answers. If it's emotional, slow down.

Ask questions. Listen. Share your story.

A simple "What makes this question important to you?" can reveal whether you're addressing the head, the heart, or both.

The Gospel, Not Your Answers, Has Power

Paul didn't say his arguments had saving power—he said the gospel does: "It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

That truth humbles and encourages us. Perfect answers don't guarantee someone will believe—and unanswered questions don't prevent it. Salvation is God's work, not the product of our persuasive abilities.

Practical Strategies for Handling Difficult Questions

We can grow in our ability to navigate tough conversations with grace and wisdom. Here are a few practical tips:

1. *Point to Jesus, not yourself*

When faced with difficult questions, shift the focus from your personal opinion to Jesus' perspective: "I try to align my beliefs with what Jesus taught because I trust His wisdom."

When your friend asks about a challenging topic like hell, you might say, "I believe what Jesus teaches on this. Would you like to look at His parable of the rich man and Lazarus together?"

2. *Answer with a story*

Stories resonate deeply and often communicate truth more effectively than abstract explanations.

3. *Reframe the conversation*

Instead of approaching difficult questions as "us versus them," try to understand what the person truly wants with questions like:

- "What are you looking for in asking this question?"

- “Why is this particular issue important to you?”
- “What would it take for you to trust what Jesus says on this?”

4. Keep a question journal

Write down tough questions after conversations. Research answers. Practice saying them aloud.

5. Remember the power of presence

Sometimes it’s not what you say, but how you say it. Listening patiently and responding respectfully speaks volumes about Christ in you.

Preparation Without Panic

Peter’s call to “always be prepared” invites intentionality—not anxiety. Here are some ways to prepare:

Anticipate beforehand what might come up based on your friend’s background, interests, and previous conversations.

Reflect afterward on which questions caught you off guard and how you could have responded more effectively.

Practice your responses by rehearsing them aloud, role-playing with a Christian friend, or writing them out.

Consider reading resources like *Mere Christianity* (C.S. Lewis), *The Reason for God* (Timothy Keller), or listening to podcasts that address common faith questions.

Grace for the Journey

You will have moments where you stumble. That doesn’t mean you’ve failed—it means you’re human.

Even Jesus’ disciples weren’t theologians. He chose everyday people with teachable hearts. He still does.

Your willingness to engage, to love, and to grow is what matters most.

Transforming My MIND:

According to 1 Peter 3:15–16, what mindset should we have when answering questions about our faith? Why do you think how we respond matters just as much as what we say?

Romans 1:16 says the gospel is “the power of God for salvation.” How does that truth affect the pressure we might feel to have perfect answers?

Transforming My HEART:

Think of a time someone admitted they didn’t have all the answers but still pointed to Jesus. What made their honesty and humility stand out to you?

How comfortable are you with uncertainty in your own faith journey?

Transforming My STRENGTH:

What is one challenging question about Christianity you could research and prepare a thoughtful response for this week?

With whom might you practice articulating responses to difficult questions in a safe environment?

Gracious God, thank You that You don't require perfect answers—only faithful trust.

The power to save is in Your gospel, not my eloquence.

Give me humility to say "I don't know," and courage to speak what I do.

Help me see tough questions not as threats, but as open doors to honest, lived-out faith.

When I feel inadequate, remind me Your Spirit shines through weakness.

May my words reflect the gentleness and respect of Jesus.

In His name, amen.

Day 29

Overcoming Barriers: When Faith Meets Resistance

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-7

When Sharing Gets Complicated

James had been nurturing a friendship with his coworker, Alex, for months. Their conversations had evolved from casual workplace banter to meaningful discussions about life's deeper questions. When Alex confided about his struggle to find meaning after a painful breakup, James saw an opening to share how Jesus gave him purpose in dark times.

But the moment James mentioned Jesus, Alex stiffened. "Religion has caused more harm than good in this world," he stated, his tone firm. "Wars, division—and the Bible? It's full of contradictions. Just another book of ancient myths."

James felt his heart sink. The rapport they'd built seemed suddenly at risk. What should he say? Should he launch into an apologetics lecture? Change the subject? Pray for a fire alarm to go off?

Many Christians have faced similar moments—when the desire to share faith collides with unexpected resistance.

These roadblocks can be discouraging, yet Peter reminds us:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade..." (1 Peter 1:3-5)

We're not offering good advice—we're sharing living hope grounded in the resurrection. That truth strengthens us when conversations don't go as planned.

The Refining Process

Peter doesn't promise that sharing our faith will be easy. He reminds us:

"though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith ... may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:6-7)

Resistance or rejection doesn't mean we've failed. It's part of how God refines us. Like gold tested by fire, our faith deepens—even in awkward or painful conversations.

Navigating the Walls: Responding with Grace and Truth

When a friend says something like, "Religion does more harm than good," it can stop you in your tracks. That's where James finds himself—what started as a personal moment suddenly becomes charged.

What now?

These moments test not only our faith, but also our relational wisdom. Here are common reactions—and a better path forward.

The Urge to Argue: When Apologetics Feels Like Attack

James might feel the urge to defend his beliefs—to launch into a defense with Scripture and logic.

While apologetics has its place, spontaneous theological debates can feel combative and shut people down. The conversation shifts from personal to positional, and James risks sounding defensive.

The Pull to Retreat: Changing the Subject

Another instinct is to dodge. But redirecting the conversation might leave Alex feeling unheard—and James feeling like he missed a meaningful moment. Avoidance may preserve peace in the short term but often creates tension beneath the surface.

The Hope for Escape: Waiting for a Distraction

When things get uncomfortable, we sometimes wish for a text message or a fire drill to end the conversation. But hoping for an exit is neither sustainable or

honoring to the moment. If we believe these conversations matter, we can't rely on divine interruptions to bail us out.

Instead of reacting, James—and we—can choose to respond thoughtfully. Peter's call to give a reason for our hope with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15) offers a better way.

Listen First: Hearing What's Beneath the Words

Alex's frustration likely comes from real hurt—his own or others'. Rather than refuting him, James can ask questions that draw him out:

“That's a strong statement. Can you tell me more about what's led you to feel that way?”

“Have you had any personal experiences that shaped that view?”

Listening without rehearsing a comeback builds trust. And empathy—truly trying to understand where Alex is coming from—can soften his defensiveness far more than a well-formed rebuttal.

Seek Understanding: Exploring the Roots of Resistance

Alex's talk of biblical contradictions or myths hints at intellectual objections. James doesn't need to be a Bible scholar. A simple, honest response works:

“I get that. The Bible can be confusing, and there are a lot of interpretations out there. I've wrestled with some of that too.”

This response validates Alex's concerns without compromising truth. It also opens the door for future conversations or shared resources—when the time is right.

Be Vulnerable: Let Your Story Speak

Instead of debating, James could share how his faith has carried him through pain. “After my breakup, I didn't find easy answers, but I found peace in Jesus. Not by avoiding the pain, but by walking through it with hope.”

Testimony invites, rather than argues. Personal stories disarm skepticism because they're real, not theoretical.

Protect the Relationship: Prioritize Connection Over Conviction

In moments like these, the goal isn't to “win.” It's to plant seeds and keep the connection alive. James might say, “I know we see things differently, but I respect your honesty. I value our friendship.”

This posture keeps doors open for the future—and shows Alex he's not a project, but a person.

Pray Quietly: Seek Wisdom in the Moment

Even in the silence that follows a hard statement, James can pray: “God, give me wisdom. Help me love well. Help me listen more than I speak.”

Prayer isn’t an escape. It’s a way to invite God into the conversation—asking for clarity, courage, and compassion in real time.

In a world of quick takes and sharp opinions, grace and truth are rare—and powerful. When we respond not with fear or force but with presence and humility, we reflect the very heart of Jesus.

Walls don’t fall through winning arguments.

They fall through love, patience, and conversations where people feel seen, not silenced.

Faith Refined by Fire

Peter’s image of faith “refined by fire” (1 Peter 1:7) can reshape how we see spiritual resistance. Just as gold is purified by intense heat, our faith becomes more genuine and resilient when tested in hard conversations.

God uses these roadblocks to shape us:

- ***They clarify belief.*** Challenges force us to reflect deeply on what we believe and why.
- ***They deepen dependence.*** When we don’t have answers, we learn to lean on the Holy Spirit more than our intellect.
- ***They grow humility.*** Admitting we don’t know everything builds credibility and fosters honest dialogue.
- ***They build empathy.*** Listening to objections helps us understand others’ stories, leading to more compassionate responses.

These moments are uncomfortable, but they forge a faith that’s “more precious than gold”—a faith that will “result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7).

The Living Hope That Sustains Us

Ultimately, what sustains us through resistance isn’t perfect answers—it’s living hope. Peter reminds us that our faith isn’t just wishful thinking; it’s resurrection reality.

This hope changes how we see everything:

- ***It gives eternal perspective.*** Awkwardness and rejection shrink in light of “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Peter 1:4).
- ***It offers divine protection.*** We’re “shielded by God’s power” (1 Peter 1:5)—not left on our own when things get tough.
- ***It fills us with joy.*** Even in trials, we can “greatly rejoice” (1 Peter 1:6) because our hope is rooted in eternity, not outcomes.
- ***It promises future vindication.*** Even when our efforts seem fruitless, they will one day lead to God being praised and honored (see 1 Peter 1:7).

This hope isn’t fragile. It’s the unshakable reality of a risen Savior—the reason we can stay hopeful, patient, and bold.

We can’t control how others respond—but we can show up with love, listen with grace, speak with courage, and trust God with the results.

Faithful presence in hard moments is never wasted. It’s refining—and it’s eternally significant.

Transforming my MIND:

What objection to Christianity do you hear most often? How might understanding the deeper concern behind it help you respond with more empathy?

How does having “living hope” of Jesus’ resurrection (1 Peter 1:3) give you strength when faith conversations feel difficult?

Transforming my HEART:

How might God be using your struggles with evangelism to refine your faith into something “more precious than gold” (1 Peter 1:7)?

Think of someone who resists faith conversations. Can you see any signs that God may still be at work in their life—perhaps even through their resistance?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Who in your life raises a specific objection to faith? How could you prepare to respond with both grace and clarity?

What kind of support could help you stay faithful when sharing your faith feels hard? (Prayer partner, mentor, helpful resource, accountability group)

Heavenly Father, thank You for the living hope I have through Jesus' resurrection. When I face roadblocks in sharing my faith, remind me that these moments can refine my trust in You—making it more genuine and lasting.

Give me insight into the deeper struggles behind objections and help me respond with the grace and truth of Christ. When conversations feel heavy or unrewarding, anchor me in the eternal inheritance You've promised.

Free me from the need to control outcomes. Teach me to find joy in simply being faithful. May even my weakest words carry the power of Your truth.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 30

The Beautiful Cost

Bible Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8-12, 2:3-10

When Faith Costs Something

The young doctor sat across from the hospital administrator, her hands steady despite her racing heart.

“Your performance has been exceptional,” the administrator began, “but there’s been a complaint.”

“A complaint?”

“Yes. A patient claims you offered to pray for them. Is that true?”

She nodded. “They were frightened about their diagnosis and mentioned their faith. I simply asked if they wanted me to pray.”

“That’s the issue. Several staff members have reported similar incidents. While we respect your beliefs, this is a secular institution. Keep your faith private.”

She weighed her words carefully. “I’ve never imposed my beliefs—only responded to spiritual needs.”

“Nevertheless, this is your final warning. If it happens again, we’ll have to reconsider your position here.”

Walking to her car that evening, the doctor felt the weight of a hard truth: sharing her faith—even in the most gentle, responsive ways—might cost her the career she’d worked so hard to build.

Paul’s words to Timothy echo across the centuries: “So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8).

The Law of Hardship: A Universal Pattern

Throughout Scripture and history, we encounter what might be called “the law of hardship”—the principle that faithfully sharing Christ will often bring difficulty.

Jesus warned, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20). And again, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Paul uses military imagery to describe this reality: “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

The form of opposition changes—from ancient martyrdom to modern workplace tension—but the pattern remains. Faithful witness meets resistance.

Historical Proof of the Pattern

When Roman Emperor Diocletian unleashed the Great Persecution in 303 AD, he erected a monument celebrating the supposed eradication of Christianity. Yet within a decade, he rose to power and Christianity spread throughout the empire.

In the 20th century, Richard Wurmbrand spent fourteen years in Romanian prisons for preaching the gospel. His love for enemies and witness to fellow prisoners and even prison guards led many to Christ. His post-release ministry, *Voice of the Martyrs*, still supports persecuted believers globally.

Today, Christianity is growing fastest in regions where believers face the greatest opposition—parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

The level of hardship varies—from social awkwardness to active persecution, which is rarely faced by Western Christians but remains a daily reality for millions of believers worldwide. Yet wherever it exists, a surprising pattern emerges: the law of hardship consistently gives way to the law of unexpected blessing.

The Strange Mathematics of Suffering

Paul offers a fascinating perspective on gospel hardship in 2 Timothy 2:8-10:

“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained.

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”

Paul suffers. Others benefit. The result is eternal glory.

This reflects Christ’s own journey: salvation through suffering. In God’s upside-down economy, hardship becomes the highway of redemption. Temporary pain becomes eternal gain—not only for us, but for others.

Why Hardship Accompanies Witness

Why does sharing our faith often lead to difficulty? Several reasons:

Spiritual Opposition. Sharing the gospel engages us in spiritual warfare. Paul writes, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood...” (Ephesians 6:12).

The Scandal of the Cross. The message itself confronts pride and self-reliance. “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Counter-Cultural Values. Christian convictions often conflict with cultural norms. Living them openly brings inevitable tension.

Our Own Weaknesses. Sometimes resistance results from our poor delivery—insensitivity, bad timing, or unloving tone—not the message itself.

The Paradoxical Power of Costly Witness

While hardship in witness seems negative, it produces surprising benefits:

Authenticity. When faith costs something, it displays its worth. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who ultimately gave his life for his convictions, wrote: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

Deepened Conviction. Psychologists have identified the principle of “effort justification”—we value what costs us something. When our faith requires sacrifice, our commitment deepens.

Compelling Testimony. When his torturer asked Richard Wurmbrand, “How can you still love God after what He has allowed to happen to you?” Wurmbrand replied, “You’re asking the wrong question. It’s not why I still love God. It’s why does God still love me?” His response, in the midst of suffering, deeply affected his persecutor.

Five Ways to Prepare for Hardship

Jesus told his disciples not to worry about defending themselves when pressured, “For I will give you words and wisdom” (Luke 21:14-15).

We're called not to fear, but we can prepare.

Here are five ways to do that:

1. Embrace the Cost Honestly

Jesus urged his followers to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28-33). Expecting hardship prepares us to face it courageously.

2. Remember Your Identity

Paul encouraged Timothy by reminding him of who he was in Christ (2 Timothy 1:8-9). Knowing who we are anchors us.

3. Maintain Eternal Perspective

Paul endured pain by focusing on the salvation of others (2 Timothy 2:10). Hardship shrinks when measured against eternity.

4. Build Supportive Community

We need friends who strengthen us when witness is hard.

5. Trust God's Sovereign Purpose

God's will is that no one would perish (2 Peter 3:9) and He can accomplish His will through our challenges.

Worth It All

The doctor from our opening story eventually faced another moment of decision. A dying patient, scared and asking for prayer, looked to her for hope.

She prayed.

That choice led to a formal review and a job transfer—with less pay. But she never regretted it. Years later, she received a letter from the patient's daughter:

“Mom passed last month. She told me about your prayer that day—it brought her back to church. She died at peace. I just wanted you to know—what you did mattered more than you realize.”

Sometimes, the fruit of costly faith doesn't show for years—or until eternity. But Paul's conviction remains true:

“That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12)

Yes, the law of hardship is real.

But so is the promise:

It will be worth it all.

Transforming my MIND:

Which of Paul's statements about suffering in 2 Timothy most challenges or encourages you? Why? How does his "soldier" metaphor change your view of hardship?

How does our culture typically respond to the idea of hardship or cost? How is that different from the biblical view?

Transforming my HEART:

What fears come up when you think about facing hardship for your faith? Name them, then take a moment to bring them honestly to God.

Have you ever faced difficulty because of your faith? How did it impact your walk with God?

Transforming my STRENGTH:

Is there a relationship or situation right now where you need courage to stay faithful in your witness?

What can you do practically to prepare for moments when sharing your faith might be costly?

Lord Jesus, You warned us that following You would involve hardship, yet You promised it would be worth it. Forgive me for when I've chosen comfort over courage.

Thank You for enduring the cross for me. Strengthen me to represent You faithfully, even when it costs something. Help me count it joy to share in Your sufferings, knowing the eternal gain far outweighs any temporary pain.

When I face resistance, remind me You faced the same. When I'm tempted to stay silent, fill me with boldness and love. And when hardship comes, help me see it as part of your redemptive work.

May I never be ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Lord Jesus, You told us following You would be hard—but worth it.

Forgive me for choosing comfort over courage.

Thank You for enduring the cross for me. Strengthen me to represent You faithfully, even when it costs.

Help me count it joy to share in Your suffering, knowing eternal gain outweighs temporary pain.

When I face resistance, remind me You did too. When I'm tempted to stay silent, fill me with boldness and love.

Use every hardship for Your redemptive purpose. I will not be ashamed of the gospel—it is Your power to save.

In Your name, amen.

