

PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

1 John 2:5-6

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(with material from Bill Hybels, used by permission)

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PROLOGUE

Pointing people to faith is something all of us can do —and it shows up on the heels of a simple walk across the room.

SCRIPTURE

But whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: {6} whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked (1 John 2:5-6 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

The image of walking is a metaphor for how a person lives. The “Christian walk” is another way of saying the Christian life. But when it comes to walking for the Lord, many of us have trouble putting our best foot forward. Our “walk” needs to have a clearer purpose and make a more positive impression.

The single greatest thing we can do in our walk is to give to the people in our lives an introduction to the God who created them, who loves them, and who has a purpose for their days. However, for many of us just the idea of sharing our faith with others sends a tremor of terror up our spines. But what if it were as easy as taking a walk across the room? No formulas, no scripts, no on-the-spot demands for huge chunks of memorized information, merely a friendly walk across a room. We just need to learn how to put our best foot forward.

1. ZONE OF THE UNKNOWN

According to the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, most Americans who attend church think their congregation is warm and friendly. And yet the primary reason for visitors not returning for a second visit is because, they say, the particular congregation they visited was cold and unfriendly. How is it that both of these things can be true at the same time?

The answer lies in what is called the “Circle of Comfort.” A Circle of Comfort occurs when we go to church and talk only to the friends and family members we know. It is comfortable because it is easy to converse, easy to relate, there is no threat, and we know that nothing unsafe will happen. It is not surprising then that most people who attend

church think their church is friendly since whenever they go to church all they do is meet with friends. But it is a different story for someone who is new in church. They may know few if any members of the church. While everyone else is enjoying being with their friends, they stand or sit alone. If no one welcomes them they will not return.

But in order to welcome them, someone needs to be willing to leave the Circle of Comfort and enter the Zone of the Unknown. Someone needs to walk across the room and reach out a hand of friendship to someone new to them. And that someone needs to be you and me.

I realize that this is uncomfortable for most of us, but think what could happen if we were to take just a few steps across a room. Is it possible that we could actually impact someone's eternal destiny—perhaps even that of their family? That we could change the course of an entire family history by simply taking a few steps toward someone and offering a warm greeting?

Bill Hybels in his book, *Just Walk Across the Room*, makes this insightful observation:

"The day Christ-followers like you and me stop taking walks across rooms in this manner, the day we stay glued to our Circles of Comfort, refuse to make the walk, refuse to enter the Zone of the Unknown ... the day Christ-followers like you and me stop doing that sort of stuff, it is lights out for the kingdom of God here on earth. It is the beginning of the end of redemptive history. It's the slow defeat of the church—the bride of Christ. It's the end of the dream of Christ that people on earth would come to know him."

2. THE SPIRIT'S PROMPTINGS

Jesus said this about his followers:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Matt 5:13).

So, as the verse says, you've got to have saltiness. You've got to have spiritual effectiveness. But what else does salt need if it's going to affect anything? It needs proximity. You've got to get salt on something if it's going to affect it, right?

Think of it this way: I can be the strongest, most savory form of salt the world has ever seen. I can be the saltiest salt known to humankind ... but I won't make a hill of beans' worth of impact unless I get up close to some people who need to be affected. This means

leaving the Circle of Comfort and entering the Zone of the Unknown.

In order for us to be effective in the Zone of the Unknown, we must be led by the Spirit. We must listen to the Spirit's promptings. Of course, there is genuine fear that has to be overcome to operate in this way. There is anxiety about how everything will unfold once you enter the Zone of the Unknown. How will the conversation go? How will the other person react? It can unnerve even the most seasoned Christ-followers!

But here's the underlying reality I want to remind you of: when we are relating right with Jesus Christ—when there is vitality and openness in our spirits to the promptings of his Spirit—here's what happens:

You'll find yourself standing in a Circle of Comfort as usual. But by the Spirit's power, as you're listening to the conversation at hand, you'll be able to have one eye open and roving around the room to see if there is someone the Holy Spirit really wants you to see. You'll be able to dial into the Spirit's whispers—*Are you trying to tell me something about what's going on in this place? Is there someone you want me to go talk to?*

Not all the time, but some of the time, by God's grace, if you ...

- Commit yourself to being "salty" in your world
- Get close to people who need grace
- Listen for the Spirit's promptings

Then with confidence you can tell God, "All right, I'll walk. I want to know where this prompting will lead, God, and so I'll go." Remember also that it's in the Zone of the Unknown where God often does his best work!

3. JUST WALK!

There's a passage in Romans that is familiar to many of you. It says:

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8 TNIV).

And how was it, exactly, that Jesus Christ demonstrated the love of the Father? What was the radical move he made to prove to you and to me that he really does feel redemptive, grace-filled, unconditional love for each one of us? Some of you know where this is going. He took a *walk*.

At a specific point in history—actual time and space—Jesus walked all the way across the cosmos and reached out his redemptive hand to people like you and me. And because of

that one walk, humankind was able to be saved and secured in the family of God forever. Think for a moment about the implications of that walk: this passage tells us that Jesus, under direction from his Father, left the ultimate Circle of Comfort—heaven itself ... direct participation in the Trinity ... the worship and adoration of the angels.

Jesus Christ left the supreme Circle of Comfort and he took the longest walk a person could ever take, metaphorically speaking. But why?

Here's why: he did it to stretch out a hand to people just like you and just like me. He did it to reach people, many of whom were smack dab in the middle of absolutely wrecking their lives. Some of you have that look that says, "You been reading my mail??" Look, we're all in the same boat here -every person who has ever inhaled air has been (or is still) in dire need of being rescued.

So Jesus leaves the ultimate Circle of Comfort, walks stride by stride all the way across the cosmos, and reaches out his redemptive hand to people like you and me. Isn't that incredible? Guess what? It doesn't end there.

In addition to taking a walk across the cosmos so that you and I could be redeemed, he also took a walk across the cosmos so that you and I could see how it's done. And these days—right here in our everyday lives—what he tries to do with us between now and heaven is to say, "What I did, leaving that circle, making that trip and reaching out to you, what I did ... is precisely what I want you to do. I want this to be characteristic of my followers, that they would be walk-across-the-room kinds of people. Just following my lead, doing exactly what I did ... whenever I give them opportunity to do so."

CONCLUSION

Leave the Circle of Comfort and start walking toward the Zone of the Unknown. Listen for the Spirit's guidance. Reach out your hand, open your mouth, take the risk. And just see what God can do through you!

Because the single greatest gift Christ-followers can give to the people in their lives is an introduction to the God who created them, who loves them, and who has a purpose for their days. Let us put our best foot forward and look for opportunities to have an eternal impact on people's lives — opportunities that originate with a simple walk across the room.

To that end I would like you to consider participating in one or more of the following:

1) Come to the four-part class I am teaching on Wednesday nights called, "Just Walk Across the Room." This is based on Bill Hybels' best-selling book by the same name. It

starts January 6 during our mid-week program known as High Point.

2) Support Alpha. The Alpha Course is a powerful tool to help people connect to God. Look for a “prayer net” to appear at the end of this month that we will use to remind us to have specific people in mind to pray for and invite to the next Alpha Course.

3) Attend the Engaging Church seminar to be held here at First Presbyterian Church on Saturday, April 17, 2010. Members and friends, officers and staff, are invited to participate in a one day seminar where we learn to be a congregation that actively pursues the purposes of God, actively seeks to be in on what God is doing in the world, and greatly desires to take ownership of the ministry God wants us to fulfill.

4) Most importantly, look for those God-given opportunities to walk just a few steps and reach out a hand of friendship to others.