

**JUST WALK ACROSS THE ROOM
(1) THE SINGLE GREATEST GIFT**

Acts 8:26-40

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(with material from Bill Hybels, used by permission)

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SCRIPTURE

²⁶Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.”

³⁰So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” ³⁸He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:26-40 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

[++ PPT Slide 1/Just Walk campaign graphic, Week One ++]

Today, we are going to begin a four-week experience that is going to change the way we view that great category of Christianity called evangelism. Evangelism. For some of you, just hearing that word sends a tremor of terror up your spine. You're sitting there wondering if I'm going to make you come up here at some point and give a personal demonstration of how to share your faith with a nonbeliever.

But please relax. That's not going to happen. Our experience through this series will be unlike almost anything you've ever read, seen, or heard, as it pertains to the topic of evangelism. Here's why I say that. The type of evangelism we'll be exploring involves:

- No formulas
- No scripts
- No quizzes, tests, or on-the-spot demands for huge chunks of memorized information

The paradigm we'll discover together is this: evangelism can be as simple as taking a walk across a room. And taking a walk across a room is something we can all do. It may not be a literal "walk" or even a literal "room" – but each of us is capable of making the effort to welcome others.

Now, I want to introduce you via video to the author of this series, Bill Hybels. He'll set the stage for our time together and then we'll dive into the content for Week One.

[++ Show excerpt from Just Walk Across the Room Four-Week Experience DVD CLIP: Message Video Excerpt, Week One (run-time 1:10) ++]

Did you catch the gist of his closing statement? "If we would all do just the small thing that we can do, we would touch a lot more lives!" If you're a Christ-follower, isn't this essentially what you want most ... to touch the lives of the people you know – the people you love – who are living their lives far from God?

The "just walk across the room" metaphor that serves as the key concept for the series has its roots in a story that's about this very thing. It's a story about one person who had been living really far from God. But then one day, his entire world got upended because a Christ-follower touched his life. And guess how it all began? You got it. With a walk across a room. It's a moving story and you can read the details in chapter 1 of the book.

[++ PPT Slide 2/Week One premise, "The single greatest gift ..." ++]

Friends, the single greatest gift Christ-followers can give to the people around them is an introduction to the God who created them, who loves them, and who has a purpose for

their life. Nothing beats it – not monetary gains, not job opportunities, not recognition or accolades. And when you boil it all down, this is what evangelism amounts to: constantly watching for ways to give this single greatest gift to someone living far from God.

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

Now, what will it take in order for us to give this "single greatest gift" to someone we know?

1. ENTER THE ZONE OF THE UNKNOWN

[+ PPT Slide 3/Point 1: Be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown ++]

We have to be willing to leave our Circle of Comfort and enter what Bill Hybels calls The Zone of the Unknown. This is the zone that makes us fearful of failure or rejection. But God often calls us into this zone. Many of us have felt that nudge in which God asks us to meet a neighbor or introduce ourselves to someone new at church or school or a ball game or ask a co-worker out to lunch. How did you respond?

If you're a living, breathing Christ-follower, then the Spirit is asking you to walk. He's asking me to walk. He's asking us to make a difference in the lives of the people we see each and every day! At work. At school. In social settings. At the gym. At our kid's basketball game. In the midst of our insane schedules. Wherever. Whenever.

If you've submitted your life to Christ but wonder why you're not just rocketing ahead in your spiritual development or your spiritual maturity, could it be that, for too long now, you have clung to your Circles of Comfort, refusing even to glance toward that Zone of the Unknown, let alone take a walk into it?

Now what would happen if we were to take 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 who may be heading for a Christless eternity? Do you think that would be worth the risk of ten steps across the room?

Here's a quote from the book that should stop all of us in our tracks:

"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."

Friends, if you have been "wrecked by grace" – if you have been bowled over by God's gift of new life, as I thankfully have – and if you want to live your life as an expression of love for the great God you know, then let's crank up our boldness-meters and introduce as many people as possible to the God who wants desperately to enfold them with his grace!

All right, so in order to bestow this single greatest gift on someone living far from God, you first must be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown. But there's more. Because unless you've got some supernatural power on your side, you could do more harm than good once you're there.

2: LISTEN FOR THE SPIRIT'S PROMPTINGS

[++ PPT Slide 4/Point 2: Listen for the Spirit's promptings ++]

In order for us to be effective in the Zone of the Unknown, we must be led by the Spirit. This is what happened to Philip as told in our Scripture reading. He was led by God to leave the familiarity of Jerusalem – to leave his Circle of Comfort – and travel south into the desert. The Spirit prompted him to make the acquaintance of an Ethiopian official and tell him about Jesus. One can only imagine what happened when the official arrived in Ethiopia as a newly baptized convert to the way of Christ. All because someone – Philip – listened to the promptings of the Spirit and was willing to risk a little bit of discomfort in the Zone of the Unknown in order to befriend someone for whom Christ died.

We must listen to the Spirit's promptings every step of the way. The key is this: being walk-across-the-room people means that we walk when the Spirit tells us to walk and we don't walk when the Spirit says not to walk. That's what makes this thing dynamic and mystical and out of your control ... and out of mine. Frankly, it's what keeps the edge and the adventure present in the Christian life.

[++ PPT Slide 5/Matthew 5 passage ++]

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" (Mt 5:13).

So, as the verse says, you've got to have savor. You've got to have spiritual potency. 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.

Some of you are thinking, "This is not for me. This is too scary. I don't have the right training, the right confidence level, the right skill level." And if you're in that camp, I assure you I'm sympathetic to your concerns. Believe me, I know what it is like to walk across the room and go, "Oh, man, this is tough! This feels way too risky!"

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, chatting with people you know, 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 some proximity to people who need grace
- Listen for the Spirit's promptings

3: JUST WALK!

[++ PPT Slide 6/Romans 5:8 verse ++]

There's a passage in Romans 5:8 that is familiar to many of you. Will you read it with me? It says:

"The proof of God's amazing love is this: that it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8 PHILLIPS).

Personally, I have spent some time this last week reflecting on what this reality means in my own life. When I was in high school I felt like my life was not right. I had not done anything majorly wrong but I just felt like things were not right. I was not right. So I wondered over and over again, "What do I have to do to get it right?"

I started going to church and I felt like God was speaking to me through every Scripture that was read during the service including Romans 5:8. The pastor used the J. B. Phillips translation as it had just been re-published that year (1972). The message hit me like the proverbial "ton of bricks." There was nothing I could do to make things right. But God did what I could not. God acting in Jesus Christ made this redemption possible. I could have a right relationship with God and a right purpose to my life.

This is not something I can earn. It is a gift from God. What an amazing gift – not merely that God would feel this type of love for me, but that he would go to such lengths to demonstrate it in such a radical manner!

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.

[++ PPT Slide 7/Philippians 2 passage ++]

The verses from Philippians you see on the screen say that 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, if you think of it along the metaphorical lines we're discussing. But why?

Here's why: he did it to stretch out a hand to people just 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. It is as if he said, "I want this to be characteristic of my followers, that they would be walk-across-the-room kinds of people."

[++ PPT Slide 8/Point 3: Just walk! ++]

And that's our third point: Just walk! Why? Because Jesus "just walked" for you. For me. For us. And for every, single person inhabiting the planet today.

[++ PPT Slide 9/Point 3: Just walk! (second appearance of same slide) ++]

This is why we're devoting an entire month to these ideas. So that we can all get better about hearing the Spirit's promptings, yes. But also so that we will start taking action with immediacy and a newfound sense of confidence ... and in the process, that we will become more like Jesus! This is what our four-week experience is about.

[++ PPT Slide 10/"God used you to help point the way" activity explanation ++]

Now I want you to think about how you wound up in the kingdom. I want you to think about how some of your friends wound up in the kingdom. Almost every Christ-follower I know can think back on somebody – it might have been a mom or a dad, it might have been a co-worker or a teacher, it might have been a friend or a neighbor – who walked across a room for them.

This week, I hope you will write a note of gratitude to the one who walked for you. If you're no longer in touch with that person for whatever reason, then please think of a person in your world who personifies all that it means to be a just-walk-across-the-room person. Write a note to them, encouraging them to continue fighting the good fight because their efforts will never be in vain.

[++ PPT Slide 11/Just Walk campaign graphic, Week One (second appearance of slide)

Here's one more quote from the book ... see how this strikes you:

"Jesus Christ knew that fulfilling his redemptive mission would be excruciatingly difficult, risky, downright defeating, and seemingly fruitless for us at times. 'But if you will just persevere,' he might say, 'the potential is colossal.' Think of it! One more treasure – a priceless human being – might be snatched from the clutches of a horrendous, lifeless eternity because of your work. So go! Go right now and bear witness. Sow the seed. Take the

walk across the room. Leave what's comfortable for that which is eternally significant. Risk your life for this, and know that you will never regret your decision."

Let us pray.

God, I pray that you will anoint these four weeks in a supernatural way. I pray that you will turn every timid heart into a bold heart for you ... that you will take every pair of shaky legs – legs that are often too comfortable in their existing circle – and that you will help point them toward people outside the circle who need a touch from you. God, I pray that as our church moves into this exciting new era of relational evangelism, every single person in this fellowship will be open to becoming a walk-across-the-room kind of person, to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.