

JUST WALK ACROSS THE ROOM

(2) LIVING IN 3D

Luke 15:1-7

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(with material from Bill Hybels, used by permission)

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SCRIPTURE

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³So he told them this parable: ⁴“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:1-7 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

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

The reason for our four-week focus on evangelism is not because I couldn't think of anything else to do for October. The reason we're doing this experience is so that we can all become walk-across-the-room people. That's the reason! Because walk-across-the-room people are typically the ones who get to be used in pointing people far from God to faith.

And the reason we want to point people to faith is because pointing people to faith is what God's heart beats for. He gave his one and only Son to reach lost people, right? ... To help lost people get found! And for those of you who really and truly desire to become more like Christ in your lives, I have some good news for you: you become most like him when you help him help lost people get found. Make sense?

Last week, if you recall, we left off with the exhortation to "just walk." We said that if we wanted to give folks around us the single greatest gift we can give them – an introduction to the God who created them and loves them – then we will:

[++ PPT Slide 2/Recap of last week's three points ... (slide builds from point one to point three in abbreviated form) ++]

1. Be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown ... by voluntarily extricating ourselves from our Circles of Comfort and being open to engaging with someone who might need a touch from God;
2. Listen for the Spirit's promptings ... by choosing to rely on his guidance instead of our own;
3. Just walk ... remembering that Jesus took a long, cosmic walk for us, right?

Today I want to spend some time talking about what happens right after you decide to "just walk." In other words, what should you be thinking about, praying about, and talking about in that Zone of the Unknown once you step foot into it? Because if you're anything like me, agreeing to "walk" is one thing. But knowing what to do once you've reached the person standing across the room from you is quite another.

I think these are valid questions for us all to ask:

After I make the decision to walk across a room ...

- What do I think about?
- What do I pray about?
- What on earth do I say??

This week, we're exploring what's called "Living in 3D." 3D Living is a framework for operating successfully in the Zone of the Unknown. It's made up of three "D's," as you probably deduced.

POINT 1: DEVELOP FRIENDSHIPS

[++ PPT Slide 3/Point 1: Develop friendships ++]

Walk-across-the-room people are those who live life in "3D"; first, they constantly look for ways to:

- Develop friendships

If we're going to reflect God's heart, as individuals and as a church, then we must be in continuous search mode. We've got to make a habit of searching for new friendships on the horizon. That is the heart of a true Christ-follower. When you operate this way – when you operate in continuous "search mode" ... watching for ways to connect with people, looking for friendships in the making – I believe all of heaven holds its breath. Heaven wonders, Will you extend a hand of friendship? Will you open wide your arms of acceptance?

All of heaven watches ... holds its breath ... waits ... and then exhales a shared sigh of relief – a joyous, celebrative sigh of relief – when you dig in and do the thing that God is asking you to do. In that moment, the cheers that break out all across heaven are thunderous ... raucous cheers ... utterly deafening cheers!

[++ PPT Slide 4/Parable images ++]

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus is seen in a marketplace setting having conversations with people who are irreligious – people who are really far from his Father and who had made lots of mistakes, painted outside the lines, used terrible language, drank too much, slept in the wrong bed, cheated other folks out of their money ... the list goes on and on.

He is interacting with them ... talking, listening, just enjoying the fellowship. And as the scene plays out, we notice that the religious leaders – the scribes and the Pharisees – become a little troubled in their spirits. A little wrinkled in their shorts. Actually, they think the whole deal is utterly scandalous because the people Jesus is interacting with are the exact people who are on their list! – these are the precise people the scribes and Pharisees hate! And Jesus of all people is hanging out with them!

Somewhere along the way, they had convinced themselves with some self-talk: "Surely God has a heart that looks like our hearts. He has people he loves, bestows blessings on, thinks good thoughts about, and answers prayer for. But he also has a list of people who absolutely disgust him. He disdains them ... and he's just waiting for the chance to send them to hell."

So the Pharisees reasoned this way: "If God's insides are like this – some people he loves, some people he hates – then it's perfectly okay for our insides to be like that – some people we love, some people we just hate. So they looked at the irreligious people who were immoral and ungodly in so many ways, and they hated them ... they wished evil upon them.

Soon enough, Jesus hears them grumbling about this. He sees their hearts and springs into action. He tells three of the most famous stories in Scripture, one right after the other. The first: a lost sheep. The second: a lost coin. The third: a wayward boy.

He starts with a big number, a big scale ... he talks about a hundred sheep. But then, he narrows it down to ten coins. And then, to one son. Do you see his point taking shape?

You probably know the stories. There are a hundred sheep, and one dumb sheep just wanders away. He's going to create all this hassle. The sheep just wanders off and gets itself lost. Then there are ten coins. One of them is misplaced. And then, there is a boy who asks for his inheritance from his father early, which in that society was like saying to his father, "You're as good as dead, so I want my inheritance right now!" And what does he do once he has money in hand? He takes it out to a foreign land and blows it all on parties and unbridled self-indulgence.

Anyway ... three stories. Three very interesting stories.

I imagine that at least one of the Pharisees who heard the stories that day just couldn't shake Jesus' words. He wondered for days on end what those three stories were about. I picture him going away from that marketplace, his mind trailing off to the three stories. He heads to the campfire later that night, and as he's sitting by the campfire, he keeps reviewing the stories, over and over and over again. He says, "Okay ... there were three stories he told. The lost sheep, the lost coin, the wayward son – what did all that mean?" He goes, "Hey wait! In each of the three stories, something wound up missing. The sheep wound up missing. A coin wound up missing. A son wound up missing. Hmmm."

Then I picture the Pharisee saying, "Wait a minute. Maybe it goes down another level. Whatever it was that was missing really mattered to somebody! The lost sheep really mattered to the shepherd. The lost coin was one of ten. The lady only had ten coins. She'd lost a tenth of her entire estate. The lost coin really mattered to the woman! And the wayward son, undoubtedly, really mattered to the father."

So I picture this Pharisee sitting by the fire. He says, "Okay. So what does it mean? What does it mean?" All of a sudden, Kaboom! I can see the Pharisee going, "Oh no ... oh no. Could it be that God's heart is not at all like our heart? Could it be that what Jesus was saying is that the Father's heart is indiscriminately loving? That what Jesus was saying is that those irreligious, immoral, profane individuals that he was talking to ... was Jesus trying to say that they actually mattered to the Father – that they were on his love list?

"And could it be that Jesus was saying, 'God the Father doesn't even have a hate list'? Could it be that the love of the Father is so much love of another kind – love at such a higher and broader and wider level – that every man, woman, and child who has ever inhaled air on this planet is the object of his great affection? And maybe there's not a single person who ever lived that God wanted to condemn?"

[++ PPT Slide 5/Point 1: Develop friendships (second appearance of slide) ++]

Developing friendships means acting on an attitude – a heart posture – that says, "I'm open to you. Whoever you are, whatever you have done, whatever you believe life is all about ... I'm open to accepting you, knowing you, journeying with you, caring about you." That's where it all begins.

No question, lots of us Christians are growing in knowledge, in worship, in character, in serving, in giving. All the research shows that. But are we also growing in our ability to radically accept whoever is standing on the other side of the room ... no matter what?

Developing friendships. This is where living in 3D must begin. Once you are willing to view every interaction as the first step in developing a new, God-honoring friendship, you will find that some pretty interesting doors swing wide open.

Such as this one: you will have unprecedented opportunity to discover people's stories.

POINT 2: DISCOVER STORIES

[++ PPT Slide 6/Point 2: Discover Stories (second bullet will auto-build) ++]

Walk-across-the-room people, remember, are people who live life in "3D", constantly watching for ways to:

- Develop friendships ... in order to
- Discover stories

If you befriend someone and consistently show care and concern for the person then sooner or later you will start to hear about the things that really matter to that person. You will hear that person's story.

Bill Hybels tells about the time he met someone who was in the same racquetball league as he was. The two men got along well, and over the course of the week-in, week-out racquetball commitment, trust levels in their relationship slowly began to rise.

After six months' time, the man felt comfortable enough in the friendship to divulge to Bill that he was working through a difficult situation pertaining to his grown son. The man and his son had come to a terrible impasse after having a disagreement. Ultimately, the father decided to cut off communications altogether ... with his own kid.

Tough stuff.

But for reasons the man couldn't fully articulate, he was now beginning to regret his action. He wanted his relationship with his son back, but he feared he had blown it for good.

In the weeks that followed that revelation, Bill patiently dialogued with this man, asking good questions about his interests, his spiritual life, and his deeper family dynamics.

- He didn't press.
- He didn't judge.
- He didn't try to fix the guy.

He just stayed the course, consistently showing up on the racquetball court each week and faithfully taking an interest in their growing friendship.

At some point, Bill felt a prompting to offer the man an opportunity. "It was a risky move," Bill says, "but I felt like our relationship could withstand it. And so, one day I just recommended that he visit with a counselor-friend of mine. I kept thinking that the situation with his son could be improved, and I knew from personal experience that a Christian counselor can be tremendously valuable in resolving complex relational struggles. Even if he wasn't a Christ-follower, I thought the visit would really help him." Surprisingly, without any hesitation, the man agreed to go.

And after a few meetings with the counselor, he and his son did in fact reconcile.

I don't know what happened after that, Hybels does not say. But here's the point I want all of us to get: It was only because Bill had walked beside this guy for a significant chunk of time – and because he hadn't tried to wedge some spiritual agenda into every interaction – that the father finally agreed to go see the counselor. And in doing so, a deep, deep need was met.

POINT 3: DISCERN NEXT STEPS

[++ PPT Slide 7/Point 3: Discern next steps ++]

This is our third point. Walk-across-the-room people are people who live life in "3D"; they constantly look for ways to:

- Develop friendships
- Discover stories
- Discern appropriate next steps

Once you've risked walking across a room to stick out a hand of friendship and unearth what another person's journey has been like so far, the very best thing you can do is lean way into the whisperings and nudgings of the Holy Spirit. During every single second of your conversation with the other person, simultaneously beg the Holy Spirit for direction. For guidance. For insight. For wisdom. For creative ideas. For appropriate next steps to take.

I want to show you a short clip that I think illustrates well this idea of taking appropriate next steps in situations that may be turning spiritual. You'll meet Dave, a sailing buddy of Bill Hybel's, who felt firsthand what it was like to have someone take appropriate next steps in his life.

[++ Show excerpt from Just Walk Across the Room Four-Week Experience DVD
CLIP: Message Video Excerpt, Week Two
(run-time 1:15) ++]

[++ PPT Slide 8/"The next steps that mattered to me" activity explanation ++]

Last week, you were asked to send a postcard to the one person who took a walk for you – the person who was the most instrumental in pointing you to faith in God. This week, I want us to dive a little deeper into the "incremental things," as Bill mentioned, that helped us warm to the idea of submitting our lives to Christ.

In the video clip, you probably noted several "next steps" that Bill took in the life of his friend Dave – steps that added up over time and led to some pretty remarkable things in Dave's life.

Bill really believed in Dave ... isn't that a great posture to have? He "saw something so valuable in Dave," as he said – a good lesson for us. Do we see something valuable in everyone we meet?

Also, he immediately turned the reins over to God. He said, "I wanted to be sure God was leading this thing, and that I was riding in the second position." This is critical.

What about simply asking about Dave's week? Asking about his wife, Beth. Asking about his work. That simple step honored Dave. It made him feel accepted and cared for. It opened the door for further dialogue because Dave didn't feel threatened or intimidated by the nature of the conversation. This is what is called a good "next step."

Or what about Bill giving Dave a copy of a book on apologetics? Not everyone you know would want or appreciate that exact book. But they might be well-served by some book. That simple step was exactly what Dave needed in order to address the questions he had about Christianity. And Bill, because he was staying tuned into the Spirit ... and tuned into Dave's needs, was able to source that need. A very good "next step."

What were the “next steps” that helped you come to faith?

One of the persons who helped me come to faith in Christ was a tremendously good listener. He listened carefully and compassionately to all my concerns. He did this in spite of the fact – as I would later discover – he was going through a hellacious time in his own life. This spoke volumes to me.

What were the “next steps” that helped you come to faith? Take a few moments to write these down. Perhaps someone gave you a book or committed to praying for you. I'd like you to spend a few moments reflecting on the next steps that led you to faith in God. Consider writing them down in your notes.

[++ Instrumental Interlude #2244 “People Need the Lord” ++]

What were the “next steps” that helped you come to faith? Perhaps you will use some of these same next steps with the person for whom you would cross the room.

CLOSING

[++ PPT Slide 9/Mark 3 text w/hand image ++]

There's an interesting story in Mark chapter 3 about a man with a withered hand. The text says that Jesus was preparing to teach in the temple one day when the Pharisees got an idea. They were upset with Jesus and so they started plotting for how they might catch him in the middle of a Sabbath infraction, quite a no-no in those days. You weren't supposed to work at all on the Sabbath. Which included, it seems, healing injured people.

The Pharisees drag this poor guy with a withered hand into the temple and then stand back to see if Jesus will take the bait. Jesus sees these religious leaders standing in front

of him and just gets irate. The text from The Message paraphrase says he was angry and "furious at their hard-nosed religion." He couldn't believe that they were prizing their rigid laws above showing radical love to someone desperately in need of it.

Well, you can read this story for yourself this week, but essentially, Jesus makes no apologies as he asks the withered-hand man to step right up and receive his healing. He can't not heal the guy. His whole cause is about healing people.

And if there's one thing I want to leave you with today, it is this: You have the profound privilege of reaching the people around you with the same radical love and irrepressible acceptance that Jesus himself carried with him wherever he went.

[++ PPT Slide 10/Just Walk campaign graphic, Week Two (second appearance of slide) ++]

A new week is about to unfold in your life and in mine. And like all new weeks, we can choose to invest it in things that glorify and satisfy us ... or we can choose to invest it in things that glorify and satisfy God. Here's my challenge to you and me.

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

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

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