

Just Walk Across the Room: Lesson 1

Bible Study

April 28, 2010

Tonight, we are starting a four-week series that I think and hope will radically change the way you and I view, understand, and think about the core value called **Outreach**.

Evangelism

For most of us, including me, just hearing the word evangelism sends a tremor of terror up our spines. **You're sitting there wondering** if we're going to make you come up here at some point and give a personal demonstration of how to share your faith with a nonbeliever or maybe go door to door to talk to people about Jesus.

I'd venture a guess that this four-week experience will be unlike anything you've ever seen, heard, or walked through 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 thing 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, wouldn't you agree? Let's try it...get up and walk... ok, so far so good. Ok come on back and sit down.**

"If we would all do just the small things 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" is the metaphor that serves as the key concept for the 4 week class.** It's a story about one person any person who was living really far from God. But then one day, his or her 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.

Question: Who touched your life? Who walked across a room for you? Give me some examples?

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.

Did you hear my welcome message last Sunday? Sound familiar to you tonight? Let me repeat the welcome.

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.**

Ultimately, what the Christ-follower can do is something that we all can do...**have a deep-seated hope that God would use you as the gift-bearer in someone else's life.** And because you are **open to being used by God**, guess what happened? God will use you.

Being Usable

Today, we begin the process of understanding how to get **“usable”** to God. I hope that's something you desire...being utterly used up 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.**

What is your Circle of Comfort? What does this mean? Why is it comfortable? Why do you hang here? Tell me more?

Now, back to the walk-across-a-room idea.

Let's take a closer look at how this whole thing unfolded. **What will it take in order for us to give this “single greatest gift” to someone we know?**

Point 1: Enter the Zone of the Unknown

Think about this with me for a moment. One Christ-follower in a social setting was standing in what we're calling a conversational **“Circle of Comfort.”** He was in a circle where it was easy to relate, where it was easy to converse, where there was no threat ... in other words, nothing “unsafe” could happen. He had every reason in the world to continue talking in that little circle he was in. It was a Circle of Comfort, a place we've all been in, right? We know about this right?

Yet he looked across the room and he saw someone—really saw someone—who was standing alone and perhaps needed a little encouragement or an ounce of friendship. Not only did he look and see, but he felt something and then heard something from the Holy Spirit—something like,

“Why don't you go over and extend a hand of friendship to the guy on the other side of the room.” So he saw the situation. He felt something. He heard a prompting from the Holy Spirit. And then he actually said to the people who were standing with him in the Circle of Comfort, “Excuse me for a minute.”

Now remember, you have no idea what is going to happen once you cross the room and sticks out you hand to this stranger. You don't know what the conversation is going to be like. You don't know what the reaction of the individual will be. But you left the Circle of Comfort. There's no turning back now.

And you walk...probably praying every step of the way. You walk all the way across the room and enter what the book calls the **“Zone of the Unknown.”**

Have you ever been there—in the Zone of the Unknown? It's in the Zone of the Unknown where God often does his best work! It's in the Zone of the Unknown where you say, “Hi, I'm so and so...what's your name?”

Can you believe how simple and straightforward this image is? Just a few steps to cross the room. So get up again and walk across the room and introduce yourself to this imaginary person.

But you tell me, how much kingdom-building impact can one faithful Christ-follower have just because he or she was willing to take them? We shall see later.

I believe the impact was staggering. I believe the gates of hell shuddered when he took the first step. In that moment, the angels in heaven probably began preparing banners to unfurl with the names of the person and his family written on them the moment they crossed the line of faith!

Here's the question I want us all to ponder: 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? Do you now have someone on your heart that you should walk over too? Write their names down in your notebook for later.

Here's a quote 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."

Hear me on this: throughout this four-week experience, I want all of us to remember that one of the top priorities of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives is to turn every single person here—every single Christ-follower—into a walk-across-the-room kind of person.

Say: I can be a walk across the room person. I want to be a walk across the room person.

Everyone, regardless of your age, your gender, your color, your personality type, your respective spiritual gift mix, your experience in kingdom-building initiatives to this point, if you're a living, breathing Christ-follower, then the Spirit is asking you to walk.

He's asking me to walk. Friends, 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?

It seems almost impossible to imagine, but there are people who have experienced the merciful forgiveness and soul-level cleansing of God in their lives and then somehow contract a bad case of **“spiritual amnesia”**—at that point, they simply forget how personal the cross of Christ is to them.

Are there are people in church inside our church that need to hear and be on the receiving end of your walk across the church?

Can anyone say testimony...??? I Need more for future Sundays.

They get wrapped up in their Circles of Comfort—warming themselves day after day from the glow of Christian community, focusing all of their energies and attention on the people standing inside the circle...never once turning around to acknowledge the isolated people standing across the room who desperately need a little injection of hope...Pretty harsh words to say right?

If you have made the choice to follow Christ—

- if you have found him to be truth;
- **if you** have found what the Bible says to be truth—then why would you—why would any of us—think that other people wouldn’t be interested in knowing about what we have discovered to be the most life-changing, heart-stimulating, eternity-altering relationship in our lives?
- **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!**

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, as we’ve established. 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, right?

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. We must listen to the Spirit’s promptings every step of the way.

Before you get the wrong idea about what this looks like, let me tell you that being available to the movement of the Holy Spirit doesn’t always work out the way you think it might. Sometimes we hear about these evangelist types of people who travel cross-country and on their way to the airport they lead everyone they come across to Christ—

the cab driver, the gate agent, their flight attendants, the person held captive on the plane sitting next to them, the family across the aisle—the whole plane becomes a church before they land! Stories like that make us feel like we'll never measure up or be successful at what God wants, don't they?

I'm excited about this kind of evangelism because I think this is what I've been trying to do for years. Sometimes you see and you hear and you feel and you move ... and then you go ahead and take the risk. And then other times, when it seems like maybe you should make a move, things just don't open up that way.

The key is this: fundamentally, 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.

In *Matthew 5:13*, 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.”**

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, true? 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 and salted.**

Based on the law of averages, there are some of you sitting here this tonight who are pushing back against this. In your spirit, you are saying, *“You know, I track with the ideas you've mentioned. But I think this whole deal is reserved for **spiritual superstars** who can do the kind of thing you're talking about with one hand tied behind their backs, and I'm not one of them! I don't have the right training, the right confidence level, the right skill level. I don't have the quick mind, the relational aptitude, or the gift mix, or whatever. I just don't have what it takes.”*

Anyone here tonight in that camp? Negative self talk about not being able to do it? Mike in Snap on Sales:

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 I am learning each day...to trust the Holy Spirit and to trust God to lead the way.

It's true: there is genuine fear that has to be overcome to operate in the environment we're talking about. There is anxiety about how everything will unfold once you enter the Zone of the Unknown.

There can be **incredible anxiety when a normal conversation suddenly shifts gears and migrates into spiritual territory**. It unnerves 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 some proximity to people who need grace and listen for the Spirit's promptings. Then you can make that turn each and every time ... and with confidence tell him, "All right, I'll walk. I want to know where this prompting will lead, God, and so I'll go." Some of you have already experienced this firsthand. If you have, I think you'll agree with what I'm about to say. Keith does it a lot in hospital waiting rooms and cafeterias.

As Christ-followers take walks across rooms ... as they explore the Zone of the Unknown ... as they have initial conversations with people **whose eternities are hanging in the balance and have zero clue how it is all going to turn out ... as they strain to hear the murmurs of the Holy Spirit ... as they frantically try to figure out what it all means**.

Those of you who identify with this, you're thinking, I know exactly what you are talking about, and I live for it! This kind of thing is a high, high priority in my life. Others of you may be able to think of maybe one or two times when you have experienced something like this. And the rest of you are going, "You know what? This is totally foreign territory to me. **If I were being honest, this is something I've never given an ounce of serious thought to.**"

What I hope **you'll discover** in the next few weeks is that this experience is not about trying to get everyone to march to some new orders around the church. **No, what this is really about is helping all of us become more aware of how the heart of God beats through us when we are operating in harmony with him.**

As Christ-followers in this scenario—the scenario where we're operating **in harmony with God**—we win because there is an internal spiritual victory that happens **when we walk by faith** and not by sight. There is something a lot like Jesus that is going on in you and in me when we leave a Circle of Comfort and take that faith-walk across the room and reach out that hand. This is something we can all do. **This is something that every single person in this congregation can decide to do and can learn to do. You can be trained for this. You can be equipped for this. You can receive the pointers that will make you more effective.**

But for what purpose? I mean, when you boil it all down, what's the reason we want to get better about all of this stuff? I'm so glad you asked.

Point 3: Just Walk!

There's a passage in **Romans 5:8** that is familiar to most if not all of us. It says, **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"**. Let me push the Pause button here for just a moment.

Personally, I have spent some time this last month reflecting on what this reality means in my own life. When I came to North Carolina 12 years ago God had gotten my attention through a number of things – I made a commitment that I would follow Christ and never stop seeking to grow and have an active relationship with Him. Since that commitment and the knowledge of truly knowing my eternal life started that day my life has never been the same. I'm no great evangelist, but my life changed that day back at Sharon UMC.

Jesus forgave me and set me free. 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? He took a walk.

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. I got it!**

Think for a moment about the implications of that walk: **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 just like me. He did it to reach people, many of whom were smack dab in the middle of absolutely wrecking their lives. 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 that 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. And we get saved and secured in his family forever as a result. 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.”

And what I hope you will hear in Christ’s exhortation is this: **“Don’t get yourself tied up in knots trying to make sure all of the mechanics and logistics are just right. Don’t give even a hint of mental energy to motivations of guilt or obligation. You can cast all that stuff aside and instead just take the hand of the Holy Spirit and walk. If we will stay open, with an eye focused on people and an ear tuned to his still, small whisper, we will be amazed by what unfolds!”**

God says to us all today, **“I am going to ask you to walk across the street; I am going to ask you to walk across a restaurant; I am going to ask you to walk across an office complex; I am going to ask you to walk across a cafeteria or locker room. I am going to ask you to take that walk, leave whatever Circle of Comfort you are in and take the walk, enter the unknown—and something really exciting is going to happen. That is what I want you to do.”**

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. **Do you believe that?** As you’ve probably surmised by now, this is why we’re devoting an entire month of our ministry calendar 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.

Let’s now look at John Chapter 4. One of the most dramatic occurrences of Christ taking action in this way is found in **John chapter 4.** Jesus and his disciples had been traveling all day and had come to a well. It’s the middle of the day, and these thirteen men are hot, hungry, and unbelievably thirsty. They see a woman standing by the nearby well—we learn later that she had been through five marriages and divorces and that she was now living with someone who was not her spouse. In highly-spiritual terms, that’s what you call having a lot of tread worn off your tires.

Make a note to take a closer look at this story during some devotional time this week—again, it’s found in John chapter 4. When you review it, you’ll notice that all thirteen—Jesus plus his twelve disciples—come up to the well known as “Jacob’s well.” **In my mind’s eye, the disciples probably size up this woman and say, “Hey, we’re going to hang together and go into town ... maybe grab some lunch or something.”**

Now, I’m sure they invited Jesus to go with them. But instead of heading off with the guys, he says, **“You all go ahead ... I’m going to pull out of this circle for a minute, but you go on to lunch.”** After the disciples head into town, he turns around and sees the woman again. Without giving it much thought, he simply makes that turn, and **he walks from one side of the well area all the way over to the other—a move which catches the woman off guard, to say the least.**

Because of the customs in that region, she's not expecting him to have anything to do with her. In their society, Jesus wasn't just walking across a typical "room"—**he was walking across gender, racial, cultural, and even man-made religious restrictions.** Because of her lifestyle, this woman would've been labeled a "sinner" by the religious establishment. She was a Samaritan—a sort of Jewish half-breed who didn't even worship in Jerusalem, the place where all Jews worshiped. Most people—Jews included—wouldn't have even walked through this part of town because they believed they would have become "unclean." **But if you've read the story, then you know that despite all of the protocol violations, Jesus took the walk anyway. He left the Circle of Comfort.** He reached out the hand, and he started the conversation with the woman **he wasn't supposed to have anything to do with.**

Moreover, he lets the conversation evolve from the seemingly innocuous **topic of drawing a cup of water** from the well to something much deeper in nature ... like "living water," as he calls it—a term that catalyzes this woman eventually coming to faith.

Right there in a dusty well area in first-century Samaria. The text says that she leaves her basin, runs into town, and drags half of her friends and neighbors out, telling them that they just have to come meet this guy who knew all about her sordid past but who accepted her and showed her something called ... grace. And for the next two days all of these wide-eyed folks hang around, just listening to Jesus teach. **It says in the text that many people from the town crossed the line of faith and joined God's family during that time frame...All because one man took a walk across a room—okay, a well area—to reach out to someone living far from God.**

But here's the picture I want to leave with you from this story: Imagine fifteen or twenty years later when all of the kids and grandkids of these people are sitting around enjoying the beauty of Christian community. They're basking for a few minutes in the community, strength, wisdom ... the guidance that God alone gives ... the security of heaven. Imagine that they begin to tell stories about where their faith journey began. One of them pipes up ... **"Hey, guys, where do you suppose we can trace our salvation back to ... I mean, where did all of this start?"**

Guess what the answer would be? That's right: you could trace their entire family's salvation back to **a measly patch of sand where Jesus left a group of twelve, with whom he no doubt enjoyed fellowship, telling them, "You stay in your circle and head into town ... but I'm going to make the turn. Please excuse me. I will walk across this dusty well area and reach out a hand of fellowship. And I'll just see what my Dad does."** Once again, in essence, **Jesus said, "Thanks, but I'll just walk."**

Please understand that I know how real life goes. I know that, like the disciples, **we can all be tempted into** staying in our safe little circles. Just like those guys did, we too can make a habit of rushing off to our lunch appointments or business meetings or family gatherings instead of caring about the people standing right in front of us.

But hopefully, the longer we hang around the person of Christ, the more our eyes will be pruned open to seeing the things that he sees. To seeing the people around us who need care, love, friendship, community ... and hope.

As we close tonight, I want you to **think again** 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 coworker or a teacher, it might have been a friend or a neighbor—who walked across a room for them.

And so if you are a Christian, then someone probably took a risk for you along the way and did a little something that would interest you in the possibility of knowing the love of God and the opportunity to be freed from your sins.

If this is true for you, I imagine you have a pretty high respect level for that person—the person who **“took a walk”** to rescue you ... the person who took the risk to approach you and hand you the single greatest gift you’d ever receive in your entire life. I know that my respect is off the charts for the one who moved toward me when I was lost and confused and completely separated from Christian community ...

Here’s the quote ... 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.”**

The single greatest gift you and I can give to another human being is an introduction to the God who declared that his mission was to find every person who was lost ... and to bring them home.

In the three weeks to come, as we talk about what it means to “just walk across the room,” here’s a fair warning to us all: **we are going to get painstakingly practical! We will learn in detail how to excuse ourselves from our Circle of Comfort.**

We’ll learn to look across whatever room we are in and open our eyes and use our ears and discern if there is someone on the other side of the room that we ought to be paying attention to.

We will learn how to take that first step, how to pray, what to pray—specifically, what to pray between the Circle of Comfort and the person who is standing in the Zone of the Unknown. We’re going to learn how to talk normally with people who need a normal Christian to talk to them in a normal way without sounding “churchy”, without having a superiority complex, without droning on and on about things they don’t yet appreciate. And as we learn together how to do it, I offer you a few personal guarantees about the month ahead: First guarantee is this: we will all grow in our relationships with Christ. Second guarantee: we will grow in our relationships with each other—this is why I encourage every single one of you to dive into this with a partner. Next, we will get better at pointing people to faith. And finally, we will have an absolute ball doing it!