

Just Walk Across the Room: Lesson 4

Bible Study

May 19, 2010

Today marks the end of the four-week journey we've been on. Three weeks ago, we began exploring a new way of looking at personal evangelism. We asked the question, what if evangelism really was as simple and straightforward as ... what? Yes, as a "walk across the room."

We were reminded of the single greatest gift we can offer the people around us, which is **an introduction to their creator and lover of their souls, God Himself**. We looked at what it means to "**live in 3D**"—anyone remember the first D? Yep. **Develop friendships. Followed by discovering stories and discerning appropriate next steps, right?**

These three things are what we can **think about, pray about, and act on** when we're operating in the **Zone of the Unknown**. The 3D framework reminds us to **take things slow with people**, allowing **the other person to be in the spotlight**, allowing **the Holy Spirit to lead** the dance.

We dove into the power of story, refreshing our understanding of how much weight our words carry ... and of how critical it is that we share God's story and our own before-and-after faith stories well.

Grander Vision Living

I would venture a guess that this series has been a necessary wake-up call for a lot of us – if not all of us. We've come to appreciate the immeasurable value of taking these walks across rooms ... just to see what God might do. And now as we wrap up this experience, I think the best way for us to use the remaining time we have together is to address the question, "How do we maintain the momentum we've gained in the past three weeks?" How do we—as individuals and as a congregation—keep this evangelistic fire burning in the coming days, weeks, months, years ... so that instead of it being a one-time shot in the arm, this four-week experience can serve as a catalyst for significant life change ... for meaningful mind shifts? For deep transformation of our habits as it pertains to personal evangelism? What I hope to do today is to plant a seed in your soul that will take root and grow into an insatiable and undeniable desire to pursue this thing we're calling the "Grander Vision" every day of your life; So that each day will be chock full of the inspiring, unpredictable, mysterious, vibrant, sensory-stimulating manifestation of the Holy Spirit in your life.

But what is this Grander Vision, Anyway?

Let's see if a good, old-fashioned fish tale from Luke 5 might shed some light on things. The format for today is pretty straightforward. First, I'd like to take a quick look at a story in this passage that's familiar to many of you. After we spend a few minutes dissecting the story—perhaps from a point of view you haven't considered before—I'd like to offer you two observations ... and an exhortation.

Friends, can you just imagine how elated Peter, James, and John were because of this monstrous catch of fish? This was the mother lode! They'd never seen a catch like this! I mean, their nets were bursting ... the boat was sinking; it was so full of fish. They'd never had to call in reinforcements before, for crying out loud. Quite a red-letter day for a few career fishermen, wouldn't you say?

Now I don't know about you, but in my estimation, supernaturally filling some fishing nets is a fairly odd means of recruiting a few disciples; Interesting choice, given all the amazing strategies at Christ's disposal. But here's what I think is even more interesting: I believe this "odd miracle" sets up one of the most critical aspects of Jesus' teaching: the idea of small fish versus big fish.

Think about this with me. From the moment He arrived on the scene ... all the way up until today, Jesus has been asking all sorts of people ... not only career fishermen ... this one question: Are you going to throw your one and only life into pursuing small fish, or will you risk tossing your nets out there in anticipation of catching the human-sized ones? Are you going to dive headlong into the Grander Vision, or will you be the type who settles for the lesser one?

Here's the **first observation** I want to make this night: Jesus desperately wanted three career fishermen ... as well as the fine people of New Hope United Methodist Church.... to understand that this life is all about people. **In Grander Vision Living, the priority is always people.** He wanted them—and us—to prioritize people above everything else that vie for attention.

Prioritizing people, this is what so much of our four-week series has been about, as you'll recall. Taking walks across rooms for people. Caring more about other people than about yourself. Having a sort of "radical inclusiveness" for people, even if they look different, talk different, act different, vote different, and so on. And so Jesus asks all of us who say we want to be walk-across-the-room people ... **Will you choose the Grander Vision in your situation?**

It's the big-fish opportunity that awaits us all, friends: You can catch fish ... or become fishers of men and women. You can be a successful businessperson ... or get all over the business of redeeming lives. You can be the top student ... or focus your attention on studying people. You can shine as a superstar salesman ... or care more about letting your light shine in the lives of people all around you! Jesus was clear about which was the better path.

To paraphrase **Matthew 5:16**, he said, **"Let your light shine before others in such a way that they may see your good works and then glorify your Father who is in heaven."** Let your light shine in such a way ... Let me stop there. "In such a way" means that there must be more than one way, right? I think what Jesus is saying is that we get to choose whether or not our "light" is going to impact people!

Our light will either shine on people and point them toward the Father, or we'll keep our light to ourselves, and in essence deny the people we supposedly care about a relationship with God.

“Make sure your light shines in such a way,” I think Jesus is saying, “that people can come to know my Father: Because of how you treat them; Because of how you respond to them; Because of how you embrace them; Because of how you prioritize them!”

I can almost hear God telling each one of us in this room ...“You can catch fish ... spend all your time netting some scaly, underwater creatures and taking them to market for a few dollars. It’s a perfectly acceptable occupation. But there’s another option! You can become fishers of men and women ... concerning yourself not with dollars but with destinies!”...But why? I mean, what’s Jesus’ end game here? Why is He so convinced that living the Grander Vision really is the better option? **Because, friends, this is the way His kingdom gets built. Jesus was saying to all of His followers—both then and now, “Please understand how important your priorities are. The stakes are way too high for you to put anything but people in your top spot. The way you treat people will serve either as a magnet that draws them to God ... or a deterrent to them ever coming to know him.”**

And whose light was Jesus talking about in the Matthew passage we looked at? **“Let your light shine before others in such a way that they may see your good works and then glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Let your light shine.** Not “your pastor’s” light. Not “your small group leader’s” light. Not “all your Christian friends” lights. No, He says, **your light.** Meaning each one of us has a role to play.

Let me read a brief quote from Just Walk Across the Room that I think sums up this idea well. Here’s what it says: **“You don’t have to be any more talented, any richer, any slimmer, any smarter, any more or less of anything to partner with God. All you have to be is willing to be used by him in everyday ways.”**

And when those of us who name the name of Christ start pulling our own weight, letting our lights shine in a way that lets the people around us know they matter, then kingdom stuff starts exploding in our world! But that’s not all. Why is Jesus so convinced we should live the Grander Vision? Not only because this is the way the kingdom gets built, **but also because this is the way our souls get satisfied.**

When you and I take up residence in this vibrant, otherworldly life called the Grander Vision, we will never want to go back to floating on the smooth, silent, serene surface of the ocean again. Jesus knew that if you and I would build a lifestyle around accepting people, getting to know people, caring for people, serving people, listening to people, embracing people, befriending people, exposing people to spiritual things ... prioritizing people, we would never crave our old ways again; Simple as that.

Observation number two about Grander Vision Living is that the focus is always on **potential.** - It didn’t seem to matter to Jesus that His soon-to-be disciples were teenage boys whose first response to His commands was a little south of obedient. Remember when Jesus asked them to put the nets over the boat to catch some fish? “But we’ve been fishing all night! And we’ve caught ... nothing!” I think their insinuation was, “Hey, who do you think you are? We’re the experts here! We were the ones slugging it out all night at sea, working for all we are worth to net a few fish. We were the ones slaving away while you were sleeping ... you

know, counting sheep, creating sheep, whatever it is you do! And now you want us to listen to you about catching fish?!”

Okay, maybe my imagination gets the best of me, but you get the point. By anyone’s standards, these guys weren’t contending for any Disciple of the Year awards just yet. They weren’t the most obvious choices for primo-followers of the one and only Messiah. **But Jesus saw what these guys could be like once they chose to live the Grander Vision. To look past the self-centeredness ... and see the potential for servanthood To look past the rebelliousness ... and see the potential for righteousness To look past the quick temper ... and see the potential for kingdom-building.**

Aren’t you glad Christ did this with you? -I know I am. You and I looked at our before-and-afters last week and we started to write them out this evening.... I wonder, how ugly was your “before”? **What was it that Christ looked past in your world in order to accept you and embrace you and enfold you in grace?**

Everybody has something that needs some shaping, a little refinement, a healthy dose of God’s perspective before they come to Christ, right? The key is to let God do His work in people’s lives and hearts instead of suiting up to become lifestyle referees for everyone we meet. You will hear more about this in your small group meeting this week, so I’ll leave it at that for now. Suffice it to say, I hope we all approach people with the same radical inclusiveness, the same eye for potential that we are so grateful God had for us, remembering that He saw something so valuable in us that He was willing to take us in ... right in the middle of our sinfulness. As we looked at in week two, **God has no “hate list.” Nor can we, if we want to be used to accomplish the work of the Holy Spirit.**

Let me give you an example of what I’m talking about. You’ll probably agree that Jesus’ eye for potential has been roving since long before you and I were around, right? In fact, in biblical times, **Christ’s eye for potential** was to blame for uprooting, upending, and utterly transforming the life of a guy named Levi ... Levi or Matthew. Different names, same guy. Do you remember this story? It’s found in **Luke chapter five. Luke 5:27** says that Jesus went out one day, saw a tax collector sitting at his tax booth—someone obviously outside the family of faith—and told the guy, “Follow me.” Matthew’s comrades probably thought he’d lost his ever-lovin’ mind. Why on earth would a successful businessman ditch his career and traipse after a homeless rabbi? But Matthew would soon discover what Jesus already knew: **choosing the Grander Vision over lesser visions leads to wealth that the world only wishes it could offer.** - “Follow me!” He said to a wide-eyed Matthew that afternoon. And in a flash, the unscrupulous tax collector left everything—including his open cash register—to pursue Christ.

What did following Jesus mean to Matthew? For starters, walking away from his business, his identity, his comfortable routine ... not to mention his financial security. But what else did it mean? It meant that Matthew would be prizing—and prioritizing—the people he once swindled. **He’d be looking for the potential good in them, rather than the potential vulnerability that he could exploit.** Tax-collectors weren’t the kindest, most respected lot in those days. Much would be shifting for young Matthew now that Christ was in his life ... much more than even he could imagine! In those early days as a disciple, though, Matthew probably wasn’t altogether sure what he’d gotten himself into. **I’m definitely going to live**

the Grander Vision, he probably thought ... now I just wish I could figure out what that means! Any of you relate?

I promised you an exhortation. And here it is: start small but start! Like Matthew, you may be chomping at the bit to start living this Grander Vision life. You're on board with the "people-priority" and "potential" pieces ... you're just a little perplexed about what's supposed to happen in your life—today ... right here and right now—as a result! If Matthew were standing here instead of me, I think he'd say, "Yeah! I totally understand where you're coming from! I felt exaaaaactly like you feel."

Here was Matthew, a newly converted disciple of Jesus' who had a deep, deep desire to expose his friends and family members to the acceptance and love, the purpose and hope, that he'd found in the person of Jesus Christ. He hadn't had time to go through the disciples' official **Evangelism 101 course**. He was too new **to have memorized** the diagnostic questions, the success scripts, the handy formulas. - But all of his old buddies were standing there in their tax-booths—the same spot where he used to work ... just days ago, in fact! Their lives would be so blessed by knowing Christ, but he had no idea how to get that introduction made. There he stood in his newfound **Circle of Comfort** ... he saw them there in that once-familiar but now unknown zone ... and something tugged at his heart ... Just then, he decided what to do. Matthew decided to take a walk. He'd already cleared his plan with Jesus and the disciples. And what was the plan? Keep in mind that Matthew was a brand-new Christ-follower. "Giving" wasn't exactly a tax-collector's natural-born instinct. He didn't know any of the catchy worship choruses to sing. He didn't have the prayer thing down pat yet. But there was one thing Matthew was good at: he was good at throwing parties!

But not just any party. A party where he could stick his old tax-collecting buddies in a room with his new friends—the Christian ones—and just see if some of the good stuff might rub off on the ones who had yet to taste grace. **What if, instead of just hanging together, what if a few of my new friends actually take walks too—walks across my living room and stretch out a hand to my old buddies?** Matthew thought. What if a couple of interesting conversations get started ... maybe about what happened to their crazy buddy Matthew! And what if some seeds are planted in the minds and hearts of my friends ... man, what if a few of those guys actually come to faith as a result of this one, simple party?! That would be amazing!

As I read this fascinating story in Luke 5, here is what occurs to me: Matthew could have been utterly consumed by his own transformation just after he chose to follow Christ. He could have gotten so enamored with how much of his own life was changing for the better that he just left everyone else in his dust. He could have absolutely ditched his old friends and instead clung fiercely to his new ones. Remember that all-too-familiar place we visited in week 1, the "Circle of Comfort?" But Matthew chose differently, didn't he? **He chose to prioritize people outside the family of God above all that ... people who need an ounce of acceptance, a little Christian friendship, a taste of grace.**

Matthew also chose to see the potential in his tax-collecting friends ... the same way Jesus had miraculously spotted potential in him. I mean, really, who would have given Matthew half a chance of ever coming to faith in Christ? Probably made the front page of the Capernaum Chronicle. You might sum it up this way: Matthew had a right view of his role in the lives of his friends. Matthew didn't have his act all together. He didn't have it all figured out. **But one**

thing he did have: the hope of heaven. And that reality single-handedly compelled him to take action.

Matthew knew that God had saved him for a purpose ... a purpose that included more than his own salvation; A purpose that included being salt and light in his world; A purpose that centered around living out a Grander Vision ... by making people his priority and their potential his focus; A purpose that included getting all over the task of taking walks across rooms ... because people were the only thing he'd be taking with him to heaven one day. Same holds true for us.

Once you start walking with Christ, everything is fair game! **His ways start infiltrating your ways. His thoughts get into the nooks and crannies of your thoughts. His desires ooze into your own heart's desires.** And from that moment on, you're never, ever the same!

And this, friends, is why we take walks across rooms ... in order to share this beautiful upheaval with people who don't yet have the hope of heaven. Who don't yet have the assurance of abundance here on earth. What a magnificent gift we get to give a waiting world! ... **The gift of a relationship with the One who is like no other; The One who cast His own agenda aside in order to reach out to people on the beach, people on the side of the road; The One who saw faithful disciples in the dripping-wet, smelly clothes of a couple of fishermen; The One who saw a passionate follower in the booth of a wretched tax gatherer; The One who saw limitless spiritual opportunities in something as fun as a party!**

Friends, don't settle for just what you can see on the surface of your life. There is a whole, Spirit-led universe of activity going on all around you ... that you can tap into right now ... today!