

## Just Walk Across the Room: Lesson 2

### Bible Study

May 5, 2010

**Review Session #1 and discuss the reading of John Chapter 4 and the woman at the well. How does this relate to walking across the room? Discuss in detail.**

I don't know about you, but during the past week, with all these ideas in my head of "walking across rooms" and "entering zones of the unknown," I found myself strangely preoccupied with people: People at the store; People jogging on the sidewalk; People in cars; All sorts of people! I'd look at them—really look at them—and go, "Okay, God ... am I supposed to be feeling anything right now? Do you want me to do something here ... maybe give them a taste of the single greatest gift thing?" It was uncanny!

**Question:** Did you all experience this too? Examples?

Friends, please know that we are in this together. I'm learning right alongside you! As a reminder to us all, the reason for our four-week focus on this area of evangelism is NOT so that we can just burn through some of our ministry calendar. Remember the real 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? With that goal in mind, let's dive into this week's content.

Last week, if you recall, we left you with the exhortation to "just walk."

We said that if we wanted to get all over the task of giving 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:

- 1. Be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown** ... by voluntarily removing 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?

Tonight, I want to spend our time together 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 destination is quite another—the person standing across the room from you.

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.

**Ready for the first "D"?** 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 the Father'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. But things don't always pan out this way, do they? Let me see if I can solidify in our collective consciousness the dynamics that are at work here.

Here's where it can get pretty interesting: let's take these same concepts and apply them to the life of a Christ-follower, shall we? So, let's say that "Jane" has been walking with Christ for ten years. She comes to Christ, gets radically accepted and redeemed and renewed by the King of the universe, and she thinks it's about the best thing she's ever experienced. Her walk with Christ is thriving. Additionally, she has a new found care and compassion and concern for the people around her ... more than anything, she wants those people to experience the same mind-blowing acceptance she experienced from Christ. In other words, all is as it should be! Jane is walking with Christ ... and experiencing a corresponding increase in her love and acceptance of the exact same people whom Christ loves. It's all good.

Over time, Jane sees dozens of her friends and family members come to faith in Christ—the transformation she witnesses is simply astounding! These new Christ-followers and Jane start hanging out with greater frequency, just to chat about how much they love Jesus ... how much they love the new lives they're living as a result of his intervention in their worlds. It's all good!

But then something strange takes place. Things turn ... not so good. After many months, or even many years go by Jane's life becomes nearly 100 percent consumed by her friends who love Jesus. That part's all good ... I suppose ... except that Jane no longer reaches out. She no longer feels that initial enthusiasm for sharing Christ with people outside the faith. - She no longer embraces unconvinced friends ... mostly because no "unconvinced friends" exist in her warm, safe Circle of Comfort. It's the ugly underbelly of the Christian life that exists if Christ-followers aren't diligent to keep it at bay.

**Here's how it plays out: we have Jane walking with Christ ... that part is still going strong, but simultaneously, the love for folks not yet walking with God wanes. Proximity to the greatest People Person ever to walk the planet ... who is Jesus, of course ... increases while proximity to the people who need Him decreases. This is the most awful "indirect variation" known to humankind.**

Seems hard to believe, doesn't it—that this trend could take place in the life of someone who is genuinely walking with Jesus Christ? If you think about it, this whole dynamic is what makes the **Circle of Comfort so comfortable**.

Almost all of us find it quite easy to love some people—maybe a spouse or our parents or our kids ... our friends at work, our friends at church. We see them, and our initial reaction is love. - We want to bless them. - **We crave time with them. We're filled with joy when these people come to mind. Anyone relate to what I'm saying here?**

**It's true: almost every human being has a loving heart toward some people.** But here's what may not be so easy to admit. While almost every human being has a loving heart toward some people, almost every human being also has a secret list of people they just can't stand. It might be a business partner who took some of your money and broke up your partnership twenty years ago. It might be a spouse who walked out on you. It might be someone who wounded you with words. You might have reasons—really good reasons—for not liking a certain number of people.

**But you know what? It even gets more complex than that.** -Some of us don't like entire groups of people. Some people in this room get huffy when we're surrounded by men and women who don't vote the way we vote. Some of us become all constricted inside when we're confronted with certain ethnic groups. Some of us are just plain disgusted with people who aren't at our same socioeconomic level. We don't talk about this very often. It's uncomfortable, isn't it?

**But it remains true: many of us have a "list"** ... and on that list are people we wish we could put on a ship headed permanently out to sea. Ask me to love some people outside of my "circle," and seemingly out of nowhere, a whole host of qualifiers and filters rise up out of me.

**I call them the "better-be's,"** and they go something like this: - "They better be white, they better be pro-life, they better be liberal, they better be Conservative, they better be NDP, they better be young, they better be old, they better be single, they better be rich." Any of these ringing a bell?

The reason I introduced you to our friend Jane here is because before you and I will agree to walk across a room and approach a perfect stranger, we'll have to get past what's inherent in many of our attitudes ... **this awful filter that says "Unless you pass my list of qualifiers ... unless you somehow meet the standard that lives in my mind and heart, I refuse to reach out to you."**

Friends, my firm belief is that unless Christ-followers get dogged in their determination to eradicate this ugly underbelly from their lives, they will never even enter the Zone of the Unknown. They will get all psyched up to remove themselves from their Circles of Comfort; they will decide with fierce conviction that, come hell or high water, they are going to walk across that room; they will finally receive a clear, indisputable prompting from the Holy Spirit; and then ... they'll freeze up.

Why? **They've pulled a "Jane," plain and simple.** And when it's all said and done, they'll have screened out dozens of people they could have been taking walks across rooms for ... all because those people didn't "fit the mold" of who they normally would hang out with.

**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.

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. The intertwining of these “D’s” is so critical for us to grasp. **Your goal and mine should be to engage in the lives of the folks around us, developing friendships where we can so that we have a baseline for asking good questions about their journey.** Then, once we truly understand their unique needs, we can try to help meet them, which we’ll look at more in our third “D.”

Friends, its uncanny how once you take time **to uncover another person’s story ...** once you are viewed as a trusted confidant ... the other person just opens wide up about their heartfelt needs. **This is the stuff God blesses, really and truly.**

I just wonder ... have you ever had a situation like this unfold in your interactions with people? Have you ever taken the risk to probe someone’s story and then been absolutely floored by the doors that opened? I know I have. Seriously ... give it a try. Strike up a relationship with a lost person and start hanging out with them, start praying and trying to have a spiritual conversation ... just to reconnect with the real world ... just to get the spotlight off of you for a change ... just to take an interest in someone who may be waiting for you to come along and care ... just to see what God might do.

**Discovering stories of people far from God.** With people who may be one prayer away from knowing the God you know. - Be the one person in their world who takes a genuine interest in their story so that you will know how best to serve them ... which leads us to our third “D.”

**“Divine forks in the road”**—intersections where you can either listen to a person’s story and then pray for all you’re worth that God would show you what to do next ... or where you abdicate any responsibility to extend a hand ... and just walk away. I hope that as God presents these divine forks in the road this week, you will take the path that leads to engaging.

**The path that leads to investing.** That path that leads to **sticking your neck out** to provide someone a resource that will meet a pressing need they have. There’s no telling what joy awaits those of you who boldly choose to take the next step with people this week!

**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 and 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 **nudges** 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.** And I mean beg! Shamelessly beg if you must. But beg. Why? Because left to our own devices, we will botch the whole thing. **Do you really know how to beg?**

This week I want you 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 or who is keeping you in faith by their example. This week, I want us to dive a little deeper into the “little things,” that helped you warm to the idea of submitting our lives to Christ. - **What little things led you to Christ?**

**Questions during an encounter:** All right, now to the “next steps”... What about simply asking about the person’s week, his spouse, family and children, or his work? This simple step can honor a person. It made a person feel accepted and cared for. It can open the door for further dialogue because the person should not feel threatened or intimidated by the nature of the conversation. This is what is called a good “next step.” Here’s another one: **how about telling the person that he was going to pray for him every day that week?** There’s power in a commitment like that. As we develop friendships and discover stories of people far from God, we need to discern appropriate next steps!

There’s an interesting story in **Mark chapter 3 verses 1 to 6** 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, remember? 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 acceptance that Jesus himself carried with Him wherever He went.

**The same radical love and acceptance was extended to you at some point along the way if you are a follower of Christ. All of us were withered in one way or another when people around us chose to take an appropriate “next step” or two**

**and help move us an inch closer to God.** Spend some time this week thinking about the “next steps” that someone took for you in your journey to Christ. **Send them a note or postcard too.**

Here’s what I want you to **remember: in your day-to-day lives, there are withered parts all around you now**, friends: People with withered hearts and withered minds and withered bodies; People with withered dreams and withered energy and withered hope. I just wonder if perhaps God will use you to help heal a few of those withered parts between now and when we meet again.

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 ... my challenge to 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; and **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. Your earnest request—“lead me, Holy Spirit”—may not lead you to wild encounters or ringside observances of withered hands getting healed ... but it might! Wherever it takes you, if you choose to be obedient to God’s leading, I think you’ll look back on this week and say, **“This was a week well-lived.”**

**Homework: Post cards or notes to people who walked to you or who now are helping you grow in faith by their actions and walks of faith.**