

Training Session 16 - Sharing God's Love: Obstacles

Objective

Identify and overcome the obstacles that keep us from sharing the love of Jesus.

Key Scriptures

Romans 1:5,16

We are living out new rhythms for life that are God's rhythms--they are all drawn right out of His word and are things He has commanded us to do. We're calling them BLESS rhythms, and one particular rhythm we're seeking to establish with our lives is the rhythm of intentionally loving people with their long-term best interest in mind (their eternally long-term best interest!) by sharing the love of Jesus with them. The BLESS rhythms are designed to lead us in a life of loving God and loving people and in our next series we want to spend a few weeks thinking intentionally about how to share the love of God with others in our lives.

Hopefully, over time, we become more like the apostle Paul, who said, "It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts Him" (Romans 1:16). What a Message, what a Hope, what a Loving, Rescuing, Redeeming God we have in Christ Jesus. "Through Him we received both the generous gift of his life and the urgent task of passing it on to others who receive it by entering into obedient trust in Jesus" (Romans 1:5). We have received the generous gift of life from Jesus; we now, as a result, have an urgent task of passing it on to others. That is what we will be considering today - how we pass on this generous gift of Jesus to our friends and neighbors.

The Reasons We Don't Share Jesus

Before we look at how to pass along this generous gift of Jesus, it is important to recognize some of the obstacles that keep us from sharing this generous gift, and where necessary, confess and repent.

Obstacle #1: "I don't have the gift of evangelism."

Yes, this is probably true in most cases, but irrelevant. According to the Bible, sharing the generous gift of Jesus (that is essentially what the churchy word evangelism means) isn't something that only the "Navy Seals" of Christianity do. All of us, not an elite few, are given the ministry and message of reconciliation that comes through sharing the generous gift of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:18); all of us, not just the original 12 disciples, are called by Jesus as disciples and made into fishers of men (Matthew 4:19); all of us, not just Paul, are given "the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24); all of us, not just those in earshot of Jesus' last words, are under orders to "go and make disciples of the nations, baptizing them" (Matthew 18:19); all of us, not just some of us, are under orders to love our neighbors, and the most loving thing we can do is share the generous gift of Jesus with them (Matthew 22: 36-40).

Another way to say this is that while we may not all have the *gift* of evangelism, we are all called to do the *work* of evangelism. According to a recent survey, less than 1% of Christians believe they have the gift of evangelism. Yet, all of us are called to the work of evangelism—that is

simply what disciples do. In a very real sense, we're in a family business, His business, and He's calling us to do the work of the family business: share the love!

Obstacle #2: "I've tried, but I'm no good at it."

Some of you have tried in the past and it didn't go so well, so you think, "Why subject myself to something that I am terrible at? I'll just serve in some other way." There are 3 reasons why your previous "success" or "failure" in sharing the generous gift of Jesus shouldn't stop you from doing so in the future. First, you need to make sure you have a Biblical definition of "success" in evangelism. Success is not "winning souls to Jesus" or "saving the lost" - both of these are Jesus' work, not ours. According to Acts 1:8, the central task of evangelism is to bear witness to Jesus - the results (of salvation) are entirely up to Him. Acts 1:8 says, "And you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." That is our role - to bear witness. That is evangelism. Therefore, success is simply being faithful to bear witness to Jesus, or, as we have said throughout, faithfully sharing the generous gift that you have received.

What we will see (in the next lesson) is that the very best way you can share the love of Jesus is to tell your story. Christians sometimes call this a testimony, but it is really just your story of God showing up in your life and redeeming and restoring you and taking the worst parts of you and making them new in Christ. Think about it. We all love stories, especially comeback stories. So tell yours. We'll work on that next week.

Obstacle #3: "I don't know any non-Christians."

Sometimes the longer people are Christians, and the more integrated they become in the church, the fewer relationships they have with non-Christians. I was having a beer with a follower of Jesus who felt this way and I asked him to consider picking up a new hobby that would bring him into contact with non-Christians. He looked at me and said, "Yeah, but the only reason I would pick up this hobby is....." He paused, then smiled as it dawned on him, "the only reason I would pick up this hobby is.....so that people meet Jesus." "Precisely," I said. "That is what following Jesus is all about. You do things you otherwise wouldn't do so that others meet Jesus and He gets glory." What could be greater in life than doing something with one intent: the glory of Christ! Joining Rotary to generously share Jesus; joining a play group to generously share Jesus; attending a neighborhood meeting to love your neighbors; building relationships with co-workers for the glory of Christ.

We hope that our lesson on "Loving Your Neighbors" has helped and all of us are praying weekly for open doors of opportunity to love your neighbors in word and deed during the normal routines of your life. In reality, we actually do know plenty of people who are hurting and far from God. Some call themselves Christians, others don't. In most cases, we don't need to do anything different (like join Rotary), we only need to open the eyes of our heart, pray for those right around us who are not following God, and then take one intentional step towards them in love.

Obstacle #4: "I'm too busy."

In Charles E. Hummel's pamphlet entitled "The Tyranny of the Urgent", he states, "Our greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important." So many urgent things invade our lives every day and crowd out important things like the Great Commandment - loving Jesus and loving our neighbors.

Bradford and I certainly struggle from this too. In order to combat the tyranny of the urgent, we have found it helpful to have a weekly meeting to make sure that our hearts and our calendars are in line with this most important value of sharing the generous gift of Jesus with our neighbors. Specifically, here are some ways we're seeking to bring our hearts and calendars in line with this value (and please don't be guilted into copying our application - this should look different for you):

1. We have a weekly meeting to talk about how we can love our neighbors on our 3x5 card "to love" list that we're praying for. In reality, often the "urgent" scheduling of soccer practice and endless kid activities take over, but we do aim for it.
2. Our goal is to have one family who isn't following God or feels far from God over for dinner every month.
3. Stephen's goal: Share the love of Jesus with 3 people a week.
4. We both try to pray for the salvation of our 3x5 card "to love" list daily and we do so with our kids at night.
5. Missional living - meaning all that we do (playgroup, going to the park, working out, kids games, etc.) is living out the mission of God, which means being intentional and prayerful with the relationships that Jesus is forming.

Obstacle #5: "I have no clue how."

Most people simply don't have a clue where to begin. Not only are they not taught, but they have never seen this modeled. Hopefully, this won't be a problem as we journey together as a group. We'll learn together and hold one another accountable to not living as ones who hoard the love of Christ.

Obstacle #6: "I'm not a good speaker or very persuasive."

Yes, but this confuses the central gospel reality that God uses the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:26). Moses didn't feel that he was very eloquent or persuasive either, but God chose him to make a speech to Pharaoh that would decide the fate of millions of people. David was the the youngest son, a shepherd boy, who became a murderer and adulterer, but God chose him to be the greatest King Israel ever had. Mary was poor and a virgin, but God chose her to birth His son. Paul was trying to stamp out the church of Jesus, but God chose him to be the prominent architect of the church of Jesus. God doesn't need "all star" public speakers to bring people to salvation, but he does want you in all of your weakness to step out and generously share the gift that was kindly given to you.

Obstacle #7: "I'm afraid of what it will do to our relationship."

Politics and religion are the two subjects that are universally off limits. In some cases, we are afraid of what sharing Jesus will do to a relationship. "What will they think of me? I don't want them to think I am pushy or one of those Jesus-freaks." And, quite honestly, we all want to be liked, but more important than being liked is being faithful. Let God sort out how they will "feel" about you, remembering that the most loving thing you can do is to eventually share the generous gift of Jesus. Think about it. If we knew a store that gave away joy, peace, and love for free, would we really be loving our neighbors if we didn't tell them about it?

Obstacle #8: “My relationship with Jesus is a private thing.”

No, a relationship with Jesus isn't a private thing. It is *personal*, yes, but it most certainly is not *private*. Satan wants it to be private so that we are isolated; Jesus wants our relationship to be public and deeply embedded in community. His desire for us is to be freely and openly sharing our failures (so our community can pray for us) and our successes (so that He gets glory).

Methods for Sharing Jesus

All of us are guilty of allowing these things (and others) to keep us from generously sharing the gift of Jesus, but now let's think about some different ways to begin to change. Here are a few ways we can generously share Jesus in the days to come:

Inviting to church

According to studies, the number one way people become Christians is through a friend inviting them to church. Wisdom and prayerful love is required in knowing when (and how often) to invite your neighbors, but this has proven fruitful for countless people.

Inviting to a Bible study or Mentoring group

Many non-Christians are hesitant to come to a church, but they are longing for an authentic community.

Inviting to serve

We should constantly be drawing in others who have a heart for renewing the community, regardless of what they believe. Either through Movement, your church, or some non-profit, the opportunities to love and value people are endless. You can use some of our own mercy, justice, and community development opportunities as a way to begin generously sharing the gift of Jesus.

Sharing your story

Sharing your story isn't debatable. It is your story. And it is probably the most powerful way for you to bear witness to Jesus. Developing a 5 minute version of your testimony with a bridge to explore Jesus is one of the best ways to generously share the gift of Jesus. We'll do that next week.

Inviting to a “Questions about God” lunch and learn or a worship night

One way for you to generously share the gift of Jesus is by inviting your friends or neighbors to come with you to one of our Curious Discussion Forums hosted by Pastor Stephen.

Inviting to explore the life of Jesus (Mark study)

How do you get people to explore the life of Jesus with you (in a Mark study) over lunch or coffee? Share your story with a bridge to explore the life of Jesus. For example, “We have been friends for awhile, but I have never heard about your spiritual journey. Tell me about your spiritual journey and the things that shaped you growing up.” After you listen, you say, “I would love to hear more about your journey and also share with you about my journey. In fact, the person who shaped my journey more than any other is Jesus. What if we read through the book of Mark together for 4 weeks so that we could learn from His journey, my journey, and yours?”

How do I create an interest to read Mark? Mark is essentially a biography about one of the most influential men who ever walked the planet. Obviously, Jesus is recognized as one of the greatest experts on spirituality that you will find, so it makes sense for us to use him as a reference point. Also, the good news is that Mark is a really short book. You can read less than three chapters (which is usually only a page or two of reading) every week and you'll have read the whole book in 6 weeks.

Individual Study and Group Discussion Study and Discussion Questions

1. Read Romans 1:5,16. Are you generously sharing the gift you have received? Rate yourself on a 1-10 scale and then give a rationale for your number.
2. What obstacle did you most identify with that keeps you from generously sharing the gift of Jesus?
3. Is there another obstacle that keeps you from generously sharing Jesus?
4. Discuss your plan to keep the busyness of life (i.e. the tyranny of the urgent) in check, so that you can engage in this urgent and important task of generously sharing the gift of Jesus.
5. Is there anyone that you sense the Holy Spirit is leading you to invite to explore Jesus with you in a Mark study?
6. Practice the bridge questions together as a group.