

## **Training Session 17 - Sharing God's Love: Getting Ready**

### **Objective**

To equip you to share God's love by having you think through, write out, and be able to articulate how his love is transforming your life.

### **Key Scriptures**

Matthew 4:19; Acts 1:8

### **Introduction: Fishermen?**

Before we begin our training this week on sharing the love of Jesus, let me tell you a fish story.<sup>1</sup> It came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen, and lo, there were many fish in the waters all around them. In fact the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with hungry fish. Week after week, month after month, those who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and discussed their 'call' to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year, they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing should always be the primary task of fishermen and the essence of any good mission statement.

Continually they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for innovative definitions for fishing. Further they said, "The fishing industry exists for fishing as fire exists for burning." They loved slogans such as "Every fisherman is a fisher" and "A fisherman's outpost for every fisherman's club." They sponsored special meetings called "fisherman's campaigns" and "the month for fisherman to fish". They subsidized global congresses with keynote addresses on the rationale and best practices in fishing. They promoted new fishing equipment and called for papers to be presented on innovative new baits discovered for fishing.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called "fisherman's headquarters." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. In addition to meeting regularly they formed a board to organize and send out fishermen to other places where there were many fish. All the fishermen agreed that what was really needed was a supportive board that would challenge fishermen to be faithful. The board was formed of those who with great courage and motivation could do vision-casting for fishing. They spoke of the need to fish in faraway streams and lakes where many fish of different colors lived. Furthermore, the board hired staff and appointed a committee and subcommittees to defend fishing and to look into current trends and issues in fishing, but the staff and committee members themselves were far too busy too fish.

In addition to fishermen's headquarters, fishing schools were built. Over the years specialized courses were offered on the existential needs and intricate nature of fish, the psychological reactions of fish, where to find fish and how to approach and feed fish. Those who taught had PhDs (doctorates) in fishology and became professors and heads of the fishology department in universities. But the teachers did not fish; they only taught fishing. Year after year many

graduated and were given fishing licenses. They were sent to do full time fishing, some to distant and exotic waters that were filled with fish.

Some spent much time, money and travel to do research on the history of fishing and see the far away places where the founding fathers did great fishing in centuries past. They lauded the faithful fishermen of bygone years who handed down the idea of fishing and eventually found that speaking about and researching fishing was far more interesting and lucrative than fishing.

Further, the fishermen established large printing houses to publish fishing guides. Presses were kept busy day and night to produce material solely devoted to fishing methods, equipment and programs to arrange and to encourage meetings to talk about fishing. A speaker's bureau was also provided to schedule special speakers on the subject of fishing. Many who felt the call to be a fisherman responded. They were commissioned and sent to fish, but like the fishermen back home, they engaged in all kinds of other occupations. They built power plants to pump water for fish and ran tractors to plow new waterways. They spent most of their time traveling here and there to look at fish hatcheries.

Others never fished because they felt their job was to relate to the fish in a good way so that the fish would know the difference between good and bad fishermen. Still others felt that letting the fish know that they were nice land-loving neighbors was more important than fishing. After one stirring meeting on "The Necessity of Fishing," one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported that he had caught two outstanding fish. He was immediately honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. He was also placed on the Fishermen's General Board of Directors as a person having considerable practical experience. So he quit his fishing in order to have time to tell about the experience to the other fishermen.

Now, consider this. Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1:17). When he uses men, he does so in Greek with a gender neutral term, so he isn't letting women off the hook (pun intended). We have to ask ourselves the obvious question: are we really following Jesus if we don't fish for men and women? Can we really call ourselves fishermen **if we never fish?**

Today, we're going to practice fishing. THIS IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR FISHING. But at least we will have our fishing gear ready and in the back of the truck so we can pull it out at a moment's notice. That moment may be literally a short 30 second moment. Or it may be more like 5 minutes or an hour, so we'll prepare for all of these scenarios. Yet the preparation is useless if our fishing rod stays in the back of the truck. At some point, we just have to drop a line in the water OR quit calling ourselves fishermen. Yet, to not fish is tantamount to not following Jesus, because we are always and everywhere under orders to fish (Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:20).

## SHARING THE LOVE OF JESUS IN 30 SECONDS

Ditch the image of the guy on the bullhorn with a sandwich board yelling, “Repent, or you will all burn in hell.” That isn’t what we’re after here. Rather, we all have relationships that have developed over the years. In many cases we have never been able to have a conversation about our faith or anything related to God. Yet that might simply be because we’ve never really known how to build an on-ramp for gospel conversations. Sure, it could also be because we’ve never had the courage or desire to bait the hook and throw it in the water, but let’s assume, for now, that we are willing. Here are some ways to do so:

- **Tell me your story:** “You know, Jim, I know a lot about you, but I’ve never really had the chance to know you. I’d love to hear your story. Let’s grab lunch or coffee and you can share your story.” In almost every case, as you meet for lunch or coffee and hear their story, the person sharing their story will leave out anything about their relationship with God. All you need to do is probe just a bit more, “Jim, I’m convinced we’re all on a journey, and one important part of that journey is our spiritual journey. Tell me about your spiritual journey. How did it begin? What was religion like growing up in your home?”

I have literally done this with thousands of people now. I almost always use this fishing lure and it almost always works. It’s like a worm and cork. It works almost everywhere.

- **Gospel summaries**
  - **DO/DONE:**<sup>2</sup> Religion says do. Do more. Constantly. Do enough, and God will accept you. The gospel is that good news that Jesus did enough in His life, His death, and His resurrection for God to adopt us into his family and call us his sons and daughters. We need not do anything to earn our way in. It’s already done. On the cross, Jesus put a halt to our exhausting effort to impress God and others when He said, “It is finished.” DONE! Religion says do; Jesus says done. Now, simply receive it by faith.
  - **LAW/LOVE:** Religion gives you a list of laws to keep; Jesus simply loves you because he loves you. Not because you, somehow, are a better person and have kept more of God’s laws than the average joe. No. Jesus simply chose to love you because He created you and He is full of love that he longs to share. The gospel is the good news that the heart of God is bursting with love. He knows you’ll never uphold all His laws, but He is mighty fond of you anyway. And the love of Jesus Christ led Him to lay down His life for you to wipe the slate of sin clean and replace it with His goodness and His righteousness. Now, all you need do is receive His love by putting your faith in a God who loves you because that is who He is.

## SHARING THE LOVE OF JESUS IN 5 MINUTES

Everyone loves a good story, especially a comeback story. One where you were down and out and then there was a sudden turn that snatched victory right out of the jaws of defeat. All of us, regardless of whether that victory happened as a little kid, were worse than defeated. We were

dead, graveyard dead, in our sin, and then Jesus snatched us out of the jaws of death and made us alive (Ephesians 2:1). So in this training session we're going to learn how to share a 5 minute version of our comeback story. We're not saying that our story is finished or that we've arrived. We're all a work in process, for sure, but we should at least be able to give witness to the power and presence of God's saving work in our life through the Holy Spirit.

Here is an outline for how to construct your story if you met Jesus as an adult:

1. Describe your life before you met Jesus
2. Describe how you met Jesus and the changes that He has made and is making

Here is an outline for how to construct your story if you met Jesus as a child:

1. Describe the difference Jesus has made and is making in your life
2. What areas of sin and/or addiction He is setting you free from

### **SHARING THE LOVE OF JESUS IN 30 - 60 MINUTES**

Your story may create a desire in your friend to hear more. Or it could be that God has shaped the circumstances of your friend's life to create a hunger or desire for Him. Remember, everyone loves a story. So tell them "The Story" upon which all great stories are built, the gospel story. Here is an outline I have shared with hundreds of people, using an adapted version of the classic "Bridge Diagram." Use a napkin or small piece of paper to diagram the key concepts below in this story:

*Transition: The Gospel is a word often used by Christians to describe a story full of good news. Are you familiar with what the Gospel means? Well, the Gospel is a story of good news and hope that encompasses three major characters: God, Man, and Christ. And it requires two things of us: repentance, and faith. Let me tell you that story by introducing you to the characters:*

#### **God**

##### **Is a Loving Creator**

God tells us in His word—the Bible—that He is the Creator of the heavens and earth and all that is within them, including you and me, and that He made us in His own image so that we could declare the glory of His works (Genesis 1:1,27; Psalm 19:1; I Corinthians 10:31). As created beings, we are absolutely dependent upon God, the Creator of all. In His love, God created us in His image to know Him, honor Him, and above all else, to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

Don't miss the pleasure factor. He created the whole world for us to enjoy. Every bit of it was intended for our pleasure. Except this one tree. Why? Because, remember, He created the world out of love and for love, and this would be one way we could express our loving trust in God, our creator.

## **Man and Sin**

### **Man is a sinner**

We'll come back to God in just a minute. But for now, let's introduce another major player in this loving drama. God didn't create robots, He created humans. Humans, unlike robots, have a capacity to love because we have the capacity to choose. Tragically, Adam and Eve didn't choose to express their love to God by trusting Him; instead, they put their trust in a snake (Satan) who told them that they could be "like God" (Genesis 3:5). In doing so, they joined Satan's team and the consequences were horrific. One of those consequences is represented in the squiggly line drawn above--separation from God. Before our sin, Adam and Eve were in perfect relationship with God. Then, lamentably, their relationship was fractured. They were cut off from God's presence and banished from the Garden.

Like Adam and Even, we all feel distant and cut off from God as well. Why? Because their sinful nature has been passed down to each one of us for thousands of years (Genesis 3:6-7) and we all feel the pain and strain of being distant from God. In fact, God tells us that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," and that not one of us is righteous (Romans 3:23, 5:12).

But what is sin? It's a church word that needs defining. At its core, sin is breaking God's law in thought, word, or deed (Matthew 5: 21-47). While you and I did not take part in this tragedy with Adam and Eve, I am sure you do not find it hard to see that sin is present in your own life as well as mine. Regrettably, this leaves us in the terrible predicament of being cut off from an intimate relationship with God. That's the bad news.

## **God Revisited**

Yet, there is also good news (gospel), and that good news is centered in the character of God. God, our creator, is both merciful and gracious. So let's talk about those two character traits of God.

### **Mercy**

First, what is mercy? Mercy is *not* getting what you deserve (2 Samuel 24:14). Intuitively, we all love mercy and are drawn to mercy because we all need it so badly. When my son Ford was 4 years old, he slugged his sister in the arm. I bent down and said, "Hey buddy, you know we don't do that in our house." He looked chagrined, eyes on the floor, until I told him, "But do you know what? I'm going to give you mercy." His eyes lifted off the floor, filled with question marks. You could almost see the ongoing calculus in his brain, "I wonder what this mercy thing is all about. Is it better or worse than the pow-pow I normally get?"

To put him at ease, I spoke up, "Buddy, you normally get a pow-pow (our term for spanking) when you hit your sister. Not today. We're giving you mercy, and mercy means you are not getting what you deserve." His eyes lit up with joy and mercy became his new favorite word, so much so that the next day, when another infraction occurred, he looked up at me with a grin and said, "Daddy, I want mercy." We all love mercy!

Praise God, because mercy is one of His fundamental character traits. It is how He is known. When God revealed his character to Moses, He passed in front of him and said, “Moses, listen up. if you want to know me and to see me, then here is what you must know about me.” Literally, he said, “The Lord, the Lord God, *merciful* and *gracious*...” (Exodus 34:6). Moses, don’t miss this: I’m merciful. Hopefully, we won’t miss God’s mercy either. This is our God. Full of mercy. His heart has and always will go out to the ones He created in loving mercy, and in a million moving ways, he grants us mercy upon mercy upon mercy.

## **Grace**

Yet, it isn’t simply that He chooses to *not* give us what we deserve. Conversely, He *gives* us something we don’t deserve called grace. The second way God describes himself to Moses (and to us) is with the word grace, “The Lord, the Lord God, *merciful* and *gracious*” (Exodus 34:6). We use the words synonymously, but, Biblically, mercy and grace are distinguishable. Grace, in contrast with mercy, is *getting* what we don’t deserve, and grace is what will melt the heart and motivate change. For example, grace is what changed a hardened criminal, Jean Valjean. Why? Because he too had been given the gift of grace. Shortly after stealing the silverware of the only person in town who offered Valjean lodging and punching him in the face, Valjean is arrested by the police and brought before this man (the bishop).

The police, certain Valjean stole the silverware, bring him to the bishop’s house to confirm their suspicion. The bishop shouts at Valjean, “I’m very angry with you Jean Valjean...” The police interrupt and say to the bishop, “He claimed you gave the silverware to him.” Holding his fate in his hands, the bishop responds, “Yes, of course I gave him the silverware. But why didn’t you take the silver candlesticks? They are worth at least 2,000 francs.”<sup>3</sup> Valjean has stolen from the bishop and beaten him. He deserves to be thrown back in jail. Grace interrupts the flow of things, and the bishop gives him a gift he doesn’t deserve in the form of his most valuable possession (the silver candlesticks). Grace is costly. It always is. It cost the bishop, and it cost God. Yet, grace is the longing of every heart. So let’s talk next about the costly grace of God and how it interrupted the flow of human history through the person of Jesus Christ.

## **CHRIST**

### **Is God’s gift of grace**

God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as the incarnation of grace. Grace took on skin. Jesus was, literally, “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). God’s Son was His gift of grace to the world. In doing so, God, through his Son, took on humanity (John 1:1,14) and lived the life that we should have lived (Romans 5:19). In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted in every possible way, which means He faced every temptation we have ever faced, yet, the crucial distinction is that He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He never gave in to temptation.

Not only did Christ live the life we should have lived, but He also died the death that we should have died. As we discussed earlier, all of mankind since Adam and Eve has been found guilty before God and deserving a punishment of death, and Christ fulfilled this punishment for us. In His death, Jesus experienced far more than physical suffering and pain; He received the full

punishment God had withheld from mankind since Adam and Eve's original sin. Jesus gave God His perfect life record and accepted man's horrible life record. Perfection stepped in the place of imperfection, and in doing so, God magnified His justice by delivering the rightful punishment, one that had been delayed for thousands of years, to a perfect man, the God-man called Jesus Christ, the only one capable of paying the full penalty for sinful man (Mark 10:45, I Peter 3:18, Galatians 3:18, I John 2:2).

But this is where the story really gets good. After Christ's death on the cross, God raised Him from the dead three days later (I Corinthians 15:3-6) as evidence that Jesus' sacrifice was an acceptable payment for man's debt that was owed as a result of his sinful record and sinful heart (Acts 13:34-39, Romans 1:4), fully satisfying God's justice (Romans 3:25,26). Additionally, Jesus' resurrection represented His victory over all man's enemies, including death and the power of sin (I Corinthians 15:56,57, Romans 6:5-7). And after Christ's resurrection, God exalted Him to heaven, seated Jesus at His right hand, and thereby declared Him Lord and Savior of the world (Acts 5:31; Hebrews 12:2). One way to summarize what we just said is through the Great Exchange.

### **The Great Exchange**

God has promised that we have a new standing before him. (2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 2:16, Colossians 1:22, John 1:12). As Judge, God promises to release us from the penalty of sin if we believe in Christ (justification) and consider us as His children who are forever adopted into his family (Galatians 4:4-7). From an accounting perspective, it's as if God deposits our sin in Christ's account (the theological word is impute) and He deposits Christ's perfect life (i.e. His righteousness) in our account. From relational perspective, God promises to accept and love those who believe in Jesus just as he does his own Son, for he lives within us (Galatians 3:27, I John 3:1).

What I am describing has been referred to as the **Great Exchange**. Christ accepted all of our sin and in return gave us His righteousness. We exchanged our sinfulness for Christ's righteousness, so that when God looks at us, He sees His Son who lives within us, making us righteous individuals in Christ.

Close your eyes for a moment and let me describe this picture for you. Imagine that you live in a world called Planet Dark Shirt, a place in which everyone is given a black shirt. In fact, in this world, black is the only color shirt in existence. One day you receive a handwritten invitation from the king of this world that startles you. The king has invited you to a feast held in your honor. He wants to adopt you into his family and make you a prince. You are beside yourself with excitement because you have always wanted to see the king's palace. Now you will get to do much more than simply see the palace—you will be a prince in the palace, an heir to the throne.

You keep reading the letter and the excitement that had overtaken you quickly fades. The letter states that to enter the palace, you must wear a white shirt. This requirement strikes your heart

like a dagger and you fall on your knees in disappointment because you know that white shirts do not exist on Planet Dark Shirt.

Months pass and the day of the feast comes to pass. Your spirits are as low as they have ever been because you realize what could have been. Wait, what is that outside in your driveway? It is the royal carriage. The rightful prince, the king's son, steps out of the carriage wearing a gleaming white shirt. You are so startled by his glorious presence that you are unable to speak. He comes over and embraces you, takes off your black shirt and places it upon his body. In return, he puts his white shirt upon your body. He looks at you and says, "You are now a prince, a son of the king. He has adopted you and beckoned you to come and live at the palace. You go in my name and in my clothing. The king requires a white shirt—I give you mine, for there is none like it."

While this analogy is not perfect, the point is that we must put on Christ (the white shirt) to enter the kingdom of heaven. We receive His righteousness (the white shirt) and He receives our sinfulness (the black shirt). We become sons of the King. But it is not only our status that has changed. We have new freedom to live as sons of God. When we put on Christ, we put on holiness. More appropriately, God gifted His holiness to us in Christ (Acts 2:38, 39, Romans 6:6,7, Ephesians 1:13,14, 2 Corinthians 3:18b). God has promised that He will free us from sin's crippling power (corruption) over our lives by freely giving us His Holy Spirit, which enables us to know Him, honor Him, and enjoy Him forever.

Go back to the story we were discussing earlier. When you put on the white shirt of the prince, you became a prince and were enabled to live the life of a prince. You could eat from the king's table, converse with the king, and develop a relationship with the king. The king adopted you into his family and you now had the freedom to live the life of a prince. But how does this happen? How can these gospel promises be fulfilled in a person's life?

## **OUR RESPONSE: REPENTANCE AND FAITH**

### **What is repentance?**

Repentance involves a two-dimensional directional change in a person's life. First, repentance requires that a person turn away from their sin—a horizontal change. For example, imagine that you intended to drive to Canada. When you were in Montana, you became confused and accidentally began driving south instead of north. When you realized this fact, the best thing for you to do would be to turn your car around and head in the opposite direction. In much the same way, repentance requires you to turn from your sin and head in the other direction, but here is where the analogy breaks down. Repentance is not telling you to simply turn in the opposite horizontal direction, but it requires you to turn to Jesus (Mark 1:15). Thus repentance requires a vertical directional change as well. If you do not turn to Jesus, you will be fighting a losing battle of trying to defeat the power of sin in your own strength. Jesus wants us to repent, turn from our sin and turn to Him, relying upon His strength to live a life that is free from sin's dominion.



## What is faith?

It might be helpful to begin with what faith is not. You must understand that saving faith is not merely an intellectual belief. The Bible acknowledges that even demons believe that there is one true God, but they are not saved by this belief (James 2:19). Second, saving faith is not merely a feeling. I've had so many people say, "Stephen, I'm waiting to experience God. I want to feel him, you know, to get God goosebumps." Yes, yes. We all want to feel the presence of God, but faith is far larger and more robust than a few God goosies. Let's put it this way. While faith isn't less than intellectual belief or feelings, it most certainly is more than either of these in isolation. So what is saving faith? At its core, saving faith is making a decision of the will to trust Christ (Acts 16:31, Romans 3:22a, Romans 4:5).

A story might help illustrate this. There was a famous tightrope walker named Nik Wallenda.<sup>4</sup> Looking for a challenge, he decided to stretch a cable across Niagara Falls and walk across. This was a feat that most assumed was impossible because of the tremendous force of the wind and water whipping off of the falls. Undaunted, Nik began walking across and in a relatively short period of time made it to the other side and back safely. The reporters cheered and the cameras flashed. Now, imagine this. Imagine Nik asking the crowd, "How many of you believe I can do this blindfolded?" A few might raise their hands, but most likely not many because it is really challenging to not have your sight. Imagine Nik responding by placing a blindfold over his eyes and walking over the falls. Upon reaching the shore safely, the crowd would go wild.

Imagine a follow-up question, "How many of you believe I can push this wheelbarrow across the falls?" After having seen his past accomplishments, my guess is that many more hands would shoot up. It seems reasonable to imagine he could do it with something to steady him like a wheelbarrow. Yet, here is where faith differs from belief when it comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Saving faith is more than mere intellectual belief. Even the demons *believe* in Jesus, but they don't have faith in him (James 2:19). Faith, in Christian sense, would be actually getting in the wheelbarrow. Remember, at its core, saving faith is making a decision of the will to trust Christ (Acts 16:31, Romans 3:22a, Romans 4:5). The major point of the analogy is to emphasize that faith involves actively trusting your life to Jesus.

It may be tempting to try to trust in our works. Many people think they can build a bridge that will help them cross the chasm that separates them from God, and this bridge is called the Good Works Bridge. They try desperately to serve the poor, be kind to others, and perform a host of various good works. But the chasm separating God and man is far too wide for any Good Works Bridge to stretch across. And what is even worse, even if a Good Works Bridge could reach across the chasm, God's holiness would destroy us once we crossed the bridge and entered His presence. Sinful beings cannot be in the presence of a Holy God. Therefore, to solve the problem of the chasm separating God and man, God laid down His own bridge in the form of the cross, and as we walk across this bridge we are made holy through the blood of Jesus. Thus, saving faith is turning from sin and self-trust (repentance) and trusting in Jesus Christ and His promises.

## Sharing the Love of Jesus in 4-5 Conversations

Some of your friends will need more than one conversation. They want a dialogue. If so, invite them to go on a journey with you that explores more of your story, more of their story, and more of the story of Jesus Christ. You can read about the story of the life of Jesus Christ through the book of Mark. Ask them to commit to meeting you for lunch or coffee and read through the book of Mark together. Each week, they will read 4 chapters of Mark and share with you their questions and more of their story and you'll do the same. Here is a link for how to help shape those conversations with a detailed one page outline at the end of each lesson on how to structure the conversation:

<https://movementmentoring.live/other-resources/>

The Mark studies are all under Phase 2. You will not need to read the introduction on leading someone to Jesus because we have covered most of it. The study of Mark is broken down into 6 weeks. Due to John Maxwell and the influence of a good friend, my thinking on this has just recently changed in that I don't typically ask people to meet with me for 6 weeks up front. Instead, I just ask them to meet for the first week. If they want to continue for another week because it is adding value to their life, then it will be up to them.

## Discussion Questions

1. Describe your reaction to the fishing parable and how it relates to you. Are you a fisherman?
2. Who is one person you are going to ask to lunch or coffee and, in advance of the meeting or at the meeting, ask them to "share their story."
3. Write out a 5 minute version of your story using the outline presented. We will read these out loud together in our training session.
4. Draw out the Bridge Diagram with the 3 key players (God, Christ, and Man) and write the key words you will write down on a napkin or piece of paper to provide a visual diagram of the gospel story.

## Endnotes

1. John M. Drescher, Pulpit Digest, July/August 1978. This version is paraphrased & adapted by Stephen Phelan.
2. I am paraphrasing gospel summaries that I received in an evangelism class at RTS. I don't have the actual summaries so I can't give credit where credit is due, but the titles of "Do/Done and Law/Love" were originated elsewhere and I gave my own content to the summary.
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJebTWuT3Z0>
4. <https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/niagara-falls-high-wire-walk-nik-wallenda-fulfill/story?id=16577963>