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Class 1 - Understanding the Times

John 4:35 - Welcome to the evangelism class. This is the first time I've ever taught on the subject, but I'm really excited about this.

- I want to make two preliminary notes about this class so you'll know the general tone and direction I'm going to go and how the class will be conducted.

1. Hope and Encouragement will Prevail

- I can't tell you how many evangelism books I've read, how many evangelism sermons I've heard, and even preached myself, where the primary motivators for evangelism are guilt and shame.
- **Question:** Does anyone know what I mean by that?
 - A) Often the primary motivation to evangelize is, "I have to teach this person the gospel, because if I don't I'll go to hell for disobeying God's command to evangelize." or "I have to teach this person the gospel, because if I don't this person will go to Hell and their blood will be on my hands."
 - Now, there is certainly some truth to those things, we should absolutely take evangelism seriously because it's part of being a Christian.
 - **Question:** But what's the problem if guilt and shame are our primary motivators?
 - Evangelism will always feel like an obligation, nothing more. It's the same way with everything in Christianity. Is it true that if we never come to church, we'll be eternally lost because we're living in disobedience? Yes, but we don't want our primary motivator for coming to church to be, "I have to or I'll go to hell." Instead, we want to instill a desire to come to church because we WANT to worship God for all He's done for us and we WANT to encourage our brethren. Anything in Christianity that's guilt and shame driven will lead to obligation, and guess what? The people we try to talk to about God will SENSE that it's just an obligation, and it'll hinder our effectiveness evangelistically!
 - B) Often the primary motivation to evangelize is, "Brother so and so converts 100 people a year. He grabs the microphone on the airplane and teaches people the gospel over the intercom and the whole plane lands in the Hudson River to get baptized. You need to be more like him!" I'm being silly of course, but isn't that how many evangelism books or sermons go? We learn about these incredibly extroverted people who talk to absolutely everyone with no fear and then we feel guilty for not being more like them. We're told we need a more outgoing personality, and then we feel guilty because no matter how hard we try, we're just not that kind of person.
 - C) Or we're told that evangelism must be done with a certain method, and if you don't use this particular method, you're a failure and a shame.
 - **John 4:35** - I chose this verse to start out because it's a verse filled with encouragement and hope. Jesus said if his disciples would only lift up their eyes and look around them, there are opportunities everywhere!

- **Interesting:** People have found it strange that Jesus says the fields are “white” for harvest because there aren’t too many crops that turn white before harvesting.
- **Point:** In those days, most of the poor people wore white garments because colored dyes were expensive. So the fields Jesus is looking at aren’t grainfields, but a field of people!
- **John 4:30 - Question:** How was it that all those people were flocking to Jesus?
 - **John 4:28-29** - The fields were white and ready for harvest simply by this woman going out and telling people, “Come and see.” There was no elaborate, complicated method, there was just a woman convinced that Jesus was the Savior and trying to introduce Him to others. Would they all be converted? No, but she did her work of bringing people one step closer to Christ.
- This is the kind of hope and encouragement I want to permeate our class this quarter. We’re going to be real about evangelism, we won’t be naive and ignore the fact that evangelism can be hard, but we’re not going to focus on how hard and impossible it is, or how you need to completely change your personality to win souls, or how you need to present the full gospel to every person you meet or you’ll be lost eternally. That’s not practical nor is it Biblical, and most of all it’s not encouraging and hopeful.

2. Discussion is Encouraged

- I usually encourage discussion in every class I teach, but discussion is especially valuable for an evangelism class because evangelism is about people, and is therefore subjective. There are a lot of objective evangelistic principles, but the truth is every person we talk to is different, so all of us will have our own experiences to bring to the table and I’m going to try to devote the last 5-10 minutes of each class to working out issues together. So start thinking now about experiences you’ve had with evangelism, both good and bad, and hopefully in each class we’ll get a chance to talk these experiences out together so we can get a feel for what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do.
- Discussion is also valuable in an evangelism class because many times the concept of humanity is removed from evangelism. In our evangelism training, often the human element is removed, and we’re trained to be robots with cookie cutter scripts to use and to pretend like everyone we talk to is the same.
- We’ll talk in more detail about this in future classes, but every person has 4 parts to their being: Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. This is encapsulated well in Mark 12:30 where Jesus tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- **Common experience:** Sometimes in evangelism we forget there are 4 parts to a person and we’re only targeting the spiritual. That’s why we often try to memorize scripts to hit the spiritual. The problem is, these 4 aspects of a person’s being are more like layers, and people won’t let us gain access to the spiritual part until we’ve broken through the physical, mental, and emotional parts first.

- **Point:** The more we can discuss real life examples of trying to evangelize, the more we'll see the humanity in people and the less pressured we'll feel to be so stiff and scripted.

With those introductory notes, let's get into our main material for this morning's class:

- **Proverbs 11:30** - Now, I'm not sure the point of this verse is directly about evangelism; it may be more generally about being persuasive and getting people to change their minds and see things your way. But it certainly applies to evangelism, and what we see is that soul winning is a sign of wisdom.
- **Colossians 4:5** - Now, for the rest of the class, I want to talk about a specific sign of a truly wise person.
 - **1 Chronicles 12:32** [This is a description of the various men who comprised David's army] - The men of Issachar are described as being wise men who understood the times, and because they understood the times, they knew what Israel should do. In Esther 1:13, King Ahasuerus' wise men are described the same way. A key characteristic of wisdom is understanding the times.
- **Question:** How does this relate to evangelism?
 - We have to know our audience! In order to best know how to talk to people about God we're going to have to be honest about the world we're living in in 2017.
 - **Illustration:** My brother told me about a preacher on the UCF campus who stand in the free speech zone and yells Bible teaching out to people and even condemns people as they walk by. He's certainly VERY courageous to do that and I give him credit for his courage, but I give him a ZERO on effectiveness. He probably goes home every night thinking that he has pleased the Lord, but he has absolutely zero understanding of the times, and for that reason he's actually hurting the Lord's cause rather than helping it because he just ends up getting in arguments with people all day and he makes no effort to get to know people or meet them where they're at.
 - **1 Corinthians 9:20-23** - Paul knew he could not approach every person the same way and he had to understand not only the times he was living in, but the different beliefs of different groups of people so he could know how to relate to them.
 - Another benefit is, once we start admitting to ourselves truths about the times we live in, it'll set us free from trying to hold on to old methods of evangelism that just don't work well anymore, and it'll help us move in to our next class on Wednesday night when we talk about defining what evangelism really is.
- **Question:** How would you describe the times today? What is your understanding of the times in terms of the religious climate in modern day America?
- We're living in the age of postmodernism. Let me briefly describe the difference between pre-modernism, modernism, and postmodernism so you can understand where this kind of thinking came from.
 - **Pre-modernism** - this kind of thinking was around from the creation all the way to the 1650's. The thinking was that ultimate truth and knowledge comes from direct revelation and the church has the power and authority in society to speak to matters of truth.
 - **Modernism** - was dominant from the 1650's-1950's. As we became more scientifically and technologically advanced, we started to reject the traditional

sources of authority, which were divine writings and church leaders, and instead to adopt the scientific method, reason, and logic as the standards of truth. Now, modernism is still heavily subscribed to today, it didn't stop in the 1950's. However, starting in the 1950's up to now, the dominant philosophy is...

- **Postmodernism** - Postmodern questions everything. It's about being skeptical toward any claims of having absolute truth or objective knowledge. It says that truth is largely based on the culture you're apart of and the upbringing you had. Truth must be defined by one's own interpretation of their surroundings. Some objective truth may exist outside of ourselves, but there's no way to really nail that down and know what it is. Interestingly, postmodernism applies to art and literature as well. In the literary world, there is little thought to the original intention of the author. It's all about what the reader gets out of the text. Whatever truth the reader gets out of the text, that is what is true for the reader. In some extreme cases of postmodernist thought, even the reality of our own existence is questioned because perhaps even our own existence is a mere construct of our minds.
- On a practical level, postmodernism says there are many ways of knowing truth; it could be through some divine revelation, but it could also be through science, it could also be through mere intuition. From a societal standpoint, postmodernism is an attempt to do away with the power structures in society. It's meant to put everyone on the same level so that no one has to submit to one particular source of authority.

Here are 9 results of modern and postmodern thought:

- **1) Truth is relative**
 - No one can claim absolute truth; truth is subjective, based on one's own upbringing and interpretation of life.
- **2) Easily Offended by Truth Claims**
 - Since many think that truth is all relative, John 14:6 is highly offensive to people. If we claim that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, or that the God of the Bible is the only God, people interpret that as arrogance because who are we to claim that we have found objective truth?
- **3) Belief in God is silly and illogical**
 - There's a general thinking that people who believe in God just don't use their brains. They aren't critical thinkers, and they live their lives by blind faith.
- **4) Apathy toward Eternal Matters**
 - It makes sense that if we can't really know the truth anyway, why worry about it? Why not just live the best life we can and eat, drink, and be merry?
- **5) Highly skeptical of anything that can't be proven by science**
 - This is a carry-over from modernism. It's the thinking that science has all the answers, and if we don't have all the answers from science now, we will eventually in the future when we discover more things.
- **6) Many think religion is harmful to society**
 - **Question:** Do you know when this started?
 - 2001 with the September 11 attacks. It ignited a series of books by men known as the four horsemen of the atheist apocalypse: Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennet, and Sam Harris. In their writings, you not only find

attempts to argue against God scientifically and logically, but you can detect genuine hatred and contempt for God and all things religious. That's why some atheists have formed organizations like the Freedom from Religion foundation because they believe religion is hurting us so we need to remove God from everything.

- **7) Religious People Don't See the Differences in Religions**

- It seems even among those who call themselves religious, people seem to think that there's really no difference between Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Sure they might recognize superficial differences in their practices and customs, but it's all kind of generally accepted as a valid way to get you to a good place in the afterlife.

- **8) Christians Don't Care about New testament Authority**

- Even among those who call themselves Christians, there's this general apathy about following the New Testament pattern. It's kind of like if you just believe in Jesus and accept Him into your heart, that's all that really matters. It doesn't matter where you go to church or what specific things you believe, as long as there's a general belief in Jesus.

- **9) Many are convinced all they have to do is be a good person.**

- Among those who admit there is some sort of afterlife, mostly the thought is, "I just need to be a good person and I'll go to heaven."

- **Judges 21:25** - "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

- **Challenge:** If we want to be effective at evangelism, we have to not only understand the times, but we have to empathize with and understand why people believe what they believe. If we go into our conversations just thinking people are stupid, we're not going to use the right tone with people and we're not going to have good attitudes.

Just put yourself in their shoes. If you weren't taught about God and were raised in this society today, not only would you not know about spiritual things, you wouldn't have any reason to find out since we can't know anything anyway. If truth is relative, you would have no reason to care, you would have no reason to do any research whatsoever about spiritual things, and you'd think anyone claiming to have truth is wacky, especially with what we've seen on the news with so many people doing crazy things in the name of religion. Rather than seeing everyone as horrible, rebellious, wretched fools with no hope, we just need to realize most people are just a product of our society's overarching worldview. And it'll help to realize our society is trying to better itself by adopting this worldview and doing away with absolute truth. They genuinely think it's a beneficial and harmonious way to live, but we can help them in our conversations to see that no one can really live that way consistently, and we can show them how refreshing it is to find the absolute truth in Jesus.

- Because I'll tell you this; there's already an undercurrent in society of people getting fed up postmodern thought because they're realizing how empty it really is and that it's getting us nowhere in society. So the bad news about postmodernism is that it might create some awkwardness or hostility in our conversations. The good news about postmodernism is that it will also create some hunger and

genuine interest in the truth of God's Word because people are being starved to death for real meaning and purpose in life.

- This quarter we'll talk all about how to shake people's foundations and expose how empty and baseless these 9 views of life really are. But it starts with understanding and empathy.

Class 2 - It's a Process, not an Event

Welcome back to our evangelism class. As a brief review, last time we talked about how the general tenor of our class will be positive, hopeful, and encouraging, and that I'll encourage discussion. We also discussed how evangelism takes wisdom, and one of the clearest signs of wisdom is to understand the times we're living in. We talked about the differences between pre-modernism, modernism, and post-modernism and the 9 resulting beliefs and attitudes in our culture today and how in order to be most effective, we need to not only understand what people believe, but we need to empathize and be compassionate about why they believe what they believe.

In tonight's class, I'm going to hammer away at a truth that will be so helpful, so practical, and will revolutionize the concept of evangelism for you.

John 1:29 - This is such a profound verse with so much depth packed in to it about who Jesus is and what He came to do.

- **Question:** You don't have to get the math exactly right on this, but roughly how long did God wait to share this truth with the world in John 1:29?

- Roughly 4,000 years! **Think about that:** Here is the most amazing, most life changing message; that Jesus is the lamb of God sent to take away the sin of this world, and yet God kept that hidden from us as a mystery for 4,000 years!

- **Question:** Why would He do that? Since man sinned 4,000 years ago in Genesis 3, why didn't God send Jesus as the lamb to take away sins in Genesis 4?

- It's because we weren't mentally, emotionally, or spiritually ready yet. There's no way Adam and Eve would have understood and appreciated it if Jesus came in Genesis 4.

- **Galatians 3:24** - The Law of Moses period, which lasted for 1,500 years, was designed to be tutor to lead us to Christ.

- **Question:** What kinds of things did the Law of Moses teach us in order to prepare us for Jesus?

- Taught us who the One true God is as opposed to all the false idols, taught us what sin is and that there are eternal consequences attached to sin, taught us that the price of sin is blood (or one's life, Lev. 17:11), that in God's mercy He allows an innocent animal to take our place, it taught us that God has high standards that no one can live up to fully, it taught us our need to trust God in all circumstances, and that God is a Savior and a deliverer.

- It was only once God's people understood these concepts that they could be ready for Jesus. **Food for thought:** If you were born and raised in this secular culture where most parents don't teach their kids about God and the schools certainly don't teach kids about God, are the people around us going to know any of these things God taught His people in the Law of Moses? Nope.
- **Galatians 4:4-5** - God waited until the time was right to send Jesus, and even then He was incredibly patient. **Just think about this for a moment.** If you're God and you finally sent Jesus to the earth to save mankind, wouldn't you just send Jesus as an adult so He could go ahead and do His all important work of saving mankind?
 - That's not what God did. He sent Jesus as a baby and waited 30 years before Jesus even started His ministry, patiently giving people even more time to learn from the tutor of the Law. Let's take this one step further, and then I'll finally get to where I'm going I promise.
- **Luke 1:17** [Even before Jesus finally started His mission, God did something else first] - God sent John the Baptist as a forerunner ahead of Jesus to prepare people for this lamb of God that came to take away the sins of the world.
- **Revolutionary Principle:** Evangelism is not an event; it's a process leading up to an event. The event is sharing the gospel message. The event is not conversion. It'd be great if people were converted, but the event we're building up to is sharing the gospel message with them.
 - The word "evangelize" is a transliteration of the word "euaggelizo" (U-ang-el-idzo) which means to bring good news of salvation. But the reason I say this is a revolutionary concept isn't because I just made it up; it's because we've forgotten that bringing the good news of salvation requires a process first to prepare people's hearts to hear it.
 - I'm afraid what we've done is we rush into sharing the gospel prematurely. And then we think, "As long as I tell someone the gospel plan of salvation, I just evangelized." When we do that, we turn evangelism into a one time event. "I told so and so the gospel." So we usually feel good about ourselves because we did our part, evangelism is finished with that person, and we can pick up and move on to the next person.
 - **Key:** We all agree the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Paul says that in Romans 1:16. So I'm not downplaying the power of the gospel at all. I am saying before the gospel can take full effect in people's hearts, their hearts and minds have to be prepared for it. God showed us this in the way He took 4,000 years to prepare our hearts for the gospel.
- **Practical Scenario:** Let's say you gather up all your courage and you tell someone, "God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to die for your sins, and if you'll submit to Him in faith and baptism you can be saved today and have the hope of Heaven."
 - That's a wonderful thing to tell someone because that's the good news of the gospel.
 - **Question:** What if that person doesn't know what sin is? What if that person has had followers of Jesus treat them terribly in the past so they're bitter inside

about Jesus? What if that person doesn't know what faith means or they're not even sure there is a god at all?

- Do you see? We've told them John 1:29, "behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and that's great, but they're not ready to hear it yet because we've not patiently taken the time to lead them to Christ. To be a tutor to guide them in His direction as a process, rather than as a one-time event.
- **Personal Question:** When you became a Christian, was it ONLY as a result of a one-time event where a stranger came up to and told you the plan of salvation?
- Probably not! It was probably a process that took many years.
- For me, I was not raised in a Christian home, but I went to an elementary and middle school where Bible classes were a part of the curriculum and the majority of the people there were from Christian homes. Yet even though I started in the second grade, it took me 8 years to become a Christian. And I didn't become a Christian simply because someone shared the gospel plan of salvation with me. Yes that was the event that finally led to my conversion, but there were a combination of other things that happened over those 8 years that led me to that point. I saw the good example set by those around me, I saw the clear difference between worldly friends and Christian friends, I was hit with the reality after 9/11 that I could die at any moment and I wasn't prepared. THOSE things all contributed to making my heart ready to hear the gospel and submit to it. I'd heard the gospel message many many times before, but it never sunk in because I wasn't ready for it.

So, here's a helpful way to define what evangelism is on a practical level. **Evangelism is the process of bringing people one step closer to obeying the gospel.**

- Notice I didn't say it's the process of getting people to obey the gospel. No, we can't "get people" to obey the gospel. We can't make anyone or even pressure ourselves to bring everyone we meet through the entire process it takes for them to make a decision for Christ. But if we can bring them one step closer to being ready for Jesus, if we CAN move them along just a few inches away from the wrong direction they're heading and toward the truth, our evangelism will be successful.
- Now, I want you to see that this is exactly how God and Jesus evangelized, and it's how Paul evangelized as well.
- **Question:** In Jesus' conversations with people, how often did He immediately come right out and say first thing, "I'm the Messiah, I'm the source of salvation, submit to Me if you want eternal life?"
- He very rarely did that. Even though that was the most important message, instead He led people through a process of coming one step closer to understanding who He was and understanding their need to submit to Him. Performing miracles was a way to bring people one step closer to Him because it opened their minds and hearts to the reality that Jesus isn't just a mere man, but He's divine. He read people's minds and told them what they were thinking. That brought people one step closer. He told parables, He asked really challenging questions, He even rebuked people.

- **Matthew 23:13-14ff** - Now, I'm not using this as the model for our evangelism in the sense that we need to go around rebuking people. No, Jesus only uses this really harsh approach because these people are so hardened, so wicked, so set against all things Godly that it's the only language they deserve. It's probably rare that we'll have to speak to anyone like this today, but here's my point: this is evangelism because what Jesus is doing is moving them one step closer to Him by trying to move them one step away from the direction they're heading. The Pharisees never had anyone talk to them like this or challenge them like this, so Jesus is actually bringing them one step closer to Him by showing how shaky a foundation they're standing on.
 - **Question:** Did you notice Jesus didn't share the gospel message with them here at all? Why? Not because it's not powerful, but because where the Pharisees were in their process of coming to God, they weren't ready to hear it. They needed to be moved one step closer to the point where they could hear and respond in obedience.

Why this is so practical:

- Remembering evangelism is the process of bringing people one step closer to obeying the gospel greatly relieves the pressure in our conversations.
 - **1) The pressure to force an unnatural opening to tell someone the gospel message.**
 - When we think all there is to evangelism is sharing the gospel message, the event, then our conversations are completely un-natural because we're just trying to force our little mini-presentation into the conversation. So we usually just freeze up.
 - **2) The pressure to be the only person on the planet responsible for this person's salvation.**
 - I understand it might sound motivating to think, "I may be this person's only chance to hear the gospel message!" But in my experience, this thinking causes 3 problems. A) **Guilt based evangelism.** It's not natural, this person is a stranger, the timing isn't right, but I HAVE to explain the gospel plan of salvation to this person because if I don't they'll be lost eternally. B) It relegates evangelism merely to an event, and it ignores the necessary process leading up to that event. C) If we really think we're the only person responsible for this person's salvation, we're going to put so much pressure on ourselves to say everything just right, to say everything perfectly in that one moment, and we're completely forgetting that God can use many people in that person's life to help them find the truth.
 - **Question:** How many of you became Christians as a result of only ONE person's influence in your life?
 - Probably not many of us. Now, there might be one person in particular who was more influential than all the rest, but again our obedience to the gospel was a process and many people were involved in that process.
 - **Question:** If none of us became Christians due to ONE person's influence, why would we turn around and pressure ourselves to be the ONE person who has to be responsible for someone's soul?

- **Key:** When I say not to over-pressure ourselves to be the only one to teach someone, I don't mean for that to just let us off the hook and think, "Oh I don't even have to talk to that person at all because someone else will do it." I am saying, instead of pressuring ourselves to be responsible for the entire process of their conversion, why not just ask, "How can I bring this person one step closer to obeying the gospel? How can I be an influence on this person to move them in the direction of Christ?" THAT is much more do-able, that is much more Biblical, and it'll allow us to be much more natural and conversational in our evangelism.
- **Example:** I recently started bringing my suits in to get them tailored since they're a little too big for me, and I just started making conversation with my tailor, asking her if she had a good Thanksgiving. And we got to talking and she mentioned that her two daughters were going in for surgery soon, one to have a C-section and the other to have surgery on her spine. Now, I could have told her the gospel plan of salvation right then, but would the timing be right for that after she told me what her daughters were about to go through?
 - No of course not, so instead I told her I would make sure to pray for her daughters. Now that was risky because I didn't know how she would react to that, she may not have even believed in God, she may have even been angry at God for letting this happen to her daughters. But I was trying to bring her one step closer to obeying the gospel by showing her kindness and compassion, and connecting that to God by bringing prayer into it. And I was sincere about it, it wasn't a way to manipulate her at all; I was just trying to show her compassion and let her know my compassion came from God. She actually thanked me, and from there I asked if she prayed often or ever read the Bible. It was all very natural and we were just having a conversation, and we talked for 5-10 more minutes and I just said, "Listen, I go to church at Palm Springs Drive and we focus a lot on Bible reading so we can better know God and His Son Jesus, and we'd love to have you come worship with us."
 - **Question:** Did I do my work for the Lord? Or did I fail because I didn't present the full gospel message and plan of salvation in that one meeting?
 - Again, most people need MULTIPLE encounters, MULTIPLE touches, we might say with Christians and the gospel message before they decide even to look into it, let alone submit to it. So what I did that day was contribute to the process of preparing my tailor's heart for Jesus. I did that with kindness, consideration, and compassion and now when she thinks about God, she's going to remember the love I showed toward her daughters by praying for them.

Body Analogy:

- Remember, all human beings have 4 parts to them. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Successful evangelism is the process of breaking through the physical, mental, and emotional barriers that open the spiritual to receive the gospel message. We can do that one step at a time in our conversations with people.
 - Next class, we'll talk about practical ways to break through people's physical and emotional barriers and prepare them for Jesus.

Class 3 - From Stranger to Savior part 1

Welcome back to class #3 of our Evangelism class. Last time we talked together about how evangelism isn't just an event. It's the process of preparing people's hearts to be ready to receive the gospel message before we share it with them.

This morning, we're going to talk practically about how to begin this process of preparing someone's heart to be ready to hear the gospel message. But before we do, I want to give you a quick illustration for why it's so important to go through this process.

Illustration: Let's say your friend introduced you to a stranger for the first time. What if, right after you exchanged names, that stranger asked, "What would you say is your biggest regret from your past?" **Question:** How would you respond to that?

- Wouldn't that be weird and awkward? I'm not sure what I'd say in that situation because it would totally catch me off guard, but probably something to the effect of, "Dude we just met, I don't really feel comfortable sharing that with you." That's because as human beings we have layers. We have a physical layer, a shell that's on the outside of us, then a little deeper we have a mental layer, a mind, then deeper we have a heart or an emotional layer, and then we have a spiritual layer. We don't let strangers into the deeper layers of our being, and certainly not into the deepest layers of our being. We might shake their hand, meaning we'll let them touch the outside of ourselves "at arm's length", but we're not going to start sharing our deepest darkest secrets with them because we don't know them.

- That's perfectly normal because there are stages in our relationships with people. They go from a stranger, then when we get to know them better, they become acquaintances, then when we get to know them better, they become friends, and then they may even become our best friends.

- **We see this in Jesus' life too!** There were strangers that He had never met, but then there were the multitudes who were acquaintances because He spoke to them in passing, but then there were the 12 disciples who were Jesus' friends, but then there were the 3, Peter James and John who were some of Jesus' best friends, and then you could even make the argument that John was Jesus' closest friend. He's referred to as "the one whom Jesus loved," and of course on the cross Jesus entrusted his own mother to John.

- **Point of all this:** Jesus is a stranger to most people in the world around us. We're trying to be the friend who introduces Jesus to the people around us. The reality is, even though we know Jesus is Lord and Savior and a relationship with Him is the most important thing in the world, Jesus is going to have to move through the same stages of relationship in the people around us. That's what the process of evangelism helps facilitate. As we evangelize, we're trying to help Jesus move from a stranger into an acquaintance for people, and then into a friend, and then into their Savior. See sometimes we're tempted to skip the acquaintance and friend part, and we want to jump straight from stranger to Savior. We sometimes act prematurely and we're essentially trying to convince people to open up the deepest part of themselves to a stranger, and we've already admitted how weird that is. Instead, the more people get to know Jesus through our example, through what we share with them from the Bible and what they

see in our lives, the more willing people will be to let Jesus in so that He can finally heal them spiritually with the gospel message.

So, what I want to do for the next 3-4 classes is to talk about how to break through people's physical and emotional layers so that we can move Jesus from Stranger to Savior in people's lives. Now I realize there's a mental layer too, and some of what we'll mention this morning reaches the mental layer, but we'll focus much more on that in later classes. But for now, there are 7 ways to move Jesus from Stranger to Savior in people's lives by breaking through the layers of their being.

1. **Heavy Love and Mercy**
2. **Interested Conversation**
3. **Consistency**
4. **Listening**
5. **Authenticity**
6. **Service**
7. **Sacrifice**

- You can memorize those by the acronym HI-CLASS. These are all crucial factors in high-class evangelism. This morning, we'll talk about the first two.

1. **Heavy Love and Mercy**

- **Luke 15:1-7** - If we're going to succeed in evangelism, we're going to need to strive to love people the way God loves people. This is where it all starts. We'll never get anywhere with reaching someone with the gospel until we learn to feel about the lost the way God feels about them. And Jesus tells 3 parables here back to back, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son to emphasize just how important even the worst of sinners are to God.
 - **Question:** In the context, why did Jesus need to tell these 3 parables?
 - **v. 2** - It's because the Pharisees did not love people at all; they held people in contempt. They had no mercy, they were arrogant and felt morally superior, they felt entitled to Heaven, and almost happy to watch everyone else around them burn for all eternity.
 - We see that at the end of the parable of the prodigal son when the son returns home and the older brother is bitter about it. He doesn't like the fact that the prodigal son was welcomed back home.
 - **Luke 18:9-13** - We see this attitude all throughout the gospel accounts that the Pharisees over and over again are all about harsh judgment, moral arrogance, thinking that God loves them more than He loves everyone else, and that God wants them in Heaven but not the rest of the filthy sinners around them.
- **Key:** I know the Pharisees were extreme in their prejudice against those outside their circle, but if we're not careful we can have these kinds of attitudes toward the people around us in our lives and if we do, it'll stop our evangelism dead in its tracks. When that happens, Jesus will forever remain a stranger to people and nobody will even want to know Him anyway.
 - **Question:** This is more of an introspective question. I don't expect you to raise your hand or answer it out loud. But have you ever found yourself looking down your nose at people around you because of their sin?

- **Confession:** I remember back in high school thinking how morally superior I was to all those kids who were going to parties and drinking. I knew some kids who would go into department stores in the mall and thought it was cool to steal clothes. And I'm ashamed to say I never once tried to reach them with the gospel because I kept thinking to myself, "They don't deserve it." And besides, even if I tried to talk to them, they're too evil to understand it or want it anyway.
 - You see unfortunately, it's really tempting to let our hatred and disgust for sin turn into hatred and disgust for the sinner so that we stay away from them, we don't talk to them, we don't want anything to do with them because it's like they have an infectious disease and we have to keep our distance lest we catch it.
- That's how the Pharisees treated people, but Jesus came to shatter all of that thinking.
- **Question:** Based on the parables in Luke 15, how does God feel about all those horrible sinners out there?
 - He desperately wants them back. They are so valuable to God that He's willing to leave everything that He has and go out searching for as long as it takes to bring these poor lost souls back to Him.
 - **Luke 19:10** - In other words, the parable of God going out looking for His lost sheep is pointing to the reality that God wanted them back so desperately He sent His Son to the earth to die on a cross to get them back.
- **Question:** What happens when God finally finds that lost sheep and brings him home?
 - There's dancing and celebration and feasting! It's the most wonderful thing ever when God can get one of His prodigal children back.
 - That's why Jesus regularly ate with sinners and tax collectors, it's why He talked to people no one else would talk to, it's why He was merciful to a prostitute in John 8 who was caught in the very act of prostitution, it's why He was merciful and forgave the harlot who was wiping his feet with her tears, and remember Simon the Pharisee said to Jesus, "If you were a prophet you'd know what kind of woman this is and you wouldn't let her touch you," but Jesus was loving and merciful to her and told Simon that those who receive the most love and mercy will only love more in return when they're forgiven. **Most important of all**, it's why He was merciful to you and to me.
 - **Helpful tip:** When we look out at our neighbors, friends, and coworkers, it'll help us to remember that we were just as lost as that person is! You are just as much in need of God's mercy and grace as that person at work who uses filthy language, tells dirty jokes, watches porn regularly, has one night stands regularly, and in general doesn't have very good manners. That's a precious, lost sheep to God. God's not happy about their sin, He's not asking us to be happy about their sin or to show approval of it, but is He is asking us to love them and want to save their souls as much as He does. To be merciful to them as He is merciful to us. That is all over the gospels, that's what Jesus was all about.
- **Practical:** People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

- **Hebrews 8:8-10 - Question:** Do you know the biggest reason why God knew things under the New Covenant would be different? Why He knew that people wouldn't just serve Him out of duty to some external law, but that they'd actually internalize His Law?

- It's because the cross shows us in the most powerful way possible just how much God cares for us. Certainly, God cared about His people in the Old Testament, but there was nothing in the Old Testament that could compare to the display of God's genuine love and mercy toward us as was displayed on the cross of Jesus Christ. "God SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON."

- It's because we've seen just how much God loves and cares for us that we now care deeply to know what He knows and to live for Him.

- Jimmy Petrouse used to say, "If you're not a people person, Christianity is not for you." And it used to bother me that he said that because when I think of being a people person, I think of being the extrovert who loves being around people and in big crowds and is the life of the party. But I realized that's not what Jimmy meant by "people-person." He meant, you need to be someone who loves people the way God does. That has nothing to do with our personality or how skilled we are at conversation. It has everything to do with our attitude toward the lost.
- **Amazing thought:** I know God hates sin WAY more than I do. If I think I'm disgusted by sin, God is repulsed a million times more. Yet He still came down to earth in the flesh to talk to us in all of our filth and sinfulness, He treated us with love, and treated us like we were the most important people in the world; important enough to die for on a cross.
- Surely we who don't hate sin nearly as much as God does, can talk to, reach out to, treat with love, be merciful toward, and sacrifice for the people around us. This attitude adjustment is the first step to high class evangelism.
- **Bonus benefit:** Being loving and merciful will help you relax in conversation because you won't feel the need to jump all over them for every little thing they say. They're probably going to use bad language or mention some bad thing they did in passing and when we approach them with love and mercy we won't be stopping them every 5 seconds saying, "Now that's sinful you shouldn't do that." That's not going to be very productive and remember one of the 9 results of postmodern thinking is that people think religion is harmful to society so if we're harsh and judgmental and always correcting people and shaking our fingers at people, we're only confirming their preconceived notions. But if we approach people like Jesus did, with love and mercy, it'll be a refreshing surprise.

2. Interested Conversation

- Notice I didn't say "interesting" conversation. Again, I'm not trying to change anyone's personality so that you have to be the life of the party or a master storyteller who always leaves people wanting more. No, interested conversation is conversation that shows interest in the person. This is very simple. It might take some practice

and you'll get better at it over time, but it doesn't take a 20 week training course from a master conversationalist.

- **Matthew 9:9-10** - Jesus talked to people that most people didn't like and didn't want to talk to. Here He is, having dinner with tax collectors, people that most Jews hated because they were highly dishonest, they were traitors to their own countrymen because they worked for the Romans, and they were very greedy. Yet even though we don't know what Jesus said at this dinner, just the fact that He's willing to have dinner with them shows that He loves them and is genuinely interested in them.
- We see that same concept with the woman at the well in John 4. Jews didn't talk to Samaritans, but Jesus was willing to show interest by making conversation.
- **Question:** What are some practical ways we can show interest in our conversations?
 - 1) Ask a person how they're doing, not as a formality, but genuinely wanting to know.
 - 2) Make eye contact and friendly gestures while we're talking to them (smile? hand on shoulder? **make sure this is genuine, not fake**)
 - 3) Put your phone away when you talk to them. If it rings, get it later.
 - 4) Use the person's name.
 - 5) Listen attentively (We'll have a whole class on this).
 - 6) Ask them probing questions. It could be a question about what they did over the weekend? It could be asking them if they have any plans for the upcoming holiday? It could be asking if they have any hobbies? It's all about you finding out as much as you can about them, not all in one single conversation of course, but over time you use questions to find out more about their background, their upbringing, their likes and dislikes. You're just showing them you're interested in them.
 - 7) Offer compliments as long as they're genuine. It's not meant to be manipulative, but it shows you're interested in the person if you notice something positive about them and bring it to their attention.
 - 8) You could even call, text, or email that person outside of work or outside of whatever the normal setting is. That's effective because then the person knows you're not talking to them simply as a part of your duty at work. You're actually interested in them as a person in contexts outside of the norm. **[Note: Be especially wise and careful about talking to people of the opposite sex. Let's be careful not to use flirting or stalking as a form of evangelism]**
 - 9) You could acknowledge a person's birthday or some other big event. If they tell you about an anniversary coming up, you can just store it in your phone or write it on a calendar so when it comes around you can just say, "Happy Anniversary" and it'll leave an impression that you remembered.
 - 10) Learn to use the expression, "Tell me more about that." Because usually when you're first getting to know someone, they'll just give you superficial answers. You ask them what they did over the weekend, and they may say, "I went fishing." and you could just say, "Oh okay, neat." and that's the end of that. But if you want to show interest in the person, the phrase, "Tell me more about that" is so helpful because it shows them you're not just interested in superficial conversation, you

genuinely want to know more. “You went fishing? Tell me more about that, where was it? Who’d you go with?”

- Now, you may not know anything about fishing, and that’s okay. We’re going to talk more about authenticity later as a part of high class evangelism, but be authentic. Instead of pretending which gets you nowhere, “Oh yea I been fishin’ before, reeled in some big ones.” Then you’re in trouble because they might start asking you questions and you’re going to look ridiculous. So instead you could say something like, “I honestly don’t know anything about fishing, but I think it’s really great that you take that time out to spend with your son.” Or, “I don’t know about fishing, but I can see it’s really important to you, did you grow up fishing or how did you get into it?” And since you’re approaching them with love and mercy and you know evangelism is a process, you won’t say, “Were you fishing on Sunday because you shoulda been in church?” That’s not going to go well. And just because you don’t bring that up doesn’t mean you’re approving of it. You’re just trying to show interest right now.
- **Bonus benefit:** As our society becomes more and more competitive, fast paced, and technologically advanced, these 10 things I mentioned to you become more and more rare. While that’s a shame, the good news about that is you will stand out BIG time from most other people who are too busy worrying about their own selfish pursuits to bother showing interest in those around them. That means your love and mercy, and your interested conversation will help in a huge way to bring people one step closer to obeying the gospel. At this stage, you might not have said anything about Christianity yet, but it’s actually helping to bring Jesus one step closer to being their Savior and not just a stranger.
- **Story:** For Jimmy Petrousse, his entire Christian journey to become a preacher and to do all the incredible things he’s done in his life began with Robert Smith seeing him in a convenience store as a teenager and saying “hi.” He just showed interest in Jimmy, and it opened his heart to later hear and be transformed by the gospel.

Class 4 - From Stranger to Savior part 2

As we continue our evangelism class tonight, we’re going to talk about 2 more of the 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism which move Jesus from stranger to Savior in people’s minds. Right now, Jesus is a stranger to most people, and as much as we’d love to immediately tell people all about Him and what He’s done for them, we’re going to have to go through the process of preparing their hearts to receive Him, to move Jesus from stranger, to acquaintance, to friend, then to Savior. As a reminder...

- 1. Heavy Love and Mercy**
- 2. Interested Conversation**
- 3. Consistency**
- 4. Listening**
- 5. Authenticity**
- 6. Service**

7. Sacrifice

Last class, we talked about our need for heavy love and mercy and for interested conversation. That was HI in Hi-class, and tonight we'll talk about the C and the L. Consistency and listening, though we won't get very far tonight with listening, and we'll continue with it on Sunday.

Before we do, I want to share a comment made by Jenny Geiger after the last class. We were talking about the power of showing interest in someone through conversation, and she reminded me of how Jimmy Petrousse was influenced to become a Christian. It all started when Robert Smith, the preacher working in Seychelles at the time, saw Jimmy, this teenage island boy with shorts, flip flops and an open shirt on in a convenience store. And all he did was say, "Hi." It caught Jimmy off guard that this guy cared enough to say hi to him, then Robert asked him more about himself. He didn't share the gospel immediately right then and there, but he started with heavy love and mercy along with interested conversation, and it paved the way for Jimmy to become a Christian and look at him now. Don't underestimate the power in these steps.

3. Consistency

- **Matthew 23:1-3 - Question:** What do you think is one of the most major, if not THE most major, turn off for people becoming Christians?
 - It's when Christians claim to follow Jesus, but don't act like Jesus. It's the ol' "I don't want to be a Christian because they're all a bunch of hypocrites."
 - I realize when we use the word "consistency," it could mean consistently bad. But what I mean by consistency is that our beliefs match our words and our words match our actions. In fact, there 3 areas of consistency we need to have. 1) There's consistency between what we say and how we live, what we preach and what we practice. 2) Consistency between days of the week, which means we're not good one day and evil the next. Living right is a regular, constant thing. Will we be perfect? No. But in order for Jesus to move from stranger to Savior, people are going to have to see an accurate picture of who He is from us. If the picture is twisted, distorted or flaky, people aren't going to want anything to do with Him.
 - **Illustration:** Let's say you know someone who's a two-faced person. They seem nice on the outside, always greeting people with a smile, but they're actually willing to lie, cheat, and steal to get ahead. They say they love people, but secretly they gossip about them behind their back. They say they're grateful for your friendship, but you hear later how much they complain about you. Now, let's say this person comes up to you to introduce you to a friend of theirs, and that friend is a complete stranger to you. Imagine they say to you, "I want you to meet my friend, he's my mentor and he taught me everything I know." **Question:** Are you going to have any interest in meeting this person?
 - No way! Unless it's to tell them off for being the worst mentor ever!
 - THAT is what it's like if people see inconsistency between what we preach and what we practice. They see the hypocrisy, and then when we try to introduce them to Jesus, the one we claim to follow as Lord, they're not going to want anything to do with Him and Jesus will forever remain a stranger to them!

- **Key:** This is why Jesus rebukes the Pharisees so harshly in Matthew 23 because they claim to be the religious leaders, the ones who emulate God the most closely, yet because they don't practice what they preach they've completely obscured God from the people. Jesus was furious with the Pharisees because when people looked at them, they couldn't see God at all. They had completely cut people off from God, even when they thought they were bringing people closer to Him!
 - **Matthew 23:13,15** - We can actually close the doors of Heaven to people by the way we live our lives! That's a scary thought, but the encouraging part is that the converse is true! We can OPEN the doors of Heaven to people if we live in line with the truth we're proclaiming.
- **Story:** I was talking again recently to my tailor and to start the conversation I asked her if she had any New Years Resolutions and from there we started talking about church (We'll talk in later classes about how to do that, how to guide the conversation in a spiritual direction), and she started telling me that there are some people who have come into her shop over the years claiming to be religious, even giving her a Bible. In fact, she still had this Spanish Bible sitting on her desk that one of her customers gave to her, and she told me how on several different occasions these people stole from her by walking out with their newly tailored clothes without paying. The one who gave her the Bible walked out and said, "I'll pay you later," and never did.
 - I absolutely couldn't believe it, but tragically these things happen all the time and Christians give Christ a terrible name.
 - **Romans 2:17-24** - When we don't live consistently and our lives don't match our profession of faith, God's name ends up blasphemed among non-believers and rather than drawing closer to God, they are repulsed and pushed further away.
 - **Question:** Have you seen any examples like this in your own life?
 - Westboro Baptist group. Catholic priests involved with pedophilia. Faithful preachers caught in adultery. Those who claim to be Christians at work, yet use the same foul language, watch the same movies, are gay and proud of it, etc.
 - Sam Harris, one of the 4 Horsemen of the Atheist Apocalypse, wrote "The End of Faith," and received death threats from Christians. He said, "*The most hostile of these communications have come from Christians. This is ironic, as Christians generally imagine that no faith imparts the virtues of love and forgiveness more effectively than their own. The truth is that many who claim to be transformed by Christ's love are deeply, even murderously, intolerant of criticism.*"
 - **Personal:** I don't remember all the details, but a couple years ago I called my bank because there was some problem with my account and I was so annoyed. I wasn't having a very good day as it was, so I was already on edge. It took me forever to finally get to talk to a human being because I had to go through the robo-prompter and I think I clicked the wrong button and waited on hold a couple times for the wrong department, so when I finally reached the person I needed to talk to I was sharp with my words, sarcastic, borderline mean, I basically ignored them when they asked how I was doing, and then come to find out in order to fix the problem I was having with my account, they had to ask me my occupation...and I just wanted to shrink away in shame because the last thing I wanted to do was tell this person that the cranky, snarky, mean, impatient

man they'd been speaking to was a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I told them, but I remember my tone changed after that and I even apologized for my behavior because I was not acting consistently with my beliefs at all.

- **Encouraging:** Almost every negative point about our culture today gives our example that much more of an impact. Because hypocrisy is SO common among those who call themselves Christians today, it makes it that much more powerful when people see us living right. In practical terms, just by me paying my tailor the wages she deserves, I'm already helping to move her closer to Jesus.
- **1 Peter 2:12; 3:1-2** - When people see that we're not hypocritical, they'll have no occasion to slander or blaspheme God, and those who are disobedient to the word may be won over to Jesus, or at least brought one step closer to Him, as they observe our consistent lifestyle.
- **Most Important Point I can make about Consistency:** There's one more area of consistency I sincerely believe is the most important. That's consistency between how we live publicly and how we live privately. We might be able to put on a good enough show so that people see that we're consistent out in public. They see us practicing what we preach and they see we do that day in and day out, and that can have a positive impact on bringing people closer to the Lord. But if our private life doesn't match our public life, we have a serious problem because secret sin will absolutely destroy our evangelism. Why?
 - Because even if nobody else thinks you're a hypocrite, but you know you are because you're living in sin on the side, A) you'll never be able to form genuine relationships with people because you'll always be hiding. You'll forever have a wall up to keep people out. B) You'll never really feel the joy of being a Christian and evangelism will forever remain a dry duty and obligation. C) You won't feel worthy to share the gospel because you'll think, "If I'm not even following it, how can I expect others to follow it?"
 - **Psalms 51:10-13** - There's a direct connection in Scripture between living a pure life of faith and evangelism. The two go hand in hand because when we're living right, we know the peace that passes understanding and we'll want to share that peace with others. But when we're living in secret sin on the side, we won't have any peace to share, we won't have any joy to share because deep down we'll know we're not saved, just like David didn't feel any joy of God's salvation as long as he had this hidden sin with Bathsheba weighing heavily on his heart.

4. Listening

- **Proverbs 18:2** - Here's something ironic to think about. If you want to know the quickest, most powerful way to be instantly more effective at evangelism, learn to listen more and talk less. This might be the biggest weakness we have as Christians trying to reach people with the gospel, because typically when we talk about getting better at evangelism, we're wondering things like, "What do I say? How should I say it? When should I say it?" And those are all important things we'll discuss later in the quarter, but I firmly believe if we think talking to people about the Lord is all there is to evangelism, we're going to shoot ourselves in the foot because we, like the fool, will only be interested in revealing our own minds to people. James 1:19 says to be quick to hear, and slow to speak. Yet typically with evangelism we reverse that, and I

think it's with good intentions. We think to ourselves, "I have the truth, this person doesn't, so why would I listen to this person more than I talk? I need to be talking way more than I listen because if I listen to this person, all I'm going to hear is a bunch of misconceptions or negativity and it's not going to benefit me to hear those things anyway, but what I HAVE TO say will definitely benefit them because it's the truth of the gospel."

- I want to challenge and correct that kind of thinking in our minds. We certainly don't want to be swayed to believe something false, but that doesn't mean we close our ears to people. In fact, the more we open our ears and hearts to people by listening, the more effective our evangelism will be.
- I want to share with you 7 benefits of listening, and we'll only get through the first one tonight. But on Sunday, Lord willing, we'll continue where we leave off and spend most, if not all, of Sunday's class on this topic too.

1. Listening uncovers the real meaning behind words

- **Proverbs 20:5** - Remember in the very first class we had, I said we need to make sure to not remove humanity from evangelism. Every person is different, and I'm amazed at how deep the human heart really is. God did not design us to be superficial individuals; we all have deep seated thoughts and emotions that are shaped and molded by our unique upbringing, our unique life circumstances, our unique brain chemistry and IQ level.
 - A man of understanding knows how to go deep into the heart and draw out the real issues there. That takes listening, because even though we're not superficial individuals, we often present only superficial words to those around us as a way to protect ourselves and not be vulnerable to being hurt.
 - That's why sometimes people will say something, but there is a much deeper truth and hidden meaning and motivation behind what they said.
 - For instance, husbands, let's say you ask your wife, "Is there something bothering you," and she says, "No, I'm fine." Do you just take her words at face value, or do you think there's more meaning beneath those words?
 - Now, maybe she really is fine, but the phrase, "I'm fine," could mean a lot of different things. It could mean, "It's a woman thing and I don't feel comfortable talking to you about it, I'll just talk to my girlfriends about it." It could mean, "I've tried to talk to you about this in the past, and you've proven yourself to not be a good listener, so I'm done trying to talk to you about this." It could mean, "I'm not sure what's going on with me right now, so I'm not sure what to say."
 - A fool would say, "Oh I'm so glad you're fine." To be a good listener though, you need to gently and supportively try to draw out of her heart what's really going on beneath the surface of those words.
 - Or let's say your child says to you, "School is stupid." What's really going on there? Do they really mean that? Or are they just feeling inadequate because they're having trouble reading, or because no girls are interested in them, or because they're getting bullied? A fool might immediately jump in and say, "How could you say school is stupid, your mother and I are paying big bucks for you to go so you better start liking it."

- Or, let's say a co-worker says to you, "I think the idea that there's a God is ridiculous." What's the real meaning behind those words? You see, a fool would jump all over him and say, "I think you're ridiculous for not believing in God and here are 10 reasons why." Well, that may sound courageous, but you've jumped the gun and not sought to understand what's beneath those words first.
 - There could be pain beneath those words. Maybe this person wanted to believe in God, but they lost a child in some tragedy and he lost his faith over that. Or maybe this person went to a thriving church, but the preacher got arrested for child pornography, and this man thought to himself, "If the preacher wasn't convinced enough in the existence of God to change his life, why should I be?"
 - **Mark 4:9** [After Jesus told the parable of the sower...] - Jesus wasn't talking about physical ears here. Most everyone had physical ears to hear. What Jesus meant was, "He who is willing to really dig and listen and try to uncover the meaning beneath the words of this parable, listen carefully." The reason many people wrote Jesus off as crazy and didn't care about His parables is because they didn't delight in understanding. They didn't want to take the time to really understand the deep things of Jesus' heart and mind.
 - If we want to be successful evangelists, we're going to have to have ears to hear what's really going beneath the surface of people's words.

Class 5 - From Stranger to Savior part 3

As we continue our evangelism class this morning, we're going to continue to talk about listening, which is one of our 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism which move Jesus from stranger to Savior in people's minds.

- 1. Heavy Love and Mercy**
- 2. Interested Conversation**
- 3. Consistency**
- 4. Listening**
- 5. Authenticity**
- 6. Service**
- 7. Sacrifice**

Last class, we talked about the need for consistency and then we started to talk about the importance of listening in evangelism. That's ironic because usually when we think of evangelism, we think more about talking. But we mentioned last time that in order to really increase our effectiveness at evangelism, we need to learn to listen more than we talk. To be quick to hear, slow to speak. To delight in understanding, rather than in revealing our own minds like fools do. I mentioned that there are 7 benefits to listening that will help our evangelism. The first was that listening uncovers the real meaning behind words. Sometimes people say something and at first we think we know what they mean, but if we'll be patient and listen, we can uncover what's really going on beneath the surface of people's words.

2. Listening helps us see the world from their perspective

- **Exercise: 3 pictures.**
 - **Picture 1:** Raise your hand if you see a young woman. **Question:** If you didn't raise your hand, why not? What do you see? An old woman.
 - **Picture 2:** Raise your hand if you see a cup. **Question:** If you didn't raise your hand, why not? What do you see? Two people facing each other.
 - **Picture 3:** Raise your hand if you see a woman. **Question:** If you didn't raise your hand, why not? What do you see? A man playing a saxophone.
- **Point:** We all see the world through a unique lens. That means we might see the exact same thing, but interpret it in a different way. For instance, the attacks on 9/11. Atheists looked at that and thought, "See? Religion is bad." Christians looked at that and thought, "See? Islam is bad." Muslims looked at that and thought, "See? Radical terrorism is bad."
 - That means if someone brings up 9/11 or ANY subject at all, we can't just assume we know what they're thinking about that subject. So listening helps us see and experience the world through someone else's point of view. Now, that doesn't mean their point of view is correct. They could very well be mistaken, but we won't really know that for sure until we understand their point of view first.
 - **Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15** - One of the things that makes God and Jesus such good listeners and why the gospel message is so effective is because we know Jesus understands the world from our perspective. We cannot accuse God of not understanding us, of sitting up there comfortably in the ivory towers of Heaven and not knowing how it is down here on the earth. God came down to earth to see things from our perspective and through a fleshy lens.

3. Listening Makes People feel Important

- By this, I don't mean we feed people's ego and pride. I mean that everyone has a desire to be known and understood by another individual. When people make no effort to know us or understand us, we don't feel valued or appreciated. There are few things more frustrating than to try to talk to someone and it's just clear they're not listening to us at all. Because it sends the message that our thoughts don't matter, our feelings are invalid, our opinions don't count, and we're so unimportant that it'd be better if we just didn't talk at all. That's a tragedy. But when someone shows enough love to listen to us, to validate our feelings, to try to see things from our point of view and understand where we're coming from and why, we feel truly loved and appreciated.
 - I think about Jesus in **Luke 19**, who was on His way to Jerusalem, was surrounded by crowds, but took the time to talk to Zaccheus and said, "I need to stay at your house." This short man, this chief tax collector, was made to feel important and valued because Jesus took the time to spend with Him at his home.

4. Listening Helps you know where to Start with People Spiritually

- Obviously, the goal is to reach people with the gospel message, but in order to do that more effectively, we're going to gauge where they're at spiritually first. So for instance, you could share a Bible verse with the person, but what if they believe the Bible is just a bunch of made up stories? Your Bible quotation probably won't go very far with that person. Or you could invite them to church, but what if they don't even believe in God, or every church they've been to has pressured them into giving them

money? A church invite may not sound very appealing to them at all. On the other hand, if we're good listeners, we'll know where they're at spiritually and we'll be able to draw them closer to Jesus by starting somewhere closer to something they can relate to.

- So if you've been listening and they said, "Every church I've been to has pressured me for money," you can still invite them to church, but now you could say, "Oh man that would be frustrating. We do take up a collection, but we always make sure to tell our visitors we're not soliciting their funds. If you come to church with me, you won't be pressured at all."
- This is why Peter's sermon in Acts 2 to a Jewish audience in Jerusalem was way different than Paul's sermon in Acts 17 to the Gentiles in Athens. Peter started his sermon in Joel 2 but Joel 2 would have meant nothing to the Gentiles in Athens, so instead Paul started with their altar to an unknown god.

5. Listening Helps You Relax and not feel overly pressured for a response

- Sometimes the reason we feel so much pressure in evangelism is because we're worried about saying the perfect thing at the perfect time in the perfect way. But if you'll focus more on listening than on talking, you'll find it takes the pressure off to have the perfect response. You'll discover just how effective it is in moving people one step closer to Jesus just by being there to listen and seeking to understand. So rather than think, "How can I give the perfect response?" shift your thinking to, "How can I lend a listening ear?"
- And you might be thinking, "But Brian we have to teach them the gospel and if all we do is listen, how are we supposed to ever teach them the truth?"

6. Listening Opens them up to Listen to You

- Almost nobody, unless they're completely narcissistic, is going to expect you to do all the listening and to never talk. So ironically, the more we listen, the more likely they're going to be to turn the conversation around so they can do the listening. See, if we start off doing all the talking, it's uninvited. Maybe we think, "Look, I have the truth and so I need to launch into this monologue about my faith, and if this person doesn't like it too bad, Jesus said the way is narrow and that's just the way it goes." But if we listen first, they will invite us to talk and then when it's our turn they're much more likely to listen because A) we listened to them and tried to see the world from their perspective and B) they've actually asked us what we think and how we see things. Taking the time to understand the world from their perspective inspires them to turn around and try to see the world from our perspective, and THAT is our opportunity to share our faith in a very natural, conversational way, and in a way that was actually invited! Listening has prepared their hearts to receive what we have to say!

7. Listening Helps People work through their own Beliefs

- The truth is, many people believe things, but they don't know why they believe them. But if we'll take more of a listening stance, we give them a chance to formulate and put their beliefs into words perhaps for the first time. And you know what might happen and what we actually are going to learn later in the quarter how to help

happen? They might, just in talking things out, discover the inconsistencies and weaknesses in their own beliefs.

- **Question:** Has that ever happened to you in conversation? Maybe you were angry about something, but then when you actually started venting and talking out your feelings with someone, you discovered you weren't really angry at all. You were sad. Or maybe you discovered there was absolutely nothing to be angry about and you had completely misinterpreted the situation. That's the power of conversation. When we verbalize our feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, it exposes what's really going on inside of us. It brings our emotions through the filter of our brains, and our brains can see logical flaws our emotions can't catch. So, hopefully what we'll find is when we really start listening to people about why they believe what they believe, they'll start to get tripped up on their own faulty logic.
- For instance, maybe someone says, "I think all religions are basically the same." And instead of pouncing on them, correcting, or rebuking them, you say, "Tell me more about that, what makes you say that?" They might start talking and realize they really don't know what different religions teach at all. So they might say, "Well, I mean it seems like they're all kind of serving the same God." And you might say, "So what do you think about Hindu's who believe there are millions of different gods?" See, just with one question and a desire to listen and to let them explain their perspective, they're already going to see, "Maybe I don't really know enough to make the claim that all religions are the same." They may not admit that out loud, but inside they're recognizing they don't have much to go on, and just with that small exchange you're already moving them one step closer to the gospel. And as a bonus, if you've listened to them, they might turn it around and ask you, "What do you think? Doesn't it seem to you like they're all the same?" Then you can tell them about the uniqueness Christianity. [By the way, later in the quarter we'll have entire classes dedicated to understanding the basics of other religions so we can have some simple, practical answers when things like this come up]

Despite the benefits of listening, there are a lot of barriers that get in the way of effective listening. **Question:** Can you think of some common barriers to listening?

- Making comparisons while they're talking ("This person doesn't know what REAL suffering is"), trying to guess what a person is really thinking ("Even though they're saying x, I bet I know what they're really thinking"), planning what you're going to say while they're still talking, letting your mind wander, quick assessment of a person's character based on one thing they say ("This person is just nuts!"), always referring what a person says back to your own experience ("I know what you mean, the same thing happened to me last year, let me tell you about it"), offering unsolicited advice ("You should probably do this instead"), arguing about everything they say ("No, you mean last Tuesday, not last Thursday, because you see we were here on Thursday so it couldn't possibly have happened then, you must have meant Tuesday), and suddenly changing the subject ("Anyway, how about the weather yesterday, eh?")

- [Adapted from a section in "Messages: The Communication Skills Book by McKay, Davis, and Fanning]

Keys to Effective Listening:

1. Interested Body Language

- If you're really listening to someone, are you going to be leaned back in your chair with your eyes closed? I'm sure you've had someone do that to you, and they might assure you, "I'm listening, I can hear you," but you don't feel listened to at all.
- Our bodies need to be involved in the listening process. That means we need to maintain good eye contact, not closing our eyes or looking off into the distance or looking down at our phones. We'll need to probably lean in a little bit if we're sitting down to show the person, "I'm tuned in to you, I'm all ears." We'll probably need to nod our heads to show the person that we're following what they're saying.
- Our faces should be involved too. **Question:** Have you ever told someone something you knew was really sad, and they just kind of stared at you blankly and said, "Oh that's interesting." You can tell they zoned out on you because if they were really listening, they would have reacted with a sad or a sympathetic facial expression. Facial expressions that appropriately mirror the emotion behind what a person says shows you're listening, whether it's laughing, smiling, or frowning.

2. Paraphrasing

- When we paraphrase, we re-state in our own words what the person just said.
Question: What's the value in doing this?
 - It shows the person you're trying to really understand what they're saying.
 - If I say to someone, "I really feel overwhelmed sometimes as a preacher." And they say, "Oh I'm sorry about that," I appreciate the sympathy but they haven't really tried to understand what I mean by that. They've not really listened and put themselves in my shoes to try to understand my perspective.
 - So instead of just saying, "I'm sorry about that," the person could paraphrase and say, "So you're saying it's a lot of work."
 - That wasn't much, but it was profound and powerful because it shows me the person is listening and understands what I'm saying.
 - Good ways to paraphrase would be to use words like, "What I hear you saying is..." "In other words..." "So basically how you feel is..." "So what happened was..." "Let me understand, what was going on for you was..."
 - Then you just paraphrase and put into words what the person said to you. It may sound simple, but it helps people feel appreciated, it prevents miscommunication, it helps you remember what was said, and prevents a lot of the barriers to listening.

3. Clarifying Questions

- This is very similar to paraphrasing, but here you're going a little deeper to try to gain an even more complete and accurate understanding of what the person is saying by asking questions. "Do you mean x?" "What exactly did x feel like?" "Can you explain x further?" "Will you help me understand something you said about x?"
- Now, sometimes paraphrasing leads to clarification all by itself without needing to ask questions.

- So if we use that same preacher example, the person paraphrased and said, “So you’re saying it’s a lot of work.” Well, that paraphrase may not be accurate, so it’ll lead ME to further clarify what I meant. I could say, “No, it’s not so much the work load, it’s overwhelming because I’m just a man and I’m put in charge of this divine task of preaching the word of God.” Now that they have clarification, their paraphrase could be more accurate. They could say, “Oh I see, so you’re point is that it’s really a daunting task.”
- “Exactly,” I would say. There, the paraphrasing led to a natural clarification and now I really feel like this person is listening because their paraphrase is more on target and they really understand me now.
- But, if they’re a really good listener, they’ll seek further clarification with questions. For instance, they could say, “Is it daunting for you because you feel like you lack the skills to preach? Or is it more daunting because you know God holds you to such a high standard of accountability for your teaching?”
- For me, it might be both, but I appreciate the question because this person in his search to really understand me.

4. Feedback

- Feedback is your reaction to what I’m saying. Sadly, many times in our conversations and in our efforts to evangelize we skip the paraphrasing and the clarification and we go straight to feedback. When we do, we shoot ourselves in the foot because we’re reacting to something that may not even be based on an accurate understanding. Plus, that person is NOT going to be interested in our feedback if they don’t feel like we’ve cared enough about them to really understand them.
- So, if I say, “I feel overwhelmed sometimes to be a preacher,” and you say “I’m sorry about that.” That’s feedback, and I’m glad you have empathy, but it’s not that helpful because it’s feedback without really understanding what I mean. I’m not really even looking for an apology.
- But after all that clarification and seeing where I’m coming from, then more appropriate feedback might be something like, “Wow Brian I’ve never thought about it from that perspective before, that must be really hard to deal with, and it makes me want to pray for you and other preachers more often.”
- **Final note:** Sometimes the feedback you have to give is negative or corrective. If I was actually complaining about being a preacher and wanting to quit because I just don’t want to put in the work, your feedback would be different. But I will be MUCH LESS open to receiving negative feedback if I feel you’ve not really listened first. And the truth is, if you really listen to me complain for a while and paraphrase and seek clarification, I’ll probably come to the conclusion on my own that I have the wrong attitude, and you won’t even have to correct me. But if you’ve really listened, I’ll be more open to listening to correction if need be.

[Adapted from a section in “Messages: The Communication Skills Book by McKay, Davis, and Fanning]

Class 6 - From Stranger to Savior part 4

Tonight, we're continuing our series of 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism to move Jesus from Stranger to Savior in people's minds and hearts.

1. **Heavy Love and Mercy**
2. **Interested Conversation**
3. **Consistency**
4. **Listening**
5. **Authenticity**
6. **Service**
7. **Sacrifice**

Just as a reminder, what we're trying to do with these 7 keys is to break through the emotional, physical, and mental barriers people have to Jesus before they'll open up the spiritual part of themselves to receive Him. Last class, we finished talking about listening.

For tonight's class, we're going to talk about the 5th key to HI-Class evangelism; that's Authenticity. Then Lord willing, we'll cover the last two on Sunday.

Illustration: There was a colonel in the Gulf War who has just received a promotion, and was moved into an office they hadn't quite finished building. When he arrived in his new office, he was unpacking his things trying to get organized and he saw a soldier coming his way with a toolbox in hand. Wanting to seem important, he quickly turned around and picked up his phone as the soldier was walking up and said, "Yes General Patterson, yes, yes, of course, I think that's an excellent plan, and you have my full support, thank you for valuing my input." He hung up, turned around to the young soldier, and said, "Yes, private, what can I do for you?" He said, "Uhhh, I'm just here to hook up your phone." [Adapted from a story in "Becoming a Contagious Christian" by Hybels and Mittelberg. p. 57]

Authenticity means to be genuine, to be real and without any sort of pretense or show.

Matthew 23:14 - The Pharisees were pretenders. That's what hypocrites are; they're people who wear masks and pretend to be someone or something they're not. Now, in the case of the Pharisees, they were wearing their masks to hide their immoral hearts. We already talked about that kind of inauthenticity when we talked about consistency. However, when it comes to evangelism, sometimes we're inauthentic with people, not because we're trying to hide a double life, but for 3 main reasons: 1) We think we need to be someone else to be effective evangelistically 2) We think if people see our flaws, it'll hurt our evangelism 3) We're afraid to be vulnerable by letting people in.

Tonight, I want to talk about 3 ways to be authentic in evangelism:

1. **Be Yourself**

- **1 Corinthians 2:1-3** [Corinth was a city that placed high value on professional orators who could speak with great fluency and proficiency] - Despite their love for gifted

orators, Paul didn't pretend to be someone he wasn't just to impress people. He was okay with being himself while he was there with them, because his only goal was to share Christ with them, not to impress them with fake credentials.

- **Psalm 139:13-16** - Each of us are made in the image of God, but we're also all unique in our personalities and temperaments. Some of our personality traits are shaped by our upbringing, but some are genetic and we're just wired differently than others.

- **Question:** Why do we all have different occupations? Why are some engineers and others painters? Why are some math teachers and others history teachers? Why are some professional basketball players and others preachers? A lot has to do with the influences in our lives, but it's mainly because of the unique personalities and abilities given to us by God.

Point: In evangelism, sometimes we're not authentic with people because we think we need to be someone else to be effective. And I will admit, sometimes that's the preacher's fault because one of the most common things preachers say about being better evangelists is "We need to get out of our comfort zones." Now, that is absolutely true, but we need to be much clear about what that means.

- To get out of our comfort zone means to take risks and to be willing to talk about things that are uncomfortable to talk about. That's really it. Getting out of our comfort zone, however, can easily be misinterpreted to mean, "You need to change your personality and be someone you're not."

- **1 Samuel 17:37-40** - The reason I'm harping on this so much is because if we try to get out of our comfort zones by changing who we are, it will actually HINDER and HURT our evangelism, rather than help it. Saul wanted David to do things HIS way; to go after Goliath with this heavy coat of armor, but David was not a soldier, he was a shepherd. He wasn't comfortable using a soldier's tools; he had his own and **notice:** he was okay with using his own tools because He knew God was with Him!

- God designed us with our own personality and our own strengths, and you better believe He can use us in His service in His own unique way! Anyone watching that fight would have said, "David is crazy going in there without armor, that'll never work!" Likewise, we might think, "So and so is crazy thinking they can be effective at evangelism! They're so quiet and shy!"

- **Question:** If we're quiet and shy, can't God use us more effectively to reach other quiet and shy people than he could someone who is more boisterous and social? Absolutely! And can't he use more boisterous and social personalities to more effectively reach more boisterous and social personalities? Absolutely! God can use you where you are and with what you have, just like He used David to bring down the giant with only a stone.

- **Question:** What if we told that quiet and shy person, "To be effective at evangelism, you need to go to the annual office party and chat with everyone there so that everyone will know you're a Christian." Is that going to work? NO. Because a quiet person is not going to do well in big group settings, and if they tried to do that, they DEFINITELY wouldn't be effective because they wouldn't be authentic! People would think, "Who is this guy trying to fool? He usually doesn't say a whole lot, and now he's mister social butterfly all the sudden?" And you'll look like that colonel!

- **Question:** What if you found the most outgoing person you know, the person who is the life of every party who would be perfectly comfortable chatting with everyone in the room, and you said, “To be effective at evangelism, you need to find one person at the office party and spend all your time with them, really having a long, deep conversation, and then after the party you need to write that person a thoughtful card telling them how thankful you are you had the chance to get to know them.” That’s probably not going to work, because highly extroverted people won’t want to only talk to one person, and they usually prefer talking to writing, so writing a card would be out of character.
- **Point:** The reason some things are out of our comfort zone is because we’re completely inauthentic for us. So get out of your comfort zone to talk about spiritual things, but stay IN your comfort zone in terms of what is authentic about you and your personality, and be yourself.
- **Helpful tool:** Learn the difference between forced and fake. Some things will feel forced in evangelism simply because we are having to force ourselves to talk about things that are uncomfortable to talk about. So if it feels like you’re forcing yourself, that’s okay, that’s what the Bible calls boldness and courage, and we’ll need that to be effective. But if it feels like you’re being fake because you’re forcing yourself to do something that doesn’t match who you are at all, that’s when we’ll lose our authenticity and our effectiveness.
- **Extroverts (Solar Panels):** gain energy from other people, prefer big groups, think quickly on the spot and like to share thoughts out loud, prefer more friends, prefer talking rather over writing, prefer to multi-task.
- **Introverts (Rechargeable batteries):** people drain their energy so they reach inward to re-charge (quiet time is crucial), prefer small groups, think best when alone, very deep thinkers, prefer fewer friends but deeper relationships, prefer writing to talking, tend to focus on one thing at a time.
 - Most are a mix, but lean more toward one. Be yourself, and God will use you!

2. Share Your Flaws

- **1 Timothy 1:12-16** - Paul’s flaws were a source of great shame for him. He wasn’t bragging about his flaws and he wasn’t proud of them, but he also wasn’t afraid to share them either.
- **Problem:** Sometimes we’re inauthentic with people by hiding our flaws, pretending to be super righteous, not so we can hide a sinful lifestyle like the Pharisees, but so that they’ll think more highly of God. Remember, we talked about how important it is to set a good example of practicing what we preach because when we live hypocritically we bring shame to God’s name.
 - Well, sometimes we take that too far and think that means if people find out that we’ve sinned in the past or especially if we’ve sinned since we’ve become Christians, it’ll bring shame on God’s name too. That’s just not true. Hypocrisy, pretending, is what brings shame on God’s name, not authenticity. Authenticity with people honors the Lord.
- **Question:** How does Paul’s authenticity honor the Lord in this text?

- It highlights and showcases God's mercy! Paul is sharing his flaws so he can share his thankfulness to God and he can give hope to people who think God could never forgive theirs.
- **Point:** People need to see that Christians are just regular people, we're all guilty of sin; the only difference between us and non-Christians is that we've found the solution to it and we're trying to live by a higher standard because of God's mercy toward us.
- **True Story:** A business owner told of an experience he'll never forget. He had an employee who had recently become a Christian. This employee, shortly after his conversion, asked him if he could meet with him after work. He agreed, but he was afraid this young religious zealot was coming to try to convert him too.
 - "The young man entered his office with head hanging low and said, "Sir, I'll only take a few minutes, but I'm here to ask your forgiveness. Over the years I've worked for you I've done what a lot of other employees do, like borrowing a few company products here and there. I've taken some extra supplies; I've abused telephone privileges; and I've cheated the time clock now and then. But I became a Christian a few months ago and it's real—not the smoke and mirror stuff. In gratitude for what Christ has done for me and in obedience to Him, I want to make amends with you and the company for the wrong I've done. So could we figure out a way to do that? If you have to fire me for what I've done, I'll understand. I deserve it. Or, if you want to dock my pay, dock it by whatever figure you think is appropriate. If you want to give me some extra work to do on my own time, that would be okay too. I just want to make things right with God and between us."
 - This business owner said it was the single most impressive demonstration of true Christianity he had ever witnessed. [Hybels and Mittelberg, p. 61-62]
 - **Question:** Do you think this man would have been more effective by coming up to his office to try to convert his boss with a gospel presentation? No way. But he brought his boss one step closer to obeying the gospel by being authentic and sharing his flaws.
- **Application:** 1) Don't be afraid to share your past with people. I'm not saying to send out a company newsletter about it so everyone knows, but in the natural course of conversation if it comes up, don't feel like you need to hide it to protect God's name. The only way it would hurt God is if you're still living the same way you used to. But if you use it as a springboard, it can be very powerful. Maybe someone says, "I'm trying to not drink so much anymore," and you could say, "Yea I hear you, I used to actually be addicted to alcohol, but the Lord changed all that for me." Or you can take more time to lead in that: "Yeah I hear you, I used to actually be addicted to alcohol, so I know it's easier said than done. What's the hardest part about stopping for you?" 2) Don't be afraid to apologize. Remember my conversation with the banker on the phone where I acted like a jerk then she found out I was a preacher? Even though I already did some damage, an apology was a great way to be authentic and let them know Christians, even preachers, aren't perfect. 3) Be honest about your present struggles they come up. If someone says, "My big mouth just keeps getting me in trouble, does that ever happen to you?" You could say, "Sadly yes, mine just got me in trouble yesterday when I yelled at my husband for no reason; I'm so glad God is patient with me while I'm working on getting better with this." 4) Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Sometimes when people ask us hard questions about our faith, we might try to act like we're geniuses. "Yea, I know General Patterson!"

Then we start talking about things we know very little about, spouting out random facts about history/archaeology that may turn out not to be facts at all, then we look ridiculous.

- **Powerful benefits:** 1) Strengthens our relationships. People cannot relate to or connect with perfection, so if they think we're perfect, they'll slide off us like teflon. But if there are some rough edges, they'll stick more closely. 2) Some think Christianity is unattainable because it requires perfection to earn Heaven, but sharing our flaws shows people we're just works in progress, we're not special on our own, we all need God's grace, and if they'll follow Him they can have His grace too.

3. Let People In

- **1 Thessalonians 2:7-8** - If we're going to move Jesus from the position of stranger to acquaintance, to friend, to Savior, we're going to have to let people get close to Him by getting close to us. If we put walls up and we're not willing to share any information with people about ourselves, if we're unwilling to be vulnerable to people, to share our pasts, our fears, our flaws, our hurts, our emotions, and our dreams and we just isolate and stay away from everyone, Jesus will forever remain a stranger to those around us.
 - Paul said he didn't only share the gospel with the Thessalonians in Acts 17 when he first came there, but his own soul.
 - **John 10:35** - Jesus wept. Jesus let people see Him; even the deepest parts of His emotions. Of course the ultimate form of this was when He allowed Himself to hang naked on the cross, and He cried out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"
 - When we let people see who we really are and don't try to put on a show to impress them, people will see that we're authentic, they'll be drawn to us and it'll encourage them to let us, along with Jesus, in to their lives too.

Class 7 - From Stranger to Savior part 5

Okay, so this morning will be our final class on the 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism to break down the emotional, physical, and mental barriers people have to following Jesus. These have been 7 practicals ways to chip away at people's hearts, to remove the hard layers that keep Jesus out so we can move Jesus from stranger to Savior in their lives.

1. **Heavy Love and Mercy**
2. **Interested Conversation**
3. **Consistency**
4. **Listening**
5. **Authenticity**
6. **Service**
7. **Sacrifice**

- **Quick note:** I do realize that these 7 things apply most naturally to a long-term approach with people we'll have multiple points of contact with. I know there will be

some people we just won't have a long time to reach, so in later classes we'll discuss some shorter, quicker ways to bring Jesus from stranger to Savior that likely won't be as effective as the longer term approach in our culture, but will still be effective in some way. In the meantime, keep in mind that sometimes it only takes 30 seconds to show someone all 7 of things, so don't assume this approach only works over a period of months or years.

Wednesday night, we talked about authenticity, so we'll wrap up this morning by talking about service and sacrifice.

6. Service

- **Mark 10:41-45** [To set the context, James and John had just come up to Jesus to ask Him for a position of greatness in the kingdom. This was one of the most common discussions among the disciples. Who is going to be the greatest in God's kingdom? By that of course they meant, "Who will have the most power to give commands and to tell people what to do?" Here Jesus explains that's not what greatness in God's kingdom is about at all] - In the Lord's kingdom, true greatness is found in the one who's willing to make him or herself a servant. It's found in the people who lower themselves, who humble themselves, and rather than asking others, "What can you do for me?" they ask "What can I do for you?"
- **Key:** This is one of the things that makes Christianity so unique among world religions. All the ancient gods among the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, etc. were all gods who only expected humans to serve them, and in return for their service they'd do them favors in return. But the God of the Bible actually became flesh, came down to the earth, and served US even when we weren't serving Him! It's totally backwards from the way things should work, yet that's exactly what makes Christianity so uniquely powerful and Jesus so persuasive.
 - Remember, with these 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism, we're talking about how to prepare people's hearts to receive Jesus.
 - **Question:** Did God prepare our hearts to receive Jesus with demands, flow charts, elaborate presentations, or sales pitches?
 - No, He used a bowl full of water and a towel and washed His disciples' feet.
- **Question:** If God knew that one of the best ways to open our hearts to receive the gospel was service, what makes us think we can get away with just telling people the gospel without making any efforts to serve them in some way?
 - Let's define service. The word "serve" means to minister or to tend to. When Jesus says He came to serve and to "GIVE" his life, giving is closely connected to serving.
 - **Luke 6:35** - To serve means to do good things for people without any strings attached. We're being kind simply because we want to share God's love with them, that's all. We're not looking for payment, we're not looking for thanks, we're not looking for a pat on the back. It's all about doing kind deeds for people because we're sharing the love and service God showed us.
- **True Story:** A man had just bought a bouquet of flowers for his wife, and as he was standing in line to check out, there was an older lady in front of him. She turned around and said with mixed emotion in her voice, "I remember when my husband used to bring me flowers, but he died many years ago." The man expressed his

condolences, they exchanged the typical pleasantries and said goodbye. Then he had an idea. He ran out to the parking lot, and gave those flowers to the woman. She was so touched by this, she invited the man over for tea and they had great conversation. Apparently that man and his wife had moved 5 different times, yet this woman in her old age, even 10 years later, tracked him down and sent him a package with gifts for their kids and also wrote him a letter about how that act of kindness encouraged her so much. [Adapted from “Becoming a Contagious Christian” by Hybels and Mittelberg]

- **Question:** Do any of you all have a story like that from your own life where someone served you and it actually helped prepare your heart to become a Christian?
 - For me, I think one of the biggest ways my heart was prepared for Jesus was the years of hospitality shown to me by my friends’ parents at school. My dad sent me to a private school and many of the families that attended were Christians. Over the years, I can’t tell you how many times I was invited over to people’s homes to not only have fun and play with my friends but to have meals with their families around the table. I even remember being on sports teams and how some of the moms would buy food for all of us after the games.
 - Those were just pure acts of kindness, treating me like I was family when I wasn’t, and it was a love I didn’t see in my neighborhood that’s for sure. I lived in a low income area where streets were filled with hatred, violence, cursing at each other, and there was very little love to be found there.
- **Exercise:** Let’s brainstorm together about very specific ways to serve people around us.
 - Mow the lawn for them, do a project for them at work if it’s something mundane they don’t like to do, knit or sew something for someone, bring someone a meal, pay for someone’s meal, clean something for someone, bring someone some coffee, offer to babysit, give someone a ride somewhere, help someone find a job, give up your seat and let someone else sit there, take an extra shift to cover for someone, leave a big tip, etc.
 - **Encouraging:** Our acts of kindness and service are limited mostly by our imagination.
- **Helpful tips:**
 - **Listen for needs:** This is where being good listeners comes in handy. As we interact with people and engage in active listening, we’ll hear needs come up in conversation. For instance, if you’re at work and your co-worker says, “I’m really stressed because I have to work late tonight to finish this report but my daughter has a piano recital. I think I can handle it though.” And as you’re listening, you can tell she didn’t say that with much confidence.
 - **Offer to help, don’t wait for them to ask:** Now, it might be tempting to wait for her to say, “Can you please help me?” But service loses some of its power when we’ve been asked to do something. It can still be powerful, but it’s even better if, rather than waiting for your co-worker to say, “I hate to ask this of you, but can you do the report for me?” you instead say, “It sounds like this is really stressful for you, and I want you to make your daughter’s recital for sure. Why don’t I do the report for you and you can go on ahead.”

- **Know your skills:** I made the statement earlier that our service is limited mostly by our imagination. Well, it's also limited by our resources like time and skill level. Obviously, if we don't know how to do the report, we shouldn't offer to do it or we might get that employee fired. But if that's something you can do well, go for it!
 - Or maybe you're highly skilled with handyman work so you can help people with work around the house. Maybe you're good with technology so you can help people with computer problems when they come up.
- **Keep it Simple:** Sometimes it's the smallest acts of kindness that speak the loudest. Don't be paralyzed into doing nothing just because you can't think of some monumental task to perform for someone.

Interesting: I was reading a book called "Irresistible Evangelism" and those guys actually put together service teams. They'll get a handful of people from church and go out to perform acts of service for people in the community. For instance, they'll go door to door and ask people if they can wash their car for them right there in the driveway. Most people think they're kidding, but they're serious and they say, "We're just trying to show God's love in a practical way."

- One guy goes around with a bucket and cleaning supplies to gas stations and he asks the attendants if they can clean the bathrooms for them for free as a way to show the love of Christ. Some of them think it's weird and say no, but others are glad for them to do it.

Powerful: It's hard for us to relate to Jesus washing people's feet in John 13. That was the job for the lowest of servants, and people's feet were sweaty and nasty and dirty. I'll tell you, cleaning gas station bathrooms is probably the best way to relate to what Jesus did there. That's a job we think is reserved for the lowest of the low because those bathrooms are the absolute worst, yet here's a group of Christians offering to do it for free. That's amazing to me! And you better believe those gas station attendants are going to go home scratching their heads about this Christianity thing, but in a good way.

- Some of their service teams go to sporting events and hand out free waters or sodas, some offer free bike repairs, and they go out and mow lawns and rake leaves together. I'm thinking about doing this some time because it's a great way to reach out to people and show them God's love in a tangible way through service, especially if you can let them know what church you attend in the process.
 - **Personal example:** Giving the handyman a bigger tip. He said, "You're so awesome." I told him I've never been good at handiwork or math, and that I'd be praying for all the best for him and his daughter.

7. Sacrifice

- **Mark 10:45** - Jesus didn't just say He came to serve. He came to give His life as a ransom. He came to actually sacrifice Himself to set us free.
 - **Key:** That's the MOST unique thing about Christianity, because while some other religions may argue that their gods have done good things for people, none of them have ever claimed to send their only begotten Son into the world to give His life as a ransom.

- **John 12:32-33** - The thing that ultimately drew us to Jesus, that prepared our hearts most fully to follow Him, was the sacrifice He made for us when He was lifted up on that cross. That sacrifice is the drawing power of the gospel. The resurrection proved He was the Son of God, but the sacrifice is what sucks us in and draws us like a magnet to God and Jesus.
 - That's because in the cross we saw that God didn't just do something kind. He actually put us BEFORE Himself. He actually regarded US as more important than Himself. That's such a drastic departure from the way things should be between God and man. We should be putting God first above ourselves, not the other way around! Yet despite the fact that we DIDN'T put God first above ourselves, despite the fact that we were His enemies, He still loved us enough to sacrifice His Son.
 - **Philippians 2:3-8**
- **Truth:** It is true we can keep it simple with our acts of service, but the greater the sacrifice required for the act of kindness, the greater the impact on the person we're serving.
 - It's true that simple acts of kindness go along way, but Jesus didn't just come to bring us a cup of cold water. He came to be hated, despised, rejected, humiliated, spit on, beaten, tortured, and crucified. That's MUCH more powerful an impact than a cup of cold water.
 - So when I said under service to keep it simple, that's true for service. But if you want to really take it a step further, be willing to serve when it costs you something major and you'll really blow people away.
- **Romans 12:1**
- **2 Corinthians 12:15**
 - The reason that team going to the gas stations is so powerful is because those bathrooms are so disgusting you not only have to sacrifice your time; you nearly have to sacrifice your dignity. Sometimes I feel vile just going in and USING the bathroom, and those guys were offering to clean them!
 - Or, let's say your co-worker had heard you talking about going to a new pottery class and you were so excited to give it a try. But then when you heard about their daughter's piano recital, you gave up going to that class and pushed it back another week. That'd be even more powerful because they'd know you actually sacrificed something for them to do it.
 - Or there's a difference between buying someone a meal and actually cooking it yourself. Buying someone a meal is powerful and I'm not saying don't do that. Simple works. But it's even more powerful to cook it yourself because it shows you sacrificed your time, which is one of the most precious commodities we have. Though, remember to know your skills. If you're not good at cooking, they'd probably rather you NOT make the sacrifice to try to make it yourself.
 - **Distinction:** Acts of service show people they're important to us. Acts of sacrifice show people they're more important to us than we are to ourselves. They're both crucial to HI-CLASS evangelism, and if we'll work on these things, people will start to see Jesus much more clearly for who He is and He'll be that much closer to becoming their Savior.

- **Caution:** Make sure you're sacrificing yourself, not others. For instance, in the same example, if your daughter had a piano recital on the same night, you could make the "sacrifice" and cover for your co-worker, but in the process you're actually sacrificing your daughter. Preachers over the years have sacrificed their families and their kids have fallen away and wives filled with bitterness all because he "sacrificed" so much for the church that he didn't take care of his own responsibilities to his family. It's like Jephthah thinking he's righteous and holy for sacrificing his daughter to the Lord. That's not righteous, that's foolish.
- Or, let's say you're always giving so much of your time and effort to others you never get a chance to take care of your own needs. By doing that, it may seem like you're only sacrificing yourself, but you're actually sacrificing others because eventually you'll have nothing left to give anyone. Even Jesus knew the importance of sneaking away to be alone with God to recharge. AND, even when He sacrificed Himself completely on the cross, He didn't sacrifice us in the process. He actually did that so He'd be able to give salvation to us all.

Class 8 - The Gospel Message

Last class, we finished talking about the 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism which prepare the soil of people's hearts to better receive the gospel message. So this morning, we're going to talk about the gospel message we've been preparing people to receive.

Romans 10:14-15 - I want to be clear that the goal of our evangelism is to share the gospel message with people, and a bonus goal of influencing them to give their life to the Lord (though of course we can't force them to). Even though we spent a lot of time on those 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism, I do not want to give anyone the impression that just doing those 7 things is all there is to evangelism. I am NOT teaching that we can somehow just love someone into the kingdom. No, God says someone must still TELL people the gospel. Someone must still be sent to teach and to proclaim. The point of those 7 keys we talked about was to remove physical, emotional, and mental barriers that keep people's hearts hardened to the gospel message. Once, however, we begin to chip away at those barriers and open the door for Jesus to become a Savior, not just a Stranger, that's when we can come in and share the gospel message with them.

- **Romans 1:16-17** - All of us would say a hearty "amen" to this. We know the gospel is the power of God, but here's my question. **Question:** Let's say you've shown someone heavy love and mercy, interested conversation, consistency, listening, authenticity, service, and sacrifice and they ask you, "What is this Christianity thing all about?" What would you say? Or, if you took a more pro-active approach and said to them, "Do you want to know what really motivates me and keeps me going every day?" What would you tell them? Could you present the gospel message to them in a clear and concise way?

Hopefully so, but if not, that's what we're going to talk about this morning. What is the gospel message and how can we present it to people in a way that's clear and understandable?

Question: What does the word "Gospel" mean?

- Good news! **Question:** What good news?
 - That Jesus died on a cross to save us from our sins and is now reigning victoriously as our king!
 - **Question:** If, in our modern culture, you told that to someone, do you think they'd understand that?
 - No. They're not going to know who Jesus is, they won't understand the concept of sin, and they certainly won't understand why He had to die on a cross, so we need to be prepared to elaborate on these things, to explain the gospel from a bigger, more complete picture.

Key: We want a complete picture of the gospel in our presentation. We don't want a watered-down version that's easier to hear and will be more attractive. However, we need it to be brief. Someone once said, "The two hardest things about evangelism are starting and stopping."

- Sometimes it takes a while to build up the courage to say something about God, and then the second someone gives us their ear to hear about him, we get overly excited and give a 45 minute speech on everything there is to know about God and the Bible and Christianity, and that person's thinking, "Okay, that's the last time I ask him about spiritual things." People have to know that they can talk to us briefly, and then we can actually let them go and not hold them captive to our speech. That'll keep them intrigued and they'll know they can come back for more later.
 - So the challenge is to be complete, yet brief. And if you want to give them more detail, you absolutely can, but giving them a big picture of the gospel first will whet their appetite while still giving them exactly what they need to know to be saved.

4 Basic Components of the Gospel:

- This'll give us a good understanding of the gospel, and then we can talk about how to condense it down even further to explain to someone very quickly.

1. God

- If you're explaining to someone who God is and what He's like, you can't tell them everything there is to know about God. What we want to do is tell them who God is and what that has to do with the good news of the gospel. **Question:** So what kind of things would be relevant about God to the presentation of the gospel?
 - **God is Loving** - God is a loving God who created us and gave us a home with Him. In the beginning we had a perfect relationship with Him and everything was wonderful, but then we rebelled against Him and went our own way. Rebellion against God is called sin, and when we sinned, we became impure.

- **God is Holy** - He is morally perfect and separate from anything that is impure. That's why when man sinned against God and became impure, the loving relationship God created us for was severed.
- **God is Just** - God, as a just judge, has to punish those who rebel against Him. Just like a judge in court today can't just let people off the hook for their crimes, God holds us accountable for our sin, and the penalty for sin is death, not just physical death, but spiritual separation from God for all eternity.
 - **Isaiah 59:2** - "Your sins have made a separation between you and God."

2. Us

- We've all rebelled against God at some point in our lives. We've all sinned against Him, whether it's with something we might label a big sin like murder or a small sin like lusting or lying, it all separates us from God. And the bad news is, there's nothing we can do to reverse our sins, there's nothing we can do to make it up to God and to mend the relationship we've lost on our own. We owe a debt to God we simply cannot pay, because the debt we owe Him is death.
 - **Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23a**

3. Jesus

- Jesus came to solve our dilemma by volunteering to take the penalty we owed God upon Himself. Jesus died in our place, suffering the death penalty as our substitute. The amazing thing is that this was God's own Son. So when Jesus came to die for us, it was an act of love on His part and on God's part. It was also an act of holiness because Jesus lived the perfectly sinless life that we didn't, and an act of justice because the penalty for our sins was paid. He rose from the dead to prove He had the power and authority to release us from our debt of sin, and now He reigns as our benevolent king.
 - **John 3:16**

4. You

- Even though Jesus came to die for the sins of the whole world and offer us salvation, we have to be willing to humbly accept his offer, to stop relying on our own efforts to save ourselves, and to give Him our lives in gratitude. The good news requires a response on our part.
 - **Acts 2:21, 37-38**

[Adapted from "Becoming a Contagious Christian" by Hybels and Mittelberg]

Note: This is a basic outline of the gospel message in the Bible. You can use this in your conversations with people with these exact points and these exact verses, or you can customize the points or the verses to put it in your own words. Just make sure you understand the basic gospel message for yourself so you'll be equipped to explain it to someone else.

- **Key:** Make sure to focus far more on God, Jesus, and what they've done for us than on the "You" part. Sometimes we focus so much on the "you," all the changes "you" needs to make, that we make people feel like they have to be perfect or to fix their lives before coming to Jesus. No, they need to come to Jesus so HE can fix their lives. Plus, "You" is going to be working on "You" for

the rest of “You’s” life. So make sure we focus on the grace and sacrifice to establish the proper motivation for “You” to make the change.

Now that we know the basics of the gospel, we can talk about some creative ways to explain this message to someone, and some creative ways to pique a person’s interest in hearing more.

1. The Bridge

Stage 1: God and Us

- We matter to God. He made us and wants a relationship with us.

Stage 2: Walls and a Chasm

- We rebelled against God by disobeying Him and our sins have separated us from Him and now there’s a great chasm between us.

Stage 3: Our Good Deeds Fail

- Most humans have an innate sense that there is a God, but that He’s not really near to them because of the separation of sin. So we try to get nearer to Him with our own good deeds like giving to charity, being helpful to our neighbors, going to church, paying our taxes. While these are all good things, they can’t earn God’s forgiveness or fix our broken relationship with Him.

- Draw arrows going over cliff. All our good deeds fall short of bringing us to God (Rom. 3:23), and the sins we’ve committed must be punished so in the end we’ll all fall into this chasm of death and separation from God called hell.

- It’s a pretty bleak picture.

Stage 4: Good News - The Bridge

- Remember, we matter to God, and because He loved us, He came to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. He provided a bridge over which we can find His forgiveness and restore our relationship with Him. He built that bridge by coming down to earth and dying on a cross to pay the death penalty we owed.

- **1 Peter 3:18**

Stage 5: Crossing the Bridge

- It’s not enough just to know about the bridge; we actually have to cross over it, but that takes humility and a willingness to give our life to this loving God and not be separated from Him anymore.

Note: You can then ask the person if it makes sense or if they’d like to discuss any part of it specifically. You can even ask where they feel they are in this diagram, and ask what’s stopping them from crossing the bridge?

[From “Becoming a Contagious Christian” by Hybels and Mittelberg]

2. 3 Questions

- This is an approach I made up, and I think it’s powerful because it actually challenges them to put themselves in the shoes of God and Jesus. It also engages them in conversation instead of just presenting something to them.

- **Question #1: If you were God and had all power, what kinds of things would you do to help people?**

- I asked this question to my step-dad and he answered, “I would end war and famine.” I imagine these are the kind of responses you’ll get from people. They’ll

talk about ending homelessness, curing cancer or other diseases. Basically, it'll likely be about making life on this earth better.

- **Question #2:** That's great that you'd be willing to help people if you were God. But how about this? If you were God and had all power, would you be willing to come down to the earth in the flesh and allow the humans you created to mock you, spit on you, rip the skin off your back with leather laced with bone and glass, and crucify you on a cross? I know that sounds extreme, but if you knew it was the only way to rescue the human race, would you love humanity enough to do that?
 - My step-dad said he would be unwilling to do that. I told him me neither.
- **Question #3:** Did you know that's exactly what God did for us?
 - **Romans 5:6-8** - This is why I'm a Christian.
 - It's brief, but I think it would really create interest and leave people wanting to know more about this.

3. Big Picture of the Bible

- Adam Willingham presented this approach to us in our gospel meeting, and there are many people who use Ken Craig's book, "The Big Picture of the Bible" and they're very successful with it.
 - My only concern with it is that it's a 40 minute presentation, and it's just a TON of information, maybe overload. The good news is, I'm really grateful that Adam Willingham actually has a condensed version of this presentation on Youtube. If you type in "Big Picture of the Bible LITE" he has condensed it down to an 11 minute presentation. And you'll probably be much more able to get someone to watch an 11 minute presentation with you than a 40 minute presentation. And if you think it's too impersonal for them to watch a video, maybe you can memorize the basics of that 11 minute presentation and present it yourself. I encourage you as part of your homework for this class to watch that 11 minute presentation.
 - Also, you don't have to open with the Big Picture of the Bible. Instead, you could talk to someone for 1 minute about the Bridge, and use that to whet their appetite for more. You could say, "If you want to see how this is all laid out in the Bible in a more detailed way, there's this really great presentation I'd love to share with you, it's only about 10 minutes long but it really clarifies what the Bible is all about in a beautiful way!"

4. Do vs. Done

- This isn't a gospel presentation, but it does generate interest in the gospel. You can ask someone, "Do you want to know why Christianity is so unique among all other religions?" It's because all other religions say "Do," and Christianity says "done." What I mean is, all other religions teach that we have to earn our way to heaven or into God's good graces by our own good deeds. The problem is, we can never do enough to earn God's forgiveness; it has to be granted to us in His mercy. Fixing our relationship was already done by Jesus Christ on the cross, so I don't have to stress and agonize about being good enough on my own to go to Heaven. I know Jesus already did for me what I couldn't do myself, so it gives me great freedom to live in joyful relationship with God. [Hybel and Mittelberg]

5. Revised Roman Road

- I say revised because the traditional “Roman Road to salvation” has nothing about baptism.
 - **Romans 3:23; 6:23; 10:12-13** - How do we call on Him?
 - **Romans 10:9-10; 6:3-8**
- There is no one set method you have to use, but hopefully this gives you some tools to put in your tool belt so you know where you’re leading them and what to say when you get them to the point where they’re ready to hear it. Be yourself. Make it your own. If it doesn’t feel right for you, then find a more natural way to explain it. Just don’t water it down by trying to leave out hard things like our own sin or hell or presenting the gospel like it’s just another self-help tool to improve our lives in the here and now.

Class 9 - The Manner Behind the Message

Last class, we talked about the core of the gospel message, some creative ways to share that message, and to create interest in others about it. Now, I didn’t tell you what I was actually doing in that class, and what I’m continuing with tonight’s class. With these two classes, last class and this one, I’m actually taking us to the end. By talking about the gospel message, I’m showing you where we’re ultimately wanting to go with a person. However, what you may have been thinking on Sunday was, “How am I supposed to get there with people? We talked about 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism to prepare people’s hearts for the gospel and we talked about the gospel, but how do I make the jump from the 7 keys into teaching someone the gospel message? Isn’t there more that has to happen before a person will be ready to hear the gospel?” Generally speaking, absolutely, which is why Sunday was only our 8th class, and we still have like 14 more to go. We’re going to spend the rest of the quarter talking about how to make that jump between the 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism and actually teaching them the gospel message.

I brought us to the end early for two reasons:

1) It’s very possible and even plausible that just those 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism will open the door for you to present the gospel. You may not need anything else but those things, and so I don’t want you to feel like you have to wait until this quarter is over to be effective at evangelism. With just the tools you have already, you can be incredibly effective evangelists.

2) Now that we’ve talked about the end goal which is sharing the gospel message with people, it gives us direction for the rest of the quarter. Essentially, we’re going to spend the rest of our classes together honing our ability to share the gospel with people in a natural way, to lead the conversation in that direction, to learn to answer potential objections and tear down barriers that get in the way, and to harness the power of questions.

Last class was part 1 of the end. This is part 2 where we talk about the heart behind the gospel message. Sunday's class was more about the presentation of the message; tonight's class is more about the manner in which we present it.

- **Illustration:** Let's say someone asks me why I'm a Christian, and with a really annoyed attitude I roll my eyes and say, "You probably won't understand anyway, but if you really want to know, God loves us, but we rebelled against Him, so that bad news is you're a sinner going to Hell, but the good news is Jesus died for our sins on the cross and now we can be back with God again. But you have to repent and get baptized, giving your life to Him. Any questions?"

- Now, I just shared the gospel message with them, but it's probably not going to have the same power to save them because I presented the gospel to them in a bored, unloving, impatient, condescending package. Can God still use that message to change that person's heart? Absolutely, but I'm getting in the way because of the manner in which I presented it.

Let's talk about 4 good manners of presentation.

1. Be Passionate

- **Acts 4:19-20** - They could not keep silent about the gospel message, not just because they were apostles and it was their job, but because they knew how powerful it was to change lives!
 - **Acts 4:12** - Peter knew Jesus was the only way to salvation, and he wasn't going to keep quiet about it.
- **2 Corinthians 5:14** - The word Paul uses here to describe what Christ's love does for them is interesting. It's the word "synecho" (soo-NE-ho), which means to hold together with pressure, to press together with the hand, to press on every side. In other verses it's translated gripped or crowded or hemmed in. Paul is saying "Christ's love presses in on me from every side, I'm surrounded by it and it's inescapable," and his point is that's what motivates him to tell people about this message of reconciliation. It's why some translations read, "The love of Christ COMPELS us."
 - **2 Corinthians 5:20** - It's not just, "It'd be nice if you all were reconciled to God." Paul is passionate about it to the point of BEGGING them, URGING them to get right with Him.
- Now, I've said earlier I don't want to cheapen evangelism to sales, but there are a lot of parallels between evangelism and what salesmen do. **Question:** Aren't salesmen who are passionate about what their selling MUCH more persuasive? If you're at a car dealership and the salesman says in a monotone voice, "Yea it's a pretty good car, you should get it," you're probably not going to "get it" and that salesman won't have a job for long. But when the salesman says, "Wow wait until you see this car! It has won so many awards, it has all the latest technology, and you know what? Right now, there's nothing I can say about how it looks and feels that will do justice to it, you just have to experience it for yourself." That's a much better presentation, because the salesman is passionate about what he's selling!
 - **Question:** What makes a salesman passionate about what he's selling?
 - He's absolutely convinced that there's nothing else like it on the market.

- That comes from 3 places: **1) Experience** - he has used the product himself and knows how wonderful it is. **2) Testing** - he has data to support the quality of the product and he knows it holds up under pressure. **3) Confidence it'll last** - he knows because of its quality it's going to last and continue to meet your needs for many many years, even decades, to come.
- **Point:** It's the same way with the gospel message. Our passion comes from an absolute conviction that there is nothing else like it on the "religious market." Those same 3 places:
 - **Experience** - As Christians we've experienced the joy of being forgiven of our sins, we know the love of Jesus personally in our relationship with Him, we know what it's like to be free from guilt, to have an active channel of communication with God in prayer, and to be in fellowship with faithful brethren. We know the gospel works because we've seen God work in our own lives!
 - **Testing** - Over the centuries people have attacked God, Jesus, Christianity, and the Bible, only to fail over and over again. We've seen archeologists and historians scoff at the Bible, only to make discoveries that affirm the Bible. Same with scientists. We've seen other religions claim to be supreme, but they're all the same efforts to save ourselves through our own works. Christianity stays standing strong after every fighter that comes to test it. Not only that, but it's tested every time someone else accepts it and it changes their lives the way it changed ours.
 - **Confidence it'll Last** - Not only does Christianity meet all our needs now, we know it will continue to meet our needs in the future and for all eternity.
 - In other words, we're absolutely convinced of the love, truth, and the hope of the gospel. We've experienced the love, we know it's true, and we're certain of its promises for the future.
 - When we have passion, that'll present us from dry gospel presentations completely devoid of emotion.
 - **Key:** Passion manifests itself in different ways with different people. To be passionate doesn't mean you have to be loud or jumping up and down with excitement. It just means you're absolutely convinced there's nothing else like it.
- **Note:** In sales, you don't just list all the features of a product. You help the customer see how it benefits them. You show them how it meets their need. With the gospel, we can be passionate because of our absolute conviction that there's nothing else that can meet their needs like it.

2. Pull, Don't Push

- **2 Corinthians 5:11** - Paul says he persuades people, he doesn't pressure or push them.
- **John 12:32** - Jesus says, "I will draw all men to myself," not, "I will force all men to myself." We could look at so many other verses about Jesus and Paul persuading and trying to convince people with evidence and sound reasoning from the Scriptures.
 - There's a big difference between pulling and pushing. When we pull people, we take them by the hand and lead them to a conclusion about what they need to do. When we push people, we just give people orders like, "Do this, and do it now."

- **Question:** Have you ever had a pushy salesperson? You could tell they're in a hurry, they don't really care much about you, they just want to make the sale so they can meet their quota or pick up a quick commission. So maybe they use pressure tactics like, "You better act today or the price may change tomorrow," or "Let's go ahead and start the paperwork now," and you're thinking, "Wait a second, I'm not sure I'm ready yet!" So you leave, and they call you back the next day, "Have you changed your mind yet? Are you ready to buy now?" That's pushy, and the biggest problem with pushy salesmen is that they don't take your thoughts or feelings into consideration. They're trying to force you to do something when you're not really even sure it's a good idea.
- Instead, when we pull someone, we're building a case for them, we're helping them to see on their own what a good idea it is, so when they make the decision it feels like it was actually THEIR decision, not ours.
- **Note:** This can happen easily with Christian parents who want their kids to be baptized, and instead of pulling, inviting, and persuading, they push and force and pressure until their kids finally get baptized. But then years later the kids either A) fall away because they're faith wasn't their own or B) they get re-baptized because they didn't do it out of their OWN decision, but because they were pushed.
- **Challenge:** We, just like God, want ALL people to be saved. So it's a HUGE temptation not to be pushy because we know the love, truth, and hope of the gospel. We know the day of judgment is coming and there is a sense of urgency, but we can still pull people urgently.
 - **Push:** "I really think you better get baptized right now."
 - **Pull:** "After hearing about what God has done for you in Christ, doesn't that make you want to give your life to Him?"
 - **Push:** "You need to change immediately and stop living in sin."
 - **Urgent pull:** "Living in sin and rebellion against God never satisfies. It always leaves us empty and ashamed. Instead, Jesus said He came to give us an abundant life of forgiveness and hope and freedom from guilt and shame. He came to satisfy all of our deepest needs and longings, wouldn't you rather have that than the emptiness of sin?"
- What you're doing is sharing the reasons why you're so passionate about the gospel and trying to get them to see the validity of those reasons for themselves. Once a person acknowledges the love, truth, and hope of the gospel in their own minds and hearts, that's when real conversions take place.
 - **Key:** Our goal is not to "make a sale" or to "get a baptism." Our goal is to make sure this person really understands the power of the gospel message for themselves.
 - **Note:** When you study good and bad leaders in business management or even throughout the history of armies, you find that bad leaders give orders. Good leaders inspire! Good leaders give orders too, but it always feels to their followers like they WANT to obey those orders because they have this pulling quality about them.

3. Be Plain

- **John 4:13-14** - By plain, I don't mean boring or bland. I mean simple, clear, and straightforward. Think for a moment about the way Jesus talked to people about the lofty concepts of God, eternity, the church, and the way things work in the spiritual realm. Did He go to seminary to get a PHD in theology so He could explain things to people using big, fancy words?
 - No way. He didn't use big words like theology, eschatology, apologetics, or propitiation. He talked about plants, trees, farmers, vineyard workers, this water pot in John 4. He used examples from every day life that everyone could relate to and understand in order to make His teachings clear. Those, of course, were called parables.
 - There are some really deep things about the gospel message, but if it is our goal to get people to really understand it for themselves, we're going to have to speak plainly to them, and that may mean using analogies for our current world to illustrate the gospel.
- **We did that with the bridge illustration.** To make points about God's judgment and justice, which can be a really complex subject, we can use our earthly court system to make an analogy about those points.
 - In our world, people may not understand crucifixion, but they might understand the electric chair better. So maybe we can help them understand by saying, "Imagine you were on death row, sentenced to the electric chair, but right before you were strapped in, someone completely innocent that you had never met walked in and said, "Wait, stop. I will take your place in that chair, and you can go free." And you ask, "Why? Why would you do this for me?" And he says, "Because I love you and I want you to know the freedom of not having to fear punishment anymore. All I ask is that in return, you don't commit the crimes you used to that landed you here in the first place, but instead you go show the love I'm showing you today to the rest of the world."
 - That's what Jesus did for us, except it was much more impressive because Jesus is the Son of God and crucifixion was far more horrific than the electric chair.
 - Or, being so far removed from Adam and Eve, people may struggle with the concept that they're sinners too. So to be plain, you could say, "Let me ask you a question: Do you always live up to your own standards of morality you've set for yourself?" Most will have to admit no. Then you could say, "How much more then have you fallen short of God's standard of morality, which is absolute moral perfection?"
 - Or you could run them through some of God's laws, like how it's sinful to lie, steal, or lust after a man or woman in your heart, and ask if they've done any of those things. If so, explain how that separates them from God.
- **Point:** The gospel message is the same, but every person is different in their ability to comprehend what we're telling them, so we'll have to find ways to be plain, to be clear and straightforward to help them understand what God is saying to them in the Bible.

4. Plant and Pray

- **1 Corinthians 3:6-7** - What'll help us to be passionate, to pull and not push, and to be plain is to realize God is the one doing the work in their hearts through the gospel.
- When we think it's OUR work to convert them, we get pushy because we want to feel good about ourselves for "making the sale." We get fancy with our words because we try to impress people with our own intellect, and we have a hard time trusting that people would believe in something so plain and simple. We think we need to complicate it, especially if the people we're talking to are highly educated.
- **1 Corinthians 2:1-5** - Paul knew he didn't need to be pushy and He didn't need to be fancy. All he needed was to be passionate about the cross of Jesus Christ and God would do the rest by His power.
- So let's plant the seed and then pray for God to do the rest. We're going to have an entire class on the role of prayer in evangelism, and I'm waiting to do that later for a purpose.
- But if we really want our gospel presentation to have any effect on people's hearts, we're going to need to remember our role is simply to plant the seed, to water it when we can, and to pray for God to give the increase.

Class 10 - Be Accessible

Share chart by J. Mack Stiles, p. 40, *Speaking of Jesus*. 3 components: Motivated, Available, Equipped. Should take 3 minutes.

So far this quarter, we've talked about being **motivated** by heavy love and mercy just like God and Jesus showed us heavy love and mercy. We talked about being motivated by our passion for the gospel message because we've experienced the love, known its truth, and rejoice in its hope. By talking about the 7 Keys to HI-CLASS evangelism and ways to present the gospel message we've been **equipping** ourselves, and we're going to continue equipping ourselves the rest of the quarter. This morning, we're going to talk about being available, or accessible, to people.

Before we talk about accessibility though, I have an assignment for you. If you have any questions about evangelism at all, whether it's what to say in a certain scenario or how to handle someone with a certain belief, please submit that question to me and I will compile a list. That'll help me to work in your questions and meet your needs as I'm putting the rest of the lessons together, and if I can't work your questions in to the material I'm teaching, I'll reserve the last 1 or 2 classes of the quarter to specifically addressing those questions. I can't tell you how many times I've sat through an evangelism class or series of sermons and I walked away thinking, "He didn't even say anything about x, y, or z, and that's the thing I was most looking forward to hearing about." I want to make sure I'm effectively equipping you for the work of evangelism, so please come to me after class with questions, or if you want to text me or email me that's fine too.

Be Accessible to People

- Accessibility means people have opportunities to come into contact with us. Quite simply, they have access to us. I love the line on the chart that shows how pointless it is to be Motivated to teach people, to be equipped to teach people, but then we're not available to people which means we're just isolated. All the motivation and preparedness in the world won't make a difference if we never have any contact with people in the world.
- **1 Corinthians 5:9-10** [Paul is writing about this brother living in sin in the congregation, and it's unrepentant sin, to the point where he tells these Christians not to associate with him anymore, but to withdrawal from him and to hand him over to Satan. But listen to the distinction he makes between this so-called Christian man and the non-Christians outside the church] - I find it so profound that when Paul says not to associate with immoral people, he's not talking about non-Christians. He's talking about Christians who aren't living right, "so-called Christians". What I fear can really hinder our evangelism is sometimes we take the principles Paul is applying here to this hypocritical Christian living in sin and we apply these principles to non-Christians. What I mean is, maybe we look out at people in the world who don't have God, and we decide, "I need to withdraw from them, to not associate with them, and instead I need to just hand them over to Satan because of their sin." But that's not what Paul says to do to unbelievers! They're already handed over to Satan, and we need to try to get them out of his clutches.
- **Luke 5:29-32** [This was the attitude the Pharisees had. They believed they were the righteous ones of God, and so they needed to completely withdraw from all the filthy sinners around them. That's why Jesus drove them crazy, because Jesus didn't take that approach at all.] - Tax collectors were not upstanding citizens, these people were dishonest swindlers out for a buck, they were traitors to their own people, and I'm just guessing that at a big reception full of tax collectors and some of the common sinners of the land that not all the conversation at this gathering was wholesome and savory. Certainly Jesus' conversation was, but when you get all these people with low moral standards together in one place, you better believe the conversation wasn't perfectly righteous. And think about how risky this was for Matthew (or Levi). He does this in honor of Jesus, but he could have easily said to himself, "I don't know if Jesus can handle this crowd, I don't know if I want my wicked tax collecting buddies to embarrass me in front of him, and Jesus might insulted like the Pharisees that I would even ask Him to spend time with them." But Jesus went, and the Pharisees couldn't stand it.
 - But Jesus did it because He needed to make Himself accessible to people. If He had all these great spiritual truths to share, but He isolated Himself from the people who needed most desperately to hear it, what good would it do? And His point about physicians is SO powerful. **Think about it:** What if you told a doctor, "You really shouldn't spend any time with sick people." That's absurd, because who is the doctor supposed to spend time with? Why would a doctor only spend time with people who are well? What's the point of being a doctor?
- **Here's my fear:** As Christians, when we only ever hang around other Christians, we're like physicians hanging out with people are already well. And I know why we prefer to hang around other Christians.

- **1) It's encouraging** to be with people of like faith, and God knew that which is why He established the church.
- **2) Less risky.** What if you told a doctor, "The reason you shouldn't spend time with sick people is because you might get sick yourself." That's absolutely true, there is risk involved for that doctor, but a doctor knows making people well is worth the risk, and a doctor knows how to take care of himself and to take preventative measures not to get sick.
 - **1 Corinthians 15:33** - I understand, God understands, there is risk involved in spending time with spiritually sick people. But I think there's a reason this verse starts with "do not be deceived." It's because we easily forget that. But if we go in to our relationships with non-Christians with the understanding that we need to be careful not to get sucked in to their lifestyle or give approval to their wickedness, we can avoid being corrupted. Just like a doctor can take preventative steps to ensure he or she doesn't get sick from their patients. I suppose a doctor could say, "Look, there's no way I'm spending time with sick people because I don't want to get sick," and the doctor might have great health. The problem is, he's not doing his job! In the same way, we could tell ourselves, "I'm not spending any time with people in the world so I don't have my good morals corrupted," but then we're not doing our job of reaching the world with the gospel! To use another illustration, Jesus calls us the salt of the earth, but if the salt never leaves the saltshaker, how can it preserve or flavor anything? Salt has to come in contact with the meat if it's going to do have any effect.
- **3) Less messy.** A doctor who only spends time with people who are well doesn't have to get his hands dirty. He or she doesn't have to deal with any disturbing bodily functions or open sores or broken bones or bloody nubs. When we spend time with non-Christians, our hands are going to dirty because we're going to be dealing with people who are in a great amount of pain they're trying to cure with addictions to drugs, alcohol, or pornography, we're dealing with people who might use filthy language, who's marriages and families are dysfunctional, who can be rough and abrasive, or who may even hate God or religion.
 - So believe me, I agree with you, it's MUCH easier or more pleasant to spend time with fellow Christians. "But it is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick."
- **Remember** I said in an earlier class, to get out of our comfort zone doesn't mean to change our personality, but it does mean to be willing to take risks. And rubbing shoulders with non-Christians in the world can be very risky, very messy, and not always very encouraging. But those are exactly the people we need to influence for the Lord.
 - **Important Note:** While we want to spend time with non-Christians, we certainly can't do anything that compromises our integrity for the Lord or that leads us to sin. For instance, many books I've read take the example of Matthew's house as permission for Christians to go to bars to talk to people about the gospel. That's clearly going too far; they were at Matthew's house, not a bar. There was certainly alcoholic wine there, but it was nowhere NEAR the potency of our modern day beer and wine. Some Christians have even gone to strip clubs to try to reach the girls there. Strippers and prostitutes absolutely need the gospel, so I'm glad these

Christians care about their souls. The problem is they're putting ourselves in a place of temptation and bars and strip clubs are typically of such ill repute that it can tarnish our influence being there. Jesus talked to prostitutes to reach them with the gospel (Matt. 21:31), but He never went to a brothel in order to teach them.

- **Example:** I went to a Persian restaurant called Ali-Baba over on 434 with some guys from Kung Fu class on a Friday night. We were having conversation, some of them were using some bad language, but I didn't tell them, "Stop talking that way," because it's not my job to control them or give them orders about how to live their lives. I chose to set a good example by not cussing myself and by not encouraging them by laughing when they cussed. What I didn't know was that on Friday nights, they put on a belly dancing show in the restaurant. The guys were excited about it, but I told the guys, "I can't do it, I'll be outside, shoot me a text when it's over."
 - **Amazing!** When I came back in they were actually having a spiritual conversation and asked me what I thought the Bible taught about God.
 - **Point: James 4:4** says friendship with the world is hostility toward God. I was friendly with those guys and I genuinely desired to have a relationship with them, to deepen that relationship over dinner. But I did not participate in their worldly activity. That's how I was able to be salt without losing my saltiness.
 - **Note:** "Friendship with the world," does NOT mean we can't be friends with non-Christians. It means we can't be friends with the way the world LIVES. We can't be friends with worldliness. We don't have the "love of the world" in us. (1 John 2:15). That's a crucial distinction!
 - **Question:** Let's brainstorm together about how to be accessible to non-Christians around us. What are some ideas for how to make contact with people or to spend time with people who aren't Christians?
- 1. Non-Christians you know:** [Make a list of people you know who aren't Christians]
- **Do what Matthew did and host an event at your home.** Doesn't have to be a big group, but even if it's just inviting someone from work over for dinner or dessert, you're spending time with them. You could host a book club at your home, invite people over to watch a sports game on TV, invite people over for a movie night, board game night, invite people over for a barbecue.
 - **Question:** What if they want to bring alcohol?
 - I've struggled with this back and forth, and you'll have to come to your own conclusion on this based on your understanding of Scriptures and what your conscience will allow. For me personally, if a person asks me if I have beer in the house, I'll say, "No sir, I don't drink," and then I'll list the drinks I have to choose from. Most of the time the person will take the hint and be fine with what you're offering, simply because they want to be grateful for your hospitality. But if they press me, and they say, "Would you mind if I bring some for myself?" I'll probably tell them they can if they'd like.
 - I know that sounds crazy and borderline blasphemous, and immediately my radar goes up and I start thinking, "Brian why are you approving of their drinking? You're acting just like one of them!" and then I realize, that's exactly the same radar that was going off in the Pharisees' minds with Jesus. They called him a glutton and a drunkard simply because He associated with these sinners who were probably actually gluttons and

drunkards, but it wasn't true. Believe me, I could set all kinds of house rules for non-Christians when they come over, like, "Absolutely no curse words, here's a dress code so that you can dress modestly, there will be no inappropriate jokes told, no alcohol, no taking God's name in vain, no saying anything against Christianity, no bad-mouthing the president since God says to honor our rulers," and do you see? I'm essentially saying, "I'll spend time with you as long as you act like a Christian." By doing that, I'm trying to spend time with non-Christians but I'm trying to get rid of all the risk and all the messiness, and that's not what this is about. Once I reach them with the gospel, THEN they'll stop drinking and doing all those things later out of repentance. But if I give them a rulebook every time they come over or want to spend time with me, they won't be able to connect with me at all because they'll be too busy trying to be someone else just to make me comfortable.

- Organize gatherings outside the home:

- Invite people out to a restaurant to eat or just to grab coffee, you could go to a sporting event with someone, you could invite someone to a play, or to the movies, or to work out at the gym with you, or to go for a hike or a bike ride, go garage-sale hunting, to car shows. **Hint:** In interested conversation with them, you'll find out what they're passionate about and what they like to do, and that's a good opportunity to set something up.

2. Non-Christians you Used to Know

- With social media, it's easy to catch up with people we've lost touch with over the years. Aren't there people in our lives who we said to them, "We'll keep in touch," but then we never did?
- Here are 2 built in benefits of reconnecting with people from our past.
 - 1) It will already impress them that you cared enough to re-connect. Most people go their separate ways, they say, "We'll keep in touch," but they don't actually mean it. It's just a polite thing to say and we go off and live our lives, never talking to that person again. However, for you to reach out and try to re-connect after 10 or 20 years, it shows that person, "Wow, they actually remembered me, and not only did they remember me, they value me enough to want to have a relationship with me." That can leave a lasting impression.
 - 2) There's a built in "catchup-factor." Not "Ketchup factor," but "catch-up." What that means is, it's only natural for you all to exchange stories about the years you've been apart and what's happened since you last spoke. That's a good opportunity to talk them about how you've grown spiritually or what great things are going on at the church you attend or deep life lessons that drew you closer to God.
 - **Caution:** If you're married, but VERY careful reconnecting with members of the opposite sex. Many marriages have been destroyed by a spouse reconnecting with an old flame, so I'd stay away from any and all ex-boyfriends/girlfriends because that could just be confusing and dangerous.

3. Non-Christians you Don't Know

- This asks the question, “How can we meet new people?” Meeting new people can be kind of scary, but I’m not talking about walking up to strangers to teach them the gospel. I’m talking about finding new ways to connect and meet new people to form relationships with.
- **Question:** What are some good ways to get to know people we don’t know?
 - **A) Strategically place yourself in a position to see the same person over and over again.** I used to go to this one particular Publix for years and I formed a relationship with a guy named David at the Deli. Every time I’d go in we’d have a great conversation, I still have his number in my phone and we keep in touch; he and I and his family are still planning to go bowling, we just keep getting distracted so it hasn’t happened yet. Placing yourself in those positions may mean going to the same stores, checking out in the same aisle at the same store. There’s not a whole lot of time for conversation with cashiers, but if you see the same one every week for months you have more chances to build a relationship. If you really connect with a particular waiter or waitress, ask to be seated in their section next time you go out to eat. Every time you see them, you’re getting to know them a little better and preparing their hearts for the gospel.
 - **B) Start a hobby/Join a club**
 - [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) is a great way to find people in the area with similar interests. It doesn’t have to be an official hobby you take up, but you could take a cooking class, or a financial class, or meet up with people who like to crochet or play sports. Whatever your interest, [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) is a great way to find people who share those interests with you. For me, of course, my Kung Fu class is a great way to meet new people and to spend time with non-Christians.
 - **C) Greet visitors**
 - Visitors are a great opportunity to get to know someone new, but it’s someone you already know has some interest in spiritual things, so you already have that in common. Why not invite them to lunch on Sunday afternoons after services so you can practice those 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism, so you can get to know them better, and be accessible to non-Christians?
 - **D) Do Volunteer work**
 - There are volunteer organizations that get together regularly to provide help for the community. You could volunteer at animal rescue shelters, national park services, food pantries, habitat for humanity, local libraries and museums, you could coach a little league sports team, volunteer at retirement homes, the YMCA, the Red Cross, and I’m sure many others. **Interesting:** I haven’t decided this yet, but I’m thinking about opening up my home on Airbnb for a few days out of every month. I’m doing research on it now, but that’d be a great way to show hospitality to strangers and get to meet people from all walks of life.
 - The point of all of this is, we’re making ourselves accessible to a lost and dying world, just like God did for us!
 - **John 1:14** - Jesus could have easily stayed in Heaven and isolated Himself from us because of our wretched sinfulness and out of fear that He too would contract our disease, but because He loved us He was willing to come down and be accessible to us in the flesh! Because of that, we have

salvation, we have the greatest message in the world, we have spiritual medicine for those who are sick and in need of Jesus, and in order to give it to them, we're going to need to be there for people like Jesus was there for us. We're going to need to become the gospel there in the flesh so people can see us, touch us, and talk to us, just like the world could with Jesus.

Class 11 - Spiritual Small Talk and the Power of Questions

Last time, we talked about our need to be accessible. We need to be available to people in the world so they can make contact with us and us with them in order to influence them for the Lord.

Helpful distinction [since Joshua brought this up]: **James 4:4** says "Friendship with the world is hostility toward God." That passage does NOT mean we can't be friends with non-Christians. It means we can't be friends with the way the world LIVES. The word "world" there isn't even primarily a reference to people. It's the word "kosmos," which means order or arrangement. We can't be friends with how the world does things. It's like in **1 John 2:15** where he says "do not love the world nor the things in the world." Again, he's not telling us not to love non-Christians. Even John 3:16 tell us God so loved the world that He gave His Son for them. It's talking about loving the things worldly people value. That's a crucial distinction that'll allow us to build relationships with non-Christians without allowing ourselves to compromise our morality in the process.

The million dollar question is, "Once I make myself accessible to people, what in the world am I supposed to say? I can't just launch into a gospel presentation right away, so how do I get to know people better without staying on superficial topics like the weather? How do I get a conversation started and steer it in the right direction?" Tonight we're going to begin a series of 3 classes on "The Power of Questions." This will introduce us to the meat of our evangelistic conversations, but before we start on the Power of Questions, I need to mention a great thing to do in our conversations that'll help us immensely in opening the door to deeper spiritual conversations.

Spiritual Small Talk:

- **Question:** What is small talk?
 - Google defines it as "Polite conversation about unimportant or uncontroversial matters, especially as engaged in on social occasions."
 - An example of small talk would be meeting a coworker at the water cooler and asking about the weather or telling them about what you did over the weekend. It's not really designed to be deep conversation that requires a lot of thought or dialogue, you're just kind of shooting the breeze.
- Now, it may seem strange or even blasphemous to call spiritual things "small talk" because we know spiritual things are the MOST important things to talk about. However, spiritual small talk doesn't mean it's unimportant; it means talking about

spiritual things in passing without requiring any deep conversation from the person you're talking to.

- **Deep conversation:** "I go to the Palm Springs Drive church of Christ. Are you familiar with what the Bible teaches about the church?"
 - That requires thought, and it requires a response on the person's part which will probably lead to more conversation.
- **Spiritual Small Talk:** "After church on Sunday, we went over to one of the member's houses to watch the Super Bowl."
 - This requires no response, you just talked about spiritual things by mentioning church very casually in conversation.
- **Deep conversation:** "What do you think about the Bible? Do you believe it's God's Word?"
- **Spiritual Small Talk:** "I love my morning routine. I get up, make some coffee, read my Bible, pray, then exercise. It gives me so much strength to conquer the day."
 - **Matthew 10:32-33** - When we bring up spiritual things casually in conversation, we're showing people that we're not ashamed of the Lord. We're very open and honest about confessing our allegiance to Jesus and what that looks like in our daily life.
 - **Acts 4:13** - Now, in context, the Pharisees recognized that Peter and John must have received their education in spiritual things from Jesus. But as a more general application, they knew these men were with Jesus because of the way they spoke. When we speak in conversation about spiritual principles, about God, Jesus, the Bible, church, people will recognize us as being on Jesus' side.
- **4 Benefits of Spiritual Small Talk:**
 - **1) It lets people know where we're at in a non-threatening way.**
 - It's non-threatening because you're not cornering them or forcing them to answer a question or challenge. You're not pushing your religion down their throat. But at the same time, they make a mental note in the back of their minds, "This person believes in God, reads the Bible, goes to church, or whatever other spiritual-related activity you mention in passing.
 - **2) It lets us know where people are at in a non-threatening way.**
 - Sometimes if you mention that you were at church on Sunday, you'll see that the person has no interest in that because they'll change the subject really fast or their facial expression will change to something awkward or uncomfortable. But that's okay because we're not requiring a response from them, and we just got a free spiritual reading from them, which will help us know how to approach them in future conversation. However, someone MIGHT pick up on our mention of church, and ask us more about it, or tell us they go to church too. In that case, we just got a reading from them on where they're at spiritually.
 - **3) It gives people a natural opening to talk to us about spiritual things.**
 - It's important to remember, we're not the only ones afraid to talk about spiritual things. We live in such a politically correct society, we're afraid to offend people, but many non-Christians or even those who claim to be Christians feel the same way! Sometimes they don't want to talk about spiritual things around us, NOT because they're uninterested, but because they don't know how to broach the

subject naturally without offending us. So when they see we're very open, unashamed, and unafraid to mention spiritual things casually in conversation without shoving it down their throats, they may think, "Wow I could probably talk to them about spiritual things and they wouldn't get upset about it because they seem so open."

- **4) It gives US a natural opening to talk about spiritual things.**

- Sometimes it's hard to start a conversation about spiritual things because it sounds SO random. It just seems so random to start a conversation asking someone their opinion on God or the Bible. But if, in the middle of conversation, we casually mention that we read the Bible, A) they might bite on that and ask us more about that, but B) if they don't ask us about it at all, we very well could use that small talk as a springboard for deeper conversation. For instance, after mentioning that we were reading the book of Hebrews last week for a Bible class, we could ask, "Do you read the Bible much?" That's MUCH more natural than talking about the weather, the Super Bowl, the new boss at work, then asking out the blue, "Do you read the Bible much?"

Other spiritual small talk ideas: If marriage comes up, mention that the preacher from the church you attend married you. Tell someone you're learning about how to be a better conversationalist in an evangelism class you're taking. Mention that a group from church met at your house for a singing or just for a potluck. **Use spiritual language** like, "I'm so blessed to have this job." or **give God credit** for things He's done for you: "I thank the Lord things went so smoothly with my children." or **incorporate Bible verses into conversation:** "The Bible verse that says, 'the love of money is the root of all evil,' played a major role in me changing careers." **Let someone know you're praying for them.**

Caution: Make it a natural part of conversation. Don't just randomly bring these things up, but if someone asks you what you did over the weekend, bring something spiritual into it. This isn't meant to be a fake, canned, robotic tactic or technique. It's just being open and honest about the way God plays the most major role in your life.

Question: Can you think of any other good ways to incorporate spiritual small talk into our conversations?

Once we've incorporated spiritual small talk into our conversations, we'll be in a much more natural position to head for deeper conversation. And so begins, "The Power of Questions," because questions are what allow us to transition from spiritual small talk very naturally into spiritual big talk. Questions move us from the superficial down into the deeper waters of the soul. For the rest of this class, and the next 2 (maybe even 3) classes, we're going to camp out on this topic and talk about 9 benefits of asking good questions in evangelism. We'll cover the first 2-3 tonight.

1. We Model the Master

- If you were to ask me, "Brian, how did Jesus evangelize? What was the key to His ability to have challenging, honest conversations with people in love?" I would say to you, "Jesus asked good questions."

- **Interesting:** There is a book by Martin B. Copenhaver, called “Jesus is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He answered.” I haven’t counted, but Copenhaver claims that Jesus asked a total of 307 questions in the gospels. What’s more, he claims Jesus was asked 183 questions by others, and of those 183, He only answered 3 directly. The other 180, He answered with another question! So Jesus not only asked good questions, He preferred to answer most questions with more questions! Now, I’ve not read the book, but he’s clearly wrong about Jesus only answering 3 directly. I’ve already found 4, which means he could be wrong about the 307 too. So take those numbers with a grain of salt, but there’s no denying that questions were a HUGE part of Jesus’ evangelism. **Here** is a handout of just a sample of 135 questions He asked. The ones in bold are the ones I believe to be particularly practical in our conversations with people today.
 - **Go over ones in bold.**
 - **Point:** When I talk about the power of questions, I’m not really sharing anything new or revolutionary. I’m simply trying to get us to model our master. For far too long Christians have been SO preachy, SO obsessed with presentations and slides and flow charts, that we’ve completely forgotten the importance of conversation and the use of good questions to lead people to the right conclusions about God. Jesus shows us how to do that!
 - And it’s certainly true, Jesus did a lot of preaching and teaching certain lessons, but so often He opened up the door for His preaching with a good question. (Matthew 11:7-8 for example).

2. Shows Genuine Interest

- **Matthew 16:15** - “But who do you say that I am?” Jesus cares about what others think about who He is, but His main concern, His main interest is in His disciples and what they think of Him.
- **Matthew 20:32** - “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus genuinely cares where this blind man is and what he believes he needs.
- **Question:** Have you ever been in conversation with someone who talked the whole time and never asked you a single question?
 - It makes you feel like they don’t value you as a person, they don’t care what you think, life is all about them and you’re just there to listen. They have no interest in your perspective or your experiences.
- On the other hand, when a person engages us with good questions like, “What do you do for a living?” “Oh really? How did you get into that?” “Wow that sounds great, what’s the most challenging part of your job?” “What’s the most enjoyable part? Is this a final destination for you career wise or is it more of a stepping stone to something else?”
 - Now we know the person is genuinely interested in us, in our story, in our feelings, experiences, opinions, goals, likes, and dislikes.
- **Here** is a list of “99 Wondering Questions” from the book “Irresistible Evangelism” by Sjogren, Ping, and Pollock. The purpose of this list is to restore child-like wonder and curiosity to our conversations, to encourage dialogue through good questions, and to get to know people on a deeper level.

What this list is NOT:

1) It is not a list of set up questions for a gospel presentation. Certainly, these may help lead to an opening for the gospel, but the main point is to show interest and to engage people in “active wonder” and curiosity about life.

- **Note:** The good thing about this list of questions is that they bring us past the superficial topics like the weather and into deeper topics which strengthen our relationships and pave the way for more natural transition into spiritual conversation.

2) It is not a list to be memorized so we can interview people with a series of canned questions. It's simply to give you a taste of the kind of questions that promote discussion, dialogue, and deeper human connection.

3) It is not a requirement to ever use any of these questions. Depending on your personality, you might choose to use these verbatim, you may adapt them and put them in your own words, or never use any of them. It's just a list to get our wheels turning and to fuel our thinking about good questions to make conversation.

Key: The more you can show interest in people with good questions and the more you can lead people into deeper conversation topics, the easier and more natural it'll be to transition into spiritual things. Because A) they'll feel safe because they'll feel valued and appreciated and B) spiritual topics won't be so random. It won't be a random jump from today's stock market performance straight into a discussion of eternal life. It'll go from stock market performance to questions about money and whether it really satisfies us, to questions about God and whether He satisfies us, to discussion of eternal life in Christ.

Class 12 - The Power of Questions part 2

Last class, we talked about using Spiritual Small talk as a way to naturally show people where we're at spiritually, to gauge where they're at spiritually, and to expose natural openings for deeper conversation. Spiritual Small talk keeps us on more of a superficial level, but how do we get the conversation to go deeper? We do it by asking questions, so we started a series last time on the Power of Questions and we recognized that questions are beneficial 1) Because they model our master. Jesus was the master of asking good questions and it was key to His evangelism and 2) It shows genuine interest in people. Questions are a great way to show people we care about them and to learn more about who they are and what they believe. I handed out the sample of 135 questions Jesus asked and the 99 wondering questions that'll help us connect with people on a deeper level and hopefully you can refer back to those things whenever you're having trouble thinking of what kinds of questions to ask people.

This morning, we'll talk about 4 more benefits of asking good questions.

3. Questions Help us Talk With, Not At

- **Luke 10:25-26 - Question:** Did Jesus already know the answer to this question?
- Of course! Jesus knew everything! Yet I find it fascinating and inspiring that rather than Jesus launching into a dissertation or even just giving Him the answer, He

made it more conversational and asked him for the answer instead. Jesus turned this into a dialogue, rather than a monologue.

- **Matthew 17:24-26** - Again, Jesus could have easily told Peter the answer right away, but instead He chose dialogue. Instead of launching into a sermon, He asked for Peter's input so it was more of a discussion than a presentation.
- **Key:** Remember, in our postmodern culture, people take offense to truth claims. If someone claims to know it all, to have it all figured out because they have absolute truth, that comes across as arrogant, so we want to avoid situations where we force someone to listen to a monologue.
- A monologue means only one person is talking, and that's me. You just sit there and I'll set you straight. The implication is, "I have it all figured out, I have all the answers," and that's a HUGE turnoff in our culture, so asking questions will prevent that. Good questions make it more of a give and take, back and forth, I ask you questions and you share your view, then you ask me questions and I share mine. It's more conversational, it prevents me from acting like I'm the teacher and they're the student, and it allows us to get down on their level and present ourselves as fellow seekers and explorers of truth together!
- That's NOT dishonest because we ARE fellow truth seekers. If you think you have every answer about everything in life, you should be teaching this class not me, because I don't. We need to be careful coming across as if we have every answer and they need to sit there and listen to us set them straight. We're fellow truth seekers, but as Christians we're the only ones on the right trail, finding the answers in Jesus.
- **Example:** There was a Jewish man who came to measure for carpet for our new offices, and I used questions to get that conversation started. He complimented the ceiling in our building, and I said, "Thanks it's a pretty nice facility, do you go to church anywhere?" Then he explained to me that he was Jewish. I asked, "Oh yea? What does that mean for you? Do you travel to Jerusalem still? Are you keeping the Law of Moses?" And he said he wasn't really a practicing religious Jew, just a Jew by ethnicity. I asked him if he had ever read Isaiah 53, and he said no.
- Well, that's when I made a mistake because I started going off on a monologue, preaching a little mini 5-10 minute sermon about Isaiah 53. I was teaching Him all about how Jesus fulfills all that and I basically taught Him the gospel right then and there, but I could tell he was getting really antsy and uncomfortable because he was being forced to stand there and listen to my sermon.
- Instead, I could have taught him the same truth, but used good questions to promote dialogue. For instance, "Isaiah 53 says He was pierced for our sins and by his stripes we were healed. Who do you believe Isaiah was talking about there?"
- If he said I don't know, I could have asked, "Did you know the New Testament says it was fulfilled in Jesus when He died for our sins on the cross? What do you think about that?" You see, this way I'm talking WITH him, not AT him. And I don't know for sure, but I think that's partly why he never contacted me back when I asked if he and his wife would like to grab dinner sometime because he thought he'd get another sermon.

- We can't shy away from the truth and there will be times when we'll need to explain our beliefs to people, but we can present it more gradually and conversationally through dialogue and good questions, the way Jesus did so often. That way we talk with, not at.

4. Questions Create Natural Openings for Spiritual Discussion

- **Illustration:** If you've ever watched a boxing match, you'll notice that the fighters very rarely just rush in and start throwing punches as hard as they can. **Question:** What do they do first?
 - They kind of dance around throwing jabs. The point of those jabs is to ask the other fighter questions. Those jabs are like little tests, and their checking for reflex speed, checking for openings and weaknesses, and sometimes even creating openings so they can capitalize on them.
 - Obviously evangelism isn't a fight, we're not trying to win or defeat an opponent. However, we can't just start preaching to people, running in throwing punches with Scripture after Scripture or spiritual point after spiritual point, when we haven't waited to find a natural opening for spiritual discussion.
 - Sometimes our spiritual small talk will expose those openings, but if they don't, questions can. For instance, let's say you ask someone what they did over the weekend and they say, "I went hiking on Sunday with my kids." Already you can tell this person probably isn't someone who goes to church, unless of course they went hiking in between services.
 - **Problem:** At this point, there's still not really a natural opening for spiritual discussion yet.
 - If you jump all over him and say, "Well you should have been in church because Hebrews 10:25 says not to forsake the assembly," well you're like the boxer who comes out swinging without waiting for an opening, and you're just going to get shut down.
 - So a better way might be to ask a question to explore that a little and possibly create an opening. "Yea? What do you like most about hiking?" Maybe they say something like, "I just love nature. It's amazing to see the beauty of creation." Now, you have a natural opening because they used the word "creation" which you can tie directly to spiritual things. You could continue the conversation from there, "I know exactly what you mean; I can't believe how detailed God was when He created the world. What about you, do you believe God was behind all this?" Or let's say they said nothing about creation and just said, "I just like the exercise." That's okay, you didn't find an opening there. So maybe ask more questions like about their kids. And I find it amazing how just asking people questions and letting them answer almost always leads to something that can be naturally tied in to spiritual conversation.
 - **Hint:** If you're finding that the conversation isn't leading anywhere spiritual at all, you can use spiritual small talk along with a question to guide it there. So let's say they said, "I just like the exercise." You could say, "Yea it's definitely good exercise, and I'll tell you, last time I went hiking I saw some

amazing creatures and I couldn't believe how brilliant God's design is. Do you know what I mean?"

- So there I asked a question to create an opening in a non-threatening way. Usually an opening will naturally be exposed as we engage people in conversations about their lives, but questions can also CREATE openings too.
 - **Mark 8:29-31** [It's hard to find Jesus using questions to create openings for discussion because He already knew where the openings were, but here's a close example. He wanted to teach them about His suffering mission as the Messiah, but rather than just randomly tell them, "I'm going to suffer and be killed," He set it up with a series of questions.] - Once Jesus used His questions to get them on the subject of Him being the Christ, He could then naturally transition into what that really meant.
- **Examples of questions that create openings:** "What are your thoughts on how we got here? Do you ever feel like there's more to life than just going to work all the time? What do you think about why Jesus came to die on a cross? I've thought to myself before, what is the point of celebrities living for fame and fortune, when we're all just going to die with nothing, do you know what I mean?"
 - These kinds of questions open the door to discussion and promote dialogue about the deeper things of life.

5. Questions Force People to Examine their Own Beliefs

- **Luke 10:25-26** - Rather than Jesus just giving him the answer, He asks HIM for the answer, which not only promotes dialogue, but it requires this man to formulate and examine his own beliefs. He actually got the answer right. But sometimes when Jesus used questions, it exposed to people that their beliefs were false.
- **Matthew 12:9-12** - The Pharisees were perfectly content with their strict Sabbath laws until Jesus came along and questioned them about it. His question in v. 11 was designed to promote self-examination. He wanted them to really think through and consider the logical problem with their man-made belief. If it's really unlawful to heal someone on the Sabbath, that would mean it'd be unlawful to do any kind of good deeds on the Sabbath, right?
 - Jesus took a simple example of something that would happen all the time of a sheep falling into a pit, and He asks a question to which they already know the answer. There isn't anybody there who would actually argue, "Well you gotta leave your sheep there to die, or least all day until Sabbath is over because lifting him out would be considered work and God says don't work on the Sabbath." It's absurd, yet the Pharisees are calling Jesus a sinner for helping to heal a human being on the Sabbath.
- Here's the difference though between a statement and a question.
 - **A statement pushes and a question pulls.**
 - Remember, to be persuasive in our evangelism, we don't want to push people to believe something just because WE believe it. We want to pull them toward self-discovery. We want to take them by the hand and lead them to the right conclusion on their own. That can only happen by allowing them to openly state their beliefs and to hear themselves talk it out.

- **Important:** In our postmodern culture, so many have grown up in a society that teaches there is no right or wrong way of thinking about religion, which means most people don't even know what they believe or why they believe it because it's not been important enough for them to articulate their beliefs. That's why it's also likely nobody's even asked them what they believe. So when we ask them questions, it forces them to articulate and examine those beliefs maybe for the first time ever.
 - So for instance, if we ask someone, "What do you think about how we got here, do you think we were created or just came about by chance?" They might actually say, "I don't know, I've not thought much about it." But if someone says, "I don't really believe in God." Instead of jumping all over them and saying, "Oh yea? Well you're wrong because He does exist and I know it because of x, y, and z reasons." Instead, you could just ask, "Really? How come?" and let them give you the reasons for it. The truth is, they may have at least formulated that they don't believe in God before, but they may not have ever been asked why not?
 - You never know. They might actually say, "I'm not sure, that's just what I've always thought." And now automatically, in a very non-threatening, conversational way, you've exposed to them that they have a weak foundation for their belief. Just by being forced to articulate their beliefs, their forced to examine why they hold them, and if they come up short on reasons, that's an open door to explore the possibility of God with them.
 - Good questions to help people examine their beliefs would be, "What do you believe about x?" "What makes you say that?" or "How did you come to that conclusion?" or "Where did you learn that?" or "How certain do you feel about that?"
 - We're not attacking them, we're just giving them a chance to explain to us why they believe what they believe. And we'll talk in Wednesday's class about the fact that when people start to examine and articulate their own beliefs, we'll be able to identify inconsistencies in their answers that we'll be able to explore with more questions.
- **Bonus:** Questions put the burden of proof on them. Often we're afraid to evangelize because we're worried we won't have all the answers to people's questions. We're afraid somebody's going to attack us and make some claim like, "The Bible is full of errors," then we're going to have to know all about the field of textual criticism so we can answer their charge. **Question:** Why not just ask them to explain why they believe that and let them prove their point instead?
 - Instead of getting all defensive when someone says the Bible is full of errors, why not just ask, "Can you give me an example?" Now they're the ones on the defensive and most of the time they won't have a good answer other than, "Well I saw it on a documentary." Then you can just say, "Well, don't believe everything you hear on TV." But the point is, just by asking them the question you've forced them to examine their beliefs and the reasons for those beliefs and if they're honest, they'll admit their foundation is pretty weak. That's what Jesus did with the Pharisees. Instead of getting defensive and say, "Here are 5 reasons why it's okay to heal someone on the Sabbath," He turned it around on them to prove it was unlawful to heal on the Sabbath.

- **Note:** Some people really have a good handle on why they believe what they believe, so if they actually give you an answer you weren't ready for, that's okay. Be authentic. You might even compliment them and say, "Wow it's refreshing to find someone who actually knows why they believe what they believe. I've not thought about this point, but I'm going to look into it and get back to you." THAT'S NOT A FAILURE! That's a success because you're talking to someone about spiritual things, and you're showing this person you're an honest seeker of truth! That'll go a long way when you come back with an answer to them because it'll motivate them to be honest seekers too.

6. Questions Help Clarify People's Beliefs

- **Mark 10:2-5** - Jesus already knew where they were coming from, but His question provided clarity. They were basing their question on Moses' command in Deuteronomy 24, and before replying to their question by saying, "No, absolutely not." He first asks them a clarifying question to see where they're at in their understanding of what Moses taught.
- Questions to clarify people's beliefs are SO important because sometimes we think we know what someone believes and we're dead wrong about it, even when they use language we THINK we understand.
- **Illustration:** I was reading the book, "Conversational Evangelism" by the Geisler's and one of the authors said he was talking to a student at Texas Tech about Jesus and this student agreed that Jesus died for us. Well, instead of assuming they were on the same page, he caught this student off guard by asking, "What do you mean when you say Jesus died for us?"
 - It turns out, that student's understanding was that Jesus died for us to show us an example of selflessness because that's the best way to live.
 - **Question:** Do you see how, on the surface, it sounded like that student agreed with the gospel message, but he didn't understand the gospel message at all?
- **More examples:** If you talk to a Jehovah's Witness, they'll agree with you that Jesus is the Son of God, but they have a completely different idea about what that means than the Bible does. If you're talking to a Jew, they may believe in a Messiah, but they have a totally different concept of a Messiah than the Biblical one.
- Sometimes a person says they don't believe in God, but their concept of God is WAY different than the Biblical concept. Same with baptism, church, denominations, the afterlife, you name it, they all mean different things to different people based on where they're at in their level of knowledge.
 - Good clarifying questions would be, "What do you mean by x?" "What is your concept or understanding of x? In your mind, what do you think of when you say x?"
 - **Example:** Let's say someone says they don't believe in God. You could ask, "What do you mean by God?" Or, "What's your understanding of who God is?" I like the way one writer approached it. He asked, "What God do you not believe in, because I might not believe in Him either?"
- The point is, if we're going to be effective in our conversations, we can't be talking past people and addressing straw man issues. We want to make sure we're on the

same page and know exactly where a person's coming from as we engage them in conversation. Questions help us do that.

Class 13 - The Power of Questions part 3

We're continuing our series on the Power of Questions. Last class, we talked about how questions allow us to have dialogue instead of monologue, to talk with instead of at. Also, create more natural openings for spiritual discussion so spiritual points don't feel so random or forced. Questions force people to examine their beliefs which leads them to natural self-discovery rather than us shoving anything down their throats, and questions help us clarify their beliefs so we can know exactly where they're coming from. We'll cover 2 more benefits of questions tonight.

7. Expose Inconsistencies in People's Beliefs

- **Matthew 22:29-33** [The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead, so they created this outlandish hypothetical scenario in order to disprove it. They used the Law in Deuteronomy that stated if a man dies, his brother is responsible to marry his wife to continue the family name. The Sadducees were saying, "What if every time the man dies, his brother marries this woman, and that happens 7 times? If there's really a resurrection, who's wife will she be in the end?"] - Now, Jesus doesn't lead with a question. He actually leads with a statement, "You're wrong." **Question:** Why is that a fitting approach with the Sadducees but maybe not with most people we talk to? The Sadducees should have known better! They were taught the Law from birth! People in our society today don't know better so it might not be wise to just say, "You're wrong." Plus they didn't have the same hangups we do about right and wrong.
- **Point:** Jesus asks a question in **v. 31-32** that exposes an inconsistency with their belief! They say they believe in God, they say they believe in the Law of Moses, yet God Himself in His Law said that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive even though dead. That proves that there is life after death. So they were inconsistent: they believed in God but not a resurrection to reward. Asking them the question about Exodus 3 exposed that inconsistency!
- **Benefit of asking questions to expose an inconsistency:**
 - 1) It leads them toward self-discovery. Without us having to tell them, "You're wrong," we can just ask them a question that exposes it to them naturally and in a non-threatening way. 2) It helps us know where to go in our conversations with people. If people have a good, coherent view on something, obviously we don't need to talk much about that. We need to focus on helping them see and work through their inconsistencies.
- In the book "Conversational Evangelism," by the Geislers, they note 4 kinds of inconsistency in people's beliefs.
- **A) Belief inconsistent with Heart Longing**
 - This is when someone's belief system is in contradiction with what they really desire and deep down know to be true.

- **Question:** When people say they don't believe in Hell, what heart longing is that inconsistent with?
 - A desire for justice. So to expose this inconsistency, you could ask something like, "So do you think Hitler or the 9/11 terrorists received enough punishment just by dying in this life?" You see, they have a heart desire for justice, and if they really believe there is no hell, that means everyone pays the same price for the life we lived; we all just end up dead and Hitler pays the same penalty as everyone else, no matter how good or bad we've been.
 - **Other examples:** Believing morality is relative, yet longing for a peaceful society where everyone does what's good and right. Believing there is no God, yet longing for meaning and purpose in life. Not believing Jesus died for our sins, yet longing to go to Heaven. Not believing we need to go to church, yet yearning for a sense of belonging. Believing in evolution, yet hoping there's something beyond this earthly life.
 - **Luke 3:15** - People were anticipating and longing for a Messiah to come fulfill the Scriptures, but then when Jesus came to fulfill the Scriptures, they didn't believe in Him.
- **B) Belief inconsistent with Behavior**
- **Luke 6:46** - Sometimes people believe things, but they don't act like they do. Their actions don't match their belief.
 - **Examples:** A person might believe truth is relative, then get upset at journalists for reporting "Fake News." Someone might claim to be a Muslim, but they don't practice any 5 pillars of the Muslim faith. Someone might claim to be a Christian, yet they don't go to church and they act just like the world. Some believe in evolution but are disgusted when they hear about people acting like animals with no moral compass. Some don't believe in God, but they'll pray during tough times.
- **C) Belief inconsistent with Belief**
- **Sadducees again** - they believed in God yet didn't believe in a resurrection. Those are two contradictory beliefs. One belief is inconsistent with another.
 - **Examples:** Christians who believe there are ways to Heaven other than Jesus. Christians who believe they need Jesus, but still think they can measure up to Heaven by their own good works. Christians who believe there is no Hell. Some believe it's wrong to kill animals to make lives better for humans, but it's okay to abort an unborn child. Some believe in evolution, yet still believe in an afterlife.
- **D) Belief Inconsistent with Basic Logic**
- **Matthew 23:16-18** - The Pharisees developed a system to get out of your vows. If you vowed by the temple you could get out of it, but if you vowed by the gold you couldn't. It was completely illogical. There was nothing magical about different parts of the temple that made your vow binding; that was completely made up.
 - Likewise, some people can hold beliefs that are completely illogical and don't make any sense whatsoever.
 - **Examples:** There is no such thing as absolute truth (Is that absolutely true?). We can't know anything about God because He's so far beyond us (If we can't know anything about God, how do you know THAT about God?). The best way to view the world is to be skeptical of everything (Are you skeptical of that?). All religions lead to the same place (How can they if they all point in different

directions?). Everyone should determine their own morals (Do you really want to live like that?).

- **Question:** How do we deal with people's inconsistencies?
- We ask questions! After we've picked up on an inconsistency, good kinds of questions would be, "How come you believe x but don't really practice it?" "How can you believe x but also believe y?" "Can you explain something to me? I understand you believe x, but I don't see how that belief is consistent with what you really long for in your heart."
- **Note:** I learned from a counseling class I took that the question, "How come" is less threatening than "Why?" "Why" is more accusatory like in an interrogation. "How come" is more exploratory like wondering out of curiosity.
- **Illustration:** I had someone stay with me recently who is a Rosicrucian. I've never met anybody who believes in Rosicrucianism, so I was asking him to explain to me what it was about, and it's kind of like becoming your best self by accessing hidden science and knowledge known only to the most enlightened. Kind of like modern day gnosticism. In the middle of this conversation he says to me, "We believe in Jesus," and automatically my alarm bells went off because there's an inconsistency between two beliefs. They believe in Jesus, yet their goal is spiritual enlightenment through knowledge. So I asked Him, "So what do you believe about why Jesus died on a cross?" And he said he doesn't think it actually happened, but that it was just a psychic or spiritual act (this is very similar to 1st century gnosticism by the way). So I know in future discussions I want to talk to him about the historical Jesus and show him that it was an actual physical act. But the more he talked the more he seemed convinced there were other ways to Heaven than just through Jesus. So I exposed his inconsistency with a question. I said this to him. I said, "Man I don't know, you're kind of a mystery to me. How can you believe in Jesus but also believe there are other ways to Heaven?" And he said, "Well, you're only looking at it from one perspective." I said, "Let me ask you this. What do you think Jesus meant in John 14:6 when he said "I am the way, the truth, and the life, NO one comes to the Father but through me?"
- He said, "Well you never know who wrote that." I said, "No, actually we do, it was John the apostle." Then our conversation transitioned into the reliability of the Bible, but do you see the point? I exposed his inconsistency with a question and showed him you can't claim believe in Jesus and yet still believe in multiple paths to Heaven. It doesn't work.
- Later, he told me, "Brian if I were to become a Christian, I'd be a gnostic Christian." There was another inconsistency, and I asked him, "Did you know that many of the New Testament books were written directly to combat gnosticism?" He didn't know that, but I was exposing the inconsistency with a question.

8. Exposes Barriers to Belief

- The truth is, there are 3 main kinds of barriers to people becoming a Christian, and questions will expose which one it is.
- **A) The Mind**

- **Romans 10:1-2** - Sometimes people's barriers to becoming a Christian are simply intellectual. It might be the case that they'd be a wonderful, faithful Christian, it's just that they're really struggling with understanding the gospel message, with understanding how we can trust the Bible if it was written so long ago. Intellectually, they may still see more evidence for evolution than for creation, they may struggle with the problem of how we can call God good yet there's so much evil in the world. They may still, just like the Jews Paul is writing about in Romans, still not understand who Jesus is and what He really came to do.
 - As we ask people questions about why they believe what they believe, many of these struggles will come to the surface, which is why we're going to spend multiple classes dealing with the common objections people raise to God and Christianity.
 - Through conversation you'll be able to find out what people's hangups really are. If someone is really struggling intellectually to grasp Christianity, we need to be sympathetic to that and try to help clear up the things that are giving them such a hard time. Our heart should be like Paul's, that we long for their salvation, and we want to help them fill in this knowledge gap.
- **B) The Heart**
 - **Matthew 27:46** - Jesus knew God hadn't forsaken Him intellectually, but emotionally hanging there all alone on that cross it sure felt like He did. Sometimes a person has an emotional barrier to becoming a Christian because they feel personally forsaken by God or angry at God for seemingly forsaking this world.
 - **Question:** Isn't there a big difference between a friend asking out of curiosity, "Why does God allow so much suffering in the world?" and someone who recently had a miscarriage asking the same question?
 - One is more of an intellectual barrier; they're seeking a logical explanation. The other isn't looking for logic; they're looking for comfort because they're feeling deeply hurt or betrayed by God.
 - **Other examples:** Someone whose parents have died, but weren't Christians. If they accept the gospel message as true, they'll be condemning their parents to hell in the process. Someone whose had a negative interaction with a Christian who was condescending, condemning or arrogant (or like my tailor who has had Christians steal from her on multiple occasions). I once read about a woman who was molested as a teenager by one of her youth group leaders at church. Do you think she was willing to consider being a Christian later in life?
 - In these cases, they may have perfect intellectual understanding of the gospel. They may get everything you've told them about Jesus, but emotionally they feel hurt or betrayed by God, by God's people, or they feel if they become Christians they'll be betraying or hurting the people in their life too.
 - Our questions will reveal the nature of their barrier.
 - **Interesting:** The Rosicrucian I was talking to had an emotional barrier I hadn't considered before. It's because Rosicrucianism saved him from a life of drug addiction. In his mind, this belief system saved him from destroying himself so he is emotionally connected to it. Similar things have happened when I've tried to talk to them about baptism, yet they're convinced they're already saved without it

because of all God has done for them or because they've felt His presence in their life or because they've changed their life.

- **Key:** Some heart barriers simply cannot be answered with intellectual answers. If someone tells you they lost a child to cancer, don't launch into an explanation of the curse of sin to them. Instead be sympathetic, let them know how sorry we are, and that we're praying for them. They may eventually want intellectual answers, but we can't give it to them right away. Instead, be patient, make sure they know you care and God cares. (We'll talk more about helping people through emotional barriers later).
- **C) The Will**
- **Question:** Do you think if Jesus were to explain everything intellectually to the Pharisees and to remove any emotional barriers they had, they would submit to Jesus?
 - No way! Because their barriers weren't primarily intellectual or emotional, but volitional.
 - **Matthew 23:37** - They were simply unwilling.
 - **Luke 16:31** - For some it doesn't matter what you say, they will not believe in or submit to the Lord simply because they don't want to.
 - **Tricky:** You'll usually be able to tell whether someone's barrier is intellectual or emotional, but you won't always be able to tell if it's a barrier of the will, because they'll usually hide it with other smokescreen questions.
 - So here are some good questions to ask people to break through the smokescreens and discover if it's really a barrier of the will.
 - "What would you say is the biggest barrier to you becoming a Christian?" "If you could know the truth about God, would you want to know it?" "What kind of evidence for God are you looking for?" "If I could give you satisfactory answers to all of your questions about Christianity, would you be willing to become a Christian?"

Class 14 - Using Questions Effectively

Last time, we talked about using questions to expose inconsistencies in people's beliefs and to uncover their barriers to belief. This morning, we'll finish up our series on the Power of Questions by talking about the final benefit of asking questions, then we'll talk about some helpful ways to use questions effectively. **[Review benefits of questions on outline]**

9. Questions Invite their Questions in Return

- We've talked about this some before, but if someone perceives that we're genuinely interested in what they believe because we've been asking them questions about their beliefs, it's only natural that they'll turn around and ask us what we think. And that's an open invitation from them to share the truth. We're not forcing anything on them, they literally asked for it.
 - **Key:** We've talked about using questions to ask people, "Hey what do you think about x or what do you believe about x?" and it sounds like we're just asking their

opinion so they might answer with, "I think this or I feel like that." When they ask us a question in return, they'll probably ask us what we think or feel. Rather than saying, "Well I think or I feel," which is language people in the postmodern world use because they believe truth is relative, it'd be better to sound more confident because you've actually looked into it. So instead of saying, "I really feel like Christianity is the best," you could say something like, "I've looked into these kinds of questions because they're so important, and what I've found is that Christianity is the only religion that really makes sense of the world, do you want to know why?" It's attractive and refreshing to people when they see someone who has A) actually researched these things and B) sound confident in their findings, but without being obnoxious. Some people are confident in what they believe, but they're obnoxious about it and you can't even have a conversation with them because they'll be correcting everything you say and telling you how wrong you are all the time. That's the other extreme from presenting your beliefs as mere opinion.

- There's a spectrum from opinion/feeling to obnoxiously stubborn. Confidence is somewhere in between. **[on the outline]**

Now that we've talked about the benefits of questions, I want to share 5 practical tips for using questions effectively.

1. Celebrate Common Ground

- **Mark 12:28-34** - Now obviously Jesus and this scribe had radically different ideas about a lot of things. But what Jesus does is celebrate and acknowledge that this man actually made a really good and truthful statement that God is much more concerned about the heart than He is about external sacrifices.
- When I said in the last class that we need to listen for inconsistencies in people's beliefs and help move them away from those inconsistencies, I don't want to give the impression that our conversation is all about correcting people the whole time. If that's the case, it's not going to be much of a conversation at all and we're going to be one of those obnoxiously stubborn people. What will really help us is to listen for the good things and the right things people say too and acknowledge and praise or compliment people for it.
- For instance, in my conversation with the Rosicrucian I mentioned last class, I acknowledged to him how great it was that he believed in Jesus. Even though he had a totally different concept of Jesus, it's still a great thing he's acknowledging his existence, and that's common ground, however small a patch.
- **Matthew 16:16-17 - Question:** When Peter called Jesus the Christ, did he really understand what that meant?
 - No. He had a totally different concept of the Christ, mainly that he would be a physical king coming to reestablish Jewish dominance over the Romans. But Jesus didn't focus on his misunderstanding; instead He celebrated the common ground that at least Peter acknowledges Jesus is God's anointed King and that He's His Son. He may not have understood the Christ, but he knew it was Jesus, and Jesus praises him for it.
- Sometimes, in the midst of people saying very inconsistent things, they'll also say things that are good and right. In those cases...

- Let's learn to say things like, "I'm so glad to hear you say you think there is such a thing as right and wrong, that's so rare in our society." "Amen, I agree 100% with what you said about a lack of perfect justice in our court system." "I know exactly what you mean!" "That's great that you're thinking along those lines."
- **Benefits:** 1) It makes it feel more like a conversation and less like an argument. If, every time they say something, we're challenging them with another question, eventually it's going to sound like we're just trying to prove them wrong. It'll turn into an us vs. them situation. But when we acknowledge common ground and celebrate it, or even compliment it, it lets them know we're in this search for truth together, and though we may disagree, we're still on their side and we're not trying to win a debate. 2) It disarms them and makes them less defensive. Sometimes when people talk religion, all they expect is a debate or an argument. So if they make a statement like, "I just struggle to believe in God because this world is such a horrible place," they may expect you to start arguing right away about why they should believe in God, but what if you find common ground with them instead, like, "I really hear you about this world being a horrible place, it can really be disheartening to watch the news." That's completely disarming because instead of attacking them about not believing in God, you're finding a point of agreement. Now they may be more inclined to ask you, "So how do you reconcile belief in God with such a horrible world?" and you've got an open door.

2. Ask Permission to Ask Sensitive Questions

- **Luke 7:40-42** - Before Jesus told Simon this short parable and asked him a question about it, He lead with a statement of intention. He said, "Simon, I have something to say to you." In today's vernacular, "Simon, there is something I need to share with you." But notice after Jesus said that, He waited for Simon's response before He started talking. He waited for Simon to say, "Say it, Teacher," before He said it.
 - **Key:** This is mainly for paving the way to talk about really personal, challenging, or uncomfortable subjects with people. We probably won't need to do this in most of our spiritual conversations because when we use what we've learned so far about spiritual small talk and asking good questions we'll be able to naturally flow into spiritual topics without it being too awkward or uncomfortable. But if during that conversation we want to ask them something really sensitive or personal, maybe about a lifestyle choice they're making or about their marriage or about some of the deep pain in their hearts, it really helps to introduce questions with our intentions to help people open up.
 - **Other examples:** If a so called Christian doesn't go to church: "You mentioned church last time we talked. I have something really important to ask you about that." Wait for permission. "How come you don't believe we need to go to church?" If someone has a deep emotional barrier keeping them from God: "Do you mind if I ask you a really personal question?" Wait for permission. "Did something tragic happen to you in the past?" Someone has a hard heart and prefers a life of getting drunk on the weekends instead of serving the Lord: "Can I ask you something really challenging?" Wait for permission. "If you were to weigh out the pros and cons of getting drunk all the time, which side would weigh more?" If you've found an inconsistency in

someone's belief. "Can you help me understand something you said?" Wait for permission. "I'm just confused about how you described God as a mean, malicious God, when the God I read about sent His Son in love to die for us."

- Asking their permission shows that you respect and care about their boundaries. Most people will let you through their boundaries as long as you acknowledge that their boundaries are important. If we steamroll right through them and say, "Hey how come you get drunk all the time?" they'll feel violated and they'll probably shut us out from further conversation.

3. Use Questions to Create Curiosity

- **Luke 13:18-19** - Sometimes Jesus would use a question to create curiosity about the topic He was about to discuss. Instead of just saying, "Here is what the kingdom is like," He asks a question to his audience to think for themselves what the kingdom is like or can be compared to. He gets them wondering before He answers.
- **Matthew 22:41-45** - Jesus asks a question here almost as a riddle for them to solve. It really is curious. How in the world can Jesus be the Son of David, when David in the Old Testament called Him His Lord?
 - It's very puzzling, but the answer is that Jesus is both human and divine. He's the Son of David in that He descended from David's seed. But He's also David's Lord because He's God.
 - Why not use questions to create curiosity in people the way Jesus did?
 - **Examples:** "Have you ever wondered what it'll be like when this life is over for us?" "Have you ever thought about why so many people were willing to be tortured to death for their faith in Jesus over the centuries?" "What do you think we'll value the most about this life when we're on our deathbed?" "What kinds of things would you want to be said at your funeral?" "Do you ever think to yourself, 'What if there is a God and I'm missing out on His amazing plan for my life?'" "Do you really find true fulfillment with the endless cycle of daily life?" "What if I knew something that would change your life forever for the better, would you want to hear it?" "What if I told you I know exactly what you're looking for and where to find it?"
 - Do you see? These questions actually entice people to WANT to know more about the gospel message and what you have in Christ. Instead of just ramming it down their throats, you're creating a desire in them to know for themselves.

4. Pick Your Battles

- Jesus was the master at getting to the heart of the matter.
- **Matthew 15:1-3** - Notice Jesus did not get into a long discussion of hand washing and purification laws in the Old Testament or even why all the purification laws of the Pharisees were bogus. Instead, He cut straight through to the main point. They care more about their traditions than God. And Jesus picks THAT battle.
 - Likewise, people are going to say all kinds of things we disagree with in the course of a conversation, but to be most effective we're going to have to get to the heart of the issues.
 - **Helpful tip:** Learn the difference between a problem and a symptom of a problem.

- So for instance, if you're talking to an atheist you'll might find out that they believe fornication is good and healthy, that drugs and alcohol are acceptable, and that using curse words is no big deal.
- **Question:** What's the real problem? Is it the fornication, alcohol, drugs or the curse words?
 - No. Those are symptoms of the problem. The problem is they don't believe in God so they don't have a standard of right and wrong other than themselves.
 - **Point:** You could spend all your efforts talking about how wrong fornication is and how harmful it is, but our goal is not to just get them to stop doing wrong things. It's to start believing right things because once they believe the right things they'll fix the wrongs on their own.
 - **Illustration:** Let's say you have a tree in your backyard you want to remove. What's the best approach? To get a ladder and individually cut off all the branches or to just get an axe cut the trunk?
 - The trunk of course, because when you cut down the trunk, the branches go down with it.
- In the Matthew 15 example, once Jesus can get the Pharisees to stop valuing their traditions over obedience to God, all the hand washing and the thousand of other man-made traditions will take care of themselves.
 - **Other examples: Symptom:** Not going to church. **Problem:** Don't think obedience to Jesus is that big of a deal. **Symptom:** Hating God. **Problem:** Not understanding who God really is or perhaps angry at God for tragedy. **Symptom:** Believing humans and animals have the same value. **Problem:** Belief in evolution.
- **Example:** When I spoke with the Rosicrucian, there were TONS of things he said I disagreed with, but they were all branches, not the trunk. The trunk or the heart of the issue was, "Who was Jesus and why did He come?" He did not believe we need the problem of sin taken care of, so that's what I chose to focus on with him. Even when I asked him about John 14:6 and Jesus being the only way to Heaven, that was still kind of a peripheral issue. The heart is, "Did Jesus need to die for us on a cross to save us from sin?" In truth, the heart for him right now is, "Did Jesus even literally die on a cross or was it just a psychic event?" Until he accepts that Jesus was a real person who actually died on a real cross, he won't let go of any other things in Rosicrucianism. So pick your battles and go after the heart of the matter.

5. Take a Curious Tone, not a Condescending One

- **Matthew 9:11** - I understand we can't tell what their tone was, but knowing the Pharisees and their hatred for Jesus, do you think they asked this question in a curious way, like, "Hey how come your teacher is eating with sinners and tax collectors?" or in a more snarky way, "WHY is your TEACHER eating with SINNERS and TAX collectors?"
 - Probably more snarky and condescending, trying to get the disciples to doubt whether Jesus is worth following.
 - **John 9:34** [A CLEARLY condescending question] - "You were born entirely in sins, and are YOU teaching US?"

- **Matthew 9:14** - I could be wrong, but this question was probably asked in a more curious tone. These were disciples of John, they obviously had respect for Jesus, and they genuinely wanted to know why there was a discrepancy between what they were doing and what Jesus' disciples were doing.
- **Point:** Tone is very important when asking a question because the same question can be taken in two different ways depending on our tone, facial expression, and the inflection of our words.
 - **Curious:** "How come you don't believe in God?"
 - **Condescending:** "How COME you don't believe in God?"
 - **Curious:** "What makes you say that?"
 - **Condescending:** "What makes you say THAT?"
 - **Curious:** "Where did you read that?"
 - **Condescending:** "Where'd you read THAT?"
 - **Curious:** "What do you think?"
 - **Condescending:** "What you do THINK?"

Class 15 - Preparing for Objections

Now that we've explored the power of questions to get a spiritual conversation rolling, we're going to talk about answering objections. We might be really good at asking questions, but what do we do when people answer our questions with an objection? What do we say to someone who objects to the gospel message, or who disagrees that there's even a God or that which religion you choose even makes a difference. In the next few classes we're going to cover almost 30 of the most common objections you'll hear today, and if there's an objection you've heard and didn't know what to do with it, please share that with me and I'll try to work it in. **HOWEVER**, you may have noticed a pattern in this class. Instead of going straight into technique, we always start with the heart first. Instead of me just telling you WHAT to say (and I always try to give you examples of WHAT to say), I always want to focus on WHY we're saying it and HOW we're saying it. That's because the WHAT will change depending on your personality, the personality of the person you're talking to, and on how the conversation is going in the moment. But the HOW and the WHY, the heart behind the WHAT, should never change.

1 Peter 3:14-15 - Question: Peter absolutely says Christians need to have answers for people about why we believe what we believe, but what does he say to do first?

- Sanctify Christ in your heart! Make sure Jesus is holding a special place in your heart, make sure you have set Jesus apart as the most important person in your life, THEN be ready to give a defense.
 - So Peter says we need the WHAT. The WHAT is giving people reasons for our hope, but he also gives us the HOW and the WHY. The WHY is because Jesus is our Lord and Savior sanctified in our hearts.
 - The HOW is with gentleness and reverence. The word "reverence" means fear. Part of the fear or respect might be treating the person we're talking to with respect, but that's not the main idea. The real fear and

reverence comes from our understanding of the importance of the subject matter. We answer people's objections with a humble understanding that we're talking about matters of eternal importance and it's not to be taken lightly.

- **Point:** From everything I read in the Scriptures, it seems clear the Lord would MUCH prefer that we have the right heart than the perfect answers. He'd much rather see us get stumped by an objection yet to maintain a good attitude than to have the answer to every question yet to answer without any love or gentleness or reverence. The ultimate goal, of course, is to have both, so before we get into answering the specific objections, this morning we want to talk about preparing our hearts for handling objections properly. We can do that in 10 ways (I know that's a lot, but none of these are totally new ideas; they all point us back to things we've already talked about and show how they apply to answering objections).

1. Be Honest if You Don't Know

- We've already talked about authenticity, and answering objections will present one of the greatest temptations to be inauthentic and one of the greatest temptations to lie.
 - Sometimes we panic because someone asks us something we don't have the answer to, and instead of being honest and saying, "I don't know, that's a great question, I'll look into it," we might start making stuff up. We might think, "If I don't give an answer for this, they're going to be even more certain God doesn't exist!" so maybe we make up something bogus like, "Well, science has proven that there is no such thing as evolution of any kind." That sounds good, but it's false, and if we didn't research it, that's going to make God look even worse because it'll only confirm in that person's mind that Christians don't use their brains.
 - **Remember:** Truth will always defend itself. Don't try to defend truth by making up lies. Instead, tell them you don't know, that you'll look into it and get back to them, then shift the conversation somewhere else for the time being.

2. Be Humble if You Don't Know

- The idea of "reverence" in 1 Peter 3:15 is that we need an attitude of humility. Sometimes we make up lies to protect God, but other times we're making up lies to protect ourselves! We feel embarrassed for not having the answer, so to "save face" we try to make ourselves look smarter and more well equipped on a subject than we really are.
 - That's not humility at all. **Truth:** Sometimes I've been asked something I didn't know the answer to, and I was so angry with myself for not knowing, that that anger came out in my conversation. I acted annoyed and angered that they would ask me questions about God and I allowed my hurt pride to get in the way of a productive conversation.

3. There are Some Things we Can't Know

- **Deuteronomy 29:29** - It's really okay to tell someone, "You know, God doesn't really give us the answer to this." Sometimes we feel the need to apologize for God as if we're embarrassed God didn't answer all our questions. "I don't know what God was

thinking by not giving us the answer to that, I'm so sorry about this," and then we might make something up just to try to fill in the gaps God didn't give us.

- **Key:** If someone asks us something we can't know, we can almost always point them in a pretty reasonable direction based on what we DO know. For instance, if someone asks, "How can we have joy in Heaven if our loved ones are lost in Hell?" Well, that's a good question, but God doesn't really tell us how that works. He does, however, assure us there will be no tears in Heaven and I believe God has the power to make sure He keeps that promise.
- This way I'm being honest and humble, I'm not getting angry because my pride is hurt for not knowing, I'm not trying to apologize for God or make up something He never told us.

4. Be Willing to do Research

- **2 Timothy 2:15** - Paul isn't talking about answering objections in this context and I know he's writing specifically to preachers. However, all Christians need to be willing to work hard to find the truth. We need to be diligent workers to make sure we know the truth of the Scriptures. Our knowledge of God doesn't happen by accident; it takes work. We don't have to be experts, but if we're going to help people through their objections, we're going to need to be willing to do some research, not just in the Bible, but in books on apologetics [I'll give you a good list later], and also material other people give us.
- **Question:** When we're in conversation with someone and we tell them about a good chapter in the Bible or a good article to read online that addresses their objection, what do we expect them to go do?
 - We expect THEM to go read it and to actually look into it. **Question:** When they tell us about an article or a documentary or a chapter in their sacred writings, what do they expect us to do?
 - Go look into it! If we expect them to do research about Christianity, we're going to have to be willing to research what they're sharing with us. The temptation will be to think, "I have the truth already, I don't need to look into anything else." Well, how would you feel if THEY had that attitude too? If we both have that attitude, why are we even talking? What's the point if nobody in the conversation is willing to go search out truth?
 - **Key:** Rather than seeing research as a burden or a threat to your own faith, see it as an opportunity to strengthen your faith. Again, truth has nothing to hide. In your research you may find things that cause you to doubt, but if you'll be honest and stick with it you'll only be strengthened in your faith in the end. And when the person you're talking with does the research, if they're honest, they're going to find so many weaknesses in their beliefs compared to Christianity.

5. Be Sympathetic

- **2 Timothy 2:24-26** - Again the word "gentleness" is used. We need an understanding and sympathetic attitude toward people who question God. Remember we said there are 3 different kinds of barriers that keep people from God: Intellectual, emotional, and volitional. Mind, heart, and will. We can have intellectual sympathy because

most people were never taught about God growing up in this postmodern culture. So we should understand why they have intellectual questions and not shame them for asking or get mad at them for having doubts or questions. We especially need sympathy for people with emotional barriers. If they were raised in a home with an abusive father, can you see why they'd have questions and struggles about a Father in Heaven who's supposedly loving and benevolent and kind? Or if they've suffered tragedy and loss in their lives, can you see why they'd struggle with believing in a God who would allow those things to happen them?

- Believe it or not, we can actually have volitional sympathy as well. If someone has been addicted to alcohol or they have some other sin in their life that you can tell they just don't want to let go of, instead of thinking, "Well, this person is just a terrible sinner who loves sin more than God," we can be sympathetic to their situation and realize Satan is really holding them captive to do his will and they have a lot of hard changes to make. We can understand why someone trapped in sin might not WANT to believe in God. Sympathy and understanding produce gentleness in us and in our answers to people's objections.

6. Praise Good Objections

- Rather than get angry or defensive when people ask questions about God, we need to praise them for raising those objections! Even the objections we don't know the answer to! **Why?**
 - Because the fact that they have objections means they're thinking! Remember last class we said we need to celebrate common ground, no matter how small the patch. Well, the fact that this person has thought enough about God to raise an objection is worth celebrating, because some people are so indifferent they've never thought much about God nor do they care to.
 - **Examples:** "That's a great question, that shows you've done some thinking about this." or "Wow, most people haven't thought deeply enough about God to ask something like that, I'm impressed."
 - **Key:** This shows people God is not afraid of their questions. God actually invites people to ask Him the hard questions.
 - **John 20:25-29** - When Thomas demanded proof of Jesus before He believed, did Jesus get angry and defensive and say, "Thomas, you fool! How dare you question my resurrection, you should just believe it because I said it and I don't have to prove anything to you!"?
 - No, Jesus said, "Touch me and find out for yourself."
 - Jesus wasn't afraid of Thomas' doubts and questions, so when we praise people for asking questions and raising objections we're showing them Jesus is waiting for them to touch Him and see the answers for themselves if they'll be willing to look into it.

7. Be Brief

- One of the things that frightens us most about people's objections is we think we have to memorize entire books on apologetics or give them some huge presentation. Not true. Most people haven't done any research on spiritual things, so as long as we have a brief, basic answer, that's usually all we'll need in a conversation. If they want

more detail, we may have to be honest and tell them we'll need to go do more research. But usually all you'll need in a conversation is one or two sentences to sum up the answer. That's how we're going to be able to answer 30 objections in 3-4 classes, because we're going to talk about BRIEF, BASIC answers.

8. Use Illustrations

- Most people's objections come from a lack of understanding. Rather than give people dry, academic answers, it's generally more effective to paint them a picture using an illustration. Illustrations are powerful because they take what a person already knows and then says, "This is like that." So if someone asks us why God can't just let us off the hook for our sin, instead of academically defining the word "justice" and taking them through all the passages in the Bible about atonement and animal sacrifices, why not just illustrate it by asking what would happen if a judge in our law courts today let people go arbitrarily? Everybody understands there would be an outcry of "injustice!" That's an illustration of why God, the ultimate Judge, can't just let people go for their crimes.
- **Question:** Wasn't Jesus the master of illustrations? He took what people in His society all understood, like agricultural illustrations, and used those to explain what the kingdom of God was like.

9. Aim for Clarity, not Agreement

- The point of answering objections is NOT to force people to agree with us, but to show them that no other worldview has more satisfactory and coherent answers to life's questions than Christianity. They may disagree with our answers, but we can't force anyone to agree, all we can do is present the answers in a clear and persuasive way and let God handle the rest. If we try to force an agreement, we'll sound like a starving salesman and we'll get pushy and angry when people disagree.
- **Key:** Our main goal is to be clear and to make sure the person understands the answer we're giving.
- So after giving an answer, instead of asking, "Are you ready to become a Christian now?" we might ask, "Does that answer make sense?" or "Does that answer your question?" or "Do you see what God is telling us in His Word?"
- That helps make people feel safe like they still have room to disagree with us without us getting angry at them, and it'll help us move forward with them in future conversation.

10. Point People to Jesus as the Ultimate Answer

- This is the most important point about answering objections. Jesus is the ultimate answer to almost every objection people raise. So whenever we can steer the conversation in Jesus' direction, not only will we be providing them answers to their objection, we'll be providing them the answer to their ultimate need at the same time. Ultimately, answering objections is not about academics, it's not a debate for us to win, it's not a chance to showcase our superior intelligence, it's a chance to bring people one step closer to Jesus and the power of the gospel to save their souls.
- **1 Peter 3:15** - Notice, Peter does NOT say give people a reason for your faith. He says give a reason for your HOPE. We will need to give people answers for our faith,

why we believe what we believe, but this passage ultimately says give people a reason for our HOPE. In other words, tell people why you're so confident you're going to Heaven! **Question:** What is the reason for our hope?

- It's Jesus Christ and Him crucified! We can talk about science and the reliability of the Bible and a host of other topics with people, but ultimately we're trying to explain why we expect we'll be in Heaven! THAT is because of who Jesus is!
- **Example:** If a person comes to you and they lost their child in a car accident and they're asking you what kind of God would let that happen to them, you're not going to have an intellectual answer for why that happened. You're going to be extremely sympathetic, you're going to weep with them and for them, you're going to tell them you don't know why that happened, but you can also tell them, "What I do know is that God was willing to send Jesus so that He could feel our suffering and experience the pain of living in this sin cursed world, and He did that because He loves us and wants to bring us to a place where there is no more suffering and death, and where you can be reunited with your child in joy for all eternity."
- Jesus is the ultimate answer to the problem of pain and suffering in this world. He's the ultimate answer to EVERY objection people raise to Christianity. When we answer objections, let's always bring people to Jesus.

Class 16 - Handling Objections part 1

Now that we've prepared our hearts for objections by understanding the need to sanctify Christ in our hearts and answer people with gentleness and reverence, let's start the objections. I'm going to lump these into categories. And, by the way, you don't have to use these answers. You might think of better ways to answer these, but hopefully this will help you get the feel for brief, short ways to handle objections. If you think of any other common objections, bring them up and I'll add them to my material.

Objections to the Gospel Message:

1. Can't God just let us off the hook for our sin?

- If a judge let people off for their crimes in court, wouldn't people cry out injustice? Since God is truly a just judge, He cannot let crimes go without the penalty being paid for it.

2. How is it just to punish someone else for our sins?

- Jesus claimed to be God, which means we've sinned just as much against Him as we have against His Father. That means Jesus is our judge too, not just some random stranger God chose to punish, so when Jesus volunteered to die for us, it was like the judge himself in a court of law volunteered to take our place on death row.

3. Adam and Eve may have sinned, but I haven't.

- **Question:** Have you ever failed to live up to your own standards? If so, how much more have you failed to live up to God's? For instance, have you ever lied or lusted? **(Romans 3:23)**

4. But I'm a good person.

- I understand by good person you probably mean compared to most people. The Bible tells us that true goodness can only be measured in comparison to God and to Jesus. That means true goodness means sinless perfection. Do you consider yourself sinless or perfect?
- **(Romans 3:10-12)**

5. What if my good deeds outweigh my bad, can God let me in to Heaven then?

- In a court of law today, if someone does hundreds of good deeds throughout his lifetime, but only commits one murder, do those good deeds mean he doesn't have to pay the penalty for the murder?

6. How do we even know Jesus existed or was crucified?

- Not only does the Bible record Jesus' crucifixion in 4 different accounts, but we also have 6 accounts outside the Bible from non-Christian sources that corroborate what the Bible says. (Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Jewish talmud, Josephus, and Lucian).

7. Doesn't it seem narrow minded to say Jesus is the only way to Heaven?

- **Question:** If you were to choose which religious leader to listen to, wouldn't you choose the one who had actually been to Heaven and back? Every other religious leader claims to show us the way up the mountain, but the only one who has ever actually been up the mountain to Heaven is Jesus. **(John 3:31; 6:38)**

8. Aren't All Religions basically the same?

- Actually, every other religion says "DO," Christianity says "done." Every other religion says you can do or earn your way to a good afterlife if you're good enough. Christianity says "you can never be good enough on your own, but God in His grace and love has provided salvation for you despite your own failures."

9. Isn't Jesus' message basically the same as other religious teachers throughout history?

- Actually, every other religious teacher claims to point people toward the way their gods want them to go. They claim to have found the right path of truth that will lead them to life. Jesus actually claims to BE the way, He claims to BE the truth, and He claims to BE the life.
 - **John 14:6** - No other religious leader has dared make such claims about themselves. It's because Jesus was the literal Son of God, born of a virgin, and raised from the dead.

10. How can you believe Jesus rose from the dead?

- According to the Bible, hundreds of eyewitnesses saw Him after He died (1 Cor. 15). Plus, if Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, Jesus' followers wouldn't have given up their lives for a lie. All of Jesus' closest followers were killed for their unwavering conviction that Jesus rose from the dead.

11. How could a loving God send people to Hell?

- **Question:** How could a loving God force people who hate Him to go be with Him forever in Heaven? Would that be loving?
 - Plus, this isn't just about love, it's about justice.
- **Illustration:** If a judge's son committed murder, the judge would still love his son dearly, but because he is a judge he can't just let him go free otherwise that wouldn't be justice.
 - Likewise God couldn't just let us go free because of His justice, but here's where His love shines through. He allowed His own Son to take our place so we could go free.
 - See, you're asking "How could a loving God send people to Hell?" when the better question is, "How could a just God send people to Heaven?"

12. Didn't Christianity borrow from pagan myths about Horus, Osiris, and Mithras?

- Nah, no scholars take those arguments seriously anymore. You can just google it and you'll see tons of articles refuting it.

Objections to God:

13. Don't you think evolution makes more sense than creation?

Question: If evolution is true and there is no God, how did something come from nothing? If the Big Bang is true, where did the material and energy come from to make the Big Bang happen?

- **Question #2:** If you saw Mt. Rushmore for the first time, would you assume it was shaped by billions of years of time and chance or by a designer?

14. Can't you believe in both creation and evolution?

- The Bible teaches that God created the earth in 6 literal days, even using the phrases "morning and evening" for each day of creation. He created man on the 6th day, so there isn't any room for billions of years. Plus, for evolution to be true, you would have billions of years of death, disease, survival of the fittest long before man was ever around, and the Bible teaches that death didn't enter the world until man sinned.

15. But how can you believe in a young earth when scientists use dating methods which date the earth at 4.5 billion years old?

- The Bible tells us that thousands of years ago during Noah's day, God sent a flood that covered the face of the earth for one whole year. Creation scientists have written a great deal about how that flood could give make the earth appear as old as it does.

16. If evolution isn't true, why do the majority of the most intelligent scientists in our community believe it?

- To be fair, there are also brilliant scientists who believe in creation, intelligent design, and a young earth, so the answer can't really be about intelligence. I can't speak for

all evolutionists, but believing in God has consequences for our lives that most people do not want to face.

- **Matthew 7:13-14** - Jesus says the path to eternal life in Him will always be narrow because it takes more than just intelligence, it takes humility. Ironically, it's our intelligence that can sometimes make us feel prideful as if we don't need God at all because we have all the answers.

17. Isn't faith what you need when you have no evidence?

- No, faith fills the gap between evidence and proof. In a court of law, the jury wasn't there to see the crime committed, thus there isn't 100% proof of what happened. However, they can piece the evidence together and make a conclusion beyond a reasonable doubt. Likewise, we can't prove God exists 100%, but we can piece together the evidence and make a logical conclusion beyond a reasonable doubt. However, the conclusion still takes faith since we can't prove it.
- **Truth:** It takes faith to believe in evolution too since no one was around to prove it 100%. To me, it takes way MORE faith to believe in evolution than to believe in creation.
- **Other example:** You have faith your spouse won't leave you, but you can't prove it. Not blind faith, but based on solid evidence.

18. Who created God?

- No one did because He's eternal, outside of space and time. When you talk about cause and effect, there has to be an original cause, otherwise you'd have an infinite string of causes. He is the first cause, the Uncaused Cause. Evolution, on the other hand, creates the problem of the never ending string of causes because all things in this physical world have a cause. So it goes back to the question, "What caused the Big Bang?" If the answer is something physical, we have to ask, "And what caused that?" If something physical caused that, we have to ask, "And what caused that?" and we'd have to go on forever. With God, He has no cause because He exists outside of this physical realm. He created the physical realm; time, space, and matter. "In the beginning (time) God created the heavens (space) and the earth (matter)."

19. We don't need God to tell us how to be good.

- **Question:** Without God, who defines what's good? Wouldn't "good" be completely subjective?
 - **Psalms 119:68a** - "You are good and do good."

20. I don't think it matters what we believe, as long as we're sincere.

- The problem is, all beliefs have consequences, no matter how sincere. **Question:** Don't you believe the 9/11 attackers were sincere?

21. Maybe sincerity isn't what matters, but helping others is what matters.

- **Question:** Who gets to define what "helping others," means? Didn't Hitler think he was helping his fellow man by ridding them of the Jews?

- **Question:** Don't some people think they're "helping" their children with parenting strategies that actually end up harming their children in the long run?
 - Without a standard for right and wrong outside our own opinions, who's to say they're wrong and not being helpful?

22. Isn't right and wrong determined by instinct?

- Actually, many times our inner understanding of right and wrong goes against our instinct. In fact, if we see someone on the side of the road with a flat tire at night, our instinct may be to keep driving because this guy might be a serial killer. Yet we're pulled to help against our instinct. **Question:** Don't you think it makes more sense to think that God put that drive to do right inside us? The Bible calls it our conscience.
 - Often our instinct is to be selfish, but our conscience convicts us to do right and makes us feel guilt when we do wrong.

23. Why would God create us in the first place?

- The Bible doesn't give us a direct answer to this, but consider this. **Question:** Why do parents decide to have children? Isn't it because they want to love and have a relationship with this child?
 - **1 John 4:8** says, "God is love." Love, by definition, must be shared. He created us to have a loving relationship with us.

24. Couldn't God have created us to never sin and only do good?

- He could have, but that means we have no free will. **Question:** Can you have a real relationship with someone who has no choice but to be in relationship with you? That's like trying to have a relationship with a robot! There can be no love there.

25. If God knew there was going to be so much trouble caused by sin, why bother creating us?

- Again I can't speak with certainty because the Bible doesn't directly address this, but apparently for God, love was worth the risk. **Question:** If you're a parent and someone told you before you had children, "You're going to have three children. Two children will be the love of your life but the other will grow up to hate you and become a murderer, but I won't tell you which one is which; you'll find out later in life." Would you choose to not have ANY children just to avoid the heartache of the one child? Probably not. You would still long for the love of the other two and hold out hope that maybe things will turn out differently for that 3rd. Love is worth the risk.

26. Why does God allow so much evil in the world?

- In order for God to respect our freedom to choose, He can't go around interfering with people's choices. **Question:** If every time a criminal pulls the trigger on a gun, God stops the bullet, does the criminal really have free choice?
 - The good news is, God has promised in Jesus Christ to restore us back to Him in Heaven where there will be no more suffering, no more evil, and no more heartache.

27. Will we have free will in Heaven?

- The Bible doesn't explain the mechanics of this, but it seems logical to assume earth is where we're making our choice. When we arrive in heaven, it'll only be because we've already chosen God, and those in Hell will have chosen Hell.

Class 17 - Handling Objections part 2

Just a reminder, these aren't scripts to memorize. If you like the answers, great, but if not, you can adopt your own. Also, most of the time with objections, it'll be best to turn it around on them and ask THEM why they believe so strongly in their objection, but it's good to have some basic answers in case.

Objections to God continued:

28. It seems like God is so strict He's trying to take all the fun out of life!

- When you were a kid, didn't your parents try to keep you from doing "fun" things like staying up all night, eating junk food for dinner, playing out in the street, and getting into the cupboards beneath the sink?
 - The truth is, the things we think are the "fun" things God holds us back from are all things that harm us and those around us in the long run.

29. How can you be sure there's only one God, not many gods?

- Logically speaking, there cannot be more than one God. To be God means you are the ultimate, perfect being with all power and no limitations. If there were other gods, they would have to be different in some way, like in their level of power, knowledge, or ability. If one of these gods is different in an inferior way, they can't really be God. If they're different in a superior way, then they would be the one true God. **Problem:** If other gods had qualities God lacks, that means God isn't all-powerful and perfect. He would lack something the other gods had, which, by definition, means He's not really GOD.
 - The Bible speaks of One God lacking in nothing.
 - **1 Samuel 2:2** - *"There is no one holy like the LORD. Indeed, there is no one besides You, nor is there any rock like our God."*

30. Doesn't the concept of a trinity suggest there are 3 gods?

- This is certainly a challenging concept to our human minds and I don't pretend to fully understand it, but the Bible speaks of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as all a part of the same One God. The Son and the Holy Spirit don't lack qualities the Father has and they aren't inferior in any way, they all just play different roles. It's why Jesus is sometimes Jesus is called the Son of God, but other times He's called "Yahweh," (which means I AM), which is the same name given to His Father.
 - **John 8:58-59; Exodus 3:14**
 - **Analogy:** We all have a body, mind, and spirit (breath/life/soul/personality) that makes up the concept of ME. My body is just as much ME as my mind is ME and my soul is ME. Yet they all play different roles. You can't really say, "Well the body is inferior to the mind," because the mind without the body can't accomplish

anything. You can't say the body is inferior than the mind, because the body without the mind can't accomplish anything either. And without our breath/life, our minds nor bodies can't work. They all work together in unison as Brian, the person.

31. If God loves all people, why does He condemn homosexuals to hell just for being born that way?

- 1) The Bible doesn't teach that we're born homosexual, nor does science support it. Scientists have never been able to find a "gay gene." I agree, it wouldn't be fair at all for God to condemn someone for being born homosexual; that'd be like condemning people for their skin or eye color. 2) The Bible teaches that God condemns homosexual behavior, He doesn't condemn people simply for having that temptation.
- **1 Corinthians 6:9** - God also mentions "fornicators" in that list. He's not condemning people who are tempted to fornicate (which would be almost everyone on the planet), but only those who actually practice it.

32. Some of the things you say God restricts for our good don't seem that bad. Like sex before marriage or drinking alcohol but just not getting drunk.

- Recent studies show that having sex before marriage dramatically increases the likelihood of divorce. Also, sex is the way God designed to glue two people together permanently as one flesh. It's an act that promises your complete commitment to that person, so when we have one night stands and then go be with someone else the following week, we lose apart of ourselves and they lose apart of themselves, much like trying to tear two sheets of paper apart after being glued together. About not getting drunk, here's a question. What if you were about to board an airplane and you saw the pilot taking a drink before the flight, would you feel better or worse about getting on board? Even if it was only one drink?
- We know drinking impairs our judgment, even in small amounts.
- **Bottom line:** if you take any sin God holds us back from and run a cost-benefit analysis on it, the cost will always be greater than the benefit, 99% of the time here, but 100% of the time in eternity.

33. If God is real, why can't He just stop all the disease and pain in this world?

- He certainly could do that, since He created us in a world free of disease and pain, and the Bible says He sent Jesus to die for us to bring us to Heaven where there won't be anymore disease or pain. For now though, it seems He's allowing us to experience the consequences of our sin so we can see how desperately we need Him. The comforting thought is, God knows how hard and painful it is here. Jesus came to experience our pain and suffering with us in the flesh, so they can sympathize with us and comfort us in prayer.

34. Don't most people believe in God just because they need something to make them feel better? Religion has been called "the opiate of the masses" before.

- That may be the case for some people, but people wouldn't make up the God of the Bible to make themselves feel better. He's a God of wrath against sin, He makes it very clear we're all guilty of sin, and even though He sent Jesus to die to set us free from those sins, He requires that we humble ourselves before Him, and then He makes

demands on our life, requiring us to do certain things we don't want to do. Most people looking for peace would invent a God that didn't require much from them, but that's not the God of the Bible.

Objections to the Bible:

35. Wasn't the Bible written by men?

- Yes it sure was, but it claims to also have been inspired by God's Holy Spirit which means God was writing through them.
- **2 Peter 1:21** - *"No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."*

36. Any book can claim to be from God, so how can we know the Bible really is divine?

- 1) Its perfect unity. It was written by 40 different authors over a period of 1,600 years, many of whom never knew each other, yet the Bible contains one unified story without contradiction! I don't think you could get 5 people to write about the same topic without contradiction today! 2) The Bible contains prophecies written hundreds of years before the events took place, and they were fulfilled perfectly. (Isaiah 53 is a great example) 3) The Bible is the #1 all time best selling book and remains at the top of that list today because it speaks to the deepest needs of our hearts in a way no other book can.

37. Doesn't the Bible contain contradictions?

- In my experience, every alleged contradiction in the Bible has a reasonable answer. Often people claim to find a contradiction, but when you consider the context, it's not really a contradiction at all. Do you have a specific example of a contradiction we can discuss?

38. Well, why are all 4 accounts of Jesus' life different?

- It's because each author is speaking to a unique audience, so they picked and chose what details to include and what details to leave out in order to make their point. It's like if 3 different people gave a book report for school. The book would be too big to share every detail, so each would pick and choose different parts of the book to report on, each approaching it from a different angle. It's the same with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They all reported on Jesus' life from different angles to make their points to their audiences.

39. How can we trust the Bible we have now? Wasn't it changed over time like in the game of telephone?

- There's actually an entire field dedicated to this question called textual criticism. Textual critics have found that the Bibles we have now are 95-99% accurate to the original, which is absolutely astounding! That's because the Bible wasn't merely passed down orally like whispering in someone's ear. It was carefully and meticulously copied by scribes who dedicated their lives to copying the Scriptures. The telephone game doesn't work as well when the message is written.

40. Isn't the Bible full of errors?

- Most of the errors in the Bible have to do with small spelling and grammatical errors during the copying process, but there aren't any errors that affect the overall meaning of the Bible at all. God inspired the original documents, but then allowed the Scriptures to go through the natural process of copying, which would explain the spelling errors. I'm not sure why God allowed that, but it shows just how seriously the people who copied the Bible took the process. It shows they thought highly enough about the text to make sure its message was preserved.

41. How do we know the Bible isn't just full of myths and fairy tales?

- If the Bible wanted to get away with myths and fairy tales, it wouldn't be so detailed in what it records. It would speak in vague generalities like, "once upon a time in a land far far away." Instead, the Bible is incredibly detailed in its accounts. It mentions cities, regions, kings, queens, local customs, dates, geographical and topographical details, common human behaviors and psychology, scientific details about the universe, all of which have been corroborated by sources of history and archaeology outside the Bible. It would be really hard to fit in all these make believe characters and events that never happened without people from that time easily discrediting the events.

42. But what if the people weren't alive to discredit those events because the Bible was written way later?

- That's one of the most remarkable things about the Bible, especially the New Testament. The New Testament was completed by the end of the first century, which means most people would have been still alive to corroborate the accounts. There is no other book in ancient history with so small a gap between the events and the recording of the events!

43. Doesn't the Bible say God told His people to commit genocide?

- He definitely had His people go in and conquer nations, killing many of them in the process, but it was never based on racism or a feeling of national superiority. It was to punish them for their sin. God even used foreign people to wipe out His own people for THEIR sin, so God wasn't showing partiality in His punishment of sin. Neither was He unfairly doing so, because He always gave people plenty of warning. On one occasion, he warned the Canaanites for over 400 years to repent, and they still refused, so they had to pay the price. These were not innocent people by any means, and God, as a just judge, could not let their savagery continue.

44. Didn't God have children killed too?

- Yes, sometimes God even gave instructions to kill the women and children, but the women were just as guilty of sin as the men were. As far as the children, likely it was to spare the them from being raised in such a wicked environment and being corrupted like their parents. In other words, God was actually saving the children and bringing them to Heaven instead of letting them rot with the rest of their tribe.
 - **cf. 1 Kings 14:13**

45. How is that different from the Koran which says to kill infidels?

- All the verses in the Koran about violence toward infidels are very open-ended and unspecific about when and where they apply. This creates the problem that any Muslim can read it today and think it applies to them. Not so with the Old Testament passages about violence. Those were very specific commands to a very specific group of people to bring God's judgment on very specific other group of people at a specific time, for a specific reason. When we read those accounts, it's very clear God is not giving us those commands today, but that they were rooted in a particular historical context.
 - In the New Testament, there is not a single verse or even hint of a verse that calls for Christians to kill unbelievers. In fact, we're to let them persecute us even to death without any retaliation.

46. What justified the Crusades then?

- It wasn't the Bible, that's for sure. It was the corrupt Catholic church who believed it had God's legitimate authority on it to wage just war. That's not in the New Testament anywhere.

Class 18 - Handling Objections part 3

We're going to continue this morning with objections to the Bible. Here's an important thing to remember about objections to the Bible. Most of the time, we're going to need to establish first that there is a God before we talk about the God of the Bible or before we start trying to defend the Bible's reliability. **Why?** Once you establish that there's a God, then a lot of the objections to the Bible can be solved much more easily. For instance, if someone doubts the reliability of the Bible, instead of going into the history and details about the scribes, you can simply ask, "If there really is a God with the power to create the universe, wouldn't He have the power to preserve His Word for us over time?" In general, I try to move from general revelation to specific revelation.

Objections to the Bible Continued:

47. Doesn't the Bible promote slavery?

- 1) "Allow" is a better word than promote. The Bible doesn't ever say, "slavery is great and wonderful and you should all own slaves." However, it did allow for slavery. 2) Slavery in the Bible wasn't based on race like it was in our recent American history. It was an act of mercy toward prisoners of war, and it was a way for people to pay off their debts. 3) There is no question in the first century world, slaves were horribly mistreated. Yet the New Testament taught a revolutionary concept; masters were to love their slaves, never to threaten or harm them, but to seek their well being. The New Testament didn't call for masters to release their slaves; in fact, to release your slaves might be harmful to that slave since that's how they made a living, like modern

day employment. Instead, it called for masters to treat their slaves like sons and daughters.

- **Interesting:** Even in the Old Testament, God commanded His people to respect their slaves, since they were once slaves themselves in Egypt. He also commanded the release of all debts and the release of all slaves every 7 years. Yet some slaves didn't even want to leave!

48. Didn't a bunch of men in church councils decide which books to put in the Bible?

- Yes and no. Some documentaries on the History Channel and National Geographic make it sound like there were tons of books that were all equal contenders to make it into the Bible, yet some council of men in the 300's AD took a vote and picked which ones would make the cut. That's not how it happened. The truth is, by the early 2nd century everybody already knew which books were inspired by God. The problem is, there was a heretic named Marcion who wanted to add other books in to promote his false teaching, so these councils convened to make an official list of all the books recognized to be inspired to prevent false doctrines from creeping in. They weren't the ones that chose which books made the cut, they simply took what had been accepted from the earliest times as inspired and made it official.

49. There were other religious writings at the time, so how did they determine which ones were inspired and which weren't?

- There were several criteria. 1) they had to claim to be inspired or to be written by an inspired apostle. 2) had to be written by someone in an inspired apostle's close circle. 3) had to have wide spread acceptance by the local churches in the first century 4) couldn't contain any contradictory doctrines. All of the books that weren't accepted as inspired failed these criteria miserably.
- **2 Thess. 2:2** - "Don't be quickly shaken or disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us..."

50. If the Bible is God's inspired word, why are there so many different interpretations of it?

- The truth is, it takes hard work, humility, and willingness to sacrifice to properly interpret the Bible. Many don't have those things. 1) Some just don't read it, or they only read parts of it. 2) Some are set in their ways, and rather than reading the Bible to find out what it says, they twist it to support what they're already doing. 3) Some know what it says, but aren't willing to do it so they follow a more comfortable interpretation. 4) Some are more interested in keeping tradition than finding the truth. 5) Some throw the rules of proper interpretation out the window because they believe the Holy Spirit is magically giving them the meaning.
- **Key:** Just because people twist the truth doesn't mean the truth isn't there for us to find. And the Bible even warns us that people would twist the Scriptures!
- **2 Peter 3:16** - "which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." (see also 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:2-3)

51. Maybe a lot of the Bible is accurate historically, but I can't get past the parts about miracles. Surely those were made up!

- **Note:** If the person believes in a god of some kind, we can simply ask, "If you believe in a god with the power to create this entire universe, what is so hard about believing this God could heal people of diseases and raise the dead?"
- If they don't believe in God, we can remind them that people were still alive when the New Testament was written so there's no way Christianity would have spread so rapidly if the miracles were made up. People would have just said, "What are you talking about? That never happened, I was there." Yet even the most staunch opponents to Christ in the New Testament never denied His miracles; they simply tried to find other ways to explain them, to no avail.

52. The Bible claims that Jesus rose from the dead! That's impossible!

- Interestingly, almost all historical scholars, over 75% percent of them, whether they believe in God or not, agree that Jesus' tomb was empty 3 days after His death. People used to argue that His tomb wasn't really empty, but most historians gave up that claim. The question is, "what best explains the empty tomb?"

53. Maybe the body was stolen!

- If so, that doesn't explain the hundreds of people who claimed to see Jesus raised from the dead, or why the apostles went around proclaiming that He did, and were even willing to die for that belief.

54. Maybe they were hallucinating!

- Doctors will tell you that it's EXTREMELY rare for two people to have the exact same hallucination. In the first century, it wasn't just two people, it was hundreds of people, and again the apostles believed it so firmly they died for it!

55. Maybe the apostles made it up to promote Jesus as their leader.

- People give their lives for things they THINK are true but aren't actually true all the time. However, people don't give their lives for something they know to be a lie. The apostles radically changed their entire lives, gave up all their earthly comfort, dedicated their lives to traveling the world at that time proclaiming this message, and then were tortured and killed for this message. They would not have done that for something they knew was made up. Plus, the Bible says Jesus was raised from the dead in Jerusalem, the very city that hated Him so much they put Him to death. All his enemies had to do to squash that lie was produce Jesus' body and say, "Look, He didn't raise from the dead, he's right here in the tomb still." But they couldn't do it because He was gone.

56. I don't need the Bible because God speaks to me directly through the Holy Spirit and through visions when I'm alone.

- **Note:** You probably aren't going to have much luck trying to convince someone they haven't actually heard someone speaking to them or trying to convince them their vision wasn't real. Instead, let's test these voices and visions.

- **Question:** Does the Holy Spirit or these visions tell you things that are different than what's found in the Bible?
 - If not, then why would you need them? Also, if you don't read the Bible, how do you know you're not hearing something different from the Bible?
 - **2 Thess. 2:2** - "Don't be quickly shaken or disturbed either **by a spirit** or a message or a letter as if from us..."
 - If the messages you're receiving are different from the Bible, how can you be sure whether you're getting those messages from God or Satan? Can't people do whatever they want and claim God told them to do it?
 - God gave us the Bible so we could all be on the same page and He says it's all we need.
 - **2 Tim. 3:16-17**

57. The Bible isn't meant to be a rule book, just a guideline for a loving relationship.

- Certainly, God doesn't want us to be robots going through the motions of keeping rules. He wants our love and relationship. However, in the Bible love and obedience to God's rules have to work together.
 - **John 14:15** - "If you love me, you'll keep my commandments."
 - **1 John 5:3** - "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

Objections to the church:

58. I'm done being a part of a church because there are too many hypocrites.

- **Question:** If you walked into a gym and saw a bunch of people who were in shape, but you also saw some really overweight people in there, would you say to yourself, 'There are fat people in here, this gym must not be any good, I'm never coming back!'"
 - No way! You would realize the people in there who are overweight either A) are just getting started and have a long way to go or B) they're members at the gym, they just don't take working out very seriously.
 - It's the same way in the church. There are genuine Christians trying to follow the Lord, but there are also people who act like hypocrites and don't live right. That's always been the case in every area of life (sports, business, school). That doesn't mean there's something wrong with the church or something wrong with the Bible or with Jesus, it just means there's something wrong with those people. They're either A) new Christians who don't know any better or B) They don't take Jesus very seriously.

59. It doesn't matter what church you belong to as long as the church believes in God and Jesus.

- The problem is, part of believing in God and Jesus involves obeying them. Jesus said in **John 14:15**, "if you love me, you'll keep my commandments." **Question:**

This is an extreme example, but would you go to a church that offered human sacrifices on an altar to God?

- [They'll likely answer "Of course not."]
- So we agree it can't be just about believing in God and Jesus; it has to be about obeying them. Human sacrifice is an extreme example, but the question is, "How do we draw the line about what we can and can't do as a church?"
 - Jesus and His inspired apostles and prophets draw those lines for us.

60. No church is perfectly following God's commands, but God will forgive us.

- I agree no church is perfect, but every church should be regularly examining themselves to make sure they're following His commands. In the Bible, God isn't satisfied with churches saying to themselves, "We might not be doing His will, but God'll forgive us so it's okay." He commands that we follow His instruction in the Bible.
 - **1 Corinthians 11:17** - "I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse."
 - We have to constantly examine ourselves and make sure we're not coming together for the worse by disobeying the Lord.

61. The church I go to is really great!

- Ask them to describe what it's like and why they decided to attend there.
- **Question:** Before Jesus died, He prayed to God in John 17:20-21 that we may all be one as He and the Father are one. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul the apostle demanded that there be no divisions among us. It doesn't sound like you and I are "one" in our beliefs, and it sounds like we're divided, would you be willing to talk more with me about how we can become one?
 - **Note:** I'm going to pick on main issue things like how we need to have Bible authority for all we say and do. I'm probably going to talk to them about baptism too. We can talk about musical instruments and coffee shops later.

62. Your church of Christ's think you're the only ones going to Heaven!

- 1) God is the ultimate Judge, not me. I do, however, know God challenges us to make sure we're obeying the Bible and only the Bible. The problem is, so far I've not been able to find any denomination that's obeying the Bible. 2) I'm not a "church of Christ" as if the church of Christ was just another denomination. I'm just a Christian trying to obey God's Word in the Bible. **Question:** Do you believe all churches are going to Heaven no matter what they believe and practice?
 - If not, how do we draw that line? Isn't it God's Word in the New Testament?

63. Command, Example, and Necessary inference is just man-made "church of Christ" language.

- That's not true. It's the way every human being communicates. There's no possible way for you to communicate with me without either A) telling me (command) B) showing me (example) or C) Implying it (necessary inference). **Question:** What other way is there to communicate?

64. The church of Christ is its own denomination started by Thomas and Alexander Campbell.

- A denomination, by definition, is a group of local churches under one structure, doctrine, and name. The Campbells never created their own group of churches with a specific set of doctrines and a required name. All they did was point people back to the Bible and encourage people to get AWAY from denominationalism. Thomas was a Presbyterian and Alexander was a Baptist, yet they were both rejected by their denominations for taking a stand for the authority of the Bible.

65. The church is just a money making institution.

- It's a shame when churches pervert what the Bible teaches. But remember, just because some churches disobey God and act hypocritically doesn't mean all churches are like that. Certainly, the Bible teaches that church members need to support the work of the church from their funds, but the Bible never says to pressure people into giving money, or to demand a certain percentage of money from people lest they be condemned for all eternity. Certainly, the Bible never tells churches to force visitors to give.
- Don't let the counterfeit cause you to miss out on the glory of the real thing.

Class 19 - The Power of Prayer

I consider tonight's class the most important class of the quarter. We're going to talk about the power of prayer in evangelism. Now, maybe you're wondering if it's the most important, why I've waited to teach this class so late in the quarter. I did that because if I taught this in the first class, it would just sound cliché. "Yea yea we know evangelism requires prayer, we got it, now let's talk about how to actually evangelize!" Well, now that we've covered SO MUCH material, my hope is this class on prayer won't be cliché at all. Now that you have a feel for just how involved and complex evangelism can be, you'll have a greater appreciation for the importance of prayer.

Colossians 4:2-6 - Sobering thought: Wasn't Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit? Didn't Jesus specifically tell His apostles not to worry about what to say in the moment because the Holy Spirit would tell them what to say (Matt. 10:19)? Not only that, but didn't God specifically send Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles?

- Yet here is Paul, an inspired apostle, asking these Colossian Christians to pray for his evangelistic efforts! He asks them to pray for an opportunity or "open door," which is odd because you'd think the doors would open automatically for the apostle sent by God to the Gentiles. AND he asks them to pray that he would speak clearly, which is again odd because the Holy Spirit should be speaking through Him anyway.
- **Point:** If a Holy Spirit inspired apostle who was a professional evangelist to pagan Gentiles needed prayers for his evangelism, HOW MUCH MORE DO WE?
- Let's consider 7 ways prayer can powerfully change our evangelism for the better.

1. It reminds us this is God's work, not ours.

- Paul could have easily said to himself, "I don't need prayers, I'm doing great at this evangelism thing!" But it was never about Paul. He understand this was God's work, not his. It's why he chided the Corinthians for bragging about their relationship to him...
 - **1 Corinthians 3:5-7** - He knew he was just a servant, a tool God was using to accomplish HIS purposes.
 - When we make evangelism about us, and not about God, it causes a ton of problems:
 - A) we take rejection personally B) we get angry and defensive when we don't know something C) we try to "win" the argument to make ourselves look smart D) we lose patience because we think it's our job to convert them E) if they do get baptized or the conversation goes well, we take all the credit.
 - Regular, daily prayer asking for God's help with evangelism keeps our heads on straight and our hearts in check.

2. Opens doors of opportunity.

- **Colossians 4:3** - "That God will open up to us a door for the word." I've heard people say, and rightly so, that God will help those who are genuinely seeking truth to find Him. What a wonderful thing to pray about! Why not pray that God will send us genuine truth seekers to talk to?
 - I think about how God opened up opportunities for Jesus like when He crossed through Samaria and just happened to find this woman at the well. Or how God showed Philip the open door of the Ethiopian's chariot, or how God opened up a door for Cornelius by sending a vision to Peter, or how God used Paul and Silas' singing in prison to open up a door for the Philippian jailor. These "chance" encounters are everywhere in the New Testament, and we know by God's providence they aren't really "chance" encounters at all.
 - **Note:** I have no idea how this works, so please don't ask me about the mechanics of God's providence in the Q&A box because we really can't explain it. But by faith we trust that if we pray to God to give us an opportunity for His gospel to reach someone's heart, you better believe He's going to work to make that happen!
 - **1 John 5:14-15** - God guarantees that He'll hear and answer our prayers that are "according to His will." **Question:** What could be more in line with His will than praying for Him to help us find a soul to save? (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4)
 - **Interesting:** I will say this about the mechanics of how it works. This doesn't mean God will arrange a meeting with someone we may not have ever met otherwise. Sometimes it's just that when we're in prayer asking God for opportunities, our eyes are naturally more opened to opportunities throughout the day.
 - **Psalms 5:3b** - "In the morning I will order my prayer to you and eagerly watch." Many times, the opportunities are all around us, it's just that we get so busy and distracted that we don't actually see the opportunities that are right in front of us. The more we pray asking for opportunities, the more alert we'll be when they show up.

- That might also give us more confidence to talk to people. If we pray to God for an opportunity and then we find one, we won't be wondering, "God should I say something or not?" we'll be more confident God put it in front of us.

Final note: Asking God to create a door of opportunity might not mean that he brings someone new into our lives to talk to. It might be that He uses the circumstances in someone's life to break down their heart and bring them to a point where they're more ready to receive the gospel. So we can also pray that God would soften the hearts of those with hard hearts around us; that'll create opportunities as well.

3. Helps us Use the Right words in the Right Way

- **Colossians 4:4** - "That I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak." Hopefully by now in the class you've realized evangelism isn't about a rote script and it isn't about saying the perfect words. However, because the vast amount of ways a conversation can go on us, it can be kind of scary and overwhelming and I doubt there's anyone who has sat through this class so far who thinks to themselves, "I don't need God's help with this." We all need God's help to speak as we ought to speak. Even Paul did! In evangelism, we probably feel a lot like Moses! "Don't send me! I'm not a good speaker!"
- **Exodus 4:11-13** - Sometimes we would just rather God send the message by someone else because we don't trust ourselves to say the right thing. Well, the power of prayer is that we don't HAVE to trust in ourselves, we're trusting in God to do His work through us.
 - Is He going to miraculously give us words like He did with Paul and with Aaron? No, but He can help us use the tools we're learning in this class and He can use our best efforts to accomplish His purposes. We might feel like total failures after our conversation because we said the "wrong" words, but because we prayed about it, God can still use what we said, no matter how insignificant we thought it was, to change that person's heart or to make them more receptive to someone else down the road.
 - And remember, the WAY we say things is important too, so even if WHAT you said wasn't the greatest, if you've been praying about evangelism, you probably had a good heart and attitude of gentleness and kindness behind what you said and God can use THAT to influence the person too.

4. Helps us Use Wisdom

- **Colossians 4:5** - There's more to evangelism, of course, than just saying the right words in the right way. We also need wisdom to discern the right timing for our conversations, we need to be able to sense when or if the person is getting uncomfortable because we're talking too much and not doing enough listening, we need to be able to discern what kind of barriers are in this person's heart keeping them from the truth.
- Every person is different. They come from different religious backgrounds, they all see the world from unique points of view, they have unique personalities with unique histories that have shaped them into the people they are currently. That means there are a LOT of moving parts in evangelism. Evangelism is very organic

and natural and we can't always have the same conversation in the exact same way with every person.

- Normally, that would sound like a terrifying and impossible task, but that's where prayer comes in. God will absolutely help us make the most of every opportunity if we ask Him for it.
- **Note:** Even if we don't feel like the conversation went all that well, we can also pray for the wisdom to learn from our mistakes and do better next time.

5. Helps to Give us Courage

- **Ephesians 6:18-20** [He wrote Ephesians and Colossians at the same time, so he requests something similar from the Christians at Ephesus] - I am absolutely amazed that Paul needed to ask for boldness. Most of the time the reason we're too afraid to evangelize is because we don't know the right words to say, but Paul had those words by the Holy Spirit and he was still afraid!
- **Question:** Why would Paul still need boldness and courage?
 - Because of the consequences of his evangelism! He may have had the right words to say, but he had no control over the outcome of his conversations. In fact, **v. 20** shows us where his evangelism had gotten him at that point: thrown in prison awaiting trial in Rome!
 - Of course, we know from Paul's other encounters throughout Acts that his evangelism got him beaten to death in Lystra, beaten again and thrown in prison in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica by an angry mob, mocked as a babbler in Athens, and do you remember what Jesus said to Paul when he came to Corinth?
 - **Acts 18:9-10** - Obviously Paul was dealing with fear then too!
- Now, we probably won't be beaten today for talking to people about the Lord, but there can still be some consequences we're afraid of: A) maybe we're worried it'll just be super awkward, which is uncomfortable. B) maybe we're worried it'll strain our friendship or family relationship. C) maybe we're worried someone will yell at us or call us names or make fun of us. D) maybe we're worried someone at work will report us to the HR department and we'll get in trouble.
- These things can absolutely happen, and we need the courage to know God is with us and He'll protect us. Prayer won't guarantee nothing bad will happen, but it will help us be willing to boldly face the consequences with the understanding that it's worth it to talk to people about spiritual things.
 - **Bonus note:** Acts 4 is a great example of this. Peter and John are forbidden by the Sanhedrin from teaching Jesus, they refuse, and instead pray for boldness to keep going.

6. Helps us See People the Way God Sees them

- Early on, when we talked about the 7 keys to HI-CLASS evangelism, the very first key was "Heavy Love and Mercy." When we pray to God about people, it really puts people in the proper perspective because it forces us to think more deeply about them.
- For instance, we all have initial, "gut reactions" to people living in sin. If I go to the mall, I'm probably going to think, "Wow these girls have absolutely no morals

wearing the stuff they're wearing in here." Or maybe you have an obnoxious boss at work and you think, "Man he is just the worst. He's always so angry, he yells at people, he drinks and cusses all the time, I can't stand him."

- But when you start to pray for those girls in the mall, the conversation with God about them starts to change your perspective. You might start to pray things like, "God I know they just don't know any better, and I pray rather than lust after these girls which is what they THINK they want men to do, I'll look on them with heartache because they're like sheep who have gone astray. Please help them find Jesus." Or about your boss, "God, he must be really hurting inside. Maybe he's had some tragedy or loss in his life that makes him feel the need to drink all the time and hurt other people. Please grant me patience and help me find a way to get to know him better and uncover those emotional barriers keeping him from you."
- **Luke 23:34** - Jesus, of course, shows us this perfectly on the cross when he says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
- Praying about people forces us to break through our superficial assessments and see them the way God sees them. Precious sheep who have gone astray.

7. Helps us See Ourselves the Way God Sees Us

- **Luke 18:9-14** [Summarize, no time to read] - If we have a bad attitude like this Pharisee, then the previous point I made goes out the window because we won't be praying that God helps the lost sheep around us, we'll be bragging that we're so much better. But if we have the right heart, our prayer will actually humble us to see who we really are before God. We were former lost sheep ourselves just as much in need of God's continued mercy as the lost souls around us.
- That'll do wonders for our evangelism by A) keeping us humble, not condescending B) relaxing in conversation with others because we'll realize our own limitations (like not being perfect speakers or on-the-spot thinkers) C) we'll be genuinely grateful people and our love for the Lord will be contagious.

Prayer truly is the most important part of evangelism because this is God's work and we desperately need His help, just like the apostle Paul did.

Class 20 - Religions Crash Course

1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3-4 - As we have more conversations with those around us, it's inevitable meet people who match the description in these verses. People who have turned away from the faith to pay attention to myths and doctrines of demons. So for tonight's class I want to give a quick crash course on 4 of the most major religions, not just in the world, but in the United States: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. I'm not going to go into great detail about these for several reasons:

- 1) We want to get to the heart of the matter. Rather than getting bogged down in too much detail, I want us to walk away knowing their basic beliefs and a good way to respond.

2) It's more important to find out what each individual person believes than to memorize all the tenets of their religion. Even if you know everything about a person's religion, that person may not even believe everything their religion teaches anyway so you could just be talking past them. It's better to ask them questions and have them explain their beliefs to us; that's more conversational.

3) It's much more valuable to know the truth of the Scriptures than to know all the falseness of other religions. We certainly want to be willing to investigate the claims of other religions to see if they line up with truth, but there is SO much information out there on other religions it'd be overwhelming to try to learn it all. Instead, when we know the truth well, we'll be able to spot the counterfeit easily.

- However, knowing the basics about these religions will help us not to be totally caught off guard and it'll provide us with a general direction for where to take the conversation.

Judaism

- **Origin:** Started by Abraham in Old Testament times when he made a covenant with God and God promised to bless the world through His offspring.
- Moses gave the people the Law, God revealed His word through the prophets about a Messiah and about the inheritance of the Promised Land by the Jews.
- **3 Main Types of Jews today:**
 - **1) Orthodox** - These are traditionalists who hold to the Law of Moses, the oral law handed down through the ages, and interpretations of the Law by rabbi's. They believe the entire Old Testament is God's word, and believe their ultimate ability to bring blessing to the world is from the Promised Land of Palestine.
 - **2) Conservative** - They believe the Old Testament is God's Word, but they don't believe Jews are bound to the Promised Land of Israel. They believe they can be lights in the world and witnesses for God from anywhere.
 - **3) Reform** - More of an enlightened form which questions the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. Judaism is more rooted in cultural heritage than religion.

Question: What about the Messiah?

- The majority of Jews have given up hope for a personal Messiah to come. Since the time of Jesus, they've had 34 people claim to be their Messiah, to set them free from political, economic, and cultural oppression. Now they simply hope for a more Messianic age of truth and justice and peace.

Question: What about salvation?

- They believe sin is serious, and atonement is made through sacrifices, repentance, good deeds, and a reliance on God's mercy and grace.

How to Approach them:

- 1) We have a ton of common ground since Christianity came from Judaism!
- 2) Help them see that payment needs to be made for sin. Our own sacrifices, repentance, and good deeds aren't enough to take care of the sin problem. We need God's grace, but God is a just judge who MUST punish sin. He can't just let us off the hook for our sin.
- 3) Show how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah.

- **Genesis 3:15; Gen. 12:3; Isaiah 53; Micah 5:2; Daniel 2; etc.**
- **Matthew 5:17** - came not to abolish, but to fulfill the Law and the prophets.
- 4) Show how Jesus was unique from all the other so-called Messiah's throughout Jewish history because Jesus came to take care of the sin problem, not economic and cultural problems.
 - **Hebrews 10:1-10**
 - **Galatians 3:24** - The Law was our tutor to lead us to Christ.
- 5) Show them Jesus even took care of sins of Abraham and Moses and other faithful!
 - They'll argue, "Why didn't they need Jesus in the Old Testament to be saved?" Help them see they were saved by faith, but that faith was based on God's plan to one day send Jesus to take care of their sins.
 - **Hebrews 10:14**

Islam:

- **Origin:** A man named Muhammad was given visions while in seclusion in the mountains of Mecca in 610 A.D. At first he wasn't sure if they were divine or from the devil, but his wife convinced them they must be from God. He received these mysterious messages for a period of 22 years and wrote them down, memorized them, and shared them with others. He started speaking out against the paganism in Mecca and was run out of town to Medina. When he gained enough of a following, he returned to Mecca and conquered the city, declaring it the center of worship for God, and thus began the rapid spread of Islam.
- **Sources of authority:**
 - **1) Koran** is the primary source of authority for Islam. It was partly written by Muhammad based on the messages he received, but the rest was written by his disciples based on Muhammad's oral teaching. They believe it is the unalterable and infallible word of God.
 - **2) Sunna** - these are the practices of Muhammad. Muslims not only follow the revelations in the Koran, but they follow the example for how to live set by Muhammad and recorded in writings called The Hadith.
 - **3) Ij-ma** - consensus of the Muslim community. If unsure what Allah wants, they rely on consensus in matters of uncertainty.
 - **4) Q'yas** - use of analogical reason. If no one was sure what to do, they could rely on their ability to draw an analogy from the present situation to that in the Koran or other precedents in previous cases.
- **Question:** What about the Bible?
 - They believe in the Old Testament and the gospels; but they believe Jews and Christians corrupted the text. Only what the Koran says about the Bible is true.
- **Question:** What about Jesus?
 - Jesus was a prophet, but He was not the greatest prophet, and certainly not the Son of God crucified for our sins. Muhammad is the greatest of all the prophets.
 - They deny that Jesus was actually crucified, and claim that God took Him off the cross and straight to Heaven before He died.
- **Question:** What about salvation?

- We're saved by doing the will of Allah, keeping the 5 articles of faith and 5 pillars of faith. The articles have to do with their beliefs and the pillars are their actions. There is no concept of atonement for sin. Their good deeds have to outweigh their bad to get into Paradise.
- **Note:** They also do not believe God is personal. You can't have a relationship with Allah, He is much more about justice and power than He is about love, mercy, and grace.

How to Approach them:

- 1) Expose the glaring problem with their "Bible has been corrupted" argument. They know the Koran contradicts the Bible, yet they believe both are from God, so they conveniently claim that the Bible has been corrupted. **Question:** If God allowed the Bible to become corrupted, how do we know the Koran hasn't been corrupted?
 - **Surah 6:115** - "The word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in justice. None can alter His words, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing."
 - If the Koran claims no one can alter God's word, how can you claim people altered and corrupted the Bible?
- 2) Share with them that their sins have separated them from a relationship with God, but they can be reconciled in that relationship through Jesus. Emphasize salvation by grace through faith, not works based salvation, which is a burden no one can bear!
- 3) Help them see that the Koran denies a fact from history that Jesus was crucified. We not only have the Bible, but we have other non-Christian sources that confirm Jesus was crucified.
 - **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** - They are denying the most important message in the Bible. That Jesus died for our sins and rose again. That is the heart of the gospel message!
 - **Galatians 1:8** - Muhammad is just like all the rest of the people throughout history who have claimed to receive a new revelation from God yet the revelation is a different gospel, and we have to reject it.

3. Hinduism

- There is no clear founder or origin for Hinduism, and it's actually very difficult to define their beliefs. Hinduism is very fluid and changing. They can be pantheists (God is in everything), polytheists, monotheists, agnostics, and even atheists.
- Brahman is the term for the Supreme Being, or ultimate reality, but they really can't even explain it. One Hindu source says, "Brahman is he whom speech cannot express, and from whom the mind, unable to reach him, comes away baffled." That's why Brahman is not a personal, knowable God. He is just this ethereal, esoteric force out there that is all things and is IN all things.
- Basically, Hinduism teaches that the main problem man has is ignorance that he is divine. They believe we are stuck on an endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth, and the goal is to get off this treadmill and become one with Brahman.
 - **3 Ways to Experience this Salvation:**
 - **1) The way of works** - you basically perform prescribed ceremonies, duties, and religious rites until you've built up enough positive karma, or merit, to earn your freedom from the cycle of rebirth.

- **2) The way of knowledge** - you have to come to the realization that you are actually not separate and apart from God, but you are one and the same with Him. That will free you.
- **3) The way of devotion** - this is about devotion and love for a particular deity.

How to Approach Them:

- 1) Help them see our main problem is not ignorance, but sin.
- 2) Help them see salvation cannot be earned.
- 3) Help them see that God is personal and desires a loving relationship with us.

4. Buddhism

- Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism, so there are many similar points. However, the main focus of Buddhism is to end suffering by reaching a state of nirvana. One does that by extinguishing all desire.
 - Hinduism says man's biggest problem is ignorance. Buddhism says man's biggest problem is craving and desire, because it's craving and desire that leads to suffering.
 - Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Guatama about 500 before Christ. He was a rich prince who went out on the streets and was disturbed by the suffering he saw among the poor. He gave up being a prince, and went on a journey toward enlightenment. When he found it, he became the Buddha, which means "the enlightened one."
 - He taught that we need to avoid two extremes in life: luxury and splendor on one extreme and pain and suffering on the other. The key was to walk the Middle Path, which he called the Eightfold path. It's right view, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
 - If you follow the Eightfold path, you can reach nirvana, a state of complete detachment from any sort of desire for anything in this life. Once you reach this state, you can be set free from the cycle of rebirth which only leads to suffering. It's completely based on a system of self-perfection.
 - One of the key differences between this and Hinduism is that in Hinduism you become one with the Universe like a drop in the ocean. In Buddhism, you just cease to exist and enter a state of nothingness.

How to Approach them:

- 1) Help them see the futility in trying to completely end desire.
 - It's just not possible to live without any desire. In fact, it's a self-contradictory system because they are desiring a state of nirvana. Essentially, they're desiring to end desire. But practically speaking, Buddhists also desire good things for their children and families, and it's impossible to cease desiring anything on the earth.
- 2) Help them see the need for Christ's sacrifice and how futile it is to try to perfect ourselves.

Question: Did you notice what all these major world religions need?

- The gospel message! They're all works based, perfection based, merit/karma based systems that lack a personal, loving God who sent His Son to die for them on the cross. Let's impress upon people the uniqueness of Christianity.

Final Note:

- We might not run into Hindus or Buddhists, but these eastern religions have had a HUGE impact on religion in America today. They are the major contributors to the New Age movement, which emphasizes concepts like:
 - 1) Spirituality over religion.
 - 2) Truth is relative, so we need to be tolerant of all religions.
 - 3) Man is the focal point and self-improvement is the key. Basically, man is God.
 - 4) God is an impersonal, unknowable force.
 - 5) There is no sin, only lack of understanding
 - 6) When we die, we are reincarnated.

Source: "Handbook of Today's Religions" by McDowell and Stewart

Class 21 - Religions Crash Course part 2

Last class, we talked about 4 of the most major world religions; Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. But for this morning's class, we'll talk about 3 religions you're most likely to encounter here in the Orlando area. That would be Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and 7th Day Adventists. I won't go into great detail about these religions, but we'll cover the basics and hopefully provide some helpful thoughts for how to talk to them about the truth of the Scriptures.

Jehovah's Witnesses

- **Origin:** This group was started by a man named Charles Taze Russel in the late 1800's. Russell, while still a teenager, was dissatisfied with some of the teachings in the Bible like the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the concept of eternal punishment in Hell. He started his own Bible class group in Pennsylvania in 1870, and 9 years later this Bible class had grown significantly and they eventually named him "pastor" of their group. He then started a magazine called Zion's Watchtower which contained all of Russell's own unique interpretations of the Bible for his readers, and 8 years later he published a volume of 7 books which would later be known as "Studies in the Scriptures." By the time he died, he had preached more than 30,000 sermons and wrote over 50,000 pages worth of books.
 - His group of followers was called the WatchTower Society, and after his death, a man named Joseph Rutherford became the new president and moved the headquarters to Brooklyn NY and officially named them "Jehovah's Witnesses," to distinguish themselves from other Christian groups who thought Jesus was God. After Rutherford, a man named Nathan Knorr became president and the society grew to 2 million members, and they produced their own translation of the Bible called the New World Translation.
- **Beliefs:** They believe their Watchtower publications are the way God communicates to His people today (It is the "faithful slave" of Matthew 24). They claim that the Bible is their only authority, but they believe we cannot understand the Bible without the Watchtower Organization giving us its proper meaning. They believe to reject the

Organization is to reject God Himself. Salvation can only be found by joining the Organization and obeying God's word in the Bible (interpreted by the Organization).

- They believe the Watchtower Organization is God's government on earth and that all other governments are Satanic. That's why they don't salute the flag or state the pledge of Allegiance.
- They deny the 3-in-one nature of God, they believe Jesus was A god, but not the god. They believe Jesus is a created being and that He is Michael the archangel. They deny that Jesus rose bodily from the grave, but that he arose as a spirit. They believe only 144,000 will be in Heaven, but the rest will be in paradise on the earth. They do not believe in hell, only the complete annihilation of the wicked.
- **How to Approach Them:**
- **Note:** Jehovah's Witnesses are extremely difficult to talk to. They are trained not to listen to anything other than what their organization teaches. They are also the most notorious for pulling Bible verses completely out of context to support their points.
Problem: I used to try to take them through the Bible and debate doctrine with them, but the problem is they're enslaved to the Watchtower's interpretation. So if you interpret a verse differently than the Watchtower does, you're wrong, period. That means there is no reasoning with them and you're talking to a brick wall.
- That's why, I try to get them to see that their organization is not God's organization at all. I ask them how they can claim they are God's organization when the entire organization is built on false prophecy?
- **Deuteronomy 18:20-22**
 - It is so easy to google, "False prophecies" from the Watchtower and you'll tons of results.
 - For instance, in Rutherford's book, "Millions now living will never die," on p.88 he proclaimed *"We may expect 1925 to witness the return of these faithful men of Israel [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other faithful from of old] from the condition of death, being resurrected and fully restored to perfect humanity and made the visible, legal representatives of the new order of things on earth."*
 - That never happened, so they claimed he was just expressing his opinion, or they'll explain that God was revealing His plan in pieces and He didn't have all the information. But there's a clear difference between God revealing His plan gradually and God actually making a false prediction.
 - They'll deny that they think the Watchtower Organization is inspired by God or that it's God's prophet, but all you have to do is google the Watchtower's claims of inspiration.
 - "It is God's sole collective channel for the flow of Biblical truth to men on earth." (The Watchtower, July 15, 1960, p. 439)
 - Listen to what Charles Russel, the founder of the Watchtower said about his own writings way back in 1910. "If the six volumes of "Scripture Studies" are practically the Bible, topically arranged with Bible proof texts given, we might not improperly name the volumes, 'The Bible in an arranged form,' that is to say, they are not mere comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself." (The Watchtower, September 15, 1910, p. 298)

- Then he goes on to say that people who read the Bible by itself within two years will go off into darkness. But if they use his writings along with the Bible, they will remain in the light.
- **Helpful:** Tim's son Wayne made a great point to Jehovah's Witnesses one time. No one has ever become a Jehovah's Witness just from reading the Bible. You need the Bible AND the Watchtower material. Russel said that himself in the quote I just read.

Mormonism: (the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)

- **Origin:** Joseph Smith was a 15 year old boy in the year 1820, and he was dissatisfied because his parents were Presbyterian but he wasn't sure which denomination to choose. In Palmyra, New York, he prayed to God which of all the Christian sects was right so that he could join the right one. Then he had a vision of two personages appearing as a bright light above him and the personage who addressed him told him all the denominations were wrong and all the creeds were an abomination and had become corrupt. 3 years later, he had another vision of an angel named Moroni who told him about a set of hidden golden plates with the full account of the gospel written on them and the full account of Jesus' trip to America after His resurrection. Apparently these plates had been engraved with the account of Jesus in America by an ancient American prophet named Mormon. The angel didn't show Smith where the plates were for another 4 years, but once he gave them to him, Smith took 3 years to translate the plates, and the result was the Book of Mormon. Later, Joseph Smith published other revelations he claimed to receive which is another sacred work called "Doctrines and Covenants." After his death, more of his writings were collected and put in a book called "The Pearl of Great Price."
- **Beliefs:** You wouldn't believe me if I told you.
 - They are the one true church and there is no salvation outside the LDS. They believe the Bible is God's Word, but like Muslims, they believe it has been corrupted and can't be trusted. They're main sources of authority are the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrines and Covenants, along with modern day prophets and apostles God continues to speak through.
 - They believe God used to be a man, but because he followed the Mormon teachings he became a god and is now ruling over the earth. They believe God actually has flesh and bones like we do. They believe there are millions of gods ruling over trillions of planets. Elohim is our Heavenly Father, and he lives on a planet near a mysterious star called Kolob with his many wives. He and his wives produced billions of spirit children who he sent to earth with physical bodies to help us learn good from evil. They believe Jesus was God's firstborn child, but not God Himself. He was given a fleshly body when Elohim came down and had intercourse with Mary. Jesus had 3 wives and bore many children before he was crucified, and Joseph Smith is one of his descendants. After Jesus' resurrection, they believe Jesus came to America to preach to the Indians, whom they actually believe were Israelites, and to establish the church there. All of those records were recorded by Mormon on the plates Joseph Smith discovered 1,800 years later.
 - Essentially, if Mormons can prove themselves worthy through a rigid code of financial and moral conduct and through secret temple rituals, they can prove

their worthiness and become gods and rule over planets in polygamous marriages the way Elohim rules over us.

- **How to Approach Them:**

- 1) Challenge them to present evidence for their faith. When you ask how they know the Book of Mormon is true, they say you have to pray and you'll feel a burning in your heart. The problem is, no cities mentioned in the Book of Mormon have been located, no names have been found in any inscriptions, no ancient copies have been found of the Book of Mormon (conveniently, Joseph Smith said the angel took the golden plates back to Heaven so we don't have those anymore), and no artifact from archeology has been found to corroborate the Book of Mormon. The lack of evidence is embarrassing.
- 2) Ask them this question: Is there more than one sect of Mormons? The person you ask will say, "Yes, but we're the only legitimate one." Then ask, "If the whole purpose of Joseph Smith was to restore the one true church and get rid of different sects, it seems like he failed."
- 3) Help them see how unBiblical it is that God would allow His entire church to become corrupted.
 - **Matthew 16:18** - "The gates of Hades will not prevail against it."
- 4) Expose the false prophecies made by Joseph Smith. You can google those easily.
- 5) Just use the Bible to show how radically opposite their teachings are.
- 6) Remind them of 2 Corinthians 11:14 - "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

7th Day Adventists:

- **Origin:** This group developed in stages. In the early 1800's, there was a great deal of religious fervor in America, and a Baptist named William Miller developed a mathematical prediction based on a passage in the book of Daniel that the 2nd coming of Christ would happen on October 22nd of the year 1844. He gained a following from multiple different denominations at that time, and they became obsessed with the imminent coming of Jesus. This group was called the Adventists. The word "advent" means the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. So essentially, they were preparing themselves for the 2nd advent of Christ, trying to do what they could to rid the world of evil, and many of them even selling their possessions. Well, October 22, 1844 came and went and Christ did not return. The name for this event is known in history as "The Great Disappointment." One Adventist at the time named Hiram Edson said, *"Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn."*
- But the next day, Hiram Edson claimed to have a vision in his grain field. In the vision he saw that instead of Jesus our High priest coming to earth on October 22nd, 1844, He actually entered the Holy of Holies, the inner room of the heavenly sanctuary, and that he had one last bit of work to achieve before coming to the earth.
- Essentially, he said Miller wasn't wrong about the date, only the event that took place on that date. What happened in 1844 was that Jesus began the process of

“investigative judgment” where he is now going through the records of everyone lives who have ever lived and reviewing them with God. Once all the individual cases have been reviewed, then Jesus will return in the final judgment to send the righteous to heaven but the wicked will be completely annihilated.

- One of these Adventists was named Ellen G. White and she also claimed to be a prophet who received visions from God. She had friends from a group called 7th Day Baptists who helped to convince her that we still need to be keeping the Sabbath. She later claimed to see a vision of Jesus with the two tablets of the 10 commandments. The 4th command about the Sabbath shone brightly with a glowing halo around it. She said, “I saw that God had not changed the Sabbath, for he never changes, but the pope had changed it from the seventh day to the first day of the week; for he was to change times and laws.” (“Early Writings of Ellen G. White” p. 33 via bible.ca)
- **Sources of authority:** The Bible is primary, but they have 28 fundamental beliefs; the 27th of which says about Ellen G. White, “Her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.

How to Approach Them:

Note: It’s tricky because in my experience, 7th Day Adventists are some of the nicest people you’ll ever meet. Their denomination has done a TON of great work in society as evidenced by the many hospitals they run. So it would be hard to attack their character, their motives, or their desire to do good in the world. Not only that, but many of their beliefs are very Biblical, so it might not seem like we’re all that different at first.

1) However, I would challenge them on their allegiance to Ellen G. White. She has made many false prophecies, and she made up a false version of history by saying the Pope is the one who changed the day of worship to the first day of the week instead of the seventh.

- In addition to the Christians in the New Testament worshipping on the first day of the week, we have over 50 quotations from the earliest Christians between the years 90 AD-500 AD all unanimously saying that Christians worship on the first day of the week and that the Sabbath was an Old Covenant institution.

- **Colossians 2:16-17** specifically tell us not to bind sabbath keeping anymore.

2) Ellen White also made many false prophecies.

3) Also, I’m going to study the difference between their baptism and New Testament baptism. They actually teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, but accompanied by their baptisms are man-made vows they have to recite. One of them is, “Do you accept the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the 7th-day Adventist Church and pledge to live in harmony with these teachings?”

- Rather than just being baptized into Christ, you’re essentially being baptized into their denomination.

4) I’m encouraging them to just be Christians. Their entire denomination is based on a Great Disappointment and lame attempts to cover it up.

Class 22 - Sharing Our Story and Quick Encounters

At the start of the quarter, we started with the heart. Evangelism must always come from a heart of love for the lost and a willingness to serve and reach out to those around us with good attitudes. The last 5-6 classes, however, have been very heady and intellectual. Handling objections and false religions can sound a little dry and factual, so I want to make sure as we bring our evangelism class to a close with a return to the heart. We only have one more class after this one. In the end, what I want you to remember is that evangelism is not about having all the perfect intellectual answers and it's not about knowing everything about everything. It's about sharing our love and gratitude for Jesus Christ with others. That's why I want to talk tonight about how to share our own story with people. Then for the second half of class tonight, we'll talk about what to do in brief encounters with strangers since someone asked about it.

John 4:29-30 - When this woman went to talk to people about Jesus, she didn't have a detailed explanation of all the facts, all the fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament, or all the details about false religions. She simply shared the experience she had with Jesus. **Note:** I understand experience is subjective and we don't want to give people the impression that our experience is the only reason for our faith. But if we leave subjective experience out completely, and merely present evidence for Jesus in a dry, factual way, our evangelism will be empty. People need to see our passion and gratitude, and sharing our story, telling people, "This is what Jesus has done for me and this is what He means to me, come and see!" is a powerful part of our evangelism.

- **John 4:39-42** - Sometimes what people need most are not intellectual answers, but to simply to come and experience for themselves what Jesus can do for them. We can help them see that by sharing what He's done for us.

- **John 9:24-27** - They were stuck on trying to understand the technical details behind HOW this man was given sight. And over and over again, the blind mind tries to get them to stop worrying about the how, and see the what. He simply shared his experience. He said, "I don't know all the answers to your questions about how it happened, but one thing I do know; I was blind, but now I see."

Application: Imagine you're talking to someone who seems to have endless questions. You've tried to oblige and answer their objections as best you can, but it always seems like they have one more question in order to believe that Jesus really is the Son of God and all this Christianity stuff is true.

- There may come a point where you can very appropriately say, "Look, I may not know all the answers to your questions, and there are some things we can't know. But what I do know is that I have a level of peace and joy in my heart that I didn't used to have and it passes all understanding because of what Jesus did for me. If you want to experience that, Jesus can give it to you too."

- The blind man in John 9 saw who the real blind men were. He saw that they weren't really interested in gaining their sight. They wanted to stay blind and ask endless questions. But if they were really interested,

the blind man pointed them in the right direction using his own experience. Don't underestimate your ability to do the same for people in your life.

Question: How do we effectively share our story?

Paul the apostle shows us how in his defense to king Agrippa.

- **Acts 26:9-20**

1. Share what you Used to think and do about Jesus

- **Acts 26:9-11** - Paul shared his pre-Christian thought process and where that led him. He thought Jesus was a fraud and that he was supposed to do everything in his power to stop his followers! It was his wrong thinking that led to wrong living, and he put Christians to death in his former life!
- **Helpful:** When you tell people what you used to think about Jesus, you show them you can relate to them. Sometimes people think Christians have always been perfect little goody two-shoes and they don't know what it's like to have sin in their lives, or they don't know what it's like to have doubts. If they see that's not true, it establishes common ground and shows them we can relate to their struggle.
 - It's so compelling for someone who is expressing doubts or expressing belief in some false version of God to hear us say, "I totally hear you, because I used to think the same exact thing."
 - Hopefully that opens the door to them asking, "What changed your mind?" or if they don't ask, you can just ask them, "Would you like to know what changed my thinking about that?"
 - **Note:** If you "grew up in the church," you might think, "I grew up being taught to love Jesus, I don't have any horrific stories about my sins, so I can't relate to people in the world."
 - **Question:** For those of you who have grown up in the church, did you ever in your life have any misconceptions about God, Jesus, or worship?
 - Maybe you could share how you used to worship simply because your parents made you every week so it kind of felt like going through the motions. You could share how you thought you were saved by works, by just marking off boxes on a checklist, or how you thought Jesus was just a really nice man, but didn't understand that He was your Savior. Maybe you saw God as a dictator giving us orders with the threat of hell if we didn't obey, but completely missed His love for you.
- **Point:** Even if your personal story isn't filled with murder or drug addiction, any misperceptions we had about God, Jesus, or religion is still relatable and it helps people lower their guard when they hear that we're being authentic about our past misperceptions about God and where those led us.
 - For me, I thought the Bible was just a bunch of fairy tales and all I needed to do to get to heaven was be a good person and live by the golden rule. I know people can relate to that.

2. Share what Happened to Change your Heart and Mind

- **Acts 26:12-15** - For Paul, the experience that changed his mind about Jesus was this appearance and conversation on the road to Damascus. He doesn't give Agrippa all

the details here, but in the account in Acts 9 he was also struck blind for 3 days and didn't eat or drink for that time either.

- **Question:** What about you all? What changed your perception of Jesus, God, or religion?
 - Maybe it was a sermon you heard, maybe it was a person you met who mentored you, maybe it was a Bible verse or passage you read. Maybe it was a tragedy in your life or the life of someone close to you.
 - For me, it was the 9/11 attacks. That really rattled me and made me realize I wasn't ready to die. I kind of assumed I'd live forever and didn't really need to take spiritual things seriously. But the people on those planes and in those buildings had no idea they were going to die that day, and if I had been on those planes or in that building, I would have been completely unprepared and lost eternally. If I had just tried to make it to Heaven by living by the golden rule, I knew it wouldn't have been enough, because I didn't always keep it.
 - When I was baptized and came up out of that water, I had no fear of death anymore. I could die in a plane crash or in any other way and be in heaven for all eternity. That was a priceless feeling.

3. Share your New View of Jesus

Acts 26:15 - This is just a natural point to share after the event that changed your previous perspective. For Paul, now He knew Jesus was the Savior and Lord. When the man you think is a fraud parts the clouds and appears to you from heaven, it's a pretty good clue He's not really the fraud you thought he was.

- After whatever event in your life changed your mind, you had a new view and appreciation for Jesus. Now you knew He was your Savior, Lord, and King. Now you knew there was salvation found in no one else. Now you knew how much you needed His grace and mercy, how much He longs for relationship with you, and how much He loved you.

- For me, after 9/11 I saw that Jesus wasn't a fairy tale, but a real person in history, and my real Savior who gave me peace that passed all understanding and rescued me from eternal punishment.

4. Share your New Purpose and How your Life Changed

- **Acts 26:16-20** - Everything changed for Paul after that encounter with Jesus. He made a 180 degree turn from murdering Christians to becoming a Christian and then teaching others to become Christians.

- Maybe for you, Jesus helped you overcome a particular sin in your life, or He gave you an entirely different and better motivation for going to worship. It may be that He taught you the meaning of forgiveness which allowed you to reconcile your relationships with others, or that He taught you how to love people the way you never had before. It may be that before you had no idea what path to take in life, but Jesus made the path of righteousness clear to you.

- For me, my new purpose was to live in gratitude for Him because He spared my life and gave me an opportunity to be saved. My new purpose was to walk the path I was created to walk. And later I realized I need to share this message with others and become a preacher.

Again, our own experiences are subjective and it's not a magic evangelism method that works on everyone every time. It does, however, show people we genuinely believe in what we're trying to show them and we know 100% that the gospel really transforms lives because it transformed ours.

Now, for the rest of tonight's class, I want to make sure to address something someone asked about earlier in the quarter. Someone asked, "What can we say to someone we might not ever see again and we only have a small amount of time to talk to them?"

- Hopefully now that we've gone through this class, you've seen that a back and forth conversation with someone you've developed some kind of relationship with is going to be the most effective means of evangelism. Trying to say quick things to strangers is less effective simply because they don't really know you, they have no reason to trust you, and they have very little context to fully appreciate what you're saying to them. Even though you smile and hand them a card, you could be an ax murderer or in some cannibalistic cult for all they know. People have layers like an onion and they won't be very willing to let a stranger into the deepest layer of their lives; their souls. I don't believe God says it's our duty to talk to every single person we meet in the course of the day about Jesus. That's not realistic, that's not the model in the New Testament, and remember we have to become all things to all men. Most people in our culture can't stand cold calls, they don't like to be accosted by strangers, especially religious strangers trying to promote their teachings.
- On the other hand, I don't want that to discourage us from ever engaging strangers because God can do big things even with brief conversations. What I suggest is to take everything we've talked about in class so far, and just condense it down to a quick event. Here are some tips for quick encounters:
 - **1) Be friendly and show interest**
 - If you're in a terrible mood and have a scowl on your face, it's going to be hard to talk to influence this stranger for the Lord. Ask them how they're doing and mean it.
 - **2) Give a sincere compliment.**
 - One time I told a cashier, "I can't believe how fast you are at this!" and you could tell she just lit up inside. (I really meant it! Some cashiers are like sloths, but this one was like a gazelle!)
 - **3) Use spiritual small talk that makes them think**
 - If you're at the grocery store and the cashier asks how you're doing, you could say something like, "I'm really blessed to have a cart full of groceries, thank you."
 - Or on an elevator if you say hi and they say hi back, "I sure am thankful to God for elevators."
 - **4) If you hand them a card, acknowledge the awkwardness and ask permission**
 - Most people will let their guard down if they know you know it's an awkward situation and you ask for permission. If you try to invite a stranger to worship or to Bible class, and you just shove something in their hand, they're going to think you're crazy. If you don't acknowledge that, it'll only confirm it. You can make

yourself appear much more sane if you recognize you sound crazy and are willing to ask their permission. So for instance, you could say something like, "I know this may seem weird and I know you don't know me, but I try to invite as many as I can to come learn about God with me, can I leave this card with you?"

- Or, "I know this sounds crazy, but I want you to know God loves you and wants a relationship with you. Here's a card if you want to find out more. Would you like one?" then instead of handing it to them, you can present it and let them decide to take it or not.
- **5) Handle rejection with kindness and respect.**
- If they reject it, just say, "I understand, you have a great day."
 - Maybe you're thinking, "Shouldn't we be more aggressive? If they reject it, shouldn't we say something like, 'The Lord will reject you in the day of judgment?'" I suppose you could, but you have to realize they might not necessarily be rejecting the Lord simply by not taking your card; they may just be rejecting you because you're a stranger and it's an awkward situation.
 - **Truth:** Our default answer when it sounds like someone is selling us something is "No." I was in Wal-Mart a couple weeks ago and a lady was offering 50% off on laundry detergent and she came up to me and as soon as I heard the words, "Would you be interested?" I said "No thank you," broke eye contact, and walked right by her. Then I realized what happened. I realized how unreasonable it was to shut someone down when I hadn't even heard what it was. I stopped, and I actually turned around and went back to listen to what she had to say, and she was just giving out free coupons for 50% off. So I took one, and bought a bottle of detergent for 3 bucks, it was great! **Point:** You know you're just trying to help people get to Heaven, but strangers don't know you so even if you offered them \$100 cash for free, they'd probably still say "no," because they'd be suspicious and think it was a trick.
 - So offer a card, but don't freak out if people aren't interested and don't be surprised. It might not be the gospel they're rejecting, but the situation. And if you get aggressive with a stranger and say something condemning, you're probably just going to confirm in their minds what they already think; you're crazy. Instead, it might have a greater impact on them when they realize, "This person really loves God enough to invite me to worship, but when I turned them down, they still treated me with kindness and respect." That'll be way more powerful in the long run.
 - The card might be one of our congregation cards or it might be a card with your email and contact info and you invite them to further conversation. It might even be one of our tracts from the foyer in the back. You could even hand people little Bibles if you want.
 - **Remember**, successful evangelism is about bringing people one step closer to obeying the gospel. With very brief encounters with strangers, don't expect that you're going to convert them in 30 seconds. Instead, just use your encounter to try to point them in the right direction.
 - You don't even have to give them a card to do that. Even just talking about God using spiritual small talk and a kind attitude can move Jesus in their mind from Stranger to Friend.

Class 23 - Pleasant, Patient Persistence

We have come to our last class, and I just want to say thank you to all of you for your participation both in class and also outside of class trying to put these things into practice in your life. Thank you for the kind words of encouragement you've offered me. I sincerely hope the principles in this class will be helpful to you for many years to come, that you'll be able to refer back to your notes whenever you need a reminder, and that we'll all continue to share our evangelism experiences together and help each other grow as we help the kingdom grow.

For our final class, I want to talk to you about pleasant, patient persistence. The message I want to leave you with is, "Never give up on people, even when they seem uninterested. Never give up on yourself, even when you may get discouraged because you don't always say things the way you'd like to say them. Never give up on trusting the power of the gospel to change lives." But you know and I know that some people in the world who "never give up" are incredibly annoying. Sometimes they bug us to death and they're all over us to the point where we throw up our hands in annoyance and say, "You never give up do you?" or "You just don't know when to quit do you?"

This lesson is about how to never give up on trying to bring people one step closer to Jesus, but without being annoying about it. We want to be persistent, but we don't want to be pushy or impatient. How do we do that?

We have the perfect Model: Our Father in Heaven. Isn't the entire Bible the story of God's patient persistence with us? When Adam and Eve rejected Him, He didn't just give up and destroy the earth. Instead, He put a plan together to bring us back to Him. Over and over again, in the Old Testament God reaches out to mankind in different ways through different people at different times to try to win their hearts to Him, yet over and over again His efforts are rejected. Then He sends Jesus, His own Son, to win us to Him, and we kill Him and put Him on a cross, and God still does not give up. He sends the Holy Spirit to inspire the apostles to give us the saving power of the gospel message. And even then many reject it, but He doesn't give up. He sends the apostles throughout the world, He has them write letters, sometimes multiple letters to the same group of people trying to help them work through their issues. Even today, when we're not living right, He doesn't forsake us or give up on us, but continues to speak to us through His Word, to wake us up by disciplining us through certain life circumstances, by sending us people we need to meet, and by reminding us through nature that He's still there.

- **Nehemiah 9:17** - This description of God being gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness is used 8 times in the Bible.

- **2 Peter 3:9** - There is no question God was and still is persistent in His efforts to save us. **Question:** Has God's persistence been annoying or pushy or obnoxious?

- Of course not. So let's use Him as our model to find out how we can be pleasantly and patiently persistent with people, especially when it seems like they just aren't interested in the gospel.

7 Ways to be Pleasantly and Patiently Persistent

1. Keep your Interest in Relationship Going

- Certainly, when Adam and Eve sinned, there was a huge rupture in their relationship with God. They were cut off from the Garden and didn't get to experience the peace and joy of innocence in God's presence. But God didn't suddenly stop showing interest in having a relationship with them after that. He spoke with their sons Cain and Abel and that He continued to seek a relationship with humankind after Adam and Eve. God could have easily said, "I'm done with Adam and Eve's family, they're not interested in Me so I'm not going to show any interest in them or their children," but He didn't say that.
- **Practical:** This is a very real temptation for me. I'll use HI-CLASS evangelism and try to have relationship with someone, but then when it seems they're uninterested in the gospel, I'm tempted to just drop them like a bag of rocks and not pay any more attention to the relationship.
- **Question:** What message does that send?
 - It says, "You really weren't interested in me, you just wanted to make a sale."
 - **Nehemiah 9:17c** - Even when they rejected God, He did not forsake them.

2. Let them Know You're Still Available

- I'm amazed at how, even after people sinned against God, He didn't say, "You all have lost your chance to talk to me forever and there will never be another chance for salvation."
- **Isaiah 1:18-20**
- **Isaiah 55:1-3** - God was constantly reminding His people, "I'm still here! If you want life and blessings, just come to Me!" So often the people would complain that God wasn't there for Him, that God was hiding from them, but so often God told them, "You're the ones rejecting and hiding from Me! You're the ones disobeying Me."
- **Illustration:** A lady once told her preacher, "I just don't feel close to God anymore," and he asked her, "Who moved?"
 - No matter how much people sin against God, as long as time stands, He is still there, He is still available.
 - **Application:** If someone doesn't seem interested in the gospel right now, don't remove that option from the table forever. If the conversation doesn't go well, don't say to yourself, "Well, I'll never in my life try to talk to this person about God again."
 - **Key:** People change over time. They might not be interested right now, but just like in our own lives we experienced things that changed our thinking, so too people might be open to it down the road.
 - **Practical:** So let's say you talked to someone a while ago about God and they didn't want to talk about it. Maybe after some time passes you can just let them know, "Hey if you ever change your mind, I'd still love to talk to you about spiritual things."
 - You're being persistent, but not pushy. You're letting them know you're still available and would love to talk, but you're leaving it in their court.

3. Take Time between Touches

- By “touch” I don’t mean physical touch. I mean an effort to reach out and make contact for a spiritual conversation. **Question:** In the Old Testament, did God send prophets to His people every single day of every single year since the creation of the world?
 - No way! He let time pass between the prophets. He used Noah as a prophet to warn the world, but then didn’t really use any other prophets in Genesis. He made appearances to different people in Genesis, but not to everyone. He allowed 430 years to pass in Egypt before He sent the prophet Moses. He left 400 years of silence in between the Testaments before sending Jesus.
 - **Hebrews 1:1** - The word “portions” there is translated “times” in the NKJV because it has the same implication. God didn’t reveal His will all at once, but He only revealed portions of His will spread over different times. God was persistent with us, but He didn’t nag us every day. He would teach us the truth, then give it time to sink in and allow us time to either live our lives by His will or not.
 - **Application:** If you talk to someone and the conversation doesn’t go well, it might be best to wait for a week or so before trying again. If we come back the next day, it’s going to seem like more of an argument to them or like we’re trying to force our views on them. Then they may not want to talk to us AT ALL about anything because they know as soon as we start talking we’ll be right back to bugging them about spiritual things. If they know, however, they can have a conversation with us without starting a daily debate, they’ll be more likely to talk to us. Plus, when we wait, we give what we said to them a chance to marinate in their minds. Then a week later, you could ask, “Hey I really enjoyed our conversation last week, have you given any more thought to what we discussed?”
 - If you try once a week and they still don’t seem interested, give it a month next time, then three months, etc. We know the message is urgent, but we just can’t force people to operate on our timetable.

4. Try Different Approaches

- **Hebrews 1:1** - God also spoke to us in many WAYS. He was persistent, but He didn’t always take the same approach. Sometimes He spoke directly to people, sometimes He used prophets to speak to people, one time He used a donkey to speak to Balaam, on Mt. Sinai He appeared to people in this terrifying lightning storm, sometimes He spoke to us through prose, other times through poetry, and in Jesus He appeared to us in the flesh.
- **Application:** If someone isn’t interested, it may not be that they’re not interested in the content of the gospel message, but in the WAY we presented it. For instance, if you try to talk about spiritual things in the workplace, some might shut you down simply because they feel uncomfortable talking about religion in the workplace. So maybe you could say something like, “Hey I know you need to really focus on work, but maybe we can continue our conversation over lunch instead, what do you think?”
 - If a person is uncomfortable talking because they just aren’t good on the spot thinkers or they’re afraid of face to face confrontation, maybe you could suggest email correspondence instead. If none of your own personal conversations have

gone well, maybe you can try an invite to worship services instead, or encourage them to listen to a sermon on our website or to watch a youtube video you found particularly powerful. Maybe you could invite them to join us in our daily Bible reading schedule. Or maybe you could try just saying more spiritual things around them and influencing them that way. Or maybe you could reach them by telling a powerful story, like a parable, and making a point to them that way.

- **Note:** It may be that you change from an indirect approach to a direct approach. Some people aren't good at reading in between the lines, and we may just need to say, "I'm really concerned for your soul. We're all going to spend eternity somewhere, and it's vital to put our trust in the Lord. What do you think about that?"
- **Point:** If you keep yourself in a box and always come at people in the exact same way, you're most likely going to get the exact same results. The gospel message never changes, but there are TONS of ways to reach out to people and try to get them engaged.

5. Live like a Christian Every Day

- One of the things that makes God so magnetic to us is that He never changes. He's always holy, He's always perfect, He's always loving and kind, and He's always just.
- **James 1:17** - The sun changes position and causes shadows on the ground to turn. God never changes His position. He's always the same, living as the Father of all good things.
- **Application:** When people see us day in and day out consistently living as Christians, we're speaking to them with our lives. When people aren't quite ready for conversation about spiritual things, we can still say a lot to people just by the way we live our lives.
- **Practical:** Sometimes if people reject our efforts to talk, there may not only be the temptation not to show interest anymore. There may be a temptation to be bitter toward them and actually mistreat them. That's only going to make things worse. Let's continue to be good, kind, and righteous in our character, regardless of how the people around us respond to the Lord.
- God drew us to Him not just because of His words, but because of His consistent character. Despite our rejection, He continued to be gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness.

6. Set a Time to Talk

- **Galatians 4:4** - Even though God was patient with us, He didn't act like He never needed to say anything to us. He was very decisive on, "Okay, now I need to send a prophet," or "Okay, now is the time I need to send Jesus." He gave us time, but He didn't keep Himself uninvolved forever.
- **Practical:** Sometimes people are somewhat interested, but they may say, "Can we talk about this another time?" or "Maybe some day we can talk." That's fine, we can respect their wishes about that. But a good way to practice persistence is to not let that go on forever, but instead to set a time. You could say something like, "Hey, you said you wanted to talk some other time, can we get together this

Saturday morning at Panera? And don't worry I won't talk your ear off, it's just a conversation." "How about over lunch next Tuesday?"

- You're being persistent by changing vague plans into specific action.

7. Ask them What Holds them Back

- God sent prophets to help people examine themselves. He basically asked His people, "Why aren't you following me? Have you turned to idols? Do you love money more than me? Do you love sexual pleasure more than me?"
- **Application:** In a situation where it's been a really long time and a person still isn't interested, it might be a good idea to ask them point blank, "Hey ever since we've known each other, I've tried to open the door for conversation about spiritual things, but you've never really seemed interested. Is there something holding you back?"
 - Maybe they say, "I just don't want to talk about it." If so, we can't force them to.
 - Or maybe they finally open up to us and we can start an excellent spiritual discussion right then and there.

Question: What if, after we've done all these things, the person is still uninterested and they've clearly made it known, "I don't want to hear about religion and I don't want to talk about religion."?

- 1) Respect their wishes. In Mark 5:17-18 when the town asked Jesus to leave, He got in the boat and left. The gospel can never be forced on people, only offered.
- 2) Don't give up on them because people change. Keep praying for them, and I would say if you still know this person, I'd remind them once every year or maybe every couple years, "I'm still here if you change your mind."
 - **Matthew 7:6** - Not all people who are uninterested are "swine." Jesus is talking about those who, whenever you try to teach them, they make a totally mockery of you and the message. They're not only uninterested, they're antagonistic and they make every effort to belittle and stomp God, Jesus, and Christianity.
 - If that's the person you're dealing with, Jesus says don't even bother talking about holy things with them because it won't be productive.
 - Sometimes, though, even a swine can change with time.
- Let's be pleasantly, patiently persistent, as God has been with us. Never give up on people, never give up on yourself as God helps you get better at having spiritual conversations over time, and never give up on the power of the gospel to change lives.
 - **Romans 1:16** - *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."*

Resource List

Books: (All helpful, but these are in order of the most helpful in my opinion)

“Brian’s Class Notes” by Brian Messerli (I’ll post the full transcript of my notes online, roughly 100 pages, if you’d like to print it out and read it in the future)

“Conversational Evangelism” by David and Norman Geisler

“Becoming a Contagious Christian” by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg

“Speaking of Jesus” by Mack Stiles

“Evangelism for the Rest of Us” by Mike Bechtle

“Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult” by Nick Pollard

“Irresistible Evangelism” by Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, and Doug Pollock

“Honest Evangelism” by Rico Tice

“The School of Biblical Evangelism” by Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort

“Questioning Evangelism” by Randy Newman

“The Way of the Master” by Ray Comfort

Note: This class has been based on a combination of things I learned from reading all of these books (except “School of Biblical Evangelism,” that’s more of a reference guide than a book to read straight through), from my own life experience, and of course from God’s Word.

- However, I couldn’t cover everything in these books, so if you’d like to do additional reading on the subject, I recommend these to you. As with every man-made book, take what you read with a grain of salt and always use God’s Word as the standard.