

# **JUST WALK ACROSS THE ROOM FOUR WEEK EXPERIENCE**

## **Week 1 : The Single Greatest Gift**

### **Message 1**

#### **Introduction**

**(PPT Slide 1 /Just Walk across the room campaign Graphic, Week 1)**

I am so glad that you are here today. Because today we are going to begin a four-week experience that is going to radically change the way you and I perceive evangelism – how we go about sharing our faith with people who have still to come to know Jesus.

*Evangelism* – For some of you, just hearing that word sends a tremor of terror up your spine. You’re sitting there wondering if I’m going to make you come up here at some point and give a personal demonstration of how to share your faith with a person who doesn’t know Jesus.

If I have just described you .... please relax.

I’d venture a guess that this four-week experience will be unlike anything you’ve ever read, seen, heard about evangelism. Here is why I say that. The type of evangelism we’ll be exploring involves:

- ✚ No formulas
- ✚ No scripts
- ✚ No quizzes, tests, or on-the-spot demands for huge chunks of memorised information.

Intrigued yet??

The new thing we will discover together is this: *evangelism*, can be as simple as taking a walk across a room. And taking a walk across a room is something we can all do, wouldn’t you agree?

I will explain more about the walk-across-the-room imagery in a moment, but for now, I want to introduce you via video to the author of the next 4 weeks series, Bill Hybels. He will set the stage for our time together this morning and then we will get into the content for week one.

**(Excerpt from Message Video Excerpt, Week One)**

Did you catch the gist of his closing statement: “If we would **all** do just the small thing that we can do, we would touch a lot more lives!!”

If you’re a follower of Jesus, isn’t this essentially what you want most .... to touch the lives of the people you know – the people you love – who are living their lives far from God?

The “Just walk across the room” metaphor that serves as the key concept for the book we have been mentioning over the past few weeks has its roots in a story that’s about this very thing. It’s a story about one person who was living far from God. But then one day, his entire world got upended because a Christ-follower touched his life. And guess how it all began? {PAUSE}.....

With a walk across a room.

Bill Hybels had been invited to a lunch event. As he and other guests entered the hotel ballroom where the event was to take place and found their seats, they were asked to introduce themselves to the other folks around the table. Bill didn’t know the other members of his table group but immediately noticed how diverse they all were .... just in terms of their ethnicity, age and so on.

Seated directly across from him, there was a tall African-American gentleman ... this was a big man, a bit like a front row rugby forward. When he said his name, it was distinctly Muslim. Then the next person, and the next person and they started their meal. At one point in the meal, the African- American Muslim made eye contact with Bill and mouthed the words “I love your books!” Here is how Hybels writes it:

*I looked over my shoulder to see if there was another famous author standing behind me. There wasn’t, so I said “Me?”*

*He said, "Yea, you! We'll talk later.." He had this huge grin on his face, but still thought that he had confused me with someone else. So after lunch he pulls me off to one side and says, "I now understand this is probably a little confusing because you assume I am a Muslim .... Let me tell you a quick story.*

*"I have been a Muslim my whole adult life. Being an African Muslim in a Southern City – and being in the profession that I am in is not always easy. As you might imagine, I have some struggles in social settings.*

*He said "In the profession I'm in, we have a lot of cocktail parties, and a lot of evening events; and the natural course for me at these parties is that I am served a drink, I get some hors d'oeuvres, and I try to make business contacts in the room. Inevitably I wind up standing alone at most parties until enough time has elapsed and I feel like I can gracefully make an exit... and then I subtly leave. This whole dynamic is just something I have learned to live with."*

The Muslim man went onto to tell Bill that one night, when he was at such a party, he found himself with a drink in one hand, a plate of food in the other, standing all by himself as usual. Sure, there were groups of people gathered throughout the entire room, talking, laughing, engaging in conversation about this or that – but he was there with no one to talk to, and nothing to do. Except to stand there looking out of place.

At some point during the party, the Muslim man noticed a guy standing on the other side of the room who was in the middle of conversation with people of his own colour and his own "kind" The guy looked away from his own group and saw our Muslim friend standing all alone just ten feet away. He was perplexed that this guy would even care to notice him, but what happened next would utterly shock him.

The guy actually excused himself from his conversation, turned away from the group, walked all the way across the room, stuck out his hand to the Muslim man, introduced himself and then asked for the Muslim gentleman's name.

From there the conversation unfolded so smoothly... so naturally. They talked about their mutual profession. They talked about their families. They talked about business in general and sports and all sorts of things. Eventually – in this same conversation – the issue of faith came up.

Our African-American friend told Bill that at that point in the conversation, he became a little reticent ...he just assumed that there would be an unfavourable reaction when the other guy learned he was a Muslim. But he took the risk, and to his surprise, the guy said, "Well I am a Christian, but truth be told I know nothing about Islam. I wonder if you would do the courtesy sometime – maybe over breakfast one day – of giving me a basic outline of your faith system... you know, why you committed yourself to Islam. Hearing your story would be pretty interesting to me."

The Muslim man almost fainted! Can you imagine his surprise when he saw a Christ-follower in a social setting like that operating with such openness and grace?

Well, the two men agreed to meet for breakfast the following week, and the conversation that ensued was incredible. The Christian man felt free to ask questions about Islam, and the Muslim man felt free to answer them.

That meeting led to another meeting the following week. And another one after that. And another. For weeks on end, these two men got together over cups of coffee so that one follower of Jesus, could take an interest in a man living far from God.

At some point in this series of breakfasts, an interesting thing happened. The Muslim man realised that this Christian guy had been a good listener all this time ... week after week after week. He hadn't judged the Muslim man's life choices. He hadn't wedged his own agenda into their conversations. He just kept showing up with a listening ear and a genuine interest in the Muslim man's life.

I'll let the Muslim man give you the rest of the story, as he told it to Bill at the luncheon that day:

*I really didn't remember that much about the Christian faith. I'd been a Christian at some point in my childhood, but the racism in our community had infiltrated my family's church. Eventually, we just left the faith altogether. Doesn't take a genius to know when you're not wanted. But for some reason I was prompted during one of our breakfast meetings to say, "You've been such a good listener all this time ... would you be willing to refresh my memory on the Christian faith?"*

*From there, it all happened so easily and respectfully and sensitively. And to make a long story short, many months later, after determining that Christianity was the superior faith system, I committed my life to Jesus Christ! And it has made an unbelievable change in my life, Bill. I am part of a local church now, and that is where I came across some of the books that you've written. I can't tell you the difference this whole thing has made in my life .... and in the lives of all my family members.*

### **PPT Slide 2/Week one premise, "The single greatest gift..."**

Friends, the single greatest gift Christ-followers can give to the people around them is an introduction to the God who created them, who loves them, and who has a purpose for their life. Nothing beats it – not monetary gains, not job opportunities, not recognition or accolades.

And when you boil it all down, this is what evangelism amounts to: constantly watching for ways to give this single greatest gift to someone else's life. And because he was open being used by God, guess what happened?

God used him.

Today we begin the process of understanding how exciting it is, that in making ourselves available to God – he chooses to use us. I hope that this is something that you, me, all of us desire. And the first step in being used by God is being willing to extricate ourselves from our Circles of Comfort and stretch out a hand to a person who needs the hope that Christ alone can offer.

Now, back to the walk-across-a-room idea. Let us take a closer look at how this whole thing unfolded. What will it take in order for us to give this "single greatest gift" to someone we know?

### **Point 1 : Enter the Zone of the Unknown**

#### **PPT Slide 3/Point 1: Be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown**

Think about this with me for a moment. One Christ-follower in a social setting was standing in what we call a conversational "Circle of Comfort". He was in a circle where it was easy to relate, where it was easy to converse, where there was no threat ... in other words, nothing 'unsafe' could happen. He had every reason in the world to continue talking in that little circle he was in. It was a "Circle of Comfort", a place we've all frequented, right?

Yet he looked across the room and he saw someone – really saw someone – who was standing alone and perhaps needed a little encouragement or an ounce of friendship.

Not only did he look and see, but he felt something and then heard something from the Holy Spirit – something like, "Why don't you go over there and extend a hand of friendship to the guy on the other side of the room"

So he saw the situation. He felt something. He heard a prompting – ostensibly from the Holy Spirit of God. And then he actually said to the people who were standing with him in the Circle of Comfort, "Excuse me for a minute."

Now remember, he has no idea what is going to happen once he crosses the room and sticks his hand to this stranger. He doesn't know what the conversation is going to be like. He doesn't know what the reaction of the individual will be like. But he has already left the Circle of Comfort – there is no turning back now.

And so he walks ... probably praying every step of the way. He walks all the way across the room and enters into what we call the "Zone of the Unknown". Have you ever been there – in the Zone of the Unknown? {PAUSE}

It's in the Zone of the Unknown where God often does his best work! It's in the Zone of the Unknown where the guy said, "Hi, I'm so and so... what's your name?" And he struck up a conversation that quite literally changed the African American gentleman's eternity, as well as the eternities of his wife and children -- WOW!!!

Can you believe how simple and straightforward this image is? Just a few steps to cross the room. But you tell me, how much spiritual, eternal, salvation impact did that one follower of Jesus have – just because he was willing to take these few steps?

I believe it was a staggering sum of impact, friends. I believe the gates of hell shuddered when he took the first step. In that moment, the angels in heaven probably began banners to unfurl with the names of the businessman and his family written on them the moment they crossed the line of new faith in Christ.

Here the question I want all of us to ponder, this morning, and over the next 4 weeks: what would happen if we were to take a few steps across a room, a short walk across our street, to stop and turn to our neighbour over our fence? Is it possible that we could actually impact someone's eternal destiny – perhaps even that of their family? That we could change the course of an entire family history by simply taking a few steps toward someone who may be heading for a Christ-less eternity?

Do you think that would be worth the risk of ten steps across the room?

When I was reading through a section of *Just Walk Across the Room* I found a quote that would stop all of us in our tracks: "The day Christ-followers like you and me stop taking walks across rooms in this manner, the day we stay glued to our Circles of Comfort, refuse to make the walk, refuse to enter the Zone of the Unknown ... the day Christ-followers like you and me stop doing this, it is lights out for the kingdom of God here on earth. It is the beginning of the end of redemptive history. It's the slow defeat of the church – the bride of Christ. It is the end of the dream of Christ that people on earth would come to know him."

Please listen carefully: as we look at this subject over the next 4 weeks, I want you to remember that one of the top priorities of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to turn every single person here – every single follower of Jesus into someone who would naturally walk across the room. Everyone.

Regardless of your age, regardless of your gender. Regardless of your colour, your personality type, your respective spiritual gift, your experience of kingdom-building initiatives to this point.

If you are a living breathing follower of Jesus, then the Spirit is asking you to walk. He's asking me to walk. He's asking us to make a difference in the lives of people we see each and every day. At work, at the school gates, in social settings, at the Gym, at our children's sportday. In the midst of our busy schedules. Wherever, whenever.

If you have submitted your life to Christ but wonder why you're not just rocketing ahead in your spiritual development or your spiritual maturity, could it be that, for too long now, you have clung to your Circles of Comfort, refusing to even glance toward that Zone of Unknown, let alone take a walk into it?

It seems almost impossible to imagine, but there are people who have experienced the merciful forgiveness and soul-cleansing power of the gospel in their lives and then somehow contract a bad case of "spiritual amnesia" – at that point, they simply forget how personal the cross of Christ is to them.

They get wrapped up in their Circles of Comfort – warming themselves day after day from the glow of Christian community, focussing all of their energies and the people standing inside the circle .... never once turning around to acknowledge the isolated people standing across the room who desperately need a little injection of hope.

If you have made the choice to follow Christ – if you have found him to be the truth, if you have found what the Bible says to be the truth – then why would you – why would any of us – think that other people wouldn't be interested in knowing about what we have discovered to be the most life-changing, heart-stimulating, eternity-altering relationship in our lives.

Friends, if you have been transformed by grace – if you have been bowled over by God's gift of new life, as I thankfully have – and if you want to live your life as an expression of love for the great God you know – then I believe what God is saying to us in delivering this course is to increase our enthusiasm and introduce as many people as possible to the God who wants desperately to enfold them with His Grace!!!

All right, so in order to bestow this single greatest gift on someone living far from God, you first must be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown, as we've established. But there's more. Because unless you've got some supernatural power on your side, you could do more harm than good once you're there.

## **Point 2: Listen to the Spirit's promptings**

### **PPT Slide 4/Point 2 : Listen for the Spirit's promptings.**

In order for us to be effective in the Zone of the Unknown, we must be led by the Spirit. We must listen to the Spirit's prompting, it says in Galatians 5 : 25, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" We must listen to the Spirit's promptings every step of the way.

There was one Sunday, I was sitting at the start of a church service and I noticed a new mum arriving in church with two little children, one of them a baby. Before the end of the service I saw her leaving and heading out the door. Then as clear as day I felt God saying "Get up, out of your seat, and go out and speak to her" So feeling prompted by the Spirit I did, I went out to the front door, and as I got there she was rocking her baby, but was getting ready to leave. I chatted with her for the rest of the service, just took an interest in her story, her background. I knew at the time that the very polite "kick up my backside" was from God, as the woman seemed to really appreciate me taking the time out to welcome her and take an interest in her and her children. The Mum was Louise Clark, and her and her family are still very much part of our church today. That for me was an example of just being obedient and listening to God's promptings, and being willing to take a simple "Walk across a room" and taking a genuine interest in another human being.

Sometimes you see and you hear and you feel and you move .... and then you go ahead and take the risk. And then other times, when it seems like maybe you should make a move and things don't open up that way.

The key is this: fundamentally, being walk across the room people means that we *walk* when the Spirit tells us to *walk* and we don't walk when the Spirit says *not to walk*. That's what makes this thing dynamic and mystical and out of your control ... and out of mine. Frankly, it's what keeps the edge and the adventure present in the Christian life.

### **PPT Slide 5/ Matthew 5 Passage**

In Matthew 5: 13, Jesus said this about his followers "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot."

So as the verse says, you've got to have savour. You've got to have spiritual potency. But what else does salt need if it is going to affect anything? It needs *proximity*. You've got to get salt *on* something if it's going to affect it, true?

Think of it this way: I can be the strongest, most savoury form of salt the world has ever seen. I can be the saltiest salt known to humankind .. but I won't make any impact unless I get up *close* some people who need to be affected.

Based on the law of averages, there are some of you sitting here this morning who are maybe saying, "You know, I go along with the ideas you've mentioned. But I think this whole task is reserved for *spiritual superstars* who can do the kind of thing you're talking about tied behind their backs. And I'm not one of them! I don't have the right training, the right confidence level, the right skill level. I don't have the quick mind, the relational attitude, or the gifts, or whatever. I just don't have what it takes."

And if you're in that camp, I assure you I am in sympathy with your concerns. Believe me I know what it is to walk across the room and go. "What on earth am I doing here, This is so tough, this feels far too risky.!"

It's true: there is genuine *fear* that has to be overcome to operate in the environment we're talking about. There is anxiety about everything will unfold once you enter the Zone of the Unknown. There can be incredible anxiety when a normal conversation suddenly shifts and migrates into spiritual territory. It unnerves even the most seasoned Christ-followers I promise you.

But here's the underlying reality I want to remind you of: when we are relating right with Jesus Christ – when there is vitality and openness in *our* spirits to the promptings of *His* Spirit – here's what happens: You'll find yourself standing in a Circle of Comfort as usual. But by the Spirit's power as you're listening to the conversation at hand, you'll be able to have one eye open and roving around the room to see if there is someone the Holy Spirit really wants you to see. You'll be able to sense the leading of the Holy Spirit "Are you trying to tell me something about what's going on in this place? Is there someone you want me and go talk to."

Not all of the time, but some of the time, by God's grace, if you:

- ✚ Commit yourself to being salty in your world
- ✚ Get some proximity to people who need grace
- ✚ Listen for the Spirits promptings

...then you can make that turn each and every time ... and with confidence tell God "All right I'll walk. I want to know where this prompting will lead God, and so I'll go."

Some of you have already experienced this firsthand. If you have you'll agree with what I am about to say. As Christ-followers take walks across rooms ... as they explore the Zone of the Unknown ... as they have initial conversations with people whose eternities are hanging in the balance and have no idea how it's all going to turn out... as they strain to hear the Holy Spirit – they begin to see God at work in incredible life-changing ways – they see lives being touched through them – enabling people to start a journey of faith to salvation – now there is nothing in life better than that!! Now wouldn't you all like to be having these experiences more regularly – I would, wouldn't it be amazing, to every single day to say "God, I am available – I want to be salt and light – I want to be salt and light – in my neighbourhood, at my work, anywhere, just show me YOUR opportunities and by your Spirit lead me".....

What I hope that you'll discover in the next few weeks is that this experience is not about rigidly sticking to a set of rules on how many people you have to speak to about Jesus, not about how many people you have invited to church. No, what this is really about is how you become more aware of how the heart of God beats *through us* when we are operating in harmony with Him!! AMEN!!

As followers of Jesus in this scenario where we're operating in harmony with God – we win because there is an internal spiritual victory that happens when we walk by faith – not by sight. There is something a lot like Jesus that is going on in you and me when we leave a Circle of Comfort and take that faith-walk across the room, and simply – stretch out that hand.

This is something we can all do. This is something that *every single person* in this congregation can decide to do and can learn to do. You can be trained for this. You can be equipped for this. You can receive the pointers that will make you more effective. But for what purpose? I mean, when you boil it down, what's the reason we want to get better about all this stuff?

### **Point 3: Just Walk!**

#### **PPT Slide 6/Romans 5: 8**

There's a passage in Romans 5: 8 that is familiar to many of you. It's coming up on the screen now. Will you read it with me? It says "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Let me press the pause button here for just a moment. Personally I have spent some time this last week reflecting on what this in reality means in my own life... I had grown up learning about this Jesus, an amazing man who had died for the sins of the world. What people had failed to tell me though, was that actually, he had died for me. Jesus had not died for the world

as a whole, but had died for **me** individually – Jesus had paid the price for **all my** sins, and even more amazing as the scripture represents – Jesus even knew what I would be like, he knew of all my sin, all the wrong things I have done, and yet he still chose to take my place, and to take the punishment for all my sin .....

What a gift – not merely that God would feel this type of love for me, but that he would go to such lengths to *demonstrate* it in such a radical manner!...

And how was it, exactly, that Jesus Christ demonstrated the love of the Father? What was the radical move he made to prove to you and me that he really does feel redemptive, grace filled, unconditional love for each one of us? Some of you know where this is going?

He took a walk!

### **PPT Slide 7/Philippians 2 Passage**

The verses from Philippians you see that at a specific point in history – actual time and actual space – Jesus walked all the way around the cosmos and reached out his redemptive hand to people like you and me. And because of that one walk, humankind was able to be saved and secured in the family of God *forever!!!*

Think for a moment about the implications of that walk: this passage tells us that Jesus under direction from his Father, left the ultimate Circle of Comfort – heaven itself ... direct participation in the Trinity ... the worship the adoration of the angels.

Jesus Christ left the *supreme* Circle of Comfort and he took the longest walk a person could ever take, if you think along the metaphorical lines we're discussing. But *why???*

Here's why: he did it to stretch out a hand to people just like you and me, He did it to reach people, many of whom were in the middle of making a mess of their lives.

We are all in the same boat here – every person who has ever inhaled air has been (or is still) in dire need of being rescued.

Isn't that incredible? Guess what? It doesn't end there.

In addition to taking a walk across the cosmos so that you and I could be redeemed, he also took a walk across the cosmos – so that you and I could see how it's done!!!! And these days – right here in our everyday lives – what he tries to do with us between now and heaven is to say “What I did, leaving that circle, making that trip and reaching out to you, what I did .... is precisely what I want **you to do**. I want this to be characteristic of my followers, that they would be walk-across-the-room kinds of people. Just following my Spirit's lead, doing exactly what I did ... whenever I give them the opportunity to do so.”

And what I hope you will hear in Christ's exhortation is this “Don't get yourself tied up in knots trying to make sure all the mechanics and logistics are just right. Don't give even a hint of mental energy to motivations of guilt or obligation. You can just cast all that aside and instead just take the hand of the Holy Spirit and walk. If you will stay open, with an eye focused on people and an ear tuned to his still, small whisper, you will be amazed by what unfolds.”

God says to us all today, “I am going to ask you to walk across the street; I am going to ask you to walk across an office complex; I am going to ask you to walk across a cafeteria or locker room. I am going to ask you to take that walk, leave your Circle of Comfort you are in and take the walk, enter the unknown – and something really exciting is going to happen. That is what I want you to do.”

### **PPT Slide 8/Point 3: Just Walk**

And our third point: Just Walk!!

Why? Because Jesus “just walked” for you. For me. For us. And for every single person inhabiting the planet today.. Do you believe that?

And as you have probably surmised by now, *this is why* we're devoting an entire month of our churches life to these ideas. So that we can get better about hearing the Spirit's promptings, yes. But also that we will start taking action with immediacy and a newfound sense of confidence ... and in the process, that we will become more like Jesus. This is what our four week experience is all about.

### **PPT Slide 10/Point 3: Just Walk**

Please understand that I do realise how real life goes. I know that we can all be tempted into staying in our safe little circles, instead of caring about people who maybe standing right in front of us. But hopefully, the longer we spend time focussing on and spending time in the presence of Jesus – listening to the promptings of His Spirit – the more our eyes will be opened to seeing the things He sees... To seeing people around us who need care, love, friendship, community and ....hope.

**Closing**

## **PPT Slide 11/ God used you to help point the way”**

As we close today I want you to think about how you became a Christian? I want you to think about how some of your friends became Christians? Almost every Christ-follower I know can think back on somebody – it might have been a Mum or a Dad, it might have been a colleague or a teacher, it might have been a friend or a neighbour – who walked across a room for you, or for them.

And so, if you are Christian, then someone probably took a risk for you along the way and did a little something that would interest you in the possibility of knowing the love of God and the opportunity to be freed from your sins.

Before I became a Christian, I was selfish, unhappy with myself. Had suffered rejection from my peer group at the time. Then a friend of mine, Mary Begg, started to call me and say “Gary, how are you?” She took a real interest in my life but would then say, “There is this new Baptist Church in Dundee called Central. It is really good, would you like to come sometime?” Mary phoned me every few weeks for, it must have been 6 months, and I kept putting her off, as I went to see Ice Hockey on Sunday nights.

Then, I had an experience of God, where God revealed himself to me, so the next time Mary phoned me, I said “I would love to come.” That is when I heard that Jesus had died for me, I gave my life to Christ - and the rest they say is – HISTORY.

Mary, took the “walk across the room” for me – she prayed for me, she persevered, she persisted –because she wanted to hand me the “single greatest gift” I have ever received in my life. Yes, it is down to our Lord, and to Him be all the glory – but in terms of me, it is because Mary Begg was obedient to the call, she made herself available to God – she took a walk, made a phone call, so that I could be rescued from my sin. Praise God!!! I have huge respect for her, for the one who moved toward me when I was lost confused and completely separated from Christian community.

Friends, the “single greatest gift” you and I can give to another human being is an introduction to the God who declared that his mission was to find every person who was lost ....and to bring them home. Amen!

So, be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown, let us learn how to listen more for the promptings of the Holy Spirit and Just Walk.... Over the next 3 Sunday mornings and in the evening sessions we will unpack how you move from taking a walk across the room, to developing friendships, seeking out and taking opportunities to point people to Christ.

There is still an opportunity for those of you who haven’t signed up for the course. There is a “Just Walk Across the Room” table located in the hall and there will be someone there who can give you more information.

I am though really excited and looking forward to what God will do in and through our lives as we “just take a walk across the room” Amen.