

JUST WALK ACROSS THE ROOM FOUR WEEK EXPERIENCE

Week 3: The Power of Story

Introduction

PPT Slide 1/Just Walk Across the Room Campaign Graphic, Week 3.

Good morning. Is everybody glad to be here? Is everybody awake? Is anybody awake?? Good, because we're headed for a brain teaser straight away this morning – ready to go!!

Here's how it will work. I will say a word or phrase, and then you just tell the person sitting next to you what comes immediately to mind. A little word association for your Sunday morning. Your response can be anything ... anything that comes to mind. But the key is to go fast. You can't give it a lot of thought. This idea is to capture your *gut-instinct* immediately after you hear what comes out my mouth! OK –

All right here is the first word...

PPT Slide 2/ Mona

Mona.....

Any Lisas out there? Okay, so some of you are catching on, at least. Ready for the next one?

How about...

PPT Slide 2/Wimbledon

Wimbledon....

Ready,

PPT Slide 3/Holiday

Holiday....

PPT Slide 4/Diet

Diet

PPT Slide 5/Kiefer

Kiefer – **PPT Slide 6/24** - What a great show!!!

Oh here's a good one..

PPT Slide 7/ Prime Minister

And now for our last one...

PPT Slide 8/Born-again Christian

Born-again Christian

Right, let us stop there for a moment.

Wouldn't it be interesting if we could electronically tabulate all the words that floated throughout the room after "born-again Christian" flashed across the screen? Personally, I think the results would be fascinating!!

Let's take it a step further. What do you think would happen if we showed the same screen to a hundred people living far from God? If we said, "Do you know any *born-again Christians*? If so what are they like ... what are your general impressions of them?"

We might get quite an earful, don't you think? What if their perceptions included things like these:

"I've come across a few Christians, and the ones I know, hmmm, how do I describe them ... they're just so ... uptight... narrow... and rigid"

Or

"I went to school with one once ... he was pretty isolated. Kept to himself all the time."

Or

"I don't know any of them very well. They hang out with their own type – certainly don't rub shoulders with people like me."

Or what about..

"I know a born-again Christian ... what a turnoff she is! I feel judged if I even inhale the wrong way. She's so self-righteous – just absolutely egotistical!"

"Christians? Classic simpletons. They're on perpetual crutches. You know what I mean ... they throw their nice Bible verses at the world's complex issues. Give me a break!"

Now please understand, I certainly hope those perceptions *aren't* out there. But in the event that a few of them are, how about you and I figure out a way to try and stop perpetuating these feelings ...to reverse the trends .. to give the watching world something *healthy and good* to say about Christ-followers!

Guess why? Because God's heart beats for pointing people to faith, remember? And while you and I are here on earth, we get to serve as his vehicle for getting that done. Here is what I wish – I wish that whenever I struck up a casual conversation with people and asked them what they think of Christ-followers they know, the first thought that would come to mind would be something like,

"Hmm, Christians? Can't say it's true for them all, but the ones I know are full of integrity. That's what distinguishes them – their integrity and their moral courage.

Or

"Christians, the ones I've come across are *ridiculously* filled with compassion. They're just plain *kind* to people!"

Or

"Christians? They tell the truth, they are always straight with you."

"Christians? They have concern for the poor – *no one* cares for the poor like Christians do."

"Christians? They're *humble*, they're honest .. they have this incredible inner strength."

"Christians? They are *radically* inclusive of people, regardless of their background, their lifestyle choices, their preferences, you name it. It's amazing!"

“Christians? They’re always taking walks across rooms. Whenever somebody needs a little encouragement or friendship, *Christians* are the first ones to make the move.”

“Christians? They really do *love well!* They love God, they love people ...they love the show 24.”

Just kidding.

But for all of them except the last one ... *that’s* the type of testimony I wish were out there about us, friends!

You what I also wish? I wish people said.. whenever Christ-followers talk about God, they are so clear! They are so unbelievably enthusiastic about him! And you should just hear them talk about their own faith journeys ... they are always so humble ...so interesting to listen to!

Now, can I ask you something – Is that what you wish for too?

PPT Slide 10/Just Walk Across the Room Campaign Graphic

I hope your answer is yes. Because that is what we are devoting our time to this week. If you’re ready to *communicate* like walk-across-the-room person, then today’s message is for you. Primarily, what we’ll be seeking to do is answer these two questions:

✚ How do we talk about God in a way that’s full of *clarity* and *passion*?

✚ And how do we convey our personal faith stories in a way that’s both *humble* and *interesting*?

Point 1: Stories are powerful!

PPT Slide 11/Point 1: Stories are powerful!

The power of story – and of words – is undeniable throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Can I flood your consciousness here for a moment with a few reminders of how supremely useful, how incomparably potent, how supernaturally empowered – words can be?

- Ø Ecclesiastes 6: 11 says that when used sparsely, succinctly... words carry *great meaning*.
- Ø Psalm 119: 130 says that words can actually *give light*. Words can give understanding to those who don’t yet understand.
- Ø Proverbs 12: 18 says that although reckless words pierce like a sword, words from the tongue of the wise can bring *healing!*
- Ø Proverbs 16: 24 says that pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. Now isn’t that a great image!!
- Ø Ecclesiastes 10 : 12 says that although a fool is consumed by his own lips, the words from a *wise man’s* mouth are*GRACIOUS!!*

Words.

Humble words, healing words, wise words, gentle words. *Grace filled words.*

I wonder, are *these* the types of words you’re known for speaking? If your closest friends or the family members who actually live under the same roof as you were polled anonymously about this, would they say that in the course of normal, everyday life, you can be counted to speak words of encouragement and grace?

Let’s take this morning as an example. Think about the very last thing you said before you walked into this church this morning. Do you remember who you were talking to? Do you remember what you said?

Were the words you spoke life-giving and inspiring and grace-filled? Or were they, well – not?

Interesting isn't it, that God allows so much power to inhabit our words. *Astounding* power – for good, or for ill, right?

It seems to me that if we could find a way to use words for *good* in people's lives – if we could be *known for* being clear, humble, succinct and relevant – then might we just frustrate a few of those awful perceptions that exist about Christians.

You be your own judge, but in my opinion, there are two areas where effective, efficient words could exponentially improve perceptions about Christ followers:

1. The first area revolves around how we talk about God, explaining who He is and what He has done.
2. The second revolves around how we talk about our *personal experience* with God... explaining the *main things* He has done in our lives.

What is God's story? What is *your* story? And just how can you get them both told *well*? So that listeners walk away saying, "Now *that* I understood! *That* I enjoyed! *That* I crave in my own life!"

That is what we are tackling today, so....

Point 2: God has a story. Learn to tell it well.

PPT Slide 12/Point 2: God has a story .. learn to tell it well!

If we remember back to week 1, the main points we covered were to leave our Circle of Comfort, listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and walk into the Zone of the Unknown.

Last week, we discovered that after you decide to take a walk across a room, it's important to focus on developing a friendship instead of saying your piece. It's really important to discover the other person's story instead of wedging your own agenda into the conversation. And it's absolutely critical to listen for the Spirit's guidance about appropriate next steps you might take to meet a need or two of the person you're talking with.

And with all of this, there is something I really believe ... I believe that once you commit yourself to all that it means to becoming a walk-across-the-room person – engaging with people, living in 3D, the whole bit - God is going to *blow open* some doors, spiritually speaking. He is going to give you an opportunity to say a word for Him or tell someone why you started walking with him. And in that moment, you will be glad that you came to church this morning!

In that moment, you will feel your posture relax, your shoulders loosen a little, your sweaty palms dry up ... and you will say, "Oh wow, is *that* what you want to talk about? We're going to have a really interesting time if you want to go there. I'll make this brief, but basically, here's how I understand what Christian faith is all about..."

God has a story. A powerful story. And your job – and mine- is to learn to tell it well.

Let's test your current comfort level for telling it well shall we?

What would you say if someone in your current sphere of influence were to come today and say this "You know John, we've been friends for a long time. And really you've been really cool not to force your God-thing on me, even though you probably knew my life would be better if I'd give all that a chance. Well, anyway, things have.... I guess you could say things have gone a little downhill in my marriage, and my wife and I well, we were talking about trying out church, the God plan. Sort of a last ditch effort before we call it quits. I just wonder if ... before I really get involved in church... you could sort of explain the whole deal to me. What is it about God that so many people are attracted to? Is God really all that *necessary in life*?"

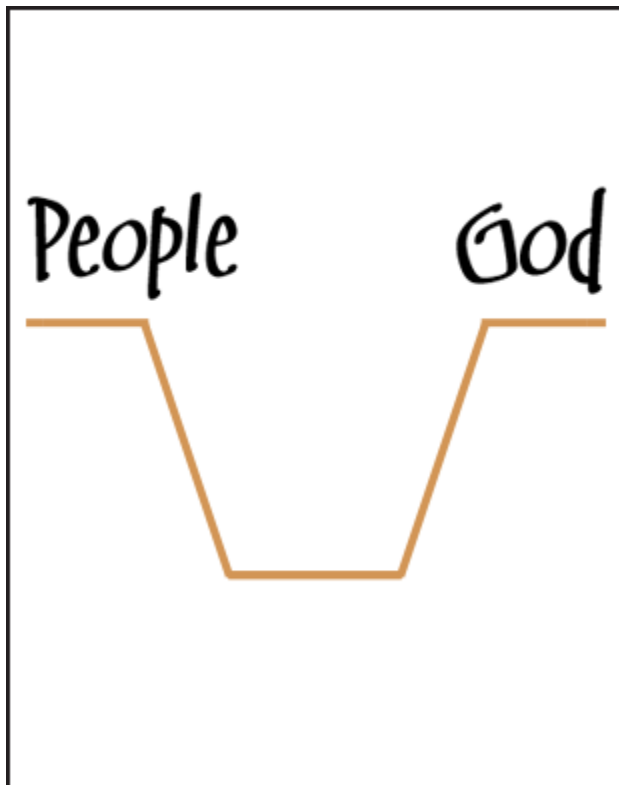
That, my dear friends, is what we call, in sophisticated theological terms, *a wide open door!*

Some of you maybe aren't too thrilled with that open door, I can tell. You're maybe feeling a little shell shocked. In our little scenario here, your shoulder's maybe aren't loosening, your sweaty palms *aren't* drying up, well don't worry – help is on the way.

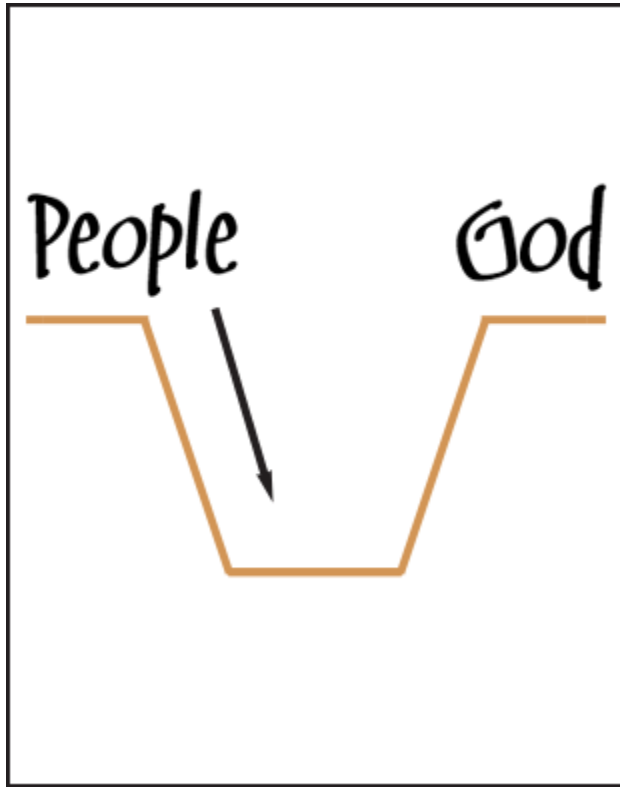
There are tried-tested- and true ways of explaining God's story. Here is one that you might consider committing to memory, although maybe some of you know it and have already used it. It is called "The Bridge" It is quite simple really, but it is a powerful way to illustrate precisely what God – and His son Jesus Christ – did for all humankind.

The next time you find yourself in a delicate conversation where the person you're talking to really *does* want to understand who God is and what he has done, grab a piece of scrap paper, a napkin, a beer mat or whatever, and ask their permission to sketch out this bridge. It is an image they won't soon forget, I assure you. Here's how it goes.

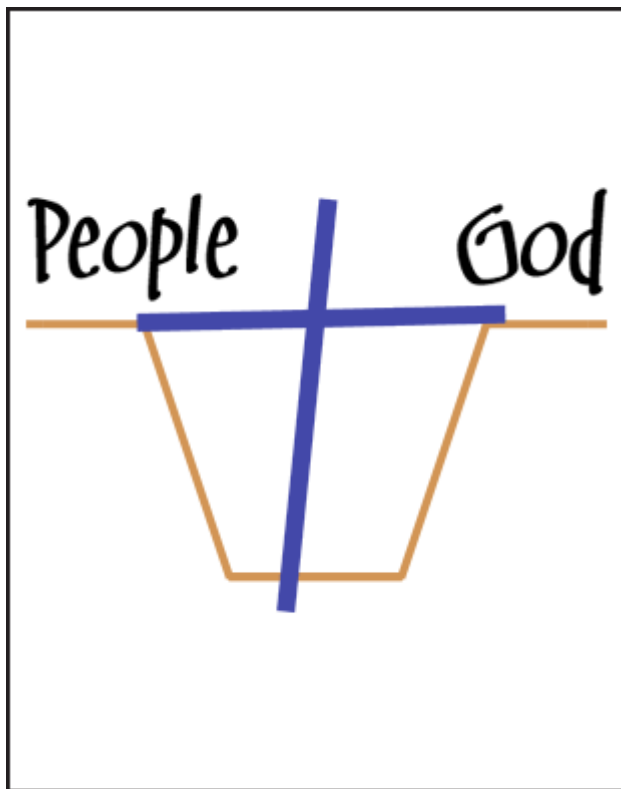
All right for starters we have to establish the reality of two beings: people and God. Between people and God there is a great chasm – a division that exists because of people's propensity to rebel against God's way and go their own way instead – The Bible calls this sin.



The dilemma people face is that we want to get to God – but know we can't just leap over the chasm. So we try everything to try and bridge the gap – exerting our own human effort, even by "going to church", being good, doing charity work, being a good husband, wife, we keep striving, even religious effort. We do everything so that we can build the bridge – but in the end ... we realise that all the human effort will never be enough to get us over the other side.



But thankfully, God sympathised with our dilemma. And because he loved us so much, he intervened so that we would have the means of getting close to him, being reconciled to him. His solution was to choose His only Son, Jesus, to serve as the bridge.



This is called Grace – Amazing Grace – Grace means that we receive mercy from God when we don't deserve it. If you remember nothing else about the bridge illustration, remember this: Christ came to earth to be our bridge, and whoever makes the decision to cross the bridge will live with God *forever*. The apostle John put it this way in John 5 : 24, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my words and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; HE HAS CROSSED OVER FROM DEATH TO LIFE." AMEN!!

So, just a simple illustration, but one that has great power. You may choose to commit a different illustration to mind, but please choose one, or have a couple that mean you can give a clear explanation of who God is and what he has done, so that when the time comes that someone sitting across from you poses the question, you're 100% ready to give a thoughtful answer.

Whatever illustration you use, keep in mind the types of words we looked at earlier. *Humble words... Healing words... Wise words... Gentle words... GRACE FILLED words.*

Let your speech be well seasoned with these things. You are not responsible for transforming a human heart ... that is the role of the Holy Spirit. *Your* role, when prompted to do so, is to open your mouth and give a tender, thoughtful, clear and passionate understanding of who God is, of what he's done for each person who has or ever will walk the planet. That's all, nothing more, nothing less.

Point 3: You have a Story. Learn to tell it Well!

PPT Slide 14/Point 2: YOU have a story... learn to tell it well!

Now, not only does God have a story, which is what we have just looked at. But, *you* have a story as well. A powerful story. And your job is to learn to tell it well!

Do you believe what I have just said..... that you have a powerful story to tell?

Friends, if you have come into relationship with God through His son, Jesus Christ, then you have a wonderful, redemptive, miracle story to tell. Here is why that is true.

Regardless of how old you were when you came to faith, hopefully you were different *before* Christ than you are *after* Christ invaded your world and beautifully transformed it with things like His grace, mercy and love.

Take the guy from Luke 5 who once had leprosy. In the Message version, the text says that "one day in one of the villages there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus he fell down before him in prayer, and said, "If you want you can cleanse me" Jesus put His hand, touched him, and said, "I want to. Be clean" Then and there the guy's skin was smooth, the leprosy was gone - Hallelujah!!

Can you *imagine* what that experience must have been like for that man?

What do you think he told every, single person who would listen from that point forward! ""I was a leper. But then I met Christ. And now I'm healed, totally and completely healed."

His self-talk was probably fascinating in the hours following Christ's act of healing. "This is unbelievable! Just moments ago, my skin was so angry that it was literally... erupting. But *NOW* look at it! It's clean. It's smooth. It's healed. Everything about me was rotting moldy, diseased, but I've been recreated. It's if I were never sick. This is unreal. Where did my hopelessness go? My helplessness? They vanished with my sores. They are not here anymore, Jesus fixed all of that. I have hope! I want to live! I finally feel....whole!"

Do you see the before and after here?

I was sick. But now I'm well.

I was diseased. But now I'm healthy.

I was outcast. But now I'm accepted.

I was defiled, tainted. But now I'm good as new!!!

I was tarnished. But now I'm clean.

I was left for dead. But now I have... a *future!!! AMEN!!!*

Who knows which aspects of the former-lepers before-and-after was most compelling to him... who knows what facet he would have homed in on? He'd have to figure out his story to himself, right?

But here's the point: for the vast majority of you sitting here this morning, the same pattern is true for you. You also have a before...

PPT Slide 15/ "Before" header

And an after.

PPT Slide 16/"After" header builds on previous slide.

And that's about all people need to hear, just in a simple fashion ... what you were like before you came to Christ. What the experience was like of embracing his love and grace and putting your faith in Him. And what you are like after that decision.

Let me just give you a few helpful before-and-afters...

PPT Slide 17/Before and after examples, build on previous slide.

"I was striving... but now I'm at peace."

"I was self-destructive... but now I'm healthy."

"I always felt guilty .. now I feel liberated."

"I was fear-stricken .. but now I'm confident."

"I was despairing, but now I'm hopeful."

Your own before-and-after doesn't have to be more complicated than this, friends. It just has to be simple, humble, succinct and true!

Sounds pretty straightforward, right?

I agree... it should be this easy to tell an effective before-and-after faith story. But if I'm being honest, I have to tell you that it's quite possible for these stories we talking about to absolutely – well, derail.

First, faith stories derail when a Christ-follower just won't shut up. He oversupplies and just *slaughters* the demand. He goes on and on... and even after the listener sends all sorts of warning signals that disinterest and disdain have taken root, the storyteller obviously keeps chatting away.

Second faith stories derail when a Christ follower is fuzzy about the story's core theme. She gets all tangled up in a dozen story lines and leaves her listener frustrated, exhausted and baffled.

Third faith stories derail when a Christ follower lays out a string of 4 syllable *Christian jargon* that no one outside the family of faith can understand. Well here, have a listen for yourself ...

Show excerpt from Just Walk Across the Room Four Week Experience DVD

Clip: Message Video Excerpt, Week 3, part 1

Fourth and finally, faith stories derail when ..please hear me on this...your faith story will derail, blow up, and leave a trail of smoke a mile long if you *play the superiority card*. If you act like you have your act perfectly together and the listener is somehow inferior to you, your headed for the ditch, ... and fast, my friend.

Show excerpt from Just Walk Across the Room Four Week experience DVD

Clip: Message Video Excerpt, Week 3, part 2 (Just press continue)

Closing

PPT Slide 18/Let's hear Your Story title slide

How about that last excerpt. Anyone else feeling nauseous about that guy's attitude?

Wow.. don't ever let that posture be true of you, or me. If it is ever true of me, I hereby give you permission to take me out the back and put me out of my misery.

Alright, so here's what I would like to encourage all of us to do as a congregation this week: we're going to write our stories down, each and every one of us...our individual *before-and-after faith* story.

But wait, there's more!! If you were sitting here during the last portion of the message thinking. *Wow, I wish I had somebody who would read my faith story and tell me if it hit's the mark or not ...* then this is your lucky day!

Because not only do you have the opportunity to write down your before-and-after faith story, but you also have the opportunity to e-mail it to the address that's coming up on the screen ... and from the Just Walk Across the Room Leadership team receive some, shall we say constructive feedback

PPT Slide 19/Let's Hear your story explanation & e-mail address, garvtorbet@btinternet.com

How does that sound? Good? I thought you would love that idea!!

I probably don't need to say this but we do have agreement here don't we. No "Hephzibahs" or "Beulahs" in your before and afters, no "look at me I'm Super-Christian" no eighteen page renditions – agreed.

We may not be able to reverse all of the negative perceptions that are out there about Christians, but we certainly can do our part to ensure, that as far as this congregation is concerned, we have our act together on the story front.

We can do our part to cause this community to say "The Christians in Broughty Ferry Baptist Church. They *know* how to tell God's story. And to hear them talk about what he's done in their lives ... it makes me want that type of thing for my *own* life!"

In 1 Corinthians 14: 9 it says, "If you speak in a way no one can understand, what's the point in opening your mouth?" Is that good reminder or what?

Let's do the One whose name we bear proud as we work hard to hone and shape and sharpen our before-and-after stories, shall we? Send in your hundred-words-or-less written in a clear, succinct, humble, simple, manner, and have an open heart to a little feedback. Stay the course until your story is ready to face the world and then go tell it confidently as often as God gives you the opportunity, and for His glory. Amen.

PPT Slide 20/Just Walk campaign graphic, Week 3.