

West Valley Presbyterian Church
EVANGELISM II
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All of us have been to Subway at one time or another...

What's your favorite sandwich? It's a great place to go, and because Tim and I hang out with baseball teams a lot we frequent subways a lot. It's cheap, quick, easy and you get a lot...

Usually Jonathan will order the "foot-long" subway sandwich – which is a lot for a little bit of money. However in Perth Australia Matt Corby is the first teen to ever post an image of a footlong subway sandwich that was less than a foot-long.

(IMAGE)

With the posting of the picture, Corby touched off a social media feeding frenzy amid claims of fraud and false advertising. Did you ever measure your footlong Subway sandwich? Try it sometime...What was Subway's response to the controversy?

"With regards to the size of the bread and calling it a foot long, "SUBWAY FOOTLONG" is a registered trademark as a descriptive name for the sub sold in Subway Restaurants and not intended to be a measurement of length."

Critics of the response point to Subway ads which clearly imply a literal 12" bun!

Well the reason I mention this is that we are in the second of three Sundays on evangelism asking the questions about how do we share our faith – how do we do this? Next Sunday we are going to be talking about, how do we share our faith through mission. Next Sunday is Mission Sunday, and I invite you to come out and learn some of the cool things that are happening as we reach out to the community and internationally with the love of Jesus. And last Sunday I asked everyone here to fill out an orange piece of paper in order to answer the question **"What is the one thing that keeps you from sharing Christ with others?"**

And do you know what the primary response was? **FEAR**...that word fear keeps us from doing so many things...and there were **two major reasons for the fear** and the first one was...**a. "I don't measure up."** I am afraid to share my faith because I don't measure up, just like that Subway footlong. I say I am a Christian but I am a bad example.

Or someone else said...I am a poor example because I don't know all the answers if someone were to ask me,
Someone even said "I cant talk about my faith because I am not like Jesus"
All these statements were about not being good enough.
So I want to find out right now who is good enough? Who of us is just like Jesus? Just put your hand in the air if you think you are. That's a pretty impossible standard. That's why I gave you the definition of evangelism that comes straight from AA last...

One beggar showing another beggar where the bread is

Cause the truth is **none of us measure up**. All of us are broken and sinful saved by grace. Not one of us is really a footlong sub...we may be growing into one...the word Christian means "little Christ's" – not huge big perfect ones - all of us fall far short of being like Jesus – what an impossible standard that is!

As I said, several people said they didn't measure up because they didn't know all the answers to the questions people might ask if they began to share their faith.

So what if you don't know all the answers? No one does.

We talked about **sharing our stories with others – what God has done in our lives - is the most effective means of sharing our faith**. And let's say someone comes back and says "Yeah, that's a great story, but if there really was is a good God why is there so much suffering in the world?"

That is one of the most common questions...and you can get really nervous at that one...

What's the answer? It's a huge question. You can't think fast enough. What should I say? How can I respond? That feeling of not measuring up with all the right answers looms large. *This is what you feared would happen! This is why you don't share your faith to begin with!*

Well let me suggest that it might be ok to say – **I don't know**. *Volumes have been written about this question. It's a great question. Its even a question that people who followed God in the Bible asked God all the time...its all through scripture. All I know is that I have had a glimpse of who God is and it has changed my life. And I try to do my best to alleviate suffering in the world...just like Jesus did. But I can't give you an easy answer to that one...I can share with you some books that grapple with this issue. But I can't answer it simply*

That's authenticity. That's humility. That's being real. Isn't it? We don't know all the answers. But we have seen Jesus in our lives in one way or

another, and it has changed us, touched us, made us realize that there is another reality and a God who loves us...

Not knowing the answers to certain questions doesn't mean we shouldn't share our faith with others. Not knowing the answers to certain questions doesn't mean we are disqualified from being witnesses.

As broken sinful people who don't measure up...we are called by Christ to share the good news – the gospel – (it was his last words to us) and in doing so we trust in God's ability to make our frail words come to life for someone – Cause as we said last week, someones changed heart has nothing to do with us...it is not about our own ability to be super knowledgeable, super Christian, super spiritual or whatever we think we need to be.

“My grace is sufficient for you,” says the Lord to Paul. “Because my power is made perfect in your weakness.”

So that is the groundwork...that is the foundation...authenticity, humility and sharing our stories. Not one of us measure up...not one.

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” But God still says, I'll use whatever you give in love to bring me glory.

The second primary reason that people don't share their faith, according to the little orange papers that you all filled out last Sunday – which by the way mirrors a national poll that was done – our results were the same - is **b.I don't want to be rejected**. It makes sense.

We live in a distrustful hostile culture. But it isn't the only time that the church has faced distrust and hostility. Now, in certain times God, religion, church enjoyed the general respect of the culture. Not today. Religion is suspect, church is weird, and Christians are seen as hypocrites.

Distrust has become the norm and people are tired of the “sales tactics” often employed by Christians and the bait and switch attempts at introducing them to Jesus.

So if we live in an environment of distrust and suspicion based on many mistakes the church has made in this era and down through history (although its done an awful lot of good too)

The basic task and the first step that we have before us then is to rekindle trust. I am not saying this is easy. All of this takes time and effort. But here's some basics on how to build the foundation of trust with others who are hostile to me because I believe. If I am rejected because I talk about God (which was the biggest fear on those orange slips of paper)...if I am rejected because, I come to church, I pray...what do I do in response to this rejection?

You will always have two choices. And the way I have laid it out here, the first is a human reaction...the second is more of a Jesus reaction...and because tend to knee jerk to the human reaction the other – which is more of the Jesus reaction - takes a little more effort

1. **Defensiveness vs. Prayer:** If we are rejected, because we share our faith, we can either get defensive, or we can start to pray for that person, for their life circumstances, for their well being. Nothing is so powerful as leaning into caring for someone who rejects you. Prayer is one way to do that.

We can also go to prayer and ask God to soften our hearts. We can admit to God that we are irritated by the persons distrust and we can bring our defensiveness to God. We can pray “Jesus, you love this person enough to give your life for him/her. Please infuse my heart with your love and passion for them. Help me see them the way you see them.” When you feel the urge to defend, pray.

2. **Seeing ourselves as the victim (the one who is rejected) vs. learning the persons language** (we need to know more about this person)

In 2001, a man in New York City went to the top of a building and threatened to jump off. **(IMAGE)** He had a problem with his girlfriend and thought life wasn't worth living anymore. Policemen tried using a bullhorn to send a loud message to him. But he didn't react! No matter what they said it seemed to be to no avail. Then they realized... the man couldn't hear a word they were saying. He was deaf!

One policeman realized the problem and tried a different tactic. He had been a volunteer teacher of sign language in a deaf school. He went to the top of the building and by using sign language, signaled a message to him which convinced him to not jump. How was he able to reach him when the other policemen failed? He knew how to speak his language.

Sometimes we simply need to understand a little bit more about someone in order to communicate effectively. We need to learn about someone's distrust – where it comes from, what has happened to them. Instead of feeling offended by someone we can choose to enjoy and accept them. We can even **allow God to captivate us with interest as we learn their *WHOLE STORY*.**

Jesus did this all the time. He let people capture his complete attention. He was genuinely interested in the stories people had to share. Time and again, one on one with people, he listened, and he listened well. If you think about it, Jesus had crowds following, but much of his most intense and transformational ministry was done one on one. He was intrigued with people's uniqueness and he leaned into their lives and gave his heart and finally gave his life.

People can smell a fake a mile away. You can't pretend to be interested if you are not. You can't pretend to listen if you are preoccupied. It won't work. (matter for prayer)

When you are feeling hurt or bruised, lean into learning more about someone and try to enjoy the process. Be intrigued...people are fascinating and their stories rich and full of design...no one is alike... choose to learn more, rather than withdraw...

c.Avoidance vs. Bonding

There was this woman we used to live next to when our kids were small. She knew me a little because we had chatted when we moved in...she did not go to church – she made that clear to me when she found out I was a pastor...but she seemed pleasant enough. Then came garbage day. Garbage day was on a Monday...and that is when she started hating me - every Monday when we put out the trash she had one little bag of garbage, like the size of a plastic Safeway bag – tied neatly at the top - now costing us all 10 cents in San Jose -, and I had mountains of black garbage bags reaching to the sky, overflowing from our trash can...three small children, two years apart, 6 mos., 2 & 4 can do that to you. She would glare at me when I took out the trash...and finally came over to me one day when we met at the curb and asked in a rather condescending way..."*I would think with your position working in the church that, you would recycle and be more socially responsible for the environment. You really should have a compost heap.*"

A compost heap. I was barely sane at that time in my life. I was living on two hours of sleep with my kids who were sick, or had nightmares, or simply would wake me up. I looked at her with bleary eyes and said... I do recycle, I snapped back...and this is what's left over...ok? Now the truth was, I really didn't recycle as meticulously as I should.

But what did I do after that? I avoided her.

That's what we do, right? That's the human reaction...the angst in us that responds when someone hurts our feelings. But rather than taking steps backward from others...try doing the opposite. Take some

kingdom steps forward. Start intentionally spending time with these folks that you might knee yourself away from. We can combat avoidance with bonding.

So nudged by the Holy Spirit I went over to her one day and began to ask her about her gardening. She had this perfect yard and mine was full of plastic toys and had it had weeds. But I commented about her pinwheel in the front yard, which I actually thought was rather awesome, (this duck thing) and then I asked whether or not her family was coming for the long weekend. She began to talk to me about her family then, her late husband, and all that he did for the community, and how much she missed him. Through this interaction we became friends and the antagonism gradually began to dissolve, and I began to recycle better. One day she said to me “I think I might like to come to your church sometime.” I was shocked. From avoidance to bonding...what a great transformation!

3. **Judging vs. Affirming**

Many many people see the church as a judgment hall, rather than a hospital for sinners, which is what we are. When I sit next to someone on the airplane, and they ask me what I do, you know what I say? I say, I'm a writer. You know why? If I say I am a pastor all sorts of weird stuff usually happens.

People either get this deer in the headlights stare and don't talk to me anymore...or they start telling me what they aren't doing that they feel they should be doing. Like “*I haven't gone to church in ages*”...or “*I just got a divorce and I haven't prayed since*”...or “*I guess you think I've had a few too many drinks on this airplane ride, huh?*” People immediately feel guilty.

But in the scripture we read today, Acts 17, Paul is standing in a place that is full of idols addressing the Athenians. He is in a town that is as pagan as they come – and for intents and purposes some of us here might have blasted them all to hell... And what does Paul do? He finds a statue that says on it, “**To An Unknown God**”and he uses that statue as his lead in to sharing who Jesus is. He meets that pagan city right where they are...and then he affirms them...He works hard to find something good in this practice of theirs which is full of immorality, and terrible kinds of sacrifices...instead of condemning them he says, “**I see that in every way you are very religious.**”

DON Everts says in his excellent book on sharing our faith called “**Once I was Lost**” (talks about the value of affirmation for others and I quote...

I think we might be surprised if God showed us today how many of our non-Christian friends' values are worth affirming; the Muslim coworkers sacrificial weekend involvement in caring for the poor, the spiritual impulses of the Buddhist faith, or the real humility of the stoned guy next door before nature, or the amazing parenting skills of the mom who dabbles in Wicca.

What you have to remember is that where there is distrust to begin with, our aloofness can come across as judgment. We have the power to combat this by looking for good in people (not faking it...but really finding something good) and affirming it. We can make a habit of that, and that habit builds trust with others.

Finally...

4. Arguing vs. Welcoming

All out debate usually happens with family, extended family or people who are really close to us. When we feel the temptation to argue against the family member who doesn't trust us because we are Christians we can choose instead to welcome them into our life. We can welcome them with open arms into our world. This habit is vulnerable and risky, but it has a way of disarming, and it is the Jesus way.

In John 1, some of Jesus' followers are asking him questions about where he is staying and who he is..., and instead of just answering them with words, he declares..."**Come and see**". They are curious about him and he invites them into his world. They get to come and see, get to know him by seeing who he really is. As Everts states, "**Come and see**" is **one of the most authentic, transparent gifts we can give. It is better than any pat answer we might offer.**"

When I was at Hawaiian Islands Ministries – two months ago – a large conference of about 4,000 people...Francis Chan was speaking. And he shared how he opened his home to some guy who had just come out of prison – met Christ in prison evidently – he said he was changed but who knows, and he was back with his family and couldn't find a place to live because of his prison record. Francis tried to help him to no avail, and then nudged by the Holy Spirit he felt led to invite this guy with 5 or 6 kids and a wife to come live with him for awhile. Huge risk...but he followed through...he did a "Come and see" – I will invite you into my life. And he strengthened this man's faith...and the man saw how Francis and his family lived...

Today because of what Francis did for this guy, who couldn't find a place to live – who could have ended up homeless and who could have gone

back on drugs and lost his faith – has a powerful street ministry to kids up in San Francisco.

I want to encourage you today to be in the Lord's service, but not in the Lord's secret service. Build trust with people that Jesus loves, get to know them, and then as the Holy Spirit leads you share your faith using the principles I described to you today. As Peter Marshall said long ago,

' It is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed, than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail.' Better to fail while serving God than to win while serving oneself. Better to die sharing the Gospel than to live denying the Christ who purchased us. Let us not let compromise eclipse courage."

Let us say the words of the scripture together before we close in prayer... these are God's words to you today...

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Deuteronomy 31:5-7