

Walking with God by Helping Others Walk with Him

Does anyone else here have a hard time sharing their faith? I can preach the truth boldly in a sermon, but get me alone with someone and I can trip all over my tongue. It can be hard to share your faith. We don't know what to say. We don't know how to explain it.

Let me tell you how big of a problem this really is. In the United States, it takes 85 church members to reach 1 person for Christ every year. That means only 1 person a year becomes a Christian for every 85 people that go to church. So a church of 85 people will have 1 baptism a year. That's pathetic.

Let me put some more practical handles on this. In the course of a year, only 21% of active churchgoers invite anyone to church. And those Christians who do invite people to church are usually inviting other Christians who already go to church somewhere. Only 2% invite a non-Christian person to church.

The problem is we know this is something we should do. Jesus says that if we remain in him, we will bear much fruit. As we wrap up this series on walking with God, one of the most important things we can do in our walk with God is to help others walk with God too. Walking with God is a journey we should never make alone. So how do we make this spiritual habit a part of our lives?

There are several different ways we could approach this. One is the obedience angle. God commands it so we better do it. Jesus said, "Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Now if you are going to be a good Christian, you must obey, so get out there and share your faith. But you know what, we already know that. We already know that we should say something to Jill at work, especially when she says things like, "There has to be more to life than working everyday and getting a paycheck every week." We know what we should do, but we still don't do it.

We could approach it from the guilt angle. A lot of preacher can lay on a heavy duty guilt trip. Look if you don't share your faith your friends, your family, they're all going to burn in hell. And it's all going to be your fault. Just think of how hard it will be on judgment day to see your uncle, your co-worker, your neighbor thrown into hell all because you didn't share Jesus. You know what though; I think most of us already feel guilty. We already feel bad about not sharing our faith like we should. Anyway, guilt never works well in the long term.

We could approach it from the education angle. If you just had the right knowledge and the right resources you would all be good witnesses. If you had the right tools. We could hold a workshop and give you workbooks and teach you the four spiritual laws or the Romans Road, or the Peace Treaty. If you just had the right system for sharing your faith you would all be evangelism pros. But the reason we don't talk to uncle Joe is not because we don't know what to say. We know what we should say to him, but still we don't talk about anything more important than who's going to win the NCAA tournament.

I think the main reason why we don't share Jesus with other people is because we're scared. We're scared we won't know what to say. We're scared we won't be understood. We're scared that we will look stupid. We're scared that people will think we're some kind of kook. We're afraid of losing our friends and alienating our loved ones. We're afraid of rejection. We're scared they'll ask us a question that we won't be able to answer. It's time for some real openness and honesty here this morning. One of the first steps in overcoming your fear is admitting it, how many of us have times we know we should say something, we would like to say something, but we're scared? It happens to most of us.

I want to share some information with you this morning that I hope will be very helpful. I personally found encouraging. No drill sergeant routine, no guilt trips, and no notebooks stuffed with papers, just some good practical, insight.

Thom Rainer, researcher and church consultant, wrote a book called *The Unchurched Next Door*. I found it helpful, because it showed in very concrete terms that the things that scare us most about sharing Jesus, don't usually happen. We have a lot more reasons to be hopeful rather than fearful.

Thom and his team of researchers spent 2 years interviewing hundreds and hundreds of non-Christians. They asked them all kinds of questions about their beliefs and their thoughts on Jesus and the church and Christians. After all of this, they compiled their information and the results I think are quite revealing and encouraging.

In one way the results were exactly as expected, because they fit so precisely with what Jesus told us. In Luke 8:4-15 Jesus tells what is often called the parable of the sower. However, the story is less about the sower of the seeds, and more about the soil on which the seeds fall.

Luke 8:4-8

5 "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. 6 Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." NIV

Not everyone hears and receives the good news of Jesus Christ the same way. People have different responses and different levels of receptivity. Some eagerly receive while others are much more resistant. What Thom Rainer and his researchers found was that non-Christian Americans fall into different faith stages, as he calls them. The stages reflect various levels of receptivity to the gospel. What's surprising is that very few non-Christians fall into the category we think they would. We tend to view non-Christians as fire-breathing pagans who want to have nothing to do with Jesus, the church, or Christians, however, nothing could be further from the truth.

Thom divides the faith stages into five groups he calls U5, U4, U3, U2, and U1, each one representing a different faith stage of the unchurched. Instead of telling you about each faith

stage, I thought I would interview someone from each stage. So I have five special guests here this morning.

U5 – Highly Resistant

I thought we'd begin with the most challenging. I happy to have with us this morning Mr. Unchurched #5. Mr. U5 is highly resistant to the gospel. In fact, he is very antagonistic toward anything having to do with Jesus or the church. He used to claim that he was an agnostic, but today proudly wears his atheist label. He is like Demetrius, a silversmith in Ephesus we read about in Acts 19. He led an organized opposition to Paul and the Church.

Mr. U5 is why many Christians are afraid to share their faith, but don't let that intimidate you. We might think Mr. U5 represents a large portion of the non-Christian population, but in truth only 5% of people feel the same way as Mr. U5. Good morning, Mr. U5, thank you for joining us. Please tell us if you have ever considered becoming a Christian.

Sure I've considered it, and rejected it a long time ago. Why anyone would want to subject their lives to such primitive thinking and live according to such antiquated ideas is beyond me. I'll have you know I have a doctorate from a highly prestigious university. I've studied under the most learned professors and I've read the most respected philosophers, and there are just too many solid objections to Christianity. I'm not going to buy into any of those old wives' tales.

The Bible is a book of myths and legends and science has disproved most of its claims. If you ask me Christianity is just a crutch for weak-minded people. There's no way an intelligent, reasonable, logical person can accept its teaching. No Christians has ever shown me how their faith makes sense from a rational point of view.

Well thank you, Mr. U5, that was....uh...quite informative. He would certainly be one tough nut to crack. He's also why many Christians are afraid to share their faith, but know this, Mr. U5 is not your typical non-Christian person. He represents only a small minority, only 5% of non-Christians are like Mr. U5.

U4 - Resistant

Our next guest this morning is Mr. U4. There are 37 million U4s in our country. That is 21% of all non-Christians. Mr. U4 reminds me of King Agrippa in Acts 26 who was willing to hear the apostle Paul explain the gospel, but afterwards replied, "*Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?*" Mr. U4 isn't opposed to faith per se, but he is personally resistant to the gospel. I wonder why that is. Perhaps we could find out. Good morning Mr. U4. Thank you for joining us, and might I ask what you have there, what is that you're looking at.

This is my list. Yep my list. It is my list of every Christian who has ever let me down, every Christian who has failed to live up to what they profess to believe. You wouldn't believe how many times Christians have done me wrong. They're all hypocrites you know. And the thing that really bugs me, is they claim to be the only ones who are right. How can you claim that believing

in Jesus is the only way? What about Buddhists, or Muslims? They're sincere. They follow with all of their heart. Who are Christians to say that their way is any more true than theirs?

I don't have any problem with God or Jesus. I believe there must be some sort of higher power, and Jesus...he's one of the greatest men who ever lived. The things he taught, and the way he lived his life...Incredible! I've got no problem with Jesus. It's his fan club I can't stand. They don't do as he taught. They don't live as he lived, and then they go around telling others their way isn't right. They have no tolerance. Don't get wrong. I'm a spiritual person. I even pray sometimes, you know, just to be safe. You never know who may be listening. But show me a real, genuine Christian... Maybe then I'd listen. Show me a church that isn't full of a bunch of phonies, then maybe I'd go.

Mr. U4, I'm sorry that you've had such negative experiences with Christians. Of course we are all sinners. We all have fallen short of what God wants for our lives. But I know many people whose lives have been genuinely transformed because of Jesus. No, they're not perfect, but they are truly changed. You need to meet some of them. Maybe we can talk later.

U3 - Neutral

Our next guest this morning is Mr. U3. He doesn't appear to be open to the gospel, but he doesn't seem opposed to it either. He could best be described as neutral. 36% of non-Christians feel this way. That's 57 million U3s in the U.S. In many ways Mr. U3 is like men of Athens in Acts 17:32 They were more than ready to discuss Jesus, but not ready to act on Him just yet. Let's see what he has to say about Jesus and the Christian faith. Thank you for joining us Mr. U3....Mr. U3....Ahem! Mr U3 what are you doing there?

Oh! Excuse me. I'm sorry, it's just that I'm so busy. I have meetings I need to reschedule, emails I have to answer. The big deal's closing tomorrow so I need to have all my ducks in a row. You know we get that deal closed, and I think I'm a shoo in for that big promotion. Excuse me? What's that?...Oh yes, Jesus, uh well, I can't say as I've given it a lot of thought. I suppose Jesus is just alright for those who have time for that sort of thing, but I'm rather busy. There's some Christians at my office, they're alright, especially Jones, he's one of the neatest people I know. Honest too. That guy will always shoot straight with you, but he'll never get the promotion. He just doesn't have the dedication and the drive. He doesn't take on the extra assignments, wants to spend time with his family. Turns down some extra hours too, volunteers for some deal at his church. He'll never make it to the top like that. Come to think of it, he talks a lot about his church. Seems like a real neat place. I wouldn't mind going with him some time, if he asked me. Probably thinks I'm too busy, but on a Sunday morning...yeah I could probably go. Anyway I'd love to talk to you more, but I just got another important message. Look I've got to reply to this.

Best of luck to you then Mr. U3. I hope you get...that....promotion. Goodbye!!!

U2 - Receptive

Let's see next we have...Oh, of course, Mr. U2. Mr. U2 is receptive to the gospel and he is very curious about the church and the Christian faith. He just needs a little bit of guidance. He

represents 27% of the non-Christian population. That's 43 million people in the United States. He is very much like the Philippian Jailer in Acts 16 who was ready and willing to hear the good news about Jesus, given the right situation.

HELLO! MR. U2. WHAT ARE YOU LISTENING TO THERE. It looks like some...U2...Well, surprise, surprise!

WHAT? I'm sorry, excuse me. It's just that...well these lyrics. He sings, "You broke the bonds. You loosed the chains. You carried the cross and all my shame. You know I believe it." He all the time singing about God and Jesus and spiritual stuff. It's really got me thinking you know. I mean I know there has to be this spiritual dimension to life, but what does Jesus and the church have to do with it all? I'm just not sure. I know some Christians who aren't very spiritual people.

I pray and I hope that God is listening. Sometimes I read my Bible but a lot of it really confuses me. I just wish someone could explain it to me. I'd like to go to church, but I don't want to just show up, you know? I'm not sure I'd fit in there, and I really don't know what I'm supposed to do there, but I have a lot of questions that I'd really like to get answered.

I know just the person you need to talk to. He has a Bible study in his home, and he's the perfect person to ask these questions to. Let me give him a call

U1 – Highly Receptive

Last but not least is Mr. U1. Mr. U1 is highly receptive to the gospel. He just needs to be told. If a Christian would take the time to just invite them to church and explain the gospel to them, he would become a Christian. 11% of non-Christians are U1s. That's 17 million people who are very close to receiving Jesus as their Lord and Savior, if someone will just take the time to share Jesus with them. The U1 is much like the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. He's very interested in the things of God. He prays. He reads his Bible. He just needs someone to answer his questions and explain it to him. Thank you for joining us this morning Mr. U1

Thank you for having me. I'm really excited about this opportunity. I've been praying that God would show himself to me, and I can almost feel him reaching out to me. And I've been reading my Bible a lot lately, and when I read it it's almost like He's speaking right to me. There's still so much I don't understand, and I have so many questions, but I just know I need to do something with my life. I can't stay where I am. I need something more, something deeper. I just need someone who can show me clearly what I need to do. I would really like to live like God wants me to, but I just don't know if I can be good enough. I was really hoping you could help me.

I'd be happy to talk to you Mr. U1. In fact, as soon as I can have a few words with this group right here, I'd love to spend some time with you.

I hope this gives you some understanding and appreciation for where the non-Christian people that you live next to, that you work with, that you celebrate the holidays with are coming from. I hope it might also help you overcome some of your fear in sharing Christ with others.

Before we close this morning, let me offer some pointers that will help you talk to the nonbelievers in your life.

1. Invite someone to church. More than 70% of non-Christian people, according to their own responses, are at least *somewhat likely* to attend a church service or Christian oriented event if you just invite them. More than 40% are *very likely* to attend if you invite them. The reason they don't come is because we don't ask them. This is unfortunate because as Thom Rainer shares in his book that the single most effective thing we can do is invite someone to church or a Bible study.

There's a lot of things you don't have to do. You don't have to wear a sandwich board that says, "The End is Near." You don't have to knock on the doors of stranger's homes. You don't have to shove literature in people's faces. You don't have to wag a condemning finger at lost people and yell through a bullhorn, "You are going to hell." All you need to do is invite them to church.

2. Don't be afraid to talk about spiritual matters. Many times Christians are more afraid to talk about spiritual matters than non-Christians. The old rule says don't talk about politics or religion. But many people today are eager to talk about spiritual things. Most non-Christians, the U3s, the U2s, and the U1s are open to talking about eternity, heaven and hell, church, your faith, the Bible and other spiritual matters. And you would be amazed how easily some of these things can be worked into everyday conversations if we only wanted to. And this can be done without being pushy, in your face, shoving down their throat, or hitting them over the head with it.

3. Build Genuine Personal Friendships One of the most common complaints or criticisms of non-Christians is that Christians are phony, that their hypocrites. Many non-Christians believe they've been hurt or let down by Christians in some way. What they really need is an authentic friendship with someone of genuine faith. This doesn't mean you have to be perfect. It just means you need to be sincere and genuine. This will open their hearts and minds to spiritual truth more than anything.

The sad reality is that once someone has been a Christian for 3 years most, if not all of their close friendships are with other Christians. We need to be very intentional about building relationships with neighbors and co-workers who are not Christian. We can't share Christ with non-Christians if we don't spend time with them. If we want them to spend time with us, we need to go spend time with them.