

Cross Culture

God's Work, Our Work

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God's Work, Our Work **John 5:17-20**

If you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to John 5. So, I'm going to show a little grace and give you another week if you've not got your homework in without counting it off as late, okay? So, if you can get it in this week, that would be great. The assignment was in 100 words or less sharing your story about the difference Christ has made in our life. I'd like to share some of the stories. It's been incredible. I'm reading every single one of these stories. It's just been a great encouragement for me to read different stories of what Christ has done in different people's lives all across this room.

I want to read some of these stories to you. Just concise pictures...45 seconds or less basically...of what Christ has done in people's lives all across this faith family. I'm going to put them up here on the screen too so you can follow along. One person said:

For years life revolved around me, what I could do, what I could build, what I could be, what I could have. I had everything that life could offer, and still there was something missing. It wasn't until a friend asked me if I knew where I would spend eternity that things began to change. I had been a member of the church since childhood. I believed who Jesus was but had never really trusted Him with my life present or future. As I began to trust Him, I learned that He proves Himself faithful every step of the way.

Just a short concise picture of here is what Christ has done in my life. The next one:

At one time, there was a deep void in my life. I tried to fill that emptiness with relationships, material things, and even other people's approval. However, there was a point when I came to realize that this void could only be filled by one person, Jesus Christ. Through an intimate, growing relationship with Him, He has made me whole and complete.

The next one:

The loss of my dad when I was young sent my family spinning out of control. No matter how hard I tried, I could not fix what was wrong in our lives. So, I tried desperately to make all that was wrong in my life right. Being right became my goal. It didn't take me long to realize that my best shot at being right was, without God, was terribly wrong. Meeting Jesus, I found that He took all that was left of me and made me right before Him. Telling others is now more than my right, it's my privilege.

All of these show a different picture, a little different angle on what Christ has done in each of our lives. This person writes:

I like maps. I always have. There's something about being able to plan my

life, which gives me security and joy. One day I realized the map for my life had many blank spaces. The things moved and it wasn't very reliable. I wondered if God had a better map. A friend explained to me that He did, and that it was the Bible. While reading the Bible, I realized that in order to follow God's map, I needed to trust Jesus and live according to His plans. Since trusting Jesus, I now have genuine security and joy knowing Him personally.

Two more. One person writes:

My life used to be described by the word rebellion. My family and I moved around a lot and therefore I was always the new girl doing whatever it took to fit in. Through a series of difficult circumstances at a pivotal time in my life, I was forced to examine who I really was. I didn't like it. God began to work on me through His Word. Through significant people in my life, I realized that if I believed in who He was and what He had done for me, I would become a new creation. I'm proud to say that I believed in Him and my life has been forever changed.

One more:

My life was plagued by shame: Shame of a dysfunctional family, unrealized dreams, bitterness, and wrong choices. I thought that I didn't deserve to be loved, but I desperately wanted love anyway. I met God, and He took that shame away. I discovered that Jesus died to take my shame away and replace it with honor. Today, God continues to turn my focus to Him and Him alone. No longer is shame the center of my life. Each day God loves me unconditionally, and I get the opportunity to love Him back.

We're going to post some of these online as you're working on yours to think through, and if you missed last week, then you need to go back and you need to dive into that sermon. During our time together, we studied our stories, how our story fits into God's story. What we're doing is thinking through, "Okay, if we have a minute to share with another person what Christ has done in our lives, how are we going to maximize that minute?" We're doing this because it's worth doing this, because it's important to do this. If we're going to be good at anything, we need to be good at telling other people about what Jesus has done in our lives. Unfortunately, though, that's not normally the case. So, we want to get to that point.

What I'd like for us to do today is take a step deeper going from God's story and our story to God's work and our work. Now, what I want to do this morning is I want us to talk about, what I believe, is the most important thing in any approach to sharing our faith.

Now, we talked last week about all of the new evangelistic fads and evangelistic approaches that are out there. Again, I would reiterate that those are not necessarily bad. If people are coming to Christ through those, then who am I to criticize that? However, there's something that's missing in a lot of those that I think is the most important element in what it means to share our faith. What I want to propose to you this morning is that the most important thing, the most important value, we have when it comes to sharing our faith is simple cooperation with the Holy Spirit of God. The most important thing in any approach to how we are going to share our faith is cooperation with the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, some of you are thinking, "Well, duh, that's easy. Thanks for stating the obvious this morning Dave." Well, I think it's missing. I think we've created a situation where success in

sharing our faith is defined by whether or not we get through the Roman Road, whether or not we get through "The Four Spiritual Laws," whether or not we get through our story...all four volumes of it...whether or not we get through all of these things, and then, we get somebody to cross the finish line, seal the deal, sign the box, pray the prayer, now we've been successful in evangelism.

What I would like to propose to you this morning though is that it may be successful in evangelism to walk away from a conversation not even saying a thing, if, maybe, the Holy Spirit is leading us to do exactly that.

Now, you're thinking, "Well, wait a second Dave. Maybe you've gone out on a limb a little bit." However, what if the Holy Spirit of God works differently in different people's lives at different times? What if our responsibility, first and foremost, is simply just to join in what He's already doing, and if that means sharing our story in an hour long conversation, then so be it? If that means leading someone to pray and give their heart to Christ, then so be it. However, if that means staying quiet and doing something else then so be it.

I'm not trying to knock evangelism methods, but I am saying this: the Holy Spirit will bust our evangelism methods time after time after time. I wish I could say that sharing our faith is predictable. I wish I could say, "Say these things and you're in. It'll get them to cross the finish line." However, that's just not the way it works. In Scripture, it's not the way it works. Every time we see Jesus interacting with different people, He's saying different things. He's taking different approaches to how His Father loves different people. We see Paul doing the same thing in the New Testament. So, instead of giving you an outline and saying, "You say these things and you're in," my goal is for us to get our lives in touch with the Holy Spirit of God and what the Holy Spirit of God is doing around us and join with Him in what He's already doing.

Some of you are thinking, "Well, that sounds a little vague. Give me something concrete, Dave. I don't just need you telling me about how I need to obey the Holy Spirit. What does that mean?" Well, that's what I want us to do this morning. I want us to dive in. We're going to look, first, at Jesus' life and ministry, and I want us to see how He cooperated with God the Father in His work on this earth. Then, I'd like for us to bridge from that picture to see how that relates to our lives across this room.

Look with me at John 5:16. The context in this passage is Jesus heals a guy who hasn't walked, and then, some religious leaders get mad at this guy because he's carrying his mat around on the Sabbath day. Things are a little backwards, and so, they come after Jesus, and they're basically attacking Him for healing somebody on the Sabbath. Far be it to help a guy walk on the Sabbath. So, verse 16 Jesus begins to respond. It says,

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father

judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."

Now, in this response to these religious leaders, tucked away in the middle of this is an incredible description of how Jesus, when He was on earth, related to the Father. What I want us to see are five truths...five principles that guided Jesus' involvement in God's work. Then, we are going to make the bridge to us. However, let's think about Jesus for a second.

God's Work ...

Jesus knew God the Father was at work.

Based on the text we just read, really focusing in on verses 17 and 19 and 20, I want us to see how Jesus related to the Father. Think about God's work in these truths. First of all, Jesus knew God the Father was at work. Verse 17, *"My Father is always at his work to this very day..."* What we saw last week was that sin entered into the world, and right at the entrance of sin in the world, God began seeking after the guilty. He began covering the shameful. He began protecting the fearful. He was seeking after man in his sin from the very beginning in Genesis 3, and He's been doing it ever since. That's what Jesus is saying. God is always...*"My Father is always working."* He's always drawing people to Himself.

I would submit the same thing is true today. The Father is working. Jesus knew that. Jesus knew that He didn't have to initiate any work. It was the Father who was already working, and He was joining with Him. So, His defense to these religious leaders is, basically, "Well, my Father is doing something, and so, I do something. I do what He does." He knew the Father was always at work drawing men to Himself. That's the first truth.

Jesus knew that apart from the Father He could do nothing.

The second truth: Jesus knew that apart from the Father He could do nothing. When you get down to verse 19, it says Jesus told them, *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself..."* That's quite a statement. This is Jesus Himself saying He can not do anything...nothing pretty much covers it; that's all of it. He says, *"I can't do anything apart from the Father."*

Now, this is emphasized over and over and over again throughout the book of John. Let me take you on a quick tour. Turn to John 5:30. You might underline these. These are where Jesus is expressing His dependence on the Father. Listen to John 5:30, *"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."*

Now, turn over two chapters to John 7:28. Again, Jesus is teaching here, and He talks about His dependence on the Father. He says in verse 28, *"Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, 'Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true.'" In other words, "I'm here because of Him."* Look over in John 8. Very next chapter, verse 28. John 8:28. Jesus, again, is explaining who He is, and He says, *"So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.'"*

Let me show you one more. Look over in John 14. John 14. Look at verse 10. John 14:10. This is Jesus explaining to His disciples His relationship with the Father. This is what He

says. He says, *"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."*

He says, "Apart from the Father I can do nothing. I came from Him. I do what He does. Whatever His work is is what my life is about. Apart from Him I can do nothing." He was totally dependent on the Father. Jesus says, "I can do nothing apart from Him." I want that to be an encouragement to us this morning. If we feel inadequate, if we feel like we just don't measure up to the task of sharing our faith with other people, I want to remind you that Jesus Christ Himself was not doing this independently. He was dependent too. He couldn't do it on His own. He was dependent on the Father. What an incredible statement.

Jesus watched and listened to know where and how the Father was working.

Third truth: Jesus knew that God the Father was at work; He knew that God the Father was at work, and third, Jesus watched and listened to know where and how the Father was working. When you get back to John 5:19, it says, not only can the Son do nothing by Himself; He can only do what He sees his Father doing. What you've got is a picture here...many scholars who've studied this passage a lot more than I have even talk about how you've almost got a parable in this picture of a son and his father. You have a picture of a son almost working as an apprentice in his father's craft, and he watches how his father works. He watches how his father uses his hands and does this or that and the son mimics that. The son sees what the father does. The father shows the son what he does intentionally so that the son will do the same thing.

The other night, Heather left for the evening, and so, it was Caleb and me alone. I had the responsibilities of doing all the bedtime stuff on my own. It was tough. However, as soon as mom left, Caleb was eating, and I started thinking, "All right, this is me and Caleb night." So, I started looking at him, and I just raised my hands and I was like, "Guy's night in, guy's night in." So, all of a sudden, he got a big smile on his face, and he started raising his hands, and he can't say, "Guy's night in," but he was like, "Ahhhhhh," "Ahhhhh." So, that's what we would do all night. I picked him up from dinner, and we'd walk away, and he'd be like, "Guy's night in, guy's night in!" Well, he wasn't saying it, but you got the picture. That was the whole night in the bath, "Guy's night in!" This whole picture he saw me do this and he imitated.

We know how that works with children. It's a scary thing to think about how this whole imitation thing works with children. It definitely makes you reinvestigate everything you do and everything you say. However, that's exactly the picture we're seeing here. It's the Son, Jesus, saying, "I see whatever the Father does. The Father shows me." He sees what the Father is doing. He watched and listened to see how and where the Father was working.

Jesus was committed to joining the Father wherever He was working.

Next truth: Jesus was committed to joining the Father wherever He was working. He can only do what He sees His Father doing because, whatever the Father does, the Son also does. Whatever it is. Jesus said, "Whatever my Father does, I do without question." Jesus is not doing anything independently. Jesus is not doing anything of His own will. He is doing exactly what the will of the Father is.

Go back one chapter. Look at John 4:34. Jesus said, *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."* Jesus' perspective, if you could put yourself in His shoes for a second, is that He would walk out to begin His day, and He would say, "I'm looking where the Father is at work, and I'm abandoned to join Him wherever He is working, regardless."

So, when in Luke 19, He's walking through large crowds of people, and He sees the Father working in the life of this guy named Zacchaeus who has climbed up in a tree, Jesus tunes into that and invites Zacchaeus to come down. That's ironically the same passage that shows us Luke 19:10, "*Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost.*"

Luke 8. Remember when He's walking through the crowd, He's going to heal somebody who is about to die, and He actually is dead by the time He got there. So, as He's walking through this big crowd, He, all of a sudden, stops and says, "Somebody touched my garment." His disciples are thinking that a lot of people did because you're surrounded by people. However, He knew the Father was working in this particular woman with the issue of blood, so He healed her right there.

Even if you look back at the beginning of John 4:4, there's a very interesting phrase. It says, "*Now he [Jesus] had to go through Samaria.*" Now, that's emphasized there. He had to go through Samaria. It wasn't an option for Him. However, what's interesting is the context behind John 4. He actually didn't have to go through Samaria. In fact, the common practice for Jewish men was to go around Samaria, to take a detour in order to avoid the dreaded Samaritans. You didn't want to hang out with them. You didn't need to be near them. Jesus had to go through Samaria. Why? Because the Father had an appointment set up for Him with a woman at a well there.

That led Him to say, "My food, what drives me, my sustenance is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work." Jesus was committed to join the Father wherever He was working, ultimately pictured in John 12 when He was facing the cross head on. He says, "*Father, what shall I say? Save me from this hour? No, it is for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!*" His prayer in the garden was, "Not my will, but your will." He was committed to joining the Father wherever He was working.

Jesus knew that the Father involved Him in His work because the Father loved Him.

Fifth truth: Jesus knew that the Father involved Him in His work because the Father loved Him. The picture here in verse 20 is beautiful. It says, "*The Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.*" The reason the Father shows the Son all the ways He is working is because the Father loves the Son. The reason you have this continual disclosure is because of the relationship they have together.

The word for "loves" right there in verse 20 is important. You see a couple different words for "love" that John uses throughout in the original language. You see "*agape*" love mentioned many times, and then, you see "*phileo*" love. "*Agape*" love is what we normally consider the unconditional love of God. "*Phileo*" love is more of a friendship love. In verse 20, it's actually this picture of "*phileo*." It's this picture of the Father and the Son as friends in an intimate relationship with one another, and the Father showing the Son what He does, and the Son joining in that because of the Father's disclosure.

You look back at John 3:35. Listen to the picture. Every single Gospel starts off Jesus' ministry with showing a picture of the Father's love for the Son. In the other Gospels, it's Jesus being baptized. "This is my Son whom I love. My beloved Son. In Him I am well pleased." Look at John 3:35. It says, "*The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.*" Throughout the book of John, we see John identifying Himself with the Father. John 10:30, "*I and the Father are one.*" What you see is Him emphasizing over and over again the intimate relationship He has with the Father. The Father is not keeping any secrets from Him. The Father is showing Him all that He does, and they're joining together in this work. It is an incredible picture of the Trinity here...these two persons, God the Son

and God the Father, infiltrated by God the Holy Spirit in this whole leadership process. It's incredible.

Now, you've got those truths in John 5:17-20 that pertain to Jesus. He knew God the Father was at work. He knew that apart from the Father, He could do nothing. He watched and listened to know where the Father was working. He was committed to joining the Father wherever He was working. He knew that the Father involved Him in His work because the Father loved Him.

Now, here is what I want us to do. I want us to take this picture in John 5:17-20, and I want us to make a bridge. I want us to bridge from this picture in Jesus' life, and I want to ask this question, "What if Jesus desires to have the kind of relationship with us that He has with the Father?" Although the way Jesus relates to the Father is certainly different because, well, Jesus never sinned. He perfectly did the will of the Father. Jesus was God. Those were some important things there. However, when you look at the book of John, what you will see is over and over again, Jesus is comparing His relationship with the Father to His relationship with us.

Let me show you a couple of examples. Look over in John 14. Start with me in verse 10. This is a verse we read just a second ago. Listen to how He relates His relationship to the Father to His relationship with His disciples, including us. Listen to John 14:10:

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.

What's He been doing? Whose work? The Father's work. So, anybody who has faith in Him will be doing whose work? The Father's work. "He will do..." Now, here's where it gets good. "He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Even greater things than what He did! "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

You see, Jesus is still in the business of doing his Father's work, but He's doing it through, guess who? He's doing it through us. So, now, we're involved in this picture. The Father's work in Christ through us, and as a result, 4,000 people today at The Church at Brook Hills doing greater things than these. What do you mean? You saw all that Jesus did: Healing this person, raising this person from the dead a couple of chapters before in John 11.

However, if you'll notice, He used that same terminology in John 5. He said, "to your amazement I'm going to do even greater things." Then, from there He went on to talk about how He would have the authority as the Judge of the universe to give life and to impart life. The beauty of what He is saying about what He does through us is that through us, He is imparting life to others. He is taking the gospel that has changed and transformed each and every one of our lives in this room, and His desire, His work, is to impart that life to others. He does that through us. That's why He says, "You're going to do even greater things than these." God, help us never as a church to settle for less than greater things than these.

Then, look at the very next chapter, John 15. It gets even better. Think about the Father and the Son and the Son and us. Listen to John 15:9:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

Now, listen to this. Think about this in relation to what we just read in John 5. *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* The Father shows the Son all that He is doing. The Son says, "Everything my Father shows me, I show to you." We're involved in this picture. We are not just servants. We're not in an employee-employer relationship with Jesus. We are friends and He, out of His love for us, is disclosing Himself to us and disclosing the Father's work to us out of His love for us.

So, I think we can definitely make a bridge here between Jesus' relationship with the Father, His cooperation with the Father's work, and our work because that's exactly what John is emphasizing over and over and over again. You see it again in John 17:20-23, which we studied earlier this year, about the Father in Him and Him in us. Therefore, we're all in this thing together.

Our Work ...

So, based on that, I'd like for us to think about those five truths that we see in Jesus' life in John 5. I want us to bridge to how that looks in our lives. What does this mean we need to do? If we are intended to be involved in the Father's work just as Jesus was involved in the Father's work, then what does that look like in our lives?

Be aware ...

I want to give you five words of encouragement that correspond with each of those truths that we just saw in John 5. Now, remember the first truth was that Jesus knew God the Father was at work. So, my first word of encouragement for us as the body of Christ is this: Be aware. Be aware because God is already at work in the lives of people around you. "The Father is always working, and I too am at work." We need to be aware of the fact that God is already at work all around us. This is huge.

One of the biggest obstacles sometimes we have to sharing our faith that people will think, "I just don't know how to get started. I don't know how to start a conversation that's going to lead to the gospel. I don't know how to initiate this or that." What I'd like to do is just free you up a little based on God's Word. I'd like to bring you in on a secret. He's already started the work. He's taken the initiative. Could it be, maybe, just maybe, that there are people all across this community that God's already started working in their life? That God is already seeking after them. God is already bringing them to a point where they're starting to ask questions or wonder things. Could it be that the work of sharing our faith starts with being aware that God is already at work? Now, we have the opportunity to join Him in that just like Jesus said, "My Father is always working, so I go to work with Him." He does this.

When we talked about this a little bit back in January, I used an example of when I went to India a couple years ago. In India, the city we were in, Hyderabad, India, is filled with unreached peoples. Literally, millions of people who have little or no exposure to the gospel

whatsoever. Many of them have never heard the name of Jesus. So, we would walk out into gatherings...large, public places where a lot of people would gather, such as parks, and other types of places...and we would just go around, and we would talk with people. The conviction that drove us, the prayers that drove us, when we would drive up and see just countless people in this public place, was that God is already at work. There are people that God is drawing to Himself.

Now, some of you are thinking, "Well, does that mean that God is not drawing some?" Let's not even go there. Let's just trust that God is drawing people to Himself and maybe those people are going to have an impact on some other people in the future. Maybe it's not all up to us at this very time. So, maybe, at this time, in this place, God is drawing some people to Himself, and my job is to find out where God is at work.

So, we would go around and ask people different questions and just get to know people and find out their stories and, as we found out their stories, there were certain circumstances where it was pretty obvious that this was not going anywhere, and so, we would talk for awhile, then we'd go to another person, and we would talk with them, and they would start to express some things that the gospel hits on square in the face. We'd be able to share how Jesus relates to this. The Father was already at work.

This last week, Daniel Phillips and I went out into the streets of Birmingham to ask some people some questions for some things we are going to be doing later in the series. I'll be honest with you, and I know you may not believe me on this, but by nature, I'm not an outgoing person. My wife is the outgoing person, and an ideal night for me is in the corner reading a book, and an ideal New Year's Eve is falling asleep at 12:01 on the couch. For her, it's being with people and out having a good time.

So, here's the point: This is not my specialty, and it's not Daniel's either. So, we go out, and we were talking on the way down there just thinking, "Okay, this is out of the box for us, so we're going to do it." We went up to people, and we would just say, "Hey, can we ask you a couple questions about your outlook on life?" It was amazing. People were wide open to talking about these things. There were some conversations that went longer than others, and I'll be honest. There were some people who said, "No thank you." Others didn't say it that kindly. However, there were many people who said, "Yeah, I'd love to." Then, we would start asking them some questions. Then, they started questioning us, "Well, what do you think about this? What do you think about this?" I remember one conversation with three people. They're asking me, basically, to tell them the gospel. I'm like, "Okay!" The Father is already at work. He wants to draw people to Himself. That is His work. He's initiated it all over Birmingham, and we're a faith family that gets to be involved in this picture. So, be aware. God is already at work in lives of people around you.

Be available ...

Now, the second truth we said is Jesus knew that apart from the Father He could do nothing. So, the second word of encouragement is this: Don't just be aware, but be available. God desires to include you in His work. Now, here's what I want us to think about. What if you woke up tomorrow morning and wherever you go, whether it's into an office complex, whether it's onto a construction site, whether it's in your neighborhood, whether it's in your home, whether it's in the local grocery store, wherever you go, you have the approach and the attitude that says, "God, I'm going to believe that you are working around me, and today, I want to be available to be a part of your work." That simple. "If you open a door around me, you provide an opportunity for me to encourage somebody in their spiritual journey, then I want to be available to that." To know that He desires to include us in His work. He's invited us to be a part of His work.

So, take that approach. Take that perspective. Maybe even just this week to try that and see if our eyes might be opened up to some things that He puts in our path. The way I look at it, even in my own life, is I want to be a resource provider for people in their spiritual journeys. As people express that this is going on in their life or that is going on in their life, I want to be able to say, "Hey, I know something that can help along those lines." If people have a question, I know someone who can help.

Maybe the greatest hindrance of sharing our faith is just the feeling of inadequacy; the feeling of, "What if I get asked questions that I don't know the answers to?" We've all been in situations where somebody has asked us a question about Christ, about Christianity, about God, and we don't know the answer, and so, we walk away, and we feel dumb. We're stumped. We think, "I wish this person were here. I wish the pastor were here. He could have done a lot better than that."

So, we start to think, "You know I just can't do this thing." I want to say to you that, if those thoughts have come into your mind, I want to say to you that they are lies straight from the Adversary. I want to ask the question, "What if God puts you in that circumstance to hear that question for a reason? What if He knows what He's doing? What if He knew "X" person here or "X" person there could have been in that conversation? However, what if He chose you to be in that conversation? Not so that you would walk away and say, "I'm stumped; I can't do this." Because whenever we walk away with this overwhelming sense of our inadequacy, it hinders other opportunities in the future, because now we just think, "I'm going to get another opportunity that I don't know what to say, and I don't know what to do." It's just going to cause us to become less and less active in sharing our faith.

However, what if we said, "Okay, God, you put me in this situation for a reason. I'm going to trust in that." If we don't know the answer to a question, for example, we say, "You know, I don't know the answer to that, but I'm going to go study that, and I'm going to think about it for awhile, and I'll get back to you." What if, instead of walking away and saying, "I'm stumped. I can't do this. I'm not as smart of a Christian as I need to be", what if we got smart? What if we dove into the Word and found an answer to that question or dove into other resources and found an answer to that question, and then came back to that person and said, "I did some studying on that and here's what I found." Maybe that would suffice. Or maybe they'd say, "Well, did you think about this?" "Well, no, no, but I'll get back to you on that." So, you go and you do that.

Why would you do that? Well, here's why: Because now, believe it or not, God is using this situation to draw you deeper in your faith, to draw you closer to Him, and He's using you to help that person in their spiritual journey. You, not somebody else. Now, you're involved in God's work, and the beauty of it is He's drawing you closer to Himself through the whole process.

Now, the first thought that comes to our mind is we say, "I'm just not smart enough. I'm just not intellectual enough for this particular person." I want to remind you that sharing our faith is not an intellectual game of who's the smartest person, because if you're the smartest person in the conversation, and you're able to persuade them this way with what you say, then somebody else is going to come along who is a lot smarter than you. I know that's hard to believe, but it could be possible. Somebody else is going to be smarter than you, and they are going to convince that person something completely different. Maybe it's not a battle of who's got the highest intellect. Maybe it's a picture where the Holy Spirit is involved in drawing people to Himself, even the hardest intellects, who are completely

against God. The Holy Spirit maybe has the power to draw them to Himself through the person of Christ.

I want to give you an example of this from a member of our faith family who had a Mormon coworker come up to him and begin to share his Mormon faith. So, this guy came to me, and he said, "How do I share the gospel with this guy?" I said, "There are some really great resources that a guy named Bob Waldrep who serves with Watchman Fellowship, an extension of this local church, is involved with helping people think through regarding how to share the gospel with Mormons." So, he went and started interacting with Bob. Basically, he came back later, and he said, "Because of this study and being able to witness to a Mormon, my strength and faith in Christ is stronger and more confirmed than ever. My wife has already noticed a difference in my walk, and I praise God for this opportunity, and I thank you for your help."

However, that's not where it stopped. What he did is he kept studying some of these Mormon teachings that go against teachings about Christ in the New Testament. He began understanding more, not just what Mormons teach, but what the Bible teaches about who Jesus is. He started getting more equipped with how to share the gospel with people. This is the latest email:

Before you left for Kazakhstan, I kept you in the loop regarding the Mormons I had been witnessing to. Things were going well. I am more than excited to share with you that all my life has completely now changed over the last two months. I now not only have a passion and a desire to know God's Word more for myself, but to share and possibly one day preach His message. In the last four weeks, I have had the Holy Spirit talk through me to a non-believer. I actually had the Holy Spirit fill me in a supernatural way that was confirmed by two non-believers. I've been able to share with my brother-in-law and sister, have been able to help a fellow Christian prepare to witness to a Muslim, witness to multiple non-believers, encourage the lives and walks of people around me. I plan to meet with two different Mormon missionaries next week and attend church with them. I'm going to share within their own walls in two weeks. This is just what God has let me do in the last four weeks. What is next? I am on fire! Nothing in this world matters to me right now other than learning and sharing about God. It always sounds good to hear on Sunday, but now I believe for the first time in my life that I can and will impact the nations for the kingdom of God. God has convicted me to give up earthly things and desires that I've truly never given to Him. I'm reading His Word. I'm defending His Word. I'm memorizing Scripture, and I can't stop talking about Him to anyone and everyone. My intentions, honestly, for the first time in my life are 100 percent for God's glory and not mine. I'm finally understanding what being a Christian really means. It just doesn't mean getting to heaven. It means taking people with me. I have put on the armor of God and, quite honestly, feel untouchable because I am finally letting Him be in control and not me.

Now, that's less than six months after getting stumped by a question he didn't know. We've got two avenues we can take when we face that kind of situation. If we're available to God and put ourselves in situations, and He gives us something we are not ready to handle, we can walk away and pout and, for the rest of our Christianity, never share the gospel with anybody else because we feel inadequate. Or we can rise up and get to know God and be active in sharing His gospel and let Him transform our lives. That's exactly what this picture is because he was available, and he realized God actually desired to use him and include

him in His work. I pray that 4,000 people at The Church at Brook Hills would get a hold of the fact that God desires to include us in His work.

Be alert ...

Next word of encouragement...the third truth we saw was that Jesus watched and listened to know where and how the Father was working. So, the third word of encouragement is to be alert. Look and listen for evidence of God at work. Be alert. Ephesians 1:18 talks about praying that our eyes may be opened and enlightened to see what God is doing around us.

There is a great story. Go back and look at it in 2 Kings 6 with Elisha. Elisha is hiding out in this town and a whole army comes to, basically, attack him and kill him. That's why they've come. They've surrounded the city, and Elisha's servant looks out the window, and he sees the whole city surrounded by this attacking army. The servant comes back and says, "Elisha, what are we going to do? This is the end for us." Elisha then prays that the servant's eyes would be opened. So, the servant goes back, and he looks out the window. This time, instead of seeing all these armies out there that are about to come and get them, what he sees is the Lord's army protecting them. Elisha then finds victory among those people because of God's provision. The picture though is of his servant having a completely different perspective, seeing things through God's eyes. Be alert. Look and listen for evidence of God at work.

Now, how do we do this? You're thinking, "It's one of those vague things, Dave. How do I look and listen for evidence of God at work?" I want to remind you of a couple promises, and then, I want us to think about how this might look practically. Turn with me over to John 8. Look with me at verse 47. I want to show you two promises that are for us when it comes to this idea of being alert, looking and listening for evidence of God at work. It says in verse 47, *"He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."* So, if you belong to God, then that means that you can hear what God says.

Now look over in John 10:27. This is Jesus talking about Himself as a Shepherd and us as the sheep. Listen to what John 10:27 says. It says, *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."* Just as sheep know the voice of the Shepherd, we can know the voice of Christ...the voice of God.

Now, think about this practically. Whose voice do you know best? For me, I know Heather's voice best. I remember, it was funny, when we first got married, and she would call and leave a message for me, whether it was on voicemail or this or that. She'd say, "Hey babe, this is Heather," and go on with her message. I'd do the same thing, "Hey babe, this is Dave." Well, we got to the point where we realized that if we start with "Hey, babe," then we don't really have to say who we are. There is a way we speak to each other. There's the voice that we use that identifies immediately. How do I know her voice in that way? Because I've spent time with her, because I'm in that kind of relationship with her.

I want you to see how our personal walk with Christ is now not just about us, but it has a huge effect on our ability to join with Christ in what He's doing in other people's lives as well. This means we don't need to just have a quiet time, spend time in prayer and the Word to check off a box anymore. We need to spend time in the Word and prayer so that we're going to be ready and available when He gives us an opportunity. We will be alert. We will hear where He is working. He will speak to us. That's how this works. They go together. The more you respond to the voice of God in those circumstances, the more you know His voice more and more.

The problem is, as we have opportunities to say a word about Christ and share our story with other people, as we close the door time and time and time again on those opportunities, we become that much more numb and that much more numb and that much more deaf to the voice of God. However, we hear what He says. We know His voice.

Now, how do you look for evidence of where He's at work? Well, think about it practically. When I walk into my home, and I see toys everywhere, I know someone has been at work. I know that Caleb has been at work. When I walk into the house after a long day, and I smell something, I know that somebody has been at work. Caleb has been at work in one way, or Heather has been at work cooking. There are all kinds of different smells that identify the evidence of what kind of work has been going on in this particular place. We know that because we identify this kind of work with this.

Well, what if we began to look at the conversations we had on a day-by-day basis and began to be alert to the spiritual indicators that are there in so many conversations, that we so many times miss. Such as when people talk about what they are struggling with, when people talk about what they are afraid of, when people say, "You know this happened to me, and I'm just not sure why it's happening this way." There are all kinds of opportunities we have.

Now, the problem is, we think, "Well, okay, how do I go from that to the four spiritual laws?" Well, you don't have to try to make weird connections. "Oh, I see you have a dog. Well, dog spelled backwards is God, and He did this and this." You don't have to go there. You don't have to do all these creative quirky things that just make us look foolish in front of the world. That's not what I'm saying. However, what I am saying is this. What if we take advantages of those opportunities to say, "Okay, how can I encourage this person in their spiritual journey?" As that opens up opportunities to go into our story more and more and more, then wonderful. Let God do that. He wants to do that. He'll do that if we let Him. We just need to be alert and look and listen for the evidence of how He is already at work around us.

Be active ...

Next, number four. Based on the truth that Jesus was committed to joining the Father wherever He was working, my encouragement is to be active. Sacrifice your agenda each day to get involved where God is at work. Now, this is big. Jesus said, "Wherever the Father is at work, I join Him." He was absolutely surrendered to joining the Father wherever He was at work. His agenda had been sacrificed to the Father's agenda.

We've taken that and augmented it a little bit. The common approach for us is, "God, you show me your will. You show me where you're at work, and I'll decide if I'm going to join you in that particular one." So, "You show me your will, and then I'll decide if I'm going to obey." That's not biblical Christianity. Not, "You show me your work, and then I'll decide whether or not I'm in or not on this particular assignment." It's an abandonment that says, "I'm going to take a risk. I'm going to take a risk and sacrifice my agenda all week long to join in God's agenda. If that means it interrupts my schedule, then so be it. If that means it interrupts my schedule, then so be it. If that means that I'm no longer going to be a busy Christian that's been busy doing many, many things with little productivity for the kingdom of God, then I'm going to sacrifice my agenda, and I'm going to take the risk to get to know people's stories. I'm going to take the risk to get involved in people's lives and let my agenda be dictated by what God is doing in their lives. No matter how awkward, no matter how uncomfortable, no matter how heavy the situation might be, I'm going to trust that He knows what He's doing better than I do, and I'm going to join with Him wherever He's working. I'm going to sacrifice my agenda each day to get involved where God is at work."

Now, in order to be involved where God is at work, we've got to think about where is God at work? He's certainly at work in our lives, but what we've been talking about is that He's at work in the lives of people who don't know Christ. So, it follows, it implies, that in order to be involved where God is working where do we need to be involved in our lives? With people who don't know Christ. The unfortunate thing is, though, trend lines show that the longer somebody is a Christian, the less and less engaged they are with people who don't know Christ. What happens is we become detached from the very people and culture that we're called to penetrate with the gospel. We have a tendency to isolate in our Christian world and not meaningfully engage the culture around us with the gospel.

I'll be honest, this is the part where I have been most convicted this last week. If I could just be completely honest with you, I look at my life, and I am surrounded by people who believe in Christ. I'm surrounded by Christ-followers. When it comes to people who don't know Christ, who are we meaningfully involved in their lives with? If we're not, then how can we be active where the Father is working if we're ignoring the very place where the Father is at work? This goes back to even what we started with last week. It shows just how we've got it backwards to think about the idea that the most effective way to lead people to Christ is to bring them into this building to hear from the guy who's standing up and saying, "I'm not around enough people who don't know Christ."

Many times we have a tendency to think, "The pastor, Dave, you've got it easy. You do this all the time." Well, I sit here and think you've got it easy. You're the ones rubbing the shoulders with these people and this person and that person. So, what if we just all got involved and instead of saying it's going to happen this way or that way, what if we just all got involved. What if 4,000 of us said, "We're going to go out into this community, and we're going to let God do His work as we actively engage people who don't have a relationship with Christ." We get involved in people's lives, and we love people, and we serve people, and we sacrifice our lives for people who don't know Christ. Be active. Sacrifice your agenda each day to get involved where God is at work.

Can you imagine if 4,000 of us were doing that on a consistent basis? Can you imagine if we realized that we were accountable for intersecting our lives with people who don't know Christ? What would happen if we were looking for opportunities to encourage them in their spiritual journey along the way? Then, God will open up opportunities, and when He does, we don't have to shoot back machine gun bursts of Scripture. We don't have to stand up on our soapbox and tell them how they need to start flying straight, but we have an opportunity to share our story of what Christ has done in our lives and share how that relates to His story and to provide resources that will help them in their spiritual journey.

Be amazed ...

Be active. Sacrifice your agenda each day to get involved where God is at work, and it all leads to this. Jesus knew that the Father involved Him in His work because the Father loved Him. Be amazed. Remember that God has involved us in His work, not because He needs us, but because He loves us. I want you to let that soak in for a second. Not because He needs us, but because He loves us.

Here's a quote from A.W. Tozer. You've heard me mention him numerous times.

Almighty God just because He is almighty needs no support. The picture of a nervous ingratiating God fawning over men to win their favor is not a pleasant one, yet if we look at the popular conception of God, that is precisely what we see. Twentieth century Christianity has put God on charity. Probably the

hardest thought of all of our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help. We commonly represent Him as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring peace and salvation to the world. Too many appeals are based on this fancy frustration of Almighty God. An effective speaker can easily excite pity in his hearers, not only for the heathen, but for the God who has tried so hard and so long to save them and has failed for want of support. I fear that thousands of Christians enter service for no higher motive than to help deliver God from the embarrassing situation His love has gotten Him into and His limited abilities seem unable to get Him out of. Add to this a certain degree of commendable idealism and a fair amount of compassion for the underprivileged and you have the true drive behind most Christian activity today.

What I want to remind you of based on this text is that God has involved us in His mission, not primarily because He needs us, but because He loves us and the Father shows the Son what He does, and the Son shows us what He does. Why? Because we are called His friends.

I feel like I have experienced some neat things in my life up to this point. I've had the opportunity to travel to different places. I think I've had my fair share of excitement, but I would definitely say that there are few things more exciting than being on the front row and seeing God transform somebody's life for all of eternity. What a privilege we have to be a part of this picture. So, let's take God at His word and be amazed when He gives us the privilege to lead somebody who means a lot to us to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that changes their life for all of eternity.

So, with that said I want to encourage you to think about the following questions. Number one, "Consider three people you know who you are frequently around and who do not know Christ personally. Answer this question about each of these three people." Now, the whole goal of these questions is not that you're going to be thinking through how this person can now be your project. That's not the picture we've seen in John 5. What we're seeing is how we're the project. We need our lives to be transformed so that we're open to what God is already doing around us. So that's the design of asking some of these questions. The different questions are aimed at helping you think through how are you meaningfully encouraging other people in their spiritual journey. How are you active, involved in the work of God, sharing yourself, your life with them, and especially, your story?

It all leads to the last question that says, "What are some specific things you can do this week to encourage them in their spiritual journey?" This is thinking about what might need to change in us in order to be involved in the work of the Father.

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