

GAME PLAN

Selected Scripture

INTRODUCTION

One of my top ten favorite stories in the Bible...a story I loved to hear as a child...still enjoy every time I read it...and a story that's had a huge impact on my life... Is the story Luke told in the 19th chapter of his gospel about this short guy named Zacchaeus.

Not a story Luke made up in his own head. A true story. It really did happen! There really is a guy named Zacchaeus! I expect to see him when I get to heaven. Which is the reason I mention him this morning. Because there was a time in his life when he wasn't the kind of person you'd ever expect to see in heaven.

He was the kind of guy everyone loved to hate. And for good reason! He made his money...and he had a lot of it...by ripping people off. And he did it as a tax collector for the Roman government – his territory was Jericho and the surrounding countryside.

As it worked then, Rome gave him a set total to collect. But, it was in his power to collect more. And if he did, it was his to keep. Which he must have done because he was a wealthy man.

Clearly he was a dishonest man in bed with a corrupt and ruthless government. So, for good reason – no one liked him. He was one of those people other people pointed to as a 'sinner'. Someone you'd never invite into your own home, nor would you accept an invitation into his.

And then Jesus came to town. And out of all the people in Jericho – who does he ask to spend the day with? Zacchaeus! It was one of those jaw dropping, eyes rolling, moments, mouths muttering – as everyone saw Jesus walk off with Zacchaeus to his home.

Jesus spends the day with Zacchaeus and at the end of it all – Zacchaeus is a changed man! He becomes a follower of Jesus Christ. He repents of the wrong he's done.

He looks into the face of Jesus and says... *“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half my possessions to the poor, and anyone I've cheated...I'll pay them back four times the amount.”*

I love every part of this story! But, what Jesus said at the end is what got my attention years ago and still does today! It convinces me that what we're talking about this morning is at the level of top priority for all of us.

Speaking to Zacchaeus, but every other person in the room, he said... *“This guy is why I came! I came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

In one sentence he gave his whole reason for coming to earth...

To seek and to save spiritually lost people.

This is why he came. And he's our example! He's our model for what should be first in our lives. Talk about wanting to be like Jesus! This is it!

This one statement alone answers how important these next few minutes are for all of us. Because what I'd like to do is add to what I did two weeks ago when I showed you one of the ways you can share your faith in Christ with another person.

Here's what I'm asking today... It's a big ask! Wherever you are with following our Lord's example in caring for spiritually lost people – I'd like you to commit yourself to taking it to a whole new level. A whole new level of making it an intentional part of your life.

- Intentional in preparing yourself as well as you possibly can.
- And intentional in having those conversations that can be spiritually life-changing for others.

The reason I'm making this ask is that I'm convinced there's an incredible potential in every one of these conversations.

Eric Metaxas who wrote biography on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote a new book this year... "7 Men" Subtitle... "And The Secret Of Their Greatness"

William Wilberforce... 1759 to 1833 in England Considered by many to be the most successful social reformer in the history of the world.

- Ended slave trade and slavery in England.
- Ended child labor where children as young as 5 years old were forced to work up to 12 hour days in horrendous and dangerous conditions.

Loved reading how he became a follower of Christ... Happened on trip he took with his mother to the French Riviera when she was older and not in good health. Trip across the Alps that lasted several weeks. Two coaches. Mother in one with a traveling companion. Wilberforce in another with Isaac Milner.

Two very educated and successful men. Wilberforce in business and politics. Milner as Professor at Cambridge University. Equals!

Wilberforce didn't know Milner was a believer. Would never have asked him... Said that he thought anyone who took God very seriously went too far.

Milner didn't remain silent. Said he disagreed and for the rest of the trip he explained why. Debated... By end of trip Wilberforce became a believer.

You never know the full impact when you share our faith with another person... It can be a whole series of lives that are changed, from one generation to the next.

So, before we begin...let's take a minute to do this... Think about someone you care about a lot who doesn't know Jesus Christ as their Savior. They might be as far away from God as a guy named Zacchaeus who got rich at the expense of others, or a William Wilberforce who lived about as a godless a life as anyone.

But, you genuinely care for them! And you'd love the privilege of helping them understand what Christ can do in their lives. The only thing holding you back is not knowing how to do it. Not knowing what to say and how to say it. And because of this, not quite having the confidence you need.

You're saying... "Steve, you're talking about me here. I want to tell others about my faith in Christ. I've wanted to do this for a long time. But, I need to know what to say so that when the opportunity comes I'm ready to roll."

Which is what makes me so excited to come back to what I began two weeks ago... I'd like to show you what you can do to increase your confidence. **You see...** I'm convinced you can do it. I'm 100% convinced that every one of us can help others understand what Christ did for them.

And I can't think of anything that would bring you more joy than the absolute thrill of seeing another person come to know Christ as a result of your friendship and sharing Christ with them.

Two weeks ago I answered three questions... # 1 Where do you start the conversation? # 2 What do you say once it's started. # 3 What do you say at the end of the conversation?

This morning I'd like to answer one more question... What do you do before you start the conversation? Order turned around... ☺

But, before we begin, there's something I'd like to show you that'll make all the difference in how well you're able to do what I talked about two weeks ago and what we'll look at this morning.

It's a journal... There's many different variations of a journal that you can find at almost any store. I found this one at Target.

I'm a big believer in journaling. I've done it for years! And guys, I'm not talking about a diary! So hear me out...

✚ A journal is something you use to write down what you learn from scripture and how you'll apply it to your life.

I'm in a Community Group with several guys on Thursday morning. Journaling was a whole new deal for five of the guys. I could bring every one up here and they'd totally back me up when I say journaling's a great thing to do.

So, I'm a big believer in journaling with Bible study. Today I'm saying that getting a journal devoted to sharing our faith is also a great idea. I wish I had thought of this years ago. Here's why...

It serves the same purpose as a playbook given to football players...

Playbook

Like this 2003 Nebraska Defensive Playbook...

“It outlines the strategy and includes multiple sets (scenarios) for defense and offense. Different formations require different combinations of players and audibles. We were given the playbook to take home, to take with us to school and to all meetings for constant review, so during the game it was part of our DNA and muscle memory.”

“Constant learning mode. Review games. Learn from what worked and didn’t work. Take notes on every play so that when the same thing happened in another game we’d know how to respond. Always making corrections and improvements. Always adding to the playbook from what was learned through the season.” Pat Ricketts

Your journal becomes your playbook that you’re coming back to daily... Including everything I talk through today. Writing down what you’re learning as you’re sharing your faith with others. Questions asked you didn’t have the answer to. Writing down the answers you found. What you learned to be most effective...what to say and what not to say. What you’re learning from others.

Everything I say today will be on our website. So, you’ll have today’s sermon to listen to and review. We’ll also put it in its written form online, so you can download it and read it. Which means you don’t have to take any notes this morning.

In your bulletin on the page where you take notes – you’ll see that we’ve written in the main points of what I’m going to talk through with you today. This is what I’m asking you to write on the first page of your journal. Your playbook for sharing your faith.

- At the top you’ll see that we’ve written “Game Plan.” (“Strategy”)
- Underneath this are the key points of this plan/strategy.

All right, let’s dig in with today’s question...

WHAT DO YOU DO BEFORE YOU START THE CONVERSATION?

Pray

Pray for yourself and for the people God’s brought into your life. **First, here’s what to pray for yourself...four things...** HELP ME

- **God’s love for spiritually lost people.**

One of the things I realize going into this sermon – is that we’re all at different points in our love and concern for spiritually lost people. Some of us don’t really care all that much. Some of us care a little. Others of us care a lot...it’s very important to us.

My own story...

I pray this prayer every single day for myself and for all of us...

Lord, please strengthen in us your love and concern for spiritually lost people.

It's a simple, short prayer...but I'm convinced absolutely essential to pray.

- **Courage**

You've got good company in your need for courage. Here's what Paul asked the believers in Ephesus to pray for him...

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:19,20

Courage is so important... Evangelical pastor who was on Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher.

- **Clarity**

Paul nailed it with this personal request in his letter to the Colossian believers...

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:4

Let me ask you... Do you ever feel the concern that when you open your mouth to share your faith in Christ that you'll turn your words upside down?

- **Grace**

"God, help me be gracious in everything I say...to be kind and patient and considerate."

- **Wisdom in capturing the opportunities God gives you.**

Have you ever had the experience of having someone who's not a believer say something about their personal life that would have been 'the perfect opportunity' to share your faith in Christ and you missed it?

After... *"Why didn't I say something?"*

I sure know I have...more than I care to admit. **It's why I pray this prayer for myself and for all of you...**

Give me wisdom to make the most of every opportunity to show your love and tell others about your grace through Christ.

Write these 5 down in your journal and pray each one for yourself. Do this, and you'll see God working in a powerful way...in you and through you. If prayer isn't in your Playbook, it isn't going to happen!

So, first of all, pray! Second, take the time to write down the names of people God's brought into your life who do not share your faith in Christ.

Write down the names of people in your life who do not know Christ.

This is something I've done for as long as I can remember. I was talking with someone about this the other day and they asked me how many people are on that list now.

- Able to go through names in my mind... 31 people I added another person this week, so now at 32.

Once you've written their names... Two things to do...

First... Pray for each person. Pray for opportunities to build friendship. Pray for opportunities to share Christ. And pray for the Spirit of God to open their hearts and minds to the truth of God's grace in Christ.

Second... Invest yourself in their lives. Build a friendship where they know you genuinely care for them. *"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."*

And this is where it takes being intentional... For example, let's say some of the names you've written down include your neighbors. You do something as simple as looking for opportunities to talk with them or helping them out with some project they could use some help with.

- One neighbor who's a talker...
- Two weeks ago talking with a neighbor behind us... I found out that he's doing some major painting in his house to get it ready to sell. I offered to help him.
- Including socially in your life...

The great thing about this... These are the people God is asking us to talk with about our faith. God's not asking us to go door to door to complete strangers, ring their doorbell and say...

"Hi, I'm here to interrupt your evening and make us all miserable for the next hour."

Write out your personal story.

You might not think so, but you are a very significant example of what God's grace does in the life of a person.

So take the time to write out your story. **Three things to keep in mind when you write your story...**

First... If there's any one thing in particular that drew you to Jesus Christ...that helped you recognize your spiritual need – write this down. And write down how your relationship with Jesus impacted your life.

Second... Make what you write complete so that it says what needs to be said. But also keep it as concise as possible. Leave out unnecessary details. (the weather that day, the color of the dress you were wearing, etc.)

(2 to 3 minutes)

Third... Speak in terms they can understand. Stay away from confusing religious jargon.

Identify a verse or set of verses to use in sharing the gospel.

Verses that most resonate with you. Two weeks ago I gave you an example of five verses I've used from Hebrews 4.

Write these verses in your journal. Memorize them so well that you could say them in your sleep. As a backup, have a written copy with you. ☺

Here's the deal... The verse or verses you choose should guide you in talking through four main things that need to be covered in sharing the gospel.

God

Us

Jesus

Responding to the truth about...

Example using John 3:16...

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

*For **God** so loved the world...* **Talk about God...** How God has revealed himself to us through creation. Creation shows God's infinite power and wisdom, his brilliance. God has also revealed himself to us through the Bible. Showing us that he's holy and just and loving. Talk about each one of these aspects of God's character.

*For God so loved the **world**...* **The world being us.** The main point to emphasize about us is our sinfulness. (see sermon I did from Hebrews 4, preached on July 21)

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only **Son**...* **The Son being Jesus Christ.** Talk about who Jesus Christ is. Talk about his coming to earth, becoming one with us in our humanity, experiencing everything we experience. Emphasize the one difference that he never sinned. This making it possible for him to die for us, taking our sin on himself and bearing the just judgment of a holy God.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, **that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** **This is the fourth point that needs to be emphasized.** That we must respond to the truth about God, us and Jesus. Explain that to believe means we trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation.

Two other examples...

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6

I got to tell you – today’s sermon is one reason among many that I wish every person in this room was in a small group. The guys I’m in a small group with on Thursdays – we’ve committed ourselves to help each other with what I’m talking about today.

Write that into your playbook... Get in a Community Group!