

The Single Greatest Gift

"Just Walk Across the Room"

On the last Sunday Lyn and I left the church where I was Pastor to come to Westlake, an Irishman named Billy came to us with tears in his eyes, thanking us for helping him get to know Jesus. Billy was a very new follower of Jesus, for it wasn't until he was in his 60's that he discovered the life that he could have in Christ. I want to start today by telling you his story.

Billy was a bass player in a jazz band that had been formed by a close friend of ours named Lloyd, who is a jazz musician. Billy was the only one in the band who wasn't a Christian, and he didn't show much interest in becoming one. But about 4 years ago, Billy's wife Beattie was diagnosed with cancer. When Billy shared this with the other three in the band, they felt the Holy Spirit prompting them to "take a walk across the room", and asked if they could come to Billy's house to pray for Billy and Beattie. Billy said he thought that would be OK, so they did. Over the next two years the band members kept asking about Beattie, but the news kept getting worse, until eventually she was sent home from the hospice to die. Then one night, my friend Lloyd rang Billy to return some P.A. gear, and asked Billy what he was doing. Billy said "I'm reading my Bible". Lloyd was so blown away by the thought that Billy of all people would be reading a Bible he said, "I'm coming around to see you both". When Lloyd asked what had happened, Billy said that a Christian chaplain at the hospice had given them some written information about how to follow Jesus, and for two weeks Billy and Beattie had been praying together. But he said to Lloyd, "Do you think I'm doing it right? I'm a bigger sinner than Beattie." Lloyd discovered that both of them, in their own simple way, had trusted Christ to be their Saviour. He prayed for them both, and kept close to them for the next two weeks until Beattie died.

A few weeks after Beattie died, Billy began attending our church. One day I asked him what it was that had caused him to want to follow Jesus. He told me he knew Beattie was going to die, and he knew she had trusted her life to Christ. He loved her so much, he couldn't bear to think that he wouldn't meet her again in heaven. When he read some information about following Jesus, and my friend Lloyd explained to them about eternal life with Christ that begins right now, it was the most logical thing for them both to tell Jesus they wanted to follow him.

Two people became followers of Jesus, because three men in a jazz band cared enough about their bass player and his wife to go and pray with them. Two people became followers of Jesus because someone cared enough to give them some information about eternal life. That's what "Just Walk Across The Room" is about. It's about listening to the promptings of the Spirit of God, getting out of our comfort zone, and sharing the life that we have in Jesus with those who don't know him yet.

My father died 18 years ago, and my mother died 40 years ago. When my father died, each of us children got a share in the inheritance he left behind. There was some money and a bit of property, but when that was divided between 5 children, it didn't amount to a fortune. But there was a greater gift that my parents left me. Something I value far more than money or education or the skills they taught me. They introduced me to Jesus. At the time, I didn't realise what a gift that was, but now looking back, I realise they gave me something that was priceless. They couldn't have given a better gift to their children, than telling them about the life they could have in Jesus. Lyn and I feel the same way. We have said to our children that our number one desire for them is not a successful career, or the attaining of qualifications, or making lots of money. The thing we want for them most of all is for them to know and follow Jesus. We are now at the stage of saying the same thing to our grandchildren. As far as we are concerned, the greatest gift we can pass on to someone we love, is to introduce them to our friend Jesus.

1. The Incarnation – God's Greatest Gift.

You and I are the recipients of the greatest gift God has ever given. Jesus, Gods only Son, left

the fellowship of the Trinity and the glory of heaven, to come down to earth and live at our place. Talk about walk across the room. This was a walk across the universe. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes it to the Philippian Christians;

***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.* (Philippians 2:5-11 NIV)**

Jesus left the worship and adoration of the angels, wrapped himself in human flesh, and walked across the universe to reach out his hand to people like you and me. It was the ultimate walk across the room. God took the initiative in reaching out to us. There is a technical theological word for this. It's called incarnation. It means going to be where the people are to identify with them. Incarnational theology is what John and Susan Osborne have been practising for the last 34 years, living in the slums of Bangladesh and Calcutta in order to share Jesus with the poor of Asia's cities. Incarnational living is when you get out of your comfort zone and make the effort to go to where lost people are in order to tell them the good news that God loves them. Incarnational theology can be as profound as living your whole life amongst the poor of another country, or it may be as simple as walking across a room to greet a lonely person.

Incarnational living is what Jesus did for us. He came because he cared. When Jesus came to live at our place, the one focus of his time on earth was reaching out to people. Sick people. Lonely people. Depressed people. People who had made a mess of their lives and people who thought they were doing brilliantly. Religious people. People from the right side of the tracks and the wrong side of the tracks. The down and outs, and the up and outs. Jesus was always prepared to go out of his way for such people.

One of the people Jesus went out of his way for was a woman who was very much like people in our day. She was living with a guy she wasn't married to. It's my guess that she had been burned by so many bad relationships, she didn't want to risk another marriage. You see, she had been married 5 times before. OK, she may have had a couple of husbands die on her, but my guess is that by the time marriage number 5 has fallen apart, she's asking herself, "What's wrong with me that I'm so hard to live with? Why can't I find a decent guy who will treat me right?" My guess is that her self esteem isn't even registering on the Richter scale anymore. Because she lives in a village where everyone knows everyone else's business, and everyone tells everyone else's business, she feels like dirt. Then she meets Jesus at the village pump. When he comes right out of the blue and tells her she's had 5 husbands, and the man she is living with now isn't her husband, she's either thinking "Who's been talking to you about me?" or else she's thinking that this man has a hotline to God.

Her meeting with Jesus just blew her doors off. Not only did Jesus know all about her life, but he was a holy Jewish man who broke all the conventions and spoke to her - a Samaritan woman. Jews and Samaritans got on together like Israeli's and Palestinians, or like the Americans and the Taliban. And the amazing thing was that having stepped on to her territory; Jesus didn't condemn her, but offered her a new start in life. She went to get some ordinary water at the village well, and got offered living water to last a lifetime. You can read the whole story in John's Gospel Chapter 4. What was Jesus doing? He was stepping on to her territory, engaging her in a conversation about things she was interested in, and telling her some good news about a new life with God that was hers for the asking. Why? Because he cared. Because his heart went out to people who had made such a mess of their lives. Because the life that he was offering was so much more satisfying than a drink of clean water on a hot day. What was Jesus doing? He was walking across the room.

Now get this. Jesus didn't sit down at the beginning of his day with his daytime planner scheduling in a meeting with a Samaritan woman. He just met her as he was going about his day. He didn't start the day with a whole bunch of tracts called "Steps to Peace with God" or "The Four Spiritual Laws" in his back pocket. He didn't have some verses from Romans and

Ephesians all memorised ready to dump on someone. But he was tuned to the Holy Spirit. He was watching the Father. At one point he said "I only do what I see the Father doing". Jesus had this amazing way of looking out for people that he met during his day, and discovering that they had been prepared for his coming. And that's a great way for us to share Jesus with others.

2. Listening To The Holy Spirit.

Over the years I've been to quite a few evangelism training courses. I tell you, I don't want to go to any more. What usually happens on an evangelism training course is that someone gives you a methodology of how to introduce someone to Jesus. You learn a sales patter. You learn how to take people through a smart set of questions that leads them to making a decision to accept Christ. You learn how to present a tract or a booklet or a questionnaire in such a way that you can convert someone. But here's the problem. After you have learned how to do it, you become so reliant on the technique that you forget about trusting God and relying on the Holy Spirit. I know God in his grace has used many of those things in the past to bring people to a point of commitment to Christ, but I've come to understand that the most effective thing in sharing my faith is to be fine tuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I know this works, because the Holy Spirit knows me better than I know myself, and the Holy Spirit knows the person I'm talking to better than they know themselves.

Here's an example from my own experience. Lyn and I had made friends with a couple and they invited us around to their place for a meal. We had been praying for them, and we prayed before we went that the Lord would give us a natural opening to ask them where they were at in their spiritual journey and to talk about Jesus. Now Tim knew I was a Pastor. When he opened the door to invite us in, the first thing he said was "Now there are two things I don't want to talk about tonight – politics and religion". My heart sank, because we had been praying about this meeting for some time. So right there and then, I just shot off one of those quick "Help me Lord" prayers and straight away I found myself saying, "Tim, I'd really like to know why you feel so strongly about religion, because my relationship with Jesus is so important to me." Now I didn't think of that beforehand. And I'm not that clever to have the right question every time. But the Holy Spirit used that question to open up a whole evening where talked about Jesus. And in case you are wondering, no, Tim didn't fall on his knees and pray a prayer of repentance at the end of the evening. But I do believe he was a little more open to spiritual truth than before we got there.

People, "Just Walk Across The Room" isn't some new evangelism technique. It's about ordinary people like you and me tuning our hearts to the daily promptings of the Holy Spirit. It's caring about people enough to leave our comfortable circle of Christian friends and make friends with those who don't know Jesus yet. It's about being bold enough to open our mouths and talk about Jesus when the Spirit of God prompts us. I first read the book "Just Walk Across The Room" in 2007. And do you know what has stuck with me? The title. There have been many times since when I've been in a situation, and I've felt the Holy Spirit say "Just Walk Across The Room. Go and greet that stranger. Go and pray with that person. Go and meet that need. Give some money here. Step out from your cosy little Christian bubble and trust me here". The more I hear those promptings, and the more I obey them, the more I find God at work through me.

So I want to invite you to come with me on this adventure of discovering what the Spirit of God is saying to us as individuals and as a church. And as we walk across the room, following in the footsteps of Jesus, let's trust Him that we will see our lives transformed, and the lives of those we speak to transformed by the power of God.

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