

Stages

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[0 : 05] You. So this evening we're looking at stages in terms of gospel presentation or gospel conversations. And this comes from how to win the west, how to reach the west. Sorry. Again, how many of you have seen that?

I've got that. Can I put your hands off if you've seen it? I've got it. Okay. I think looking at for a few minutes this evening is that for a long, long time, the model has been probably up for 1000 years.

That Church recognized. Christians recognized that people in the community and people in society had a basic idea of God and a basic belief in God and in heaven and hell, even if they didn't come to faith in Jesus and many of them would come to Church. And Church was a great place for hearing the gospel and responding to the gospel and coming to faith, a lot of people would come to Church who weren't believers. So I was always kind of ready made field of people that we prayed that they would respond to the gospel. The foundations was there and the fundamentals was there.

And I wonder whether that has changed in the last 40 to 50 years, that we're living in very unique days and completely different to that. What would you say?

What is the uniqueness of the day in which we live as opposed to what has been in Christendom for the last number of centuries? What would make the world we're living in today? You think different from that in terms of people and their understanding of God and everything else?

[1 : 52] Create a sexual revolution in the 70s made a difference. Yeah. What about, generally speaking, technology?

People have a lot of different inputs, a lot of different opinions out there. Yeah. Access to a lot of different opinions. What else would make this time unique in terms of the gospel, do you think? Social media.

Social media, yeah.

That's a massive thing. I think there's that whole I think it's just so it's very secular.

It would claim to be very scientific, so that they've dispensed with the need for religion and all that goes with it and the crutch that religion is. But at the same time, there's increasing even in the last number of years, there's an increasing subjectivity. For a while, it was already objective, it was scientific, and everything needed to be proved. But now, again, there's this powerful subject development in people's lives. It's all about feelings.

[3 : 03] And if it's okay for me and spirituality is fine as long as it comes from yourself and it's individual and it's privately consumed. So it's an interesting day. And I think, as Keller said, it's not in the book, in this book or he might, but not in the book I was reading anyway. But somebody says that I think this is the first society that has no belief in the supernatural and in God, and that is a challenge. So he mentions four basic steps that are important to consider when we're preparing to share our faith.

The first is attention. Someone want to read Mark chapter five, verses 18 or 20?

I've just taken some basic Bible references, not looking in any detail at them.

Mark five versus 18 to 20. Speak out nice and loud. Everyone hears it.

Okay, that's a well known story of Legion and Jesus saving him. Legion wanting to come with Jesus and Jesus say, no. You go back to your own people. You tell them how much you've done. And the big question for us, how do we get people's attention today?

[4 : 47] How do we get people's attention if they think it's irrelevant, if they think the gospel is irrelevant? And Michael Green, and this is something that he did a number of years ago. But he estimated that about 80% of evangelism in the early Church was done by ordinary Christians sharing their faith with their families and their close associates. And the way that they got attention was because those to whom they were speaking knew them and recognized the change in their lives and recognized the Lordship of Christ in them. And today, more than ever, I think stories and people's personal narratives are really important.

So Jesus said to Legion, I'm not coming back to the capitalist with you, he's a son of God. You thought I would be much more effective, but he says, no, you go back, you tell your story. People know you Legion, and you tell them what Jesus has done for you. And I think that as we share who we are with people as Christians, not just our testimony of coming to faith, but our whole Christian philosophy of life, that we are going to people and saying, look, we've got a response that they're seeing, that we've got a response, a meaningful response to suffering. We've got an ability to love people who we disagree with, and we don't cancel them.

We're able to hold on to unchanging truth, but with respect and with gentleness. And a lot of these things are not evident in the society around us today. And it's important, therefore, that we grab people's attention by sharing with them what Jesus has done in our lives. And that makes two assumptions. The first is that we're confident in Christ is the object of our faith so that we actually are confident that he's changed and is changing our lives, and that we have a Christ centered philosophy of life.

But also the second assumption is that we are interacting meaningfully with unbelievers, that we have that space in our lives to interact with unbelievers. Whether we have articulated it or whether we've stated it properly over many years. That has certainly been the aim of us as leaders in the Church here at St. Columbus, we've always said we didn't want to be a program heavy Church where people were engaged all the time, maintaining an institution, maintaining a Church with a lot of programs where we're always interacting with one another, maintaining this edifice, as it were. But we wanted always to be a Church where we said, go and live, go and share, go home and tell that we would all be legions and that we would all do that work of the evangelists ourselves, in a sense, making friends, having the time to sacrificially, make these friends and serve them, building personal, significant personal relationships.

And that's much harder, isn't it? In some ways, sometimes it's much easier to think that's the Church job, church's job, that's the Minister's job. Well, it is, but not exclusively, because relationships are messy for the long haul. They require patience today and courage and honesty and wisdom. But that is one way of gaining today attention.

[8 : 35] And in a sense, going back to what it was at the very beginning, where it was the ordinary Christians who gossip the gospel, who spoke it, who told who shared it, and who got people's attention. The second thing that Kelly mentioned is and I've just completely plagiarized these four things from him. The second is attention, attractions, attention, and then attraction. Can someone read someone else read? March 10 versus 17 to 23, Mark 1017 to 23.

Correct.

You want to read. It says, to a winding gift, no one is good that's going to work.

And he says, kept on you and Jesus looking at her local loss, you have gone then heaven.

So the title this is Attraction. And I think it may be a bit of a misnomer because it doesn't seem that the rich young man is attracted very much to Jesus here. But it's a different scenario because what Jesus is trying to do is trying to show that the gospel has countered attraction to the wealth that this man has and a better and more fulfilling life for him. And he challenges him to think about where he's finding his identity, where he's finding his satisfaction and happiness, and to recognize and to challenge him, to see that wealth isn't where he's going to find his happiness, but it's in Christ. So it's taking people's attractions and refocusing them towards Jesus Christ, where they'll find true.

[11 : 13] Well. And that often involves work in our part. It does involve knowledge of the individual that we're dealing with and speaking to. But it also was reasoning our own faith. And we see Paul in act 17.

There's great different verbs used to describe the way that he spoke to me, reasoned with them. He proclaimed to them, he persuaded them, he explained things in the marketplace, those who were worshipping idols. He said, you're attracted to worshipping an idol. Let me tell you about the God who is the only God and the real God, and he was the one who became all things, as we've seen before, to all men, 121 seven in order to win them. And a lot of that was about trying to give them a counter attraction.

And that will sometimes happen when we question people's answers, sometimes. This is a great quote when we question people's answers, sometimes before we answer people's questions. So we're very quick to want to always answer people's questions. But sometimes it's good to question other people's answers because often they're not well founded or they haven't thought deeply about them challenging. We often find weird on the defensive, don't we?

We're always the ones being attacked as believers. Why do you do? Why do you believe? Why are you doing? And I think it's good sometimes to turn the tables a little bit, to question other people's foundational beliefs and offering a gospel that they need, that if they recognized as what it was, would be attractive to them because they are chasing the shadows of the true gospel, showing them that there's many things about the gospel that fulfills what they're looking for in other areas.

And I think it's important for us to wrestle with that a bit more probably as a Church as well as individuals, and to provide opportunities for people to question and for us to question them. And I think that's confessing failure here as a Church, I think we need to provide more opportunities as a Church for doing that with those who are on the outside.

[13 : 45] And that's a real challenge. Can I just share a challenge? One of the challenges we have in the city center as a Church is passion for the lost in a general level. Why? Because our Church is always growing.

Church is growing all the time. We lose a lot of people, but a lot of new people come in, new students come in, new people move to the area, and the Church is growing. And that consumes our time in many ways. And it gives us maybe sometimes a false sense that things are going great because of the growth. Now there are occasional that we hope people are growing in their faith, and there are occasional conversions.

But it's easy to mask the lack of conversions in a fairly stable, growing city Center Church, as it were. And it's easy for you not to therefore sometimes demand that we as a Church, as Church leadership, provide opportunities, evangelistic opportunities that you can make use of with people that you're living among and sharing your faith with. And I think it's a weakness, something we should really address and provide opportunities. It's not about programs, but it's just providing an opportunity as a Church for you to say, hey, well, could we do something that our Church is doing this? Can I give you an example?

Cornerstone recently, and they're still doing it. They've hired a room in the black eye around the corner from the Premier months, and they've advertised a think and drink evening, okay. Where they have a room and people can take a drink in with them, and they'll sit informally and discuss them. This latest one was the question was in the advertising is lasting peace possible. Now, that's what I mean by providing a kind of structured opportunity by the Church for individuals within Church to see their friends.

Hey, we're doing this thing in the black Ivy. I don't know if you're interested in coming along. It'll be very informal. That kind of opportunity is a stepping stone, an evangelistic stepping stone towards further discussion. And I think that is one way of working through the attraction of the gospel with people in a meaningful way.

[16:15] And then, of course, the third thing is demonstration. Read these verses before they're kind of classic versus read them again. One Peter 3:15 and 16. Someone want to read one Peter 3:15 and 16. You could actually probably say it off by heart if you've been at any of these.

Anyway.

Anyone got it.

15 and 16 for a reason. For the people that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good consciousness so that whatever happened is those who revive you good behavior.

Thanks. So that's that whole thing about being prepared to always be prepared to have a reason for the hope that is within you. And that's really, I think what policy in there is. We need to demonstrate verbally and visibly the reason behind the hope we have. And that means that you and I have got to be there's no way around it.

[17:59] But we've got to be thinkers when it comes to our faith. We're not people who are blind have a blind, ignorant faith. It's important for us to show that we haven't cheaply given our lives to a crucified you from 2000 years ago, because that's crazy and the right to think that's crazy. Until we reveal and work through and wrestle with some of the real issues that are connected with that, we do have to work towards having answers to some of the traditional objections to the faith hell and suffering and the Bible and its authenticity, or the church's record and slavery or the oppression of women gender issues. And we're not going to have all the answers.

And there are times we're going to say, well, I don't know. And there's times we're going to say, well, we can't defend what the Church has done in the past or whatever it might be, but we have a reason if they're asking that question, we should be asking that question. We should be asking what the church's role in slavery was. We should be asking what the church's role in gender is and all these difficult questions. We might not always find the answers or have the answers, but people need to know that we are serious and not just have a stupid blind faith that is kind of unthinking.

And we do so with humility and with clarity and I hope with honesty. So on Sunday we have a Connect meal and Katrina have a lot of people signed up. Yeah, not a lot. A lot of people have signed up to host or big numbers for hosting, potentially.

Okay, so 20 signs have to be hosted. We'll plug it a bit more, and there's lots of spaces for people to have a bacon roll. But that would be a great place together to play Devil's advocate with one another and ask each other among your friends and with others some of the difficult questions because it's good to work out with friends first, isn't it, if you struggle with getting the answers and do it in front of the mirror, but wrestle with talk about these things and wrestle with them and think through them together as Christians, which then helps us when we're doing it with unbelievers. And that's important. So that's the third issue is demonstration.

And the last issue is conviction. So these are four important things for us as taking steps towards sharing our faith or some of the things we need to consider when we're sharing our faith. So conviction. So if I was to say that any gospel presentation that we make must have at least two very important points, what would you say are the two really important things that must, one way or another, come out in a gospel present, a biblical gospel presentation, two kind of very basic things. As Corey said earlier, it's really hard when I know what I want you to answer me with and you don't know what I want to know.

[21 : 34] But what are the two fundamental things you must include in a gospel presentation to anyone, do you think, just at a general level?

Yes. That kind of straddles? Both. So what does that include then, a general level?

Okay, well, you kind of mentioned it there. So really, however you describe it, I think what we need to get across is bad news and good news. So there needs to be both elements, doesn't there? And you mentioned that both there there needs to be with people need to come to the point where they see themselves as needing God's Grace, that they need to know that they can't be right with God themselves. That's how we do that.

I'm not saying that that's how we tell it. How we do that is difficult. I was thinking a lot about that now that I'm regularly with unbelievers in the football environment, and I often rest with how best to share faith in a way that will make people think it's not just for me or just not just for Christians. And I wondered whether saying something people say, what makes you a Christian? I wonder whether a good response would be to say, well, I just know there's no way I could make myself right with God.

And it kind of is slightly disarming because you're saying they begin to realize, well, he doesn't think himself as a kind of goody two shoes model, upright person. Why would he think he's not good enough for God? Why would he need to be good enough for God. I wonder if I'm good enough for God. Now, I'm surmising these are the responses people might have, but it's trying to get to a place where you're wrestling with the kind of question or the kind of presentation of the bad news that will make them think that it also applies to them.

[24 : 13] And that's a challenge for us. And then obviously, the good news is that it's Christ alone that can give you the life that you are created for, that you're looking for. And again, how you present that will depend a lot on the people you're speaking to. And I don't think we need to get the whole twelve yards in every time. I don't think we need to get a whole story every time.

I don't think we need to go from creation to fulfillment or even crossing resurrection every time, because I think that is a big leap for people.

But you see that with Jesus, the way he dealt with the woman at the well, wasn't it? He brought her to the point from being kind of a bit kind of defensive. And why are you convicting her of her need? And he knew that she had a need and that she was morally struggling and felt guilty, but brought her to using the living water as an example of a way of describing what he had to offer. So I don't think there's any formula.

So I do think we need to work through things with every individual.

And obviously, along with that, we need courage to get across somehow with conviction. This gospel is not just for me, it's not just a private thing. It's not just for religious people. I am one of Jock Thompson's, Berns, however you want to put it, we're all the same and we all need and that everyone needs that good news and that within that the death and resurrection of Jesus is really pivotal for how we share the faith. So in summary, very briefly, and unlike Cory, when it says it's the last point, this will be it.

[26 : 24] There will be another seven or eight. Okay, we need to be thinking about people. So how can I introduce people meaningfully? We need to be thinking about them. How will I do it so they might get it?

I don't mean immediately saved that's God's job, but how might we get it? So their eyes will open a little bit to seeing it means something to them. So be thinking about people. Obviously, to be prayerful for these people, that has to be part of it. We have to be wrestling with God, naming them before God, pleading their characters and their needs before God, and maybe sometimes even telling them that thinking about people prayerful for people to be sacrificially engaged with people who are not like us.

It's great to be together and it's wonderful to be part of our Christian community, but we have to push the boat out and socialize and be with people who are not like us, who will challenge us, who will make us feel uneasy, who make us squirm, maybe even in the social environment they take us into. But there needs to be a sacrificial engagement with people who are not like us as an act of love and Grace. I think as well we need to be inventive for the sake of people. However, that looks as a Church and also for us as individuals. And we need to be different among people.

We don't win them by being like them. At one level which we often used to argue.

We win them by being different, but by loving them, we win them by being different among them, being people for whom the gospel is real.

[28 : 24] And we're working on the ability to articulate that gospel and that takes courage for us. So it's all about our interaction, I think, both with God and with people and working out that great command to love him and to love one another and to love our enemies and also encapsulated. And some of these points we've looked at. So there are some of the stages maybe that we need to think about is attention and attraction and demonstration and conviction. And you'll find that articulated in I was going to see how the west was one that's a different book altogether, how to reach the west again.

And for anyone who wants that, let me know and I'll send it out to you. Any questions? Does anyone have any questions? I always like to bit of interaction on a Wednesday night. I know you're tired and things like that and it's hard to jump on top of you, but if you have any questions about that or any thoughts that you would add into that before we head to prayer, there's a tension there in terms of how we want to live our own lives.

Yeah, it is tough and I think it's a wisdom call often. And again, it's a motive thing.

I always like to go back to Jesus example, who was the classic case of being coming out from among them and being separate. And yet his hands were absolutely dirty with people. And he was accused of being a drunkard and a sinner because he went to these things where he socialized with the people that nobody would socialize with and all kinds of false accusations were made. And I think it's more I mean, I grew up in that environment very much as well. And it was in the Church.

You come out from a Godless world. But I think that the big thing to remember in that is that the world is in us. The world is not a geographical place out there. It's an attitude of mind and heart. And we can be as separate from unbelievers as we want and be as worldly as anyone because our hearts aren't right and we can be involved with people unbelievers a lot of the time and give the Church the impression that we're miles away and we're sharing our faith with them all the time.

[31 : 21] We're sacrificial we're loving and so it's all about our attitude in terms of being separate in the workplace. For example, you need to show your separation from the world by the way you think it's the way you think it's the way you respond. It's gossiping stopping when it comes to you not being passed on. It's about not bitching about other people. It's these kind of things that are noticed in the world in the workplace, which are everyday occurrences that will make you separate, that will make people uncomfortable sometimes and we can't get away from that.

We can't get away from sometimes. It will not necessarily be that popular, but it has to be done really humbly and graciously. We need to have a servant as we're doing it. But that's a great point and a great dilemma. How do we do that well.