

How's it going? Good. Good to see you guys. If this is your first time to be with us, my name is Aaron. I'm honored to be one of the pastors around here serving alongside of an incredibly gifted team. We were reminded of that this summer. Can we just express our deep appreciation to everybody on the team who taught at all of our campuses this summer? They did a great job.

And if we haven't had an opportunity to meet, I have been away for the past six weekends on what is called a study break. And basically what that is—there's a little bit of vacation planned in there but mostly I was here in town. I was just devoting most of my time and energy, that I would normally invest into weekly sermon preparation, to do some other things.

So some of my own personal spiritual care and long-range sermon planning. I was able to get some teaching series planned out through July of 2018. I'm very excited where God is taking us as a church and was able to spend some time with my family and have a full weekend with them.

I just want to thank you, as a church, for not only giving that to me every summer but encouraging me to do it and supporting me in it. My family deeply appreciates it. We love you. We miss you and, man, it's really, really good to be back.

And what a great weekend to be back because this is the grand opening, today, of our West campus. So we just want to celebrate that right now. If you are at the west campus right now, welcome. If this is your first time to be with us, we are honored to have you. You are in good hands with your campus pastor, David Cupp, and that entire team.

Our family attended the soft-launch last week at Avon Middle School North. It looked and it felt great. There were over 500 people at the soft-launch last weekend. I just got text messages between the hours. They said they had close to 700 at the 9:30 service this morning so just bananas. Awesome to see that.

Want to say hello to our North and Downtown campuses. Love you guys. I was able to visit each of you this summer. So excited to see what God continues to do in and through you. And I want to welcome anybody watching online and those of you here at Northwest.

We are in a series that we are starting today. I've been looking forward to this series for a long time. It's called Base Camp. And I don't know about you guys but I am kind of a documentary junkie. How many of you share my disease? Man, if I get on Netflix and I

go to the documentary section—it doesn't matter what it is—alright? If it's a documentary on salt, I'll watch it. I'll get into that black hole and wake up like three hours later and I've neglected my family. I've been watching documentaries.

Not long ago I was watching a documentary on Mount Everest. And one of the things that I learned by watching that is that about 17,000 feet up there is this thing called base camp. There are actually two of them. There's one on the north side of the peak and there's one on the south side of the peak.

Apparently, if you're going to climb Everest you don't just run straight up to the peak. You need to stop at base camp a few days to acclimate to the altitude, to repack your gear, to make sure that you're fully rested, that you've got nutrition and to build relationships with the people who you are going to be depending upon to get to the summit.

So you could say: Base camp is necessary if you're going to reach the summit. Any experienced climber would say that it's not optional, it's necessary. You need to stop at base camp for your own safety, well being, and that of those who you are climbing with. However, base camp was never, ever meant to replace the summit. Think about that for a minute. You don't put together an expedition to climb Everest only to stop at base camp and call it a day.

I was thinking about that this last week. It might be tempting to do that. It kind of seems like some people were doing that. If I were to climb Everest and I got to base camp and I found that there were friendly people there with snacks, and there were warm sleeping bags and it's kind of a party atmosphere, and a killer view, I think I might be tempted to just post a couple of pictures on Instagram #Everest and call it a day. Wouldn't I get credit for doing that?

This is kind of the analogy that I want to use over the course of the next seven weekends together because I think that something can happen very similar to that in our lives when it comes to our church experience. I know that this was true of me when I was growing up. I oftentimes viewed what happened on the weekend at church as kind of this summit. That really what God wanted from me is that He wanted me to go to church. And as long as He saw me here and I got credit for that, then that's really the summit of my experience with Him. But God has something much, much greater in mind than just periodic weekend church attendance.

At the same time, I wouldn't say that this is unnecessary either. There have been seasons and times in my life where I thought, "Well, church attendance is sort of optional. I don't necessarily need to go. Why do I need to be there? I can be a good Christian without it. So, our church experience is base camp. It's not the summit. But it's not something that we want to bypass either.

Well, what is the summit? The summit is transformation. The summit is that thing that God is doing in your life and in my life too—to transform us as a person and as His

people. Just because we occupy a seat here on the weekends does not mean that that has happened. But it's also important that we are here and a part of this as well. This is base camp.

So over the next seven weeks we're going to kind of unpack our gear and repack it and we really want to explore our seven values as a church. What is it that we are about? What are we seeking to accomplish?

If you've been around here for a while, these seven values will be review for you. Hopefully they will be a good reminder as we take a look at them in a fresh way. And if you're somewhat new to our church, hopefully this will give you a good idea as to who we are and what we are about and where our heart is and what it is that we are seeking to accomplish.

We're going to be in the Book of Acts every weekend together. So if you have a Bible or a Bible app go ahead and meet me in the Book of Acts. Acts is a book that records the history of the early church. Some of you know that. That's just review. You may not though. Luke is the author of the Book of Acts. He's recording and telling us all we need to know about the beginning of the first century church.

One of the things that I love about our seven values is that all seven can be found in the Book of Acts. So we're going to be looking at the history of the early church and where these values came about and then how we can contextualize these for our church today.

Go ahead and find Acts, chapter 10, starting in verse 1. If you don't have a Bible in front of you, bring it next week. I'll put these verses on the screen beside me as we walk through this. We're going to read a passage that describes a meeting between two men who were perceived enemies. They didn't have very much in common. Their worlds wouldn't have naturally intersected. But God is going to bring these two guys together, not only for what happened, but then there is kind of a why behind it that we need to take with us and that will reinforce this value.

We start off in verse 1. It says, "In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius," can I just say that that's a sweet name? There are not enough Corneliuses in the world. And if you happen to be pregnant, throw that name in the hat, alright? "... who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. "

So what I want you to know about this guy is that he was what would kind of be a modern-day equivalent of an army officer. So he is very successful at what he does. He's a centurion, which means that he leads about 100 men. It gets better than that.

Going on in verse 2, Luke wants us to know: "He was a devout," that's the word that he chooses to use. It means that he's a faithful, "... God-fearing man, as was everyone in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. If you knew nothing else about him you would say, "Well, I don't really that he needs much else. I

mean, this sounds like a pretty good guy.”

Now understand that he is a Gentile in the first century. God’s people were Jewish in nature, so he’s a Gentile but he’s God fearing and he’s devout. I think there was something about Judaism that he respected and appreciated. He was generous with the poor and he prayed regularly to God. But what we’re going to see is that even though he was a good, religious, devout man he is still in need of Jesus. That’s the one thing that he does not have.

Going on in verse 3 it says, “One afternoon about three o’clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. ‘Cornelius!’ the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror.” I would too. “‘What is it, sir?’ he asked the angel. And the angel replied, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering!’” In other words: God has acknowledged you. God has seen your heart, “‘Now send some men to Joppa,’” Joppa was about 32 miles south of Caesarea along the seashore, “‘and summon a man named Simon Peter. He is staying with Simon, a tanner’” a tanner was somebody who specialized in leather goods so it had nothing to do with Hawaiian Tropic, “‘who lives near the seashore.’”

So understand. God comes to Cornelius at 3 o’clock. The reason why I think that Luke points out that it’s 3 o’clock is because that was the Jewish hour of prayer. So at an hour when the Jewish people were supposed to be lifting their voices to God, God sent His voice to Cornelius. And He says: Cornelius, I want you to send some of your men 32 miles south to this guy named Peter. He’s a Jewish apostle. You have nothing in common. You guys are perceived enemies. Your worlds never crossed. I want you to send some men and bring him to meet you.

Now, meanwhile in Joppa Peter is at Simon the Tanner’s house and he goes up onto the rooftop at lunch to pray. Now if any of you have ever tried to pray when you are hungry—it’s really difficult because it’s hard to concentrate. And he’s up there and he’s hungry and it’s about lunch time so God uses the opportunity to speak to him in a vision. You can read all of this in verses 7 through 15.

God lowers this blanket or this white sheet from heaven and inside of this blanket or sheet is all kinds of animals that the Jews would have viewed as dirty or unclean. They were forbidden by law to consume. And a voice says to Peter in this dream: kill and eat. And I’m sure that would have been tempting because he was hungry. But here’s the thing. Peter is deeply, deeply offended. And he cries out and he says: I’ve never eaten anything unclean.

Now keep in mind Peter is not talking about his clean diet. He’s not talking about Paleo, he’s not talking about high protein, gluten free, low carb—that’s not what he is referring to. He’s referring to his Jewish upbringing. He was a good Jewish boy. And he’s talking about his religious convictions. He’s like: How could you ask me to do something that I have never done in my entire life. Why would you ask me to violate these personal convictions that I have. And then God says to him in verse 15: Peter, if I made it then it

isn't unclean.

And in verse 17 it says, "Peter was very perplexed." He's thinking to himself, "What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Standing outside the gate, they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there. Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision," here's where the Holy Spirit gets involved, "the Holy Spirit said to him, 'Three men have come looking for you. Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them.'" That is implying that he had a lot to be hesitant over. And it says: Don't worry, for I have sent them.

Now Peter may be confused as to what is going on but what I want you to see is that God had spoken to this Gentile centurion named Cornelius up in Caesarea and now he has spoken to this Jewish apostle named Peter in Joppa. And basically He said: I want you guys to meet. Do you see what God is doing? He's orchestrating a meeting here. And it is impossible to really, fully understand the gulf of difference that would have existed between the Jews and the Gentiles.

We've talked about it around here before and we'll actually see this come up another time or two in our study during this series, but basically the Jews were God's chosen people. That's great. They were chosen by God to be a blessing. The problem was that they interpreted being chosen by God as favoritism. And they thought: Since we are God's chosen people, then that obviously means that we are his favorites, that we have got this thing figured out. Therefore they drew lines of division between them and other groups of people. And Peter is a Jew and Cornelius is a Gentile and there were clear lines of division between them and God is trying to break those lines of division down.

In verses 24 through 33 we read that Peter arrives at Cornelius' house and I would imagine that he stepped off of the camel or whatever he was riding on and he kind of tentatively walks up to the door. He's the foreigner here. He's the outsider here. Cornelius has gathered all his friends and family into his house and Peter steps inside and they greet one another, they sort of swapped stories as to what God had said to them and how they had arrived.

I love what Cornelius says because he is clearly a gracious host. He had good people skills. He understood what was going on. And in verse 33 he says this to Peter, "So I sent for you at once and it was good of you to come." I love that. That's something you can kind of blow right past if you're ever reading this in your Bible on your own.

Basically, what Cornelius has just said is: Hey, I'm acknowledging that it's probably a little intimidating for you to be here. I'm acknowledging that you're probably a little bit out of your comfort zone. I'm acknowledging that you're laying your reputation on the line for even showing up at my house. You know what? It's good of you to come. And now that we are all here we are waiting before God to hear the message.

In other words, this isn't just a photo op. This isn't just a casual meeting: We want to

hear some content from you. We want to hear the message the Lord has given you. You ever been put on the spot like that? You walk in and it's like: So we're prepared. Are you prepared to give a few words to us today?

No, I don't get what you're talking about.

He says: We want to hear the message. You got something to say to us Peter? And then Peter replied—now notice Peter did not come out with a condescending tone, Peter didn't sound judgmental. Peter didn't say: Yeah, I've got a couple of things to say to you. Instead this is what he says, "I see very clearly that God chose no favoritism and in every nation He accepts those who fear Him and do what is right."

I love how personable and humble Peter is in this moment. Before he delivers this message that Cornelius and his friends, family, and relatives needed to hear—and they needed to hear it—he says: Let me tell you what God has been doing in my own heart. Let me tell you that right now I'm being worked. Let me tell you right now I'm convicted because for so long I just kind of lived in such a way that I just felt like God had favorites that I was a part of His chosen people. You know what? God has shown me that the gospel here is for everyone. Can I just tell you what God is doing in my own heart first?

I think that that was enough to cause them to say: We're ready to listen to whatever it is that you have to say. And then Peter dials it in and he is clear and he is concise and he says in verse 36, I love this, he says, "This is the message of good news for the people of Israel," in other words it started there but now it's expanding, "that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

I would want you to know, and I realize that maybe at all of our campuses right now, maybe some of you are not yet convinced—maybe you came at an invitation of a friend or a family member and I want you to know that this right here is the essence of what we call the gospel message. There is peace—anybody looking for peace? There is peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Now in order for that to be good news you've got to understand that maybe there is some bad news. And this word peace kind of implies that there is a war going on. God is at war. Now He's not at war with you, He's not at war with a group of people. God is at war with this thing called sin that is in the world.

I realize that whenever we are told that we are sinners, it might be easy to sort of get put off or offended by that because we all see ourselves in the best possible light. We all see that we are good people with good intentions, so we hear that we are sinners and we kind of get offended by that and say, "No, no, no—I'm a good person."

Nobody is disputing your intentions. This is where I think it would be important for us to understand the difference between two words that start with "C": cancer and character. Those are very, very different things. And you can have a good solid character but still have cancer that needs to be dealt with.

If I were to go to the doctor this week and if the doctor were to diagnose me with cancer in my physical body, the appropriate response for me would be to say, “What needs to be done? Tell me what we need to do to address this cancer in my life.”

The inappropriate response would be, “How dare you? I’m a good person. I’ve got good intentions.” I think the doctor would look at me with a bit of a puzzled look on his face and he would say, “I’m not saying anything about your character. I’m just telling you that you have cancer to deal with.”

See, many times we don’t see sin as cancer because it’s so fun. Can I just be honest and say that sin is a whole lot of fun and that might be surprising for you to hear a pastor say. I thought it might be kind of quiet. I didn’t think that anybody would agree with that out loud or verbally. Listen. If sin isn’t fun then you aren’t doing it right. And I’m sure that some of us here could help you, right? Figure that out. Or, you’re just not being honest about it. Sin is a whole lot of fun—for a while. And then it completely jacks up your life. And that’s what God is taking aim at.

Just think about this for a minute. Sin, at its essence, really only boils down to two things: pride and selfishness. And everything else springs out of that. So lust and greed and anger and envy and jealousy and all of those things are all connected to my pride and selfishness. And it feels good for a little while. And then it begins to attack my contentment, my peace of mind, and every single one of my relationships.

Let me tell you this. Whenever my marriage goes through a difficult time, it’s usually connected to my pride and selfishness. Whenever I’m worried about finances and I start to cross the line from just wanting to take care of my family into personal greed, it’s usually connected to pride and selfishness. When I get angry and I lose it with somebody, it’s always connected to pride and selfishness.

Now let me tell you, in each of those scenarios there is a brief moment when it feels really, really good before it all falls apart. It’s kind of like sneezing. Sneezing feels really good for a minute and then you’ve got that clean up to deal with afterward, right? That’s kind of what sin is.

And Peter is acknowledging: Listen. All of us have this sin condition. Every single one of us regardless of how good a person we are, regardless of our good intentions in our lives—we all still have this cancer of sin.

And listen. When the Bible talks about the wrath of God and the justice of God it’s talking about this sin that is cancer that He wants to deal with in your life so that you can live life to the fullest. And Peter delivers this content to Cornelius and his household and there’s the message of what the text is saying.

But then if you really want to understand the passage, you’ve got to ask yourself, “Why is this here? Why would God send a vision to Cornelius and why would God do the

whole blanket thing with the dirty animals on it? You know, the whole barbecue thing for Peter in Joppa? And why would He get these two guys together?” It’s because God is presenting the application of the passage to you and me today.

Here it is. This is not a slide on the screen but I want you to take this with you. Write it down. Put it on your phone. Take it with you. It’s simply this: God always uses people to reach people. And I love that about Him. I love the fact that God could save any one of us without any one of us. God could just speak by His Holy Spirit into each one of our lives. But God, more times than not, will always send another individual into your life and mine to speak words of truth and grace.

Just look all through the Book of Acts. We see that all of these conversion accounts and there is always somebody else involved. I mean you’ve got the Philippian jailor who had Paul and Silas, and you see that Lydia had Paul, the Ethiopian eunuch had Philip.

My favorite is Ananias. This guy named Saul is killing Christians and he’s on the road to Damascus and God blinds him with a bright light and speaks to him. I think that God could have saved him in and of Himself. He didn’t need anybody else. But God comes to this poor guy named Ananias and He goes: Hey, there is this guy named Saul. I blinded him. I need you to go talk to him.

And Ananias is like: Um, okay. I think I miss-heard you. Saul? Like that guy kills Christians.

Yeah, I know.

Well, you know that’s kind of scary.

Yeah, I know. I need you to go talk to him.

And Ananias didn’t really even say anything revolutionary to Paul, but God wanted him to go. God always uses people to reach people.

I think about my own life. I could rattle off half a dozen or more names of men and women whom God has brought into my life who have spoken words of truth and grace just when I needed them the most. And I’m confident that you could as well.

This is why the first of our values that we are looking at in this series is this one right here. It’s relational evangelism. It’s one of our seven values as a church. And this is what we mean by it. We want to remove any unnecessary barriers, because there are barriers to Jesus that we won’t remove—namely watering down any of the truth that everybody needs to hear in their lives. But there are some unnecessary barriers: religiosity, unnecessary moralism, being mean spirited, being weird. All of those are barriers that can keep people from knowing, trusting, and following Jesus.

I believe that Jesus can save anybody. But He's basically said to us: if you lift up My name, if you live this out, I'm drawing all men and women unto myself. People are really thirsty. People want to know. Our task, both as individuals and as a church, is to not convince anybody of anything, but to remove the unnecessary barriers so that people can get to Jesus. In other words, clear the path. And that's what we mean.

See, we have this conviction that Jesus is the only one, He's the only one, who can change anyone ... and He is available to everyone. It's not my task to convince you of anything. I took that pressure off of myself years ago. As a younger preacher I always felt real nervous. I felt like, "I've got to convince them." I've just taken that off of me. It's not my job to convince anybody of anything. Jesus is the one who does that.

It is our task to love people and to present grace and truth in the way that we speak with them, in the way that we interact. And we want to push that down into the DNA of our church.

Now, I'm going to go ahead and go out on a limb and say that regardless of where you are, what you believe, how you are living your life right now—regardless of whether you would call yourself a follower of Jesus or you would say, "You know what? I'm just not yet convinced."— I'm going to go out on a limb and say that evangelism is probably not your favorite word.

It makes us a little nervous. It makes us tense. Some of us are like, "What's value number one?" Evangelism. "Awesome." I think that we can look at that and we immediately can think of all of the worst examples of this, can't we? So maybe we get sweaty palms just thinking about it. Our heart rate elevates. I don't know, the thing that comes to my mind is sitting down to have dinner with my family and the doorbell rings and it's a couple of religious people out on the front porch who want to convince me to believe something.

Maybe you think about that co-worker who spiritualizes every conversation. And you are like, "Man, are you a real person at all?" Maybe you think about that family member at Thanksgiving who asks you to pass the mashed potatoes and as you do they say, "So, are you born again?" Well that's weird, alright? I get that there are all kinds of strange examples of this.

Tim Downs who is an author of a book called Finding Common Ground shares an experience that kind of authenticates these fears and I just want to read an excerpt of what he writes. He says, In the fall of 1975, I was actively involved in a campus ministry at Indiana University. At one of the weekly gatherings the campus director unexpectedly announced that there would be no presentation that evening. Instead we were all going to pair up and go out on campus to find someone with whom to share our faith.

This announcement was met with the same enthusiasm as if he had announced that we would all be having root canals....

We all agreed to go and meet back an hour later to describe our experiences. My roommate and I decided to team up. We headed out to the streets of downtown Bloomington to look for an appropriate target. We spotted a solitary figure standing under a street light. He met all of our criteria: He was alone, he seemed to have nothing to do, and most importantly he was smaller than we were. We approached.

“Hi,” I said. “My name is Tim and this is Dave.” I forgot to ask his name. “We’d like to share with you the contents of this little booklet. Would that be okay with you?” He turned and began to slowly walk away, his eyes glued to the sidewalk. He said nothing in response to our question, so we assumed his consent. I began to read.

“This first page says that just that there are laws that govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws that govern or relationship with God ...”

I plunged ahead. As I finished each of the four spiritual laws, I was careful to stop and add an illustration or an explanation. For his part, he said nothing; he simply began to pick up the pace of his walk, his eyes never leaving the ground before him.

I went on.

“Man is sinful and separated from God so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love.” We came to an intersection. Without waiting for the light to change, he ran across, putting his very life in danger. We were right behind him, reading fast.

“Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience His love.” By this time, we were in a dead sprint. What a sight we must have been: one student running down the sidewalk with two others in hot pursuit, reading as we went, like some sort of mobile study group.

We arrived at his dorm just as I finished my presentation. He was out of sidewalk, I was out of spiritual laws, and we were all out of breath. He flung open the front door, wheeled around to look at us for the very first time with a glare in his eye. And he slammed the door.

Dave and I began to sheepishly look around wondering if anybody had seen us clearly enough to identify us. We began the long walk back to the gathering dreading the upcoming opportunity to tell the other students our story of this profound spiritual encounter. I could hear the other student’s stories now. The lonely freshman from a broken home who receive the gospel in tears; the alcoholic pre-med student who not only came to faith but became sober instantly; the impromptu testimony given at a drunken frat party, which ended with all of the brothers joining hands and singing How Great Thou Art. And then it would be our turn. “We read a tract to a guy chasing him down the sidewalk in a full sprint. He tried to get away but we stayed right there with him. He glared at us but he didn’t actually throw anything.

I think that some of you have been greatly impacted by campus ministries or the Four Spiritual Laws. That's not what's wrong with this story. What's wrong with this story—did you catch it? They never bothered to make a connection. He didn't even ask the student his name. And it's not that they were wrong, the content was good, it was just out of context, it was weird.

See, the word for what they were doing—and this is what so many people rightfully reject in our culture—maybe this is what you have a problem with as well. It's this word right here: proselytize. Let me just give you this definition. Proselytize is an attempt to convert someone from one religious belief or opinion to another. Do you see how impersonal that is?

And it's not that we shouldn't tell people, it's not that we shouldn't communicate something— this is different. This is impersonal. This is a transaction. This is no regard for who this other person is. No questions to ask, “Hey, who are you. Tell me about your life. Tell me about your background. Tell me what you believe. Tell me what you struggle with. And tell me what questions you have so that I can be sensitive to that.”

Just trying to tell people what they should believe and how they should live their lives, especially when you've shown zero interest in who they are as a person and what they are going through and what their story entails, it's highly offensive.

But that's not what evangelism is. Here is evangelism. And there are multiple definitions of this. I like this one: Evangelism is simply taking the posture to say, “Hey, I found something good. It's been given to me. It's not because I'm smarter than anybody else; it's not because I know more; it's not because I've got everything figured out, I've found something good. It's been given to me and I want to tell you about it and then you can decide for yourself, because I can't convince you of anything. But I can tell you about something good in my life.”

It's amazing that anytime that I experience something good, whether it's a new restaurant or a documentary on Netflix or a vacation spot, there's just something natural within me—I just want to tell somebody. And usually the next person that I see or talk to, especially if I'm in a relationship with them, I'll just naturally share it with them. But it's not weird. I'm not trying to sell them on it. I'm not trying to strong-arm them on it. I'm simply coming across saying, “Hey, I discovered something really good. I'd just love to tell you about it. Check it out for yourself.”

See evangelism is not winning a debate. And if you're thinking about it like a debate then you're thinking about it wrong. Evangelism is not convincing someone to believe like you do, live like you do, or behave like you do. Evangelism does not mean that we have it all figured out, know all of the answers, and that we don't struggle with questions anymore. Evangelism is more than just memorizing a tract and then repeating it at somebody. Evangelism is about building genuine relationships with people, much like we see with Peter and Cornelius: Peter, it was good of you to come. Tell us what God has sent you to say to us.

Well, hey. Before I do that can I just tell you what God is doing in my own life?

I'd love to stand before you as the example of this as your pastor, but I have failed at this more times than I have succeeded. And there have been so many times when I just forgot to be a human being. It's a little bit like what Jake talked about last week, just crawling down into the well with somebody and just listening and just being a human being and shouldering it with them. And isn't it true that you're the most open to hearing about something brand new from somebody you know who loves and cares about you?

It's not our job to change anybody's mind. It's simply our job to say, "I've found something good, true, and life-changing and I want to share it with you too. I want you to experience it too. You just come and see. Come and see for yourself and you decide—and then backing it up with a life that has been transformed.

Haddon Robinson says it this way. This is super convicting for me. He says, "Those who are far from God are first drawn towards Christians and then to Christ." There is another author who said that many people read the Bible they read Christians. Robinson says, "Unfortunately, not all Christian attract. Like a turned magnet, some repel."

It was super convicting for me this last week because I was thinking about that and I thought, "You know, a magnet—when you look at it—just by looking at it you don't know what side attracts and which side repels because they both look the same until you get up close to it. And the same can be true in the world. I think that many people look at Christians, at a distance, and they can't really tell by looking at them, but if they have one or two or a dozen bad experiences when Christians repelled—they throw everybody into that category.

So here's the question for you. I've asked it of myself: do you attract or do you repel? in the way that you present yourself, in the way that you love people, and in what you say.

So I just want to give you a handful of practical applications to take with you. I want to teach the text and explain the text and then I want to send you with something from the text. And here are the applications, and these applications are for those of you who are Christ followers. So if you're not yet convinced, this will hopefully just give you an indication of what we are attempting to do—what we would like to do.

Here's the first thing. We need to communicate to people simply this statement right here: I care enough about you to tell you the truth and I'm going to do it in love. I care enough that I want you to know the truth because the truth is just really, really good and it may not be what you think but I'm going to do it in a loving spirit.

Here's the next thing I want us to consider. Communicate to them: I care more about you than being right. So regardless of whether you've received this or not, regardless of whether you believe this, it's not going to change the fact that I'm going to continue to

be your friend and I'm going to continue to be there in your life. And if you share the gospel with somebody and they reject it and then you reject them—wow. That's repelling people away from the good news of Jesus.

Here's the next application: Make fewer statements and ask more questions. I think the number one reason why we are so hesitant to share our faith is because we're not sure that we know enough and what if they ask us a question that we don't know the answer to? Isn't that true? So we just kind shy back from it. Well here's the thing. Just ask them more questions than they ask you. Just fill up the time, right?

When you make a statement—even if you're not trying to come across this way—when you make a statement it makes it sound like you're a know-it-all. It makes it sound like your diving in trying to fix their problems. Speaking as a fixer—this is my spiritual gift I have to deny, right? I have to like deny this and I have to ask lots of questions.

What kind of questions? Well, ask them their story. Ask them what they think it means to be a Christian. Ask them just lots and lots of questions and get them talking. It's amazing what God will do and where He will lead the conversation.

Here's the next one: Don't be combative or offensive. Man, don't be combative or offensive. Usually one of the first reactions to conviction is defensiveness and if you get combative about that people will just shut you down. Remain calm and kind.

Here's the next application. At some point, just say this to them—in the context of a relationship say, "Hey, you know what? I'd love to tell you sometime what God has done in my life whenever you feel comfortable with that. I'd love to have that opportunity. And you know what? I'll bet you that they will take you up on that. And it puts them in the driver's seat, it gives them a chance to process it, you're not springing it on them as you pass them the mashed potatoes. You're giving them a chance to process it themselves and they're inviting you in whenever they are ready to hear it.

Here's the last application. Some of us need to hear this. I know I do: At some point, you've got to clarify what Jesus is offering. See here's the thing. Some of you have been—some of you are really good at the relational thing and you've been building relationships and there are people in your life that you've earned the right and the credibility to speak into their lives, but you haven't yet. And maybe it's fear. Maybe you're not sure what to say. Maybe you're afraid they'll ask you a question that you won't have an answer to. But you know what? Maybe it's time. And follow the counsel of Peter in verse 36: keep it clear and keep it concise and keep it humble and make sure that you point them toward Jesus.

Some of you might recognize the name Penn Jillette. He has had a show in Vegas for a long time, Penn and Teller. Maybe you recognize that. He's known as pretty adamant atheist. A few years ago there was a Christian who came to one of his shows and afterward asked to meet with him. And he gave him a Bible. And I guess this guy was really authentic and he was real. And it really moved Penn. And the next day Penn did a

video blog about it and I want to read you what he said. This is coming from a guy who is a pretty adamant atheist.

He says this, it's so surprising. He says: "I don't respect people who don't [proselytize] ..." Now that's the word that he uses. Obviously that's his understanding of it. It doesn't make this any less true. I don't respect you if you don't.

And he goes, "If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward," Isn't that true? Man, that's my fear. I mean just try being a pastor sometime. First question people ask you on a plane, "What do you do?" It gets real interesting after that, alright?

"How much do you have to hate somebody to not [proselytize]? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? If I believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point that I tackle you, and this is more important than that."

He's got a point, doesn't he? This doesn't give us a license to be obnoxious or judgmental or mean spirited, but compassionate. And to say, "You know what man? I believe this to be so true all the way down to my bones, not because I grew up in church, not because this was mom and dad's faith but because of the transformation that God has been doing in my life. And man, I'd love to share it with you."

See, I love Paul's encouragement to the Colossians. And I just want to end it with this. What if this could be said of our church right here, that we—you and I together—would, "Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive," that's relational evangelism, "so that you will have the right response for everyone."

Father, we come to You right now and we just ask that You would give us the courage and the clarity, the compassion and conviction to build relationships especially with the people who we don't perceive that we have very much in common with. And God, maybe there is somebody who we work with and we're like, "Man, I just don't know that I could ever get along with her. I don't know that we would ever do anything outside the office, but God, I pray that You would develop a compassion for her."

Or maybe we have a family member who constantly makes fun of us for being a part of church or we've got a neighbor who we just wonder at times where they are headed and what does his story entail. God I pray that instead of us just drawing up barriers between those people, God I pray that You would give us a heart for those who need to not only know Jesus Christ and the truth that He is offering, but they need to see it.

God, I pray that, as your people, we would be the side of the magnet that attracts people to You rather than repels, that we follow the very example and footsteps of Jesus, who was often called a friend of sinners because there wasn't anybody that He

wasn't willing to interact with.

God, I pray that You would give us the courage speak when it is appropriate but You'd give us the wisdom to know how to posture ourselves when it's not. But most importantly, we would manifest Your Spirit in the way that we interact with other people.

God, I pray that if there are some at all of our campuses who this is all brand new to them and maybe they are not yet convinced or they've got major questions or hesitations that they would, during this series, at least be open to investigating this for themselves and seeing what it is that You have to offer.

God, in these next few moments as we take communion together, I pray that You would meet us in this place and work in our hearts and give us what we need from this passage. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Right now we're going to take communion together, which is just a piece of bread and a small cup of juice that represent the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. This moment right here is the reason why we gather every weekend. We've sung some songs, we've heard from God. Now is the time when we actually get to spend a little time reflecting and asking, "God what is it that You needed me to hear out of that message? Maybe it's not everything, but maybe there was one thing. God what do You want me to apply to my life and take with me from this place." Right now, in these next couple of moments is the time to do that.

If you're not a follower of Jesus, just let the tray pass. No big deal at all. Nobody's going to think anything of it. Just spend a few moments thinking and processing what God may have said to you as the ushers come right now.