

## How to Be Ready to make a Difference

**Scripture Text: James 3:13**

***“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”***

It's fun to compare how life today is different from life 500 years ago.

Some of the expressions we use, and the things we do, are based on life in the 1500's.

For instance, did you know that...?

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May.

- In order to smell pretty, brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide their body odor.
- Remember they hadn't invented Right Guard yet.
- Baths were a big tub filled with water.

- The man of the household had the privilege of nice clean water, then all the other males could take their bath.
- Next the women were allowed to bathe and then the kids.
- The babies were last.
- By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it.
- Therefore the saying, “Don't throw the baby out with the bath water.”
- Back then houses had thatched roofs.
  - It was the only place that animals could stay warm so they lived together on the roof.
  - When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would fall off.
  - That's where we get the expression, “It's raining cats and dogs.”
- When company came over, the host would bring out some bacon and hang it up in order to show off.
  - It was a sign of wealth that a man “could really bring home the bacon.”
  - They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and “chew the fat.”

Don't you feel better knowing what these phrases mean?

While many things have changed in the last half century, the Message of the Gospel stays the same.

Just before Advent – I preached a series of sermons where we learned that in order to make a Kingdom impact, we must Own our Mission.

Our Mission is on your bulletin and you'll it hanging on the walls throughout our church.

“...To fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment by reaching the unchurched with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ.”

We can do that because Jesus:

- 1<sup>st</sup> He Accepts us
- 2<sup>nd</sup> He Commissions us
- 3<sup>rd</sup> He Equips us
- 4<sup>th</sup> He Motivates us

A very popular book and study came from the Willow Creek Church, at that time pastored by Bill Hybels entitled, **Contagious Christianity**.

The thesis of that study was Christian believers sharing their faith in Christ in a Contagious and attractive way.

We want to be contagious in our Christianity, don't we?

How many of you this morning want to make a difference in sharing your faith with loved ones, friends and people you don't even know?

In the sermons in the next several weeks, I want to teach you how to do that.

My good friend and Nazarene evangelist, Richard Strickland, told me one time, **“Dan, we owe an apology to all of our laity in our churches, because for so long we preached and made people feel guilty about not sharing their faith, and yet have never endeavored to show them how to do it.”**

This morning we're going to focus on How to live out our responsibility.

Specifically, **How can we take biblical truths that few people understand and communicate them in a way that is both practical and compelling?**

**When you and I really think about it our mission is Gigantic and there is no other mission.**

- We are the plan.
- When Jesus looks at you and me this morning, He still says, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”** (John 20:21).

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As evangelicals we like to talk and preach about witnessing but we struggle to actually do it.

Evangelism is a bit like strong horseradish – we praise it with tears in our eyes!

If I had one thing I could change about this church and my ministry it would be in this very area I am going to teach about this morning.

I would change our church to putting greater emphasis on learning these basics. Maybe it's not too late yet!

I was greatly helped in my understanding of the importance of raising our evangelistic temperature from a book called, "**Building a Contagious Church**" by Mark Mittelberg (Zondervan, 2000).

I've incorporated a few of his thoughts into the first part of this message.

### **Truth #1: People Matter to God**

The starting point for all of us is to recognize and fully believe at least five truths.

### **Here's proposition #1: People matter to God.**

John 3:16 tells us that "**God so loved the world...**"

We agree with this one but we don't always own it.

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We hear it so much that it doesn't penetrate our hearts and lives anymore.

I remember I use to cry when I would think about my dad, at that time being unsaved, missing heaven and going to hell because he wasn't saved.

Do you remember when you use to cry over someone, or have you ever wept over someone who is lost?

You see - In actuality, this belief, "**God so loved the world ...**", is the hardest one to fully absorb into our value system.

### **Do you believe it to the very core of your being?**

Friends, **we need to do whatever** we can to gain God's heart toward those who don't know Him yet. II Peter 3:9 reminds us that God "**is patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**"

It doesn't matter how old they are, what color of skin they are, what country they're from, whether they have money, education, or a job.

It doesn't even matter how bad their sins are. You see – understand this - They have great value in God's eyes, and their repentance will bring

**“rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God”** (Luke 15:10).

## Truth #2: People are Spiritually Lost

Romans 3:10-12 spells out this reality: **“As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have altogether become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’”**

**This is not a pretty picture.**

- But we need to understand this truth or we won’t be motivated to become a contagious Christian.
- People are lost without Christ.
- Applying this certainty on a personal level, it means that our friends, our neighbors, and even our family members are not okay simply because they do good things and engage in religious activities.

Let’s be crystal clear on this: **No matter how “good” people are, if they don’t know Christ as Savior and Lord, they are headed for eternal torment in a place called Hell.**

This can be shown by adding a chasm to our drawing which illustrates what Isaiah 59:2 states:

**“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”**

## Truth #3: People Need Christ

The good news is that everyone matters to God.

The bad news is that people are spiritually lost.

The great news is that Jesus died as full payment for our sins and everyone needs Christ in order to be saved.

Our post-Christian culture bristles at the teaching that Jesus is the only way to a relationship with God, the Father.

And, there is an insidious form of religious pluralism that is creeping into many churches, which teaches that there are multiple ways to get to God.

Folks, there is no truth to those lies.

Jesus Himself said in

John 14:6, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

Acts 4:12 adds, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”**

The apostle Paul captures this truth in a short phrase when he says in 1 Timothy 1:15: “...**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst ...**”

Here’s the tough thing we have to admit: we have an unpopular message and we’ve been commissioned to present it boldly.

While it might not be popular, it’s the best news we can give to people who are spiritually lost and on the road to eternal separation from God.

People need to hear the message of the cross because, as Romans 1:16 says, “***It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.***”

Before moving on to the fourth truth, for most of us, the first three are nothing new.

This is standard Christian teaching that has been taught in various ways for two thousand years.

**While it’s true, we need to ask God to transfer these truths from our head to our heart and then to our hands.**

## **Truth #4: People Have Moved**

While this picture may have described people in our culture a few decades ago, something has changed.

The vast majority of people in our society used to live close to the chasm and had at least some understanding that they were sinners who needed the forgiveness of God.

Most people shared sort of a collective church consciousness.

As a result, evangelism could be very direct and confrontational.

After all, if people are on the fence, they need a compelling presentation and a push to commit their lives to Christ.

Here’s the fourth truth.

**For the most part, people in our culture have moved.**

They have disengaged from biblical moorings and can no longer look over the edge and see the depth of their sins.

In fact, for many people, they don’t even recognize that there is a rift between them and God.

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People are further away than we had originally thought – and they're continuing to move in the wrong direction.

Here's how we can illustrate it:

Whatever term we use: secular, postmodern, or post-Christian, the fact is that people don't think the way they used to think or believe the things they used to believe.

People have taken steps away from Christian beliefs, values and morals.

When we say, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," many will respond by saying, "Oh yeah? Which God?"

They may even wonder what they've done that is so bad that they need forgiveness for.

The position of the postmodern person is that all people are basically good, even though they may make mistakes here and there.

**Because so many people today don't believe in absolute truth**, and they regard those who do with suspicion and even contempt.

We must be willing to try something else.

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We need to communicate the same message but use a different approach.

If we're serious about impacting our culture with the life-changing gospel, we must recognize that people have moved. That leads to our fifth truth: People Need Answers.

### **Truth #5: People Need Answers**

Many have erected roadblocks and walls between them and the Lord.

If we want to help move others toward Christ, we need to proactively address their issues and show that the Christian life is the best way to live and the only way to die.

People today require more than to merely have the gospel declared to them – they must also have it demonstrated.

And if they are going to really listen, then they need to be disarmed.

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 10:5: ***"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."***

Please turn in your Bible to **1 Peter 3:13-16**.

We'll see that we have **three responsibilities** if we want to be ready to reach lost people today.

- **We need to Demonstrate (3:13-15a)**
- **We need to Defend (3:15b)**
- **We need to Disarm (3:15c-16)**

Follow along as I read:

***“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”***

### **1) – Demonstrate (3:13-15a)**

If you haven't read the book of 1 Peter recently, I highly recommend it to you for further study.

Peter instructs different groups of believers by giving them specific guidelines on how to live in a world that is hostile to their presence.

The problem of suffering has marked the people of God throughout the centuries, and continues today.

In **chapter 3**, Peter gives several principles for enduring difficulty in a way that is thoroughly Christian.

- In **verse 13**, we're told that doing good will make persecution less likely.
- While he generally believes that this will help, he knows that not all of our adversaries will be so lenient in **verse 14**.
- But, even if we suffer, we will be blessed.

Matthew 5:10 puts it this way: ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

The last part of verse 14 contains a quote from Isaiah 8:12-14: ***“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”***

The context in Isaiah 8 describes how Ahaz, who was king of Judah, faced a crisis when the Assyrian army was just about to attack.

The kings of Israel and Syria invited Ahaz to join them in an alliance so they could oppose Assyria, but he stubbornly refused.

When he turned them down, Israel and Syria begin to make plans to attack Judah.

Now, there are three powerful countries poised to pounce on Ahaz!

Unbelievably, Ahaz decides to align himself with the wicked king of Assyria because he is so afraid.

The prophet Isaiah warned him against this ungodly partnership and urged him to trust God for deliverance.

Peter quotes this passage from Isaiah to remind us that when we are faced with a crisis we may be tempted to give in to our fears and make wrong decisions.

The bottom line is that the fear of the Lord conquers every other kind of fear.

If our relationship with God is strong, we can handle opposition and even persecution.

Folks, listen to me Fear can paralyze us.

The disciples were huddled in fear in the upper room after the Resurrection.

The same word for **“fear”** that described the disciples is used here in verse 14 and means **“to be so frightened that you want to flee.”**

Have you ever felt that way? I have. It’s especially scary when it comes to witnessing, isn’t it?

Friends, the first step in being ready to make a difference is to demonstrate authenticity in your Christian life.

Verse 15 begins with a contrast to verse 14.

- The word “but” shows that we don’t have to be filled with fear.
- The word “hearts” is from the Greek, “kardia.”
- The heart is the most important place in the human system and came to represent man’s entire mental and moral activity.

What Peter is about to ask us to do must take place internally, not externally because it must happen at the core of our being.

We are to **“set apart Christ as Lord.”**

To “set apart” means to “sanctify” or “make holy.”

Peter is arguing that Jesus must be Lord of our lives.

The word “Lord” is a title of honor that demands respect and reverence.

It’s the New Testament equivalent of the title “Jehovah.”

To say that Jesus is my Lord is to say that He has sovereign power and authority over me and I submit to Him with reverent obedience, because I am His possession.

When Jesus is set apart as Lord, He will deliver us from fear.

**To live under the lordship of Christ is a command.**

It’s one thing to acknowledge Jesus as Savior, it’s another thing to make Him Lord of your life.

Scripture never separates the Lordship of Jesus from his work as Savior.

In the book of Acts, He is referred to as Savior twice, but is called Lord 92 times!

- When the two titles are mentioned together, Lord always precedes Savior.
- When Thomas finally recognized Jesus as His Savior after the Resurrection, he exclaimed: ***“My Lord and my God!”***

- Charles Spurgeon has said, **“You cannot have Christ for your Savior unless you also have Him as your Lord.”**

Is Jesus Lord of your life right now?

Have you ever made a decision of your will to decide to live under His leadership in every area of your life?

Is Jesus in complete control, or are you deliberately keeping things from Him?

You see – watch out for this thinking - It’s easy to think that because Christ has enabled us to overcome one or two sins in our lives, that we are now good enough.

Some of us are living under our own leadership, not the Lord’s.

Emily Post, the etiquette expert of another generation, was once asked, “What is the correct procedure when one is invited to the White House but has a previous engagement?”

This is how she answered, **“An invitation to dine at the White House is a command, and it automatically cancels any other engagement.”**

The Lord of the universe has given us a command.

He needs to reign in our hearts.

He is Lord and longs to lead your life.

Are you ready to cancel all other engagements so that you can dine with Him for the rest of your life?

Let's face it.

One of the reasons we don't engage in evangelism is because we know we're not 100% committed to Christ.

While we don't have to be perfect, we do need to have something to share with people.

Spiritual seekers want to know that Christianity is not just some stale theological exercise, but a daily relationship with Christ that radically transforms a life from the inside out.

Sadly, according to researcher George Barna, almost half of born-again believers questioned in a nationwide poll admitted they are "searching for meaning and purpose."

This is the same percentage as what non-Christians say.

If believers are not experiencing meaning and purpose in life, than what do we have to give to lost people?

If people don't see us living with love, joy, and hope then do they really want what we have?

The first thing we're called to do is to demonstrate an authentic Christian life by setting apart Christ as Lord in our hearts.

Evangelism is primarily what we are, not what we do.

As someone has said, "**Evangelism is what spills over when we bump into someone.**"

When we're living under the leadership of Christ, we have something that appeals to others when it spills on them.

## **2) – Defend (15b)**

**The second challenge is to defend what we believe.**

We see this in the middle part of verse 15:  
***"...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..."***

We're called to visualize Christianity by living it.

We're also urged to verbalize our faith by expressing it.

Here's how it works.

When we are living under the Lordship of Christ, our lives will be characterized by hope.

Non-Christians will see what we have and be curious about it.

Some of them will ask us about our faith.

When they do, we need to be ready.

The word **“always”** means that we are to be ready at all times, to be on a state of alert.

We should have an attitude of anticipation.

If we are walking with Christ, people will notice, and they will ask.

To be **“prepared”** comes from the word that we translate **“fitness.”**

It carries with it the idea of **“being in readiness.”**

We're challenged to give an “answer.”

This is the Greek word, **“apologia,”** from which we get the word “apology.”

That doesn't mean we should apologize for our faith, but instead means a “verbal defense.”

It was used in a courtroom when someone gave evidence or testimony about a situation.

We are to be prepared to give a logical, step-by-step explanation for what we believe.

Not every Christian has to be a theologian, but every believer is called to be an apologist – we're all charged with the responsibility of giving a reason for our faith.

Did you notice what causes people to ask about our faith?

It's the fact that we have “hope.”

When you think about it, this world offers no hope.

When a pre-Christian sees someone living with hope, they want to know how to get it for themselves.

We're to give an answer to everyone who “asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have.”

The word “ask” means to “crave or desire.”

People are craving answers.

They know they don't have hope – and they want it.

While there are no hopeless situations, there are tons of people who have grown hopeless about them.

Are you ready to give them the answer?

### 3) – Disarm (15c-16)

When we demonstrate the leadership of Christ in our lives, people will be curious and will want some answers.

When they ask, we need to be ready to defend our faith.

Lastly, the end of verse 15 tells us how to witness in a way that disarms people: "...but do this with gentleness and respect...."

We must remember that we are not called to win arguments, but to make disciples.

While we should be ready to defend what we believe, we should avoid being abrasive.

I wish I had done this when I first became a Christian.

I'm sure I turned a lot of people off by my self-righteous attitude.

We're to be "gentle."

This is translated "meekness" in some versions.

It's an inner attitude that affects the way we interact with others. 2 Corinthians 10:1 gives us a great example of how Paul treated others: ***"By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you..."***

We're also to relate "respectfully" to others.

Interestingly, this is the same word that is translated "fear" in verse 14.

We're to have a sense of holy awe at the opportunity to speak words of life to people who are lost in their sins.

Instead of bolting, we're to turn our sense of fear into a reliance upon Christ.

It's a holy moment when eternity hangs in the balance.

Most of our witnessing is likely to happen in the passing moments of conversation.

As we mix it up with people, we'll have opportunities.

The issue is not that we should necessarily become more aggressive about sharing our faith.

It's that we should be more sensitive to the needs of the people around us, and more aware of the subtle promptings of the Holy Spirit.

To be respectful will mean that we will be more gentle to people and their pain.

When our attitude is gracious and gentle, verse 16 helps us see that those who oppose Christianity will be disarmed: ***"...those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."***

### **Conclusion:**

As we demonstrate Christ to people by making sure He is Lord of our lives, as we defend the reason for the hope that we have, and as we disarm people by our attitude of gentleness and respect, God will use us to clear the way for people to see the central message of the Cross of Christ.

Once the barriers crumble, our friends will be more prone to hear the message in a way they can understand and embrace.

Here's how we can illustrate it:

### **Challenge**

As we wrap up this morning, let me give you three challenges that relate to demonstrating, defending, and disarming. I'll take them in reverse order:

**1. Disarm.** Ask God to turn your fear of witnessing into an inner attitude of grace and gentleness toward those you know. Specifically, think of one person and determine to communicate gentleness and respect by something you say to him or her this week.

**2. Defend.** Practice telling your story. If you've never written out your testimony, I encourage you to do it this week. For an outline, think about what your life was like "before" you became a Christian. Then describe "how" you became a Christian. Finally, write down how your life has changed "after" your conversion. This is part of being ready. Find a Christian and practice with him or her. Make sure to explain words and phrases that may sound archaic and mysterious.

**3. Demonstrate.** If you have never submitted yourself to the Lordship of Christ, I want to give you an opportunity to do so right now. Turn everything over to Him. Live only to please Him. Be satisfied with nothing less than God's purposes and the pleasure of serving Him.

Please close your eyes and reflect on these words:

You call me Master and obey me not,  
You call me Light and see me not,  
You call me Way and follow me not,  
You call me Life and desire me not,  
You call me Wise and acknowledge me not,  
You call me Fair and love me not,  
You call me Rich and ask me not,  
You call me Eternal and seek me not,  
You call me Gracious and trust me not,  
You call me Noble and serve me not,  
You call me Mighty and fear me not,  
You call me Lord and surrender not.

Invitation and Closing Prayer