

We've spent our entire fall looking at Harbor's mission, which from the day we opened our doors fifteen years ago has been to *Help People Find Their Way back to God!* Each week, we've been asking the question...

*Now that the gospel is going to work in us...
How does the gospel work its way out through us?*

And I've been trying my very best to show you that when the God's grace goes to work in your life, it will produce in you habits and characteristics that your friends and neighbors may consider curious.

I received an email this week from a woman who attends Harbor, sharing how God is working in her father's life to bring him back to a personal faith in Jesus. At the end of the email, she wrote that her father attended Harbor some time ago, and went on to say this!

"I think he did see a questionable life that day in all that he saw, heard, met, etc. and I like to believe that he sees (our) new faith and how it's "busting out of us"."

Now...if you were to meet this couple, you would immediately see that their newfound love for Jesus is contagious...and they habitually and joyfully bless others. As a result, God is working through them to stir in her father a spiritual curiosity.

You have no idea what God is able to do in and through your life when you live this way for his glory!

Let's look one last time at the text that inspired this entire series. Written by the Apostle Paul in Colossians chapter 4. Will you read it aloud with me?

"Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone." Colossians 4:5-6

Now...look at the beginning of that verse! As followers of Jesus, we're to make the most of what opportunity?

Every Opportunity! What opportunity? Every!

That's fairly all encompassing. So...let me ask you. When you're at work Monday morning surrounded by colleagues...is that an opportunity? Yes! Make the most of it! The holidays are upon us and because you're all committed to living *Questionable Lives*, you've already created margin in the midst of the craziness to eat with others,

right! Make the most of every opportunity! And in a couple of weeks when you're out in the drive clearing snow because it's New England, and snow is coming. And you see your neighbor with his shovel, rather than continuing to blow your snow, make the most of that opportunity? You say, ***"But it's cold!"*** Exactly! The text doesn't say, "Make the most of seasonal opportunities, but every opportunity!" Finally, when you get paid this week...your paycheck is a God-given opportunity! So...as you pay bills and purchase food and put gas in the car, make the most of what God has given you by generously giving some of it away!

As you make the most of every opportunity by blessing people for the simple purpose of bringing them joy or to alleviate a burden. And hospitality and generosity a part of your everyday life...and when you do more listening in your relationships than talking...your life will become very strange...and yet strangely attractive at the same time! And Paul goes on to imply that people will begin to question, *"Why do you live this way?"* Then he writes...when they ask...

"Be ready to have the right response for everyone."

The Apostle Peter says it this way...

"And if someone asks you about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it." 1 Peter 3:15

Always be ready to explain your hope in Christ!

Now...last week I explained that if you're going to share your hope in Christ, you must first be able to understand your story of hope! So...we discovered that there are three parts of every one of our stories who are walking in Christ! And just to remind us all...they are: ***Before*** (*this is what life was like before Jesus poured out His mercy on me*)...***But God*** (*this is what God has done*)...***Now*** (*this is what God is doing in me...*).

Today...as we wrap up this series, I want to answer the question, *"How do we explain the hope we have in Christ? How do we share our stories?"*

Now...to bring this home for us...I want to share with you one of the most unlikely and yet, most powerful stories in all of Scripture of a young woman who shared her story of hope with an entire village and as a result, saw her village transformed by Jesus.

Through her story, we discover how to share our hope in Christ with others in a meaningful way!

If you're taking notes...I'll give you three ways to effectively share your story of hope in Christ, and then we'll look at each of them. They are...**Live, Tell, and Invite!**

#1 – Live...

Look with me at John chapter 4:4...

"(Jesus) had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, 'You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?'"
John 4:4-10

Let me give you some context so you don't miss the weight of what is happening here...

Jesus entered a Samaritan village and struck up a conversation with a Samaritan woman, which may not seem unusual to you, but notice her shock that he is even speaking to her! *"You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"* **Why does she question Jesus?**

First, the Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies. Centuries before, when most of the Jews were exiled to Babylon, some of the Jews who stayed behind intermarried with other Canaanites and essentially formed a new tribe, the Samaritans. They then took parts of the Jewish religion and parts of the Canaanite religion and created a new syncretistic religion!

As a result...the Jews considered the Samaritans racially inferior heretics. On top of this, during that day it was scandalous for a Jewish man to speak to a strange woman in public.

Finally...this wasn't just any woman at the well! The text says that she came to the well at noon, while most women came in the early part of the day while it was still cool! Later, we discover why this is. She had been married to five different men, and was living with a man who wasn't her husband. And every commentator agrees that even within her little marginalized community, she would have been labeled a social and moral outsider...which is why she was at the well alone!

When Jesus speaks to her, he is deliberately reaching across every racial, cultural, gender and moral barrier! This was shocking! Look at vs. 27.

“Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, ‘What do you want with her?’ or ‘Why are you talking to her?’

John 4:27

Jesus was always doing and saying things that no one else expected! Yet...it was because of Jesus' shocking choice to talk to this young woman that her life was changed forever!

Please hear me. If you want to see your family, friends, and neighbors encounter Jesus Christ in a personal way, it will happen when you begin to live in such a way that cuts across the grain of our culture and people's expectations!

Blessers vs. Converters: In a book, *Discover Your Mission Now!*, the author recounts a doctoral thesis entitled *“Blessers versus Converters.”* The researcher looked at two teams of short-term missionaries that visited Thailand with distinctly different missional strategies.

One team went with the intention of simply **blessing** people. They saw their mission as being to bless whoever came their way in whatever practical ways they could.

Another team went with the sole intention of **converting** people and evangelizing everyone they encountered.

The author summarized the researcher's findings:

“First of all, they discovered that the ‘blessers’ had a greater social impact than the ‘converters.’ This proved that the ‘blessers’ intention of blessing the people and the community around them resulted in tremendous amounts of ‘social betterment and social good.’ Secondly, and here is what was so surprising, they discovered that the ‘blessers’ also had almost 50 times as many conversions than the ‘converters.’ The blessers were 50 times more successful at helping people find their way back to God.” Dave Ferguson

Did you catch that? The most effective way to share the greatness of Christ with the people you love is to begin by actively loving the people you love!

I mentioned all the way back at week one...that if our lives are no different from every other middle-class suburban family! We spend the same amount on our houses...we shop at all the same stores...spend the same amount on

entertainment...we take all the same vacations...and live at the same hectic pace. If our lives look exactly the same as everyone else, no one is going to QUESTION our lives!

But the moment you begin to live out your love for Jesus in surprising ways...people will grow curious...and doors of opportunity will begin to open!

If you want to share your story of hope, begin by living *A Questionable Life*.

Now, let's turn our attention this young woman, because she's going to show us the remaining two ways to effectively share our story of hope!

#2 - Tell... (vs. 28)

"The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?' John 4:28-29

At first glance...it doesn't make a lot of sense why a young woman with her past would run back to her village screaming, *"Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. He knows all my baggage!"* It makes no sense...

Unless something about her encounter with Jesus changed her so deeply...that she was no longer ashamed of everything she ever did!

Now...I'll let you go home and look at the entire encounter...but here's the cliff-notes version! When the woman questioned Jesus as to why he was speaking to her...Jesus ran with it!

"(He) replied, 'If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.'" John 4:10

To which she says, *"Wait...you asked me for water! You don't have a bucket...where are you getting this living water...and besides, this is a good well...your water can't be better than this."*

Then, Jesus goes even more cryptic... (Vs. 13)

"Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give them will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them giving them eternal life." John 4:13-14

And before long...you realize that Jesus isn't talking about literal water at all; He's speaking metaphorically... He's saying, *"I've got something for you that is as basic and necessary to you spiritually as water is to you physically. Something without which you are absolutely lost."*

Think about this for a moment. She had spent much of her life looking for love and acceptance in the arms of men! And Jesus shows up and says...

"You're thirsty...but you're trying to fill your thirst by drinking the love of men. And it's not working, is it! Why don't you try the living water I'm offering you?"

And she responds in the same way we would... *"Jesus, why don't we talk about something other than romance? Let's talk about worship! What synagogue do you go to? What kind of music do you listen to? One day a Messiah, called Christ, is going to come. And when he comes, he will explain everything to us about worship...he'll fix my man problems."*

And Jesus says to her, "I am the Messiah." I am the one you've been waiting for.

This absolutely rocks her world...The Messiah...God's chosen One is here...and He's talking to me! So she runs back to her village to tell everyone about this!

Now...it's easy to view this story as a detached spectator! But don't you see. Her story is no different than ours, is it? We've all tried to find soul-satisfaction in something other than God! We've looked for it in the arms of lover, in our careers, in our money, in beauty or in our children! Each of us has looked to something to fill the thirst inside us! But if you've tried that for very long, you've realized that those don't fill you completely do they? They don't work!

Gospel – This is the gospel! We were created to love God with everything we are and to be satisfied in Him. But we've tried to find life and satisfaction through everything and anything but God! And God knew in his sovereignty and mercy that it would never work! We would live and die thirsty and empty!

So...in a shocking act of love, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to give us the only life that will satisfy!

This is our story of hope! **Before** I met Jesus, I looked for life in all of these other things...**But God** had mercy on me...and **Now** He is the One who gives me life and peace and joy!

In the same way that Jesus has changed our lives, He changed this woman's life! He gave her the confidence and courage to go back into her village to tell everyone, *"You've got to see the one who told me everything I ever did!"*

Most of us think of evangelism as some kind of theological technique or formula we must master in order to convince people why they should give God a 2nd look. But what we learn through her story is that sharing the hope that we have in Christ is as simple as telling them, "There is one who knows everything I've ever done...and yet he loves me!"

She changed an entire village with this one statement! You have no idea what kind of effect your life can have when you learn to tell your story!

Finally...as you live a *Questionable Life*...and learn to share your story simply and clearly...there's one more thing I want to encourage you to do!

#3 – Invite... (Look again at verse 29)

"Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah? So the people came streaming from the village to see him." John 4:29-30

The final way to effectively share your hope in Christ is to simply invite others to come and see Jesus!

Let me read for you the rest of the story...the prologue that most teachers like me don't get around to. Then I'll give you some practical ways to put this into action!

"Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, 'He told me everything I ever did!' When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe." John 4:39-41

Don't you love that...an entire village meets Jesus and comes to faith in Him because of a single woman who met Jesus and had the courage to say, *"You've got to come and see this man!"*

Let me ask you! How are the people in our lives who don't know Jesus personally going to encounter him and believe? What's going to do it for your family member who is simply not interested in Jesus? How about for your colleague or neighbor?

To answer this question, you've got to look at the end of the narrative where this woman's village turns to speak to her! And what they say is remarkable!

"Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.'" John 4:42

Now we believe...not just because of what you told us...but in part because of what you told us! Meaning, if you had never told us about Jesus, we would have never believed!

Imagine for a moment if she had never run back to her townspeople to say, *"Come and see the One who told me everything I ever did."* Imagine if she never shared her story! ***Before I met Jesus...I was looking for love in the arms of lovers...But I met One gave me the acceptance and affection my heart cries for!"***

It's possible that her village would never have begged Jesus to stay, and the people of that village would have remained untouched. It is possible that her story is told...not only as an example of the great love of Jesus for a social and moral outcast, but of the great love of a woman for her village!

But she did share her story...and she did invite them to meet Jesus. And as a result...many more encountered Jesus and believed!

Application:

As we get ready to close this series...let me take a moment to encourage you, and then I'll give you a way to put this into action in the weeks ahead.

If you are walking in Christ, you have a story to share! *Take the time to discover your story by remembering what your life was like before you met Jesus, celebrating what God did to bring you back into His arms, and thanking Him for what He's doing in your life today!*

Learn to tell your story... *"There is One who knows everything I've done...yet He loves me."*

But know this...opportunities to share your story will come when you begin to live a *Questionable Life*.

Take a moment to ask yourself! Do I see God shaping in me things like hospitality, and generosity and compassion for others...the ability to listen and care? Is that happening? Ask God to shape this in you. Talk with your family or friends about ways to put these into practice this season!

Finally, remember the power of this young woman's story...and how her invitation changed her entire village!

Christmas Celebration: Harbor's Christmas Celebration is just days away...and we've been encouraging you to invite someone to join you! So...as we get ready to pray, take a moment to pray over a person or family you'd like to invite! Pray that Jesus would become as real to them as He was to that young woman! And then invite them (if they say no...keep praying...invite again!)

Never underestimate the power of a simple invitation.

My prayer for you is that a day would come when someone looks you in the eyes and says, *"Now I believe, not just because you told me! But because I have encountered Jesus myself! He is indeed the Savior of the world!"*

He is the Hope of the Word...I can't wait to celebrate this with you next weekend!

Pray!