

YAMs

Summer Midweek 2010



The Gospel, The Culture and The Church:
a radical reformation



yams summer midweek 2010 | wednesdays @ 6 p.m.

Week Seven:

Excuses: *how Satan tries to keep us from our mission*



covenant chapel

EXCUSES:

Consider this: If Jesus were to look at your life – your priorities, the way you spend your time, your money – what would he find? Would he conclude that you're doing a good job sharing the Gospel with people?

Now if you're like me, that's a really convicting thought. And if you're like me, the first place your mind goes after that realization is on the defensive. I immediately go to the reasons why I should be exempt from that conviction.

This week we're talking about excuses we commonly use to avoid our mission. As we begin, ask yourself, "What excuses most commonly come to my mind?"

I'm not sure about you, but here are my top excuses for not sharing the Gospel with people:

- Thinking I'm the only one who cares
- Thinking that everyone around me has already heard the Gospel
- Thinking I'm busy - (the "once...then..." mentality)
- Realizing I don't know what to say or do

Since these seem to be fairly common excuses, let's look at each one. As we do, let's uncover the lie we tell ourselves and, in contrast, the truth that will motivate us to pursue our mission.

Excuse #1: I'm the Only One Who Cares:

Ever feel that way? Do you ever feel like you are the only one who cares about Christ enough to do something about it? Often when we have a strong conviction for sharing the Gospel or using our lives to do something well to bring glory to God, it seems that not many people share that conviction. We feel like the only one.

And when we do feel like the only one, we are much less willing to go out and take risks to share the Gospel. But that is what followers of Christ are called to do, regardless of the number of people doing the same thing.

1 Corinthians 1:28-29: We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

We labor with Christ's energy, not our own. So we cannot be discouraged if we feel like we are the only one. We must be encouraged that it is not by our strength, but by Christ's that we will accomplish what he demands of us. What God requires, God supplies.

Moreover, we must remember that we are never the only one. This excuse is not a new one – we see the same exact thing in Elijah in the Old Testament. Elijah

was being a faithful prophet of the Lord in a time where Israel – the northern kingdom – had turned to worshipping Baal. Elijah’s life was threatened and, failing to trust God, he fled to Mount Horeb where the Lord spoke to him:

1 Kings 19:13-18: Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

We are quick to assume loneliness when faced with a challenging task, but we are never alone. We always have God, and God has always burdened others with the same burden.

In addition, part of our role as we follow Christ is to bring other people along. We’re not supposed to just go it alone. And often times our feeling of “I’m the only one who cares” is really a sign of our own self-righteousness.

Last time we talked about our need to repent of and destroy self-righteousness. And that applies equally to self-righteousness directed at those inside the church as it does outside. It is equally evil and sinful to have a self-righteous attitude toward those in the church who we feel aren’t living out the truth of the gospel.

Now, if they are in the church and claim to follow Christ, it is our role to teach, and to lovingly help them see the ways they are not following God’s standards. But self-righteousness, however good the reasons may seem, is always wrong. It must be our role as followers of Christ to bring others along.

And if you bring others along, then you definitely won’t be the only one, right?

Excuse #2: Everyone around here has already heard the Gospel

Another excuse that I often wrestle with is the feeling or thought that everyone around here has already heard the Gospel and has made up their mind one way or the other. This is a culturally-specific excuse, particularly here in Kansas City –in the middle of the “Bible Belt” of this country.

But I think when we really look around, especially at some of that data we looked at a few weeks ago about how “Christians” actually live, we see that there are a

lot of people who either don't know the gospel or are following a weak, false gospel. The Bible talks pretty specifically about this exact phenomenon:

2 Timothy 3:1-5: But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power.

2 Timothy 4:3-4: For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

The gospel, the true gospel, points to the awesome, unchanging, perfect glory of God; the sinfulness of man; and the redemption of man by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Any other gospel is no gospel at all. It is heresy. It may seem subtle, but it is heresy nonetheless. We cannot compromise or kid ourselves.

Example: Jude (Judas Jesus' brother) writes about a particular, seemingly subtle heresy that Jesus was only God incarnate for his time of ministry, not during his death. In other words, Jesus wasn't actually God. May not seem like a big deal, but it changes everything, robs God of the glory, and is therefore a false gospel.

So people may say they know the gospel, but they really do not. And the only way we will be able to do anything about this is by really getting to know them and come alongside them to help them not just know the gospel but to live it.

This is why I am so passionate about Community Groups and about everyone being in one. Because there is no way to truly facilitate healthy spiritual growth and application of the word from just attending a Sunday morning service and hearing a sermon. As long as it is backed by solid Biblical teaching, I will always say that it's more important for people to be in a small group or community group where application and accountability can happen on the personal level.

You and I know, or hopefully know, that the true gospel *transforms* people. It does not leave them unchanged:

2 Corinthians 3:18: And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord

This transformation is what gives us this desire and passion to see God glorified in our lives and to share the Gospel with others. If we do not see the same transformation in others, it's very possible that they do not know Jesus. But rather than make us self-righteous, this reality should make us weep and then strive to help them know and live the true Gospel.

So yes, if you're just talking about a few facts about Jesus dying and being the source of salvation, then probably most people around here do know what the Gospel affirms. But there is no doubt in my mind that most people - even people who attend Covenant Chapel - don't really know Jesus and make him the central focus of their lives. The need for the Gospel here in our city is great.

Excuse #3: I'm busy - (the "once...then...." mentality)

Busyness is easily one of the most common excuses for avoiding mission. How can we possibly take more time to be intentional about building relationships and sharing the Gospel with people with all we have going on?

In this same category are what I call "Once...then..." statements. I am an expert in these. How it works is that I tell myself that I'm in a busy season right now and that once I (*fill in the blank*) then I'll (*fill in the blank*) in this case then "then I'll..." is sharing the gospel with people. For example: "Once I finish seminary and have more free time, then I'll intentionally share the Gospel."

You can start thinking this way with a sincere heart. But it builds so quickly from there: Once I get past this busy semester, once I'm not a leader in this organization, once I graduate college, once I move to Kansas City, once I get acclimated to my new home, once my job isn't so new, once I join the staff of a church, and on and on we go.

It doesn't take long to realize that there will always be something competing for your attention. But if you really do believe Christ is the all-satisfying, all-surpassing, holy, worthy God he is, then He has to take priority in our lives. If not, we will spend our entire life saying "once...then...." and never do a thing.

I think the best way to look at this Biblically is to look at the life we're called to live.

John 10:10: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Jesus came, died and rose so that we could live abundant life - meaning a joy-filled life with complete satisfaction in him - starting now. Not after this busy season of life is over. And if we believe that the most satisfying life we can live is one following Jesus, it will bring us joy to share it.

1 Timothy 6:12: Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Looking at Paul's words, it's clear that eternal life isn't just something we go to after we die. It is something that begins now. Eternal life is a quality of life experienced with God, empowered by the Holy Spirit that believers should live and display now.

Don't wait until you're dead. Why would we ever waste this short breath of a life making our to-do lists an excuse that deters us from our God-given mission? Taking hold of that quality of life now means putting God first, glorifying him with everything in our lives, and by sharing the Gospel so others can do the same.

So we must remember the life Jesus died to give us and begin living it now. Let that be what makes us busy – everything in our lives viewed apart from this perspective is a distraction.

Excuse #4: I don't know what to say or do

This one may be the most sincere excuse on the list. I would say there are many people with the desire to share the Gospel who fall into this camp. And so it must be our role as the Church to equip people to know the Gospel and how to share it.

Before, we talk about this problem specifically, let's about how people get here – by trying to find the middle of the road.

When we become Christians, we become (and should become) radical by the world's standards. But even within Christianity there are extremes. Last week, I shared the story about the Christian conference and hearing two very different viewpoints on how to do evangelism. The short version is there's the bold approach that lacks love – make a decision in 5 minutes; and the loving approach that lacks boldness – a friendship that never shares the gospel. And so we conclude that we have to find a middle of the road approach between those two.

That's a good thing. There are many examples in following Christ of us having to navigate seemingly contradictory things:

- Living in the World without being of the World (John 17:15-16)
- Speaking the Truth in Love (Ephesians 4:15)
- Salvation by Works and Dead Faith without Works (Ephesians 2:8-9 vs. James 2:17)

But as we try to find the balance, we cannot let it cause stagnancy. We cannot let these tensions cripple us. So many good intentioned people live their lives trying

to find a balance and end up wrestling with it so much that they do absolutely nothing.

This week's topic was subtitled "how Satan tries to keep us our mission." Satan loves to use things like this to get us out of the game. Don't ever make the mistake of thinking Satan is stupid. He knows that blatant lies will not hinder followers of Christ. So he will never say "sharing the Gospel is wrong" – that's too obvious.

But Satan knows that if he can make us wrestle with trying to find the middle of the road long enough, he'll be able to take us out of the game and render us completely ineffective for Christ and his Kingdom.

And that brings us to the Biblical response to this excuse: *There is no way to separate learning from doing.*

Jesus didn't just teach his disciples in isolated environments, he sent them out and used examples they encountered to teach them. Similarly, we will never know enough about the words to say and how to share the gospel unless we go and do it.

Matthew 10:18-20: On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

We must trust that God is in complete control – that our words or "mistakes" in sharing the Gospel are not significant enough to hinder the Holy Spirit and God's plans. We're just not that big and important.

There are two verses that encourage me greatly:

1 Corinthians 1:17: For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Acts 1:8: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

It is all about God's power working through us – not our knowledge or know-how. And in that way, when people come to Christ, God gets the glory. I just can't fathom how or why God would honor a strategy or method of evangelism that is so "wise" and "well-planned" that it robs Him of the glory due him.

Jesus says “no one can come unless the Father draws him (John 6:44)” so if he’s doing all the work, why would we ever get the credit and the glory?

So you may have been hoping that I would teach you specifically how to do this. But I won’t because I can’t. To teach you a certain group of words or a certain method at the cost of ignoring the Holy Spirit’s leading on your lives would be a horrible, horrible error.

So my call and my challenge to you is to pray – to intentionally take time to seek God for wisdom in how to share the gospel with people. And then – whether you hear a clear answer or not – go and do it. Always seek his direction as you go, but do not stop.

As a believer already, and having wrestled with these questions for the past few weeks, you are already more than adequately prepared to share the gospel with people. So the only question left is *will you?*

Please, let us be people who, through action, make mistakes and share that wisdom with others. Let’s not let a feeling of inadequacy keep us from starting our mission. We will learn as we go because there is no way to separate learning from doing.

Next time: Missional. Next week, we’ll consider what it means to be “missional” or a mission-minded person. Once we’ve considered our call to share the Gospel and our culture, we need to incorporate that reality into our everyday lives. We’ll think through how to do that the next two times as we close out our study.