"One Step Closer"

Today's message comes out of a place of conviction. As you all know, our church is being called to evangelize and disciple the 15,000 plus people in the city of Duncanville that have claimed they do not follow any religion. Now, we are not called to reach ALL of the 15,000 people…we have several churches in Duncanville that all share the same calling. But what we are called to do is reach one soul at a time for the Gospel. I almost have a motto for South Gate Fellowship. The motto would be something like: "Worshipping One God and going after one soul." If every Christian in America made a commitment to just one person to lead to the Lord, the world would change in a single generation. A single generation.

As a pastor, I am more and more convinced that my job is to help the church be the church. The sermons in the house of God are designed to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. So, just like a preacher has to preach a message on money and giving from time to time, the preacher must also teach equipping messages to help the saints be faithful and successful in the marketplace.

The title of today's message is "One Step Closer." I understand that not every Christian believes they are bold. But by the end of today's message, I pray you are encouraged and equipped so that you have more passion to share the message of Jesus Christ.

Let me explain this with an awesome story that happened back in 1988. In Oahu, Hawaii there was a helicopter pilot that lost control and crash landed. His arm was almost torn off, and he was bleeding profusely. To make matters worse, his head was sinking under the water of the river he crashed in. It was at this time that the pilot's co-worker rushed to the rescue. This Vietnam vet lifted a two-thousand-pound helicopter off of the pilot to save his life. It is also funny that the person who saved the pilot's life went by the name "Tiny."

I share that story to highlight that everyone in this room has the power to save someone. If you were walking in the park one day and happened to see a child in a pond struggling to stay afloat, would you jump in and rescue the child? Of course. Who cares that your phone was in your pocket. Who cares if your clothes get wet or ruined. Who cares what other people think. All you know is that if you don't jump in, that child can drown and die. Now imagine if we applied that reasoning to evangelism. You may not be called to be a lifeguard and save people every day, but you can save one soul that is in danger. Notice also that your drive to save a child's life is not based on education, skill set, or reputation. It is entirely based on love. I believe that evangelism is based on love. If you are taking notes, you can write this down: **"Boldness comes from Closeness."** Many Christians are terrified to talk to other people about the Gospel. Good hearted and scared believers might pray something like, "Dear Lord, please remove my fear of talking to people about the Gospel." But let me propose that maybe your problem is not with fear. Maybe your problem is with a lack of love." What would happen if you prayed for more love? I don't know if you know this or not, but love will cause you to do some crazy things. Like lifting a two-thousand-pound helicopter with your bare hands.

Let me give you a textbook definition of evangelism to set up a powerful truth that is going to help you be a greater and more bold witness for Jesus:

Evangelism: "*The active calling of people to respond to the message of grace and commit oneself to God in Jesus Christ."*

This is not a bad definition of evangelism, but it can lead to a false expectation. Some believe that evangelism is doing everything to get a person to "sign on the dotted line" and surrender to Jesus. The truth is that there is more "pre-evangelism" in the marketplaces than actually evangelism. Hear me clearly church, this will encourage you greatly…your job is not to seal the deal (although that can happen). Your job is to move someone one step closer to salvation. Think about it in baseball terms. Everyone loves homeruns, but players won't hit a home run every time. The goal for the baseball player is to get to home plate. Typically, this is done one base at a time. It starts with a single. With evangelism, your goal is to simply move a person one step closer to salvation.

Let's look at the Biblical example of evangelism before I give you some very practical tools. The Great Commission is our ultimate guide, and it says:

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
– Matthew 28:18-20 NASB1995

One preacher said, "We accomplish the Great Commission with the Great Commandment." But here's the thing, we are motivated by love, but we are to proclaim truth. What do I mean? I mean that evangelism has slipped into a dangerous place in the modern church. It has become both commercialized and institutionalized. What do I mean? Think about it. What has been the primary way people evangelize in America for the last four decades? It is invite someone to church. The thought is that if I invite someone to church, the pastor will give an altar call and they will get saved. Does this happen? Yes. Is it wrong to evangelize this way? No. All I am saying is that it is not the Biblical model. All throughout the Bible, the house of God, the tabernacle, the temple, the New Testament church were all designed for believers not sinners. Church is a fellowship of believers who gather to both minister to God and become equipped in the Gospel. But consumerism has crept into the church so instead of training soldiers to go outside of the walls and preach the Gospel, we have created performances that make people feel better about themselves.

The second trap with evangelism is our approach with evangelism. Many times, we are compelled to talk to people about God by saying, "Jesus loves you." This is true. Jesus loves every single person on the planet. However, not a single disciple started an outreach with "Jesus loves you." Do you know what the primary evangelistic message was? "Repent." Evangelism will include God's love, grace, and mercy…but it begins with a dire need. The need is that you are separated from God because of sin and you need to repent and be saved so that your soul escapes hell and you live in an intimate relationship with the Father.

Jesus' method of evangelism was different than we see today. Be encouraged to know that Jesus' model of evangelism was relational and limited. Jesus didn't have 200 disciples, He has 12. But those 12 turned the world upside down. Jesus didn't spend everyday street preaching and confronting people. BUT He used every opportunity He encountered. Jesus has a SMALL circle of disciples. Listen to me. You don't have to have a Bible Degree, years of church ministry experience or even have all the answer. You may not know all the answers, but you know THE answer. You may not understand all truth, but you know THE truth. You have the Gospel, and you have a story and sometimes that's all you need to be a faithful witness of the Gospel.

So, what I want to do today is give you examples of evangelism and some practical steps you can take today that will help remove the fear of evangelism and set you up for greater success. If you are taking notes please fill out method number one:

Methods of Evangelism

Method #1 – <u>Confrontational.</u>

This method is Biblical but unfortunately it is not very effective. The reason is that people get offended. John the Baptist came bringing a fiery message of repentance. He confronted the religious legalists of the day. You may also see this in the "Turn or burn" people who protest and stand outside of events with big signs that say, "God hates ____" and "Repent or go to hell." We are not called to this kind of evangelism but sometimes we are called to confront people in the name of God. Either way we are commanded by God to be bold. Look what Romans 1 says:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." – Romans 1:16-17 NASB1995

Method #2 – <u>Intellectual.</u>

We see an example of intellectual evangelism with Paul on Mars Hill. We even see 12-year-old Jesus going toe to toe intellectually with the religious leaders of the day in the Temple. Look what 1 Peter 3 says about this issue:

13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence…" – 1 Peter 3:13-15 NASB1995

The danger of intellectual evangelism is that you win arguments, but you don't win souls. If you are not compelled by love, your debates won't lead to salvation…they will only lead to winning the argument.

Method #3 – <u>Testimonial.</u>

Telling someone your story is one of the most powerful methods of evangelism. The encouraging thing about sharing your story is that all you need is a story. Think about the demonic is Mark 5 who was filed with literally thousands of demons. After the Lord delivered him, he was commanded to stay behind and tell everyone his story. This demonic turned evangelist was possessed by demons five minutes ago and now is an evangelistic with a captive audience. Romans 10 says this after Paul explains the way of salvation:

14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" – Romans 10:14-15 NASB1995

Method #4 – <u>Relational.</u>

Everyone here has a relationship with an unbeliever. It could be a family member, a neighbor, a co-worker, someone at school. Sometimes evangelism works best with a slow cook. As you build relationships with people, they begin to see your life and trust you more and more. Eventually you will have a place to speak into their loves and because they know you well, won't turn you away or shut you down right away.

Method #5 – <u>Invitational.</u>

When I say invitational, I don't mean just invite someone to church. That's good but there is a better way. When I say "invitational" I mean it in a way that was like the woman at the well in John 4. After Jesus spoke with this Samaritan woman (which was so unkosher) it says she "left her waterpot and went into the city saying 'come, see the man who told me all the things I have done, is this not the Christ?" So, she invited people but not to the Temple, to Jesus. When you invite people, invite them to Jesus more than a ministry.

Method #6 – <u>Serving Method.</u>

We forget that there is more pre-evangelism than reaping the harvest. It is not always going out and having people "sign on the dotted line." We simply need to move people one step closer to salvation. Sometimes the best way to do this is to serve someone. Last week I taught that there is a difference between outreach and evangelism. Outreach is meeting a need with no strings attached. It is displaying the love of God. Evangelism is the proclamation of the Gospel. Outreach is not evangelism, but it is part of the process of evangelism. Let me give you a recent example. I was mowing the church property last Thursday. A lady on a Harley stops on the side of the road and approaches me. I turn my mower off and say, "Howdy, can I help you?" She asked my how much I would charge to do her lawn. I laughed inside like, "Oh you see a little brown boy mowing, and you think he has a business?" Just kidding. I said "I have a great landscaper I can give you their number, but you know what, I'm gonna mow your front yard at

least so that the city doesn't fine you. If you live in Duncanville, you know they are crazy at giving notices for tall grass. So here is how I made it an outreach moment. I said, "What's your name by the way?" and she told me. Then I said, "Well, I'm Rudy and I don't just live in this house, but I am the pastor of the church right here. Let me go ahead and mow the front of your property for free." Did I preach the Gospel? Nope. But now my neighbor knows there is a friendly Christian who would go out of his way to help her. Now she knows Christians are not all that bad. I didn't lead her to salvation, but I moved her one step closer.

So, those are the types of methods for evangelism we see in the Bible. Now I want to wind down by giving you a little practical application. Please fill out how to evangelize step one:

How to Evangelize

STEP #1 <u>Pray</u> and Pay Attention.

Evangelism is organic. A cookie cutter approach may not always work. We need to train our hearts more than follow a template. If you want to evangelize more begin with praying and paying attention. I heard one pastor say to make a list of twenty unsaved people you know (family or friends) and begin to not just pray for their salvation but ask for ways you can help. Jesus said, "Ask, seek, and knock." Are we asking for souls?

STEP #2 Utilize the <u>Gifts of the Spirit</u>.

Your evangelism can be prophetic, and your evangelism can be supernatural. I was watching a podcast of a pastor and his wife talked about their encounters with supernatural ministry. The pastor was out in the marketplace and came across three ladies. He felt in his spirit that one of these ladies had severe neck pain. This pastor hears the Holy Spirit tell him this and then immediately obeys. He says, "Hi ladies I just felt from the Lord to pray for someone who is dealing with severe neck pain. I believe that may be one of you. One of the ladies says, "That's me" and goes on to explain the severity of her injury. The pastor then prays, and all of her pain immediately left her. The pastor then uses that supernatural miracle to begin talking about salvation. He asks the first lady and it is just a blank stare. He asks the second lady and there is another blank stare. He gets to the last lady who was just healed and through tears she responds to the salvation invitation. She even got filed with the Holy Spirit on the spot. This didn't happen with debating or preaching but like what Paul said, "A demonstration of the Spirit's power.

STEP #3 Tell Your <u>Story</u>.

Most Christians understand and can be comfortable sharing their testimony. But here is the thing…most Christian's have not been purposeful to write it down and make it concise. Can you tell your testimony in 2-3 minutes? Have you sat down and wrote it out or practiced it? I challenge you this week to write that out and begin to practice it. You will be so much more willing to tell your story if you are prepared.

STEP #4 Highlight the <u>Need</u>.

This is a big one. Somehow you need to make sure that the greatest need is mentioned. It is not just “Jesus loves you” or do you want to go to heaven? This person’s soul is on the line, and they are headed to hell. They have sinned against the Creator of the Universe, and their sin is separating them from the loving God that wants a relationship with them. So, use the person’s struggle or suffering to highlight there is freedom, and this freedom can only happen if there is surrender to the Lord.

STEP #5 Present the Gospel.

After you have done what the Lord commanded you to do with an unsaved person or you have had a relationship with an unsaved person, you will be led to actually share the Gospel. Like your testimony, I would encourage you to write down a 1-2 min Gospel presentation in your own words. If you need an example you can grab an E-Card in the lobby and snap the QR code to see a video where I give the Gospel in 2 minutes.

Let me close by saying these two things. The first is to remember your job is just to move someone one step closer to salvation. The second is that the more you practice the easier it will be. Most of us were very nervous to start driving. Today, most of us don’t even think about fear when driving. Why? Because we have done it for so long and so many times. Evangelism can be the same. The more you share the more bold you will be.