TIME OF GRACE

Time of Grace Ministry
Let's Goooo (and Make Disciples): No Experts Needed
John 4:5-7, John 4:16-18, John 4:28-30, John 4:39-41
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If you're one of our guests here today or if you're watching at home and you're not a Christian, I have to let you in on a little secret that most of us Christians have. There is probably nothing more in the world that we would love than to share the good news of Jesus with you. And there's probably nothing that makes us sweat quite like the thought of sharing Jesus with you. We're not saying you're an intimidating person. We're not trying to imply that you're not an approachable person. But I don't know if it's a cultural thing where we're told never talk about politics and religion. And so, when it comes to talking about our religious beliefs, our convictions about Jesus, we get a bit anxious about it. We actually value our relationship with you, and we don't want to force our personal beliefs down your throat. We don't want to be like cramming Christianity down your gullet. We want to do it in a winsome, loving, respectful, and humble way.

And so many Christians, even longtime Christians, are kind of stuck. Like, I so badly want to talk about the best thing in my life, which is Jesus, and I'm so absolutely nervous to do it. I would say a good summary that a lot of Christians have to this great commission, this great mission that Jesus has given us, is this. If you're taking notes, we say, "Who? Me?! You want me at Thanksgiving dinner to talk to my cousin about my spiritual convictions? You want me to go to the woman I'm dating, to my next-door neighbor, to my teammate, to my co-worker, and take the conversation deeper? I can see other people doing that, better people doing that, but me doing that?"

What if today I could convince you that all your assumptions about sharing your faith are dead wrong? But what if I could persuade some of you that what Jesus is looking for is not the ultra-extrovert who is super comfortable making cold calls, knocking on doors, and squeezing Jesus into every last conversation. What if I could prove to you from the Bible itself that the people that God has historically used to share this good news about Jesus are exactly like you? They seem under, if not totally unqualified. Today, I want to take that big question by the horns. Who me? And give you God's surprising and beautiful answer.

Here's a crash course on what Israel was like back in the days of Jesus. I always picture it like an ice cream cone with three scoops on top of it. The cone in ancient Israel was a desert in the south where barely anyone lived. The first scoop was a

region called Judea. That's where the city of Jerusalem was. The top scoop was a region called Galilee. That's where the Sea of Galilee and where Jesus grew up in a town called Nazareth. But in between Galilee in the north and Judea on the south was the scoop in the middle called Samaria. And that's where an ancient people called the Samaritans lived. Maybe you've heard that word before. We sometimes talk about good Samaritans. But you should know back in Jesus' day, no one equated the word Samaritan with good. In fact, just the opposite.

The Old Testament tells the long version of the story, but here's the short version. The Samaritans were backwards, bad believing, and bad behaving people. When many people in Galilee wanted to go to Jerusalem, instead of going as the crow would fly through Samaria, they would go around it. It was not a place where good people lived, much less people that would be representing this amazing faith that Jesus Christ was launching. But when Jesus came into the world 2,000 years ago and he wanted to pick his next evangelist, anyone want to guess where he went?

Here's the story in John 4. "So, he," Jesus, "came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water." You know, in those days, under the hot Middle Eastern sun, when women wanted to draw water from a well and bring it back to their homes for the day, they would do it bright and early in the morning before the sun peaked in the Middle Eastern sky and baked down on the top of their heads. So why was this woman not with the other women early in the morning? Why is she here all by herself when it's high noon? Why would you do the most, like, uncomfortable, sweaty work at the worst time of the day?

And the answer is because this wasn't your average, bad Samaritan woman, this was someone who was even worse. This was the girl who didn't fit in with the other Samaritans but somehow had been socially excluded from their ranks. She was not allowed to sit at their lunch table or join them for breakfast and a trip to the well. She was ostracized and excommunicated, essentially, by her own community. And there she is about to meet Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus launches into this conversation with her, and we read this in verse 16. "Jesus told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus said to her, 'You're right when you say you have no husband. The fact is you have had five husbands. And the man you now have is not your husband.'" Holy cow! The secret lives of Samaritan wives. This woman married five times. This is like the Elizabeth Taylor of first century Samaria. Five marriages didn't make it. She hopped from man to man, from bed to bed. She needed a second hand for all the rings that had been on her fingers. And now she was with another guy. She was sleeping with another guy, trying to make another relationship work. "You're right, you have no

husband, but you've had a lot of men in your life." This woman needed a walk-in closet to fit all of her relational skeletons.

You would think that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, the holy, holy, holy one that angels bow down and worship, he would have ran back up to Galilee, but he didn't. Because despite all of her baggage, all of her unworthiness, Jesus had two plans, two things, in fact, that led him to Samaria that day. He wanted to save this woman, and he wanted to send this woman. He wanted to cleanse her of her shame, and he wanted to empower her with a brand-new purpose. Jesus, with great boldness and love, exposes this woman's sin. He says that essentially, she's been trying to satisfy that hunger in her heart, that thirst in her very soul for unconditional love in all the wrong places. That she's been jumping from relationship to relationship, but these men have been like salt water. And it never works, and there's always another, and another, and another. But Jesus said, "What you're really looking for, true love, I can give you that."

And when she hears this message, when she sees her own sin, and then Jesus' offer to satisfy and save, something happens in her heart. Verse 28, "Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.'" Can you imagine their eyebrows when she said that? "'Could this be the Messiah?' They came out of the town and made their way towards him. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. 'He told me everything I ever did.' So, when the Samaritans came to him, they urged Jesus to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words, many more became believers."

There was a revival of true faith in the least expected spot, a revival in Samaria itself. And how did it happen? From a first century Mother Teresa who memorized the Old Testament and had Woo in her StrengthsFinder? Nope. From a woman who didn't even fit in with her messed up neighbors, God saved and sent her on this great mission to go and make disciples.

Here's what I love. If you could somehow speed read the Bible cover to cover before this day is done, you would find out that this kind of story is the normal story of the Bible. That when faith spreads, when people have their hearts changed and learn the truth about God and his son, Jesus Christ, it is rarely through the expected teachers and preachers. It's almost always through shocking people that you would think would have no right to have a purpose this big, but God saves them and he sends them. Think about Christmas, for example. Who spread the good news of great joy? Who told what they had seen and heard about the Christ child? Do any of you know the story? The shepherds did. We're not talking like pastors in suit and tie with a Bible in one arm. We're talking dudes that smelled like animals working the third shift who probably chain smoked and drank Pabst after their shift was done. I mean,

these are rough around the edges dudes, but they were changed by the gospel, and they spread the news about the gospel. Who were changed by Jesus and then sent to share the message of Jesus. Again and again, and again and again, Old Testament and New, it's not the people that you would expect. It's people just like you and just like me that were changed by the gospel and then sent to share the gospel.

You know what struck me last week, that some of the most popular movies and books and television series of our day have had this exact same storyline. Show of hands, how many of you ever read at least one of the Harry Potter books or seen one of the movies? You ever thought about that? Who stands up against the evil Lord Voldemort? I'll tell you. A scarred orphan, a nerdy, talkative girl who comes from the wrong family, a really, really awkward ginger, and a buck-toothed boy whose name is Longbottom. And those kids were the ones who stood up against evil. You ever seen "The Hunger Games" or read any of the books? Who fights against the injustice of the Capital? It's not some bulky dude that you would expect. It's the girl from like the last district that no one thought was anything. You ever seen "Stranger Things"? Who fights against the monsters? It's a bunch of like misfit 80s kids who probably were pushed into lockers and had their heads stuck in toilets. We love these stories. Unexpected heroes. Like breaking all the assumptions that regular people can do very not regular things. Why do those stories stir our hearts? Because that's our story.

How did I get to know Jesus? You ever heard the trending name Judith Laverne Novotny? No, you have not. But that's my mama. From the booming metropolis of Kewaunee, Wisconsin on the shores of Lake Michigan. But it was that ordinary woman from an ordinary farm family who birthed me and then blessed me with the good news about Jesus. If you're a Christian, was it some famous influencer who influenced you to follow Christ? No, it was some dude you work with, some guy you made music with. It was the next-door neighbor. It was your uncle, your grandma, who was always so faithful. Always the Bible next to her bed. God loves to use people that we wouldn't expect to do the most unexpected thing and save someone's soul. Grab a pen, write this down. The big question in our hearts is who me? And God's emphatic answer is yes, yes, yes, you!

Let me be real with you. Not to sound overly dramatic, but Jesus said that the devil is the father of lies and he is lying every single day to try to keep you, to keep your mouth shut. So, before I say amen, I want to tackle three of his biggest objections and lies that find their way into our hearts, into our church, and I want to overcome them with the truth of God's word. Here's the three objections, if you're taking notes. The first one is when you say, "But Pastor, I don't know all the answers." The second one is, "But honestly, wouldn't the pastors be better?" And the third, "But my story is way too messy."

Let's start with the first one. But I don't know all the answers. I'll be real with you. If you have a roommate or a boyfriend or an uncle who doesn't follow Jesus, I bet they have some pretty big objections, questions, and hesitations. You know, churches that only and always are asking for money, hypocrisy, scandal, abuse, cover up, some hypocrite in their family who went to church every Sunday but they were terrible at home. Maybe they have big questions, philosophical questions, like how can God be good and powerful if there's so much evil and brokenness in the world? Why do little kids get cancer? Why the Holocaust? People have big questions and hesitations that keep them from religious beliefs and the Christian faith. And if you don't have all the answers, if you don't have like some one-liner on the tip of your tongue, you think, "I'm not ready yet. I don't know enough."

But here's the truth. Write this down. Jesus did not call you to be a lawyer but instead a witness. I've been in court a couple times. I know the difference. A lawyer is the person who has to know all the things. They have to have the TV commercial with like the 700 legal books in the back, that they know the statutes and the procedures. But if you've been in a courtroom, a witness is so distinct. A witness doesn't have to have all the books. A witness doesn't need to know all the answers. A witness just has to share their story. What have they seen and what have they heard? You should know this. Before Jesus returned to our Father in heaven, he said to his friends not, "And you will be my lawyers in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." Now, any of you long-time Christians know what he actually said? "You will be my witnesses."

Objection number two, "But honestly, wouldn't the pastors be better?" I didn't count, but I have probably read 30 or more books about how to share your faith. I have a whole bookshelf on like tough questions and biblical answers. It's probably 50 to 70 books long. I went to seminary where one of the classes I was required to take was called evangelism where we literally had to go knock on the professor's door. He pretended to be someone who didn't believe in Jesus and we had to see if we could stand up to his objections and questions. With all of that background, let's be honest, wouldn't it be better if I just did it? Ready for a one-word answer? No.

Here's why. Write this down. Because people don't talk about their faith with the most knowledgeable person they know, but instead with the most approachable. Isn't that true? Imagine you were at the mall doing some holiday shopping and there's one of those strange guys at the kiosk who's trying to sell you some product. I bet you he knows more about that product than anyone in the mall. But if he says, "Excuse me, sir, could I talk to you?" What do you do? Why is this strange man talking to me? Now, what if the person you were dating, whose life had been changed by the better, wanted to talk to you about that same product? Would you listen? Of course. Because it's not about who has the most knowledge about a thing, it's about the person who has the best relationship with you.

Here's the fact. If you gave me the names of five of your family members and friends who knew nothing about Jesus and during Thanksgiving dinner, I knocked on the door to say, "I would like to talk to you about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." I would hear a lot of closed doors in my face. But what if God gave you that relationship? What if it's no coincidence that you found the home or the apartment in that spot next to that person? What if it's actually no accident that you're part of the family that you are? That you connected with the people in high school that you did? What if you're the most Christian person that that person knows? What if no one's told them in a year or two or ever what Christianity is all about? What if that person, like most of us, would be totally weirded out if some stranger with a stack of Bible books on his shelf knocked on their door or sent them a text? Maybe God has you, who might not be the most knowledgeable but is the most approachable, in that place with that person for a divine purpose.

Okay, but what about objection number three? "Pastor, my story is too messy." Maybe you got some baggage in your past. Maybe you got some stuff in your present. Maybe you don't have the best relationship with alcohol right now. Maybe you were hungover just this weekend. Maybe you just went through a breakup and you kind of mentally spiraled. Maybe you practiced self-harm in the last year. Maybe your marriage didn't make it. We all got something, right? What if you're bouncing from relationship to relationship like the Samaritan woman from job to job, from medication to medication? Is it really smart for you to like be an ambassador of the Christian faith? But I hope and pray that you never, ever believe that because here's the truth. Your mess displays God's mercy. The fact that your life is messy is actually, in a way, proof that God isn't looking for the best people, the better than average people, or even the good people. He is trying to save sinful people.

The Apostle Paul, you might have heard that name. He's kind of famous for writing half of the New Testament. He once said this in the book of 1 Timothy. He said, "I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life." Paul said, "I am the worst sinner that I know. I used to kill Christians. And even after I became a Christian, I struggled with so many things, the good things I want to do. I don't do them. And the things that I know are wrong in a moment, I give in to them." What a wretched person. Why would God save someone like me? Am I too much of a mess? And he says, "No, no, no. I was shown mercy so that if Jesus can be patient with the worst sinner, he can be so patient with you."

Some of you know that I talk pretty frequently and pretty openly about a long-time addiction I had to pornography. Do you know why I do that? Because every single Sunday, someone is watching at home who thinks God can't save addicts. Every week, someone is walking into our church with the assumption that Christianity is about morally okay people trying to get a little bit better. What we are about here,

what this book is about, what the historic Christian faith is about, it's not like good people having tips for a perfect family. It's about sinners and souls being saved. It's about people who deserve nothing from God getting everything from God. It's about the dead being made alive, the blind coming to see, the lost being found. It's about people like me that God should be so mad at, so done with, but he's not because of Christ and the forgiveness of my sins. God is so not done with me. In fact, God delights in me. I stand here today with all of the baggage past and present and know that God likes a man like me. This is true for you. Your mess is your message. It is proof that Christianity is not about inherent goodness. It's about a Savior from outside of us.

In the New Testament, 79% of the uses of the word gospel come from a single author, Paul. The good news that changed this world, so good, in fact, that we now like count the number of years since it's been since he was born. Who proclaimed this? It was the messiest, most unexpected dude. Your mess is not the problem. It's an opportunity to proclaim the unconditional love of Jesus. Let us, let me and you and you and you and you, let's go and let's make some more disciples. Let's pray.

Oh, God, thank you so much for the gospel. I would be so scared to die if salvation wasn't a gift. I would be so terrified to stand before you, the God who is infinitely good, just thinking about the million bad things that I have done. But I'm not scared, God, because salvation is a gift that's not by works so that no one can boast and all of us can be blessed. Thank you, God, for good news that is so good we'd never guess it, we'd never believe it. It would have to be preached into our hearts, and your Holy Spirit would have to convince us of it.

God, there's someone that we're going to see in the next seven days who's never grasped that. They've made all the wrong assumptions about the Christian faith, what it is and what it isn't. God, just open a door, please, for us to talk about Jesus. Help us to be humble, kind. Help us to be quick to listen. Help us never to see another human being as some project to be converted, but instead as a person that we love and that you love even more. God, give us patience if the time isn't right, if the door is closed. And give us courage if the time is right and you've opened that door. Help us to believe we never step into those conversations alone, but your Holy Spirit, who has changed us from the inside out, is still with us. God, I so deeply want to see my family and friends discover what I've discovered in Jesus, that he is a Redeemer, a Savior, a King, a Lord. He is the one who is holy, holy, holy, and worthy of all of our worship. I pray, in the season to come, you would open more doors than ever. We proclaim the gospel louder, stronger, and clearer than ever, and your kingdom would come in our hearts and in the hearts of those we love. We pray all this for the sake of your glory and the good of our church, and we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.