

The Christian Man

Session 10: Sharing My Faith: Authentically Helping Others Change Their Lives

Edited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Well, good morning, men. Welcome to Man in the Mirror, men's Bible study. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to John chapter 15. Let's begin with a shout out today. This is to an international group from Kakamega, which is in Kenya, in Africa. This group is led by Julius Mwangi and they have been meeting for a couple of months. They call themselves "Beloved Brothers For Christ", 20 men meeting on Fridays at 7:00 PM at their church. Julius writes, "We are a group of 20 members who are born again with the aim of starting evangelism fellowships and reaching the unreachable." I wonder if you'd join me in giving a very warm and international welcome to Beloved Brothers For Christ. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome. Men, as a way of saying thank you, I would like to offer you, if you're interested, let's do a video conference together with your group. If you're interested in that, send me an email at PatrickMorley@ManintheMirror.org, and we'll figure that out.

The title of today's message: Is Sharing My Faith Authentically Helping Others Change Their Lives? This is the 10th and final session of The Christian Man series. Someone has said the deepest conviction of the Christian is that Christ was not wrong. You and I are passionate about our faith in Christ because we have this deep conviction that Christ was not wrong. Over the last several decades now, I look at myself in the mirror, I realize it's several decades, I have been accumulating two files, one I call Selected Quotes and the other I call Selected Verses. From Selected Verses, these are verses that I look at from time to time and they inspire me. They amp me up. They get me ramped up. As Jim Long, one of our table leaders, gave a devotion to the table leaders meeting on Monday morning, it's about having the fire. These are some of the verses that give me that fire.

Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Yet, when I preach the gospel, I can not boast for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. But if I say I will not mention him or speak anymore in his name, his word is in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones. I am weary holding it in. Indeed, I can not. Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him," and many more just like it. I have the conviction that Christ was not wrong and you do too. We have this passion. Then, there are some quotes that I have accumulated, three pages of them. You all have these in a handout, but a couple of them.

Richard Baxter said in 1656, "If you do not long for the conversion of your hearers, you are not likely to see much success, but let all who preach for Christ and men's salvation be unsatisfied until they have the thing they preach for." Oh, that juices me up. Brother Lawrence, "I tell you that this sweet and loving gaze of God insensibly kindles a divine fire in the soul, which is set ablaze so ardently with the love of God that one is obliged to perform exterior acts to moderate it." In other words, I'm going to explode if I

can't do something because of this gospel that I believe. Then, one that I have taped in my Bible, Hudson Taylor, "Many Christians estimate difficulties in light of their own resources and thus attempt little and often fail at the little they do attempt. All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckon on his power and presence being with them." I get all jacked up and you can too.

But have we properly thought about how we are going to reach the next generation of men with this gospel about which we are so passionate? Today what I want to do is I want to start a little bit of a conversation, just start a conversation. We're not going to get all the way through this in one week. It's a conversation about how to have a more relevant way of authentically helping others change their lives.

UNDERSTANDING OUR AUDIENCE AND THE TIMES IN WHICH WE LIVE

The first thing I want us to look at this morning is understanding our audience and the times in which we live. I have stood by and watched as you have, and I think that the way that I have an allergic reaction to the guys who's standing on the street corner with a sign that says repent. I do. To me, that's not the relevant way of doing it, but I also know that the way that I am presenting Christ is also not relevant to a whole group of people. In other words, they feel about me the way that I feel about the guy with a repent sign. I think that there's been enough of a shift in culture that we need to talk about this.

In what might be called the first shot fired in the culture wars, in 1987, quite a long time ago now, Allan Bloom wrote a book called *The Closing of the American Mind*. The first sentence and some thoughts from the first two pages of that book, the very first sentence in his book, "There is one thing a professor ..." By the way, he's a 30-year revered college professor. "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of. Almost every student entering the university believes or says he believes that truth is relative. The students' backgrounds are as various as America can provide. Some are religious. Some are atheists. Some are to the left. Some are to the right. Some intend to be scientists. Some, humanists or professionals or businessmen. Some are poor. Some, rich. They are unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality."

The moral value that he goes on to express that has been adopted by the new generation that has come on the scene is the value of openness. He writes that, "Openness is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past. Men always thought they were right and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right, rather it is not to think you are right at all." We're talking about a value system that's in the culture. More could be said, but my question is: How could we convince a new generation of men that Christianity is true when they do not believe in absolute truth?

I can stand up here and give you all the techniques and all the ideas, but until we answer this prior question to really understand our audience and the times in which we live, we probably would not make much progress. We are going to need a new starting point. First and foremost, we're going to need to understand what will not resonate and therefore not change minds. "God said it. I believe it. That settles it," do you think that really resonates in today's culture? Fundamentalism has been on the demise for 50 years because it's this absolutism. This would be the thing that a young person today would ask you, "Are you an absolutist?" They would ask you that, as Allan Bloom would say, with the same indignation, "Are you persecuting witches?" There's an indignation that comes with that kind of approach.

Building the case for absolute truth does not resonate with this generation. In most cases, that would mean that it is pointless to make our appeal on the basis of absolute truth. Sidebar: If you're Christian, do you think Christianity is true? Well, of course you do. That's why you believe it. That's not the point. The point that I'm making is to the person who does not have the distinctly Christian mind, they don't believe that absolute truth is even knowable. Why does this matter? Niebuhr, a theologian, once said, "There is no greater loss than the answer to a question no one is asking." This generation is not asking, "What is truth?" They're asking a different question.

Let me give you an example, maybe a couple. Imagine that you are selling an SUV to a man and he has told you that the only reason that he wants to buy an SUV is because he has a wife and four children and he's looking for something big enough and safe enough for his wife to take their children to school and soccer. Then, imagine that you spend the next 30 minutes explaining to him how incredibly awesome this SUV four-wheel drive system with this limited slip differential is in the mud and how this SUV can go anywhere you want it to go, and you talk like that for 30 minutes. Have you said anything to him that makes any sense to his situation? No, you have not. Have you said anything that's wrong? No, you have not. The fact that he wants to have an SUV to transport his wife and four children to soccer and school, is there anything wrong with that? No, because that's what's real to him. That's the authentic need that he has.

Let me give you another example. Let's say that you are trying to sell a house and you happen to know that this house was constructed with upgrades to everything behind the walls, the electrical system, the plumbing system. The walls are not studs. They're poured concrete. You know that this is one of the best constructed houses that's ever been made. That's the truth. A man comes to you and he says, "You know, we're looking for a house. The only reason we're looking for a house in this neighborhood is because of the school district. What we're interested in is being able to send our kids to this school. We are interested in this house." "Well, let me tell you about this house. You wouldn't believe the way this house is made," and you talk about that for 30 minutes, but he doesn't care about that. The real need that he has, the real world he's living in, what's authentic for him is he's looking for a place in particular school district where he can send his children.

This is why it matters how we present. Every salesman knows that people do things for their own reasons. Let me say that again. People do things for their own reason. Let me say it again. You do things for your own reasons. Every salesman knows that what you need to do is ask enough questions to figure out, "Why is this person interested? What are they looking for?" Then, help them solve that problem. In other words, take the automobile or the SUV that you're trying to sell. Yeah, all these other things are true, but it's also true that this is going to be a great car to drive your kids to school in. Something can be true but not address what's real for the person you're talking to at that moment. What is the solution? What can we say that will open the minds of the next generation to the gospel?

Number one is to answer the questions that they're asking. Figure out what are the questions that the next generation is asking for which the gospel of Jesus provides an answer. Second, answer respectfully in terms they can understand. Francis Schaeffer said it so well. He said, "Each generation of the church or each generation of the body of Christ, in each setting, has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought forms of that setting." For 30 years, that's always been one of my top favorite quotes or sayings. How do we offer a persuasive apologetic to a post-modern generation that does not believe in absolute truth? We need to make a correction. What's the definition of insanity? Doing the same thing over and over again and then expecting a different result.

Because of that, that's why the **Big Idea** today is this: **For this generation, a more resonate starting point is not that Christianity is true but real.** Notice what I didn't say. I didn't say that Christianity is not true. Christianity is true. We believe it's true, but can you prove that Christianity is true? You can not prove that Christianity is true. You can not prove that the Bible is true. You can believe that Christianity is true. You can believe that the Bible is true, but it's not two plus two equals four. It's not a mathematical formula. It is by faith that we are saved, belief that we are saved. It's not by knowing but by believing. Yet, once you do believe, you do come to the place where you understand that it really is true. Even the disciples, even at the resurrection of Jesus, it said, "But some doubted."

Notice I didn't say that it's more important that Christianity be real than true. I said a more resonate starting point. This is all about how we engage our audience and how we understand the times. Are you with me? Are you tracking? Does this make any sense? So far? Did somebody say, "So far"? I had a very interesting experience. In seminary, I took an apologetics class from Ron Nash, brilliant, one of the great apologists, great professors of all time. During the course of the semester, he took us through all the different arguments for the existence of God, to prove the existence of God, the cosmological argument, the ontological argument, the teleological argument. We even looked at the epistemological arguments. You know what he said on the last day of class? He said, "All of these arguments for the existence of God have great gravitas," he says, "but you should know that in my own experience, by far and away, the most powerful argument for the existence of God is a changed life." The power of changed lives.

Why is that? Because a changed life is something real. Your changed life is something that is real. It's something that is resonate. You know, you put forth Christianity's true. Christianity is a set of propositions, so you put forth a proposition that Jesus Christ is the ... Like the Nicene Creed or whatever or something. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He died for your sins. He's born of a virgin, lived a sinless life. These are propositions. You can present them to people or you can say, "Look at me. Look at how Christ has changed my life." You can focus on what is true. This is just the starting point. You can focus on what is true or you can focus on what is actually real.

We're talking about not a change in the message. You need to understand what I'm saying here. I'm not saying anything about the truth in Christianity. We're not trying to change the message of the gospel. What we are doing is we're trying to, in the spirit of Francis Schaeffer, change the method by which we present the message and perhaps the order. Here's the full Schaeffer quote. This basically comes from the last few pages of *Escape From Reason*. He says, "There are two things we need to grasp firmly as we seek to communicate the gospel today," which I find very interesting because the original copyright on this book would be when? 1968. What's that? 50 years ago and it's as relevant today as it was then.

"There are two things we need to grasp firmly as we seek to communicate the gospel today. The first is that there are certain unchangeable facts, which are true. These have no relationship to shifting tides. They make the Christian system what it is. If they are altered, Christianity becomes something else." We're stipulating to the truth of the gospel. "This must be emphasized because there are evangelicals, Christians today, who in all sincerity are concerned with their lack of communication, but in order to bridge the gap, they are tending to change what must remain unchangeable." We don't want to do that. He goes on, "If we do this, we're no longer communicating Christianity and what we have left is no different than the surrounding consensus. But," he goes on, "we can not present a balanced picture if we stop here. We must realize that we are facing a rapidly changing historical situation." You have no idea, Francis, how much it's going to change in the next 50 years, buddy.

"A rapidly changing historical situation. If we're going to talk to people about the gospel, we need to know what is the present ebb and flow of thought forms." I've been recounting how they have basically been evolving over these last 50 years. He says, "Unless we do this, the unchangeable principles of Christianity will fall on deaf ears." Get it? It's very, by the way, poor form for a speaker to read this much, but this is an important topic. I need to read this to you. In my opinion, we need to hear this. He goes on, "It is much more comfortable, of course, to go on speaking the gospel only in familiar phrases to the middle classes." What did I say before? "God said it. I believe it. That settles it," that kind of a thing. "But that would be as wrong as if, for example, Hudson Taylor sent missionaries to China and only taught them to speak in one of three dialects." In other words, how do rappers speak? How do hipsters speak? How do gays speak? How do, blah, blah, blah? You get it. We can not imagine Hudson Taylor being so hard-hearted.

"Of course, he knew that men do not believe without a work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts," as do we, "and his life was a life of prayer to make this happen," as is ours, "but he also knew that men cannot believe without hearing the gospel." And then his famous statement, "Each generation of the church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought forms of that setting." The reason we often cannot speak to our children, let alone other people's, is because we have never taken time to understand how different their thought forms are from ours. May I just append and be angry at them because they don't think like we do or don't have the intelligence to see what we see. Then, one final thought from Francis Schaeffer, "In crucial areas, many Christian parents, ministers, and teachers are as out of touch with many of the children of the church and the majority of those outside the church as though they were speaking a foreign language." The Big Idea today: For this generation, a more resonate starting point is not that Christianity is true but that it's real.

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES AND OUR MISSION

I took almost my whole time for that, but I do want to talk a little bit about understanding ourselves and our mission. Our mission is the same. Jesus said in the most impactful speech that's ever been given in the history of the world, a speech which has inspired more millions of people to action and generated more billions of dollars in charitable contributions than any other speech that's ever been given, we call it the Great Commission, Jesus said, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you. I will always be with you, even to the end of the age." Then in Acts chapter one verse eight, he says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses here in Jerusalem, in Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth."

These are verses, again, we're back to the passion. This other part was the rational. We're back to the passion. "For I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me." You should be at John chapter 15 verse eight, John chapter 15, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my," what? Okay, go make what? What brings glory to God? Bearing much fruit. What does that show that we have become? Disciples. Look down at verse 15, "I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you." What an incredible thing. Then, 16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear," what? What kind of fruit? Fruit that will last. "Whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."

That is the mission. Making disciples is God's designated way to release the power of his gospel on all the issues that men face, all the ones that are looking for something real, but not necessarily worried about whether or not it's true. They are looking for something real. This is something real. The gospel of Jesus, it's real, man. We know it is. Let's show this generation that the gospel of Jesus is real, that Christianity is real. I had a conversation with a young man. He said, "I can't believe I can't be a Christian." I said, "Why?" He says, "Because I don't believe the Bible is true." I said, "Where in the Bible does it say that you have to believe the Bible is true? It doesn't say that anywhere." Is the Bible true? Do you have to believe it's true in order to become a Christian? I don't see that anywhere. What I see is the billboard, the best billboard I ever saw in my whole life, nine words, "Jesus, please forgive my sins and save my soul." Nine words.

We should have passion. We should be able to say, "I'm not ashamed of this gospel." The message of the cross is foolishness to those who perish, but for those of us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you. For my power ..." Okay, you get it. I wish I had time to walk you through the 2 Corinthians five passage, but here it is. That he has given us the ministry of reconciliation, not frustration. You know, a lot of times, you look at it as a battle. It's a ministry of opposition, the frustration. It's the ministry of reconciliation. It's figuring out what this person wants, where they're coming from, what's their angle, what's important to them, and then talking in terms, understandable thought forms to them. This is what we're getting at here today.

The passage goes on, that we've been made ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us, through our lives. We want to authentically help others change our lives. This is the start of a conversation. We're not saying everything that could be said about this this morning, but this is a powerful start to understanding how to authentically help others change their lives. The mission we don't change, but the way we reach out to the audience because of our understanding of that audience that does change. The big idea: For this generation, a more resonate starting point is not that Christianity's true but it's real, your changed life. Then, finally, understanding how you could bear the most fruit.

UNDERSTANDING HOW I BEAR THE MOST FRUIT

The Donald Miller book Building a StoryBrand, he's the one that wrote Blue Like Jazz. He's got this incredible sentence. This is it in a nutshell. He's talking about how you build a brand and tell your story. He says this. He says, "A character who wants something encounters a problem before they can get it. A man wants to have a contentment piece," whatever, "and he encounters a problem before they can get it. At the peak of their despair, a guide," that's you, "steps into their lives, gives them a plan, and calls them to action. That action helps them avoid failure and ends in success." Here's how you bear much fruit. First of all, ask yourself, "What has worked for me? How am I wired? How do I bear fruit?" For me, it's one-on-one. I just do things like one-on-one, but also, hey, apparently, I can write books, so I'm going to do that. I teach the Bible, so I'm going to do that. Maybe you're good at leading a small group. Maybe you're good at inviting people to church.

We have a man here, Brian, who he sends me texts, saying, "Hey, Pat. I'm on my way down to RMC to visit a Winter Park playboy who's in the hospital with stage IV cancer. Could I stop by your house and pick up a signed book to him?" I think to myself, "Well, that's pretty assuming." Then, I think to myself, "Are you nuts? You spent your whole life waiting for someone like Brian who is so passionate that he will reach out to his friends in the way that they need and want to be reached out to." Maybe you give away books. Maybe you are able to go through this little process that I talked to you about before. You

ask the golden question. First of all, you start with a cup of coffee. Take a guy to coffee. You start with the golden question, "Where are you on your spiritual journey?" Then, what do you do? You shut up. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. You don't get mad at the guy because he doesn't understand the gospel the way you do. You go for a cup of coffee. You ask the golden question. You listen carefully. Then, you do this three minute elevator testimony thing here. You got the worksheet here. We've done this before here, offered this before. Do this in advance.

Then, after you've listened to him, you tell him where you are on your spiritual journey, but you adapt this three minute testimony that you've prepared in advance, a skill that you had been working on. You adapt it to what he said to you so that you're relevant. You're the guide. He's presenting you a problem. At the moment of his despair, you present him with a plan of action. You tell him your story and you talk about the gospel of Jesus, how Jesus loves you. Jesus wants to help you. Jesus wants to forgive your sins. Jesus wants to help you reconcile your marriage or whatever the problem is. Jesus wants to help you get back on your feet financially. Jesus wants to help you overcome your depression. Whatever that is, Jesus wants to help you. All you have to do is do what the billboard said, "Jesus, please forgive my sins and save my soul." That's a plan of action. Then, you invite him to the church. You invite him here at our gym. I invited Fred. Fred invited Doug. Doug invited Chris. John invited Jim. How many people here has John Anderson invited? Look at that. See? Half a dozen men. Invite him to your church. The big idea today: For this generation, we need a new starting point.

Let's pray. Our dearest Father, Lord, we are men who are passionate. Lord, our deepest conviction is that you were not wrong and we are passionate about it. Lord, help us to channel, or whatever the right way to say it is, that passion into, rather than trying to get people to do what we want in the way we want them to do it, to help them understand what to do and help them in the way that they can respond to this gospel that does authentically help people change their lives. We ask this, Jesus, in your name. Amen.