

I'd Like to Get to Know You

Luke 15:1-10

Sound Clip

Intro: A man sees a sign in front of a house: "Talking Dog for Sale." He rings the bell and the owner tells him the dog is in the backyard. He goes into the backyard and sees a black mutt just sitting there.

"You talk?" he asks.

"Yep," the mutt replies.

"So, what's your story?"

The mutt looks up and says, "Well, I discovered this gift pretty young and I wanted to help the government, so I told the CIA about my gift, and in no time they had me jetting from country to country, sitting in rooms with spies and world leaders, because no one figured a dog would be eavesdropping."

"I was one of their most valuable spies eight years running. But, the jetting around really tired me out, and I knew I wasn't getting any younger and I wanted to settle down."

"So, I signed up for a job at the airport to do some undercover security work, mostly wandering near suspicious characters and listening in. I uncovered some incredible dealings there and was awarded a batch of medals."

"Had a wife, a mess of puppies, and now I'm just retired."

The man is amazed. He goes back in and asks the owner what he wants for the dog.

The owner says, "Ten dollars."

The guy says, "This dog is amazing. Why on earth are you selling him so cheap?"

The owner replies, "He's such a liar. He didn't do any of that stuff."

We're going through a series of sermons entitled, "Just Walk Across the Room". The series is about sharpening your ability to make a difference in other people's lives.

Summary of last week's sermon:

1. Be Willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown
2. Listen for the Spirit's Prompting
3. Just Walk

But what is your objective after you've decided to take a walk?

What am I going to say?

What am I going to pray about?

So many of us are uncomfortable talking to people we don't know. Unfortunately, they are our best prospects. Our family is our toughest mission field.

1. Develop Friendships

If we're going to reflect the Father's heart, as individuals and as a church, then we must be in continuous *search* mode. We've got to make a habit of searching for new friendships on the horizon. *That* is the heart of a true Christ-follower.

Some of you have almost nothing but Christian friends. That's alright. Here's the kicker. You have no intention of changing that. You believe in a heaven and hell. You believe that salvation comes through Christ. You believe that there is no hope except through Christ. Some of you have nothing but Christians for friends. That's alright and it's not alright.

Does anyone remember “direct and indirect variations” from high school algebra class? Some of you are getting nervous. Well, I'm no Mr. Math, but if memory serves me well, they went something like this.

Let's say you are trying to evaluate a young man's height and weight. We'll call the guy Jake. Maybe Jake just hit puberty, and so his height skyrocketed last year. **Jake grew 10 percent in one year.** Now, if his height and weight are in *direct* variation, then as one goes up, the other goes up too ... in “direct” proportion. So, if Jake grew 10 percent taller last year, then he also gained 10 percent more weight. *Indirect* variation would be reflected in a situation where Jake's height and weight necessarily go in *opposite* directions. In other words, Jake got taller—his height increased—but simultaneously, he lost the same proportion of weight—his weight decreased. All right, everyone still with me? Those of you who break into hives from arithmetic terminology can rejoin the conversation now. We're all done with that.

O.K. for those of you who have dazed off or gotten a rash from “Math talk” you can rejoin us now.

So, let’s say that “Jane” has been walking with Christ for ten years. She comes to Christ, gets radically accepted and redeemed and renewed by the King of the universe, and she thinks it’s about the best thing she’s ever experienced. Her walk with Christ is thriving. Additionally, she has a newfound care and compassion and concern for the people around her ... more than anything, she wants *those* people to experience the same acceptance *she* experienced from Christ. And so she embraces them and walks with them along their own journeys toward faith. In other words, all is as it *should* be! Jane is walking with Christ ... and experiencing a *corresponding increase* in her love and acceptance of the exact same people whom Christ loves. It’s all good.

Over time, Jane sees *dozens* of her friends and family members come to faith in Christ—the transformation she witnesses is simply astounding! These new Christ-followers and Jane start hanging out with greater frequency, just to chat about how much they love Jesus ... how much they love the new lives they’re living as a result of his intervention in their worlds. It’s all good!

But then something strange takes place. Things turn ... not so good. After many months, or even many years go by, Jane’s life becomes nearly 100 percent *consumed* by her friends who love Jesus. That part’s all good ... I suppose ... except that Jane no longer reaches out. She no longer feels that initial enthusiasm for sharing Christ with people outside the faith. She no longer embraces unconvinced friends ... mostly because no “unconvinced friends” *exist* in her warm, safe Circle of Comfort.

It’s the ugly underbelly of the Christian life that exists if Christ-followers aren’t diligent to keep it at bay. Here’s how it plays out: we have Jane walking with Christ ... that part is still going strong.

But *simultaneously*, the love for folks not yet walking with God *wanes*. This is the most awful “indirect variation” known to humankind.

If you think about it, this whole dynamic is what makes the Circle of Comfort so *comfortable*. Almost all of us find it quite easy to love *some* people—maybe a spouse or our parents or our kids ... our friends at work, our friends at

church. We see them, and our *initial reaction* is love. We want to bless them. We crave time with them. We're filled with joy when these people come to mind. Anyone relate to what I'm saying here?

It's true: almost *every human being* has a loving heart toward *some* people.

But here's what may not be so easy to admit. While almost every human being has a loving heart toward *some* people, almost every human being also has a secret list of people they just *can't stand*.

It might be a business partner who took some of your money and broke up your partnership twenty years ago. It might be a spouse who walked out on you. It might be someone who wounded you with words. You might have reasons—*really good* reasons—for not liking a certain number of people. But you know what? It even gets more complex than that.

Some of us don't like entire *groups* of people. Some people in this room get huffy when we're surrounded by men and women who don't vote the way we vote. Some of us become all constricted inside when we're confronted with certain ethnic groups. Some of us are just plain disgusted with people who aren't at our same socioeconomic level.

We don't talk about this very often especially in mixed company. It's uncomfortable, isn't it? But it remains true: many of us have a "list" ... and on that list are people we wish we could put on a ship headed permanently *out to sea*.

Ask me to love *some* people outside of my "circle," and seemingly out of nowhere, a whole host of qualifiers and filters rise up out of me. "All right now, if you're asking me to love some people outside of this circle, they better be nice, they better not hurt me, they better be safe, they better be stable, they better be *deserving!*"

Maybe I'm not alone here. Maybe you have your qualifiers too. Please, oh please, tell me you have your qualifiers! I don't want to sit here in my sinfulness all alone! They're called the "better-be's," and they go something like this:

"They better be white, they better be black, they better be pro-life, they better be liberal, they better be Democratic, they better be Republican, they better be young, they better be old, they better be single, they better be rich."

Any of these ringing a bell? So, where do these qualifiers come from? What are these filters all about?

In our text, Jesus is seen in a marketplace setting having conversations with people who are irreligious—people who are really far from his Father and who had made lots of mistakes, painted outside the lines, used terrible language, drank too much, slept in the wrong bed, cheated other folks out of their money ... the list goes on and on.

He is interacting with them ... talking, listening, just enjoying the fellowship. And as the scene plays out, we notice that the religious leaders—the scribes and the Pharisees—become a little troubled in their spirits. A little wrinkled in their shorts. Actually, they think the whole deal is *utterly scandalous* because the people Jesus is interacting with are the exact people who are *on their list!*—these are the precise people the scribes and Pharisees *hate!* And Jesus of all people is hanging out with them!

Somewhere along the way, they had convinced themselves with some self-talk: “Surely God has a heart that looks like our hearts. He probably has insides like our insides. He has people who he loves, bestows blessings on, thinks good thoughts about, and answers prayer for. God has a certain number of people who he loves ... but he *also* has a list of people who absolutely *disgust* him. He disdains them ... and he’s just waiting for the chance to send them to hell.”

So the Pharisees reasoned this way: “If God’s insides are like this—some people he loves, some people he hates—then it’s perfectly okay for our insides to be like that—some people we love, some people we just *hate*. So they looked at the irreligious people who were immoral and ungodly in so many ways, and they hated them ... they wished *evil* upon them.

Soon enough, Jesus hears them grumbling about this. He sees their hearts and springs into action. He tells three of the most famous stories in Scripture, one right after the other. The first: a lost sheep. The second: a lost coin. The third: a wayward boy.

He starts with a big number, a big scale ... he talks about a *hundred* sheep. But then, he narrows it down to *ten* coins. And then, to *one* son. Do you see his point taking shape?

You probably know the stories. There are a hundred sheep, and one dumb sheep just wanders away. He’s going to create all this hassle. The sheep just

wanders off and gets itself lost. Then there are ten coins. One of them is misplaced. And then, there is a boy who asks for his inheritance from his father early, which in that society was like saying to his father, “You’re as good as dead, so I want my inheritance *right now!*” And what does he do once he has money in hand? He takes it out to a foreign land and blows it on wine, women, and song. I’m so glad we don’t struggle with these issues of being lost and wandering away and squandering blessings today ... aren’t you?

I imagine that at least one of the Pharisees who heard the stories that day just couldn’t shake Jesus’ words. He wondered for days on end what those three stories were about. I picture him going away from that marketplace, his mind trailing off to the three stories. He heads to the campfire later that night, and as he’s sitting by the campfire, he keeps reviewing the stories, over and over and over again. He says, “Okay ... there were three stories he told. The lost sheep, the lost coin, the wayward son—what did all that mean?” He goes, “Hey wait! In each of the three stories, something wound up *missing*. The sheep wound up *missing*. A coin wound up *missing*. A son wound up *missing*. Hmmm.”

Then I picture the Pharisee saying, “Wait a minute. Maybe it goes down another level. Whatever it was that was missing really *mattered* to somebody! The lost sheep really mattered to the shepherd. The lost coin was one of ten. The lady only had ten coins. She’d lost a *tenth* of her entire estate. The lost coin really mattered to the woman! And the wayward son, undoubtedly, really mattered to the father.”

So I picture this Pharisee sitting by the fire. He says, “Okay. So what does it mean? What does it mean?” I can see the Pharisee going, “Oh no ... *oh no*. Could it be that the *Father’s* heart is not *at all* like our heart? Could it be that what Jesus was saying is that the Father’s heart is *indiscriminately* loving? That what Jesus was saying is that those irreligious, immoral, profane individuals that he was talking to ... was Jesus trying to say that they actually *mattered* to the Father—that they were on his *love* list?

“And could it be that Jesus was saying, ‘God the Father doesn’t even *have* a hate list’? Could it be that the love of the Father is so much love of another kind—love at such a higher and broader and wider level—that every man, woman, and child who has ever inhaled air on this planet is the object of his great affection?

And maybe there's not a single person who ever lived that God wanted to consign to hell?"

II. Discover Stories

Before the "Don't Call Lists" we were all inundated with phone solicitors. Remember how you enjoyed being interrupted by their incessant calls? I looked forward to hearing from them. Didn't you? Didn't your real feelings come out and sometimes give them a piece of your mind?

Old ideas about personal evangelism included going out and "cold turkey" knocking on doors. Let's imagine that scenario. A complete stranger comes to your door and wants to talk to you about Christ. You don't know whether they are a conventional Christian or a Cult. If you've had no Christian background at all, you'll view this stranger from an extremely suspicious vantage point. He comes in, (usually in twos) you don't know whether they're in to convert you or rob you blind.

One guy begins, "Tell me your story. I want to know your life story. Tell me about your fears and hurts. Tell me, in intimate detail . . . your greatest struggle. We've got an hour or so and if we don't get it all covered, we'll come back next week . . . tell me your sin problems.

How would that approach work with you? For most people, we'd develop a quick case of flu and usher them to the door.

Personal discussions are reserved for personal friends.

And you would be surprised by the amount of people who have incredible stories and tough stories to tell. They're waiting to share those stories with somebody they trust.

III. Discern Next Steps

There are no packaged answers as to what you do next. It's one of the most critical moments of the relationship. What do I do next?

Most react in one of two ways:

1. Do nothing (don't want to risk)
2. Jump in, using common sense, and effectively damage the relationship.

It is important to pray at this moment that the Holy Spirit leads you. It might be nothing more than a commitment to pray for somebody. It might be suggesting a Christian Book. It might be confronting them with the obvious and brutal truth. It may be an act of sacrificial kindness.

But if you go on your own wisdom, you'll screw it up!

Mark 3:1-6

The text says that Jesus was preparing to teach in the temple one day when the Pharisees got an idea. They were upset with Jesus and so they started plotting for how they might catch him in the middle of a Sabbath infraction, quite a no-no in those days. You weren't supposed to work at all on the Sabbath. which included, it seems, healing injured people.

The Pharisees drag this poor guy with a withered hand into the temple and then stand back to see if Jesus will take the bait. Jesus sees these religious leaders standing in front of him and just gets irate. The text from *The Message* paraphrase says he was angry and "furious at their hard-nosed religion." He couldn't believe that they were prizing their rigid laws above showing radical love to someone desperately in need of it.

Well, you can read this story for yourself this week, but essentially, Jesus makes no apologies as he asks the withered-hand man to step right up and receive his healing. He can't *not* heal the guy. His whole *cause* is about healing people.

And if there's one thing I want to leave you with today, it is this: You have the profound privilege of reaching the people around you with the same radical love and irrepressible acceptance that Jesus himself carried with him wherever he

went.

The same radical love and irrepressible acceptance that was extended to *you* at some point along the way, if you are a follower of Christ. Just take a look at all of the evidence of it right here this morning. I'm standing in front of dozens of pieces of evidence of Christ's love ... that was extended just to those of us in this room.