

FISHERS OF MEN // Share Your Story

Throughout this series, we've been working our way through five missional practices that we see in and around the life of Jesus that are so practical and simple, yet incredibly powerful as it relates to becoming fishers of men.

God's strategy to reach the world through the nation of Israel, through the body of Christ, and through His church was and is a "blessing strategy" and the five missional practices we're talking about just so happens to spell out the world "BLESS."

B.L.E.S.S.

B – Begin with Prayer

L – Listen Without Judgment **E** – Eat Some Meals

S – Serve Others

S – Share Our Story

1. Begin with prayer. Before Jesus chose the original 12 disciples, he prayed all night long and the Father directed Him. Today, we're going to begin praying daily for at least one person who is far from God. Hopefully you've been doing that faithfully throughout this series and will continue long after.

2. Listen Without Judgment. We're going to get curious about the people in our lives who don't know Jesus. We're going to ask questions, hear their story, maybe even hear some opinions or perspectives that we completely disagree with, and we're not going to condemn them for it. We're going to get curious, and we're going to know them and love them and wait on the Lord to open the door for spiritual conversations.

3. Eat Some Meals. Before I knew Jesus, a couple invited me over for dinner, and we had one conversation over a meal that changed the course of my life. Breaking bread with someone who is far from God is an easy way to love him or her right where they're at. Jimmy shared a story of someone who invited his neighbor to church, and the neighbor didn't show up. Then he invited the neighbor over to his home for dinner, and the neighbor jumped at the opportunity.

4. Serve Others. In one of His final acts before His betrayal, Jesus wraps a towel around His waist and washes His disciples' feet. He even tells us that if we want to be great in the Kingdom of God, we must become a servant. In light of that, we're going to look for simple and practical ways to serve the people around us. Like the Good Samaritan, we're going to prepare in advance with our resources and with our time to serve those whom God brings across our paths throughout the week.

Today we're talking about sharing our story when the doors open to conversations about our faith. Even though we might be nervous and timid about it, we're going to step out of the boat, and we're going to trust the Holy Spirit to guide us in those moments.

A while back, my wife Misty and I were sitting on our front porch and my son (who was 8 at the time) and his friends were outside running around the house when all of sudden we overhear three of them begin to have a conversation about God. One of these children did not know Jesus.

The conversation started with superheroes, and eventually one of the boys said that all the other superheroes are made up and that Jesus is the only real superhero. Makes sense, they're eight-year-old boys after all! When Misty and I hear this and we look at each other and immediately know what we have to do. We stand up, and very quietly sneak over to eaves drop on their conversation, like any good Christian parent would do.

We overhear one of the boys say that Jesus isn't real either. All of the sudden, our neighbor's son responds by saying to this very kind, polite, unbelieving 8-year-old boy: *"You don't believe that Jesus is real!? Well, you're going to spend eternity burning in hell!"*

Although true, this is maybe not the most helpful way to start that conversation.

When we're talking about sharing our story and sharing our faith, this is NOT what we're talking about.

So, what are we talking about?

In Mark 5, Jesus had been traveling, teaching, and working miracles for some time. When Jesus and His followers come to a town the east side of the sea of Galilee, they find a man possessed by a legion of demons.

Mark 5:3-5, "...He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones." (ESV)

This kind of self-destructive behavior is not just mere sickness or insanity. What we see in any form of spiritual warfare is an all attempt to distort and destroy God's image in people.

This is why Paul writes in Ephesians 6:

Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the **rulers**, against the **authorities**, against the **cosmic powers** over this present darkness, against the **spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly places." (ESV)

People are not our enemy. We're fighting against spiritual forces of evil that are in all-out assault on the image of God in human beings.

The word "legion" was a military word that meant about 6,000. This man was tormented by demons and yet, as soon as he sees Jesus, as soon as this legion of demons come into the presence of Jesus, there is no struggle, there is no contest.

What's fascinating and almost hilarious about this interaction is that the lead demon is calling on God to command Jesus: *"I adjure you by God!"* It's like the demon is trying to exorcise Jesus by calling on a power greater than itself.

What's amazing is that in the entire history of ancient literature regarding demonic encounters, Jesus Christ is the only one in human history to not call on a power greater than Himself to cast out a demon. He doesn't say, *"By the power of the most high God!"*

Jesus calms the storm, Jesus works miracles, Jesus alone casts out demons by calling on a higher power because He IS the Higher Power. There's no power in the universe greater than Jesus. He doesn't even work up a sweat, He just says, *"Come out!"* and this legion of demons obey Him.

Just being in the presence of Jesus, the legion of demons falls to the ground and begs. There's no struggle, there's no contest.

Jesus then gives the demons permission to flee and possess some nearby herd of pigs, and 2,000 pigs suddenly run off the side of a cliff into the sea and drown.

Mark 5:14-15, *"The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind."* (ESV)

They couldn't believe what happened to this man, and they were afraid. The herdsmen were really upset with Jesus, because they just witnessed 2,000 pigs collectively decide to go cliff jumping into the sea after Jesus did something to them. They begin to drive Jesus out of that region.

Mark 5:18-20, *"As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged Him that he might be with Him. And He did not permit him but said to him, 'Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled."*

When we think about sharing the gospel or having conversations about faith a lot of us get nervous, or timid, or fearful. We don't want to say the wrong thing, we don't want to misrepresent Jesus, we don't want to offend someone we care about, and so many of us end up never saying anything.

In fact, there's a quote that's often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

"Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words." - St. Francis of Assisi

We like that word "if." Because "if" gives us an out. We say things like, *"Oh I just preach the gospel with my actions and with my life."* We come up with reasons to NOT share our faith with other people.

You can't preach the gospel without words. That's like saying *"Feed the hungry, and if necessary, use food."* The only way to feed the hungry is with food, and the only way to preach the gospel is with words!

Romans 10:14, *"How then will they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of Whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"*

You might think, “Well, Rob if I wear a Christian T-shirt, or I have a Jesus fish on my car, that’s enough, isn’t it?”

First off, your driving had better be impeccable. But let’s play this out: even if your driving was impeccable, I don’t think your driving could ever be so good that it would cause someone to give his or her life to Christ! *“Man did you see that turn, they put on their blinker, they were so thoughtful, and they effectively communicated in traffic — they even fully stopped at that red light back there! What am I doing with my life!? Jesus must be real!”*

It’s ridiculous! The only way to preach the gospel IS to use words!

Maybe you just don’t want to come across as some fanatic or be rejected. But the truth is, if we’re starting with prayer, we’re listening, sharing meals, serving, investing relationally in people over a long period of time, we can trust that God will open the door to spiritual conversations. You don’t have to kick that door down. When God opens the door, we want to do what the man did in Mark 5.

Mark 5:20, “And he went away and began to **proclaim** in the Decapolis **how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.**”

He just simply told his friends and family what Jesus had done for him. He knew almost nothing other than Jesus saved him, He healed him, He set him free! And no matter what your story is, if you belong to Jesus, that’s true of you as well.

Think about the blind man that Jesus healed and the Pharisees are all up in arms about it. The Pharisees say to the man’s parents: “...*He was blind! How can he see?*” To which the parents respond: “...*We don’t know ask him!*” So, the Pharisees ask the man, to which the man responded that he also did not know, but proclaimed:

John 9:25, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

Consider the Samaritan woman at the well. She encountered Jesus and then she ran back to her town and she can’t help but tell everyone.

John 4:29, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” They went out of the town and were coming to Him.

So, practically speaking what does this look like for us?

BEFORE | DURING | AFTER

Just tell your story! Don’t overdramatize it, just be real, just be honest. Your story doesn’t have to be like: “*I used to be a drug-dealing Satan worshipper, but ever since I found Jesus, now I pray 10hrs a day and I’ve memorized the whole Bible.*”

Unless that’s your story!

We've all experienced the grace of God. We know what it is to be forgiven and set free from sin. We know what it means to have significance and meaning in life and to have hope that goes far beyond our circumstances.

Jesus changes how we approach our relationships, our financial decisions, and our priorities in life. He not only gives us eternal life, He's filled us with abundant life here and now no matter what our story is.

Just share your story. What was your life like **before** Christ? What was your journey like **during** the time you came to Christ? What does your life look like **after** Christ?

It doesn't mean that everything is perfect or smooth sailing. Just be honest and real about your story and if you do that, you'll help people find their way back to God.

In fact, we've attached a helpful tool for you as you prepare in advance to share your story so that you're ready when the moment comes. That tool is provided under the "downloads" button under the sermon on the "messages" page on the website.

Now get this: the next time Jesus comes to the Decapolis area in Mark 8, the first time He's been back since he instructed this man to simply share his story with his friends, there are 4,000 people that gather all around Jesus where he feeds them, heals them, and ministers to them.

It went from one man to 4,000 in a few short chapters because one man simply proclaimed all that Jesus had done for him. Imagine what God might do if we all began to share the story of what God has done for us with the people God is leading us to?

But remember, we've got to begin with prayer. What lost people do you know? I encourage you to write the names of at least one of those people and commit to praying for that person every single day for a year. I can't wait to see what God does!