

# That'll Leave a Mark

## *The Impact of Contact*

January 21, 2024

Today we're learning to be more intentional about the impact of our interactions. Cuz it's easy for *everyone* to get lost in a dark world and *no one gets out without* someone to *point* out the way out. So, the question is: **Where are you pointing people?** Cuz like it or not, each relationship with every person in *your* life plays a pivotal role in guiding and deciding *where* they're going and *why*.



And that **means we need to talk about the "E" word, evangelism**. Now, *every* person in *this* room is here because *someone*, at some *time*, somehow shared God in a way that *moved* you to *attend* today. But, we *also* need to recognize that *many* people *outside* this room *aren't* here because *someone*, at some *time*, somehow shared God in a way that moved them to *stay away* from church today.



Because the truth is **sharing isn't always caring**. Sometimes sharing is *condescending*, *judgmental*, or *intimidating*. Sometimes we share to brag, belittle, or berate because **being in a position to offer help puts us in a position to indulge pride**. And it takes careful consideration to keep our offerings *humble* and *helpful* rather than *high* and *mighty*.



And that makes things *tricky*! Cuz **there's no magic words or secret formula to evangelism**; sharing God with others *hits* or *misses* differently with everyone on a *case-by-case* basis. In fact, the *exact same* words can be both *compelling* to some and *repelling* to others. So, we *know* we need an approach that's adaptable. If we want to be received as *relevant* and *relatable*, we need to *cater* to our audience.



**[The way Paul says:]** Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings. – 1 Corinthians 9:19, 22-23 NIV

But *don't* mishear that – **catering your approach does not mean compromising your beliefs!** It means finding common ground to *disarm* the *defensiveness* that naturally grows from our *differences*. And as Peter adds, *that* means keeping your heart in line:

In *your* hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who *asks* you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect  
– 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

So make yourself *relevant* and *relatable* and then share with *gentleness* and *respect* – sounds easy, right? *No it doesn't!* It's *instinctual* to get *heated*, keep *score*, and try to *win* whenever we're at *odds* with *anyone* – so *how* do we keep our cool when trying to evangelize?! **Well, stop trying.**

At least, stop trying to *save* people! That's *never* been our job! **God does the saving, we do the pointing!** Our number one *priority* should be pointing people *toward God*, not pointing out *their mistakes* or *our success*; point first and foremost to the One who actually gets things *done!*

Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. – 1 Corinthians 3:7 NIV



**Don't forget, we're the saved, not the Savior**, so the most powerful *argument* we can make on God's behalf, is *living* for Him – not *speaking* for Him. *Yes*, as first-hand witnesses to God's power, we *are* called to testify; but our *words* pale in comparison to the *silent* witness of our example – due to something called "**Locard's exchange principle**".



Y'see, Dr. Edmond Locard, known as the *Sherlock Holmes* of France, noticed *all* forensic investigation is based on a very *simple premise*: **every contact leaves a trace**. One forensic expert put it this way:



**"Wherever he steps, whatever he touches, whatever he leaves, even unconsciously, will serve as a silent witness against him. Not only his fingerprints ... but fibers from his clothes, glass he breaks ... paint he scratches, blood he deposits ... This is evidence that does not forget."**



And in his TED talk London policeman John Sutherland explains how the principle applies not *just* to forensic science but to *all* human contact:



**"Every time two people come into contact with one another an exchange takes place. Whether between lifelong friends or passing strangers, we encourage, we ignore, we hold out a hand, or we withdraw it. We walk towards or we walk away. We bless or we curse... And every single contact leaves a trace. The way that we treat and regard one another matters. It really matters."**

*Amen!* This cop is preaching and he doesn't even know it! It's our actions *around* and interactions *with* others that impact us most; or said *simply*, **our relationships change us**. And in every *relationship*, *actions* speak much louder than words. So no wonder the *cornerstone* of Christian belief is a transforming relationship with Jesus based on what He *did* for us! He sacrificed *Himself* to *save* us; to *point* us to a *relationship* that *changes* us; **to see the supreme power of love**.

[So, as Paul says:] Therefore if you have *any* encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. – Philippians 2:1-4 NIV

And this is the mark of evangelism done right – **reproducing the relationship that changed you**. Our goal is to get others into their *own* relationship with Jesus, with gentleness and respect.

So how do we do this when the whole world feels increasingly at *odds* with God? How do you reach every *neighbor, co-worker, and family member* who shuts off when they hear the words *cross, sin, or Savior*? Well, *strangely*, **you just focus on your relationship with Jesus!** And here's why:



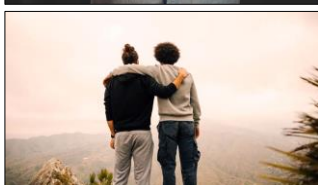
[Jesus] died for all, that those who *live* should no longer live for *themselves* but for Him who died for them ... – 2 Corinthians 5:15 NIV



[Cuz as Paul further explains:] I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who *loved* me [there's the *relationship*] and *gave* Himself for me [there's the *action*]. – Galatians 2:20 NIV



*Get it?* Once Jesus takes the wheel, everyone who has a relationship with *you* now, *unknowingly*, has a relationship with Christ *in you*! **Christians smuggle the Spirit into all our relationships!** And thanks to Locard's Principle, everyone in *your* life is being changed by *their* contact with Christ even if they didn't want to hear anything about Him! And the *stronger* the *presence* of Jesus in *your* life – the *bigger* the *mark* He gets to leave on the lives of others, *through you*!



We *are* therefore Christ's *ambassadors*, as though God were making His appeal through us. – 2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV

And we know our approved approach to His appeal cuz He tells us:

As I have loved you, so you *must love one another*. By *this* everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. [And as John reminds] – John 13:34-35 NIV

Let us *not* love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. – 1 John 3:18 NIV

And I can't speak for you, but I can verify it was the *actions* and *truth* in the relationships I had with "*Spirit Smugglers*" that changed me most. It was the few *friends* who really *listened*, it was a couple *bandmates* who dropped what they were doing when I needed *help*, and it was my *mother* who worried about *me* while *she* was fighting a brutal battle with *cancer*.

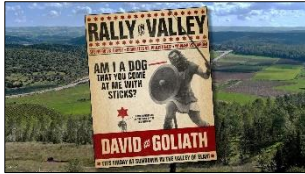
*Those* are the relationships where God left the biggest mark on me, and 90% of the impact came from the *silent* witness that testified in every *interaction*. And only *after* I was on the hook through our *interactions* did I ever give weight to their *words*. Then "*Christian*" changed meaning to *me*.

[So,] Let *your* light shine before others, that they may see *your* good deeds and [after learning how you are the way you are,] glorify your *Father* in heaven. – Matthew 5:16 NIV

In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and *soundness* of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. – Titus 2:7-8 NIV

Cuz **when our actions are attractive, they give weight to our witness**. And *then* it changes people.

Take last week's look at David and Goliath. I *loved* all the inspiring insight about how *courage* and *faith* keep us from underestimating ourselves as the underdog – but most of us *don't* have David's mindset yet. Don't get me wrong, that's the *goal*, but *until* then, a lot of us are more like the Israelites; standing on the sidelines, *trying* to muster the courage to make a move. Remember how:



Whenever the Israelites saw [Goliath], they all fled from him in great fear. [And they stayed back while David tells Goliath:] – Samuel 17:24 NIV



"I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, ... This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head ... and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's – 1 Samuel 17:45-47 NIV



But despite the inspiring *words*, nobody was *moved* to change until David took *action* on *their* behalf, before *their* eyes, and killed Goliath:

Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines.- 1 Samuel 17:51-52 NIV



Notice David didn't try to *convince*, *coerce*, or *guilt* the Israelite army into an *increase* of faith; at this point, he didn't even *speak* to them! He only spoke to *his* enemy about *his* faith *in front of others* – knowing **the mark he left on Goliath would leave a mark on them!**

But that's how it goes; a front-row seat *fires* us up! Cuz our *proximity* to *power* starts a *chain-reaction of change* – and the *closer* the contact the *bigger* the impact. That's why *real*, intimate relationships are so important, they keep contact close. And like Roosevelt famously said:

**“No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”**

And that means **love is the only foundation for evangelism**. Sharing *has to be* caring for it to be *effective*. Cuz *every* interaction of *each* relationship leaves *evidence* that *does not forget*. And *inspiring*, *encouraging*, and *empowering* actions are all hallmarks of contact with Christ. While *condescending*, *judgmental*, or *intimidating* words are all fingerprints of *pride*.

So, all that to say, here's the secret to keeping your evangelism attractive, **don't try hard, love hard.**

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [and]  
Love your neighbor as yourself. [Cuz if sharing God is your goal, get this:] All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. – Matthew 22:37-40 NIV

Evangelism is mostly the mark left by your love of others that naturally grows from your love of the Lord! So wherever your faith falls, on a scale from Israelite to David, remember, our job centers on giving others a front-row seat to our life as it *becomes* Christ's life. And then you can be confident you're pointing people in the right direction! Cuz **you're just the middle man, smuggling the Spirit.**