

“Share: Going Fishing, Reflecting Light”

January 30, 2022

The Walk series

What a blessing to serve as the clean-up batter after the leadership of Brad, Jim, Jeff, and Mike - along with everyone who leads worship! Let's pray...

How many of you have heard of Wordle? Wordle is a daily online word game that gives you six chances to guess a five-letter word, giving you hints about letters and where they fit. I know some of you play because I've seen you sharing your scores on Facebook. Now I'll admit that I'm on the Wordle train, though I don't post my scores. For those who care, I usually guess it in four tries.

I couldn't help but make a connection to my part of this series about our walk with Jesus - **share**. We've spent January talking these five essential practices of faith: **(SLIDE)** *Worship/Prayer, Study, Serve, Give, Share*. As we continue our faith journeys personally and together, spiritual disciplines are vital to forming our faith and growing in faith. Faith doesn't deepen without attention and intention. Faith doesn't deepen without engagement.

All of these practices call us to be more engaged - worship, study, serve, give, and share. Wordle takes about five minutes a day (or less) to play and share. How many of us have taken on these practices - praying five times a day and reading five verses every day, along with five acts of kindness and serving every week and five acts of generosity each month?

Though I haven't done it perfectly, I've tried to engage more deeply in these practices. I can witness that my prayer life has deepened, and I've felt more attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit nudging me to call or text or connect with others. Today as we come to the end of this series, I pray that it's just the beginning of committing to these practices, and I hope you post this card where you can see it (it's posted on Facebook, too) for the reminder of our daily walk with Jesus.

Today we come to end of this series, and it may be the most challenging of all for some of us - sharing our faith, telling others, inviting others. Back to Wordle - I thought about how easily we share the scores we receive. Why is it so difficult for us to be more intentional about sharing our faith in whatever way we can? Many times, it doesn't require us to use words, and our actions speak much more loudly. But this Wordle phenomenon has challenged me and called me to challenge us together. How are we sharing our faith just as quickly as we share other things - whether it's a

score on a word puzzle, a game we're watching, an event we're attending, an opportunity to support our kids, or something exciting in our lives? Sometimes our faith reflects through that sharing, but I wonder if we might be even more engaged every day. That's just as much a challenge for me as for you.

Each week, we've been encouraged to take on a specific practice. For sharing our faith, here it is: **(SLIDE)** *Let others know you are a Christian and invite 5 people to church every year.* If you need ideas on whom to invite, use the acronym FRAN **(SLIDE)** to pray about friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors.

All of us know someone who doesn't have a church home. Perhaps someone has asked you about your church. That's an opportunity to share your faith. Recently, I was in a salon, and the person helping me asked about the practice of writing a sermon when I told her I was a pastor. We had a conversation about worship and being virtual - and how important that's been for her. She had a church home and shared about what it meant to her. It was a reminder to me of what witness can be.

Again, think about the acronym FRAN **(SLIDE)** to pray about friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors. It's never been easier to invite others to join you online for worship. It's never been easier to share posts and encourage others to connect. It's very easy and non-threatening. How many know what this is? **(SLIDE)** It's the "like" button on Facebook. We "like" posts all the time. We "like" businesses and organizations. It shows our feelings - or at least assumes that we're invested enough to offer a good review.

The video we watched reminded me of many people who've told me that it took many invitations for them to even consider coming to church because of their struggles, bad experiences, or uncertainties. We may need to invite more than once. We can be invitational and incarnational. We can't stop inviting and sharing. We can't stop following Jesus as he seeks people just as he sought out the ones fishing. It's such an interesting encounter. They drop their nets and follow him. I still wonder if there's some missing dialogue. But something must have been so compelling to them that they would follow, leaving their livelihood and family.

We can't stop following Jesus and reaching out in his name. There are many people who are skeptical of faith and church - maybe because of a negative personal experience or because of the loudest voices that make faith and church out to be hypocritical, judgmental, homophobic, and just plain mean. Maybe you've experienced this or know someone who has. We're not perfect and may have had

moments when we've been less than loving, but we have to clear on who Jesus is. Those voices that are less than loving don't speak for me, you, or the One we worship. Sometimes we don't do the work to undo the damage that's been done - to show a different way.

We have the opportunity to share our faith - and the directive to share it. There's the Great Commandment - to love God with all your (say it with me) heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. And there's the Great Commission - go make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them... If we don't fulfill the Great Commandment - to love God and neighbor - then we can't fulfill the Great Commission - to make disciples. We need to love as God loves in order to make disciples.

We are not perfect, but I pray we can be the antidote to those negative perceptions wherever we find ourselves - in a salon, on a soccer field or in the stands, in our office or online meeting, at a medical appointment, in the grocery store line, and especially in our own homes and families. We have close family who are skeptical. How can we offer a positive image to work against the negative?

How have you been formed in faith? Who shared faith with you? (shout it out) One of my many people is a woman named Marilyn who served at a mid-week program at a local Baptist church. I found a card from her recently that she wrote when I was graduating and told me how proud she was of me. It meant a lot to me, and it reminded that witness matters.

Parents, grandparents, loved ones: don't ever discount the impact you have on the faith journey of your loved ones. Your intentional efforts to share your faith, to talk about faith, to be a part of a church community make an impact. Write down why your faith is important to you - share it with them. Show and tell why it matters. I have cards saved from my grandma who always managed to include a witness to her faith in what she wrote.

Jesus calls us to make a difference and an impact for him - to be salt, intensifying the flavor of the world around us; to be light, shining God's grace into the despair and fear many people feel. "Our goodness is to be so obvious," one writer says, "so in evidence, that, through our presence, the very presence of God's love and grace is felt in those around us."

We're here in worship, whether in-person or online, because of other people who have offered a positive witness as a follower of Jesus. And I pray that we can be one of the many reasons that others choose to follow Jesus - not the reason they

don't. Just like we can name those who shared faith with us, would someone say that you helped them to follow Jesus. That's who we want to be - not for ourselves - but for the Kingdom of God. Maybe you invited them to church, prayed with them, taught them about God, or lived your faith authentically and helped them to trust Jesus. I loved hearing the stories from our speakers in this series who shared about people who helped them grow in faith.

How can we be more intentional about sharing the faith that is so important to us? It might be as simple as a post about a song we sang that touches your heart, a Bible verse that moves you, an offer to pray for others, or a picture of you serving with others. It could be as simple as "I went to church today or Bible study this week, and I'm thankful." Or even simpler "God is good all the time." That positive review of faith is powerful, and you never know how it will land or who needs to hear it. It may be one of the forty words of witness, but it matters.

And if you want to go deeper, think about how you might develop a short personal testimony. I've always loved these verses from First Peter 3: **(SLIDE)** "Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life. *Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear.* This way you will make people ashamed for saying bad things about your good conduct as a follower of Christ." Remember that these words come at a time when Christians were persecuted.

One translation says that we should offer our witness with gentleness and respect. You don't need a theological degree to share why you believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. You can share why faith makes a difference in your life.

I've often thought about what would be missing if I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus and a community of faith. It's my calling, but it impacts who I am as a spouse, parent, daughter, sister, family member, friend, and neighbor, and I hope I'm more loving because of my faith. Faith affects how I see myself and others, what I give, and how I serve. More recently, I've noticed how my faith impacts how I respond to grief and loss, and I can't imagine dealing with death without faith in Jesus who offers eternal life.

So, what's your elevator speech - even a sentence about why this matters to you? Let your heart speak. Share it. You are crucial to Jesus' mission. We are crucial to Jesus' mission - to love God and others - and to make disciples. Hamilton says it this way: "It is in giving away our faith, sharing it with others, that our faith and our spiritual passion grow." When we talk about faith journey, what Jesus means to us,

how Scripture offers us guidance and comfort, when we witness to God's presence, our faith deepens and grows. That's a great benefit to us, but it's also a directive from Jesus as he seeks to draw people to God and offer compassion to those who feel disconnected, offer something to those who are disillusioned. We are ambassadors for Christ. God is making an appeal through us. And we are on a mission with Jesus. He leads the way, and we go with him. Love God. Love others. Make disciples.

Thanks be to God. Let us pray...

A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition (Contemporary Version)

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,
Praised for you or criticized for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.
And now, O wonderful and holy God,
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
you are mine, and I am yours.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it also be made in heaven. Amen.