

**Introduction:** Welcome back to our fall vision refresh series I'm calling Neighborhoods and Nations.

**Summary so far:** So far, we've been reviewing some of the fundamentals of who we are and what we're doing as the church. In my experience, our lives are best lived when they are lived intentionally and purposefully. And the same is true in the life of the church.

When you start to talk about the purpose and mission of the Church, the stakes are high and it's vital that we stay intentional in order to stay effective. That's why I take us through this refocus series each year. I don't want us to forget about what our Biblical calling is, and I don't want us to lose focus.

**Last week,** I talked about our church's responsibility to be mat carriers for our community...looking for those small little chances to jump in and be mat carriers for the broken, the hurting, and the paralyzed that desperately need to get in front of Jesus.

Today, I want to talk further about what it means to be ready and willing to grab a corner of the mat for those God brings into the orbits of your lives at home, at work, at school, on the sports field, or the sidelines; in your neighborhoods, and when you're out and about in our community. The Apostle Peter gives us some good direction in terms of readiness to be mat carriers. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 3.

As you're finding your way there, let me give you some background to Peter's letter. Peter's whole letter here was written to Christians for the express purpose of helping them understand how to live faithfully, and represent Jesus well in a culture that was hostile to Christ followers and

the Christian faith. So, his comments are super relevant for us at this time in our culture.

Peter's brief comments towards the end of Chapter 3 coach us in how to be ready to grab a corner of the mat when the need is there. I want to show you 2 verses in 1 Peter 3.

**NOW**, if you are not a Christian yet, give me a few moments here to talk to those who are already Christians. Look at verses 15-16

*"But 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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." - 1 Peter 3:15-16.*

**These verses offer us four important reminders as we seek to be intentional about our faith and look for ways to help get people in front of Jesus.**

**1. Each of us is called to keep our relationships with Jesus fresh.**

1) Each of us is called to keep our relationships with Jesus fresh. Peter commands the Jesus follower here, "...in your hearts revere Christ as Lord." What does that even mean? To revere someone means to set them apart as special, to honor them as a priority, to consider them first. Peter says we are to revere Jesus as Lord. By "Lord" Peter means we are to set Jesus apart as THE ONE who is our leader, or the one who is in command in our lives.

To "revere Christ as Lord" means we hold Jesus in high esteem in our hearts and minds. Our gratitude towards Jesus, for wrapping us up in his holiness and qualifying us for heaven deeply moves us to align our real time behavior with his teachings, so that our day-to-day life grows to

match the holiness he has given us. *Putting it simply, our gratitude to God, **drives our alignment** with God.*

On the flip side, revering Jesus as Lord means that we must put off some things in our lives. We have to let certain habits and attitudes go. For example, we must learn to stop revering **self** as Lord. We have to grow out of our bias: "I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it."

Instead, we are to learn to pursue God's purposes in our lives, rather than simply our own purposes. For example, we must learn to resist falling prey to **wealth and materialism** as the leader of our lives, and instead keep Jesus the leader of our lives.

Students, for you this means you are to seek to follow Jesus, as the leader of your choices and directions, not your **friends**, not peer pressure, not the **culture** and mindset you see on your devices. It means you pursue Jesus as your role model in life and his truth as your fundamental guide for living.

Now, for all of us, part of revering Jesus as Lord is being prepared to talk about the reasons Jesus means so much to us. Look at the second phrase in verse 15.

Peter writes, *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."*

2) Each of us is to be ready to **talk about** why Jesus means so much to us. Preparation here means that we are both willing AND that we have taken some action to be prepared to talk about why Jesus matters to us. Now, please realize, Peter is not suggesting that every Christian is to be some sort of highly skilled apologist for the faith. This is not academic, it's personal!

What he is saying is every believer should be prepared to talk about what Jesus means to you and why he is special to you. The idea here is that

each of us is to be prepared to do this in our own words and in our style. This is a call for each Christian to do their due diligence to be prepared to tell someone their “Jesus story” in their own **style** and **way**. In other words, “Use what you’ve got, don’t try to be who you’re not.

This means you need to think through your story of what Jesus has done in you and through you so that you have a kind of “Spiritual Elevator Speech” of why you’re revering Christ as the leader in your life, and why you are seeking to live and love like him.

Have you ever sat down and tried to concisely describe why you believe and follow Jesus? Why do you like Jesus so much? Have you ever tried to concisely explain that?

Try and do that this week.

1. **Start by just sitting** down at the computer or with a tablet and reflecting back about your life and **make notes of key times** when Jesus showed up for you.
2. Or make a list of the reasons why Jesus matters to you, or why he makes sense to you.
3. **Then re-write** a few more drafts of it making your description more concise, more crisp. Doing this exercise will give you the **freedom** in the moment to explain why you are hoping in Jesus.

Now, as you get various opportunities to share bits and pieces of why Jesus means so much to you, some of those opportunities will lead to conversations about how to actually become a Christian. So, it’s also just as important and super helpful to be prepared with some sort of pathway in your mind for how to lead someone through a decision to trust Jesus and **value him** just as you have.

Now, I recognize that for some people, leading a person to a relationship with Jesus comes natural and it’s as easy as breathing. But, for many of us there is a high intimidation factor in this. *So, let me offer a couple of easy outlines* you can remember or have outlined on a card in your wallet or purse.

The first one is called **"One-Verse" Evangelism**. Many people feel in order to be effective in evangelism they have to memorize a complex illustration and a multitude of verses. But the Gospel is most powerful when shared simply and naturally with love, clarity, and simplicity.

"One Verse" Evangelism was developed by the folks at Cru (Campus Crusade For Christ) many years ago. And it can be shared in about 10-15 minutes and only uses one verse—Romans 6:23. There are a number of different ways you can personalize this according to your style of relating...some draw some pictures to help...but I'm just going to briefly walk you through it. There are other tutorials online if you want to pursue it more.

***Now...before I share this...if you're not a Christian yet, I'd ask you to listen carefully to this part of this message***...this will be helpful for you.

Roman's 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* -Romans 6:23

First, circle the word **Wages** and explain how it's something you earn... something that is "due us." Deep down, we all know that it is only right that we get what we deserve. So, in this way, we earn wages from God for how we have lived our lives.

## **Sin**

Next draw a circle around "sin." You might ask your friend what they think when they hear this word. You might explain that sin can be just as much an attitude as an action. It can be either actively fighting God or merely excluding Him from our lives. Sometimes God can seem super distant because that is one of the things sin does -- it makes God seem far away.

## **Death**

Next, circle the word "death" and ask what thoughts come to mind. Explain that death in the Bible always means some kind of separation. But here is the good news...circle the word "but."

## **But**

While circling the word "but," mention that it is important because it means that a sharp contrast in thought is coming. What we have just looked at is bad news; what follows is good news.

## **Gift**

Then draw a circle around the word, "gift." Contrast the word "wages" with the word "gift." Wages, something we earn, and gift, something purchased by someone else and then given to us.

## **Of God**

Circle the words "of God" and explain that the gift you are talking about is free. It is from God Himself. And it's so special that no one else can give it.

## **Eternal Life**

Then circle the word "eternal life" and talk about the differences between "eternal life" and "death," circled earlier.

## **Christ Jesus**

Finally, circle "Jesus Christ" and help your friend consider the truth that every gift has a giver, and only Jesus Christ can give the gift of eternal life because he was killed, buried, and rose again to live forever.

## **Trust**

Finally, write the word "trust" in big letters over the top of the verse.

- Explain that Jesus wants a trusting friendship with each of us.
- All you have to do is admit that you're responsible for the "sin" of either fighting God or excluding him from your life.
- That is what Trust means...trusting that Jesus wants to forgive us for rejecting Him from our lives.

- At this point, you can ask if they want to start a relationship with God that will last forever. If “Yes,” invite them to pray a short prayer in their own words, asking Jesus to forgive him.
- Close by reminding them that this simple illustration shows what God is like: Someone who really cares about people, especially them. Invite them to read more about it in the Bible, beginning with the gospel of John.

Basically, you can take a person to this one verse and allow its words to help you walk through the fundamentals of becoming a Christian.

The next one is one I’ve shared with you a few times. Lowell Goetze introduced this outline to our Leadership Board several years ago.

### **Gospel Outline**

It starts with a question? “Has anyone ever explained to you HOW a person becomes a Christian? I have found this question so helpful to focus or refocus a conversation.

If the person says, “No.” Offer this: If I could explain that to you in 60 seconds, would you want to hear it?” (If the response is positive, go through the following four points.)

Here’s the 1<sup>st</sup> point you need to know...

#### 1. Love of God

Sometimes people think that God is mad at us. But the Bible actually teaches the opposite. God loves us with the best love possible. Maybe you’ve heard this verse out of the Bible, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life”* John 3:16. Unfortunately, many people don’t understand how much God loves them; they think God is disappointed in them. Many times, they think God is disappointed because they know their own secrets and regrets in life. But the Bible repeatedly assures us, God knows all our crud...and he loves us in spite of it.

"Would you agree that most people recognize they are not perfect, that everyone has regrets and things they are not proud of in their life? The Bible acknowledges that as well. It teaches that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death. Rom. 3:23, 6:23." This is the second main point...

## 2. Sin of Man

"Now, I recognize that is sad, discouraging news, but here is the good news...and this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> point."

## 3. Cross of Christ

"The Bible says that God demonstrates his powerful love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. 5:8. So, Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sin and he wraps us up in his perfection. In doing so, he qualifies us for heaven. All of this he offers to us as a free gift."

## 4. Prayer of Faith

"We receive the gift of eternal life in heaven by faith when we receive Jesus and trust him as our forgiver and leader in our lives. The Bible says to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12."

"NOW... if that explanation makes sense to you, and you want to become a Christian, then you can let God know that by praying something like this:"

*"Thank you, God, for loving me. I confess that I have sinned against you by living my life independent of you. Please forgive me. Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross for me and for your gift of eternal life. Right now, as an act of my will, I invite you into my life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be. Amen."*



Are there any of you hearing this today who want that prayer to be yours today? If so, welcome to the family of God. I'd love to know about your decision. Come and let me know after the service, stop and let one of the volunteers know at the Welcome Booth, OR if you are listening on line, text "Decision" to the number on your screen (530) 492-5330.

Now, for those of you who are already Christians, being prepared with your personal story and with this type of four-point guide in your mind can free you and boost your confidence in those conversations God opens for you. And being ready gives us freedom to navigate around in the conversation with flexibility and ease. In addition, it helps you keep the conversation focused more naturally.

Remember, every believer is called to preparations like these. And some of you have people in your lives right now who need to have this conversation with you. Your world needs you to be ready and to be a faithful ambassador.

Now notice the attitude and posture Peter says we are to have as we go about having these conversations? Look at the last part of verse 15, "*But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*"

3) Each of us is to be **gentle and respectful** as we speak about our relationship with Jesus.

Gentleness here carries the meaning, "humility, kind, pleasant." Respect here is the word often translated fear. But it doesn't mean being afraid. Please realize, we'll always have a bit of fear because we recognize how high the stakes are when we are talking about Jesus and we don't want to mess it up.

You see, the word "respect" here refers to a sober valuing of God, and therefore the person, and the message. It speaks to the importance of

this calling of being ready and prepared to share when opportunities arise.

Gentleness and respect are to characterize you as you navigate these conversations. So, there is no room for crazy “turn or burn” threats, guilt trips, or manipulations. In another place, the Bible calls us to “speak these kinds of truths in love.”

But, it’s not just our words Peter is concerned with, He’s also concerned with our lifestyle. Notice in that same section Peter references “good behavior in Christ.” This is the fourth piece I want you to see and it’s tied tightly to the third piece. As ambassadors each of us must seek to match our talk with our walk.

*4) Each of us must seek to **match** our talk with our walk.*

Peter is reminding us that our actions, attitudes, and how we treat others in our families, our neighborhoods, and our workplaces matters.

Our conduct is to align with our conversation. Our walk is to match our talk as best as possible. None of us are perfect, we’re all human, but what happens when we talk like heaven but live like hell? We send mixed messages. We live like hypocrites.

Maintaining a clear conscience in this refers to your good behavior matching your good words. It’s not suggesting you must be perfect before you share...rather, through and through you are seeking to align your walk with your talk, recognizing sometimes you blow it. This is again where the humility and gentleness mentioned above come into play.

### **Summary/Conclusion**

Peter is calling us to Readiness today. Why? Because your world needs you guys.

Your world needs you to set Jesus apart as your leader and follow him.

Your world needs you to be prepared to talk about your relationship with him.

Your world needs you to have these conversations naturally, lovingly, and respectfully.

Your world needs your talk to match your walk.

Which one of these four pieces of Peter's challenge is your next step to work on? Pick one to be your next step of growth to focus on and begin working on it this week.

**BE READY!!! YOUR WORLD NEEDS YOU!!**