

## Introduction

Good morning. How are we doing this morning out there everybody? Well... one of us is ready for church today. I'm glad to hear that. The rest of you guys... we'll work on it. If you have your Bible with you today, I want to invite you at this time to go ahead and take it out and open it up with me. We are going to be Acts chapter 4 today. If you don't have a Bible with you today, don't panic. It's going to be alright. There is a Bible in the seat tray in front of you, and you are welcomed to use that one. If you don't own a Bible, guess what? Good news... that's our gift to you today. Feel free to take that with you as you leave here today. If you don't want to use a physical Bible, you can certainly use a digital Bible on your Smart Phone or on your tablet. We don't care how you engage with Scripture. We just believe that the Scripture is God's Word, and that is the way that He speaks to us. It's important that we study it, that we know it, and that's how God's Holy Spirit really speaks to us. He illuminates, the Spirit does, the Word of God so that we can follow and understand His will for our lives. So we encourage you to be reading the Scripture with us.

We are in a series in the Book of Acts; that series is entitled "Release." We have put together... your staff has put together a curriculum that goes with this study, and we would love it if you would follow along with us. The best way to do that is to join a Life Group. Now, you may not be in a Life Group... maybe you've had reasons for not doing that... your schedule or whatever. Right now, I believe we have 40 adult Life Groups that meet in all parts of our community, on different nights of the week. There is a Life Group that will work for your schedule. We would love it if you would join one. You will get one of these books whenever you join that Life Group. You will be able to find all the different ways that you can follow along. The best way to get this information is to go out to our Life Group table as soon as service concludes today, and you'll be able to connect with our discipleship team. They will help you find a Life Group, and they'll get you set up so that you can move forward in that. It's going to be a lot of fun. It's a great study, and I hope that you will join us in that.

If you're enjoying this study... I know that I am; in my Life Group, we're having a blast. If you want to share that with some of your friends or some of your family members who aren't part of Houston Northwest, we would love it if you would do that as well. The best way for you to do that is to go to our church website... [hnw.org/release](http://hnw.org/release). As you head over to [hnw.org/release](http://hnw.org/release), you will see the teaching videos. You'll also find this book, but you'll find it in a PDF format so that you can share that. You'll be able to let them read that and follow along as well, so even if they're not here in our church, they will be able to join us in this study as we go through it.

I'm going to be jumping into Acts chapter 4 here in just a moment, but I do want to introduce the Bible for those of you who are unfamiliar with the Bible. Just very quickly... the Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is a record of God's people and their desire for a Rescuer, a Redeemer. His name is Jesus. So we read in the Old Testament about that journey for that Rescuer, that Redeemer. In the New Testament, we find out who Jesus is. So we read about His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ministry. The people who decide to follow after Jesus in the New Testament, come to be known as the Church. So the Book of Acts is actually the Book that chronicles the birth of the Church. So if you're sitting here today, that is because someone here in the Book of Acts shared the Gospel and then that person shared the Gospel and that person shared the Gospel... all the way down to us. So we are the inheritors of this spiritual legacy that stretches back 2000 years. So we are studying this Book so that we can understand where we come from. We are also studying it so that we can understand what it is that we are supposed to do. I am going to pray over us, and then we are going to jump into Acts chapter 4. Let's pray.

"Lord, we thank You for Your goodness; we thank You for Your grace. God, we pray and we ask that You would have Your Scripture come alive to us today, Father, so that we can hear from You, so that we can obey You, Lord, so that we can respond to you. Lord, it has been precious in this place today to see Your Holy Spirit moving, and God, I pray through the proclamation of Your Word, that You would continue to move today. Rescue those who need to be rescued, deliver those who need to be delivered, and God do all this in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

Acts chapter 4, beginning in verse 1... *"And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."* In the chapter earlier, Peter and John healed a man in the name of Jesus, and it stirred up this big commotion. Verse 3... *"And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of men came to be about five thousand."*

*"On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by Him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'*

*"Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying 'What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it many spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.' So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old."*

Several years ago I found out that my mother-in-law had bunions. You didn't know that the sermon was going to start that way today did you? That's right... I didn't even really know what bunions were. I found out that they are a very painful foot condition. I let you know that to let you know how it was that a few years ago I ended up sitting on the couch with my wife and her laptop, googling 'Bunion Surgery.' We were researching this and finding out all these things. I saw some things that I wish I had never seen before... but I did see those things. Anyway, we researched that. Three days after we had done this internet search, we got a direct-mail postcard in our mailbox from a local bunion surgery clinic. (Laughter) It was addressed to Joy... we had been using her computer... "Dear Joy, Do you need fast, effective relief from your painful bunions?" I don't know about you, but I was a little weirded out whenever I saw this postcard in my mailbox. Literally, the next day, I was driving to the church office, and I was listening to the radio and

they said, "You know, you may notice that you begin to receive some direct-mail postcards from medical providers." I am thinking, "Well, I want to hear this story." So I turned it up and I come to find out that "Google" had begun selling our internet searches to certain medical providers so that those individuals could target... they could market in a targeted fashion to the people that they thought might best receive it. Maybe you haven't got a direct mailer, whenever you're doing bunion surgery searches, but you probably have had that sort of semi-creepy experience where you are on a website looking at an item, thinking about purchasing it, and then your self-control kicks in and you decide that you don't need to spend the money on that. So you move onto another website to read a news article, something like that, and there on the sidebar... (Laughter) ...yeah, you're all laughing... you know what I'm talking about. There it is... it's like they doubled-down... "If we just give them one more opportunity, they're going to click. We know that they are going to do it." It's called "Targeted Marketing." That's what I want to talk about today... targeted marketing... because Acts chapter 4 is actually all about the targeted marketing strategies that the Lord uses so that He can get the Gospel to the people that He believes need to hear it. The Holy Spirit is actually God's targeted marketing strategy. It's what He uses to be able to move the Gospel forward. I want you to follow along with me as we look at Acts 4 today and we see these things that it is that God is trying to do to get the Gospel into our hands using His Holy Spirit.

## **Two Of the Holy Spirit's greatest marketing strategies:**

### **1. The Spirit Activates The Common People. (v. 13)**

I want us to notice, first of all, that the Spirit basically has two big things that He's doing in this particular passage. First and foremost, it is that the Holy Spirit, not just in this passage but really all throughout the New Testament, has one fail-safe when it comes to marketing His name, and it's this... that the Spirit loves to activate the common people. Look at verse 13... "*Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men...*" Yeah... Peter and John... these are just normal guys. They are not special. In fact, if you remember, just a few pages earlier, Peter... the person who is standing up proclaiming Jesus... had actually denied that he even knew who Jesus was. That is the way that the Spirit works. He takes common, ordinary people and activates them and uses them for the Kingdom. Many of us, when we read the Bible, we tend to think of the Scripture as if it is a comic book of sorts, so we're reading about Peter, we're reading about John, and they're these super-heros of the faith. So it's sort of like they have some sort of super-spiritual knowledge that we don't have. But can I speak frankly with you? Peter and John, they were just normal dudes... ordinary people. In fact, they are just like us. What do they have? They have the true hero, the true rescuer, the one who actually has power... the Lord. They are filled with the Holy Spirit, and that is what is transpiring in the pages here, in Acts chapter 4. They are common people and that's what the Holy Spirit loves to do... activate common people for His Kingdom purposes. I love the way that the King James Bible renders Mark 12:37. This is what it says... "*And the common people heard him gladly.*"

Several years ago, whenever Joy and I planted a church, we named the church "Commons Church." We did so, believing, because Jesus loves common people, and common people love to hear Jesus. Our slogan was "Common people with an uncommon goal." I think that that same slogan applies even today. You see, God takes great delight in loving common people, taking them and then transforming them to become His Kingdom agents. If you are an ordinary person here today who doesn't feel like a spiritual super-hero... good news... God wants to use you. The truth is that God takes regular people and changes them every single day.

## Reasons Why The Common Men Became Bold:

### A) By The Name Of Jesus. (v. 2)

How does He do that? He does it in two ways, we see first in verse 2... they were *"...greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."* Now why does that even matter?

In the ancient Sanhedrin, there were two theological perspectives. There were the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the conservatives of the day. The Pharisees believed there was a true resurrection and that you needed to take the Scripture seriously. The Sadducees were the theological liberals of the day. They believed that there would be no resurrection at the day of the Lord. So here we have people in the court not only preaching the resurrection but that the resurrection happens in the name of Jesus. You see, that's the thing that actually changes common, ordinary people in the first place... they understand the power of the name of Jesus.

It's not just saying the name... it's not just the actual word, the letters on the page itself, but it is what the name means and what the name represents. And when we understand that name, we are able to have access to the power that that name gives. If you notice, the word "name" appears all throughout the first part of chapter 4. They ask, in verse 7, *"...by what name did you do this?"* In verse 10, Peter responds, *"...let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth..."* This name, this reputation, was moving forth throughout the city. In fact, they continued to say, later in the chapter, in verse 18... you cannot *"...speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."* Keep teaching as much as you want... just don't mention this Jesus.

Why is it that the name is such a powerful draw and such an important transformational thing in the New Testament? It is because the name of Jesus represents what God did in the person of Jesus. When I talk about the name of Jesus and I speak of the name of Jesus, I am making reference to what God did in Jesus. And what did God do in Jesus? He gave grace. And this is the thing that I want you to understand. Peter and John were transformed because they had grasped the miracle of God's grace in and on their lives. And here is the thing that you can hear today... God wants you to understand that once you know the name of Jesus, that you can have the grace of God in and on your lives.

You see, the name of Jesus is different because every religion in the world operates by the same set of principles. They may have different names, they may have different rituals associated with them, but they are all the same in every way. And this is what they are: "If you exercise a certain amount of self-discipline and you do enough religious activity, there will come a moment when you will finally have done enough holy stuff that God will see you favorably and will receive you into His presence." This is what is sometimes referred to as a "theology of works." Theology of works is just a fancy way of saying "You do enough good stuff so that finally you are loved." But that is actually not what the name of Jesus is about. The name of Jesus is actually the opposite of that... that you could, even on your best day, never do enough good stuff to have God love you. Consequently, you then need the name of Jesus because it's by the name of Jesus and through the work of Jesus that God receives us anyway. This is what the name does. The name of Jesus means that in the body of Jesus, God became flesh. The name of Jesus means that that body was then crucified for our sin. The name of Jesus then means that that body was resurrected to conquer death. The name of Jesus then means that if we place our faith in this same Jesus, we can have acceptance by the Father, we can be received into the presence of the Father, and we can have access to the Father right

here, right now, and even more so after we die. That's what the name of Jesus means. That's completely different than a theology of works. You see, the glorious thing that we need to understand today is that if we are common and we are not spiritual super-heros, the Gospel seems even too sweet to be real.

Ephesians 2:8... *"For by grace you have been saved through faith."* You don't have to do anything, you don't have to earn anything... you just say, "Jesus, I believe in You. I am ready to follow You." When you are ready to place your faith in Jesus and follow Him, it doesn't matter what you've done, who you are, God receives you then. This is called grace. It's absolutely confounding to us, as it was in those days, but it is still the beautiful heart of the Good News.

So this name is what changes us, and this name is also the thing that changed Peter and John. It was the thing that offended the sensibilities of the Sadducees because the name turned these ordinary people into bold preachers because they realized "I don't have to do all of the religious "mucky-muck" any longer. I simply have to place my faith and believe that this Man was Messiah, and I am going to follow His way in this world today."

### **B) By The Nearness Of Jesus. (v. 13)**

But it's not just the name of Jesus that changes them. It's also the nearness of Jesus; verse 13... *"Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."* It's not just the name but it's the nearness. We don't just need to know it here what this name does, but we then need to spend time with Him.

You may have heard that the Royal Society Of Open Science had a study that actually went public in August, but it's just now making the rounds in the news cycles, that mood... are you ready for this?... your mood is contagious. Did you know that? That's actually been scientifically proven. You've probably already suspected it for some time. If you're around someone who's angry long enough, guess what? You start to get a little bit angry. If you're around someone who's happier, you start to feel a little bit happier yourself. This is the way that mood actually works. It has a contagious feel. Have you guys seen that thing going around on social media... this maxim that's out there that says, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." There is something to that... actually scientifically true. If these people have positive uplifting moods, well guess what? That's going to rub off on you. If these are the sort of people that are down... then guess what? That's going to rub off on you as well. But here is the question that I have for us. What would it look like if one of our Top Five was Jesus? What does it look like if one of the five people that we spend the most of our time with is the Lord? Then, how does that affect the way that I speak? How does that affect the way that I love? How does that affect the way that I interact with other people? If we begin to spend so much time with Him, will people begin to see it?

Here is the test question for us today, Church... "Can people tell that you spend time with Jesus Christ?" Now listen... we love to have that thing that we say as a church... "I just want people to be able to tell that there is something different about me." That's good... but can they tell that there is Jesus about you? I'm not talking just that you're different. There are a lot of nice people in the world. Do you know what I'm talking about? There are a lot of nice people, but there are very few "Jesus" people in the world... very few Jesus people. When they are around you, can they tell... does your speech ooze Jesus? When you're talking about the things going on in your life, are you able to say, "God's hand was evident in that"? "I saw the Lord working in a certain way." "God provided for my family in this way." "I was able to see the Lord

do this." Do you use those kinds of phrases? ...Because those are the sorts of phrases that come up when you are someone who is spending time with the Lord. The way that you know that you love someone, you spend time with them, and the way that they change you, you spend time with them.

Galatians 5:22-23... Paul lists out the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. How do you get the fruit of the Spirit? Paul uses fruit intentionally because fruit isn't something that you can manufacture. It just happens naturally. In other words, I can't walk out to my orange tree and pick a watermelon. Why? ...Because fruit happens naturally, according to the tree of its kind. That's where fruit is born. In the same way, the fruit of the Spirit is borne out in those who are filled with the Spirit and walk by the Spirit. You see, the fruit of the Spirit passage is in the same passage in Galatians where the apostle Paul says, "Walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh." He is telling us, every one of us senses those things within us... the flesh... that lead us down the wrong path, but it is the Holy Spirit Himself, the Spirit that leads us to walk in the right way. And when you are filled with the Spirit and you walk by the Spirit, guess what? Love, joy, peace, patience, etcetera, begin to show up in your life. If you want to see your life changed and different, you've got to walk with the Spirit. Are you spending time with Him? When Moses went up on the mountain and spent time with the Lord and he came down, his countenance was changed. He literally had a veil that he had to place over his face. Whenever you spend time with the Lord, people will be able to see it, and they will know that you have been with Jesus. Church, may I exhort us this morning... when we go into our community, will they not just say, "That's a church-going person." Will they not just say, "That's somebody who loves to read the Bible." But will they be able to say, "That person right there, they spend time with Jesus." That is the prayer that I think we ought to be praying over this church, they we would be a church that when they encounter us, they say, "That's a Jesus Church. That's a Jesus Church right there." ...Because it's not just the name of Jesus, but it is Him being near to us that then activates common people and releases them out into the world.

## 2. The Spirit Annoys The Confident.

Now here is the funny thing... it's that the Holy Spirit's targeted marketing loves to active the common person but also loves, at the same time, as you've noticed in this passage, to annoy the confident. Did you see that in verse 2? I mean, how many times do you ever see the word "annoyed" in the pages of your Bible? Look at verse 2. *"...the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."* Now what is it that annoyed them? They are annoyed because Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead... because they were sharing the name of Jesus and the power of Jesus, these spiritual superstars were suddenly threatened and annoyed. Now the reason that I bring this up is because I want us to see that those who are confident in themselves and those who are comfortable in themselves... believing that they have already got everything that they need, that they don't need the Lord... those are the sorts of people who keep God at arm's length. And whenever they hear the Gospel preached, they get annoyed at that. They say, "That's just superstition. That's just self-help gobble-de-gook. That's not real stuff." They get annoyed at it. You know how this is. Whenever you're comfortable, it's tough to move. When I'm at the house, I'm up moving around and doing stuff and Joy says, "Hey, will you come in here and help me fold laundry?" Do you know what? I just walk over there... boom, boom, boom... and fold the laundry. But what if I just sat down in my recliner... I've got a cold Topo Chico, and there's a wedge of lime that's been pushed down in there... I've got a remote in my hand, and then Joy says, "Hey... will you come help me fold laundry?" Why is it that suddenly not only can I not move... I don't want to move. (Laughter) Why is that? ...Because comfort prevents movement.

It's not just true in our physical life. It's true in our spiritual life. Many of us in this room are being asked by God to do something. He is challenging us to take a step... to be more generous... to be more loving... to spend more time with Him... to take whatever the next step is in our spiritual journeys, and we are not doing it. Why? ...Because we are really, really comfortable. Jesus Himself said that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Why? Well, you've heard all the stories about, "Well, that's just the name of the gate, and the camel goes down...and all that." Do you know what? None of that has ever been historically proven. Did you know that? But do you know what is true? It's tough when you have a lot of money to depend on God. That's true. Many of us, we've got our Starbucks in the morning, we've got our Netflix at night... we've got our friends and our work in between, and we don't need anything. And that's our problem. And because we don't need anything, God can't move. We are the same people that are so comfortable whenever bad stuff happens to us, we will say, "Why is God allowing this?" Well... because you've been ignoring Him, and He crashes into our lives and allows circumstances to push us to our knees so that He can say, "Hey... guess what? I can't use comfortable people. The confident people, the Holy Spirit annoys, but whenever I get broken people... oh yeah, I can take advantage of that." The thing that we need to recognize is that the confident and the comfortable are often annoyed because they don't want to have to make a move.

### **3. Why does the Gospel annoy the comfortable?**

#### **A) It seems uneducated.**

Why is it that the Gospel annoys the comfortable? First of all... because it seems uneducated. A couple of weeks ago I was at a Yom Kippur service in a synagogue here in our city. I did a Q & A and shared some of our theological beliefs. They asked a little bit about what Christians believe. But after the service had concluded and I was standing out in their courtyard area, a few of them circled around me and they said, "We didn't want to ask you this question publically, but we wanted to ask it to you privately." I said, "Okay." They looked at me and they said, "Do you believe that we are going to hell?" I said, "Well, thank you for that easy question. I'm glad to be here today." (Laughter) I joked with them and I said, "You know, I appreciate that you're not pulling any punches. Let me tell you. First of all, I don't get to decide who goes into heaven. But let me tell you what the New Testament says. 'No one comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ.'" They didn't like that. They actually felt as if that was a very uneducated position. They said, "We're not trying to make you become Jewish. Why is it that you're trying to make us become Christian?" I said, "I'm not trying to make you become Christian; I'm trying to introduce you to who Jesus Christ is." As we talked further about this, I began to recognize that the reason that we struggle with this in our world is because we believe that there are competing faiths out there, and you can simply choose from them as you would on a menu... and that any of them are equal.

Let me explain why that is not the case. Those religions make conflicting truth claims. For example... I have many friends that are Muslim who follow the way of Islam. Maybe you are in this room today and you follow the way of Islam. Listen... Islam claims that Jesus was a prophet and that Muhammad was greater than He. Christianity claims that Jesus was God Incarnate. Those two things cannot be the same. They can't. One of them is true; one of them is false. That's just the way that it is. In the same way, the Incarnation is a scandalous doctrine to my Jewish friends because they believe that God cannot become flesh. These things aren't because I'm trying to disparage another faith or I'm trying to be difficult. It is simply because I want us to understand that you must choose who it is that you will serve, and Jesus has said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me."* This perspective seems uneducated in our world. But I want you to understand... I'm not uneducated on this. I've been very

educated on this, and this is the conclusion I have reached. If you are on this journey today, I would challenge you... find out what is it that God wants and respond to the thing that God is asking you to do... because the way to the Father is through the cross and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **B) It Seems Unnecessary.**

It's not just that it seems uneducated, but it's also because it seems unnecessary. These Sadducees... they've been versed in the finest of theological education, but they also have everything happening in their lives. They feel so comfortable. Why is it that whenever we get a great job and things move in the direction that we want to, we get our friends that we like... "Yeah... they like to party on Saturday night. It's tough for me to make it to church, but I'm happy right now." Why is it that whenever we get into that kind of a circle... when we're in that place... why is it when we are like that that suddenly it becomes tough for us to respond to what God wants to do? You see, it seems unnecessary... "I've got everything that I need. I don't need to actually follow after Jesus because everything that I have I've already been given." But have you ever noticed that the people that Jesus attracted throughout His ministry, and have you ever noticed that the people that tend to follow after Jesus are the people who actually were broken outcasts. Why is that? It's because they recognized that they needed something outside of themselves.

In John chapter 4, Jesus attracts a Samaritan woman who had the go to the well in the middle of the day to draw water because if she drew water at any other time, she would be ridiculed because she had been divorced four times, and she was living with a man who was not her husband at that time. Yet Jesus engaged her. Jesus attracted a centurion who couldn't worship in the temple courts because he was just a Gentile, yet Jesus brought him in and attracted him anyway. Jesus attracts the lepers who were too dirty... no one wants to touch them, but Jesus loves them and attracts them. The woman who has been bleeding for months and months... Jesus attracts her. The people who were broken and know that they need something... they get it. They know that they need the message of grace. They understand. Those of us who are comfortable... we often find the Gospel to be unnecessary.

Whenever Jesus was sending out His disciples, He instructed them to look for a person of peace. There's a move right now in the world around the international community... a way to share the Gospel with your friends. It's something called Discovery Bible Study. In fact, if you get one of these books from Release, it talks about ways to start a Discovery Bible Study with some of your neighbors, your friends, and your coworkers. You can read about that. It's just a Scripture reading plan where you ask three questions...

1. What does this passage show us about God?
2. What does this show us about people?
3. If this is true, what should we do about it?

When Jesus sends them out to look for this person of peace, He tells them that the peace will set on them. What is He talking about with the peace? Well, the idea is that when you share the Gospel with someone, if they are ready to receive it, they might be a person of peace and that they can turn around and unlock that into their community. Do you know what I've noticed about us? And I'm not just talking about us as a culture... I'm talking about me... that I tend to be the sort of person that whenever I'm in a workplace or whenever I'm in a neighborhood, or wherever I am that I want to share the Gospel... I tend to think that I can find the person of peace that needs to hear the Gospel better than the Holy Spirit. "Man... you see John over there? He's good-looking, he's got it all together, he's hyper-organized. He is on his way up the corporate ladder. That guy right there... he has got to be a person of peace. Jesus... if You'll just save him,

Your Kingdom is going to really take off around this place, so let's go get him..." But if you've noticed, again, that Jesus is attracting the broken... He is attracting the needy... He is attracting the open-minded... the ones who are spiritually curious. I'm not saying that those who are upwardly mobile and organized can't be persons of peace. I'm just saying that those are the people that I tend to identify when really Jesus is saying, "Let Me tell you My persons of peace throughout the Gospel." Hey, that Samaritan woman who came out to the well; she had been married four times and living with another man that wasn't her husband... Guess what Jesus did with her? He sent her back to her village and she came back; she brought her entire village and they all met Jesus. I don't know about you... I wouldn't have picked the four-time divorced woman to lead my missionary movement in that village but Jesus did. What about the Gerasene demoniac... the guy who is running around naked, howling at the moon, breaking the chains and possessed by demons? What does Jesus do with him? He says, "Go now back to your home town and tell them what the Lord has done for you. He takes the leper and says, "Now that you've been cleansed and healed, go now and tell them what the Lord has done for you." Jesus takes the people who are demon-possessed, messed up, broken, and says, "Now that you've been redeemed, rescued and fixed, go tell everyone what God did." God is looking for ordinary broken people to rescue and to use in His missionary movement. He is not looking for super-studs who have it all together.

Who is broken in this place and is ready to be used by God? That's the question today; that's the thing that we need to ask. (Clapping) The thing that I've begun to realize is that whenever we are looking for those with whom to share the Gospel... God will bring them to us when we act like Jesus, look like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and love like Jesus. When we do that, God will bring people to us that we never knew that we needed and never knew that He wanted to rescue, but that's what God does. He brings us the people that we didn't know.

You guys... you just know me as Dr. Steve Bezner... senior pastor of Houston Northwest Church. Can I tell you something? If you would have known me when I was a little kid, you would never had looked at me and said, "That kid right there... God is going to do something with him." I was just a dorky little red-neck kid... I was bad at being a red-neck. Do you know how hard it was being a red-neck when you liked Star Wars? I mean... man! (Laughter) That was a problem! There are pictures of me running around in my cowboy boots and cutoff blue jeans... (Laughter) "Mom... why did you let me do that?" ...But there I am. My dad left home whenever I was six. The man who raised me had been married before. If you were to look into our house whenever I was nine or ten years old, you would say, "That kid who's awkward, thinks he is funnier than he really is... kind of nerdy, kind of goofy... coming from a family where both the parents have been divorced... God isn't going to raise him up to do something great with him, is He?" That's what we would think. But I was in a church, and that church just kept loving me and telling me about Jesus, and raising me in the way of Jesus. And God used me.

Here is the thing... God wants to rescue dorky little red-neck kids and God wants to rescue broken people that are in this room today. Here's the thing. He doesn't just want to rescue you so that you can come to heaven one day... He wants to rescue you because He loves you and He actually thinks that you... yeah, you... could help move His Kingdom forward today. That's what He wants to do. So here is the question. How many of us have someone in our life that doesn't look like they fit the bill to be used by God and God is putting a neon sign over their head, "Tell them about Me" ...because He wants to heal them and change them. How many of us in this room might be that person? And how many of us are ready to say "Yes" to Him right now? Let's find out.

Everybody bow your head with me right now... nobody looking around. I want to ask this question: If you are here today and you would say, "I need this Jesus. I'm so broken. I'm so messed up. I'm not a spiritual superstar; I'm just an average, ordinary person. I need this and I am ready to follow this Jesus." Would you do me a favor? Would you just raise your hand where you're at right now... just raise it up and say, "It's time for me." Okay. I see you, sir. Who else? Raise them up. Alright; I see you, too. Who else? I see you, too. Who else? I've got three hands up right now. Who else? Okay; you can put your hands down. If you just raised your hand, I just want you to just pray with me where you're at... silently... "Dear Jesus, I know that I'm messed up; I know that I'm broken, and I know that I need You. I ask that You would forgive me, and I want to make You the boss of my life today. You are now my Lord. I give my life to You. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Church, would you just let the three people who just raised their hand know who you feel about the fact that they're ready to give their lives to Christ today? (Clapping; cheering) If you just raised your hand, this is what I want to ask you to do. I want to ask you to take that card from the pocket of the seat in front of you. This is what I need you to do; this is important. We want to help you take that next step so that you can get connected here at Houston Northwest. We also want to help you learn how to begin to grow as a Christian. We want to help you to find out information about being baptized. We've got all of these things that we want to let you know about, but we can't do that unless you take that card and you fill it out. So fill that card out. As soon as we are done here in a minute, I am going to be standing right out here at the Connection Center. Just walk up to me and hand me that card. That's all you've got to do. I'm just going to give you some quick instructions, and we'll go from there. So please do that and fill out that card before you leave today. For those of us that have been here, we've been thinking about this. This is the question I want us to leave with today. Who is the person... the ordinary person that God may have placed in our life... in our path... that He is wanting us to share the Gospel with? Think about that; who is that common person? Invite them to church. Share the Gospel with them; bring them here. Let them experience who God is. Let them know that.

Would you stand with me at this time? I am going to pray a Benediction over us. After I've done that, we will sing the Doxology and we'll be dismissed. We are so glad that you are here today. If you're ready to get connected at Houston Northwest, stop by our Life Group table and find out about the Life Groups or come by the Connection Center. We would love to visit with you today and give you more information about Houston Northwest.

"Now, may the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and give you His peace... peace which comes through this great truth... that common people receive the Lord; He seeks them out each and every day. That's the Gospel. We grow in our knowledge of the Gospel, applying it to every area of our lives, and then we go, declaring that there is one name under heaven and on earth by which men and women might be saved... the beautiful name of Jesus Christ. Amen and amen."

[Doxology sung]