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A Questionable Life

COMPELLED: The Joy and Simplicity of Introducing People to Jesus Series

1 Peter 3:15

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The prayer of that song, *Let's Be Beautiful,* is exactly the reason why we've been reading the book *42 Seconds* over the last three weeks, which is really about practically learning how to live a beautiful life —a life that shows Jesus to others—and so hopefully you're caught up with us. We've been reading this last week the section called *Be Brave*, and we're going to talk about how we can do that this morning, and then next week we'll do the last section which is *Be Jesus*. Then next weekend, during the service, we'll have sort of a video wrap-up of the book that we've been reading. So, we want to talk about how we can *be beautiful*.

A couple of years ago I went to get a haircut at a place where I didn't normally go, and as I sat in the chair, I struck up a conversation with this young woman cutting my hair. I asked her questions and she asked me questions, and pretty soon she came to that question that, as pastors, we all dread which is, "What do you do?" (*laughter*) Oftentimes the answer shuts down the conversation, but I said, "I'm a pastor at Lincoln Berean." She goes, "You're just the person I wanted to talk to today!" (*laughter*) That was even scarier. I said, "Yeah, why is that?" She says, "I've been dating this guy for a few years and all of a sudden, in the last month, something has happened to him, and all he can talk about is Jesus, and I'm just kind of freaked out about it. I thought I knew him and all of a sudden he just can't help but talk about what God has done in his life and who Jesus is, so help me understand, "What am I supposed to do with this?" I prayed real quick, (*laughter*) and this is what came to me. "You know," I said, "when you get something brand new or something really exciting happens in your life, what do you do?" She says, "I tell everybody about it," and I said, "That's exactly right. He has had a brand new encounter and experience with God. He's come to know Jesus; it's changed his life, and he can't help but talk about it. It's just oozing out of him." She goes, "That's really, really helpful." I said, "Just listen. Just enjoy."

I think everyone of us in the room this morning who knows Jesus personally, knows the same two truths that that young man knew. One is that the gospel of salvation in Jesus is really, really, really good news, right? We know that; we've experienced that. The second thing we know, that that young man knew also, is that we have been given the amazing privilege and opportunity and responsibility to share that great news with other people around us. We get that. We know that; we feel that. We feel compelled to want to tell others about it. That's why our series is titled *Compelled,* because there's something in us—the presence of God in us—that *compels* us to want to share this with others because we know it is really, really good news. So, what is the problem?

The problem is, "How do I do that, right? How do I do that in a way that just fits who I am? I'm not Pastor Clark; I'm not Billy Graham; I'm not a preacher; I'm not eloquent." I'm not…fill in the blank…right? How can I, just as the person that I am, be authentically and effectively a good communicator of Jesus to people who don't know him?

So that's what we want to help with this morning. We're going to be very, very practical. Okay? We're not doing a whole passage and go into all the theology. We get the theology; we know that we're called to be on mission, right? But let's just talk practically about how we're going to go

about doing that. And to do that, we're going to use one verse of Scripture. You don't even have to open your Bible because it's going to be on the screen the whole time this morning. I hope you memorize it. I hope it gets deep into your soul, because in this verse are three critical elements to being an authentic and effective communicator of the love of Jesus to others. And there's a flow to this verse and to these three elements. And if we get the flow wrong, we're not going to be very effective. And if we skip one of the elements, we're not going to be very effective, so it really does matter. Alright, if you take notes, take notes, because there are going to be some good and important questions that you need to think about and some suggestions that I have for you this morning. So, here's the verse on the screen: 1 Peter 3:15. I want you to read it out loud together with me. Okay?

> **…but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;** (*NASB, 1 Peter 3:15)

The first element for you and me to effectively and authentically communicate Jesus is that very first phrase: **sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Sanctify** means *set apart as distinct from all others*. So as a believer, as a follower of Jesus, what we know is that all that we need for life is found in Jesus, right? Jesus is everything. Jesus is our Master; He's our Savior; He's our Lord, and we should follow Him and listen to Him, and in order to live life well, we need to be filled up with Him. We need Him to fill us up. I like what Jesus said in John 15 when He was talking about where we get our strength from in life and He said, "I'm the vine and you're the branches." So, He uses this vineyard scene, and He says, "The life is in the vine—the branch does not bear fruit of itself." In other words, God's not saying, "Hey, go out and change the world; go out and hope and get it done." He's saying, "First of all you draw your life from the vine, from Jesus Himself. I'm the vine; you're the branches." He said, "If you abide in me and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit. You will live a life of love." You will be able to do the next two elements. But we have to be filled up with Jesus in order to authentically and effectively share Him with others. He needs to be oozing out of us, sort of every single day.

So, going to church once a week is not going to do it, right? It's an important thing but it's not going to make us full of Jesus every single day. So we have to have the discipline of reminding ourselves every single day, "I need to get connected to Jesus. I need to be deeply rooted and connected to Jesus every single day." And that's more than saying, "Okay, I know good Christians are supposed to read their Bible and pray…check…check…check." This means that I get on my face before God and I say, "God, if I don't have You filling my life today, if I'm not in submission and surrender to You, if I'm not submitting to You and listening to You all through the day, I'm going to miss what You have for me today. I need You to fill my life today." And that's how we ought to start every single morning. And some of you may be like me, where once a day in the morning isn't going to be enough, alright? Because pretty soon you get busy and then you kind of forget and you lose touch and you start going it on your own, and so maybe it's multiple times a day you have to stop, slow down, listen, and re-acclimate that, "I need to be filled with the life of Jesus."

Now we're all familiar with the story of Daniel. When I was a kid, sort of the way I heard the story was Daniel was super, super religious and righteous, right? I mean he was so religious that three times a day he stopped and he opened his window and he prayed, like he was a really pious person. But I've come to think of that very, very differently. You see Daniel was in a high position, surrounded by people who didn't know God, and he knew that he was the representative of God in

that place and with it the tremendous opportunity that he had but also a tremendous responsibility that he had almost singularly in that place. And I think what Daniel did is what I experience in my life, and that is that he knew that just in the morning, getting with God wasn't going to be enough for him to be full of God all the way through the day. So three times a day he stopped; he re-acclimated, and he got himself back in connection, deeply rooted and connected to God. So, whatever it takes, okay? This is really practical. You can't skip this step, right? If we're not full of Jesus, we will never get to the next two parts of this verse effectively.

So, what's the next thing? Well the next phrase says, …**always being ready to make a defense**, always being ready to give an answer, right, **with gentleness and reverence**. So, there's a talking part to this, like if we're going to be authentically sharing Jesus, we're going to have to use words. But the next phrase has to come first before the talking. Notice what it says, …**always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.** So before I get to words, there is something that people ought to see in me that causes them to ask questions, which then leads to conversation.

Both phrases make a huge assumption, and I want talk about that for just a second, okay? The huge assumption that Peter is making here—and it makes sense because these was a band of Christians in a big unbelieving culture that were living there—and the assumption of this verse is that the people he's talking to, and to us, is we are in close proximity and relationship with people who don't know Jesus, okay? We're in close proximity to people who don't know Jesus. That's the assumption of this verse. Now here's the sad reality, okay, because there are a lot of believers and a lot of Christians in our community, and so it's possible for us to literally just surround ourselves with other Christians. And one of the reasons we never get to either the living or the speaking in a way that engages people who don't know Jesus is, we're not in proximity or in a relationship with them. In fact, statistics show that within just a few years of a person becoming a follower of Jesus, they've lost almost all of their non-Christian friendships. So, I want to ask you to think about who is in your circle who doesn't know Jesus. Are you pursuing friendship with people who don't know Jesus? Are you paying attention to the person who serves you, waits on you, the places that you go regularly and who you have contact with? Are you seeing them as in your circle? So those are the people that both our life and our words need to speak to, but it doesn't do any good to have a heart for this if we're not in proximity and relationship with people who don't know Jesus, alright?

So let's talk about this. I've read this verse dozens and dozens and dozens of times in my life, and I really kind of skipped over this *to give an answer to those who ask you to give a reason for the hope within you.* About a year ago Josh Luse gave me this little book by Michael Frost called, *Surprise the World*. It's a very little book, but the first chapter of that book was entitled, *The Questionable Life*, and it's taking this verse right here in this phrase, and he unpacks it to say, "Does our life raise questions or create curiosity about our faith?" Do I live in such a way that people go, "It doesn't make sense to me how you live; I want to know more. There's something unusual about you; there's something different about you; there's something attractive about you; there's something that stands out; you don't look like everybody else." One of the things that he talked about is a theory of communication, and that is when there is a high level of predictability, there's low impact. So if we look like everybody else, we have very little impact…we just don't! So, here's the question, "What is it about your life that stands out, that so looks like Jesus that people would go, 'Whoa, I need to know more about what you've got.'" There's something different about you, and in an attractive sort of a curiosity-raising way.

So, let me tell you a couple of things that I don't think raise curiosity. The fact that you show up at church every week—I don't think that's a particularly curiosity-raising thing. Lots of people go to church. The fact that you have a nicely-manicured lawn—the envy of the neighborhood. I don't think that's going to raise many questions about your faith, right? The fact that you pay your taxes, hold down a job, wave to the neighbors. These are just polite normal things we do. So here's the question, "What do you think we could live like that would be so unusual, so like Jesus, that it would actually raise questions, create curiosity, which would then lead to conversation?" Now I've been thinking about this over a year and, literally, I've come up with several dozen things that are in the Scriptures that Jesus talks about. A good place to start is the Sermon on the Mount. Right after the verses that Ryan shared last week—about being the light of the world—he starts unpacking ways that we should live like Jesus that are so radical, so out of the ordinary of our culture. And I want to share just three ideas with you this morning about how our life could look so different that it would raise questions. And if we live like these three things flowing out of the life of Jesus that fills us up, it will create opportunity for us to talk. Here's the first one.

If we are more interested in other people and we care more about other people than we even do ourselves, right, if we have an "*others' focused life*." We care about them; we invest in them; we serve them; we love them; we reach out to them; we ask them questions, and we're others' centered. It doesn't matter whether it's the waitress at the restaurant or the person who checks you out at the gas station or the person who cuts your hair. Wherever we go we're interested in people; we care about people and it shows; it flows out of us; we care. And even more than that, take it another step further; we try to build a relationship with people who are different than us. Whoa, that's radical! It is. Because most of us want to find people who are pretty close to like us, and then we huddle together, right? We're comfortable there; it's safe. But I'm telling you, Jesus went to the other. He built relationship with the "other" and that is so radical, so different, that it will raise questions, "Why do you do that? Why do you have friends like that? Why are you interested in that? Why are you serving? Why are you taking your time and your money and your talent and serving people instead of building your own life?" Because we live in a very selfish culture, so that's radical! If we live an others' centered life, I promise you people will sit up and take notice.

A month ago a businessman here in our church was killed in a car accident and I did the funeral. And what played out over the days immediately after his death was dozens and dozens and dozens of people coming forward to say, "This man helped me…this man served me…this man gave me what I needed. This man gave me money…this man helped me…this man gave me opportunity," and it was dozens and dozens and dozens. Every place he went, he was thinking about how he could serve and help somebody else. One of the stories the family told was, leaving church here on Sunday morning and driving to a restaurant, they came up on a guy with the sign, "Will work for food." We've all seen that sign, right, and we all just sort of look the other way, right? Don't make eye contact. This man drove past and then he whipped a "U-y" and he came back around and he got out his business card and he wrote his number and said, "Call me tomorrow if you want to work. I've got work to do at my house, and I'd love to pay you and help you out." And that man showed up and worked for that week, and his wife told me that oftentimes at their house guys would just show up to work around the house, like, "Who are you?" "Well, you know your husband invited me to come and work." (*laughter*) And 700 people came to that funeral and many of them didn't know Jesus, but you know what? Their curiosity was peaked because he lived such an others' centered life. Who is this guy? What is it about him? And they got a chance to hear the gospel. So that's one.

The second thing—and I think God uses this often in helping people be curious—and that is when we suffer well, when we're not undone by trials and difficulties and pain and loss, and we have this quiet calmness because it comes from God. People go, "Whoa, how do you do that? How do you walk through that kind of pain? How do you walk through that kind of loss? How do you walk through that kind of suffering that comes in all kinds, shapes and sizes, right?" But when we do that with calmness and a quiet confidence because we know that God's on the throne and He's with us and we're not alone in it and God just provides what we need. When we're full of Christ in the middle of that, when we suffer well, that will raise curiosity. In fact, I believe probably more people come to faith in Christ because of having seen someone go through a hard, hard thing in a grace-filled way that it is attractive…really attractive. Now we could talk about forgiveness and being quick to forgive and quick to ask forgiveness—that's radical and rare, right?

But here's one more that goes way over the top that Jesus was full of, and He's invited us and told us to do the same thing. And it's found in the Sermon on the Mount at the end of that chapter where Jesus said, "You have heard it said, right, the culture says, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." That's the world's view, right? "Love those who love you; hate the people who dislike you or don't like you or hate you or do something towards you." And Jesus said, "But I say to you, love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you. Pray for them," not pray for their demise, right? "Pray for them; seek to serve them; seek to love them; seek to do good back to them." That is so radical. If you love your enemies, your enemies won't know what to do with that. And they may be the very people that God's trying to use you to reach.

We moved into our neighborhood fourteen years ago and we were told it was an unfriendly neighborhood. We didn't really understand that. In our cul-de-sac, for our welcome my wife took some baked goods around to different people, and two of the neighbors came over and said to my wife, "I'm here to put you on notice, keep your children off my property." Hey, welcome to the neighborhood. (*laughter*) And they really have been, you know, not friendly people. One guy has been very aggressive and nasty to several of the other neighbors, and so, you know, my pious response to that was, "I'm just going to, you know, not going to be mean back, but I'm just going to step back." I mean, why would I reach out to people who clearly don't want to have anything to do with me? And when I started to think about Jesus saying, "Love your enemies," I'm thinking, "Uh oh, I don't think that's what God's called me to do," so I started praying, you know, regularly for those people and looking for an opportunity to do something good, to reach out to those people.

You could probably think of a lot of other things, but I challenge you to think about it. How would God call you to live in such a way that would be so different than the world that it would raise questions, create curiosity? So, a Christ-filled life leads to a life that raises questions and curiosity and attracts people who want to then have a conversation, and we get to that phrase **being ready to make a defense**, right? Be ready to **give an answer to anyone who asks you**, right? But do it **with gentleness and reverence**. So let's talk about that. Once again, it's better when your life speaks before your words speak, alright? Ninety-five percent of the time the sharing of our faith is going to flow out of our life, speaking over a period of time before we get to words, okay? Sometimes there are weird things where we just get into conversations with people we don't even know. That's so rare, and I think that's what we're all afraid of, right? We're all afraid we're going to sit down on a plane next to somebody and somebody's going to go, "Hey, tell me about who you are and about your faith and we go, but, you know, whatever. But we're talking about: let's live in front of people with people in such a way that they ask the questions and now we're responding to

their questions. We're not forcing something on them; we're responding to their curiosity. This is how God calls us to live.

So, here's a couple of things that He says we should do. We should **be ready**. First of all, He doesn't say, "Be ready to answer every theological question anybody throws at you," alright? We send those to Pastor Clark. (*laughter*) What it does say is to be ready to give an answer **for the hope that is in you**. Now that involves two very basic things. One is that you ought to be able to share your own story with Jesus, right? In your own words, in your own way, "This is what I was; this is where I was. Then I met Jesus; this is how that came about, and this is what my life is now. Hey, I'm not perfect; I've done a lot of things, but I'm not doing it alone; God's with me and I have peace and confidence and joy." Put it in your own words but you have to know how to do that. You should be prepared. "We should expect," He says, "to always be ready, expect that you are going to be asked questions when you live a questionable life, and be ready to share your story, simple and short." You know, don't give them the three-hour version of your life. You'll lose them. The second thing that you ought to be able to share and be ready at all times is a very simple basic story of Jesus, who He is and what He's done for us. It can be very short and very simple. "I believe Jesus was the Son of God. He came, lived a sinless life; He died to take the sins of the world, *my* sin on Himself. He rose again on the third day; He's alive and He's present, and He's changed my life, and He wants to change yours." I mean that's the simple gospel, right? Let me illustrate that.

In second grade, I had just become a Christian, and I was really excited about Jesus. We had a little Gideon New Testament in my house and so enthusiastically I took it to school. Over the lunch hour, I had a friend and we went out into those big concrete barrels that they had on the playground and we got inside there like we often did and talked or shot marbles or whatever, and I said to my friend Frankie, "Frankie, I just found out this verse thing," and I showed him the only verse I knew in the Bible which was John 3:16, right, "For God so loved the world..." and I opened the Bible and I said, "Frankie, look at this. God so loved the world He gave His only Son, right, that whoever believes in Him won't parish but have everlasting life. Frankie, I believe that, do you believe that?" I don't know what I said. I'm sure it was stupid—you know, I tripped over my words. This was not the makings of a preacher or anything like that. Trust me. *(laughter*) Nothing happened, right? Frankie didn't say anything. He didn't jump up and down and say, "Yes I believe." He didn't fall on his knees. Nothing happened, okay? Seven years ago, just before my dad died, he went to Frankie's father's funeral. This is 45 years later, and Frankie came up at his dad's funeral and said, "Bob, I don't know that anybody knows this. I've never told anybody, but I did not believe when Mark first shared that with me. But I thought about it and I couldn't forget those words and I trusted Christ and then a brother of mine and a sister of mine and then another sibling and another sibling and then my mom and my dad and the whole family are followers of Jesus." (*Applause*) Now that is not about me, okay? That's a second grader, right? The power is in the gospel! I just have to be ready to share it. Share a verse. Let your enthusiasm for Jesus show in a simple, simple sort of way.

Now here's a couple of other things that we need to be aware of as we engage in conversation, okay?

One, think friendship. They're not a project. You have the same goal that Jesus has and that is to take somebody who's far and make them a friend. God wants that person who doesn't know Him to

become a friend. So my objective is to help make a friendship with them. So that ought to enter into how I ever talk to anybody, right? I should talk to them as though I'm building a friendship and we're just taking it a little bit at a time. We're letting it go where it needs to go. I want the friendship more than I want to get something said. I want to be your friend. I want to walk with you in life. I care about you, and so I approach my conversation like I would with a friend, building a friendship. You can do that with anybody in the community you're in touch with. You interact with them in a way that you think, "Over time, we could build a friendship."

Second, you're just having a conversation; you're not giving a presentation. There are no sales involved. We cannot and should not sell Jesus, right? We're just talking. As a matter of fact, the Barna organization does research. They've researched a lot about evangelism and how it works and both what Christians do and how it works for them, but also what non-Christians want. The number one thing all non-believers in the survey said that they wanted was a conversation with a nonjudgmental friend. If they wanted to explore faith, they wanted to do it with a nonjudgmental friend and have conversation. So, conversation, over time, listening. Ask questions, right? It's a give and take of friendship. Let them lead. You don't have to lead. Let them ask the questions. Go where they want to go. Little by little, bit by bit, think many, many, many conversations. Never get in the mode where you think, "Man, I may never have another conversation. I've got to dump the whole load on them." (*laughter*) Think multiple conversations. Give God space to work—and then invite. That's the next thing. Invite people into further exploration. If they're really interested, then you invite them. "Hey, you want to read the gospel with me?" "You want to get together and talk?" "You want to come to church with me?" "Here's a book to read. I'd love to hear what you think about it."

So, I have a gal who cuts my hair, and I see her every two weeks. I've been going there for maybe two or three years and so we've built a really good friendship. She's opened up to me. I've asked her tons of questions. I know about her family; I know about what she likes; I know about what she doesn't like. I mean I know a lot about her, and I think she trusts me. We have a very trusting relationship. One of the things I've noticed about her is that she has a very low view of herself. She doesn't feel very good about herself so she's always putting herself down and kind of making fun of herself. So I said, "Tell me something good about yourself," and she said, "Well, I don't mess up all the time." So here's what came to me one day. I said, "Do you have a Bible?" She goes, "Yeah, I have a Bible." I said, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to go home and I want you to read Psalm 139." Psalm 139 is the one about how we're fearfully and wonderfully made and how God uses us, how He loves us, what He thinks about us, and how He cares for us. I said, "You go home and read it, and in two weeks I want to know what you think." Two weeks later I come back. "Hey, did you read that passage?" She said, "Yeah, I did. When I first opened it up, I was really, really mad at you." And I said, "You were mad at me?" She goes, "Yeah, it started out like, "Shut your mouth and be quiet and get still before God and repent." And I said, "What?" And she says, "Yeah, then I realized I was reading Psalms 39. (*laughter*) She said, "Then I read Psalm 139. That was very helpful." Long-term exploration, invitation, bit by bit, little by little. You can do this.

And here's the last thing. Respect means that you respect their right to choose whether or not to believe. It doesn't change the way you view them or think about them, because you know why? Because God gave them the right to make that choice. God gave every human being the right to make the choice. So, you and I, we have no pressure. Build a friendship…listen…have many

conversations…give and take…invite. This is how God wants to use every day ordinary people like you and me. Be filled with the presence of Christ which leads to living a life that creates curiosity and attraction, which leads to conversations, which leads to changed lives, and that's what we're going to celebrate right now—some more people whose lives have been radically transformed by the power of God. And I hope that in your mind, as you think about the people in your circle, you're looking forward to seeing them on stage one day being baptized. God wants to use you, just as you are, in the world where you live, to have an authentic and effective impact in sharing the love of Jesus with others.

God, may this be true of us. May we walk in these ways. May we imitate You in all these ways. And, God, would there be hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people from the spheres and the circle of life that we all live in, who will one day be on this stage sharing their story of what Jesus has done for them. This we pray in His name, Amen.

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