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Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a father towards us and that you have a father's love towards us. Thank you that you care about each and every person here. Thank you that you have given us such good news. Help us to be bold and strong as we bring this good news to others. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen. This week I was studying for my sermon and as I often do I was using the blue letter Bible website. For those of you who are computer users, I know I've mentioned it before but I really encourage that's a really great free resource if you're interested in getting into a deeper Bible study. You can click on a verse and you can see all the different translations and you can go back and agree and you can pick apart each word and see what the words mean and there's audio commentary and video commentary and it's great and it's free. In any ways over on the side of the page as I was studying there was this link for something from Billy Graham and I normally don't click on the advertisements but this time I was like that looks interesting so I clicked on it and his association has put together this thing where they give you this video and this information and the idea is you invite your friends over to your house and you show them this video and then you give them your testimony and then you offer to lead them to salvation. I thought that's very interesting and the video, I was watching a video describing the video and I kind of just in my mind I expected oh I'm going to see some white guy in suburbia doing this program but actually they had people from Thailand and the Philippines and Hong Kong running this program and there was this one woman and I can't remember if she was from Thailand or the Philippines, I think it was the Philippines but anyways she went out to this school out in the countryside and they gathered all the kids together like into the auditorium and she had never done this before and she was just talking about how nervous she was and how her hands were cold because she was so nervous and I was like I'm nervous for you, my hands are cold and so but she did it, she showed the video and she gave her testimony and prayed with the kids and I thought to myself I don't know what I would say if I was called to do something like that but then I thought about it and I was like well I know what I'm supposed to say, I'm just not comfortable saying it because I'm not practiced in it. So we're going to start with a couple verses here today and they're in your bulletin, 2 Corinthians 5.20, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." 2 Timothy 4.2 says, "Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season." See it is great that God has saved us, that's amazing but he also wants us to extend this out to other people. It was his design and his infinite wisdom to create a church that spreads and goes out and carries itself out into the world. He could have just sent an angel down to every human and the angel would have presented them with the gospel and then they would have to make a choice but instead he wanted a church that grew organically through relationships and that's why he calls upon every single Christian to be ready and willing to preach the good news, to take this wonderful thing that we found and tell it to others. It makes sense when you think about it because if you were to come to me and you were to say, "I like the Colts," or "I think the Colts are going to win the Super Bowl this year," and I said, "Why?" It would be completely normal for you to give me a reason why and it would be nonsensical for you to say, "I don't know," or if you said, "I think Carmel, Indiana is the best city in America," and I said, "Why?" And you said, "I don't know." That doesn't make sense. If you make a judgment call about something is great or wonderful or you love it, it's only natural that you should have some reason for saying that. So I think a lot of us when we think about talking about God or Jesus to people, we get a little nervous. "Don't let your friends get cold," she said. And I think the reason that we feel that way is because we are, we don't, it's not something we've done before. It's something that's not normal for us. And so my exhortation for you today is to practice, or as the front of your bulletin says, exercise. Start working God and biblical truth and such into your day-to-day speech. Take the theory and the ideas that you get on Sunday morning and as you go throughout your life during the week, look for the ways that these ideas and these theories apply to the real world. When you see someone whose marriage is falling apart, then ask yourself, "What does the Bible say about that?" Well, the Bible says, "Honor your wife, be a good husband or wife, be a good spouse." And that person was cheating on their spouse and they were being a bad husband or wife, and that's why their marriage is falling apart. And so what does the Bible say the solution is? The Bible says to confess and repent and love your wife the way that Christ loves the church. So as you begin to see the things going on in your world, when you begin to see the problems, start to think about how does the Bible tie into this? How does the Bible point out that problem and how does the Bible offer a solution to that problem? Begin to really make what we talk about here practical in your life, begin to look for those connections. When I was at the Unite Youth Workers Conference a few weeks ago at Quaker Haven, one of the guys, one of the speakers, he came from this really bad town. I think it was in Ohio, but I couldn't tell you the name of the town. Anyways, whenever he tells people, "I'm from that town," people go, "Oh, wow. Man, you must really have a calling if God wants you to live in that town." It's like the murder capital and the crime capital and all these other things. Someone asked him, we were all sitting around the campfire afterwards, and someone said, "So, what's the cause for such a high crime rate in that town?" I looked up at that person and I said, "Sin." Everyone just kind of chuckled. They're like, "Yeah, we know it's sin." He was expecting an answer like drugs or mafia or some tangible worldly reason why this town was such a bad place to be. But at the end of the day, sin really is the problem with that town, and it's the problem in everyone's lives. That's what I mean when I say, "Look for the connections between the Bible and what is going on in the world, and also look for the biblical cheer for those things." But get stuff into your speech. Practice in the mirror. Some of you, you remember from when I was a little kid here, you may have seen me a couple times doing little card tricks and stuff. That's because I was in the Society of Young Magicians, and it wasn't anything evil. It wasn't that kind of magic. It was just card tricks. But one of the things that they would always tell us is they'd say, "Go home and practice in front of the mirror." You would do that. That way you could see what people see when they look at you doing a trick. But it would also help you build your confidence to be able to practice like that. That's important for us as Christians when it comes to sharing what we feel and what we believe about this faith. We need to practice. I mean, even if you're just talking to yourself in your bedroom, just being able to articulate the things you believe is a very healthy exercise, and it will help you to get comfortable once you're actually in front of another person. Get comfortable by yourself putting these things into words, and then expand on that next time you're in your small group or your boards or your committees or your Sunday school class. Just take a minute and everybody go around and, for example, everybody share the gospel in one sentence. The gospel, it's the summation of what we believe as Christians. It's foundational to who we are. And yet I find so many people when I say, "Speak the gospel," tell me the gospel, they just stumble over it. The gospel is, in case you're a little rusty, God created the universe and the world and mankind and we were all perfect, but humans sinned and we messed it up. And we were separated from God and we were destined to die, but Jesus came and died in our place, and anyone who puts their faith in Him will be reunited with God and will live for Him for all eternity. That's the gospel, and you need to be able to let it just roll off your lips just that easily. It's good to share the gospel like that, but it's also healthy to have some kind of personal testimony. Now, a lot of you, when you hear, share your testimony, you think of some alcoholic's anonymous kind of meeting. You go through and you talk about all the bad things you've ever done in your past, and then you say, "But Jesus saved me." And that's an example of a testimony, but that's just one small part of what your testimony can be. Your testimony can just be an answer that God's giving you to prayer, or it can be how you have been a better husband this year than you were last year. It's just some personal way that the Bible is real to you. So a testimony doesn't have to be a big, complicated, flowery thing, and some of you maybe grew up in the church and didn't have a big, nasty life of sin. That's okay. Is the Bible real to you? Has God made Himself real to you? Has He answered a prayer? Just share that. The more I thought about this, the more I realized this is so foundational for our church to grow. It's so nice that we have food bank and these service and these missionaries we support and stuff, but we're just people being good until we give the credit to God, until we use our lips to make sure that people know God is the reason that we're doing all this stuff. It's foundational that everyone here be able to articulate what we believe and why we believe. So now we're going to take a moment and exercise. We're going to break into little groups of about two or three, just the people sitting around you. I assume that if you're sitting next to them, you know them, so you shouldn't feel uncomfortable. And just say in one sentence, the gospel, God created us, we sinned, Jesus died for us, we believe in Him, we go to heaven. Just say one thing that's just personal about maybe how God has improved your life, maybe how He's answered a prayer, something like that. Very simple, it can be two sentences. And if you're feeling nervous about this, then that's exactly why we have to do this. Because if you were sitting at a colts game and I said, if you said you like the colts, you wouldn't be afraid to tell someone why you like the colts. Or if you said, I love shopping at Kroger, it shouldn't be difficult. If you actually love shopping at Kroger, it should be difficult to explain why. And some people go into this whole thing and they think, oh, but I've got to convince someone to become a Christian. I have to convert them to Christ. And if they don't believe that I failed and I'm not a good Christian, no, no, no, no. If you tell someone you like shopping at Kroger and they still want to shop at Marsh, it's no big deal. And that's how you should go into this. You just have something good. You have some good news and you just want to tell someone about it. All right? And if you can't do it in a room full of people who already know and agree with everything you say, then you have a problem. Because everyone here is going to say the exact same thing as you. Now, there may be a couple of people here who aren't Christian and you're just visiting us today. And I just want to say I'm not pressuring you into saying something you don't believe, but we could use your help in having good listeners and having someone to talk to. So just politely sit there and listen to what your neighbor has to say and just say, I'm not sure what I believe yet. And we'll respect that. We're not going to get you in any theological conversation. We don't even have time for that. So, but remember, this should be your greatest joy. If God has saved you from eternity in hell, eternity in fire, then you should be kind of happy about that. And it shouldn't be difficult for you to be full of joy and just say, let me just take one sentence and tell you what God has done for me. All right? But before I start, let me read you two more verses. Joshua 1.9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." And I want you to remember that verse to encourage you as we do this. And also Ephesians 6.19, "Pray for me that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel." Paul is saying here that if you're going to talk about God to someone, then pray about it first. Pray that you'll have boldness. So I'm going to pray real fast before we start. Heavenly Father, you are the greatest thing in the universe, and you love us like your dear precious little children. Help us to throw off our fear and our worry, and help us just to simply tell our friends about this good thing that we have found, this good news that even though we were lost, you came to us and saved us. Help us to be comfortable, help us to learn how to break out of our little shells and to share this good news just like we would share the good news of our favorite sports team or whatever else. Help us to be bold and pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're just going to take like five minutes, just turn to your neighbor, and just say, "This is what the gospel is, and here is a way that God has been real in my life." Well, based on some of the conversations I'm hearing, everyone's done. They're just talking. So I'm going to wrap it up. I hope that that filled you with joy. It wasn't my intention. I hope that you weren't saying, "Yeah, got that done with." I hope it brought you real joy to express something that was dear to you and share it with another person. It's been noted by psychologists and stuff that one of the most fundamental aspects of human life is when we find something that we love, we immediately want to share it. That's why things like Twitter and Facebook are so popular, is because an experience just hasn't been experienced yet until you have shared it with someone else. And so I hope that as we shared this good thing that we have with each other, that that has brought joy to you. And I also hope, I'm sure some of you here have really never done that before with anyone, have never shared the gospel before. So I hope that we have kind of broken that fear shell and that you realize that it can be a good and joyful experience to talk about our God with someone. So practice when you're by yourself. Practice when you're in small groups of other Christians, people you can trust. And before you know it, you won't even just be ready to share it with people outside the church. You'll be eager and excited to do it. I want to leave you with this. Second Corinthians 5.15, "He died for all that those who should live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again." Jesus is truly wonderful and he deserves our all and he has brought us such goodness and such an amazing, wonderful story and testimony to share with this world. I hope you can see and hold on to the joy of what we've started here today. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you. Thank you that you have not given us a sad message to share with the world like so many other religions that have fatalism and just nothing after this life. Thank you that you have given us such a wonderful news of the God who came down to rescue us out of the fire, out of the pit, and to restore us as children to himself throughout all eternity. Help us to hold on to the joy of that message and to carry it with us out into this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.