



# First Baptist Pulpit

Sermon Publication of First Baptist Church

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## Highly Potent Believers

Luke 10:25-37

[1]Last week we saw that Jesus gave us a formula for becoming contagious Christians. In Matt. 5 he gave such clear instructions about being “**salt and light**”. He knows that as you learn to live out these guidelines in tangible ways, people will begin to “**see your good deeds (works) and praise your Father in heaven.**” (v.16)

Do you see what Jesus was getting at? He was telling us that the attitudes and actions, the works of each of His followers would either draw people toward a relationship with God or push them further away. So Jesus was pleading with His people—then and now—to live in a way that would draw people toward the Father. Think about it; how we conduct our daily lives has implications that reach all the way into eternity.

*“Christians must be good news before they share the good news.”*

*“IMAGE IS ‘EVERYTHING.’”*

That's what a popular television advertising campaign told us, and apparently a lot of people believe it, including church-going people. After all, look at how much energy is spent by individual believers and ministries to keep up a good front, even when deep conflicts and inconsistencies lurk below the surface.

Consider our own denominational problem.....the recent Christianity Today article reports the following:

Rarely do media report about the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) without mentioning its 16 million

members. That's a problem SBC president Frank Page wants to correct. ...Convention records indicate that fewer than 6 million people attend Southern Baptist churches each week. “*I never talk about 16 million. That is ridiculous,*” Page said. “*I ... say even the FBI could not find 5 million of our members.*”

When I came to First Baptist Church there were approximately 100 active attenders. However, when I checked the membership records, we had over 400 members! It would have taken the Secret Service to find ours. And that would be the number that would be reported each year to our denomination. Well, I changed that and since coming I only report “active” membership. And if you do not attend the services or functions of First Baptist Church in six months, then you are not an “active” member.

We are talking about Evangelism -- sharing the one hope every person has to be connected to God now and for eternity. People need Jesus, but for the person you are seeking to share Christ with, image is not everything. People have an uncanny ability to sniff out what is real and what isn't. And you'd better believe that they are not interested in committing their lives to something that isn't real.

Jesus said, “*If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit*” (John 15:5). If there is no real fruit, then something is fishy, and people smell it.

### FIRST THINGS FIRST

Now, we are talking about evangelism, and it's tempting, to run ahead and talk about practical tips for communicating our faith, but it would be premature. You see, in a spiritually resistant culture ( which we live in) before we can help others catch Christianity, we must first live in a way that convinces the people around us that we actually have the disease ourselves!

Today I want to share what are some of the most powerful and potent qualities that we can have that make us “Highly Potent Believers.” And they're not secret, in fact there the exact same things YOU want to see in other believers.

### I. AUTHENTICITY

Definition - "Worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact."

The first is to just be real. Being real will be attractive to seekers and turn their heads toward heaven.

One thing I'm talking about is **Authentic Identity**. Being Real on the inside. I can't tell you how many brand new Christians tell me that part of what drew them to Christ was the realization that there can be great diversity in the makeup of God's family.

You see, most people "think" that to be a Christian and believe the Bible you have to fit into a certain mold. You have to be a "cookie cutter" Christian. But it's not true.

And that also means an Authentic Emotional Life. Tragically, many Christians have gotten confused about how to express their feelings. Some well-meaning but misguided pastors and leaders have taught that dedicated Christians should never get angry, and that expressing sadness or hurt or grief are signs of low faith or shallow character. Untold numbers of believers have tried to smile and say, "Praise God" in the midst of any and all circumstances, thinking this an indicator of spiritual maturity.

Along similar lines, there is another area that I'll call **Authentic Confession**. This has to do with how dedicated Christians deal with their mistakes and failures. The problem is that most of us have mistakenly thought we should hide our failures at all costs. We've been told that our mistakes will drive people away from God, so we'd better not let anyone find out about them.

And another part of authenticity is to have an **Authentic Faith**.

Do you remember seeing, 18 years ago, the Chinese college student who stood in front of the advancing tanks in Tiananmen Square? Why do we remember that? What went through your mind when you saw that man literally laying down his life in front of that tank?

I've learned through the years that people are not impressed with spinelessness. They are attracted to Authentic Faith. I need to emphasize this because many Christians are so afraid that if they state what they really believe, if they come out of the closet, or if they live by biblical priorities, then they'll

automatically alienate those outside the faith. But that's almost never the case.

## II. THE PULL OF COMPASSION

So many times when I meet a person who is far from God and tell them that I am the pastor of a church, they ask something like this, "So what are you doing to help the poor in our community? What are you doing to help the needy?"

They don't understand the love of God in Christ, but they seem to instinctively "know" that caring for the tangible needs of human beings is part of genuine Christianity which believes in a God of Love. They seem to have an innate awareness of [James 1:27](#): *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress: . . ."*

When action-oriented compassion is absent, it's a tell-tale sign that something's spiritually amiss. Whether the problem is with the organization or the individual, uncaring Christianity does not attract inquirers into its fold. But a clear and consistent demonstration of Christ-like love is a powerful magnet that pulls people toward Him.

### A ROAD-SIDE ILLUSTRATION

Jesus illustrated the importance of compassion in one of His most famous parables, found in [Luke 10](#). It's about a Jewish man who was walking from Jerusalem toward the city of Jericho. He got part of the way there when some thugs jumped out from behind the rocks. They robbed him, stripped him, beat him up, and left him half-conscious in the ditch on the side of the road.

A short time later a priest came walking along. The wounded traveler saw him coming and thought his luck was finally turning, but the priest walked over to the far side of the road without even slowing down. A little while later another religious man, a Levite, came along. To the injured man's dismay, he too passed by quickly.

Then, Jesus told His listeners, a man from Samaria came down the road. Even though there was a lot of ethnic strife between Samaritans and Jews, this Samaritan felt compassion for the robbery victim and stopped to see how he could help. After assessing the situation, he knelt down over him, poured oil on his wounds, and bandaged him up.

Then he lifted the Jewish man onto his donkey and took him to an inn, where he made sure the man

had a clean, warm bed. He even gave the innkeeper some money. *"I'll cover the tab as long as it takes for this man to get well,"* he told him. *"You take care of him and I'll come by later to pay any additional expenses."*

You can't help but wonder what went through the mind of this robbed and beaten Jewish man when he woke up the next day in a comfortable bed, all bandaged up, and his room and board paid for by someone he didn't even know! "Who did this?" I'll bet he asked. "Why didn't he turn away like everybody else?"

Aren't those the kind of questions that are often asked by people on the receiving end of compassion? They want to look behind the generous act itself to get a glimpse of the underlying motivation. "Why would anyone do something like this for me," they ask in bewilderment.

### III. THE GIFT OF SACRIFICE

We've already seen the attractiveness of authenticity and felt the pull of compassion. There is another contagious characteristic that maybe the most powerful of all - sacrifice.

Think about it. Sometimes authenticity fails to grab people's attention; compassion is occasionally written off as just being a do-gooders who may have some ulterior motive. But sacrifice, motivated by genuine love and concern, is extremely difficult to discount. It just screams for a response of some kind, which is probably a large part of why Jesus lived such a sacrificial life and then called us to follow in His steps.

#### THREE SACRIFICIAL GIFTS

Though there are many ways we can show love by sacrificing for others, I'm going to focus on three specific areas that I think have the highest impact on people in our culture. When we give of ourselves in these ways, it will almost assuredly gain attention and, over time, pique curiosity.

#### 1. TIME - Maximizing You're Moments

You may have already guessed this first one, and its impact is huge. It's the sacrifice of time. Time, as they say, is money, and it's becoming about as rare of a commodity. Work weeks are longer, leisure breaks are shorter, and the pace of life is faster. USA Today recently poked fun at the madness of most of

our schedules, calculating that if we did all we're supposed to do to live what the experts say is a balanced, well-rounded life, it would require forty-two hours a day to get it all done! It's tough enough to keep all the do-or-die activities afloat without trying to maintain a daily regimen of exercising, flossing, keeping up on world events, enjoying a hobby, and nourishing deep, meaningful friendships with lots of people. It's not difficult to do it all; it's impossible.

Well, in the midst of a world like that, you make a huge statement to others when you joyfully offer them the gift of time. It's no insignificant gesture.

And it wasn't in Jesus' day, either. Do you remember what Jesus did when He passed through the city of Jericho on a teaching journey in **Luke 19**? There was a huge crowd of people following Him at this stage of His ministry—something like the Rose Bowl Parade without the floats!

Suddenly Jesus surprised everyone when He stopped the procession and asked a man named Zacchaeus if he could spare a few hours to have a leisurely dinner together to discuss spiritual issues. Zacchaeus must have gasped in disbelief. But he consented to the meal, and before the stroke of midnight he was a different man! He had experienced a spiritual birth that transformed him from the inside out.

**The key to his conversion was that Jesus gave him time.** He stopped the parade and focused His attention on this one person. And, as a result, Zacchaeus's future was forever altered.

Zacchaeus was like a lot of people you know. He was interested in the spiritual dimension of his life. He was open enough to look for a strategic place along the parade route to catch a glimpse of Christ. But to help him past the curiosity stage, somebody had to sacrifice the time to set up the dinner and turn the conversation in the direction of spiritual matters. Jesus took the time, and that made the difference.

Almost all of us rub shoulders every day with people who are seeking. They're looking for someone who will take the time and effort required to help them come to some solid conclusions about spiritual truth. Can you be that person for someone?

#### 2. Reinvesting Your RESOURCES

A second kind of sacrifice that turns the heads of people searching for spiritual reality is the giving up of resources.

"Money isn't everything," we've heard it said, "but it sure beats whatever's in second place!"

In an age when most people are intoxicated with the desire for money and material goods, all you have to do to raise a seeker's eyebrows is to put their material needs before yours. These days that might even make the headlines!

What might happen in the lives of your friends and family members if you relaxed your grip a bit on your own material possessions? Think about whose heart might open up, or whose attitude might soften, or who might get curious and start asking spiritual questions, if you applied the instructions found in **1 John 3:18**: *"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*

Try God on this one. Put your faith into action on behalf of others—action that requires some investment—and watch the return He'll bring in the form of changed lives.

### 3. Sacrifice of your LIFE

The third kind of sacrifice I'd like to discuss is a sustained, long-term effort that will affect the lives of people outside the family of God. It's the sacrifice of a consistent, godly lifestyle.

You know what? Some nuts are hard to crack. Spiritual cynicism runs deep in certain people. They need to watch a Christian live out his or her faith over a substantial period of time before they'll be convinced the whole thing isn't a scam.

There are more of those people around than we tend to think. They watch and keep score of our moral and spiritual consistency, often without even realizing they're doing so.

You know, it's not much of a trick to project a squeaky-clean Christian image to friends and colleagues for a short season. You can pump yourself up to put on a spiritual facade for a few months or maybe even a whole year.

But it's going to take longer than that to make an impact on some of the people in your world. Don't be surprised if this is the attitude of some of the people closest to you, including family members. They are often the ones who smirk and say: *"This*

*too shall pass. A year from now you'll be into astrology or crystals."*

When I became a Christian, in my college years, after I worked up the nerve, I went home and told my parents all about it. I remember that conversation over the kitchen table. That kind of headache blank stare on their face. They didn't really know what to do or say. My mom said something like, "oh honey, that's nice." And my dad said, "son, college is a time when you learn about a lot of things, yada yada yada."

After that, I could tell they both thought it was just another fad, like long hair, and I would get over it. But I did get over, praised and you know what? In time, a lot of time, both of my parents received Jesus Christ. And it wasn't because of something I said. It was because after time, a lot of time, they saw something real in me and Nina, and in the people they met when they came to church with us.

*It's the sacrifice of a consistent, godly lifestyle.* Are you willing to make that sacrifice for those around you?

### Do Good Works Save?

Let me leave you with one final thought. It may shock you, but let me ask you to think about it before you dismiss it.

The Bible says that we're saved from our sins by faith in God, apart from good works. Right? That's the gospel truth. (Eph 2:9, 2 Tim 1:9). Our positive behavior, our good works have nothing to do with obtaining salvation. It's a gift of God freely given to those who trust Him.

But something else should be added: Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:16 that although our works have nothing to do with gaining our own salvation, **they might be used by God to save somebody else!** What we DO really matters, and it can affect the eternity's of people we care about.

### CONCLUSION

I'm sure you've seen the logic I've followed in this section. Authenticity, compassion, and sacrifice all work together to help those outside the faith come to the point of saying, "The proof is in the living, and the evidence seems irrefutable. Who else but God could be behind how that person is?"

[1] This message is largely based on the book "Becoming a Contagious Christian" by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg. Zondervan, 1994.