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Life on Mission



What do you like best about connecting with people?

QUESTION 1

#BSFLIdentity

We can better share the gospel when we step into the shoes of others.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It's a different kind of museum. When you walk in, someone will fit you with a pair of shoes that will be very different from your own. They may be the actual shoes a chess grandmaster has worn, or a roller derby player, or even a sewer worker. This is the Empathy Museum, a touring experiential arts exhibit based in England.

The Empathy Museum is designed so that you can experience the old saying: "You can't understand another person until you've walk a mile in their shoes." The Empathy Museum also offers a human library. But you don't borrow a book at this library; you "borrow" another person—and you talk. You learn about who he is and hear about his life experiences. All this has been designed to enable you to see the world through another person's eyes.

What if we took that a step further? What if, instead of simply understanding the other person, we took that understanding and built a bridge? And not just any bridge, but a bridge to Jesus Christ.

This is not a new idea. The apostle Paul modeled this for us and taught us how to step into the world of others. We step into their world so that we can connect with them. We find a way to identify with them so they can discover their identities in Christ.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (CSB)

¹⁹ Although I am free from all and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law — though I myself am not under the law — to win those under the law. ²¹ To those who are without the law, like one without the law — though I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ — to win those without the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. ²³ Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings.

We speak a lot of languages. I don't just mean English, Spanish, Swahili, or Chinese. Even within the same verbal language, we have a lot of different cultural dialects and vernacular. A twenty-something talks about life a lot differently than a senior adult. And people from the Northwest don't always understand Southern phrases and lingo.

In his travels, the apostle Paul also experienced many cultural differences. The Roman Empire was massive, which meant it contained people from various backgrounds and cultures who viewed life differently. And they saw the gospel differently. Yet Paul made it his goal to share the gospel with all people regardless of their backgrounds.

Different people are reached in different ways with the truth of the gospel. The apostle Paul was committed to reaching all kinds of people, which is why he said, "I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some" (v. 22). Paul even made himself "a slave" (v. 19) to this task; Paul was a free Roman citizen and free in Christ, yet he chose to serve these different people in whatever ways would influence them and bring them to Christ. In doing this, Paul followed the model Jesus left us: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

How did you first hear the gospel?

QUESTION 2

The best way to share Jesus is to serve and share like He did. How did He do that? Jesus addressed each person in a unique way because each was a uniquely different individual. To connect with someone like Jesus did, we must reach them at the place where they are. In this passage, we see the apostle Paul doing exactly that: he was busy meeting people where they were.

Paul identified three different groups in his culture with whom he sought to interact:

- » **The Jews.** Paul was already a Jew. But under the grace of Christ, Paul knew he no longer had to follow the customs and rituals of the Jewish law. When he interacted with Jews, however, Paul would follow their practices as a way to win their trust and gain a hearing for his message. (See Acts 16:1-3; 21:23-26.)
- » **Those who are without that law.** These were the Gentiles. The best example of how Paul accommodated the Gentiles is his speech at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31). He didn't begin his message on the law or on Jesus as the Messiah; he began by addressing their culture and the world they knew. His starting point was their culture and from there he explained the gospel in terms they could understand.
- » **The weak in faith.** We can assume Paul is talking about the same weak people mentioned in the previous chapter (1 Corinthians 8:7-13). Because these fellow believers had little understanding of spiritual matters and an immature faith, the actions of other believers could become a stumbling block to them. Paul chose to identify with them to help disciple them in the gospel.

Paul was always flexible in how he interacted with people in different settings and communities. He was willing to step out of his own comfort zone for the sake of the gospel. His goal? To bring others to Christ.

What are some different approaches Christ-followers use to share the gospel?

QUESTION 3

"I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some."

1 CORINTHIANS 9:22

IN THEIR SHOES



List 1-2 groups of people for each of the following descriptions. Then, identify one thing you can do to build or deepen a relationship with someone from that group.

An ethnic group that I encounter regularly that is different than me:

A socioeconomic group that I encounter regularly that is different than me:

A religious group that I encounter regularly that is different than me:

What things might we need to set aside to run the race of faith well?

QUESTION 4

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (CSB)

²⁴ Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. ²⁵ Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown. ²⁶ So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. ²⁷ Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Paul was fully committed to reaching anybody and everybody with the gospel. He did not go through life “like one who runs aimlessly” or “like one beating the air” (v. 26). He had a specific goal and exercised discipline in his work.

To reach that goal, though, wouldn't be easy. Paul saw it as a serious task that would require strict discipline and self-control. He underscored this by comparing the Christian life and ministry with an athletic race. This analogy would be easy for the church in Corinth to understand because of the Isthmian Games that were held in their city every two years. These games were a big deal, second only to the Olympic Games. Unlike our modern athletic events, those ancient athletes only won a prize if they took first place. The Isthmian Games did not give gold, silver, and bronze awards, and certainly no “participation” awards were handed out. An athlete either won the race, or he went home empty-handed.



The athlete who “gave it all” is the one who won. To do that required the utmost discipline. A time of celebration and rest would come after the race, but for the moment their efforts required sacrifice.

Athletes who discipline themselves to excel and win today can win a variety of prizes, from money to gold medals to the privilege of putting a “26.2” sticker on their cars. In Paul’s day, the athletes won a crown, which was nothing more than a ceremonial wreath of leaves!

That’s quite a contrast to the prize that awaits believers who are disciplined in the life and ministry to which God has called them. Paul doesn’t explain what that prize is other than “an imperishable crown” (v. 25). The only other reference Paul made to a prize was “the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). We can be confident that this prize is eternal and of great value.

The other contrast is that, in Paul’s day, only one athlete won the prize. Even today in our Olympic Games, only three out of all the competitors take the winners’ stand in each event. But everyone who runs in Christ wins. Paul wanted us to be like him: disciplined and determined to “run in such a way to win the prize” (v. 24). Because this prize is of immeasurable worth, Paul practiced discipline in how he lived and served so that he would not be “disqualified” (v. 27). This is not a matter of losing salvation, but missing out on the blessings that come from serving the One who saves us.

We all have days when we’d love to serve Christ by resting in a hammock. But serving Christ and reaching people with the gospel takes disciplined work and effort. As we rely on God’s Spirit to work through us, we will go where people are—and that often means stepping outside our comfort zones.

Keep your eyes on Jesus and look for opportunities to share your faith in Him with others. Your identity is in Christ. This week, take that identity, step into the lives of others, and lead them to find their identities in Christ.



What things might we need to pick up to run the race of faith well?

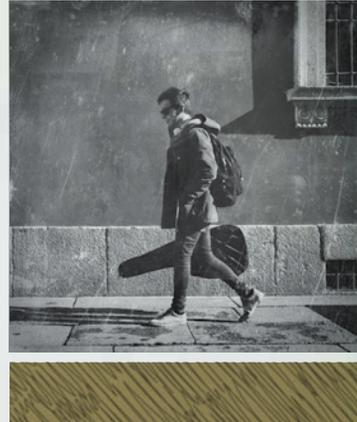
QUESTION 5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you step into the shoes of others this week?

- » **Pray.** Identify a person you personally know who does not know Christ. Pray for this person and ask for guidance in knowing how to bring the gospel of Christ into his or her life.
- » **Learn.** Choose an ethnic group that is different from you that you encounter regularly in your community. Become a student of their beliefs and customs and be ready to engage in conversation when the opportunity arises.
- » **Step out.** As a group, identify one way you can minister to a person or group that requires you to step out of your comfort zone. As you do, be ready for opportunities to share the truth of the gospel.

You may never physically walk in someone else's shoes, but you can build relationships that give you insight into who they are. **When you do that, you get opportunities to share the gospel and connect with others the way Jesus did—by meeting them where they are.**



My thoughts