

## “A Contagious Heart” Romans 10:1

Lee Strobel, co-author of the Contagious Christian series we are doing in Sunday school shares a true story about a friend of his named John. John had taken a routine business trip to Atlanta one day and was telling Lee that everything was going according to schedule when he decided to stop into this little sunglass shop at the airport to buy some sunglasses. He browsed around and found a pair he liked, paid for them and proceeded to walk out of the store.

As John relates his story it was about this time that he felt a nudging from God to turn around, go back into the store and talk to the cashier about Jesus. He knew he had to do it, but wondered on what basis he could get into a spiritual conversation with this stranger, especially since he had already made his purchase.

As he relates what transpired, he describes it as the worst transition into a spiritual conversation in the history of evangelism.

He went back into the store and picked up another pair of sunglasses to buy some time while he figured out what to say. Finally, he said to the guy behind the counter who was reading the paper, “Sunglasses, huh?” He looked at John and said, “Yeah.”

John put the sunglasses up to his face and looked through them and said “Uh, isn’t it great that, uh, these sunglasses can, like, um, protect our eyes from the brightness of the flames of the sun?” The checkout guy said “yeah.”

Then John just blurted out “well, wouldn’t it be great if we had something that could protect us from the flames of hell?” In recounting the incident to his friend, Lee, he said as soon as the words came out of his mouth, he couldn’t believe he said that.

But the guy set his newspaper down, looked John in the eye and said he had been thinking about that a lot lately.

John was shocked but started talking to him about Jesus, forgiveness, grace, and eternal life. Tears started flowing down the face of the cashier who then prayed right at the counter of the sunglass shop to receive Christ as the forgiver of his sins and the leader of his life.

John told his friend Lee that the day had started out pretty routine, but ended up with an incredible adventure.

When we develop a contagious heart for Christ that is what the Christian life will be like for us, filled with adventure. When we yearn to let God use us to reach others, when we make ourselves available to talk about Jesus as opportunities arise and as the Holy Spirit prompts us we’ll see God open doors to share our faith with people who are searching for real meaning in their lives. We may become any number of links along the chain of events that brings a person to Christ.

I bought my first good camera in 1980. It was a Pentax K1000. I snapped a lot of pictures with that. Sometimes I would add a filter to the lens depending on the picture I was taking. Sometimes I would add a converter to my lens that would double its magnification. Later on I got a zoom lens that would allow me to get a closer view of something far away.

I am learning that I need to look at people through a different lens. The lens I came with wants to view people with skepticism or criticism or some other kind of ism that brushes them aside. I look at them and confess that their appearance expresses or exposes to me a heart that can’t possibly be interested in spiritual things. Yet that may be far from the truth. They may be just like the cashier in the sunglass shop. I am learning that I need to

change the lens through which I see people. I am learning to ask the Lord to give me a new lens that I might see others through His eyes. Jesus looked on the multitudes and saw a field of souls ready to be harvested. He looked on the lost sheep of Jerusalem and wept because many would deny and reject the Messiah. I need to pray that my heart will change so that I see others as Jesus sees them.

**How can we develop a contagious heart for those who are yet without Christ? How can we develop eyes that will see others through the lens of Christ? How can we begin to yearn for the souls of the unsaved to reach them for Christ?**

**If Jesus came to live in our house, what would we learn from Him about His passion to seek the lost?**

The first may be very obvious, but it is essential.

## I. PRAYER

There are certainly many lessons we could learn from Jesus if He were to live in our house, but perhaps one of the first and best lessons would be about prayer. We all know that Jesus spent a lot of time praying. *I think that before Jesus talked with his neighbors about the Heavenly Father, He would first talk to His Father about His neighbors.* I think He would pray for them and about them. That's a good lesson for us. We need to develop a list of people to pray for who need Christ and then regularly pray that they will come to know Him.

I want you to take out your bulletin for a moment. Inside you should have a blank 3X5 card. Sometime today write down the names of some unsaved friends or family members you will commit to pray for regularly that they will come to know Jesus. Stick it in your pocket. Attach it to the dashboard of your car or above your kitchen sink. Tape it to the mirror in the bathroom or on the door of your refrigerator or in your locker at school. Put it in a place you spend a lot of time where you will constantly see the names and pray for them.

Prayer was an essential component throughout the ministry of Jesus. Before embarking on anything of importance, He spent time in prayer. In fact, as British pastor John Stott has pointed out, Jesus' prayers for lost people continued right up until His final breaths on the cross. From the cross Jesus said **"Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."** In the Greek that phrase is in the imperfect tense meaning it was something that He repeated over and over: "Father, forgive them; Father, forgive them; Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

This teaches us one important truth about Jesus' prayer life. *It was constant.* When it came to prayer for the lost His heart was resolute, it did not change. Time and again we find Jesus going off to some remote place to pray. When we pray for our unsaved friends we need to be praying constantly for them that God will somehow through some way or someone reach them with the Gospel.

### Romans 10:1

**If you were asked by some pollster on the street the one thing that is your greatest heart's desire, what would it be?** This verse expresses Paul's deep love for His own people – that they might be saved. That was his heartbeat. It was not only his heart's desire, but also his earnest prayer. His prayer for his kinsman was intense, something that was on his heart and mind all the time. It leads me to believe that it was a passionate plea with the Lord that the Jews might be saved. May that be our longing; to have such heartfelt love for others who are not saved that it would drive us to earnest prayer.

If you were to read through chapter 9 you would see how much he grieved for them. It helps us better understand his love for them to want them to be saved. No matter how seemingly unlikely they might be to repent, Paul still earnestly prayed for them. May that be our heart's desire as well to earnestly pray even for the most unlikely.

Grief for their lost condition and love for them to be saved come from a singular heartbeat. **How can we grieve over the lost condition of someone's soul and then not have a love for them to be saved?**

We must constantly pray for others. Constantly pray for our own heart to be contagious for Christ. If we are serious about that prayer, then our prayer life will become more fervent and intense on their behalf.

Perhaps the reason we don't share Christ is because we haven't prayed for others like we should, we haven't seen them through the eyes of Christ. We need to constantly pray that we might see our neighbors through the lens of Christ.

We need to constantly pray that we might see the grocery store clerk through the lens of Christ.

We need to constantly pray that we might see the co-worker on her third marriage through the lens of Christ.

We need to constantly pray that we might see the kid at school who is a cutter through the lens of Christ.

We need to constantly pray that we might see people like mass murderer James Holmes through the lens of Christ.

We need to constantly pray for the person who is religious but has no personal relationship with Christ through the lens of Christ.

We need to constantly pray for them that the gospel of God's grace through Christ might penetrate their heart by the Holy Spirit that they might come to know Christ, praying that we through the power of the Spirit will be emboldened to share the gospel.

**When we watch the news and hear of someone who has gotten in trouble with the law do we cast judgment or do we pray for them to find Christ? When we see government officials spinning yet another issue for their own political agenda do we view them with disdain or do we pray that they might know the truth through Jesus Christ so the truth can set them free?**

**How do we pray for others in our circle?**

Dr. Jack Sternberg was a cancer physician from a conservative Jewish background, but was very far from God. While practicing medicine in Arkansas he began to treat a 30 year old patient with terminal cancer. He saw her only as a patient who had a husband and young child whom she would soon leave widowed and motherless. Yet she seemed more concerned about his spiritual welfare, in his knowing Jesus, than the fact that she was dying. She saw his lostness, his separation from God, as a greater tragedy than her own illness. She trusted this Jesus, then and for eternity even though God had allowed this illness to ravage her body. Yet she still loved, worshipped, and followed Him. She seemed confident about her future and genuinely concerned about his. Through her constant prayer and witness Dr. Sternberg ended up giving his life to Christ. He asks a penetrating question: "What if I cared that much about my neighbor?"

At one point, Paul was willing to give up his own salvation if his people would be saved. That's how much Jesus cares for you and me. He saw our lostness, our separation from God as a greater tragedy than His own brutal execution on the cross. That's why He was willing to die for us so we could be reconciled to God.

## **II Corinthians 5:17-20**

We have been given this responsibility of reconciliation in order to help others be reconciled to God through faith in His Son. If Jesus lived in my house I'm sure He would teach me that prayer for the unsaved should not only be constant, but also consistent. By consistent I mean not only would He pray for the same thing centered around their salvation, but consistent in that His prayers would be the same thing God the Father wants for them – His will is that they be saved.

**II Peter 3:9 "God isn't willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."**

Lee Strobel tells about getting ready to baptize a woman during a service when he asked the woman if she had received Christ as her Savior. She responded affirmatively that she had. He then did something he had never done before and turned to the husband who was assisting him with his wife's baptism and asked the same question. The man looked at Lee for a moment and then suddenly burst into tears. He replied that he had never done that and was ready to trust Christ as his Savior. Before a large congregation he confessed his sin and his trust in Christ. Later on a woman approached Lee and said she was the sister of the man and had been praying for him for nine years.

**Are we committed to praying consistently for someone to get saved as long as it takes? Is there someone we have stopped praying for?** Don't give up. to keep on praying.

## II. AVAILABILITY

If Jesus lived in our house something else He would teach us is to be available and open for questions. As we read about the life and ministry of Jesus, one thing is very obvious; He never pushed someone away who came with a genuine question.

### **Luke 7:18-20**

If there was anyone who knew the identity of Jesus it was John the Baptist. In **John 1:29** we hear John testifying to the crowds as Jesus approached that He was **"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."**

John baptized Jesus and saw the heavens open up and heard the voice of the Father say to Jesus **"You are My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**

Sometime later John was thrown in jail by Herod. He was like so many of us when tough times came his way. He began to have some doubts. John sent a couple of his disciples to find Jesus and ask Him

if He was the One they were expecting or were they to look for someone else. **Are you the Messiah or not?**

**How does Jesus react to these questions coming from someone who announced His arrival and baptized Him?**

### **Luke 7:21-23**

Notice that it was right at that time that Jesus performed a number of miracles. Many with sickness and disease were healed. Demons were cast out. He gave sight to the blind. Jesus did not criticize John for his questions. Jesus sent the disciples back and told them to tell John what they witnessed. What they saw and heard should serve as evidence that Jesus was who He said He was. He is the Messiah.

When someone asks us questions about Jesus and our faith, we shouldn't get agitated that they have one more question. We shouldn't roll our eyes when they ask the same question yet again after we so carefully explained it a week earlier. We shouldn't shrink away or attempt to avoid them because we may not have an answer. **On 9/11 I was asked by an engineer at work what a religious person thought of what was going on. I gave a lame answer because I really wasn't sure what to say. How important it is for us to remember the words of I Peter 3:15 "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."**

Be available to them for questions.

**Romans 10:14-15 "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.'"**

If they don't know about Christ, they don't know what questions to ask.

Let your friends know that it's okay to ask questions. Let them know that if you cannot answer them you will get an answer and get back with them. When we aren't ready, we shy away and so do they, but it just may be one question that is a sticking point keeping them from coming to know Christ. Be available to answer questions.

Several years ago a church staged a major debate open to the public and allowed the American Atheists, Inc. to have their best debater stand and proclaim the case for atheism. Then they had a Christian present the case for Christ. Then the two debated each other.

They actually had people vote. Of those who came to hear the debate that evening as atheists, skeptics, or members of another world religion, after having heard the case for Christ and the case for atheism, more than eight out of ten said the case for Christianity was stronger. Forty-seven walked in as avowed skeptics, heard both sides and walked out as followers of Christ. Not one person was convinced to become an atheist.

We have the truth on our side. It's not to say that we should go out and get into debates with people; instead, it's much more fruitful to get into discussions where we listen to their viewpoint and gently and respectfully present ours and then let the Holy Spirit work.

To help answer the questions that may come up we need to study God's Word. There are a lot of resources through Christian books and websites that can help you or those you are talking to learn more about Christ and the claims of Christianity.  
 Josh McDowell – *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*  
 Charles Ryrie – *Basic Doctrines*  
 The Pocket Testament League not only has free Gospel's of John to pass out, they also have a *Ready*

*Reference* guide that can help answer many questions people may raise with supporting Bible passages. It's the size of a credit card. [www.LeeStrobel.com](http://www.LeeStrobel.com) has hundreds of free video clips in which experts discuss answers to the toughest objections to Christianity. He has also written several books *The Case for Christ, The Case for Faith, The Case for Easter, The Case for Creation*.

Robyn sent copies of the teen version of *The Case for Christ* to her sister and nephew because he wasn't sure he believed in God and her sister wasn't sure how to answer his questions.

My point is this: there are plenty of resources available to help us answer questions to those we make ourselves available to. We need to be prepared so we don't become obstacles to people's faith, but rather a conduit for God's truth.

If Jesus lived in my house, He would show how important it is to pray for non-believers and to be available for them to ask questions. He would not only share His faith, He would show His faith.

### III. DEMONSTRATED FAITH

Talk is cheap. Jesus didn't just say He loved the world; He showed His love by being a servant. He served the blind by restoring sight. He served the lame by restoring mobility. He served the leper by restoring health. In the ultimate act of servant hood, He gave His life to pay for the sins of the world.

When we serve others as Jesus did, when we sacrifice for others as Jesus did, when we put our love into action in tangible ways as Jesus modeled, this opens otherwise impenetrable hearts to the gospel.

Jesus said **“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)**

The Greek word for **“good”** doesn’t merely refer to good as opposed to bad. It means more than just doing right or living right as opposed to doing things that are bad or wrong. The word as it’s used here also carries the idea of being winsome or attractive. Jesus is saying that we should serve other people in a way that is attractive so that they see God through our actions and they are drawn to Him. They need to see it is God who motivates us to live or act in a way that goes against a “me-first” or “do as you please” culture.

When we serve the very real and tangible needs of other people, inevitably this opens up opportunities to talk to them about their very real spiritual needs that they may not even realize they have. People are more open to the gospel when we show them that we care rather than just say that we care. As you have heard me say before, **“people don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”**

Let’s put up our “compassion radars” and scan our neighborhoods, schools and workplaces searching for ways to reach out to people in need.

#### IV. AUTHENTIC FAITH

##### I Thessalonians 1:5

There is one more thing Jesus would show us if He lived in our house. He would show us what authentic faith is like.

**I like what the old farmer once said about authenticity: “Be who ya is, cuz if ya is who ya ain’t then ya ain’t who ya is.”**

Be genuine, not hypocritical. Be real, not phony. Jesus didn’t just communicate the gospel; He lived

it out in front of others. There must be consistency between our beliefs and our behavior, between our creed and our character.

If you’re a Christian, then your neighbors and co-workers have their “hypocrisy radar” scanning our lives all the time. What are they looking for? They’re looking for false piety, a “holier than thou” attitude, character that doesn’t fit with what you say you believe. **Sarah shared last week that her co-workers know she goes to church, but you can bet your bottom dollar they are watching her like a hawk to see if she messes up. They want to see if she says one thing and does another. What are they picking up on their radar screens about you?**

Few things can repel a person from God as quickly as an inauthentic Christian.

**Maggie had become poisoned against God and the church because of the abuse she suffered as a child at the hands of people who claimed to be Christians. Listen as she shares her story in her own words.**

**“The Christianity I grew up with was so confusing to me even as a child. People said one thing but did another. They appeared very spiritual in public but were abusive in private. What they said and what they did never fit. There was such a discrepancy. I came to hate Christianity and did not want to be associated with a church.”**

**She read about the debate that occurred at the church I spoke of earlier between the atheist and the Christian and went in order to see the Christian humiliated, but instead, the Christian won. So she started asking questions. She finally joined a small group at the church made up of two Christian leaders and several others like her seeking for the truth. Here is how she described that experience:**

**“When I came to the church and to my small group, I needed gentleness. I needed to be treated with respect and validated. Most of all, I needed to see people whose actions match what they say. I am**

not looking for perfect, but I am looking for real. 'Integrity' is the word that comes to mind. I need to hear real people talk about real life and I need to know God is, or can be, a part of real life. Does He care about the wounds I have? Does He care I need a place to live? Can I ever be a whole, healthy person? I have asked questions like these and I have not been laughed at or ignored or invalidated. I have not been pushed or pressured in any way."

"I don't understand the caring I've received. I don't understand that the leaders don't seem afraid of questions. They don't say things like, 'You just have to have faith' or 'You need to pray more.' They don't seem to be afraid to tell who they are. They just seem genuine."

She then wrote a poem about the two Christians who led the group. It reveals the heart of someone who is far from God, but wants to know if He is real. It reveals what seekers want and need from us.

Do you know, do you understand that you represented Jesus to me?

Do you know, do you understand that when you treat me with gentleness, it raises the question in my mind that maybe He is gentle, too. Maybe He isn't someone who laughs when I am hurt.

Do you know, do you understand that when you listen to my questions and you don't laugh, that I think, "What if Jesus is interested in me too?"

Do you know, do you understand that when I hear you talk honestly about arguments and conflict and scars from your past that I think, "Maybe I am just a regular person instead of a bad, no-good little girl who deserves abuse." If you care, then I think maybe He cares – and then there's this flame of hope that burns inside of me and for a while I am afraid to breathe because it might go out.

Do you know, do you understand that your words are His words? That your face is His face to someone like me?

Please – be who you say you are!

Please, God, don't let this be another trick.

Please let this be real this time. Please.

Do you know, do you understand that you represent Jesus to me?

I don't know if that brings up times in your past when you remember being too busy or preoccupied to be like Jesus in your neighborhood. A poem like that can be convicting. How many Maggie's are there around us who are asking the same questions, thinking the same things, wanting authenticity. The good news is that Maggie came to know Christ. She explained that what helped her become a Christian was meeting a whole bunch of people who were like Jesus to her. They had a contagious heart for Christ that made an eternal difference in her life because they chose to be genuine. The good news is we don't need a doctorate in theology to reach out to the Maggie's in our lives. We just need hearts that are contagious, hearts that long to be used, hearts that lead us to do what we can for others in the name of Christ. We can pray for others and begin dialogue with others and help point them to the Savior. We can look for ways to serve them that can open the door to spiritual conversation. Like Maggie, there are many more who are looking for you to be authentic. Develop need to a contagious heart.

Next week we will take a look at contagious relationships. Evangelism isn't just about being a door knocker going out cold calling. God has gifted us uniquely to share the gospel in a way that is natural to us and receptive to others.

I would encourage you today to take your 3X5 card with that lists the names of your non-Christian friends and begin to earnestly pray for their salvation. Make it a matter of earnest prayer.

Pray for them

Be available to them

Demonstrate your faith before them

Be authentic with them