

# Of First Importance

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 February 2025

Preacher: Rev. Jonathan Clark

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. You be seated. It's good to be with you all again. Most of you all know who I am, but if you don't, if you're new, welcome. We're really glad you're here today. My name is Jonathan. I am a dear friend of Matthew's.

Actually, Matthew and I went to seminary together. We were roommates together, so I've known Matthew for a very long time, and it's a real treat to come and fill his shoes for a couple of weeks and to examine a really crucial and fun, important topic for us this week.

I currently work as a college pastor. I work with the denomination that Cheyenne Mountain is a part of. It's called Reformed University Fellowship, the campus ministry wing. I work on UCCS mostly, but also on Pikes Peak, and we've just started on Colorado College as well.

I'll share a lot of stories about that over the next coming weeks. It's really great to be with you. I'm married to my wife, Caroline. She's a really talented artist and a really great mother. We have two little girls, Phoebe, who's five, and Molly.

She's 19 months almost, and I grew up here in Colorado, and it's a real treat to be with you today. So the next four weeks, I will be with you this week and then three weeks after, and we will be looking at a topic that's really close to my heart and really close to your session's heart.

[ 1 : 16 ] We're going to be looking at the topic of evangelism, which is how do we share our faith? How do we share our faith? This is something that Matthew and I have been, and a couple other pastors in town have been bopping around, and we've been realizing, like, man, we need to do a better job of equipping our people, the people in the pews, y'all, on how to share your faith.

And so that's what we're going to be doing. This session has graciously invited me to come, and so my hope over the next few weeks is to not necessarily give you a theology of evangelism because everybody knows that they should be doing it, but a lot of the time we get into it and we think, now what do I do?

You know, sometimes we'll, you know, the dog that chases the car catches it and goes, now what? Now what do I do with it, right? And so we'll find ourselves in circumstances where there's an open door for us to share the faith, or we don't even know how to start the conversation.

And fortunately, this is something I do a lot on a college campus, and so I'm going to mostly just share stories of what's worked and maybe some of what hasn't worked and how do we share our faith as Christians today.

And so today we'll be looking at what I think is the starting point. It's a great place for us all to start in this. And so it comes from 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians 15 is an amazing chapter.

[ 2 : 33 ] It's kind of one of the high points of the Bible. It's talking about the resurrection. But in it, Paul lays out something that he says, this is the most important thing that it is to be a Christian. And so I would argue this is where we start.

And for those of you who are maybe here today and you're wondering, oh boy, man, what is this is, what am I doing here? I don't know if I even trust this, and now I just get to get proselytized for 30 minutes. I would challenge you to pay attention to what does this mean for your life?

And for those of us who are Christians, hopefully we can apply it to our, how do we share our faith with others? And so this is 1 Corinthians 15. This is Paul speaking, and he says this. Now I remind, I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you.

Which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the 12.

This is God's word. Would you pray with me? Lord in heaven, thanks that we can worship you today. Thanks that we have a day of rest. Thanks that we have a day of gathering, of singing. Thanks that we have a day where we can hear your word.

[ 3 : 54 ] And we pray that as we look at it now, that you would equip us. That is our big request, that you would send your spirit to equip the saints once more for the work of ministry, and that you would be glorified in it.

And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So I want to spend a little bit of time, just before we start, is to just describe to you, if we were to zoom out to the big, you know, telescopic level of setting the stage of the realities, kind of the missionary realities of the world that we're living in, in Colorado, in the United States.

And the realities are that organized religion, you've probably seen this in the news, organized religion is by and large on the decline in our world. This is just demographically, statistically the fact. There is a rise of what is being called by sociologists, the nuns, N-O-N, nons or nons, nuns. 30% of Americans who would claim no religious affiliation.

They would just say, I'm not a religious person. I don't claim a creed. I don't behave or act religiously. I'm just, I'm not a religious person. And scholars over the next 10 to 15 years believe that 35 to 40 million millennials, that's my generation born between 1982 and 1992-ish or something like that, will leave the faith.

[ 5 : 15 ] This is people who have perhaps grown up in a kind of faith. And so millions, tens of millions are going to, on the trajectories, to be leaving the faith. And then Generation Z, which is the generation that I currently pastor, this is late teenagers to early to mid-20s, they, that is going to be the least Christianized generation in American history.

It's just, this is what's going to happen. Compound that with the reality that Christianity, as an influence in our society, has generally lost the cultural questions.

It's generally lost favor, right? Universities, secular universities, media, government, schooling, the Christian answers are no longer paid attention to, no longer heeded.

And in fact, in a lot of ways, they're viewed with suspicion, they're viewed with antagonism. The Christian vision for life, both the individual life and the questions that we would have or the answers that we would have for social life, how we should live life shared together, it's no longer considered desirable and it's no longer considered good.

Christianity is just like, well, you don't have a good story of what the human person or what the human life is about. And so most of the major questions that younger generations and older generations, frankly, they're built on a, no longer on a Christian view of the world, right?

[ 6 : 37 ] So questions about human purpose, of what the human body is for, of what marriage is, of what babies are for, they're no longer orbiting within thinking about how Christians have historically thought about things, right?

So just less Christians and more skepticism about the Christian faith, right? Next, there's what we could call a privatization of the Christian life that by and large, both Christians and our non-Christian friends believe that if Christianity is true, it's only for your individual personal happiness.

It's not necessarily something that you can, should, might share with other people. It helps, you know, I've heard students say like, Jonathan, I'm glad that Christianity helps you sleep at night, it's just not for me.

It's just not for me right now, right? And that is a piece of a larger system of kind of capitalism, pleasure that's kind of infiltrated the way that we view things, that religion is just basically a calculus of pleasure and pain.

What am I getting out of this? And we treat all of life this way, right? We treat the way we order products off the internet, we treat relationships, we treat restaurants this way. What am I getting out of it? And when we treat religion as a consumption, a product to consume, and it doesn't meet our expectations, we just say, well, I'm just gonna move on with that, right?

[ 7 : 55 ] Maybe if it's really bad, I'll leave a bad Google review, but by and large, it's just, it's not for me. And so for most people, the demands of radical discipleship and of following Jesus, they don't meet that pleasure expectation that as consumers, we would expect, right?

The next thing that's happening in our world is we live in what one philosopher would call the triumph of the therapeutic. The triumph of the therapeutic, which means this. It means that I do in my life what feels good.

I do in my life what feels good, what makes me feel most authentic, what makes me feel like the most true version of myself, and what that means is that the things that are most intrinsic, inner desires of me, that's who I am, and that's how I should live, right?

And the Christian claims about sin, about killing parts of who you are, about self-denial, those feel clumsy, at least, and even oppressive, at most, to who a person is, right?

And lastly, we live in a world that assumes, this could maybe encapsulate all of it, it assumes the doctrine of the day is that I'm my own person. I'm my own person.

[ 9 : 13 ] I get to do what I want to do. I have the right and the power to create my own values, my own identity, my own beliefs, and anyone or anything out there, society, a person, a faith, a God, anyone out there who tells me who I am or what I should believe is a power grab.

They're trying to get power over me. They're trying to manipulate me, right? And so the way I often think about it is the world that we're living in right now, it's kind of the formation of like a super hurricane, right?

So a Category 5 hurricane or an F5 tornado takes dozens of different meteorological events to form, right?

It doesn't just happen on its own. It has to have the right combination of air pressure and water pressure and air humidity and the jet stream has to be just right. And when all of those pieces can come together, you can have a really big storm, a really big, big storm.

And the reality is right now in 2025, we are in such a storm with how it feels to be a Christian. That's just the way it is. And we need to face the reality, right?

[ 10 : 25 ] All of these different forces, the rise up of the nones, the doubt about the Christian narrative and answers, the privatization of the faith, consumption of the faith, view of it as just what I'm getting out of it.

Triumph of the therapeutic, I am my own, has created a super storm in our world. And this is the world that you and I live in and it's the world that you and I are called to share our faith in, right?

This is the world that Jesus does that go and make disciples. This is the world where we are called to evangelize. That's what's happening on this giant level, on this 50,000 level of, and you've felt this.

You have seen this when you look on your Instagram or your Facebook or something like that or you watch the news and you'll see things like the war on Christmas or you'll see the rise of different visions of human sexuality, the rise of the LGBTQ movement.

You'll see this in politics. You've all felt this, right? I'm just trying to describe what it's like. Or you felt the fact that when you talk with your Christian friends or non-Christian friends, there's more of a disconnect. They just don't understand what you're saying.

[ 11 : 29 ] It's harder than it maybe was, especially for those of you who have grown up, who've been here on God's green earth a little longer. It's just different. It's just different, right? And on the other level, just zooming down into life, you all have friends.

I know you do. Neighbors, coworkers, family who you want to be Christians and you're, I don't know how to do this. How do I bring it up in a way that doesn't make them angry with me again?

How do I share this thing that's so dear to me that I would spend every Sunday of my life in? I don't know how to bring it up anymore. So what I want to spend is the next four weeks on how to do this. And I don't share any of this big picture stuff to scare you. And I don't do it too, I mean, it is what it is, right? But actually, the good news is actually better than the bad news. We could spend a lot of time on the good news.

Pieces of the good news are that the Christian faith is on the rise faster than it is on the decline in the rest of the world. Christianity in the global church is exploding in Africa and South America and Asia.

[ 12 : 31 ] it is growing at exponential rates. It is exponentially expanding in Africa. In fact, they're beginning to send missionaries here. They're beginning to send missionaries to us and they encounter us and they say, what are you doing?

You said, what is this, right? So the global church is in a really good place. Here it's on the decline, but there's really good news in that. Other piece of the good news is, and this is one of my favorite pieces of the good news, is that the rejection of the gospel over the last, I don't know, 70 years, it's beginning to bear fruit, particularly in the lives of my generation and younger, and they're miserable.

They're really miserable, and I'm going to share some stories about that. And we're getting to tell them, I mean, I'll often ask students, they'll talk to me about how depressed or anxious, and I'll just say, how's it working out for you not being a Christian?

It's clearly not working very well. You're lonely, you're isolated, you hate yourself, you're anxious. What if it didn't have to be that way, right? So there are levels of receptivity that I think are new and unparalleled.

And so this is an exciting, I mean, for me, I don't know, for me as a pastor of college students, I love my job because I get to share the gospel three or four times a week, and students are interested, right? And I would bet that there's a level of interest, curiosity, even in your friends, right?

[13:47] So the good news is that there's a level of receptivity even as there's decline. And then the last news, and this is the best news, is that Jesus has proven himself more and more over this, you know, he's proven himself very comfortable in stormy seas.

If our cultural moment is a F5 tornado or a category 5 hurricane, we can go and say Jesus has been very comfortable with culturally and literally stormy seas, right?

And he has proven over and over again that he has and will save his own, and he will use us in that, right? So we have total confidence that God will work, and at the same time, we must face the missionary realities of 2025, face the realities of the ways that we have done evangelism the last few decades will probably not work the ways that we have seen them work in the past, and so we need to innovate.

Not the message, but how we do it. We need to face the realities that door-to-door evangelism not only doesn't work but actually turns people away in the same way that if somebody knocks on your door and says, would you like to buy this?

We go, not right now. That's the feeling that people feel when door-to-door evangelism happens. It used to work great, right? The reality that handing out tracts and even handing out Bibles is not effective anymore.

[15:08] It only turns people away, right? We have to know that the reality that people do not bring in Christian worldview things, Christian assumptions like Jesus is God or God's judgment like things that we could 50 years ago.

I remember I was talking with a student last year. She knows absolutely nothing about Christianity, and she said, hey, what's this thing called the Trinity? I've never heard of it before, and I just heard of it last week.

And I was, here's a girl who's 20 years old and has never even heard of the Trinity, right? We cannot just assume these things anymore like we could. We must adapt.

So a few years ago, I read this really great book about leadership. It's a book called Team of Teams. It's by General Stanley McChrystal. And McChrystal was the general of the U.S., of the whole U.S., I don't know, military.

I'm not a soldier. You guys can ask Andy, but he was in charge of it. But he was in general in charge of defeating the insurgencies of ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the mid-2000s. And he looked at the structure of the U.S. military and said, hey, we are built, the U.S. military is built right now to defeat a large line of tanks that slammed towards us in like a Cold War scenario.

[16:20] And he says, what we're fighting now is these cellular, highly mobile, highly adaptable terrorist insurgents like ISIS. And we cannot just slam tanks into them the way that we used to.

And he says, if we're going to defeat them, we must adapt. We must become ready to fight the enemy that we have to fight, right? And now I hesitate to use this story because I don't want to equate evangelism with military warfare.

Do not hear me say that. I do want you to think about evangelism as a thing that must be adapted. Evangelism is something that we take the timeless message in which we will look at in just a minute and apply it in ways that are relevant and hearable to our audience.

We must approach evangelism with new eyes, new techniques. So that's what I'm hoping to share with you over the next few weeks. So my goal over the next four weeks, first and foremost, is to equip you with words to say about evangelism, of you share your faith.

And if you have things that you're, questions that you're thinking about, come and talk to me. I'm writing these this week and over the next few weeks and I will think about it and I'll come and speak to them. So if you hear something today and you say, Jonathan, think about this.

[17:37] I'd love to hear from you and we can have a dialogue about it. We can ask questions together. I do evangelism probably three to four times a week. I meet with three or four

non-Christian students and I want to share what's working.

I don't want to spend time over the next four weeks doing a theology of evangelism. We're basically trying to guilt you and to say, here's why you need to share your faith. If you're a Christian, you know you're called to share your faith and you want to, but you run into brick walls, culturally, even vocabulary, words to say.

I want to look at how you share it, what words you say. Next week, we're going to look at how do you start a spiritual conversation because I know that's ridiculously challenging. So we'll look at that next week.

My suspicion is that you have a nagging guilt that you should be, but you don't know how. So that's what we're going to look at. That's what we're going to look at, right? So let's dig into what our text says to here.

I want us to see that this passage shows us what and how to prioritize the most important thing that is the Christian faith, which is the person and the work of Jesus Christ. That's what we preach.

[18:42] That's what we proclaim is the person and the work of Jesus Christ. And start with this.

What is the Christian faith about? What is the Christian faith about? Well, the Christian faith is about the wonderful works of God to reconcile all things to himself.

We believe as Christians that God has done everything necessary to fix, that is reconcile, our broken world back to the way that he created it and to the way that we intuitively know it should work.

So 1 Corinthians 1 says it this way. He has transferred us. This is Christ has transferred us from the domain of darkness. He's delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption of forgiveness and sins.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross.

We believe in a God, the only God, who comes to earth, becomes God and man at the same time, lives the perfect life, dies the perfect death to make the world the way we hope it should be, the way we know it should be.

[19:58] It is trust in the God who redeems and reconciles creation through the saving work that is the death and resurrection of his Son. And that's what Paul says to this church when he comes to them, right?

Look what he says to them. Verse 3, I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received. So this is the most important thing of first importance, top priority stuff right here.

What is it? That Christ died for our sins. That Christ died for our sins. Paul here says that is what of first importance, the thing that is the most crucial thing that we believe truth claim that we have is that there was a man named Jesus who was also God and he died for human sins.

And he says that he received it from the authoritative witnesses, that is the apostles, the people who saw it and understood what it meant and now he tells them to us what it is.

It is the simplicity of the death and resurrection of Jesus, of first importance, right? Now the resurrection in this text, it tells us what this is, it tells us what it is. It tells us it's two things.

[21:12] It's an event with meaning. It's an event with meaning. Now some things can happen in, let's look at that, an event with meaning. It's something that happened in human history and it means something, right?

So think about this. We can all have events that don't really have a lot of meaning. Things that happen in our life that weren't particularly meaningful. I put this jacket on this morning. It happened in human space, time, and history, right?

It's an event or I ate an omelet for breakfast. It's an event but it didn't really mean a lot, right?

Something but not a lot. On the other hand, we can have things that are non-historical but have a ton of meaning, right?

So I'm a huge Lord of the Rings fan. You read the Lord of the Rings and you can derive a ton of lessons and meanings about life from this, of the struggle, of good versus evil, of loyalty, of friendship.

But it's not historical. It didn't actually happen as much as I really wish Lord of the Rings did. It didn't. It didn't happen, right? The resurrection, Paul tells us, is an event that means something.

[22:17] It's like the Declaration of Independence. The event was July 4th and the meaning is the start of the United States of America. The event, Paul says, is the resurrection.

The God-man died on a hill outside of Jerusalem and then came back to life. Our faith starts with the conviction that that happened around 35 AD.

In fact, we actually, we assent to that every time we say the Apostles' Creed, right? We say this. There's a line that says, it says, he suffered under Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate, we know, is a historical figure.

Everybody acknowledges that this man, Pontius Pilate, really existed, right? It's an, and nobody doubts that. Nobody doubts the history of Pontius Pilate. We say Jesus Christ suffered under, it happened, right?

But second, it's an event with meaning and the text tells us this. It tells us what the meaning is. It says that Christ died, there's the event, for our sins in accordance with Scriptures. The Scripture becomes the interpretive lens.

[ 23 : 23 ] It becomes the tool that we use to interpret the event. For our sins in accordance with Scriptures. And so the Scripture is this absolutely kaleidoscopic and beautiful meaning of what the event is.

To save the world from sin, to deliver us out of bondage, to defeat dark powers of Satan and everything else around us. It is the event of what it means.

And so the Bible is this interpretation. It says it twice in our text. It says that he was raised on the third day. There's event again in accordance with Scripture.

There's the meaning. And it's a whole list of things to estone from sin, to propitiate the Father's wrath, to triumph over demonic forces. And here's the point. This is where it starts to get to evangelism.

If that didn't happen, then Christianity is worthless. If that event and that meaning didn't happen, then our faith is utterly worthless.

[ 24 : 26 ] If the resurrection didn't happen, then Paul says it's one of two things. It's either a giant deception. Verse 15, he says, we are found to be misrepresenting God. We are lying about who God is if it didn't happen.

Or it's a pitiful delusion. Verse 19 says that if the resurrection didn't happen, we are of all men most to be pitied. So the resurrection, the event with meaning, everything in the Christian faith hinges on that.

It is of first importance. Perhaps you've heard of C.S. Lewis' Lord liar lunatic argument that he lays out in mere Christianity. He says that either Jesus was a liar, he thought he was God, but he, I'm sorry, he knew he wasn't God and he told everybody he was and so he was just lying, which makes him a horrible person.

Or he thought he was God and he wasn't and he was just delusional, so he's an absolute lunatic. Or Jesus actually is who he claimed he is, which is God, right? But it's the same idea here.

The resurrection makes Christianity either the biggest lie that has ever fooled the most people in human history or the most pitiful delusion or the best hope for our lives and our world.

[ 25 : 41 ] Those are the stakes. That's what it is, right? And if we're wrong on this, we're either liars or idiots. And if we're right on this, then we offer the best hope for our world and the best hope for our friends' lives.

That's what it is, right? Now, how does this apply to evangelism? How does this apply to evangelism? Well, 1 Corinthians 15 gives us a shortcut to evangelism.

A shortcut. Let me try and explain it to you. I'm going to try this with two stories. So a few months ago, I met a student on campus and we'll say her name is Jen and Jen is a lesbian. And as you can imagine, she meets me, a Christian minister, and all of a sudden, all of her defenses go up.

And she's like, it took me everything I could to try to get her to meet with me and to talk with me.

She's just like, I don't want to. And she knows nothing about Christianity. She's currently in a romantic relationship with another woman.

And she's heard that Christians don't like her because of her sexuality, because she's a lesbian.

And she's had several Christians and one pastor tell her that she needs to be straight to follow God.

[ 26 : 45 ] And she's totally ignorant of our faith, but she has at least a bad taste in her mouth for Christians. And frankly, that describes a lot of people in our town. You probably have friends in this camp or friends who experience this.

And she knew that she was a pastor and she agreed to meet with me. And so I started asking her questions. You know, she's like, how'd you come to school? How did you come to, what are you

studying? Tell me about your girlfriend. All these things.

So then my wife and I have her over for dinner. And I told her, I was like, hey, you know what? I personally hold the historic and orthodox view of gender and sexuality, but I really like hanging out with you.

And you're always welcome in my home. And we don't have to talk about gender and sexuality all the time, right? And so we're just building our friendship. And eventually, she comes to me and she says, so Jonathan, why does Christianity not like gay people?

Why does Christianity not like gay people? And I said, hey, I've been waiting for that question. I've been waiting for that question. I'm really glad you asked it. And you deserve a careful and thoughtful answer. And I can give you a careful and thoughtful answer.

[ 27 : 46 ] But can we sideline that for now and talk about what I think is the most important thing about the Christian faith? Can we sideline that for now? Because you deserve to know what I think.

But if we're going to go there, can we start at the beginning? And we looked at 1 Corinthians 15. And I said this, I said, Jen, if I'm wrong on this, 1 Corinthians 15 of first importance, then it really doesn't matter what you do with your sexuality.

It really doesn't matter because if I'm wrong on this point, then I'm either lying to you or I'm deluded. But if I'm right on this, then we need to pay attention and everything else falls into place.

If the resurrection did happen, it means that Jesus is God, that he died and rose again because he loves you and he's your Lord. And you need to follow him with all of your life.

And if you're a non-Christian here today, that's the challenge before you is to ask, is it possible that a man named Jesus Christ was also God and he died and came back to life three days later?

[ 28 : 54 ] Is it possible? I think it is. I think it is. So I'm in this process with her. And here's what's amazing with Jen is we got to sidestep the hot issue.

The thing that she was ready to blow up at me, the thing that she was ready to say, I'm never talking to you again. I was like, hey, this is such an important thing to you. Can we sideline it for now and talk about this?

And she was like, yeah. She's willing to do that. Second story, I'm currently teaching a class at UCCS in political theology and there's three women in this class who are queer.

And they're fascinated why a Presbyterian minister will teach in political theology and yet here I am. And eventually, one of these girls, she grew up as super Christian in the charismatic tradition and has since left the faith. And she's also, yeah, she's a lesbian and she came to me after class and she said, Jonathan, what if you're wrong about Christianity?

Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought that you're wrong? And I said, yeah, I might be. I might be, right? And if I am, then again, Christianity is the biggest lie in the world and it's the biggest delusion that's fooled all the people in the world.

[ 30 : 00 ] But I said, I don't think I am. Of course, I don't think I am. But I think that there is really persuasive evidence historically, theologically, every kind of evidence that you can have to say that I think this actually happened.

And she looked sideways at me and she said, Jonathan, you're the first person I've ever met that said he might, the first Christian I've ever met that said he might be wrong. I've never heard that before. And that's the tool that 1 Corinthians 15 offers you.

It offers you the ability to sideline the hot topics and the red flag issues that your friends want to bring up. Politics and faith, sexuality, environment, all the things that they want to attack you with and you say, look, those are so important issues.

And I frankly can't defend all of them right now on it. But I can defend one thing. And it is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if that's wrong, then I'm wrong.

But if I'm right, then this is the hope of the world, right? And it places you in a place where you can be humble and confident at the same time. Say, I might be wrong here. If I am, you don't have to pay attention to me.

[ 31 : 10 ] But if I'm not, this is the hope for the world and you need to pay attention. Here's the other blessing out of this, particularly for our younger generation. The younger generation has far less hangups with the possibility of a bodily resurrection than older generations did.

Older generations, our baby boomer friends, some of our Gen Xs say, well, that's physically impossible. How could that be? A dead person coming back to life. My generation and Gen Z are much more willing to say, yeah, it could happen.

Maybe it happened, right? They don't get stuck up on the scientific claim of it as much as older generations. Much more open to the possibility of it, right? So you just say, let's let it hang in the air for a minute and let's talk through it.

And they'll go, and I've not once had anybody say no. They're always, I've done this hundreds of times, saying, sure, let's talk about it. And good things have come from it.

New Christians have come from it, right? So what are my tips? How do we do this? First and foremost, like I'm doing with Gen, you must build trust. You must build trust with your friends who are not Christians yet.

[ 32 : 17 ] Trust is the most persuasive tool that you have. I've recently started a small group with some women from Colorado College. Colorado College, if you know anything about it, is an incredibly progressive school.

And it is very, very non-Christian. And for all, for various reasons, these five women who are coming to this small group in my house have a very bad taste in their mouth for religion. They, it took everything within us, my wife and I, to try and tease them to come to a pastor's house and to have a conversation about spirituality.

And we had to start at the very beginning of very simple, of just saying like, come to our house and eat dinner with us. No agenda, no talking about anything, just come eat our food. And they were willing to do that, right?

People are weary of, are wary and weary of conversion attempts. They hate them and they see through it. And they say, I don't want to be a part of that, right? But they're also desperately lonely and they're looking for meaning in their life.

And so if you can offer friendship and build trust, then I have found, almost without fail, that they are willing to begin talking with you, right? So they will view evangelism poorly done the way that we would view door-to-door sales or a pyramid scheme.

[ 33 : 27 ] But they will view trust and they will view, honestly, food with a lot of, I mean, they'll pay you back in dividends, right? So you, you know, how do you build the trust?

The best thing I know is to eat together, right? So there's this great book by Rosaria Butterfield who was a lesbian professor at, you know, in an Ivy League school and this pastor invites her over for dinner for months and they eat together.

Something, I always say this, something magical happens, something spiritual happens when you eat together with people. It's so much more than the sum of its parts. What are the parts where we're sticking food into us to maintain our biological life?

But so much more happens when you eat together. You connect and you laugh and you share life and you talk about your day. So the best thing you can do to build trust is to tell your neighbor, hey, you know, we don't really know each other.

You want to come over for dinner sometime? Or to tell your coworker, we talk about water cooler stuff all the time but maybe we could, you want to come over for a cookout? That could be great, right? They'll often do it because they're lonely.

[ 34 : 33 ] Then you begin to ask questions about their lives and you probe for deeper things. You'll say things like, you know, I know you're a lawyer but tell me what attracted you to law school. What is it about law school that you wanted to do? And you'll find in there, we'll talk about this next week, there's going to be a kernel of something that they value deeply and you can grab onto that.

You can turn it into some sort of thing about the gospel. Come back next week. You have to sincerely care about them, not for the sake of just getting to evangelism but because you truly care about them, right?

They have to know that I love you. I'm in your corner. I don't just want to make another notch in my belt of a convert with you. I want you to be my friend. I want you to know that I'm in your corner in all of life.

Second piece of this is we can and should be quick to acknowledge the failures of Christians because one of the first things particularly that younger generations will do is they will weaponize the systemic and historical failures of the Christian faith and they'll say and most of them have experienced something from that, right?

In fact, everyone who I've ever met who's gay, who's LGBT says I got kicked out of a church because of this, right? So we just need to acknowledge that and say, you know, they'll say I go to a church and when X happened I quit going or a pastor did this to me or a group of Christians did this to me and we need to acknowledge the reality to them that Christians can do really painful things,

right?

[ 35 : 56 ] And so one of the things that I'll say when I'm trying to gather students for RUF is I'll say, hey, we want to be the Christian group that can acknowledge the reality of spiritual abuse and they go, what?

Spiritual abuse? You think that happens? And I say, of course it does. Jesus derides and criticizes the Pharisees repeatedly for being bad shepherds, for being pastors who did not care well for them. Of course it can happen. But then I would say, but if you, would you hold that same standard of rejecting something because of one bad apple?

Would you reject the whole thing? You wouldn't hold that standard in any other area of your life. If you went to a Thai restaurant and got sick from it, you wouldn't say, well, I guess all Thai food is bad. Of course not, right?

We wouldn't hold that standard to other areas of our lives. And beside that, the Christian faith has openly and often said that humans are sinners. That's the point. I will, be more than willing to say that Christians will do hurtful things, but I will stand my ground on a God who saves all of us.

[ 37 : 02 ] So acknowledge freely, yeah, Christians could do really hurtful things too. I'm so sorry that happened. I'm so sorry that happened. Would you be interested in maybe looking past that for a minute, setting that aside and looking at a piece of 1 Corinthians 15 with me?

And they'll say yes. I haven't had them. I've literally never had someone say no to this. Next, acknowledge the reality of hot topics, but don't feel pressured to spend all your time there, right? Man, you nailed it. You nailed it. Sexuality is a really hot topic in our day. Like the Christian sexual ethic, it's really, really hard. And that's the big one, and we're going to have to talk about that eventually.

But I think the Christian faith has a really satisfying answer. Can we sideline that for now? Can we just sideline that for now? And can I look at 1 Corinthians 15 with you?

If I'm wrong on that, on this, then I can be wrong on the, you know, then we can talk about. So acknowledge the reality of like, man, yeah, church and politics is icky. It's really icky right now. And it's not the first thing that I believe.

[ 38 : 08 ] The thing of first importance that I believe is that Christ died for our sins and was raised for our, and was raised on the third day in accordance with scriptures. That's what we do.

Now, the most important thing you can do, and this is a part of building trust, the most important goal when sharing your faith, especially in the first few moments, you have seconds to do this, is to get to the next conversation.

That is all you have to do, is get to the next conversation. I met a girl on campus who, she introduced, I met her through tabling where we set up a table and she introduced me to one of her friends and her friends had been dreadfully hurt by the church and she wanted nothing to do with, and so her friend meets me and says, hey, this is my pastor and she looks me up and says, I don't expletive mess with pastors.

And I was like, okay. I didn't know what to say. Like, she just, she just cursed me out right then and there and I said, okay, well, can I buy you a coffee? Like, it's just, you know, she just, and then she told me, I'm a lesbian, you don't want to hang out with me.

And I said, no, I do. I really want to buy you a coffee. And she stopped and then she's still trying to, I met with her earlier this week, she's still trying to get me to reject her and I will not do it.

[ 39 : 35 ] I will not do it. And the only thing I'm trying to do with this gal right now is get her to meet with me again. That's your only goal is to just get to the next conversation to build trust to where you can, so they trust you and they know that you're in their corner.

My mentor says that for a thoroughly secular person or for somebody who has a really bad taste in their mouth, it can take five years to persuade them of Christianity. Hundreds of conversations.

This will not happen overnight. There's no pressure on you to defend the entire history of the Christian faith or to defend the entire doctrine of the Christian religion.

There's great power in saying, that's a really good question. I don't know the answer to it, but someone else does and I'll get back to you. Right? And then you call your session or you call Matthew and you say, hey, they asked this question.

I didn't know the answer. And they can find the answer, right? So if somebody asks you a question, you say, oh no, you know, is the Christian faith defeated? No, it's not. You just don't know the answer right now.

[ 40 : 37 ] We can figure it out. You just say, that's a great question. Can we meet for coffee again in a month and I'll get back to you? They will say yes. I've never had them say no. Right? The goal is to build trust to get to the next conversation, to get to Christ and him crucified.

Do not win the argument, but lose the person. Be the person who says, who they say of you, man, I've never met a Christian who was this gentle, but also this convicted, who actually cares about my life, doesn't just want to persuade me to come to his side.

It's simple as that, honestly. And it's really fun. At least I love it. It's really amazing. And I think you'll find that your non-Christian friends, it's a relief.

They actually enjoy it. I said this before, I do this weekly. And they really enjoy it. And I'm in the process with maybe 20 students right now and a couple of professors at UCCS of doing this. And nobody thinks, I always tell people, I want to be the campus ministry that people are glad it's on campus. And I've had so many people say, Jonathan, we're glad you're here. We disagree with you about sexuality, but we're really glad you're here.

[ 41 : 51 ] I said, great. Let's meet again next week. And they'll do it, right? And the Lord works in that. So go to 1 Corinthians 15. Evangelism's tough.

It always has been tough. But it's not impossible. Your call, my call, is to point others to Jesus. And despite the storm of culture and of pain and abuse, it's to show them the nerve center of what you believe, which is Christ and him crucified.

Point them to Jesus, and your task is done. And the Holy Spirit will do the rest. Be the safe person, the Christian that they probably have not met before, who they can meet with and not be preached at, but have a conversation with.

And the Lord will work in that. One of my favorite quotes comes from G.K. Chesterton. He says it best. He says, Christianity has died a series of revolutions. Sorry, Christianity has had a series of revolutions.

And in each one of them, Christianity has died. Christianity has died many times and risen again, for it has a God who knew his way out of the grave. It's different times now sharing our faith than maybe it ever has been in human history.

[ 43 : 03 ] There's no doubt about it. But this isn't new ground in a lot of other ways. Christianity is a faith who has died, that has died many times and risen many times, for it's a God who knew his way out of the grave.

Let me pray for us. Lord, first and foremost, thank you that you are the God who saves us. You are the God who does inject yourself into our world of sin and brokenness to bear the shame and guilt on the cross for us and to save us from ourselves and from the world and the flesh and the devil which war against us.

May that truth be sweet to us and may it be so sweet that we can't help but share it with our friends. Give us wisdom. Give us words. We pray for the person that each one of us is thinking through that if and as we have this conversation in the coming weeks that you would be working in them so that they may have the hope and the peace and the joy and the assurance that you have given to us and we will give you the glory.

It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen. Let's stand and sing our final hymn.