

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

TELL THE STORY | SUMMER ROAD TRIP

KYLE RILEY | JULY 23, 2023

Video

My name is Kara and I serve in the fifth and sixth grade room for Kids' Ministry. I want to contribute to the process of building a relationship with the kids that would make them want to come. I also wanted to be a consistent leader so that I could be a representation in the classroom where kids could see leaders who also look like them.

Traders Point is a very welcoming church, a very open church, and I wanted to show that we are for everybody. Not only are we just here sitting in the seats of the sanctuary, but we're also here serving. And there is a place for everybody.

The fifth and sixth graders are amazing. I get to watch them go into middle school, so I get to watch them transition into being a little bit more mature. They get to go into their teens now.

They have questions. They want to know answers. They are actually engaging and are intentional about building relationships with God. Man, there are some kids who know more than me.

I think what people get stuck on is that they don't know the answers. You don't have to know the answers. Find out together because now this is contributing to your growth too. You're here to teach, but that doesn't mean that you're not also here to learn. You just need someone to show up. We might be the only person who asks them how they are doing. They just want someone to care. And everything else, you can learn together.

I wasn't really sure in the beginning if I was going to make a difference. Being invested and being consistent, you're not always going to see an immediate result. I've have had plenty of kids where for months I said, "Hey, how are you?" And I got a, "Fine." Sometimes they will engage, sometimes they won't.

But after a while of being consistent with my hellos and checking in with people and being intentional with getting to know them better, the relationships did start to blossom and start to form. Before I knew it kids would come in and they would be looking for me. Or kids would come in and they would be excited to share what happened that week. The consistency that I committed myself to, the showing up every Sunday and being with them has now resulted in this beautiful relationship built on trust and love.

In the process of doing all of those things, I get to tell you about God. I get to show up for you and I get to also show you how God is showing up.

End Video



Kyle

Alright. Hey, can we celebrate Kara? At all of our campuses celebrate her as well as all of the people who serve and make a difference. And we get to hear, not just the how, but the why they make a difference and why it's important to them. I'm so grateful for everybody who steps in and serves around here.

And we know that there are a few people, many people, who probably are desiring to step in and make a difference in some way. So, at each of one of our campuses, out in the lobby, we have Serve tables there. We would love for you to stop by there on your way out—connect with us and we'd love to help you take your next step in getting connected to serve as well. Alright?

Well, as I said, my name is Kyle. I get to serve as the Downtown campus pastor. I am very excited to be here with each and every one of you today. And before we jump in, I want to let you guys in on something that is happening in about a week.

Twice a year, as a staff, we engage in a week of prayer and fasting. We've been doing this for the last couple of years now. And all it is is us looking ahead toward this next season that is coming. And we are saying, "God, we never want to get ahead of You. God, we want to stay submissive to who You are and where You are leading us. We want to stay humble in the process so there is this moment of repentance and confession in that.

And then we begin praying that God would just touch each and every one of our ministries. That He would begin reaching people in our city who don't know Jesus and He would just allow us to be a part of what He is already around us.

As we approach that here in the next week, beginning at the end of July in fact, Aaron and a few of the other leaders here in our church said, "I would love for us to invite the entire church into this." We get to begin praying toward what God is going to do in this next season, we believe that He is going to do exceedingly and abundantly beyond anything that we could ask for or imagine. And we get to rally around that together.

Here's what that looks like. Beginning on July 31 we're going to begin a week of prayer and fasting. There are probably a lot of questions and details that you are wondering about and we have provided a space for you to learn all about that. You can go to tpcc.org/prayerandfasting. So mark that down, write it down, save it as a bookmark on your phone and then visit that because all of the details you need to know about that are going to be there.

One of the highlights of that that I'm excited about is every day we're going to pray at the same time as a church no matter where you are. It's going to be around lunch time and we would love for you to carve out some time in your day and just begin praying. We're going to be praying over different areas of our church, of our city, and really inviting God into what it is that we are seeking Him to do.



So, I can't wait for that. I don't know if you guys are excited about that, but it's going to be a very, very powerful time. Can we just celebrate all of that—what God is going to do ahead of time?

If you're just now joining us we are in a series called Summer Road Trip. And it is exciting. I am excited because it reminded me of some of the road trips that I have been on. A lot of them have been road trips where they were very memorable. The things that happened that we remember... One of the trips that I remember taking, that is memorable to me, is the very first trip I took with my family, my wife, and my kids.

We have three of them, Bri and I. They are all girls so pray for me. At the time (this was last year) last summer they were six, four, and six months. So... Oh, somebody said, "Ooh." Yeah we had the bright idea of, "Let's take tiny humans down to Atlanta—eight hours of them not being able to control their bladder or feed themselves. It will be fine."

But I said, "I'm going to out smart them. That's what I'm going to do. We're going to leave for Atlanta at bed time." Right? So I'm like, "We're going leave. They are going to be sleeping already. They are going to sleep through the night. It's going to be great. And as I'm pulling into the parking lot of the hotel, they are going to wake up bright eyed and bushy tailed." That didn't happen at all. They woke up halfway through the trip asking for iPads, Chick-fil-A, and public restrooms.

But it was a great time. We had a remarkable time as a family. These are a few pictures of us. This is us pulling into the parking lot of Chick-fil-A, very excited as you can see. We went to the Georgia Aquarium, which was phenomenal and my kids got to experience some remarkable things.

The highlight of the trip, though, for me actually happened at our hotel pool. It's what solidified for me that my kids are PKs, pastor's kids. Because I look over and out of nowhere I see my oldest daughter washing away the sins of her younger sister, nearly drowning her. She had a vest on and she was not going down. But she said, "You're going down in Jesus' name." It was fine. She lived. We almost got to see if the baptism worked since she about drowned her.

I think a lot of us have trips that we've taken and what makes them memorable are the experiences. Right? The things that we got to do while on the trip. The moments where we laughed uncontrollably or cried uncontrollably when things didn't go so well. You almost got lost because you didn't listen to your wife with directions—hypothetically. We all have these experiences and they make the trip memorable.

I would argue that one of the best things about taking a trip isn't just the experiences that we have, but it's getting to tell the story of the trip. When people ask you when you get back, how was so and so? How was the trip? And you get to tell them the story.

And what we've been doing in this series is we've been looking at a guy by the name of Paul who is taking some trips. He takes three very, very important trips. On each of these trips he has stops along the way and he's telling people a story. He's telling people



the story, actually, about a trip that happened early on in his life. It's a story about something that happened that was very memorable for him. And he's telling the story to anybody who will listen.

Paul, who was a very religious leader, actually hated Christians at one point in his life. And he was doing everything that he could to stop them from spreading the message of Jesus. So he is taking this trip from Jerusalem to the small town called Damascus and he's getting ready to arrest some Christians, have them thrown in jail.

In the middle of that trip he has an encounter with Jesus and it changes everything about his life. He becomes a new person and he has a new purpose. You can read about it in Acts, chapter 9 later. Paul becomes one of the most prominent leaders of this movement, the very movement that he was trying to stop. And he spends the rest of his life telling the story of Jesus. And that's what we get to do in this series.

Today we're going to be in Acts, chapter 17. If you have a Bible or a device with a Bible on it go ahead and flip or scroll there. We're going to be in Acts, 17—the latter half of it.

And to give context, last week we saw that Paul made his way to two towns, one is called Thessalonica and the other is Berea. And Paul and his squad got run out of both of those towns. So what Paul's friends say is, "Hey, Paul. Go ahead to the next town. Go ahead to Athens. And we're going to catch up with you later." That's where we are going to pick up, verse 16 of chapter 17. While Paul was waiting for his friends, this is what happened. Verse 16 says:

"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there."
Acts 17:16-17 (NLT)

We're going to pause right there and unpack this a little bit. Paul is waiting for his friends. My man decides to do a little bit of sightseeing. Athens was a vibrant, eclectic city that had a lot to offer. So Paul was like, "Okay, I'm going to go out and I'm going to hit the town."

He is in this beautiful, beautiful city that has a lot of rich history and is like one of the cultural and intellectual centers of the world. I mean, he's walking in some of the very streets that philosophers like Plato and Aristotle likely walked at one point.

The crazy thing is that as he is doing that he isn't even remotely concerned... All that he can focus on is the fact that there are all of these different shrines that existed around the city of Athens. Everywhere he looks there are these different temples and altars that have been erected and built to honor all of the gods that the Greek people worshipped.

And there were a lot of gods—hundreds and hundreds of gods that they worshipped. There's even this quote, an ancient quote, that said that in Athens there are more gods than men. The city of Athens, itself, was named after the goddess Athena.



So Paul is seeing this and I don't know if you caught his response. But it says that he was deeply troubled. He's looking at all of these different shrines and altars that they have built to these gods, and he's deeply troubled. He is grieved in his heart. There was this sudden emotion that was solicited within him because of these false gods that these people were looking at and worshipping. And he was so sorrowful and grieved and broken over that.

As I was reading I was like, "Man, that's inspiring that Paul is doing all of that, and that he felt that way in response to all of the idolatry that was taking place." It was almost like in that moment that I was feeling that, that the Holy Spirit just kind of subtly whispered to me, "Kyle, do you feel that way?"

"Kyle, as you look out into the city and you see all of these different things that people are worshipping, yes, it's not necessarily temples and it's not necessarily these monuments dedicated to gods that people are serving, but there are gods that people are serving outside of Me. Some of the very gods that at one point in time, Kyle, you used to worship—gods of sex and money and power. Kyle, do you feel the same way?"

"Kyle, do you know that there are people who are chasing after all of these things trying to attain fulfillment, but it's fleeting and it's momentary. And all along here I'm trying to have this relationship with them. Kyle, do you see the city? Do you see the gods that all of these people are worshipping? Do you care? Do you care enough to do something about it?"

Those were convicting and sobering thoughts that God placed on my mind. But I was encouraged as I continued to read because Paul, he doesn't allow that internal emotion to grieve him so that he doesn't do anything about it. He actually moves into action.

As we read, we see that he gets to interact with all of these people. He went to the synagogue and had a conversation with the people there. But he also went out into the marketplace and he had a conversation with people out in the marketplace.

I love that. I love it because Paul was reminded of the mission that he was on. The emotions that he felt, the grievances that he had, they reminded him of the mission that God had given him. The same is true for us. Jesus has given us a mission. And that's one of the things that we can take away. If you're taking notes, I want you to write this down:

JESUS ESTABLISHES OUR MISSION

Jesus establishes our mission. And we learned about that last week. Pastor Bart reminded us of what that mission actually is. It comes out of Matthew 28 where Jesus says, "All authority has been given to Me now go. Go and make disciples, baptizing them, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." That is the mission that we have inherited and we are to look out and to see that the harvest is ripe for that mission.



But, similarly, I see this as we look out into the city, we can be grieved over it—look out at our communities and be grieved over them. But there is another thing that I felt like God was saying to me in this moment too.

He was saying, “Kyle, don’t forget first to look inwardly.” Because our own hearts can be cities of idols, our own hearts can be drawn away from the true God and we begin to worship things outside of God, looking to them to bring us momentary pleasure.

So God said, “Hey first, I need you to do the hard work that is in your own heart, submit that to Me, do the confession and repentance to Me, and then allow that to move you to this awareness of how people are looking for Me but they don’t even know that they are looking for Me. Let that set you on mission.”

So we, like Paul, have this opportunity as we feel that brokenness in our own hearts to then take that to other people and enter into relationships. Have conversations, real conversations, with real people—you don’t get into arguments on the comment section of social media. Social media has its place, but enter into real conversations with real people. And we get to live out that mission with grace and humility and love.

So, I would love for us to keep reading because Paul goes in depth about what this actually looks like, to have these types of conversations as he enters into the marketplace. Look at what happens in verse 18. It says:

“He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.” Look at this. “When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection,” hold onto that, “they said, ‘What’s this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he’s picked up?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods.’” Acts 17:18 (NLT)

So, I don’t have time to go into the depth of these philosophies, nor do I want to pretend to have the intellect and the intelligence to be able to do so. But I will kind of break down what we see here.

The Epicureans believed that there was a god who existed, but he didn’t really involve himself in humanity. So their logic was, “Okay, if death is the final end, and there is no judgment after that, then our main pursuit while we are here in this life is pleasure. We’re going to live it up. We’re going to pursue pleasure to the nth degree and nothing else actually matters.”

The Stoics, on the other hand, their thing was that they were going to put logic over emotions. And they found tremendous nobility and value in being able to go through life with no emotional response to the hardships of life. So if they could get through life and the things that are happening to them, but they are not emotionally responding to them, then that was noble to them. That was what life was all about.

As I was reading that, I was reminded that both of those philosophies are very much alive and well today. We may not call them Epicureanism or Stoicism but we experience

them. Many people experience that. Many people are saying that pleasure is the ultimate thing in life, “I only have one life to live so I’m going to live it up.”

And you have other people who may be going through really hard things right now, people right here in this church. Maybe it’s a relational thing: it’s a marriage, a divorce, a job loss, it’s financial issues and they are saying, “You know what? If I can get through this and I can stuff all of the emotions down, if I can not let anybody in, if I can show that I’m tough and I can forge through this, then that’s what is most important.”

We see Paul enter into a conversation with these two trains of thought. He actually offers a third way. And it’s brilliant. I love it. Paul enters in to a conversation with these two camps of people and he says, “Hey, let me tell you a story. Let me tell you about Jesus and the resurrection. Let me tell you that there is this man who left heaven, this man who came to earth.

“Let me tell you that there is this man who lived a perfect and sinless life. And do you know what that perfect and sinless life got Him? It got Him nailed to a cross. And on that cross He sacrificed Himself and atoned for each and every one of your sins. The sins that separated you from your heavenly Father.

“And this man, Jesus, was taken down from a cross and He was put into a grave. And guess what? This man, Jesus, He wasn’t just some good moral teacher. This man, Jesus, He wasn’t just another prophet or some good person who lived out and taught all of these great values. No, this man, Jesus, claimed to be God and then He proved His claim by rising from the grave three days later, restoring your relationship with your heavenly Father.

“And now you get to partake in the peace and the hope and the grace that God has designed for you to have this entire time. Let me tell you this story.”

That is the story that he began to tell. And it began to change everything.

JESUS IS OUR MESSAGE

So, just like Paul preached on Jesus and the resurrection, not only does Jesus establish the mission, Jesus is our message. Nothing else. Everything we do and everything we say as followers of Jesus points to Jesus and the hope that we have that is available in Him and in Him alone.

And here’s why that is important. There is no shortage of other messages that are out there today. Open your social media app, browse the internet, open a book—there are tons and thousands of messages that are screaming for our attention that are trying to prove that other things in this life actually matter. We have self-help books, we have prosperity, we’ve got horoscopes, we have all these different things that are clamoring for our attention.

And all this messaging is promising something that ultimately, I promise you, will leave you empty. The message of Jesus and His resurrection is the only message that says



God sees you, and loves you, and proved it by leaving heaven to come here and die for you. And it's the only message that offers the power to redeem and to save and to restore those who are lost and hurting and broken—the only message that exists.

And I know that from experience. I know that because that's my story. That's how God got ahold of me. He got ahold of me in college. And it changed my life forever. Somebody preached the gospel to me and I said, "Okay, if this is true, I'm going to give my life to it." Because I was chasing after everything. I was Epicurean and Stoic, I was Epistoic. I didn't say Apostolic, but Epistoic.

Jesus changed everything. And I began praying and asking that He would allow me to just tell the story to people around me. I began praying and asking that God would get ahold of their hearts—family members and friends.

And that's what happened. One by one I started to see the domino effect that started to happen. Years later, my brother would begin to follow Jesus and give his life to Him and be baptized. He's here today, right here in the front row. I saw my mom give her life to Jesus and get baptized right over there in that tank. I saw my sister give her life to Jesus and get baptized in that very same tank as well. One by one, as the story was told, He began to work. The story is powerful. As Romans 1:16 says, "The gospel is the power that saves."

As a response to what Paul says in this marketplace to these two different philosophies, they say, "Okay. That's kind of different. And it's a little weird, but it's interesting. We want to invite you to tell this story that you're telling to more people."

So they invited him to this place called the Areopagus, or Mars Hill. And there was this place up on the hill in Athens where pretty much people just sat around and talked about the latest trends and ideas and gossiped all day. Kind of like the TMZ of our days. That's what they did.

They said, "Come to this place called Mars Hill. We want you to tell the story to all of these people who sit around talking about philosophies all day. So in verse 22, this is where we pick up that Paul did that. Look at what it says. It says:

"So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: 'Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: "To an Unknown God." This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about.'" Acts 17:22-23 (NLT)

I don't know if you know what is happening here but they had built this altar, and they wrote this inscription on it—it was almost like a form of insurance. They had so many gods and they said, "Hey, just in case we missed one, we're going to build this altar. We're going to write this inscription on it just kind of as a way to cover our backs." Right? So that's what they did. And Paul sees this and he's like, "Okay. Let me tell you a story about a God that you don't even know about but you wrote this inscription to Him. Let me tell you about this God.



I just want to speak to a person who may have come here today and you're in a place like that. You're in a place where you might be open and you're curious about who this God could be, you're curious about who God is, You're curious about His purpose and His plan for your life. Actually, I think Paul has something to say to you as we read. It's deep. So bear with me as we read through the rest of this. It unpacks who God is and what He wants for your life in profound ways. Look at what it says in verse 24. This is what Paul says to them:

"He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

"His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us." Hello Epicureans. "For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."

"And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:24-31 (NLT)

Man, that is amazing. It's deep, but it's amazing because he's explaining God's purpose and His plan and all of it culminates in who Jesus actually is. Actually, when Paul is done giving this sermon, it says that there were a lot of people there who respond by laughing at him. And they mock him. And they didn't want to have anything to do with what he said.

But there were a few, select people who actually said, "That's actually kind of interesting. I want you to tell us more about it." And they actually become believers. And I think that there was something that happened there that is very significant that we have to pay attention to.

Yes, what Paul said is important, the content which he spoke—very, very important. But I think there was also something methodically that he did that allowed them to connect with his message. It wasn't just what Paul said, but it's how he said it. Paul did something that we call contextualizing the gospel.

So there was a purpose and reason behind why he was walking throughout the city of Athens learning about their culture, learning about what it was that they worshipped, learning about the different things that influenced their day. And he used that in order to support the truth claim that he was making. Things like the altar that they had to the unknown god. He even quoted one of their own Greek poets. And said, "Hey, your very poets say that we are His offspring."

Paul had, what we call, cultural intelligence—CQ for anybody who is familiar with that. And it was very important because it led him to be able to unpack the gospel in a way that they could understand.

I'm not the most culturally intelligent person but I'm a little bit culturally intelligent. Growing up... I am multi-ethnic. My dad is African American. So as a result I have a deep, deep love for Hip hop. And I went to a historically black college in Washington, D.C., Howard University. My mom is half Caucasian so I was exposed to other cultures growing up as well. Like rock-n-roll, country, and doing things on a lake.

So, I say that to say I can draw sermon illustrations from Bon Jovi to Biggie Smalls. I can sit with my white friends at the Indy 500 and watch the race and be like, "You know, there's another race that we're in and Paul says that we need to run this race with endurance because there's a prize at the end of our race." Or I can sit at a cookout across some of my blood brothers playing Spades and offer up a king and be like, "You know what? There's another King who trumps all kings and all people."

I'm very privileged that I was able to be groomed in an environment that was very diverse with different cultures and ethnicities because it has aided me in being able to connect with different people and different ways. All of it pointing to truth, but I get to be strategic on how I unpack certain things in a way that people can understand.

Jesus was a master at this as well. Jesus lived amongst the people that He lived around and He was constantly using imagery and examples of things that were going on in their every day lives in order to point to the gospel. Things like farming and agriculture and economics. He did it with intention and He did it with purpose. And I think we take our cues from both Paul and Jesus because not only does Jesus establish our mission, not only is He our message:

JESUS INSPIRES OUR METHODS

He inspires the way in which we connect with people and we unpack the gospel in a way that would tell the story. The message doesn't change. The message is and always will be Jesus. We don't water down the gospel to make it more comfortable or palatable or to make it more convenient. We don't do that to make it cool. We don't conform to culture in order to appease people as we tell the story. The goal is not conformity. The goal is clarity. So that's why we use different methods and ways to connect with people in ways that they can understand.

So, just like the message, the way the message doesn't change, we don't change either. We are trying to stay authentic to who we are and everything that we do, as we tell the story of Jesus, but sometimes the way in which we tell the story and connect with people needs to change.

I love that our Youth Ministry is at the pinnacle of doing this. They are constantly staying true to the gospel message and unwavering from that but they are always trying to meet students right where they are with kind of like these cultural bridges with them.



I'll be the first to say that I do not understand the lingo of G Z at all. I don't even try. And a lot of people who serve in Kids' Ministry or Youth Ministry, you would agree with me. But that doesn't keep you from leaning in and being curious, asking questions, and actually looking for ways to build these cultural bridges.

And we, as a church, I'm so glad that we are constantly doing this. I'm glad that we are not just looking at society and culture and shaking our heads and saying, "Shame on them. They need to get their act together. Hopefully they come in, walk through these doors one day and they can hear about Jesus."

No, we're standing out like, "How do we go to them? How do we meet them where they are? How do we see the world through the lens in which they see it but also stay true to the gospel and bring our cultural and biblical lens into that framework as well? How do we do what no one is doing to reach people that no one is reaching?"

I think Paul would actually say something very similar in 1 Corinthians, chapter 9. I love the way that *The Message* version paraphrases this. Look at what it says. It says:

"... I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized—whatever. I didn't take on their way of life." That's important, "I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it!" 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (MSG)

Man, does anybody else want to be a part of a movement that is like that? We're saying, "I don't just want to talk about it. I want to be in on it." But it requires us being strategic about the message that we use.

And I would say all of us would say, "Yeah, I want to be in on that, Kyle. That sounds great." But I want to put the question to all of us then, if that is true, if that is something that maybe we aspire toward:

WHAT KEEPS ME FROM TELLING THE STORY?

Have you looked at your life, and this isn't meant to shame anybody, but just an honest assessment, and honest interrogation, if that is true then what keeps me from telling the story?

I think a lot of times it falls into one of those paradigms, those buckets that I mentioned: the mission or the message or even the methods. So for some of us, maybe it's the mission and you would say, "You know what? If I'm honest, I've not bought into the mission. I don't have the sense of urgency. I don't even think that it's my responsibility to tell the story. You know what? It's a lot easier for me to just invite people to church and say, 'Kyle, you guys, you do it. You stand up there and you tell them the message.'"

And I would say that I get that, that's not necessarily inaccurate. I would say that it is incomplete. Yes, it can be a part of what we do, a part of the mission where we say, "Hey, come and see." One of the disciples said, "Hey, come see about this man named Jesus who told me everything that I need to know, everything about my life."

But then, as we said before, there has also been this commissioning where we don't just say, "Come and see," we go and tell. So we shift from this come and see to this go and tell mindset. And that's important because you have the relational equity with people that I, or people on this stage, will never have. You have the trust and rapport with your friends and your family members that gives you leverage to be able to build a bridge that leads from their life to the life that God wants them to have. You have that leverage through proximity and presence in their lives. So you get to tell the story.

You first have to see, as I said before, your own brokenness and then that has to move you to feel and to know that you have been sent on mission. I love the way that pastor and author Léonce Crump, Jr. says it in his book *Renovate*. He said:

"For only to the extent that ourselves are broken can the love of God sweep in and fill us with a desperate love for the people who surround us and the towns and cities in which we live. God's view calls us to see ourselves as sent and not simply existing."

And my question is: Do we see ourselves as sent? Or are we just simply existing. If you are a follower of Jesus you have been sent to tell the story, both with your words, but also with your life. You have been sent to be on this mission. The question is: Are you even aware? Do you believe that God wants to use you to do it?

Maybe you understand the mission, but the message is kind of what trips you up. Maybe for some you would say, "You know what? I'm not even a believer. I don't believe that message yet." But I think there would be others who would say, "I believe it. I just don't feel confident in telling it. I don't feel like I know enough. I don't feel like I know it well enough."

And I hear you. But I would also say as a loving challenge, if this is the most important story that we could ever tell, learn it. You have an obligation; you have a responsibility to learn the story that changes hearts and changes lives.

And then a lot of times we over complicate it. You know the framework that I use when I'm telling the gospel to people? It comes from our Kids' Ministry. God made it. We broke it. Jesus fixed it. And we receive it. Simple as that. That's the message.

So, yes there may be things in the Bible that you have questions about and there is depth that you have to mine and explore, but God is not trying to complicate the story for us. It's simple. That doesn't mean that it's easy, but it's simple.

So I would encourage you to take time to read the gospels, to study resources. There are lots of them out there to help you understand what the Good News of Jesus is and how you can be confident in sharing it with other people.



And then there may be some people who say, “I get the mission. I get the message. But the methods are kind of what hold me back. I don’t know how. I don’t know how to get to Jesus with people.” And I would just simply challenge you and I’d say, “Start where you are. Don’t try to swing for the fences, start where you are. Start with the people who are around you: family members, friends, relationships that you already have and find a way to authentically establish common ground with people around you.

Build relationships with them. Invite them over to your house. Learn their story, interests. Tell them your story. Tell them how your story then intercepted with God’s story. This is who you once were, and then you met Jesus, and this is who you are now becoming—imperfectly, but you’re following and chasing after Jesus.

We don’t do this perfectly. I don’t do this perfectly, even as a pastor. There are times where I drop the ball or I miss opportunities. But one thing that I always do is I constantly pray, “God, would You give me people in my life who I can share the story of Jesus with.” That’s a prayer that He will answer 100 percent of the time.

And then what I also try to do is I also try to constantly place myself in environments where I can be challenged and encouraged by others to go and to tell the story.

This happened recently for me as I led a *Rooted* group this past spring. I led a group of men for 10 weeks and we just walked through the curriculum of *Rooted* and learned and surrounded ourselves around the message and the story of Jesus.

And there was a guy in my group, his name is Jim. Jim was very reserved and hardly shared a lot of things, but he had these deep wells. There was a lot that he was able to draw from. There were nights where we were around for two hours talking and Jim hardly shared a word.

But we get half way through *Rooted*, and we were in about week six talking about serving. It’s about serving both inside the church and outside the church. And Jim comes to that and he was like, “Hey, I want you guys to know that I’ve really been digging into this and I really feel like God is calling me to something more in my life, to be able to serve other people.

“And I just started having a conversation with a homeless guy who sits outside of my job every day. I started just asking him his name, his story. I give him some money from time to time. And I just ask him questions about who he is.” And then he said, “I’m thinking about inviting him to church. I’m thinking about going and actually picking him up and bringing him with me.” We were all encouraging him but we did not know what was going to be the result of that.

Then the following week, he brings his friend, Fred, into the door of our church. Both of them hear the exact same message. Both of them come down front to me for prayer after service. Both are a wreck, just bawling. Two different people in two totally different seasons. Both equally broken. Both chasing after Jesus.



They developed this friendship. And do you know what Fred said? Fred said, "I'm so glad that Jim built this relationship with me. I'm so glad to have this friendship. And I'm also glad he brought me into this church. I've never felt so seen and loved and valued. And I'm going back to my corner and I'm going to read the Bible." He has been bringing Fred to church every single week after that. Fred has not missed a service.

But what happened after that first visit is Jim took Fred out to get some food. He took him shopping and he said, "Hey, I would just love to hear more about your life." And he spent time driving throughout the city and Fred was showing Jim the different places where he grew up, different jobs that he had. He was introducing him to some of his other homeless friends. There was a relationship that was built.

Jim started where he was. He wasn't going out trying to swing for the fences. He was like, "Who is already around me that I can build a relationship with? I can begin to ask them their story, learn about who they are, share about who I am as well, and share what Jesus is doing in my life." And I think that is something that, contextually, all of us have the opportunity to do. Start where we are and watch how God honors that.

I think there is also another camp of people who would say, "I get the mission, I get the message, I get the methods, but honestly, I just don't have the courage. I don't have the boldness to be able to share with people. I don't have the boldness to be able to share with my friends, to share with my family members. I get a little intimidated when it comes to talking about Jesus around other people just because, I don't know, they may respond the same way they did to Paul. They may laugh at me. They may say that I'm ridiculous for believing in such things."

Paul would go on from Athens to a city called Corinth. We read that in chapter 18. Here's what we can take away. We're getting ready to look at it here in a second. But, not only does Jesus establish our mission, not only is He our message, not only does He inspire our methods, but:

JESUS FUELS OUR MOTIVATION

He Fuels our motivation. Paul would go to Corinth and he would run the very same play. He would go into the synagogue and he begins to have a conversation with the Jewish people there and some Gentiles who were also there and they laughed at him. They ridiculed him. They spoke harshly against him.

I would imagine that Paul was feeling very discouraged in that moment. Scripture actually says that as he was leaving out of the synagogue he shook the dust off of his feet and said, "You know what? I'm done preaching to the Jewish people. I'm taking the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. It was his way of saying, "I'm washing my hands of the blood that is on them."

I would imagine that as he's feeling discouraged, he's kind of questioning and wondering, "Do I still continue to do this? Do I stay on mission? Do I still continue to

preach the message of Jesus? Do I use these methods that involve me building these cultural bridges with people?"

And we see that he has this vision and Jesus says these very words to Paul. In Acts 18, verse 9 he says:

"Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me." So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God." Acts 18:9-11 (NLT)

Church, I'll just say God is saying something very similar to each and every one of us. Yes, I know it may be intimidating. Yes, I know it may be fearful. Yes, I know you may get discouraged at times.

And as you're thinking, "Kyle, you don't know my friends. You don't know my family members. You don't know what it's like to have that conversation at Thanksgiving with my cynical uncle who hates Christians and has everything against the Bible. You don't know what it's like."

God is saying, "He belongs to Me. I have many people in this city who belong to Me. Guess what? They just don't know it yet. They just don't know it yet." The classmates who are always talking about you and gossiping, you're scared to share Jesus with them. They belong to Jesus. They just don't know it yet. The coworkers who work down the hall from you, if you're being honest you don't really care for, they belong to Jesus. They just don't know it yet.

The family members, the friends, the people who you have counted out in your life and you're saying, "There is no way that God could get ahold of them," God looks at them and says, "Yep, they're Mine. I have many people in this city, they belong to Me." We just don't know it yet.

And I pray that that encourages us. I pray that we don't have to have all of the answers. We don't have to have all of our theological *Ts* crossed and *Is* dotted. All we have to believe is the power of Jesus and the brave words that He said to Paul, "I am with you." That is enough.

That is enough for each and every one of you to take this story, the best story that ever existed and tell it to a lost, broken, and dying world that is searching for answers, those who are trying to feel their way through trying to find fulfillment and meaning. And God is saying, "I'm the one that they want. Tell the story to them. I am with you as you do it. They belong to Me. They just don't know it yet."

So, I pray that, as we enter into the last song, I want us all to stand to our feet and get ready to worship. I pray that as we sing this song, that it's falling on fresh ears and fresh hearts. We know that we serve a God who revives. We serve a God who renews. We serve a God who wants to reach the deepest, darkest areas of this city. But the best



story that ever existed, the best story that each and every one of us could ever tell, we believe in it—as we do it, God is saying, “I am with you. They belong to Me.”

Let us pray.

Father, we thank You. God, we thank You for the best story ever. God, we thank You for the gospel, the Good News. God, Your Word says that blessed are the feet of those who bring that Good News. So, God, we want to take it to those areas of our city, the areas of our lives and our communities, that need it. The dark areas. The people we are counting out. The people that we are saying that there is no way that God’s grace could get ahold of them.

We know that You are saying, “Build those bridges. Build that relationship. Be hospital. Show love. Show grace. Tell the story.” Because there is a mission, the most critical mission on the face of this earth that we are to be a part of. We get to join in and partner with You as we do it.

So, God, I’m praying right now that we would believe that You are the God of revival. That You would come awaken this city. That You would awaken Your people, God. That You would use us to do it. And we will give all of the glory to You as that happens. Pointing to You over and over again because You are our message, Jesus. May we be emboldened and motivated by You as we take this message to a lost and dying and hurting world. And may You get all glory, honor, and praise as that happens.

Jesus, we thank You and we love You. It’s in Your perfect and matchless name that we pray. And everybody says: Amen.

