

Turning Walls into Tables

CCC 6/23/24

My kids introduced us to a YouTube site called FAIL ARMY. If you have not been there, it is a compilation of 10 second clips of people screwing up. It is the golf cart wiping out into a lake...or the BMX bike going over the ramp and winding up with a teen on his head... it is the guy who is walking through an open space that turns out to be a well cleaned sliding glass door and thud... on the ground... and some man is always getting whacked in the kahoodles. And I don't know why other people's pain is so funny! But I laugh and laugh when I watch it. I am so stuck in Junior High!

Well, my quest for sharing my faith sometimes looks a lot like FAIL ARMY. I am thinking I am going over the BMX ramp and it just collapses under me. OR I don't see the wall and I just run right into it. Sheesh. Can anyone relate?

The good news is that Jesus did a great job of teaching the disciples what to do when they run into walls. And it is different than you might think. Today, we are going to be looking at four walls that Jesus took his disciples up to. And these same walls are around today and keep us from engaging in spiritual conversations with our friends **Tribalism, Distraction, Religion, and Conversational Avoidance...** and one story where Jesus blasts through all four of the walls.

OK, Grab a bible because we will be looking at Mark 7:31 p. 705

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.

OK, so the places are really important in this message and that means we get a....MAP!

Use map

So, Jesus ministry HQ is here at Capernaum. He would take his disciples on little trips out and about. They went to John at the Jordan, they went to Jerusalem at least three times – usually south because that is where Israel is. But this time, they go outside of the box. When a Jewish person hears this story, they might suck in their breath lean in and go “you are kidding”. Jesus goes up to Tyre and Sidon, home of Baal worshipping idolatry and home town of the evil queen Jezebel. After interacting with a bunch of people including a woman who goes toe to toe with Jesus asking for a miracle – remember “Even the doggies get scraps from the table.” He then takes a right and goes with his team into the region of the Decapolis.

What is the Decapolis? I am so glad you asked – two parts to the words “Deca” means ten in Greek, Polis means city... or really in this case, Village. So, this area is modern day Jordan and it is dry and arid. But the biggest deal is that it is filled with Non-Jews. Imagine this image: it is like Jewish people of today venturing into Gaza or the West Bank. You are going into territory where you may not be liked and are not sure how you will be treated

1) Wall: Tribalism

Every culture puts up walls base on tribalism. There might be barriers of language, there might be barriers of culture. There might be barriers of past offenses. Even here in Nebraska, we have tribalism based on sports... Like Nebraskans still don't ever root for Miami because of that one football game back in 1981...

Tribalism forms among many lines. The most poignant feeling right now is the political divide. Democrats and Republicans, Donkeys and Elephants, Blue and Red, Left and Right. And our friends on Instagram, TikTok, Fox and CNN love to make an unfair caricature out of the opponents and blast the stereotype. It leaves everyone assuming the worst about the other person. And thinking that people in the other tribe are just idiots.

But the divides can happen in so many ways. Racial tribes, economic tribes – rich and poor, geographic tribes, school tribes. And that is not all bad, ya know, sometimes you just need ‘your people’ – friendship groups are good... and will tend to be around similar interest, economics, education or religion. and there is the Christian tribe too. The problem is the tribe is that we tend to become insulated, to think the worst of people outside of our tribe and have them think poorly of us too. It is the essence of building walls.

Recently, I got placed in a scientific forum group with a guy from San Francisco. He said “I must admit that I live in a bubble, because I have never met a thoughtful intelligent Conservative Christian in my adult life.” He too is thoughtful and intelligent and downright likable so we are continuing a relationship and a dialogue. We see each other only rarely, but we email regularly on issues of biology, faith, abortion, astronomy and life - when we want to get the perspective of the “other side” from someone who is bright and articulate. It is way to blast through the walls.

Jesus not only blasts through this wall of tribalism, but he turns the wall into a table. He says “Oh yeah, we are going there. Literally. In fact, we are doing a discipleship tribe mission trip to the most uncomfortable place in walking distance – the Decapolis.

Table: Common Ground Jesus says – we are walking through this wall, and we will sit down with human beings who are different than us and get to know them as human beings who get hungry and tired and love their kids and want to be safe and understood.... Just like the human beings back home.

He knows his master plan is not just to go across the river, but around the world. As the crowd files, they are only 20-30 miles from home, but Jesus is conditioning these guys to go to the far corners of the planet. That Peter will go to Antioch in Asia Minor, that James will go to Rome in Europe, that Jude would go to Iran, Matthew would go to Ethiopia in Africa and that Thomas would go to India. He was getting them ready to make tables around the world.

So, your first application today is to Go where the people are. Put yourself in contexts where the Christian tribe is in the minority. Neighborhoods, schools, restaurants, bars, business parks... we must exist where there are people to reach.

Mark 8:1-21

During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ²“I have compassion for these people; they have already **been with me three days** and have nothing to eat. ³If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

⁴His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

This is the second time Jesus has done the bread multiplying miracle, so the disciples should know when they ask “WHERE can we get bread?” The real question is “WHO can get us bread?” Jesus reminds them -

⁵“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

⁶He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. ⁷They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them.

Two small phrases to draw out of this text. Three Days. Sit down. By the time you have been with someone three days, you have built some trust. You have inside jokes. You know their kids names. They are not just a “them”, they are a real person.

Alright, lets get a little experience of what this is like! **distribute bread** to the whole crowd! We will make about 30 seconds of fun at that point so lets have **a pianist with a carnival kind of a vibe for 30 seconds** while the team distributes.

You were not hungry for three days, but we do have bread for everyone! It is not gluten free, dairy free, nut free but it is caffeine free. As you eat it, I want you walk into this experience

with me. Imagine you are there. Hungry for three days, super filled in your soul, but just empty in your tummy. And seven little dinner rolls turns into enough to feed 4000 people!

Now, I want you to see that Jesus did not only created a common eating experience, but he had everyone SIT DOWN. He turned the entire Decapolis plain into one big table and shared enough food for everyone!!!

⁸The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, ¹⁰he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

2) Wall: Distraction Table: Time Together

Was Jesus agenda to do a cool miracle? Yes, but much more. It was to train his disciples that these people are worth your time. Oh, this may be the biggest wall we have in reaching people. It is not that they are not open, it is that WE don't have the time. Anyone feeling convicted? And the only solution to our lives that are distracted with Netflix and death scrolling, and fellowship events... is to prioritize time with lost people.

This is why our summer of 1000 tables is our challenge. You see, Jesus took an entire plain and turned it into a table. He had people sit down – because that is when leisurely conversation happens. And he shared a meal – something all humans have in common.

¹¹The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹²He sighed deeply Big sigh – In the Greek, this word means PPPbbbtththththth. and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” ¹³Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

¹⁴The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ¹⁵“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

¹⁶They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”

3) Wall: Religion Table: Hunger for Transcendent

So, Jesus does a big miracle on this side of the lake, but as soon as he crosses back to the other side, the religious police – the Pharisees – ask for a sign. And Jesus is like – here I am, the son of God and all people want is a magic show. Or a free meal. This is a never ending cycle! So he does not bite.

But he does tell the disciples – beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. What's up with that? Well, yeast is the element that moves bread from being flat to fluffy. A tiny bit makes the

dough rise – it is expansive and pervasive. So Jesus says “Beware the yeast of the pharisees.” It is that religious teaching that can kill your real faith. It is wanting the sign, rather than the God who is right in front of you. It is the desire for the blessing rather than the designer of the blessing. It is wanting relief from pain more than the presence of God.

It is the idea that religion is about moral performance, or moral perfection. It is that it is all about YOU – your Bible knowledge, you tithing, your adherence to self discipline. Religion is among the worst enemies of real faith

It works its way through you like infection in a body. Religion makes you self conscious about your personal spiritual accomplishments. It makes you think that you are moral enough to merit eternal life. It makes you think that the scorecard is church attendance and journey groups and giving rather than the very presence of God. Beware, Jesus says – religion is the antidote to a true connection to God. Trust the person, not the principle.

People are hungry for the transcendent... and not for rules. Hungry for God, not a behavioral modification system.

Friends, this is why we point people to Jesus – a person and not a system. Systems are poison independent of the person. Jesus and his Spirit that lives within us – is dynamic and life giving. He gives us the power to live right without the straightjacket of rules. It is not about ‘getting it right’, but doing it with him. It is not about performing, but yielding. Beware the yeast of the Pharisees... and religion.

¹⁷ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

²⁰ “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

²¹ He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

Jesus has been talking about spiritual stuff all along. Doing Miracles. Pointing out pitfalls and even teaching through symbolism. Jesus is always engaging conversationally.

4) Wall: Conversational Avoidance Table: Engagement

Did you notice that he brought up the conversation about the yeast of the Pharisees? And now this number symbolism thingie that should be OBVIOUS! So obvious that he does not even explain it. And in case you missed it, let me explain...

MAP again

When Jesus first did the feeding of the 5,000, it was HERE near Capernaum in Jewish territory. (Tabgha?) The second time it was HERE in Gentile territory. 12 baskets leftover. 7 baskets leftover. OK, so what does twelve remind you of Biblically? 12 tribes and 12 disciples. It is the people of God. And what is 7? Completion. 100% Everything and everyone. Jesus is saying “This whole mission we took wasn’t just for them... it was to teach you and you are never done when it is just your tribe. This mission is for not just the 12ers, but the 7’s.”

Back to 4- **Wall: Conversational Avoidance** **Table: Engagement**

Now, the application here is not to get better at math. It is to be a tour guide.... Pointing things out along the way that others might miss. You see, sharing your faith is not about making a sales pitch, but showing people what you see and they are missing. For Jesus – beware the yeast of the pharisees or notice the 12 and the 7? For you, it might be “Didn’t God do a crazy good job with that sunset?” OR “Be careful not to mix up religion and following Jesus” In fact... one of my lines I like to use is people ask me if I am religious, I’ll say “Not at all! I follow Jesus!” Or do it in the form of questions. “Have you ever talked to God about that?” OR What is it that makes life worth living? Or “How do you think God feels about that issue?”

You see, Jesus was a provoker. He provoked thought and insight and mystery and awe. Not in a way that was condemning, but in a way that knocked you off your feet and made you think more deeply. People like that are great to be around. Can you become that for someone else? Practice at it when you are around tables and it will leave people near you changed.

SO, lets be the kind of people who turn WALLS into TABLES. We turn Tribalism into common ground. Distraction into time together. Religion into a hunger for the transcendent and Conversational Avoidance into Engagement.

PRAY