

Surprise the World
Listening to the Spirit and Learning to Know Jesus
1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 1:15-20; John 15:4
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I want to begin by sharing a quote from C.S. Lewis. Lewis was a 20th Century British scholar, author and theologian. You might know him as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* or you might be familiar with some of the many other books he wrote, including [Mere Christianity](#) and [The Screwtape Letters](#). Lewis wrote,

“The Church exists for nothing else but to draw people into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him.” C.S. Lewis

Lewis points out that the purpose of everything is Jesus, and in his far-reaching statement, he alludes to words the Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians chapter 1. Paul’s statement is one of the best statements about Jesus in Scripture. Listen to what Paul wrote,

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:15-20

Jesus’ reign is comprehensive. Paul uses the word “*all*” 7 times and for good measure he also throws in the word “*everything*.” Our purpose in this sermon series called, “*Surprise the World*,” is very simply—in C.S. Lewis’ words—to “*draw people into Christ, to make them little Christs*.” The name “*Christian*” was given in a demeaning way by opponents of Jesus about early followers of Jesus, but Jesus’ disciples adopted it to define themselves, because the phrase literally meant “*little Christs*.”

During this sermon series and the initiative we’re encouraging around it, our goal is to provide people with simple tools they can use to help people notice Jesus in them in the hope that their appetites will be whetted and they’ll desire Jesus for themselves. I’ve said this before,

but it bears repeating—**Our Heavenly Father’s primary plan for communicating his love to people who don’t know Him and inviting them into a relationship with Him is you and me.**

When Jesus walked the earth, He taught and preached; He performed miracles; and, He loved people—all to indicate the Kingdom of God had come. But as Jesus prepared to leave earth, He told his disciples He was going to put his Spirit—the Holy Spirit—in them to empower them, counsel them and guide them into all truth. And He told them that through the power of his Spirit living in them, they would do even greater things than He had done. Our Heavenly Father also gave us his Word—the Bible—which is God-breathed to assist us in pointing people to Jesus. Of all the possible methods Jesus could have chosen to communicate who He is: sky writing, dramatic appearances, acts of nature, etc. his primary plan is that followers of his—like you and me—would demonstrate Him and his love to others. We’re called to be Jesus with skin on for people who don’t know Him.

If you’re visiting our church for the first time today or if you’re a regular, but haven’t been at McBIC the past 2 weeks, joining us in week 3 of our sermon series might feel a bit like entering a movie theater an hour late for a movie you know nothing about and trying to figure out what’s happening. So, I’m going to give an overview of where we are in our series. In the New Testament these words were written to early followers of Jesus in 1 Peter chapter 3, *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”* 1 Peter 3:15 That sounds straight forward and simple. Being prepared to give an answer for why we love Jesus and seek to live for Him sounds easy enough, but there’s a problem. The problem is few of us are regularly being questioned about why our lives are different. Our lives aren’t raising questions and so we rarely have the chance to share the hope we have in Christ. That’s where Michael Frost’s book, [Surprise the World](#), and this sermon series come into play. Frost wrote his book highlighting 5 habits designed to help followers of Jesus live in a way that raises questions about the hope we have in Jesus. During our sermon series we’re explaining these 5 habits and making the book available to all who want it and then during Lent from February 26th through April 10th we’ll be encouraging our church family to practice these habits. 6 weeks

isn't a long time, but our hope is that consistently practicing these habits during Lent will help us develop new perspectives and patterns that will carry on well after Lent ends.

Frost has arranged these habits in an acronym he labels: **BELLS**

Bless

Eat

Listen

Learn

Sent

As we **ble**ss others, we point people to Jesus through our generosity. As we arrange times to **eat** with people, we practice hospitality. As we **listen** to the Holy Spirit, we seek his direction and leading. As we **learn** about Jesus, we position ourselves to grow in Christ-likeness. And we embrace our calling as people who are **sent** by God, as we place ourselves in community with others for accountability. Last week Pastor Susan preached on the habits of BLESSING and EATING. Those are the "active, outward focused" habits designed to get people's attention. Today I'll be introducing the habits LISTENING AND LEARNING.

As I introduced this series 2 weeks ago, I mentioned that one of the things our staff found most attractive about Frost's book and the BELLS model is that it's well-rounded. BELLS avoids a frenzied, works-driven approach on just doing more stuff by focusing us upward toward our relationship with God as well as inward toward growing in community with other followers of Jesus. We appreciate the IN, OUT and UP focus, because our goal isn't to have you add more to your already full plates or to cause you to feel guilty about not being able to incorporate these habits into your lives. The goal is to provide us with simple tools designed to elicit questions from those who don't know Jesus.

Over the past 15 years, I've made a personal commitment to intentionally position myself among people in our community who don't know Jesus doing things I enjoy and at which I have abilities and gifts. That commitment has resulted in me coaching youth sports, getting involved in a variety of community service organizations and serving on our local school board. Reading Frost's book, seeking to incorporate the 5 habits he identifies and discussing our progress as a staff has helped me re-focus on God's mission for me. I've become more

intentional about looking for opportunities to bless people I interact with regularly and initiating contacts with people in my sphere of influence. But an aspect of Frost's emphasis I especially need is his focus on Listening for the Spirit's voice and continuing to learn to know Jesus better. For activists like me it can be easy to get so wrapped up in doing that I lose sight of intentionally tuning into God's heart and growing in my relationship with Him. I agree with Frost's statement: ***"Missional living doesn't only arouse questions from others—it is also a great framework for our own deeper discipleship as well."***

Listening for the Spirit's voice is the 3rd habit suggested by Michael Frost and the first one I'll be unpacking for us today. Frost identifies fear and laziness as 2 prominent mission killers for followers of Jesus. Fear and laziness immobilize us and keep us from pursuing the life God has for us—a life that will elicit questions from people who don't know Jesus. Carving out time to listen to the Holy Spirit provides us with the opportunity to hear God's truth so we can replace fear with courage and laziness with focus. On page 59 of his book Frost shares this quote from Bruce Demarest:

A quieted heart is our best preparation for all this work of God...Meditation refocuses us from ourselves and from the world so that we reflect on God's Word, His nature, His abilities, and His works...so we prayerfully ponder, muse, and "chew" the words of Scripture...The goal is simply to permit the Holy Spirit to activate the live-giving Word of God. Bruce Demarest

God's mission can't be accomplished without God's strength. If we're trying to do God's work in our strength, it degenerates into our mission, not God's. Jesus points out this truth in John chapter 15 when He told his disciples, *"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."* John 15:4 As we seek to accomplish God's mission of helping people experience Him and His love and pointing them to His love for them, we need to carve out time to eliminate distraction so we can hear God's voice speak to us. Frost writes, *"Our practice of generosity and hospitality must be intentionally nurtured and sustained by the disciplines of solitude, silence and prayer. We need to learn to listen to the voice of God, particularly as he shapes us as missionaries and fills our hearts with love for those to whom he sends us."* p. 61

One of the challenges faced by those of us who seek to position ourselves in relationship with people who don't know Jesus is finding the balance between being withdrawn and

judgmental on the one hand and on the opposite side, engaging at a level where we're being negatively influenced by others. Jesus encountered this as He engaged with those the religious culture of his day identified as "sinners." He was called a glutton and a drunkard and a "friend of sinners," but He never sinned and in those settings God's love and light shone brightly through Him. Carving out time to spend with God listening to his voice is crucial for us as we seek to find that sweet spot of engaging with people who don't know Jesus and pointing them toward his character and his love. As we seek to live out the first two habits of blessing and eating with people, listening for his voice positions us to live out of God's strength, rather than our own.

Frost's 4th habit and the 2nd one we're exploring today is **Learn to know Jesus**. Early Christians adopted the phrase, "Learn Christ," to emphasize the importance of new believers moving away from the pagan culture in which they had been immersed and engaging fully in the life and ways of Jesus. I enjoy hearing people who grew up in homes where they didn't know Jesus talk about the hunger they had to know Jesus once they placed their faith in Him. They speak about devouring God's Word and memorizing it. They attended church often and immersed themselves in Christian sermons and teaching and reading and their lives changed noticeably. But for many of us, our acceptance of Jesus was less radical—more of a gradual process. One of the downsides of that more gradual process is that while we've been around church and Christians and the Bible for most of our lives, we may never have really immersed ourselves in learning to know Jesus.

My observation is that **One of the weaknesses of followers of Jesus (and of the church) in our country is that many of us embrace a cursory level understanding of Jesus and the Bible and what it means to be in relationship with Jesus, but our values more closely resemble the values of our world, than a biblical, Christ-centered world view.** If we're going to effectively share Jesus' life, love and truth with others we need to immerse ourselves in learning Jesus. This starts with reading and meditating on Scripture, but this learning of Jesus can be supplemented by reading good books about Jesus and watching videos and movies about Christ's life. Frost says, "*We need to marinate our minds and souls in the story of Jesus.*"

For the past 5 years or so one of things I've "given up for Lent" and that has helped me focus on Jesus is listening to the Bible on CD in my car, rather than listening to sports talk radio. For some of you that wouldn't be much of a sacrifice, but I miss staying on top of everything that's happening in the sports world—and I can listen to the New Testament 2 or 3 times just by making that trade-off. This year I plan to narrow that discipline by focusing on Jesus' life and listening exclusively to the Gospels.

I'd like each of us to consider the question, "**What will it look like for me to incorporate the habits of listening to the Spirit's voice and learning to know Jesus into my life?**" I'm not going to sugarcoat it, with our already busy schedules and our addiction to activity, these habits aren't easy, but they're especially important if we want to intentionally and effectively represent Jesus to people who don't know Him whom we interact with every day.

Next week I'll be wrapping up our series and we'll explore the last habit: sent—walking in community with other followers of Jesus and holding each other accountable to live out Jesus' mission.