

## Building Bridges to Our Family

Shortly after becoming a Christian I went on an 18-month campaign to save my family that was a miserable failure. I was bold; I was abrasive; I pulled no punches. I was stupid. I had an uncle who told me to never come to his home again and to stop trying to change him, because he was not going to change. In short – I did more damage than good in those 18 months. I turned people off and alienated myself from my family. I was a terrible witness for Christ.

It literally took me a decade to repair the damage that I caused in my first 18 months as a Christian. God in His mercy helped me to repair those bridges; rebuild relationships and re-establish some form of credibility with my family.

Almost 15 years ago I woke up one morning with this haunting thought – if we didn't reach my family for Jesus Christ – no one would. In my immediate family there are 15 people who have no relationship with anyone that's a Christian besides us. When you count all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins that number reaches beyond 75. That morning I began praying for God to allow us to move back home to Illinois and begin the process of trying to reach my family with God's love. It's a long story that as you know came together in early November of 2002 when we accepted your call to New Day Community Church. In the years that followed, I had the privilege of praying with my father following one of his cancer surgeries for him to accept Jesus Christ into his life and about 18 months later he died. During those same years I prayed with my mother on numerous times for her to accept Christ while she was battling Alzheimer's.

This morning I want to share with you some of what God has taught me and is still teaching me 15 years later on trying to build bridges to family members in order to influence them for Jesus Christ. Now, I'll be the first one to admit that I don't have the best relationship with one of my brothers and at times I've had a bad attitude towards him but I've still had a couple of opportunities to pray with him about accepting Christ before and again after his cancer surgery and I still need to pray for his soul and ask God to work in his heart and life.

Now, at the top of your outline is the statement;

**“With God's help I want to build a bridge to this family member \_\_\_\_\_.”**

Don't fill it out until the end of the message.

Let me give us four guidelines for Building Bridges God's way to our family members who do not know Jesus Christ.

### **Guideline #1: Prioritize The Relationship**

One day Jesus was asked a question about priorities.

**Matthew 22:36-39 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.” NIV**

Out of the hundreds of Old Testament commands that He could have referenced, Jesus said that the two greatest are; 1. Love God completely. 2. Love people. Now, we need to understand that both of these commandments are describing relationships. The reason we need to make our relationships our top priority is that a relationship never just slips into being a priority. I have to make; you have to make them a top priority. Many years ago Rev. Billy Graham was interviewed by David Frost. David Frost talked to him about all the great things he had done in his life, the millions of lives that he had touched, the countries that he had gone to, and the presidents that he had had an influence on. Near the end of the interview he said to him, “Any regrets?” **Billy Graham said, “Yes I do have one regret. I regret I wasn't there with my family in the younger years as they were growing up. I feel like I failed them. They wouldn't say this but I would say this. Ruth was there with them. She did a great job raising them. They're great kids but I missed some things in their lives in those younger years that I can never recapture. I can never get those things back.”**

Friends, our relationships will never become a top priority until you and I make them a top priority. Here are three practical steps to make our relationships with our families as well as with others a top priority.

### **Step #1: Plan Them**

### **Step #2: Schedule Them**

### **Step #3: Do Them**

## **Guideline #2: Do The Little Things**

Too often when we think about building a relationship with a son, daughter, husband, wife, parent, brother or sister etc. we think about something big that we could do –but I believe that consistently doing the little things will have the biggest impact.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-5 “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.” NLT**

**Discussion:** List some of the “little things” that we can do so that we can have a big impact on family for Christ.

## **Guideline #3: Don't Give Up**

**1 Corinthians 13:7 “Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” NLT**

The word used for endures gives us an interesting picture. It was originally used to describe two soldiers who would tie their legs together while in the trenches so that when the enemy arrived the soldiers were not tempted to run and leave their partner to fight alone. It's a word that says to us “we are in this together and we will not give up on the other person or this relationship.”

Every one of us here today has been tempted to give up. I have, you have, we all have. Nothing was happening – no one was listening and for a couple of years I gave up trying to reach my family for Christ. Friends, take it from my experience – don't give up on that parent. Don't give up on that child. Don't give up on that spouse. Don't give up on that brother or sister. Don't give up – instead endure.

**Discussion:** Every person in this room has felt like giving up on influencing a family member for Christ. What can we do to help each other not give up?

## **Guideline #4: Accept God's Help**

**Psalm 101:2 “I will be careful to live a blameless life—when will you come to help me? I will lead a life of integrity in my own home.” NLT**

**Psalm 101:2 “I will try to walk a blameless path, but how I need your help, especially in my own home, where I long to act as I should.” TLB**

**Psalm 101:2 “I'm finding my way down the road of right living, but how long before you show up? I'm doing the very best I can, and I'm doing it at home, where it counts.” The Message**

Friends, we all need God's help in order to be used by Him to reach family for Christ. We need God's help to make good relationships better. Remember how Jesus prioritized relationships? First, Love God. Second, Love people. We all want to love people in our life – but in order for our relationships to become the best possible – we must first love God and then God will help us to love people.

**1 John 4:19 “We love because God first loved us.” NCV**

That's where our help and strength comes from. That's where we get the power we need to build great relationships.

**Ephesians 5:1-2 "Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. <sup>2</sup> Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God." NLT**

**Ephesians 5:1-2 "Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. <sup>2</sup> Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that." The Message**

We receive God's help by letting God love us so that we can then love Him. We must accept His love as a free gift – given to us simply because of His grace and mercy for us. It is our free gift. Once we accept the gift of God's love and forgiveness then we can love others and have the help we need to build great relationships.

Now, go back to the top of your outline.

**"With God's help I want to build a bridge to this family member \_\_\_\_\_."**

Fill in the blank with the name of the person in your family that you want God to help you build a great relationship with so that you can influence them for Jesus Christ.

**Application: What is the first step that you will take and when will you take it to building a bridge to that family member?**