



Introduction:

A major marketing tactic often used is before and after photos. In order to draw you in, companies do this to show the effectiveness and result of using their product. By comparing scripture, we get a glimpse into the change (the before and after) that took place in the heart and life of the maniac of Gadara (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39). So, what led to such a change? The Bible says in Luke 8:28, *"When he saw Jesus..."* Upon seeing Jesus, the change was initiated in this man's heart. Just like for this man, Christ is the catalyst for change today. Without Him, change is impossible. After Jesus ministered to this man and helped him become restored and reconciled, he had a great story to tell (vs. 39). In the same manner, if you are saved, you have a story. Somebody impacted you with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Somebody cared and reached out to you. Somebody made a difference in your life. Maybe it was multiple people, but they are part of your story, your story of salvation and redemption. If you are saved, you have had the opportunity to enjoy God's grace and goodness, which is wonderful, but are you part of anyone else's story? Have you extended God's glory toward others (Psalm 126:2; 2 Corinthians 4:5-6)? God desires to use us in people's lives (2 Corinthians 3:2-3, 6-11; 5:18-19).

The Focus:

- **Every believer's life can have divine, eternal impact on others? How?**
 - **By looking for divine opportunities.**
 - **By engaging others in spiritual conversations.**
 - **By knowing when to walk away.**
 - **By continuing to tell your own story.**

After Christ and His disciples came through the storm, they landed on the shore of the Gadarenes (vs. 25-26). As Jesus got out of the boat and headed toward the land, *"...there met him...a certain man"* possessed with devils, naked, and homeless (vs. 27-28). It is probably fair to assume that the disciples were a little apprehensive, but Jesus, as He always did, saw this as an opportunity to minister love and truth (vs. 29-39). How often do we have opportunities to be a witness for Christ? We have opportunities every day to make an impact for Christ, but many times, we simply are not spiritually aware and sensitive to the Spirit's leading. We have to remember that some of our greatest interruptions are in reality spiritual opportunities. The world, like with this man, will try to put away (vs. 29) or suppress those they can't tame (Mark 5:4). If they can't do anything, then they will leave people to themselves, wishfully hoping that everything or the individual will go away (Matthew 8:28). Remember, Christ is no longer here on the earth, but He has commissioned His church, the body of Christ, to minister to those in need (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

Understanding that we must engage others in spiritual conversations, it is often easiest by looking or listening for things you share that are common between you or another person. Also,

you could do what Christ did which was ask for their name (vs. 30). As the conversation began to unfold, it became clear that this man battled with spiritual oppression and darkness (vs. 30-33). When we engage people in conversations, we must be careful to first listen then speak (James 1:19). If we aren't listening and being a learner of a person's situation, we may give them truth, but it may not be what reaches or persuades them to truth of God – who He is and what He accomplished for them (John 3:16). We must talk with others; we must steer the conversations toward God and Jesus Christ. When you speak with others and introduce Jesus into the conversation, you cause them to think about the truth of who He is, their life at the present, and their future. At that time, you have caused them to see Christ on the radar screen of their mind. They will have to think and make a decision, maybe not at that moment but eventually.

After engaging others in spiritual conversations, it is important to know when to walk away. Just as you have to look for entry points to get Jesus into a conversations, you have to know when to exit. It is important to remember that we can't save anyone. It is God that has the power to save (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 3:7). You have to remember that what you talk about is totally opposite of their nature. It is contrary to what they have been told most of their life, therefore, it may take time. Oftentimes, people are intimidated and fearful when talking about spiritual things. This is normal. It even happened in our text (vs. 34-37). Even when Christ ministered and talked with people, they didn't immediately repent and believe. You may sense that a conversation needs to end, or someone may come right out and tell you, but regardless, you need to know when to stop and let God's Spirit work in their heart. Upon the peoples' rejection (vs. 37), it says that Jesus *"went upon into the ship, and returned back again."* Jesus walked away. He didn't push it down their throat. They saw and heard. The seed had been planted. Now it had to be watered and fertilized, which the restored man of Gadara would do (vs. 39). If you share the truth of Christ and you end up walking away, you can walk away knowing you did your part.

If you end up walking away, don't be discouraged. Keep telling your own story. In our story, Jesus only saw one conversion, but what a difference it made in that man's life! Although this man longed to be with Jesus, He left him to be a witness to those who didn't believe (vs. 38-39). Christ saw the need, so he gave the man a mission (vs. 39). For him it was to stay and shine his light within his community (vs. 39). For others it was to *"go"* (Matthew 28:19; Galatians 2:9). Like the converted man of Gadara, we must tell our story. If we continue to tell others our story, we will become part of someone else's story.

Response to the Sermon:

The message from Luke 8:26-39 was focused on being a witness or ambassador for Christ. We must be praying, daily, for opportunities. We must speak to others about the grace and mercy that was extended to us through the love of Christ's accomplishments on the cross (Romans 5:8). Upon praying, we must then engage in spiritual conversations with others. What conviction can be had if we don't engage others with the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3)? Also, don't try to coerce anyone into trusting in Christ. It must be them placing their faith in what Christ did

for them on the cross. Therefore, it is very important that we learn when and how to walk away. And as we walk away from different conversations, we must not get discouraged if they don't trust Christ. We must focus on the fact that we were able to tell them, either from our life or from God's Word, how loving our God is. Remembering that God gives the increase, we must spend time in prayer for those we share the good news with. Pray that it will take root in their heart. Are you sharing your story with others?

Bible Study Thoughts & Questions:

Paul gives Timothy some practical instruction regarding our approach and attitude with those who oppose themselves as did the maniac of Gadara (2 Timothy 2:24).

Rather than arguing with others, what characteristics does Paul say we should employ when speaking to those who are antagonistic toward the truth (2 Timothy 2:24-25)?

Why is it so important for us who know the truth to be patient with those who have not acknowledged the truth (2 Timothy 2:25-26)?

Application Questions:

Christ, during His earthly ministry, provides multiple examples of how to approach people to meet their need. One such example is the maniac of Gadara (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39).

According to God's Word, what had Christ and His disciples just faced right before being met by the maniac of Gadara (Luke 8:22-25)? How does this relate to us when it comes to our life and our relations with people (Luke 8:26-30)?

Think about your daily or weekly routines, what opportunities do you have on a regular basis to minister to others?

Besides asking someone's name (vs. 30), what are some ways that you can engage others in spiritual conversations? Why is it important to engage others in spiritual conversations?

Even though Christ was God in the flesh (John 1:14), He was rejected for the things He did and said (vs. 29-37). Why is it important to know when to walk away from a situation where spiritual things were brought up and discussed (vs. 38-40)?

Just like the maniac of Gadara, all believers have a story of what God has done for us and how He had compassion on us (Mark 5:19). Think about your salvation story and tell it to another person. What is your salvation story?

Prayer:

- Pray to have a mindset that is focused on the needs of others (Luke 8:27-28).
- Pray that others would see what God has done for you and how He can help them too (Mark 5:19; Luke 8:39).
- Pray for discernment to know when to walk away from a situation or spiritual conversation (Luke 8:38, 40).