

Children’s Moment

Mission Impossible [play squirrel video]

What was the squirrel after? What did the squirrel do to get it?

God helped the squirrel. God loves all animals.

What do you want? What will you do to get it?

God will help you. That’s because God loves us even more than God loves squirrels.

Do you know what God loves even more? When we invite our friends and other people to come and share church with us.

Do you think you can invite your friends to VBS or to church?

Message: The Code of Jesus

What’s your code?

Have you watched any of the popular “Fast & Furious” movies? Whether you’ve seen the films or not, there are some interesting things to note: (1) the principal character is Dominic Toretto, played by actor Vin Diesel, who wears a cross around his neck; (2) the thing that sets Toretto apart is his code: family. He has a younger sister and a diverse crew he calls family. That’s where honor and respect come from; (3) many of the movies end with the family gathered around a table, having a meal, celebrating their relationship and closeness. Those gatherings always include a prayer. It’s a positive image of faith, family and love.

The movie villains see family as a weakness. Many of them threaten or hurt Dominic’s extended family, which leads to a showdown between good and evil. You see, by attacking those he loves, the villains end up making the hero and family even stronger and more tightly connected. By holding to a code, even when things seem difficult or impossible, the hero overcomes all challenges. In this way, art imitates life.

What’s your code? What’s the one thing that’s most important, the one thing that gives you strength, even when you are threatened or attacked?

That’s a difficult question for many of us to answer. The reason is we typically don’t sit around and reflect on our life’s passion and purpose. The apostle Paul did. In his Philippian letter, Paul wrote, *“It’s not that I have already reached the goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it as Christ pursued me Brothers and sisters... I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me”* (Philippians 3:12-14). When the leader has a strong code, other people want to follow. They want to be part of the community, to become family. Through the leader’s example, people gain trust and confidence, and they find purpose and hope.

Our leader is Jesus. He’s the strongest spiritual leader we could have. No other spiritual leader ever predicted their own death and then rose from the dead. Jesus promises to show us the same way. Jesus draws us to his community. It isn’t the building, the books, the songs, the rituals

or things that attract us. We follow Jesus because of the way we feel inside when we believe in him and learn to imitate his way of life.

What’s the best way to imitate Jesus? He tells us.

First, Jesus taught us two great commandments, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... and love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:36-39). And, in his last words, Jesus gave us a commission: we’re to share that love with everyone in a mission the world says is impossible (Matthew 28:16-20). The mission is “...to make disciples of Jesus Christ”

That’s the code of Jesus. It’s what makes us part of the familia.

There’s one big problem: we aren’t sure how to live it. We’ve lost the skills over the last 50 years. We don’t know the language. We don’t know how to help our children, our neighbors or our co-workers develop a healthy spiritual life. We don’t know how to talk about the good news of Jesus Christ and what Jesus means to us in our every day life. The good news is that we can learn again. Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit to teach us. All we have to do is trust God and believe in Jesus.

What are the benefits of choosing to accept the mission? It depends...

- Elders: Jesus gives us a commission; it’s how we follow him.
- Middle aged: it’s how we invest in others for the future, a meaning and purpose for life.
- Young adults: an authentic spiritual life shows us a new way to live, a way that invites us to be part of the solution, not the problem.

Why do we need to do it? Two reasons immediately come to mind ...

- ***To be relevant to the world and authentic in the way we live.***
We have a lot to offer. We are developing a pattern of living that realistically wrestles with diverse opinions and views, yet holds to the higher purpose of faith. Who wouldn’t want to be part of that?
- ***In order to live the way Jesus did, we need to reach out to those who are unchurched.*** The population of those who know about church or who have left church is shrinking dramatically, while the population of those who have never been in church is growing dramatically.

We have to find a new pattern, a new way to live. We need a code.

Here are a few facts as an illustration:¹

- **“Less than 18% of Americans attend church regularly.** 65% of the U.S. population has no real church connection. There was a 19% decrease in church attendance in the last 10 years. That means there are 156 million unchurched people in the U.S., which qualifies as the 8th largest population in the world! Since 1993, only 15% of unchurched adults have been connected to a church.”² That means 85% of unchurched people have had no real connection for the last 25 years!
- **“47% of unchurched in America are open to being invited to church (80 million).** That leads to an obvious question: are Christians inviting non-Christians to church? Sadly, the answer is ‘no.’ 21% of active churchgoers invite anyone to church during the course of a year. That number drops to 2% when you look at the number of churchgoers who invited an unchurched person to church. One study found that 9 out of 10 of unchurched people would come to church if they were invited by a friend!”³ (repeat)
- **“Churches that plant new, missional congregations grow three times faster than most well-established churches.** 60-80% of the members are new converts to faith while 80-90% of new members in churches >20 years old are people transferring from another church.”⁴

Very few people who don’t attend church have someone to share with them how to become Christian. And Christians have not been particularly influential. “‘[Hank] is a trip,’ Peter W. of San Diego said to Dr. Thomas Rainer of Christianity Today in a 2007 survey. Peter is an unchurched man who works with [Hank]. ‘We’ll be talking about the Chargers or the Padres and, before I know it, he’s telling me something about his church or God. I really respect him, you know. He doesn’t beat me over the head with his beliefs, but he sure isn’t shy to talk to me about it. Most of the church people I know act like they are ashamed of

¹ <http://www.portablechurch.com/2016/church-launch/church-planting-statistics/>

² <https://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2014/12/15/10-things-you-didn-t-know-about-unchurched-americans>

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2007/july-online-only/102704.html>

⁴ <http://www.portablechurch.com/2016/church-launch/church-planting-statistics/>

*what they believe.”*⁵ If you think “the time isn’t right,” you’re missing the boat. The other person is wondering why you’re so hesitant.

So I have to ask: are you ashamed? Paul wrote, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith...*” (Romans 1:16). Our job is to extend the invitation in a loving way. God and the other person will do the rest. Don’t be afraid. God promises to give strength and protect you when you need it (Isaiah 41:10). We’re usually more afraid of what could happen that what will happen.

Remember, God is on our side. We’re stronger together. We learn from one another, care for one another, and find our spiritual life richer. We’re inspired to be part of something with the power to change our life, family and world. That’s unique in the world today. It’s a way of living and a voice that is missing.

How do we do it? Think about others. Invite them to join your group, especially before, during and after service. Introduce the language of faith and spiritual life to them with grace. Following Jesus is a spiritual journey. We share our spirit with others and they share with us. We engage in the lives of people we meet, everywhere we go. Events are opportunities to gather and celebrate relationships. Events can be starting points, milestones or checkpoints, but they’re only one-time activities, not a way of living. It’s that deeper way of living and connecting with God and others that makes our community different. It’s why we gather on Sundays and other days of the week to praise God.

Good relationships take time. Our relationships are NOT based on a “save ‘em or move on” mentality. We’re not making people into projects; believe or leave. Life as a follower of Jesus isn’t about quantity. Quality is important. Finding the courage to share our experience and love of God takes time. God’s Spirit isn’t timid, so we can be bold and speak about our faith with quiet courage. When we gather and share our faith, there are more opportunities to learn from one

⁵ *Ibid*

another and grow. That’s how we pass our code - our faith, hope and love, on to others.

There’s a myth about faith: “We’ll learn it when we need it.”

The rationale is this: we don’t want to impose on others. We’ll wait until our children are old enough to understand or for our friends, neighbors, co-workers to ask. So that means you’ll wait until your children are teenagers or college-aged adults to introduce them to Jesus. How’s that going? What spiritual advice do your friends, neighbors and co-workers ask you for today? We have a responsibility to introduce our children to the faith, hope and love we have in age-appropriate ways. They’ll still have to make their own decision when they’re older. You aren’t harming or abusing them. And your co-workers, neighbors and friends are probably wondering why you’re hesitant. Don’t be afraid.

Let’s do a quick exercise: What’s your favorite thing about the people of our congregation? Think of two people you’d like to share it with. Let’s pause for 15 seconds. During that time, ask God to open the door for you to be able to invite them to come. [*pause*]

We can only learn how to share our spiritual life and invite other people if we do it, over and over again. Rev. Bill Hybels, pastor at Willow Creek Church says, “The local church is the hope of the world.”⁶ What we do in our church, homes, neighborhoods and community makes a difference. We need to reclaim the spiritual power we lost. Let’s reclaim our integrity as those who truly follow Jesus.

You’re probably thinking about the mission impossible video.

Let me assure you, no one is trying to make you jump through hoops.

To help, there are three parts to an invitation:

- **Our part** – our role is to invite people to join us, without regard to age, gender, capability, income, sexual identity or ethnicity. It means we have to “walk the talk.” Your invitation has no meaning if you say “yes” to God with your mouth but “no” in the way you live.
- **Their part** – others engage and respond in the way they choose. If a person isn’t ready to hear or change, we can pray, encourage and

⁶ *Discipleshift*, p. 21

invite them again without judging. We all struggle at times and need acceptance.

- **God’s part** – ultimately, God alone helps people answer the call. God transforms lives and brings lasting spiritual change.

Let’s be alert to the opportunities God gives us to invite others.

We’re responsible for our part and our own spiritual walk. When we show others how we live by trusting God, we’re helping them to learn and grow in a new, spiritual way.

I want to offer another way to invite people. When you came in today, you received a “Sow Seeds of Faith” card. I invite you to take the challenge. Do one hundred acts of kindness for others. And when they ask why, tell them it’s because you’re paying God’s love forward. And then get to know them. When the time’s right, tell them what you love about our church and invite them to come.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to live by the code of Jesus. You are to invite others and share what you love about Jesus and his people. Let’s GO. God will do the rest. One, last thing: this message will not self-destruct, but is available on our church web site should you wish to consider it.

Let us pray:

Lord, help us to be open and willing to hear your call today. Renew our spirits with the water of life, which fills us with the spiritual power and energy we need to live as your children. Help us to be changed by your love so we are filled with joy and we can’t wait to share the reason why with others. Help us to give ourselves to others in faith so they will know your love and find hope. Give us boldness to extend the invitation with love. Thank you for the divine appointments you set for us this week in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matthew 28:16-20 (CEB)

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”