

## Welcome

Let me start by asking you a question. How easy is it for you to explain to people outside of your work what is is you do at work? Is your job easy to describe or kind of difficult?

Some jobs don't really need much explanation, like we know what a dentist or teacher does. People in other careers might have a little more explaining to do.

My husband, Jeff, for example, is the Senior Technical Support Coordinator and I'm an Academic Facilitator for Richardson school district. So, just based on the definition of those words, you might assume Jeff spends his time at work coordinating tech support and I spend my work days facilitating academics in schools. Like, I go to a school and say, "Hi. I'm Sue. I'm here to facilitate your academics." Ok...sure...we could definitely be more specific.

If you're also in the same field or industry I am, it's much easier for me to explain what I do. For example, I might say,

"I go to schools to support implementation of the TEKS Resource System and the disaggregation of data from CBAs, MOYs and Sims. I spend a lot of time helping PLCs and Admin plan their RTI."

So, some of my friends here who are in public education probably know what some of those words and acronyms mean. For those of you who do not work in education, I'm sure I would have to get into the weeds a little bit about what my day-to-day is like because, as I'm sure you noticed, there was a lot of jargon or in that description of what I do at work. In education, we have a lot of what outsiders might call "mumbo jumbo." In fact, in meetings we sometimes joke that we should play "Lingo Bingo" to entertain ourselves during long presentations because it sees like every new thing in education comes with it's own new set of jargon we have to learn.

It's not just our jobs. Everything has jargon, and it's not necessarily a bad thing. We're grateful for civil engineers who understand *Modulus of Elasticity*, whatever that means. I think it has something to do with making sure bridges don't fall apart while we're going over them. I don't need to know what all their jargon means. I just need to know that THEY know what these words mean.

Learning jargon is also a necessary part of the learning process. When we're teaching students in school, we often teach vocabulary words. It's awfully difficult to teach and study Biology in high school without ever talking about mitosis and nucleotides.

Also, the more jargon you know, the more you feel like part of the community or group who uses that jargon. It can be a comforting feeling knowing you're sharing a common language and vocabulary with others.

However, it can be problematic. In that same high school Biology class, it's easy for jargon to become meaningless babble for students who struggle to understand all of the scientific terminology. Using these terms, in this case, can be a barrier to their understanding. It can cause the students to feel so frustrated, they just want to give up.

When we talk about faith, it's tempting for us to lean on church jargon. But if jargon is a barrier to people outside our circles, then our Christian jargon can make it harder for people to understand Jesus' good news. So today, we're going to explore how to talk about Jesus jargon-free.

That matters because in coming to us as Jesus, God speaks our language. God removed every barrier between us and him. So we should do the same. Let's begin this morning by singing some songs together that celebrate the love of this God who speaks language we understand.

## **Message**

Our Epiphany series this year is called *Good News for a Change*. We're talking about how to talk about Jesus... with anyone. The "jargon" word in the Church for this is Evangelism, and it's a word with enough baggage to make just about anyone break out in a nervous sweat.

This is why, in our series on evangelism, it's so important for us to stop and think about the words we use when we tell others about the Good News of Jesus.

We are in the Church season of Epiphany, the season that follows Christmas. Epiphany celebrates the God came not just for us, but for the whole world. Appropriately, then, our Epiphany series this year is called Good News for a Change. We're talking about how to talk about Jesus... with anyone. The \$20 word for this is Evangelism, and it's a word with enough baggage to make just about anyone break out in a nervous sweat. Whether you've been preached at or sat through those classes on how to preach at people, Evangelism conjures to mind that combative, confrontational, in-your-face kind of approach, or maybe just having no idea how to talk about Jesus with people we really care about.

Throughout this series, we've explored a lot of our misconceptions about Evangelism, and found it can be a lot more fun than we would've imagined. We began by talking about what the Gospel even is - that it means "Good News". Then we spent some time asking how God is good news - both in our own lives and in the lives of people we care about. Next, we explored how to translate the good news out of our language into the world of the person we're talking to. We spent several weeks working out what it looks like to translate the Good News into the language of those in our lives. Last week, we considered how we navigate people who are resistant or even outright hostile to Jesus.

Today, we're exploring another barrier we often accidentally put between our friends and Jesus: jargon. Specifically church jargon. This is a season where we try to be purposeful in thinking about what we read in the Bible means, not just for us, but for everyone else in the world too. In our everyday lives, we are interacting more and more often with people who do not have the same experiences and backgrounds as us.

If you've grown up in church or around church people, like I have, then it can be difficult for us to put ourselves in the shoes of someone who has never really been to a church or even knows what goes on at one.

So, what do I mean by church jargon? Something like this...

Show Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Dxo0Yjno3I>

If you've been in church for a while, you may have said some of these words, and meant them sincerely, and that is ok. We're not saying this morning that there is anything wrong with these words. What is maybe funny about this video is that all these churchy words are taken out of their context. Without a story or a situation to surround these words, like anything taken out of its context, can start to sound pretty silly.

When we share the Good News, we should always pay attention to our audience and consider the fact that some of the words or jargon we use to talk about God will be out of context for some people and it can be really confusing.

Matt Mikalatos, in his book *Good News for a Change* gives a great example:

*"Let's use the word Lord as an example. This is a great word that has a clear, specific meaning for us in the Christian community. Most of us use the word every time we pray. For instance, "it's common in evangelistic presentations to say something like, "Would you like to ask Jesus into your heart as Lord and Savior?"*

*That phrase and the word Lord in this context is Christian jargon. (the word Lord means something different for Christians than for the outside community.)*

*The easiest way to recognize Christian jargon is to consider how the word is used in secular settings. Ask yourself, When do I hear the word outside church? Here are a few instances I can come up with:*

- *Landlord*
- *Warlord*
- *Drug lord*
- *Lord Voldemort*
- *Lord Vader*
- *Lord of the Dance*

When you're talking to someone outside the Christian community, a word like *Lord*, can have a much different context and connotation. I mean, we would never intend to put Lord Voldemort and the Lord, Jesus Christ in the same category, but we might be unknowingly asking the person listening to us to try on their own and figure out what the heck we are talking about.

At this point, you might say, forget it! Talking about Jesus and is too important of a thing for me to mess up! Maybe I'll just leave it up to the experts. Maybe pastors and theology professors should be the only ones doing evangelism or talking about Jesus.

The truth is, we're pretty much equipped with all the skills we need for evangelism. Although we value learning theology, studying the Bible and careers in ministry, you don't need fancy words to talk about Jesus and your life.

You may be thinking, if the Bible uses these words, then how can you say they're a barrier?

True, we get a lot of our "insider" jargonized language from the scripture itself. So, does that mean we shouldn't use the words in the Bible? That's not what we're saying.

We can look at Matt Mikalatos' book, *Good News for a Change*, for another good example. Here, he is reflecting on a particular experience in his work with college students.

*"I could never follow Jesus because he wants children to suffer." a college student said to me, tears brimming in her eyes. "Why would you possibly say that?" I asked. "I went to a church once, and they were reading from the Bible, and Jesus said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me.' If children want to come to Jesus, he'll make them suffer." "Oh," I said. "That's from the King James Bible." I pulled out an NIV. "Try this." She read the verse: "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'" She wiped the tears from her eyes. "Let the little children come? So he's saying - " "He's saying no one should stop kids who want to be near him. He wasn't some distant power; he wanted to let the kids get in close." I explained to her that the King James, while enormously beautiful, was written around the time of Shakespeare. Sometimes they used words differently than we do today. It's still the Bible, and still God's Word, but it uses language that, for the modern reader, is archaic.*

*"So the problem wasn't Jesus," she said thoughtfully. "It was the translation." Which was, yes, more or less correct. The King James is a wonderful translation, but it wasn't a good translation for her- not at that point in her spiritual life, anyway. She hadn't understood the message because King James wasn't speaking her language; the unfamiliar translation had introduced noise into the signal, making it difficult for her to parse the message correctly."*

So, like this college student, we don't want important messages about God to be "lost in translation." It's not that there's anything wrong with the King James Bible, it's just that this translation was throwing an unnecessary hurdle in her path to understanding about Jesus.

[Scripture Slide] Jesus managed to have quite a way with words without having to rely on jargon or fancy terminology all the time. Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke Chapter 8, verses 4 through 8. If you borrowed one of the Bibles from the back table, it's on page ###. If you don't have a Bible of your own, you're welcome to keep one of those.

In the Bible, Jesus had conversations with lots of different types of people. When he spoke to Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious leaders of the time, he would use jargon, probably because he knew they would understand what he was saying. It's also likely it gave him some more credibility.

In contrast, Jesus took a different approach when speaking to regular people. He often taught about God using parables. Parable is just a church-ey jargon word for a simple story used to teach a lesson about God. In the time and culture of Jesus, most of the people he spoke to would have been agrarian: farmers, shepherds and fisherman. They didn't have electricity. They baked and ate a lot of bread and used a lot of clay pots for things. There were always sheep hanging around. So, Jesus used a lot of terms and examples they would be familiar with.

This parable in Luke starts in verse 4.

While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

Ok, just stop here and imagine you're in this large crowd of people gathering around Jesus to hear him speak. Imagine that you're just a regular person living in that time and place. Picking up at Verse 5:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” -- Luke 8:4-8

Here, we see Jesus using regular examples- sowing seed- to explain how God's Word- the Good News- the Gospel helps us understand God. Jesus told many parables to explained what God had planned for the world.

You could imagine that if Jesus was here today, telling us as parable, he might draw on some pretty ubiquitous examples from what life is like for us today: driving in rush hour traffic, football, shopping at Walmart, oversharing on social media, and our endless desire for chips and salsa.

In Matthew chapter 13, verse 33. We see another example.

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” -- Matthew 13:33

It doesn't take much yeast to make a whole bunch of bread. It doesn't take much for people who follow Jesus to change everything and impact the world.

Another parable from Jesus helps us understand a similar idea. This is in Luke 13, verses 18-19.

Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.” -- Luke 13:18-19

Here again, Jesus uses the example of a seed. A mustard seed. For us, we have no idea what this parable means because mustard is that yellow stuff that comes in a plastic bottle. But the ancient farmers Jesus was talking to knew instantly that a mustard seed is very small, but when you plant it, it grows into a huge tree with lots of branches. When people hear about Jesus, it starts as just a small thing- just a conversation, but it has the power to grow and stretch a person into something much greater.

So, the everyday language Jesus used for THEM is actually jargon to us. (because we're not farmers living in the Ancient Near East.

In educational psychology, we talk about a person's affective filter. When teachers work with students who speak English as their second language, they have to be intentional about lowering a student's affective filter when teaching school subjects in the English language.

The affective filter is the the psychological barrier experienced by a person when they are immersed in an environment of language that is unfamiliar. A high affective filter means the person is full of anxiety and stress and a person with a low filter has little anxiety. A person with a low filter is more likely to be able to comprehend and pay attention or focus.

When we talk to other people about our faith, do we really want to raise their anxiety and stress? No, thank you.

In these examples, we don't see Jesus using a lot of jargon for the people of that time.

So, how do we follow the example of Jesus and avoid too much church jargon language when we talk to people outside the church?

How do we even know if we're even using jargon? How do we know WHEN we're using it? How do we avoid unnecessarily confusing people when we talk about Jesus?

Let's think about how words become jargonized. The first step in understanding a word might be to think about it's definition- like you would find in a dictionary. Let's use the word "Lord" again as an example. We can define the word "Lord" as a person who has some type of power, authority, or influence.

Beyond just the definition, there's also the feeling or emotion a word can evoke. Remember, I talked about the word "Lord" not just being associated with saying, "our Lord Jesus Christ," but also "Lord Voldemort" from Harry Potter or Marvel's "Star-Lord," the leader of the Guardians of the Galaxy. For someone who is new to their understanding of Jesus, you can imagine what their thought process must be like...is Jesus a Lord like Voldemort or is he a Lord like Chris Pratt's character in the movie Guardians of the Galaxy? The correct, answer, is of course, Chris Pratt as Star Lord. Just kidding.

This is how we end up with jargon- which means words used by a specific group of people who for those outside, is difficult for them to understand. It's a word that is not only understood by its definition, but also the feeling it evokes and the fact that it's only used among a certain group of people.

So, inside the church, our jargon can become really important. When we say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ it recalls a time when we submitted to God’s way and it made me a better parent, or changed a relationship at work, or helped our family grow closer. ‘Lord’ has become really important for us.

So, when talking to people outside the church about Jesus, how important is it for them to understand a jargonized word like “Lord” in order to embark on a journey of learning about Jesus? Probably not super important. Does this person need to be inside of our group, our community, to begin learning about Jesus? Do they have to understand the concept of Lordship to have a **relationship** with Jesus? No. That’ll come. But they can know God loves them and wants a relationship with them without understanding the nuances of 'lord'. Not necessarily. Eventually, but maybe not at that moment. People have to start somewhere.

Possibly, the reason we use jargonized terms without really thinking about it has to do with an idea called “the curse of knowledge.” Sometimes, when we know a lot about something and we begin to talk about it, it’s easy to assume everyone we’re talking to has some kind of base level knowledge of what we’re talking about. We assume something is “common knowledge” that may not actually, be knowledge that is all that common.

However, that’s not always the case.

For example, my Dad is an industrial maintenance technician, so whenever I ask him about work, he sometimes launches into an explanation about injection molding machines using a lot of technical terms. When this happens my eyes begin to glaze over. My Dad, has the “curse of knowledge” when it comes to injection molding machines. So, it’s a challenge for him to explain what he’s working on to people like me who have little background knowledge on the engineering and maintenance of these machines. My affective filter is high. He’s losing me. I become desperate to change the subject.

The “curse of knowledge” can be a problem for us if we’ve spent a lot of our lives in church. We know what these churchy words mean, but just because we know them, doesn’t mean everyone knows them.

So what do we say if we can’t use jargon? I’ve grown up in church all of my life. How do I talk about God without using churchy words? It’s not easy, but I will give you a couple little strategies you can use.

One thing I do when I’m having a conversation with someone at work is I try to pay attention to the language they are using. I try to really understand where a person is coming from. People often use a lot of metaphors when they speak to explain complex feelings. I listen for the metaphors and then I ask them what they mean by them. For example, a person may say “it’s as useless as a screen door on a submarine.” So, I’ll say “That’s funny. Tell me more about what you mean by that.” Then, I try to use their phrases and metaphors in my responses to them as a way of giving value to their thinking and to help them think about familiar things in new ways. For example, I might say, “it seems like you need a more useful door for your submarine, so to speak. What would that look like in this situation?” A question like this invites them to reflect on what their problem is in a different way.

This is really about meeting people where they are. It’s about stepping into their world, listening to them and understanding their perspective. A few weeks ago, when JR shared with us the story of Jesus turning

the water in the wine and later about Brock the Brony- or the My Little Pony enthusiast, he challenged us to take time to listen to someone else and learn what they're into. What are they excited about? How do they like to spend their time?

Another thing you can do is practice talking about Jesus with a friend or family member. Every time you use church jargon, have that person point it out to you and then think about how you might explain what you're talking about using words that would likely be more familiar to those who are not part of a church community.

Not using churchy jargon empowers us to share clearly and authentically with others. It makes Jesus more accessible to those who do not know much about him. Relationship is a big part of what it means to be God's people. When we take time to build positive relationships with others, especially others who are different from us, it helps us grow spiritually.

Having a personal understanding of what it means to be the people of God is very much connected with our interpersonal relationships with other people. We live in community with one another. In fact, relationships with others are so important, it is why we practice Communion, a holy and sacred activity for a spiritual community, every week here at Catalyst.

Church jargon can be an important and meaningful part of our community, but it can also be barrier, and part of the Good News is that in Jesus, God removed every barrier between us and him.

Communion. When Jesus had to explain that he was about to die on the cross and be the fulcrum of humanity's experience with God, he explained it in term of food and drink. It's relational. Jesus didn't offer a complicated theological lecture. He didn't express what was about to happen in religious language at all.

Instead, he took a loaf of bread, broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Take it and eat it."

After the meal was finished, he gave them a cup saying, "This wine is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Take it and drink it."

Jesus offers us eternal love in a language as simple, as accessible, as food and drink. You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion with us today. If you are hungry and thirsty for God's love, you're welcome to come.

Before we come, I want to lead you in a prayer of examen. I'll ask you some questions and give you space to reflect prayerfully on them. Then I'll pray for all of us and as you're ready you can approach the table.

1. Who has God brought into my life to share the good news of Jesus with during this series?
2. What words that I use to talk about Jesus are 'insider' words?
3. How can I share Jesus without that jargon?

Let's Pray Together:



God you have gathered us today that we might know you better. When you rescued us, you didn't stay in Heaven or insist we become fluent in your heavenly language. Instead you came among us as Jesus, flesh and blood. In Jesus, you made the world of heaven accessible to us. And you invited us into your divine love through your death on the cross, a death we participate in now by accepting your invitation to this table.

As we receive these wafers and this grape juice this morning, we pray they become a spiritual food. Give us the grace we need to follow your loving example in our world. Give us words to share your love with everyone we meet.

We offer these prayers and approach your table today in the name of your son, Jesus.

**Homework and Blessing:**

I have something for you. I'm giving you each a whistle to help you with removing jargon when talking to others outside the church community about Jesus. Before we did communion, we talked about some strategies. In the book, *Good News for a Change*, the author, Matt Mikalatos offers a great idea. He suggests you ask a friend to help you with a "project." Talk to your friend about Jesus and every time you use a jargon word, have them "buzz" you with a buzzer from a board game, like Taboo.

I don't have any buzzers, but I have whistles for you. Everytime you talk about Jesus or your church and use a churchy jargonized term, have your friend blow the whistle on you. It's a win-win. They get to hear about Jesus AND they get to try and annoy you with whistle blowing. That sounds fun, right? So, your homework this week is to think about how you talk about Jesus and how you can be more open to using words that the people you're talking to will understand.