

“I Ain’t No Big Christian”

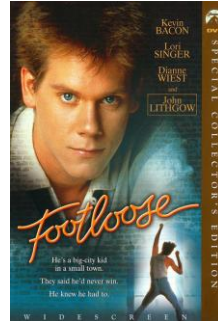
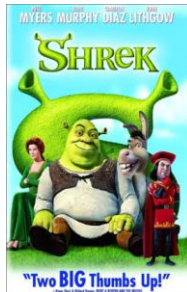
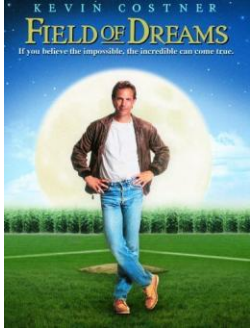
John 4:4-52



Have you ever played the game,  
Six degrees of Kevin Bacon?  
Or have you even heard of it,  
might be a better question.  
The game’s premise is based off the idea  
that any two people  
are six or fewer acquaintances apart.  
Those of you who are avid movie buffs  
are good at this game  
because you take a random actor  
and try to connect them  
to Kevin Bacon in 6 people or less.

So let’s try it, shall we?  
I think we can do this...  
(though I don’t know a ton of movies, wink)  
But for all the youth here this morning,  
I give you permission to make full use  
of the spiritual gifts  
of using your phone faster and better  
than any adult in this room  
to help us look up clues.

First I’ll use Kevin Costner  
to explain how this works.  
We would think of movies  
that Kevin Costner has been in  
and the actors who have been in those movies with him  
and use all our brain power  
to connect Kevin Costner to Kevin Bacon.

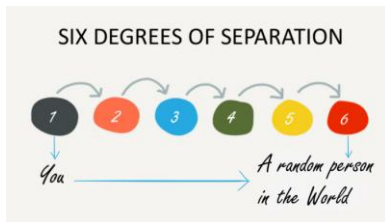


*Example: **Field of Dreams** which also stars **James Earl Jones**, who was in the **Coming to America** with **Eddie Murphy** who starred in **Shrek** with **John Lithgow**, who starred in **Footloose** with **Kevin Bacon**. See how that works?*

Try one more time?

This time I have not looked up anything!

So we are depending on the youth to help us out!



Now like I mentioned earlier  
the game Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon  
is based off the premise  
known as Six Degrees of Separation.  
Social networks are based on this concept  
—which is pretty fascinating.

Lots of research and data has been done  
based on this concept  
and several researchers have debunked  
the Six degrees of Separation as an urban myth.  
But a somewhat recent Columbia University study  
explored connectedness with internet and email users.  
They sent out over 24,000 emails  
aimed at 18 targets and 13 countries.  
According to that study connections

were made through chains of 7, 8, 9 and 10 people.<sup>1</sup>  
Which, let's be honest even 10 degrees of separation  
is still amazing!

Which means we are more connected than we think.

Even with those we don't know,  
we are connected by a beautiful, complex web.

We live in a small town  
and isn't fun that not one of us  
can go to the grocery store  
without bumping into somebody we know?

Or in our case where both my mom and her husband  
and Tripp's parents also live in the same town,  
we almost never go anywhere  
without being known  
or bumping into people who know them.

I like that small town feel about all of us.

It is heartwarming.

It is what draws people of us to this community,  
both Hickory and this church  
—the feeling of being known  
and being connected.



But perhaps one of the drawbacks  
to living in small community

is that there are no secrets.

And news spreads like,  
if I say "wildfire," is it too soon?

Anybody can be up in '*your business*.'

Even when you tell someone something  
and swear them to secrecy,  
they tell two of their closest friends

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six\\_degrees\\_of\\_separation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_degrees_of_separation)

and swear them to secrecy  
and they tell their three closest friends  
—well, all of you in here know  
what I'm talking about.

Of course the flip side  
is sometimes you want news to travel fast!  
That becomes knowing,  
exactly the right person to tell.  
If you want people to know  
about your child's school's fundraiser,  
you might tell your walking group,  
and they'll tell their Bible study  
and they'll tell their neighbors and boom!  
You've got a successful yard sale  
at Grandview Middle School.  
There are those people in our community  
that just seem to know everyone, right?  
*Matthew Pitts, where are you?*

One night I was at American Honor  
for a "GNO—girls night out,"  
and just by chance  
Bill and Christy Taylor had been upstairs  
eating with their daughter at Highland Ave.  
Bill and Christy came downstairs  
and came by our table to chat,  
and a few minutes later,  
Mike and Denise Filip walked in.  
Then Valerie Taylor who gave us our dog  
walked in with her daughter Erin.  
And last of all,  
here comes Mary Calder Taylor  
who literally bounced her way to our table  
with the kind of enthusiasm and volume  
that no one else on the planet has  
—I'm telling the truth.  
Our waiter at the end of the night said,  
"What do you do?"

How do you know everyone in town?"  
So of course we made him guess.  
He said, *realtor*.  
Which is a good guess,  
but it turns out he was-dyed in the wool Catholic  
and not impressed  
that my answer was *minister*.



Which brings me to say,  
that our Lady of Samaria  
was a mighty fine preacher.  
Bet you didn't think I was ever  
going to make a connection with the text, did ya?  
The way I see it,  
our woman at the well  
has gotten a bad rap for far too long.  
Why did she have 5 husbands?  
What is she doing at the well at noon,  
when no one goes to get water?  
Why is she talking to a Jewish man?  
All the answers that we have come up with  
point to her having  
moral character flaws somehow;  
was she fast and loose with all those men?  
Was she one of "those women,"  
who lived with a man outside of wedlock?  
Did she go to the well at noon

because she knew the other women in the village  
wouldn't be there then  
and she didn't want to wade through  
their disdain so she could get water?

Even she admits that it isn't proper  
to be talking with a man,  
let alone a Jewish man.

How many degrees of separation  
do you think ran through her mind  
as she saw Jesus the Jew sitting at her village well?

I mean Jews and Samaritans...  
they make our Democrats and Republicans  
look like kissing cousins.

But as it concerns our woman at the well  
I think it is time for a little redemption.  
That's what all of this is all about, isn't it;  
redemption?

Because the way I see it,  
this was the perfect woman to be at the well  
when Jesus got tired from his journey  
and stops Samaria.

She's perfect whatever her past entails;  
she's perfect given  
what the social codes allowed for,  
between two sparing ethnic groups  
like Jews and Samaritans;

she's perfect no matter what she and Jesus  
go back and forth with  
in their discussion of water.

She's perfect because as they talk,  
she hears Jesus telling her,  
things are changing,  
*"But the time is coming—he says—it has in fact come  
—when what you're called will not matter  
and where you go to worship will not matter.  
It's who you are and the way you live  
that count before God."*

What do you say to that?

When you live, sleep, eat, breathe,  
rules and codes, honor and shame  
—what do you say to some thirsty Jewish man  
when he tells you that?

You say exactly what she says in the text,

*“I don’t know about that.  
I do know that the Messiah is coming.  
When he arrives, we’ll get the whole story.”  
And of course Jesus has been waiting;  
waiting to tell her there aren’t  
six degrees of separation here,  
there are none;  
“I am he,” says Jesus.  
“You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.”*



And when she hears this, she,

she becomes the perfect preacher.  
She was the one to convince,  
she was the one to bear this kind of witness.  
She goes off to tell her village,  
*“Come see a man who knew about all the things I did,  
who knows me inside and out.  
Do you think he could be the Messiah?”*

The story tells us

that folks in the village then  
went out to see for themselves.

So she couldn't have been *that* untouchable  
or no one would have listened to her.  
She couldn't have been that  
*'loose woman'* we all assumed,  
because the people went out to see Jesus  
based on *her* testimony.

"She [must] have been well connected;  
she [could have had] had lots of family;  
I love the idea of not painting her as the social outcast  
—after all she wouldn't have been able to convince anyone  
about Jesus if she wasn't well connected—  
no one believes the outcast and forgotten and poor.  
But the whole town believes her."<sup>2</sup>  
She was a somebody in town  
who knew everybody.

She must have been a realtor.

Or maybe she's one of the first  
female ministers of the gospel.

Her testimony of Jesus is convincing enough  
that the whole town comes out to the well  
and asks Jesus to stay for a few days.  
They decide to give this Jew a try  
—let him prove he is who she says he is.

And the most amazing thing happens,  
*"A lot more people entrust their lives to him  
when they heard what he had to say.  
They said to the woman,  
"We're no long taking this on your say-so.  
We've heard it for ourselves  
and know it for sure.  
He's the Savior of the world!"*

If that doesn't beat all!

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from, Pr. Janet Hunt, <http://dancingwiththeword.com/jesus-and-the-samaritans/>



That is some good preaching

To think she wasn't even a Christian,  
she's a Samaritan!

Or we could say, she isn't even an American,  
she's an immigrant!

What her story says to us  
is we are more connected than we think.  
It means we are more alike  
than we are different.

And, here's the kicker,  
her story tell us that we don't have to be  
anything other than who we are,  
to bear witness to the good news of the gospel.  
**We don't have to be anything other than who we are,  
to proclaim the good news of the gospel.**

You want to try a social experiment  
to see how connected we all are?  
Go and spread the good news,  
go tell people you met the Messiah,  
the savior of this world  
and he knows everything about you,  
just like your 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Sunday school teacher  
who you saw at Lowe's food the other day  
buying green beans.

You want to cut the number  
of connectedness down from six?  
How about a number of none?  
Then be the person you are  
and let Jesus use that  
to change the people around you.

One more story that drives that point home.



Sean Dietrich and his buddy  
are sitting at quintessential beer joint  
in south Alabama.

Chain smokers, jukebox only plays country,  
which means George Strait, Hank and Merle.

Sean's buddy jokingly tells their waitress  
that he's a writer

and she turns to them and says,  
with a doubting, cocked eye brow,  
"well I gotta story for ya."

She's a no-nonsense woman,  
tattoos up her arm and  
pink press on nails.

Maybe she's had a couple of husbands,  
who knows?

There was a homeless guy, she tells him  
the man rode his bike all over town.

She often saw him on her way to work  
and wondered where he was going.

So one day, she followed him.

He lived behind a strip mall,  
in the woods.

She discovered he had a son.

"It was enough to break your heart," she adds.

"They were living underneath a tarp."

The next day, she and a friend delivered gift bags.

A prepaid cellphone, snacks, clothes, toys, food.

As many items as they could fit into a few gym bags.

"He was skittish," she said.

"Very protective of his son,

didn't want us getting close."  
She couldn't get him off her mind.  
                  She contacted her brother-in-law—a church deacon.  
                  She convinced his church  
                                  to offer the man a room and meals.  
                  One night, she approached the homeless man with the offer.  
She walked right into his camp.

This woman is fearless.

He refused.  
                  He told her he didn't want her charity.  
                  "So I got in his face," she says.  
                  "Told him if he didn't take my handout,  
                                  I was gon' call the law  
  and have his kid removed."

Magic.

He moved into a small Sunday-school room  
                  which she and her friends  
                                  had outfitted with beds and a mini-fridge.  
                                  The church agreed to hire him as a custodian.  
  They even paid him.  
  Good thinking church.  
People brought casseroles upon casseroles.  
                  The boy attended school.  
                  He was smart.  
                                  And, Sean writes, I understand he was a good athlete.  
  She went to his games.  
  She says it didn't take long for the man  
  to save enough to buy a car  
  and get his own apartment.

Eventually, he got on his feet  
                  and she's never heard from him again.  
                  That was a decade ago.  
                  "The end," she says.

Because Sean is a writer, he asks

if she'd let him write about it.

She nods and tells him she doesn't want recognition.

That's not why she told him the story.

**She is clear about this.**

She goes on, "All I want's average folks to know  
we CAN make a frickin' difference in this world  
if we just TRY, you know?"

I mean, come on, y'all. Dang."

Yeah.

"Shoot, if I can do it..." she says.

"I mean just look at me,

I ain't no big Christian or nothing."

Ma'am, he writes

You're the biggest kind there is.<sup>3</sup>

Mmm, hmm.

Maybe a good social experiment for us these days  
is accepting ourselves

with all the flaws and moral code failures,  
maybe we ought to trust ourselves  
to be good preachers.

Good proclaimers of the gospel.

Maybe we ought to let Jesus  
change others around us using us.

Who would have thought?

I mean, we ain't got to be no big Christian to do that.

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<sup>3</sup> Sean Dietrich, <http://seandietrich.com/author/seandietrich/>