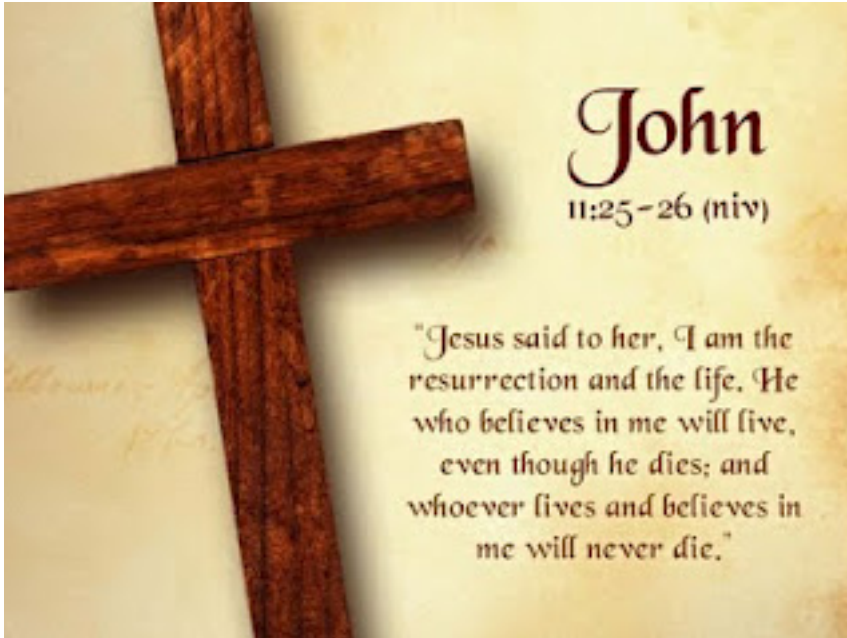


Jesus, the Communicator -His Sermon Method: Meeting Felt Needs First

Written by admin

Tuesday, 27 March 2012 09:50 - Last Updated Tuesday, 27 March 2012 14:04

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Jesus sees our hearts: the pain, the hurts, the hopes and fears. He meets each of us at the point of our need. Read how he met the needs of Blind Bartimaeus, the Woman at the Well, Zacchaeus, the Man at the Bethesda Pool, the Woman caught in Adultery, Nicodemus, the Thief at the Cross and others.

Blind Bartimaeus

Down the long, dusty road on their way from Jericho to Jerusalem, almost two thousand years ago, trod Jesus with His motley band of twelve disciples, followed by a huge crowd.

Because of their long journey, they were all hot and sweaty. The dust clung to them. They were weary, but Jesus was at the height of His popularity and the great crowd of people pressed close to Him. They were jabbering endlessly: Asking questions, Seeking favors. They could be heard a mile away.

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“Hey, what’s all the noise?” blind Bartimaeus asked his friend as they sat by the highway begging

“I don’t know,” answered his friend with a puzzled tone in his voice.

“Let’s ask somebody else,” they agreed.

“It’s Jesus,” a passer-by informed them.

“You mean Jesus of Nazareth, the fellow they claim can heal the sick and the blind?” Bartimaeus excitedly asked.

“That’s the One,” came the reply, “and I’m not going to miss seeing Him for anything. Good-bye.”

The crowd came closer and closer. Excitement filled the air. The noise became intense.

“I can’t believe it,” shouted Bartimaeus to his friend. “This just has to be my lucky day. I’ve got to get to Jesus. I know He can heal me.”

“Hey, Bart, there He is,” cried Bartimaeus friend, “but how will you ever get His attention?”

Dignity was dismissed. “This is it,” said Bartimaeus. “I may never see Jesus again. I want to be healed.”

So, seeking to drown out the noise of the crowd. Bartimaeus yelled at the top of his voice,

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“Jesus, have mercy on me! O Lord, son of David, have mercy on me!”

“Cool it, man! Calm down!” retorted some of the crowd to Bartimaeus. “You’re making too much noise. There are so many others here you don’t stand a chance of getting to Jesus, so just relax and keep quiet!”

But Bartimaeus was all the more determined to get to Jesus. He couldn’t see, but he could yell. He cried out all the louder. Hear his voice rise above the din of the crowd. It rang out like a great clarion call. “Jesus, O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus, O Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

And Jesus stood still.

And the crowds stood still.

And a great calm settled down over them all.

The winds and the waves couldn’t stop the Saviour. Neither could angry mobs. Crowds of people couldn’t stop Him either. But a lone, blind beggar did.

And Jesus with His great heart of compassion asked for Bartimaeus to be brought over to Him. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked.

“Lord,” Bartimaeus nervously replied, “please give me my sight.”

And Jesus did. “Go your way,” He said, “Your faith has made you whole.”

Immediately Bartimaeus could see and he followed Jesus along the way (Mark 10:46-52).

With Christ, a person's salvation usually came as a result of His having first met that person's felt need.

If Jesus had anything like a standard approach it was more likely to be a question such as the following: "What do you want me to do for you?" or "Do you want to be made whole?" or "What is your deepest need?"

The Woman at the Well

On another occasion Jesus and His disciples left Judea to head for Galilee. He wanted to go through Samaria, as He had some business to take care of on the way.

About midday Jesus was tired so He sat down and rested at Jacob's well. While His disciples were in town getting some lunch, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well.

I'm sure this woman was the reason for Jesus wanting to come this way. But how could He approach her? For one thing she was a Samaritan and Jesus was a Jew, and it wasn't socially or culturally acceptable for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan. She also had some personal problems which would make it look rather suspicious for Jesus to be talking to her alone. She had lived a rather colourful life and had had a few men in her time. Because of this she wasn't too popular with the other women of the town, so she came to the well alone in the middle of the day. All the other women came in the cool of the evening to draw their water.

Imagine, if you can, Jesus approaching this woman by making a statement like this: "Excuse me, lady, my name is Jesus and I'd like to ask you a personal question." And without waiting for a reply or giving her a choice He asks, "Tell me, if you should die tonight do you know where you would spend eternity?"

Not being a member of a local church she probably wouldn't have the faintest idea what He was talking about and would probably dismiss Him as being some kind of a religious freak.

But Jesus didn't approach her with any kind of a pat program. Being very sensitive to people's needs He knew that this woman was in trouble. The fact that she came to the well alone in the heat of the day was saying that. Somehow He sensed the kind of life she lived and knew that she was hurting, that underneath her brave exterior and good looks was a frightened and lonely woman. Her felt need was emotional. She needed understanding and acceptance.

Psychologists say that every life a person touches he either builds a bridge to that person or a wall between them. And Jesus, being a great bridge builder, bridged the great social gap between them by simply asking, "Please give me a drink."

This was the beginning of quite an interesting conversation. Following a brief discussion about living water, Jesus put His finger on both the need and problem area of her life. Without judging her in any way He told her that He knew she was living with a man who wasn't her husband and that she had already had five husbands. "You have to be a prophet," she exclaimed and then turned the conversation to spiritual things herself.

She then got so excited that she left her waterpot behind, rushed back to the city and, in essence, said to the men, "Come with me. I want you to meet a man who told me all about myself with all my weaknesses and He accepted me just as I am. He didn't even criticise me. He must be the Christ." (See John 4:1-30.)

Jesus knew this woman's deepest need – her need for acceptance – and when He met it she believed in Him and automatically became a most enthusiastic, witness.

Zacchaeus

Then there was Zacchaeus, the little fellow who had to climb a tree in order to see Jesus when He passed by. In spite of the great crowd of people, Jesus saw him in his tree and came over to talk to him.

I wonder just how Zacchaeus felt with Jesus looking up at him. He was a tax gatherer and, as such, was despised by the people. In a sense he was an upper-class social outcast. You can imagine some of the thoughts and feelings racing through his mind: "I wonder what Jesus is

going to say to me? I'm scared to death. Will he condemn me too?"

But his fears were quickly allayed. Sensing Zacchaeus's deep social need and a need for a friend, Jesus quietly said. "Come down, my friend, I would like to go home with you for dinner tonight."

When Jesus met his felt need, Zacchaeus, of his own initiative, confessed his sin and promised to make restitution to all he had cheated (Luke 19:1-10).

The Man at Bethesda

In Jerusalem there was a pool called Bethesda where many sick, crippled, blind, and impotent people waited. This particular pool was visited from time to time by an angel after which it had certain healing powers for the first person who entered the water.

One of those many people lying on his bed beside the pool was a man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years! One day Jesus came to him and said, "Would you like to be made whole?"

The impotent man replied pathetically, "But, sir, I don't have anybody to put me in the pool when the waters are visited. And while I am struggling to get there, somebody else always beats me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed, and walk."

And the man did. Jesus had healed him – and left without even telling the man who He was or why He healed him.

It was at a later point of time that Jesus spoke to this man about spiritual matters (John 5:1-15). The man's need was obviously physical and Jesus met him at that point of need first.

Rebecca Pippert explains how Jesus “had an extraordinary ability to see beneath the myriad of layers of people and know what they longed for, or really believed, but were afraid of revealing. That is why His answers so frequently did not correspond to the questions He was asked. He sensed their unspoken need or question and responded to that instead. Jesus could have healed lepers in countless ways. To the leper in Mark 1:40-45 He could have shouted, ‘Be healed ... but don’t get too close. I just hate the sight of lepers.’ He didn’t. Jesus reached over and touched him. Jesus’ touch was not necessary for his physical healing. It was critical for his emotional healing.

“Can you imagine what it meant to that man to be touched? A leper was an outcast, quite accustomed to walking down a street and seeing people scatter, shrieking at him, ‘Unclean – unclean!’ Jesus knew that this man not only had a diseased body but an equally diseased self-concept. He needed to be touched to be fully cured. And so Jesus responded as He always did, with total healing for the whole person.” [1]

The Woman Caught in Adultery

Perhaps one of the most beautiful examples of communicating Christ’s love in the entire New Testament is where Christ ministered to the woman who was caught in the act of adultery.

Why the scribes and Pharisees brought only the woman to Jesus for judgement is a little difficult to understand. How a woman could be caught in the act of adultery alone is beyond my comprehension. If the truth could be known, the guilty man may very well have been one of the accusers. If I were a betting man, I’d bet he was. The whole affair was undoubtedly a setup to trap Jesus. Not only was this woman being used, but terribly abused.

Regardless, you can just see these religious bigots gloating over their victory. “We’ve got Him cornered at last,” they bragged among themselves with a false sense of anticipated triumph. “He can’t win. And we can’t lose. Whatever way He answers, He’s damned. If He says to punish her according to the law of God, well accuse Him of having no mercy. If He says to let her go free, well accuse Him of breaking God’s law.”

So there they stood around Jesus and the guilty woman. They were like a pack of hungry dogs just waiting for the signal to pounce on Jesus and devour Him.

What did they care about the woman? Absolutely nothing They were using her as a pawn in their game.

“Now, Master,” they sarcastically addressed Jesus. “this woman was caught committing adultery the very act. God’s law demands that such a woman be stoned to death. How do you feel about that? What’s your judgment?”

Jesus ignored them. He stooped down and wrote on the ground. But these men were persistent. They were determined to win their devious game so they kept pressing Jesus for an answer.

So Jesus stood up, looked at them, and agreed with them. “Yes,” he said, “you’re absolutely correct. The law of Moses, God’s law, does say that such a woman should be stoned to death.”

“He’s agreeing with us,” they mused among themselves, and you could see them going for the rocks tucked under their religious robes – the rocks of accusation they were about to hurl at Jesus. They were more concerned about killing Jesus than they were about stoning the woman or defending justice.

“So,” continued Jesus, “go ahead and stone her to death if that’s what you desire.”

After a brief moment’s pause and with a burning look that pierced the depths of their consciences Jesus added, “However, gentlemen, wait just a minute, I’d like to add one condition – let the man who has never sinned cast the first stone.”

Thud

Their own accusations had boomeranged on themselves. They weren’t prepared for that answer. The silence was deafening. And now like frightened puppy dogs, they tucked their “religious” tails between their legs and got out of there as quickly as they could.

Jesus was left alone with the woman. He knew she'd been used. He understood her deepest need and gently asked her, "What happened to your accusers? Where did they go? Isn't there anyone left to condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she replied, "they've all gone."

Then Jesus made a simple but profound statement: "I don't condemn you either. Go, and don't commit this sin anymore." (See John 8:1-11.)

The crucial issue to see and understand in this situation was not that Jesus won, nor was it that the woman was set free. The profound dynamic in communicating His message in this story was this: Before Jesus told this woman to go and sin no more He first met the basic need in her life, the lack of which was causing her to sin.

This is such a profound truth, it desperately needs understanding. Let me explain. Counsellors tell us that a prostitute, for example, is a woman who has been hurt deeply by her father – perhaps by her mother too, but mostly by her father. She is very hostile towards him. He didn't meet her needs for love; acceptance, and approval. Neither did he confirm her womanhood. For one or many reasons she felt rejected by him. She doesn't come to this conclusion consciously, but the greatest way she can get back at her father is by becoming a prostitute. She is also desperately searching for the father's love she never received as a child or as a young woman and is unconsciously trying to prove to herself that she is a woman. She is being driven into acts of sin because of unresolved hurt, anger and by an unmet need for love and acceptance.

The same principle applies to the man who is running around using women. His problem includes lust, but it goes far deeper. He is not the great masculine figure he thinks he is. He may be angry at his mother and be using other women as a means of expressing his hostility. Or he may be still searching for the mother's love and acceptance he never received as a child as well as trying to convince himself that he is adequate as a male.

Behind all external acts of sin, there is almost always a deeper sin, fault, unmet need, or damaged emotion. In other words, all behavior is caused or motivated. There is a reason why

people do what they do. This is not to excuse their behavior. Not at all . Jesus didn't condemn the woman for her sin, but neither did He condone her actions. He told her not to do it again. However, He knew that this woman had a deep emotional need in her life and it was this unmet need that was driving her into acts of sin.

In meeting her needs, Jesus could realistically say to her, “Go and don’t commit this sin anymore.”

We tend to see sin as only the external act. But this external act is merely the tip of the iceberg. Sin is anything that falls short of the perfection God planned for us. It includes all of our damaged emotions, our wounded personality, our mixed motives, our unresolved inner conflicts, and our supercharged repressed negative emotions. These are the pains that keep us in bondage to ourselves and cause us to act out in sinful ways. These are the barriers that alienate us from God, from others, and from ourselves so that we no longer know who or what we fully are. Sin is the whole iceberg, not merely the external tip.

Because of this, when Jesus ministered to the woman caught in adultery, He dealt with her whole person not just her sinful act. As already noted, before He took away her act of sin He first met the basic need in her life, the lack of which was driving her to commit sins. Jesus loved and accepted her. When He did this, I believe, for the very first time in this woman's life she was loved and accepted by a man for whom she was rather than for what she had to offer. Jesus knew her sin and her weaknesses. He understood her fully and loved and accepted her unconditionally. In so doing He confirmed her personhood and her womanhood. In other words, the needs that her own father did not or could not meet, Jesus met. In meeting these father needs Jesus could then realistically say to her, “Go and don’t commit this sin anymore.”

Or take the person with a drinking problem, a lying problem, a stealing problem, a drug problem, a gossip problem, or any other kind of sin problem. Behind the external act of sin lies a deeper fault, problem, or sin. The external act of sin is merely the symptom of the deeper sin. And when a person is hiding a deeper sin or fault, he tends to commit – and confess – a lesser sin all the more vigorously.

Therefore, how unkind it is of me, how lacking in understanding, and how unlike Christ to take away your external acts of sin or condemn you and make you feel guilty for them without seeking to understand and meet the basic needs in your life, the lack of which are causing you to commit sins.

It is easy for me to lay rules on you and make you feel guilty if you don't conform, and in so doing deceive myself into believing that I have been faithful to God and His Word. That's not costly at all. But how difficult and how costly it is to seek to understand you, to learn why you do what you do, and then attempt to meet your deepest needs – the lack of which are causing you to commit acts of sin. This takes true commitment to Christ and commitment to you and your growth.

Being a sinner myself, I do not have the right to tell you not to sin again. I only have the responsibility to accept you as a fellow sinner and help you meet your needs and thereby help take away your need for sinning. And in fact, if I take away your symptoms your external acts of sin – without dealing with the deeper causes, I will drive your inner sins and problems deeper underground and damage your personality even further.

Nicodemus and the Thief on the Cross

Jesus was an effective communicator not only because He understood God's message but because He also understood people. And when communicating God's message to people He always met each individual at his or her point of felt need – regardless of what that need was.

In fact, there were only two people mentioned in the entire Gospels whom Jesus met directly at a point of spiritual need. These were Nicodemus and one of the thieves who was crucified with Him. The thief on the cross, about to die, understandably confessed his sinfulness to Christ and asked for mercy. That was indeed his felt need.

Nicodemus's felt need was also spiritual. Being a religious ruler of the Jews he was puzzled about Jesus and His relationship to God. He was searching for spiritual answers.

Knowing Nicodemus's felt need, Jesus didn't ask him if he wanted to be made whole. He knew that Nicodemus was concerned about his own relationship to God and the matter of eternal life. So ignoring Nicodemus's initial statements, Christ came directly to the point and simply stated, "Nicodemus, unless a man is born again, he will not even see the kingdom of God let alone enter it!" (See John 3:3,5,7.)

Whether a person's need was physical, social, emotional, or spiritual, Jesus always met each individual where he was in terms of his or her spiritual understanding and always started at their

point of felt need. To be an effective communicator the formula is therefore simple: know God, know yourself, know people – and always target your message to meet their felt needs. However, doing this is complex, but it was the way Christ communicated. I doubt if we will find a better way.

Toni

I met Toni in an Eastern city about five years ago. I had flown into town to visit with Tom, a very close personal friend of mine from college days. I hadn't seen Tom for about ten years and was looking forward very much to our meeting. However, I had a few hours to wait until Tom got off work and was waiting for him in the lobby of a large downtown hotel. I had been reading, looking at the news-stand, and generally killing time.

During the afternoon I was approached by an attractive young lady who started asking some "interesting" questions. However, it didn't take too long and too much insight to discern that this woman of the day happened to be a woman of the night.

Immediately I knew that here was a person in deep need, and possibly deep pain. So I introduced myself to her and asked her what her name was.

"Why are you in this business?" I asked Toni kindly.

"I need the money," she rationalized

I knew that she wasn't in it for the money. That was just the excuse to justify her behavior. However, I didn't disagree.

I simply replied and asked, "Tell me about yourself. Did you always live in this town? Did you grow up here? Do you have brothers and sisters? Do you still live at home? What does your father do?"

Toni began to open up to me and we were having an interesting conversation when suddenly she stopped and blurted out. “Hey, Dick, wait a minute. Nobody in my whole life has ever talked to me like this before. By the way, who are you? What do you do?”

“Oh, no,” I thought to myself, “if I tell her who I am and what I do, she'll go for her life.”

I couldn't think of anything to say, so I stood there and grinned rather foolishly – which I often do when I'm in a jam. I learned that technique by the time I was five and used it to try and out-manipulate my mother! I decided to tell Toni the truth.

“You'll never believe me,” I finally replied, “but I'm a minister of religion,” to which I expected her to bid me good day and go for her life.

But Toni never batted an eyelid. As quick as a flash she responded, “You mean you believe in the Lord?”

“Yes,” I said rather relieved.

“So do I,” she said positively and continued, “I often pray in the shower and ask God to forgive my sins.”

“Very interesting,” I thought, “that's pretty common. Like Pilate of old, people still try to wash their guilt away – which water can never do.”

Toni didn't really give me a chance to reply. She just opened up to me. She told me all about her family and her work, how much she despised what she was doing, how unhappy she was, how her parents were divorced many years before, how she felt that her father had deserted her and moved a thousand miles away. She hadn't seen him in years. She was very hurt and angry at him. She also told me how much she hated her mother. And then came the crunch line. I didn't know what it would be, but I knew there was one somewhere in her past.

“Dick,” she said with tears flooding her eyes, “in my whole life I have never felt that anyone ever loved me. I am terribly lonely all of the time.”

I wept quietly with her. “Oh, I can understand how you feel,” I genuinely said. “I came from a broken home too. My parents were divorced. And I hated my father too, because I felt that he rejected me. I know what it’s like to feel lonely – like nobody in the whole world loves you. I know what it feels like.”

That’s why Toni was a prostitute.

She was craving a father and mother’s love which she had never had. She was also acting out her inner hurt, anger, and self-hatred in self-destructive ways. She desperately craved love and acceptance.

Apparently there was another couple involved in this racket. They could see that business wasn’t going too well there in the hotel lobby. I don’t think they approved of the tears. They were closing in on Toni and I could see that they were about to grab her arm and take her away.

Very quickly I beat them. I put my arm around Toni’s shoulder and said, “Toni, I will probably never see you again, but there is something very important that I want to tell you. I hope you will never forget this as long as you live. It is this: No matter what you have ever done or have failed to do – no matter what it is, and no matter how you ever feel or don’t feel, remember that God loves you and so do I.”

And with that I let go of Toni and she was taken away.

As I stood there that day, I felt profoundly moved in my spirit. Two people had related – heart-to-heart – and not merely head-to-head.

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Then I was suddenly struck with the thought that in God's sight Toni and I were both the same. We both had similar needs and hurts. The only difference being that to overcome the voice of her inner pain, Toni became a sexaholic. To overcome the voice of my inner pain I became a workaholic – "for God" no less! But with God who looks on the heart and not on the outward appearance, there wasn't any difference – Toni and I had both sinned and come short of His standard (Rom. 3:23). And then as I sat there in that hotel lobby in deep contemplation, waiting for my friend to arrive, another truth hit me. It was this:

"It was a lack of love that drove Toni into acts of sin. Only love will ever take her out again!"

Love, understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness. That's the message of Christ. It's the greatest healing power in the world. It's the message that our broken world so desperately needs. And that's the message every effective Christian communicator will always strive to communicate.

As we have already noted, Christianity is much more than a creed. And witnessing for Christ is much more than sharing the plan of salvation (as important as that is at the appropriate time). Being a Christian and being an effective witness for Christ is to experience God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness, and to communicate this to every life we touch.

"Do this," I can almost hear Christ saying, "and you will be one of my witnesses indeed."

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