

Loving Like Jesus series

#2 – *Being Approachable*

10/28/2018

Last week we began our series on Learning to Love Like Jesus by focusing on becoming a person who notices others which was something Jesus was really good at. To accomplish this involves getting your nose out of your cell phone and your daily planner and intentionally approaching every day wanting to be God's arms and legs of love to the individuals God brings across your path.

But merely noticing people and their needs isn't enough if you don't do something about it, as James points out.

James 2:14-17 (NIV) *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

Therefore this morning, spring boarding off of "noticing" I want to talk about the second aspect of loving like Jesus which is being **Approachable**.

One of the obvious aspects of Jesus, throughout his ministry, was that he was approachable to everyone.

- He spent an evening visiting with one of the **Pharisees** by the name of **Nicodemus**.
- **Lepers** frequently approached Jesus and Jesus even reached out and touched them, which would have made him unclean. (**Mark 1:40-42**)
- Mothers brought their **children** for Jesus to bless them, and even though his disciples tried to turn them away, Jesus invited them in and spent the time to bless them.
- He spent time dining with **tax collectors and their friends** in their homes and frequently came under criticism for that from the religious rulers. (**Mark 2:15; Luke 15:1-2**) The reason this was such a big deal was because dining in someone's home implied acceptance of the host and many of these individuals had been taught by the religious elite that they were unacceptable to God because of their many sins.
- Only 2 times did Jesus acknowledge the faith of individuals and both of them were non-Jews.
- The woman, only identified as "*a sinful woman*" felt that it was safe to break into the party held in Jesus' honor by Simon the Pharisee and lavishly anoint Jesus with expensive oil and anoint his body with her hair. And at the end of the evening, it was the "sinful woman" who was praised for her faith and not Simon.
- The angel appeared to Joseph and told him that the baby growing inside of his fiancée, Mary, would be called, **Immanuel**, which means "**God with us**", immediately it implied that God was no longer in heaven somewhere, but that He was coming down to us – that He was no longer distant but right here with us and hence approachable.

- In Jesus' teaching he frequently stressed that he was approachable and available to everyone, regardless of their economic level, their social status, their lineage or their level of sins.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV) *"Come to me, **all** you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Notice he didn't limit who could come to him but he said, "**all** who are tired are welcome to come." And He emphasized that whoever God brought to himself, "*He will never drive away.*" (John 6:37)

This message of God being approachable was loudly and visibly proclaimed at Jesus' crucifixion for when he died the very large veil in the Temple that separated the most inner room, the Holy of Holies, from everywhere else, was torn in two from top to bottom, symbolizing that everyone now had access to God. Access wasn't granted on the basis of your good works or impressive accomplishments but rather on the sacrificial death of Jesus for our sins.

Additionally there's a fascinating passage in the one of the Jewish writings that records that from the point of Jesus' death, that the gates in the temple kept opening up randomly and they couldn't seem to keep them closed. Once again emphasizing God's approachability to everyone at all times.

The writer of Hebrews continues to emphasize this new reality when he writes:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22 (NIV) This is quite the contrast to when God appeared to His people, shortly after He miraculously rescued them from Egypt, and cautioned Moses to not let them get too close to the mountain that He appeared on or He would kill them. Now, since Jesus, we're all invited to come with confidence into His very presence.

Jud Wilhite in his book **Uncensored Grace** talks about how Jesus' example of approachability should impact the way we live our lives. *"As the most spiritually mature person to ever live, Jesus stands as the model for what a spiritual life looks like. He remained approachable to outsiders and the hurting. His life reveals that the more spiritually mature I am, the more approachable I am to people who feel far from God. As spiritual maturity increases, approachability increases."*

Notice that he doesn't equate increased approachability with the **length of time** you've been a Christian but rather he ties it to the increase of **spiritual maturity** in a person's life. It's entirely possible for you to be a Christian for many many years and yet never become more approachable, because you settle into a comfortable inward focused life. But if you want to really love like Jesus it takes intentionally allowing the Holy Spirit to transform your mind and heart, which will naturally make you more approachable. Just as people were drawn to Jesus, so also people will be drawn to you when they recognize God's love in and flowing out of you.

So, what does it take to not merely notice people and their needs but to be approachable enough that they would feel comfortable to open up and allow God's love to touch their lives?

How to be Approachable:

1. **Be "available"**. That means physically and emotionally available. And I add emotionally because we all know that it's possible for you to be physically with someone and yet not really paying attention to them. Many of you have experienced that first hand during the current football season. Try to talk to someone who's watching a football game and you realize that while they are nodding, you really don't have their full attention. Others can feel that as well. So, when you're with someone focus intently upon what they are saying. Make it your goal to be Jesus to them at that moment in time. If you're sitting, lean forward in your chair and ask questions, when appropriate to make sure you correctly understand what they are saying. Fight the urge to figure out what to say next and instead commit to being fully listening and understanding what they have to share. People aren't used to others really caring how they are doing, and if you do, you'll stand out from the crowd and have the opportunity to show them that they matter to you and to God. Jesus taught in the temples on the Sabbath, but the rest of the week He was in the streets, villages and hillsides building relationships with those who weren't in the temple on the Sabbath. He left the 99 who were safe in the temple to search for that one who would listen to Him outside of the temple.

Would the people who know you best say you're largely available or distracted?

2. **Be humble**: people can detect arrogance or condescension quickly and are turned off by it. Nobody wants to merely feel like they are your charity project and nobody likes being judged. Amazingly, Jesus was the only person who never sinned and thus the only person who had a genuine right to judge others. But sinners who humbly came to him never felt that judgment, otherwise they would have turned away. But people were drawn to Jesus because of his acceptance and love. They certainly weren't used to being treated this way by the other religious leaders of that day. They were used to being snubbed and told they were being judged by God because of their sins. But Jesus came to earth by humbling himself (**Philippians 2:8**) and it continued to show throughout his ministry. The opposite of humility is pride and being prideful is all about being exclusive, not inclusive.

Would people that know you well say that you're inclusive or exclusive?

3. **Be compassionate:** Jesus didn't merely see the needs of the people and feel badly for them but he felt compassion for them (Mt 9:36). That's different than feeling pity. Feeling pity for someone is feeling badly that they are in that predicament. But feeling compassion means that you actually feel the pain of their condition. You hurt with them. Compassion isn't something you can develop on your own efforts. It's a character trait that the Holy Spirit can develop within you in response to your openness and prayers.

Would the people that know you well say you're compassionate or indifferent?

4. **Be trustworthy:** They've got to know that you have their best interest in mind and that if they share something with you that you won't go blab it around to everyone else. And this they will discover over time. As they share small details about their life and see what you do with that and then go deeper over time as you prove that you can be trusted.

Can people trust you with their hurts and pains?

5. **Smile!!** Researchers say that a smile of just a mere four-thousandths of a second is enough to produce a mini emotional high in others; it makes people see things around them in a more positive light. Rev up your smile and you instantly become more approachable.
6. **See the good in others (in other words, see them through the eyes of Jesus)** – You can probably find negative things about just about everyone and some people believe it's their spiritual gift. Or you can choose to discover the "good" in others and point that out to them. People don't often receive compliments, so if you look for the good in others and point that out to them, you'll stand out from everyone else and rather than building a wall you'll be building bridges of potential healing and the opportunity to share Christ with them.

Would those who know you well feel encouraged by being around you or discouraged?

7. **Ask questions about their life:** asking open ended questions says that you're interested in them and want to hear more. We probably all know individuals who just love to talk about themselves and you leave realizing that they never asked about you, but rather just wanted to talk about themselves. As often as you can deflect the attention off of yourself and back on to them.

Would those who know you well say that you're more self-absorbed or outward focused?

Both Vickie Seifert and Lynn Barton during the past several months have had a neighbor pass away and they both noticed it and have reached out and showed Christ's love to the family members. Helping take care of kids, praying for them, giving words of encouragement and offering to help in whatever would be helpful. That's what I'm talking about this morning. Get outside of your normal guarded life and be aware of the needs of those around you and enter into their world fully expecting that God has great plans to use you to show His love to others.

Let's not just "notice" people but let's love people in actions as well by learning to be approachable. There are lots and lots of people who just want someone to care about what's going on in their lives. I'm guessing there might be even several within our midst this morning that are carrying a heavy burden and are hoping that someone would care enough to help them with it. One of the most powerful witnesses of the early church was how they did such a great job caring for each other. 47 times in the New Testament we are instructed on how to treat each other with the little phrase "one another". Included in those Scriptures are the commands to "*Bear one another's burdens*" and to "*Encourage one another and build one another up*". Often when we talk about learning to love like Jesus we can think that's another evangelistic tool to reach people who don't know Christ. And while that's absolutely true, we need to remember that one of the greatest witnesses to the world is how Christ's followers care for one another. Remember, Jesus said that the way the world should be able to tell if we're one of his followers would be how we love one another. So, let's make sure that we're "noticing" people within our own church body and being available and approachable to them. So as I dismiss you this morning, I want to encourage you to not just run and visit with those you already know but take a few moments to look around and take time to be Christ's love to the people who are right here and then take what we've discussed this morning and go out into the hurting world we live in and be Jesus to them.

I'd like to close our service this morning by reciting together a well known prayer composed by Teresa of Avila. I've modified it slightly to make it more about the responsibility and privileges we have as a church to be Jesus to the world that we live and breathe in this week. So, let's read it together and then proceed to show Christ's love to the world – beginning right here and right now.

“Christ has no body now but ours.

No hands, no feet on earth but ours.

Ours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Ours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Ours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Ours are the hands, ours are the feet, ours are the eyes, we are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but ours.”

Teresa of Avila

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Loving Like Jesus #1 principle: _____ others

How was Jesus approachable to others?

Would you consider yourself an approachable person?
What evidence is there to support that assessment?

Do you generally see God as approachable or distant?

How to Be Approachable:

1. Be _____
Are you more available or distracted with others?
2. Be _____
Are you more inclusive or exclusive?
3. Be _____
Do you tend to be more compassionate or indifferent?
4. Be _____
Can people trust you with their hurts and pains?
5. S _____
Do you frown or smile more? Why?
6. See the _____ in _____
Are people generally encouraged or discouraged by being around you?
7. Ask _____ about their life
Are you more self-absorbed or outward focused?

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