

Love in action

Making a Difference: Call to Love Others

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We live in a world where self-promotion is the norm. Every job application asks for our credentials and accomplishments. Every reference letter asks someone to write about our strengths. And every interview I've ever been in basically comes down to one question: "What makes you so great that we should hire you?"

This self-promotion goes beyond the world of resumes and applications. Many of our daily conversations are tainted with an underlying need to impress the person we are talking to. When the opportunity arises to talk about myself, what's the first thing I'll say? When I state my opinion on a subject matter, what list of credentials will I rattle off to prove to the other person that I know what I'm talking about?

When Simon Peter had his first encounter with Jesus Christ, Peter could have made many statements about who he was. After all, Peter was a professional fisherman, and Jesus was telling him how to fish!

But Peter didn't act like an expert. He didn't tell Jesus why he knew better. In fact, Peter's response can be summarized in one word: humble. The first statement Peter made about himself was, "I am a sinful man!"

The first recorded statement that Peter made about himself was one that acknowledged his own humility. If that in itself isn't rare, what comes after this declaration is unusual. Jesus calls Peter to be his first disciple. In Jewish culture, calling of disciples was not an uncommon occurrence, but the calling was usually based on proven adherence to the Law and a sophisticated view of theology; never on the awareness of one's own sinful nature.

Peter had a very real encounter with Jesus Christ, which is recorded in Luke 5. Previous to his calling, Peter had listened to Jesus teach, and witnessed a miracle Jesus performed. And as He experienced the power of Christ and the hope in His words, he was left with only one response: humility. He didn't feel the need to prove Himself. He didn't feel the pressure to demonstrate how great he was in order to gain all that Jesus had to offer.

Does this response seem foreign to you? We are called to be disciples who,

in the presence of others, show the love of Christ in humility. But oftentimes, we can't stop talking about ourselves. It's no secret that the words we use are as much of a testimony to the power of Christ as our acts of service.

Sometimes I've wished that, at the end of the day, I could receive a personal transcript of every word I've spoken. What would it reveal to me about how I view myself? I imagine that if I were to highlight every spoken word for the purpose of self-promotion, the paper would quickly be filled with bright yellow lines. Statements made in humility would be rare.

Somehow, we've been led to believe that our sin disqualifies us from being disciples of Jesus Christ, and as a result, we're prone to speak about our greatness rather than God's. We wrestle with our own inadequacy on a daily basis. It haunts our minds, and yet we only occasionally offer it up to God. What would it look like to not only come before the throne of God with complete humility, but to acknowledge your own sinful nature in front of a brother or sister in Christ? Or better yet, someone who does not know the Lord? It would shatter their stereotype of a "perfect" Christian. It would speak to them about their own need for a Savior.

And that is how Christ makes "fishers of men." Not by granting them external perfection, but grace in the midst of humility.

DEVOTION: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What accomplishments do you credit yourself with instead of God?
- If you were to read a transcript of your daily conversations, could you honestly answer that your words were for the purpose of bringing glory to God?
- What are some ways that you can make your actions and words consistent?
- Is there a person in your life that needs to see the grace of God through your own humility? If so, how are you going to demonstrate your own need for a Savior to them?
- Are you consistently acknowledging your own sin to God? Do you have a brother or sister in Christ who can hold you accountable?

How to deal with mourning in your group

One of the first lessons you learn in youth ministry is that this world is broken. As a young youth minister I saw this firsthand when the father of two girls in our ministry suddenly died of an aneurism. There were no signs or symptoms, and a wonderful family suddenly found themselves in an ocean of shock and heartache. Through this painful moment the students in their group found a voice as the body of Christ. Here are three things that I learned about how God works through a community during a time of mourning:

Pray: The Bible tells us to carry one another's burdens, and prayer is one way we can do this. During the family's mourning, one of the daughter's said she was so heartbroken and angry she couldn't even pray. It was a blessing to hear one of the girls in her group say, "Don't worry, we will pray for you." Prayer is powerful, and it redirects our hearts to the healer of our souls.

Give: When tragedy strikes many people go into survival mode. The best groups step up and offer to pitch in with things like gas cards, meals, cleaning the house, or running errands.

Listen: As people walk through the process of mourning, there may be times when they don't want to hear from another person that, "Everything is going to be OK"; and they may scream if they see another casserole. Sometimes it is best to send a card or even an anonymous gift.

When a Jewish family goes into a time of mourning, their friends and extended family sit "Shiva." Shiva, which is Hebrew for seven, is the time of mourning for the immediate family of someone who has passed away. During this time friends will make a home visit to just sit with the family. They do not speak until they are spoken to. Sitting Shiva may seem extreme, but there is something about listening before speaking and making yourself available.

Nobody gets mourning perfect. Did our group of teenagers mourn with this family perfectly? No. They crossed boundaries, offered too many hugs and asked too many questions. But as I watched a family heal through a group's love and some ungraceful mistakes, I couldn't help but think that the body of Christ is the only place I would ever want to be when my world falls apart.

GROUP LIFE
BY CHRIS BALL

