

GROWING A HEART LIKE JESUS - Part 2

A Heart that Confronts - Jesus and a Pharisee

Excerpts from Bill Crowder's Book Entitled "Seeing the Heart of Christ"

In this series, we have looked at God's heart through Jesus' interactions with hurting people. We know that His heart touches, marvels, accepts, and cares. Today, we look at a heart that confronts.

John 14:9:

"He who has seen me has seen the Father."

Are you familiar with the character George McFly? George, is a dad of a suburban family in the film "Back to the Future." He has trouble at home, trouble with his wife and kids. At work, he has trouble with his boss the very unlikable Biff Tannen, a bully who's been causing George problems since high school. When George is challenged to stand up and do something about the abuse he's received for years, he weakly responds, "I just can't stand confrontation."

In 1980, five years before the movie "Back to the Future" came out, Christian counselor David Augsburger wrote a book that challenged the fear of confrontation. He raised this concern to a level of spiritual responsibility. In his book "Caring Enough to Confront," David Augsburger encourages followers of Christ to recognize—relationship carries responsibility, and this responsibility is sometimes neither easy nor enjoyable.

Doing a hard thing is not the same as doing a bad thing.

Proverbs 27:6:

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Yes, confrontation should be done with gentleness and with a deep sense of our own spiritual frailty but it has to be done. Sometimes confrontation is what love requires.

Luke 7:36–38:

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸ As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

In Luke 7, we're introduced to polar opposites of first century Israel. A man versus a woman. A Pharisee versus a sinner. A person fully aware of her spiritual poverty and another who's clueless as to his spiritual need. Talk about an odd couple! The tension between those who embraced Jesus' message and the religious leaders who refused it, sets the stage for Simon's dinner party. At events like this, the invited guests would recline at the table to enjoy both the meal and the conversation. When traveling dignitaries or celebrities entered a home for such gatherings, men of the town, not women, were allowed to line the interior walls of the house to quietly listen to the conversation.

But this is an odd couple. A woman had entered a scene where she doesn't belong. Not only is she a woman in the wrong place, she's also the wrong woman in the wrong place. The term "sinner" is intense, speaking of one who's dedicated and devoted himself or herself to sin as a lifestyle. It's generally thought to mean she was a known community prostitute. Some have

speculated she may have simply been a Gentile, outside of the covenant faith of Israel and therefore unworthy to be in such a place.

Luke 7:39:

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

This sinful woman rattled the masculine cage of every man in the room except Jesus. It begins with her violation of social protocols in entering a men's only event. A woman entering that room, unless there to help serve the meal, would be very shocking. Her presence has virtually nothing to do with who she is and everything to do with who Jesus is, for He is why she came.

She anoints Jesus with a highly valuable perfume. She wept so profusely she's able to wash the Master's feet with her tears. And in a massive social error, she lets down her hair in public and uses her hair (her glory) to wipe and dry Jesus' feet. Simon's private musings range in two directions—not only does the woman prove who or what she is by the shameful way she behaved but she may also be simultaneously proving who Jesus isn't.

Jesus had been proclaimed a prophet, but a real prophet would know better. A real prophet would condemn her actions. A real prophet would hold the line of religious righteousness. To Simon the Pharisee and the men around the table, everything about this was wrong. To the watching members of the community, everything is wrong but the woman doesn't care. And what will arguably shock Simon most, is that Jesus seems to agree with her.

Luke 7:40-43:

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. ⁴¹ "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

The Bible's full of stories and storytellers. In Jewish culture, stories were more than a significant tool for communication, teaching, and entertainment. They were part of the culture's fabric. Perhaps that's what gave story telling a subtle and profound forum for confrontation. The classic example of this, of course, tracks back to the Old Testament, to king David. David had a one night stand with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his mighty men of valor. Hoping to cover up his moral failure, David goes underground for nine months, until Nathan shows up. Nathan is a prophet who, in spite of the awkwardness of the situation, cares enough to confront (2 Samuel 12). He chooses storytelling as his method of choice. A family, a lamb, and a scoundrel for a neighbor are the principal characters of the story. David's response to Nathan's tale was near nuclear rage, but it exposed his own scoundrel-like behavior against the slain Uriah. Through a story, David was disarmed and exposed.

Jesus used this approach to challenge Simon's attitudes and thoughts. Much like our world, ancient Israel was a land of debt, debtors, and creditors. Because of this, Jesus' story would have had relevance for the people at the table and around the room. Present there are both sides of the debt equation, and no doubt most of them would have easily found their own place in Jesus' story. The wrinkle of forgiving the debt would've been shocking. A denarius was the equivalent of a day's wage. A debt of 50 days almost 2 months—that's a lot, but the debt of 500 days wages was much greater. The key element in the story, however, is not simply the amounts owed or the disparity between them. In fact, when Jesus applied the story, the only reason to even notice the disparity of debt is to underline the power of the response of love and gratitude from the forgiving person. The application of the story is that both of them

are debtors. Both of them are accountable. Both have a need. The woman clearly sees her need, but Simon is oblivious to his own need.

It was easy for Simon to say “She’s a sinner” but impossible for him to say “I’m also a sinner.” Jesus proved that He was indeed a prophet by reading Simon’s thoughts and revealing his needs. The parable does not deal with the amount of sin in a person’s life but the awareness of sin in his heart. Her sins were known, while Simon’s sins were hidden to everyone except God. And both of them were bankrupt and could not pay their debt to God. Simon was just as spiritually bankrupt as the woman, only he didn’t realize it.

Jesus's purpose in telling the story was to open Simon's eyes to his own deep spiritual need. At Simon's feast, a woman and a man, were on level ground as debtors, but they displayed very different responses to the spiritual need their personal, spiritual debt represents. In trying to penetrate Simon's religious armor, Jesus asked His host to make the application. A heart of love and gratitude is the normal response to forgiveness, and if you're aware of the depths of your real need, the more you'll appreciate the wonder of being forgiven. For that, love is the only appropriate response.

Luke 7:44–47:

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Turning toward the woman, Jesus talked to Simon. Notice the physicality of the moment. Jesus is speaking to Simon—He’s looking at the woman. This woman is clearly in the spotlight, and Jesus sees her thoroughly. The question is, does Simon? Simon thinks he sees her, and that he sees her far better than Jesus. But Jesus is trying to awaken Simon's slumbering heart—from religious self satisfaction and to grace and mercy.

This woman's actions spring from the reality of a forgiveness that Jesus had already granted. Forgiveness was the point of the debtors story. They loved because they had already been released from the burden of their debt. Luke chooses not to tell us when or where that took place for the sinful woman, but Jesus' words make it clear that at some point, perhaps in recent days, she met the Savior and in faith responded to His mercy. Maybe it was in that moment.

The sinful woman's spotlight is slowly moving to the man beside Jesus. Normal hospitality of the day meant that when Jesus, Simon's special guest, arrived at the house, servants would be dispatched to wash feet. Jesus would've received an anointing of oil to refresh Him from the weariness of the day. His host would have greeted Him with a ceremonial kiss. None of those things had happened. It seems the woman rushed in to give Jesus the honor His host had withheld. Common hospitality should have motivated Simon to provide these courtesies, but a greater motivation moved this woman. Grateful love had driven her to do what the moment demanded, and she stepped into the void left by Simon's oversight.

Luke 7:48-50:

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

How did Jesus feel that day after leaving Simon's house? Was he troubled by the Pharisee's lack of self-awareness? We can easily forget that Simon was as much a part of Jesus' rescue mission as that woman or the man born blind or the leper or the woman with a bloody hemorrhage.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and that included the Pharisee who could not come to grips with his own lostness.

As seen in the case of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus was doing everything necessary to present the need and the remedy to the religious leaders, and in some cases they responded. But in all cases, Jesus cared. He cared enough to confront so grace could take hold. The woman got it. Did Simon? But more importantly, have you?

So what's our faith step this week?
Deal with it. Care enough to gently confront the issue you've been avoiding.

GROWING A HEART LIKE JESUS - Part 2

A Heart that Reaches - Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

Excerpts from Bill Crowder's Book Entitled "Seeing the Heart of Christ"

In this series, we've looked at God's heart through Jesus' interactions with hurting people. We know that His heart touches, marvels, accepts, cares, and confronts. Today, we look at a heart that reaches.

In John 4, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the Father seeks after and desires true worshipers of Spirit and truth. It's arguably one of the most amazing statements Jesus ever made. God is looking for and desires true worshipers, but what is it that makes someone a true worshiper? Is it a certain style of music, dress or rituals? Is it the proper religious heritage or denominational affiliation? Is it a required volume of biblical knowledge or a certain Bible translation?

Who is God and what makes Him worthy of our attention? To that end, Jesus came to our world seeking men and women He could grow into true worshipers. He came to His own and they, broadly speaking, didn't receive Him. Many of His followers stopped following Him altogether after He presented a message that was particularly tough to accept. The disciples failed to grasp the nature of this call. The religious leaders rejected the One who called out to them. Even the closest of His disciples, Simon Peter, failed to understand the heart of worship.

Upon the failure of the Jewish leaders and His own followers to grasp worship, Jesus takes radical action. He left Galilee goes northwest to the coastal areas of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre was 35 miles from Capernaum. Sidon was a 50 mile walk. This would've taken 2 to 3 days.

How does it feel when you're talking to someone and that person ignores you? How does that feeling change when you factor in the importance of what you're talking about?

When you talk to God about things, does it ever seem as if He's ignoring you? Does that feel wonderful? In Matthew 15, a Gentle woman came to Jesus with the most important request and concern you could imagine—the suffering of her daughter.

Matthew 15:22:

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

Tyre and Sidon we're twin cities near the seashore of the Mediterranean. In the Old Testament era, this territory was occupied by Canaanites. This mother is described that way—ethnically. This general area had been the place Jezebel had come to Israel, bringing her religion and Baal worship to her marriage with King Ahab. As a result the northern kingdom of Israel was led astray. Later the region was conquered by Alexander the Great, who imported Greek thinking, philosophy, and various gods. The area was still heavily Greek in culture during the time of Jesus. Additionally, the Syrophoenicians had historically worshiped Ashtoreth since the days of Elijah. Ashtoreth was the goddess of beauty who was worshiped through the absolute pursuit of pleasure, including an epicurean lifestyle, which had a similar pursuit. As Jesus' fame grew, people from all over the region were drawn to Him for help and for rescue.

Why would a woman like this come to Jesus in the first place? Perhaps it was because she had heard the stories of His power from some of her neighbors who had traveled to Galilee. Now, anguished over the demonic possession that affected her daughter, she comes to Jesus and bares her soul to him.

Matthew 15:23:
Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him,
“Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

When Matthew says that she began to cry out, his words carry a sense of continuous action. She begins to and then continues to cry out over and over and over again. Jesus and his men have crossed over into pagan territory and when they hear shouts and screams, not only is it unnerving, it also may have seemed rather embarrassing to the disciples to have this woman screaming at them at the top of her voice.

The cry, “Lord have mercy” is an acknowledgment of a person's total and absolute dependence. It's asking of the Lord what we're incapable of doing for ourselves and what we may not even deserve. It's a cry from a desperate mom who comes to Jesus and pleads for mercy.

This Gentile woman was already convinced of the true nature of the person she was addressing—one chapter before this, Peter made his infamous confession.

She says, “have mercy on me.” It's her daughter who has been demon possessed, but it's this mom who feels the weight and burden of fear, despair, hopelessness, and anguish caused by the condition. No parent can watch their child suffer without entering into that suffering with the child, and that's exactly what drives this desperate mom to Jesus.

It's not surprising that this mother would feel so deeply for her daughter and want to intercede for her. What's shocking to us, however, is Jesus' response or perhaps better put, Jesus' lack of response.

When Jairus came to Jesus, pleading for his little girl, Jesus immediately took steps to come to her aid. Now this woman comes to Jesus to seek mercy for her little girl, and Jesus ignores her.

Clearly this is not what we have come to expect as Jesus-like behavior. It almost seems as if Jesus was away and Peter had taken over for a minute. To add to her pain, not only does Jesus seem to ignore her pleas, but the disciples also begin a counterattack, begging Jesus to send her, with her loud embarrassment, away. Just as she had been unceasingly crying out for Jesus's help, the disciples are now unceasingly crying out for Jesus to refuse to help her.

This was a scene of verbal turbulence, the woman and the disciples are relentlessly crying out, and Jesus, somber as a statue, is silently standing in the eye of that storm.

How do you feel when you're put on hold? How must it have felt for this woman to be put on hold by Jesus? It's one of those good news/bad news situations. The bad news is that Jesus hasn't said yes, but the good news is that He hasn't said no. Even more disturbing is when Jesus finally breaks His silence.

Matthew 15:24:
He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

Did Jesus actually tell her He wouldn't help her because she was the wrong ethnicity? Now this really doesn't seem like Jesus. That cheering you hear in the background would be the disciples celebrating Jesus' rejection of this woman's request. Some might speculate that Jesus helped Jairus because he was an observant Jew and then He refuses this woman because she's a pagan. But how does that stand up against the earlier episode where Jesus helped the Roman centurion? Perhaps there was a look on Jesus' face or a tone in Jesus'

voice that told her He was not rejecting her outright. It would seem that something is inviting her in, because rather than walking away in despair, she presses the issue further.

Matthew 15:25:

The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

When Matthew tells us she began to bow down before Him, he utilizes an expression used of worship. This woman would seem to have been ignored, rejected, and insulted by Jesus, and still she comes forward and offers her worship to Him. We think, surely now Jesus will help this woman and her daughter. But Jesus continues to surprise. This woman could easily have turned her back and walked away. She has pleaded with Jesus and has been ignored. She has been insulted by the disciples. Jesus' next response feels even more harsh.

Matthew 15:26:

He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

She has been ignored, rejected, and insulted. Now Jesus calls her a dog. Ancient Jews, by virtue of their distinct place as the covenant people of Israel, had a remarkably low view of other humans. Gentiles were outsiders, and that sense of distance from the God of the covenant often resulted in their being referred to as dogs. Even worse, however, this term was generally used to refer to street dogs, the disease carrying, filth laden first century equivalent of rats.

Matthew 15:27:

"Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

She refuses to let go! Having offered Jesus her heart, her daughter, her need, and her worship, she now offers Him her humble trust. What she had picked up on was that when Jesus used the word dogs, he did not suggest a negative connotation. Rather than calling her vermin, Jesus uses an affectionate term for a beloved house pet, a puppy. It signals welcome, not rejection and she jumps at this opportunity.

It's as if she were saying, "I accept! I gladly will accept the crumbs that fall from the table, as long as it's Your table, in Your house. I have no desire to deprive your children, just let a crumb of grace fall to help my child. I accept Your invitation and I trust You to meet our need."

Matthew 15:28:

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."
And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Jesus uses a Gentile to teach His disciples the true nature of faith and in this case the worship it generates. What was the point of pulling her painfully through a series of emotional knotholes if the eventual outcome was going to be the same anyway?

Not everything that happens to us is for us. Sometimes the things we experience are actually for the benefit of others.

What happened to the woman and her daughter was for the disciples. They have been so long in a religious system that bought and sold worship activities that they needed a new reference point for what a heart of worship looks like.

The appropriate response to the God who had come to them in flesh was humble faith and worship, and this woman had demonstrated this heart clearly.

Matthew 15:29:
Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee.
Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down.

This was not a random visit. Jesus had come for this woman and her daughter. He had walked his men 2 to 3 days to get to this woman. Now He walks them two or three days back to the Sea of Galilee.

Why such a dramatic step? Because Jesus wanted His disciples to encounter a heart of worship, and to do that He reached across geographical, ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries to help her and to teach them.

Clearly, the God who reaches out to us finds pleasure in a heart that humbly worships and trusts Him.

The Father has reached us by sending His Son. Jesus has reached to us by entering into everything we face and struggle in life. As He reaches to us, our best response, as with this hurting woman, is to humbly give Him our worship and trust, knowing that all we give to Him, He can handle for our best and for His purposes.

So, what's our step of faith this week?

Reach someone with the Gospel message.

GROWING A HEART LIKE JESUS - Part 2

A Heart that Restores - Jesus and a Blind Man

Excerpts from Bill Crowder's Book Entitled "Seeing the Heart of Christ"

The gospels are good news because they culminate the story of the Old Testament, fulfilling the promise of the cross and the resurrection found in the Bible's first 39 books.

The four Gospels are good news because they record for us the story of the greatest life ever lived. They aren't just biographies—they're witnesses.

We see in the gospels the true story of Jesus as He lived out His mission to reveal the Father to us.

Jesus came to do for us what we needed the most—He came to explain to us the Father, who seemed distant and inaccessible.

He came to show us the Father, who is love—for the world could only be satisfied by offering His Son as payment for our sin and brokenness. Jesus has declared to us the heart of the Father by showing that heart.

John 14:9:

"He who has seen me has seen the Father."

As we observe Jesus interacting with hurting people of His day, we see that He is not just relieving the pains and struggles of men and women engaged in a life that was too big for them.

We see, in every case, something of the Father that Jesus is declaring. So in this series, it's my hope that we not just marvel at the work of the God-man Jesus, but that we also learn about the heart of the Father that Christ revealed as He interacted with the people in need.

It's Jesus's heart for hurting people that's a reflection of the heart of the Father. It's a heart that we are to grow ourselves.

In this series, we've looked at God's heart through Jesus' interactions with hurting people. We know that His heart touches, marvels, accepts, cares, confronts, and reaches. Today, we look at a heart that restores.

Among the best known captains of slaving ships was John Newton. Newton came to Christ out of the slave trade. But what Newton is best known for is a song.

Perhaps not just a song but "the" song. *Amazing Grace* was Newton's anthem of praise to the God who had rescued him from darkness and brought him into light.

When we sing *Amazing Grace*, we're clearly not singing about physical sight. It's something more. It's what happened to John Newton when he came to the Savior. It's spiritual sight.

Have you ever walked in darkness?

In Mark 8, we come into contact with someone who needed physical sight.

Mark 8:22–26:

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" ²⁴ He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." ²⁵ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

The scene opens in the Galilean village of Bethsaida which means "house of fish." On the west side of the Sea of Galilee, Bethsaida was home to part of the lake's fishing industry. It was also Philip's hometown.

Jesus had accomplished several miracles here, but it was a community that had failed to respond in faith to the Messiah. Jesus has pronounced judgment on this town.

In this case, friends of a blind man brought him to Jesus, and they make the request, pleading for Jesus to heal their friend of his blindness. It makes us wonder a little bit whether or not the blind man was excited about coming to Jesus.

His friends, however, have a great confidence that Jesus can help him. Jesus takes the blind man by the hand and drags him away from the comfortable familiarity of Bethsaida to deal with him in private.

How do you feel about conventionality?

Jesus' method of healing this blind man is anything but conventional. Jesus spits on the man's eyes! Viewed as rude behavior, spitting in someone's face is insulting. Jesus spits on the man's eyes and touches him.

Most of the time when Jesus worked a miracle it was presented as a done deal. Nothing to it. Here, the man says he can see, which at one level confirms that a miracle has been accomplished, but he can't see clearly. He could not distinguish men from trees.

The fact that he knew his sight was garbled probably indicates that he had not been born blind, because he seems to have known what a tree looked like and what men look like. What he was seeing didn't match up.

Jesus laid hands on the man again, and his sight was perfectly and completely restored. Jesus instructed him not to return to the village which had been judged for its absence of faith but instead to go home, apparently to celebrate his healing with his family and friends.

This is the only miracle recorded where Jesus performed it in stages. It's the only time that a person's healing was not both instantaneous and complete.

Why did Jesus heal this man in this way? It must be understood that part of what makes this story so remarkable is that Jesus didn't suffer from creative limitations.

With a man born blind in John 9, Jesus packed his eyes with mud and sent him to the pool of Siloam to wash them out. With blind Bartimaeus, Jesus didn't touch him at all, but healed him with a spoken word.

Here, Jesus spits in this man's eyes, then touches him. Obviously, Jesus was not limited to one method of healing people.

He did it that way because he could, showing His very personal approach to ministry.

Do you ever just feel like a number? A social security number? A credit score? A test grade? Do you ever feel like a face in the crowd? Do you ever feel that people no longer see you?

Do you ever feel like a face in the crowd with God, or do you sense He personally, independently, and individually loves you?

For this blind man, he probably couldn't care less about the method itself or if there was even a method at all. This formally blind man could proclaim the word that John Newton would make a part of his song many hundreds of years later: "I was blind but now I see."

A few years ago, a fad of sorts started in United States where people were challenged to perform random acts of kindness. In the fast food drive-through line, you pay for the meal of the car behind you. At the grocery store you slip some money to a person who doesn't have enough to pay for their bags of food. Sometimes it seems that God operates with the same randomness that so often appears to characterize life.

Isaiah 35:4-5:

"...say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."

The eyes of the blind have been opened and the ears of the deaf have been unstopped— Messianic work is being done, as promised by the prophets, and that can mean only one thing — the long awaited Messiah had arrived.

These two cycles of ministry were intended to help the hurting and to meet needs, but they were also designed to prepare the disciples for what was coming.

Jesus wasn't all that easy to figure out. The more people looked at the evidence of His work and His heart, the clearer the picture became. Those closest to Him saw Him as the Christ.

The evidence of Scripture is substantial that Jesus is exactly who they thought He was, the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The testimony of millions of Christ followers over the span of two millennia underscores the claims that the rescuing Messiah and Savior is still very much alive and at work in our generation as he was in his own era.

In the pages of the Bible we see the great story of God coming to rescue a broken world supported by the smaller stories, individuals, ideas and events that carry textures of story within themselves.

In the healing of the blind man and the events that led up to it, we see multiple layers of God at work, judgment on Bethsaida, help for the blind man, lessons for the disciples, and a parable for us.

As was true with the blind man, these events can move us from darkness to dim light and from unclear sight to a full and clear vision of the picture of these events are painting.

Clara Scott in 1895 said this in a popular hymn... "Open my eyes, that I may see, glimpses of truth Thou hast for me. Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me

free. Silently now I wait for Thee, ready, my God, Thy will to see. Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!

What's our step of faith this week?

Restore something or someone this week.

GROWING A HEART LIKE JESUS - Part 2

A Heart that Comforts - Jesus and a Hurting Dad

Excerpts from Bill Crowder's Book Entitled "Seeing the Heart of Christ"

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Popular culture has inflicted some pretty severe damage on the images of dads over the course of our lifetimes. In the 1950's and 60's, we had shows like "My Three Sons," "Leave It to Beaver," and the iconic "Father Knows Best."

In the 1970's we had Howard Cunningham, the lovable but sadly inept dad on "Happy Days," and the angry bigot Archie Bunker on "All in the Family."

In the 1990's popular culture gave us Homer Simpson and "American Dad," presentations of fathers that are such extreme caricatures that they can only be presented in animation.

The cultural depiction of dads has become a sad reflection of the overall perspective of generations of people who appeared to see dads, at best, as a necessary evil.

In this world there are far too many poor fathers. There are abusive, mean-spirited, demanding, hurtful, emotionally distant men who severely damage children and wives under the authority of their title of "head of household."

There are, however, many men trying to do it right. These are men who sacrifice themselves for the welfare of their children, men who may be overwhelmed by the demands of fatherhood but who are doing their best.

James J. Braddock, the real life Cinderella Man, was a highly successful boxer who lost everything in the stock market crash of 1929. He entered the Great Depression desperate to support his family and keep them in tact through some of the harshest moments in American history. In the film, the critical moment comes when, having seen his children shipped off because the heat had been turned off in the cellar apartment, Braddock takes the long trip to Madison Square Garden in New York City.

The Garden was the boxing capital of the world and the site of many of Braddock's previous successes. Now he's forced to go into the club at the Garden, inhabited by sports writers and boxing aficionados who are largely untouched by the ravages of the depression. With hat, literally in hand, Braddock, the once proud champion, begs for money from these men. The humiliation drives him to tears as he seeks the money necessary to keep his family in one piece.

In Mark 9, Jesus encounters a devastated father in a story about two sons. But this is also about a grieving dad who's willing to beg because of his love for his son. It's that voice, that begging, pleading voice, that we want to hear in the midst of a setting that's almost parabolic in nature.

Mark 9:2-9:

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared

before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) ⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The story begins on the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus, in the presence of His Father, radiated with glory. Unlike Moses, who wore a veil because his face showed the radiance of the reflected glory of God, this glory was the actual essence of the Son of God Himself, who had been in the presence of His Father.

When Jesus and His inner circle of disciples, Peter, James, and John, left the mountaintop, a very different story was unfolding in the valley below, and it too is a story of a father and a son.

Mark 9:14-18:

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶ “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked. ¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

Notice the contrast between the relationships of the two fathers and their two sons. One is rooted in light. The other in darkness. One is enriched by the presence of God. The other is tormented by the demonic. One is reciprocal. While the other seems to be one directional.

One is marked by joy and affirmation. The other by pain and grief. One is characterized by utter fulfillment. The other by abject despair. One is marked by perfection. The other by brokenness.

The relationship on the mountain top is perfect and without any sense of the disappointment our brokenness often produces. The relationship of the father and son in the valley carries with it the characteristics that make our broken world broken: despair, heartache, pain, fear, and failure.

Two fathers. Two sons. And their stories come together in the valley not on the mountaintop.

In first century Israel shame and honor were significant realities. In this light, we enter the valley with Jesus and his three core followers and find all of the group, especially Jesus, dishonored by the failure of some.

The key factor in the disciples’ failure to deliver the demon possessed boy is that they had done this before. Not only had they been equipped for the task but they also had succeeded at it. They had been commissioned to rescue the demonic and equipped to do so, but they had failed in that very thing. What was the result of their failure? They’re directly connected to Jesus by the man whose son they couldn’t heal.

The crowd seems to make the same link, apparently causing the verbal sparring match between the scribes. The result is that the disciples’ failure is laid at Jesus’ feet, as if He Himself had authored the disappointment the hurting dad now felt.

But if their failure grieved the heartbroken father, he wasn't alone. Jesus also responds with a disappointment not unlike that of the dad, expressing His grief with authority.

Mark 9:19:

“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

Who is the unbelieving generation to which Jesus responds? Is it the crowd? The religious leaders? The disciples? The man and his son? Mark doesn't tell us. What he does tell us is that Jesus was distressed at the situation, and His lament is the fruit of that stress.

The resolution of the heart cry of this hurting dad was completely in Jesus' hands, and Jesus' first step toward resolution was, surprisingly, not to help the son. He begins by comforting the father in his pain.

When the demonic spirit attacks, the boy is the focus of attention, for some with disgust, for others with terror, and for still others with fascination. And in the midst of it all, this dad, gets lost in the shuffle of the spotlight shining on the horrific condition of his child.

Any decent parent would gladly take pain and suffering on themselves rather than to see it inflicted on their children. Like Jairus in Mark 5, this dad knows that there's no circumstance in life more painful than watching your child suffer while knowing there's nothing you can do to relieve that pain.

It's a pain that's unleashed when Jesus calls for the boy to be brought to Him.

Mark 9:20–22:

So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

As the demon seizes this boy, the child suddenly begins to be in agony and cries out in anguish. For people of that generation, it was an all-too-familiar scene. Jesus however, while not ignoring the pain of the child, again focuses on the pain of the father.

Jesus begins to pull the pain out of the dad like drawing poison from the wound. By gently asking questions, Jesus allows this father to fully express the experience of shared suffering he has had with his boy. Luke tells us that the man describes the child as his “one and only son,” the same way that Jesus, the “One and only Son” of the Father is described in the Gospels.

Jesus locks in on this dad because with Jesus no one's pain is hidden in the shadows or ignored. Jesus' care for this man is deeply personal as He tugs on this dad's broken heart all the years of hurt and helplessness he had known since the birth of this, his one and only son.

None of our pain is hidden from Jesus and His care, and neither was the pain of the hurting father who unpacks for Jesus the struggles he and his son have endured together.

Throughout the course of any given day, we act out thousands of tiny expressions of faith, usually with very little information to support that faith and without any way to test the person or entity in question and determine if that source is truly worthy of our trust.

As Jesus deals one on one with the father of the demon possessed boy, we find a man whose faith is imperfect, like ours; whose confidence in Christ is incomplete, like ours; who's spiritual frailty is real like ours. And Jesus comes to his aid.

Mark 9:21-24:

“If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

This poor, overwhelmed dad says “If you can, will you?” His faith is fragile, yet he has already exhibited some measure of faith by bringing the boy to Jesus in the first place.

Now the very faith that had driven the man to Jesus has been tested to the breaking point by the failure of the disciples. In that context, it’s as if the man were saying to Jesus, “Your disciples couldn't do it. Can you? If you can, will you?”

His plea is laced with intense emotion. He begs Jesus to have pity, care, concern, compassion, and help him with his struggling faith.

Jesus never questions the size or amount of the man's faith. He simply asked the man to affirm the reality of it. The point the Master is driving for is the reality of that faith and where it is placed. That's the larger issue.

Upon hearing Jesus's words, this father breaks. His words “I do believe, help my unbelief” could be the course of many of our life songs.

The man does affirm his faith in Jesus, but he also refuses to paint that faith to seem bigger or better than it actually is.

He acknowledges that not only does he need Jesus' help to heal his boy but this man also admits that he needs Jesus' help just to trust him to heal his boy. The desperate dad has made a pilgrimage of faith all of his own.

The dad expressed the desire for Jesus to help his boy and to help him.

This unnamed dad recognizes that he needs the help of Christ even to be able to significantly trust in Him. His admission of absolute helplessness is all that’s required. Part of trust in God is trusting Him with the outcomes but primarily it’s about trusting the relationship with Christ.

Mark 9:25-27:

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

After the father’s emotional tug-of-war, the boy’s rescue almost feels incidental. Yet the gentleness of Jesus is clearly seen as He raises the boy up and lovingly gives him back to his dad. Both father and son are now whole.

The father’s faith has been strengthened and purified as the son has been brought back from a living death.

Mark 9 is a story about two sons and two fathers. It has something to say to us whether we're loved and cared for by our fathers or ignored and rejected by them. We have a Savior who, from the heart of His Father, cares deeply for our hearts and our struggles.

Jesus cared for the disciples by rescuing them from their failure. Jesus cared for the father by reaching into his heart and pulling him from the shadows of his pain. Jesus cared for the boy by rescuing him from his oppression.

The answer to how Jesus cares for us, how Jesus loves us, and how Jesus rescues us in our struggles and suffering in strife is ever and always this: the cross.

The proof of His care and His love and His compassion is in His willingness to die for us. And no life circumstance, daily battle, or chronic struggle can diminish the reality that His love drove Him to the cross to solve our greatest problem—alienation from our Creator with a remedy that will eventually take care of all the rest of our pain in an eternity with Him.

What's our step of faith this week?

Comfort someone this week.