

Meeting Others in Our Path

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Be prepared for God to direct you on your path to encounters with others.

Every human being is made in God's image and is His potential spiritual child. Be sure to handle with Christlike care those we meet in our path today by God's will, giving Him all glory.

The best sermon is not what is preached or heard, but what is "lived out" in real time with real people before a very real God. Therein lies our most effective witness in heeding Jesus' invitation of "Follow Me."

Consider for a moment a miraculous event in the book of Acts when Peter and John approached the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1-10). As they were about to enter, they came upon a lame man who daily sought alms from those crossing his path.

We may remember that this man was miraculously healed by the apostles, but what intrigues me is what immediately preceded that moment. Verse 4 reads, "And fixing his eyes on him with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.'" This was in stark contrast to other people scurrying past this man as they hurried to fulfill their seemingly important religious obligations. It is Peter and John who locked eyes with this individual, offering him dignity and grabbing his attention.

From whom did Peter and John learn this method of dealing with those with whom they crossed personal paths of life? They learned from the One who offers us the same invitation of "Follow Me," not merely by His spoken words but by practical examples of dealing with those in His path.

Practical spiritual realism

At times we can become spiritually stymied in allowing Christ's light to shine through us in an increasingly darkened society. We might be asking, "Where do I start, and will it even make an impact?" What can we glean from the example of the One who declared, in the words of one translation, "I am the path, the truth, and the energy of life" (John 14:6, The Voice).

Let's reflect on His invitation of "Follow Me" by considering four practical steps as to how He dealt with those crossing His path. We will discover that the choices made in those fleeting moments of encounter are what create the truly Christlike difference.

Step 1: Embrace your personal sphere of influence

Let's be spiritually realistic as to what we are able to do. We can't interact with the whole world at once, as much as we might desire to. Even Jesus, though He came to ultimately deliver all the people of the world through His sacrifice, didn't meet them all at once during His fleshly existence. When travelling through the Galilean hill country, He was not overly anxious about what might be occurring over the next rise.

But He did take personal responsibility for those who were directly in His path and within His immediate reach—one person, one heart at a time, He never shied away in dealing with such people in an intimately focused manner, granting His undivided attention.

A careful study will show that most of Christ's recorded encounters took place not in synagogues or the temple courtyard but in common venues such as village wells, weddings, dinners, meadows and on the road. But herein lies the difference between *His* example and where *we* might be: His heart and mind were always leaning forward in readiness as to who might come His way.

God has granted us a target-rich environment to give personal witness to the fact that Christ lives within us. And you don't have to travel far. Think of it—your spouse, your children, extended family, coworkers, neighbours, classmates, fellow congregants and the unknown many who daily cross our path.

One more note regarding spiritual realism and the challenge that lies before us: Jesus lived in a slower-paced society where humanity's speed was around three to four miles per hour. In general, walking was the way to get around and to interact with others. People didn't have smartphones to lure them into an insular existence. The pace of life and distractions were much different. But the greatest distraction of all existed then just as now—*self-absorbed and self-serving human nature*.

A vital key to remaining alert and ready is to learn to simply heed God when He says, "Be still, and know that

I am God" (Psalms 46:10). It's the first and most important step in resisting self-centeredness. Strive with His guidance to spiritually pace yourself in serving Him as His witness on the ground. Ask God to develop in you a sense of anticipation that He will use you each day to make a difference in someone's life not by what you know or say, but by how your shared paths connect even for a moment. And in asking, knowingly prepare to meet your prayer request in real time with real people.

Step 2: Approach all people with a Christlike heart

Every human being is made in God's image and is His potential spiritual child. Lest we forget, what revelation we ourselves have from Him now has come only by His grace—yet there are so many who need to experience love, hope and peace of mind and heart. Matthew 9:35-38 describes what lay in Jesus' path. As He "went about all the cities and villages . . . [and] saw the multitudes, He was *moved with compassion* [Greek *splanchnizomai*, 'to be moved as to one's inwards,' *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Compassion"] for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." Does this sound like our world today?

What might we share on our pathway of life? Romans 5:5 speaks of "the love of God" which has been "poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit . . . given to us." This speaks of a love not rooted in human soil but that is the perfect outgoing affection of our Heavenly Father and Christ that is intentionally "poured out" and spread to all it touches. As developing disciples of Jesus, do we perceive ourselves as the human vessels that display, share and dispense to others this precious gift from above which was so freely given to us?

Step 3: Focus as Jesus did on those in your path

What follows next is a small yet key practical step that moves beyond our loudest arguments and can create a Christlike bond.

Scripture tells us that "God has given us the seeing eye and the hearing ear" (Proverbs 20:12). Such a blessing! But can we be honest? We don't use our eyes to full spiritual advantage due to the rush of life, our human nature and a lack of understanding that the eyes are "the lamp of the body" (Matthew

6:22-24). They are truly the mirror of our souls and those who cross our path. They are a bridge by which relationships are forged and enhanced. And they need to be wide open to others!

Consider for a moment Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus, the small man of Jericho who wanted to see Him arrive in town. Because the crowd blocked his way, he climbed into a tree for a clear view. Scripture tells us, "When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down'"—for, to paraphrase Jesus, *I'm coming over to your house tonight!*

Imagine the glistening smile in Jesus' eyes seeing this man in a tree straining to see Him, and imagine the smile of Zacchaeus over Jesus reaching out and locking eyes with him. I would suggest that, more than just eyes, they locked hearts. Is it any wonder that later Peter and John looked on the lame man lost in the crowd by the temple gate—and directed *him* to look at *them*?

Step 4: Whoever comes your way, give God the glory

This last step is perhaps the most important if we are going to truly heed Jesus' invitation of "Follow Me." What was incredible about Him was that He never took the glory for Himself but continually directed praise for His works toward God the Father. He set us an example in living by these words: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

Why is this so important? Because human nature left to itself wants our personalized autograph signature on all we do. "Look what I did today!" Here in stark contrast is perfect humility by One who was the Son of God yet encapsulated in human flesh. He exemplified the great understanding that praise should mainly be directed upward. His immediate response to those He actively connected with on the path of human experience echoed the words of David: "I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify your name forevermore" (Psalms 86:12).

It's time for me to stop writing and you to stop reading and for me to practice what I've written and for all of us to handle with Christlike care those we meet in our path today by God's will, giving Him all glory.