

# A Gospel People

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## PEOPLE MATTER

Be a friend:

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class was walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, "Why would anyone bring home all his books on a Friday? He must really be a nerd." I had quite a weekend planned (parties and a football game with my friends tomorrow afternoon), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on. As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him. He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. So, I jogged over to him and as he crawled around looking for his glasses, I said, "Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives." He looked at me and said, "Hey thanks!" There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude. I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out, he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school before now. I would have never hung out with a private school kid before. We talked all the way home, and I carried some of his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid. I asked him if he wanted to play a little football with my friends. He said yes. We hung out all weekend and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him, and my friends thought the same of him. Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, "Boy, you are gonna really build some serious muscles with this pile of books everyday!" He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends. When we were seniors, we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown, and I was going to

Duke. I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. He was going to be a doctor, and I was going for business on a football scholarship. Kyle was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak. Graduation day...I saw Kyle. He looked great. He was one of those guys who really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had more dates than I had and all the girls loved him. Boy, sometimes I was jealous. Today was one of those days. I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, "Hey, big guy, you'll be great!" He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. "Thanks," he said.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. "Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years: your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach...but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story." I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. "Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable."

I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his Mom and Dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Not until that moment did I realize its depth. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life. For better or for worse. God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way.<sup>1</sup>

Great story isn't it! The sort of story that tugs at the heart strings. The sort of story that inspires us to be that friend. A question that's been going through my mind is this: "Is that enough? Is that kind of friendship enough?"

Question – 'How much do people matter to you – to the church?

One of our values is People Matter: “We will share the good news of Jesus with anyone who does not know him.” How true is that...really? In order for it to be true we must, it seems to me, have a passion for people! But it also seems to me that we must have a passion for the gospel! So how true is it...that we will share the gospel? Phillip Yancey said: “People who meet Jesus never stay the same.” How about you? Do people matter enough for you to want to tell them what you’ve got? We will share the good news of Jesus with anyone who does not know him. How true is that for you?

“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon.” (Acts 3 v 1) Peter and John were doing what they’d always done, they were going to the temple to pray. These guys were Jews and the Jewish custom was to pray three times a day: 9a.m; 12noon; 3p.m. They went to pray. How about you? How much do you pray that you will be able to share your faith? Who do you pray for? Who are you praying into the waters of baptism? Peter and John were in the habit of prayer. I am profoundly challenged again by the habit of prayer for people who matter to God! How much do they matter to me...to you?

“Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.” (Acts 3 v 2-5)

Peter and John stopped! That is significant. You may say: “Ah yes, because the beggar asked them for money!” That’s true, but he almost certainly was not expecting them to stop! As a beggar in that society he knew he was ceremonially unclean because he was not allowed to enter the temple. Actually he was sitting as close as he could get to the temple, outside the gate outside the temple courts. He’d chosen a very strategic place to sit too, because there would be people coming and going all the time and he knew that many people would give him money for one simple reason: it was religiously good to do so. The giving of alms

was an important part of the Jewish faith. But people passing the unclean beggar wouldn't stop! They would throw their money and walk on! But Peter and John stopped!

Maybe this is a picture of the way the world is: here's a man crippled from birth - in many ways a broken man. Isn't that how much of the world is?

Aren't there lots of things in the world that are crippled and broken and just not how they should be? Aren't there many people crippled and broken, hurting and abused? Aren't there many people living without hope, who see no future for themselves? Aren't there many people who go through life having to beg in one way or another - desperate just to keep going from day to day, never having confidence or purpose or joy? Maybe some of them are here ..... today?

Peter and John stopped when they could have walked by. They stopped because this guy mattered. How much do we need to stop because this person matters?

Here are some questions you might like to ask yourself:

- Are you a friend of sinners?
- Do you do any regular activities with outsiders?
- What do you do by way of interest, hobbies outside of church activities?
- Can you think of 2 non Christians who would consider you a friend?
- Do you diary in time to make contact with non Christians?
- When was the last time you shared something of significance with an outsider?
- When was the last time you did something that was a blessing to a non Christian?
- When was the last time a non Christian shared anything of significance with you?
- How often do you pray for non Christians?
- When was the last time you asked a non Christian about what he or she believed?
- When did you last share the gospel with a non Christian?
- When was the last time you found yourself unable to answer a question put to you by a non Christian?
- When was the last time you invited a contact to a Christian event?
- Are you aware of what type of event/course/community your contacts may be able to listen to the gospel message?

- When was the last time you personally invited someone to a small group for instance?
- When was the last time you invited someone to come to church with you?

It seems to me that these kinds of things happen only when we take time to stop, to stop and build friendships and relationships. Do people matter enough for us to stop? It is also interesting that Peter and John were going to the temple. Why? As we've seen, they were going to pray but also that's where they knew people would be. Seems to me we need to stop and go meet the people! So where do you go?

The beggar is expecting Peter and John to give him money. That's what he wants, what he is expecting and what he thinks he needs. How much should the church give the world what it wants, what it is expecting from the church and what it thinks it needs from the church?

The church - this church - finds ways of showing compassion to the poor and the needy, the lonely, the elderly, the unfortunate, the mistreated, the prisoner, the rejected, the victims and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that at all. That's why I can't give up on the Easter Team, because God's heart is for the poor - and therefore my heart and the churches heart should be for the poor!

But maybe it's not always right to be driven by the world's expectations and maybe that's not enough! For example Life Discoveries, when men get together to canoe, 4 wheel drive, jet ski etc. the comments back are "Great day! Fun! Enjoyable", "These guys are normal!" "They are OK". But is a great day enough? It's good and important to show we're normal and enjoy the same things as other men. But is it enough to show we're normal? Is it enough to have great things like:

- Parent & Toddlers / Holly Hedgehog
- CYM / Football
- Parenting / Aquila / Stepping Out

At one level at least it would have been easy for Peter and John to give money ..... and walk on! They'd have done their duty, what was expected and a good thing too!

1 John 3 v 17 says: "If anyone of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has not pity on them, how can the love of God be in you?"

Deuteronomy 15 v 11 says: "... I command you to be open handed towards those of your people who are poor and needy in your land."

Peter's response is significant! "Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God." (Acts 3 v 6-8) This crippled beggar got more than he ever expected! He asked for money but he got a new life! He was literally picked up and taken out of his broken world, a world of limitation in which he had lived for so long. And he was given an opportunity to reach his full human potential. What had Peter and John given him? New life that comes through the truth about Jesus!

At one level Peter and John had absolutely nothing to give this man, they had no money! Maybe, because they were part of the Acts 2 community, they'd shared everything they had and already given away all their money! They did not have what this man wanted! They could not give his man what he thought he needed. But they had something far better, far more valuable and of much more importance! They had the truth about Jesus. I would love to know what Peter and John were thinking through all this. "Oh man .... we have no money ... what are we going to do? Let's do what Jesus did – yes let's. You really think so? .... But he was Jesus!! Ok so what have we got to lose?" Seems to me they had nowhere else to go – but faith in the risen Jesus.

Noel's challenge: "If you are not living on the edge, you are taking up too much space!" Peter and John were on the edge! They were on the edge by going to the temple (chapter 4). They were on the edge because they stopped! They were on

the edge because they didn't have what this man wanted or expected. They were on the edge because they had nowhere else to go but faith in the risen Jesus.

Why were they on the edge? Because People Matter!!! People mattered to Jesus and they mattered to Peter and John. They were on the edge because they had met with the risen Jesus! They knew the truth that Jesus is alive, and that Jesus can change and transform the lives of ordinary people, that Jesus can heal the broken and restore the lost. How about you? Are you living on the edge because people matter? We only have one life here, how much do people matter? Enough to live on the edge?

1. Story received via email.

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009 by Rev. Ian Phillips.