

God can use you...even if you don't know what you're doing

- So for the last couple of weeks we've been talking about how **God can use** each and every one of us. And regardless of how **inadequate we feel**—like Moses did— or how often **we've messed up in the past or even now**—like Peter had a habit of doing—**God has a plan and a purpose for us here, in his kingdom.**
- So now here we are and you're maybe thinking, "I know God can sue me despite my doubts in myself in others, despite my fears and despite my failures... **what do I do?**"
- And that's a fair question. A player can have **all the confidence** in the world, but it doesn't help one bit to put him **on the field without knowing what to do.**
- Well we already touched on this a little bit, and I'll even point you back to our reference verse for this series:

John 15:15-17

15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. 16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. **I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.**

- So love is clearly part of it, and we talked two weeks ago about how Moses had **supernatural signs of nature** to point people to God and how **our sign is love.** But love is probably one of if not **the most ambiguous terms** in the English language; open to endless **amounts of interpretation.**
- And then even if you can **nail down a definition** of some sort, you have questions like: "is the love I show my **wife** the same I show other **Christians?** Or my **kids?** Or **non-Christians?** Or my **enemies?**"
- So today we're going to look at **the master of love: Jesus.** We're going to examine **how he did** this whole **evangelism-love-ministry** thing and see if we can't pull a thing or two out of it.
- I'll say right off I borrowed a lot of concepts from Brian McLaren and Grant English, but I don't know that I quote them anywhere...so I wanted to mention it now.
- Now, I'm going to give you **fair warning**—Jesus' **conversations** with people are a little **weird at times.** He talked in **code** with **Nicodemus.** He **argued** with the

religious elite. He **comforted** the **woman caught in adultery**. He **confronted personal issues** with the rich **young ruler and woman at the well**. He told **stories** to the fishing communities and laborers and seekers.

- But I think he had a definite **purpose** with the **varying methods** he used. He knew that, ultimately, the **goal was to show people the way to God**.

- And no matter what else he did, **Jesus led people to grace**.

Matthew 9:10-13

10 Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. 11 But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?”

12 When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.” 13 Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”

- **Grace** was bigger than anything else in Jesus’ mind. When he met those **who “knew”** they were **righteous**, he **told them otherwise**. **Not to shame** them, but to show them that **they needed God**.

- And when he found those **who “knew”** they were **beyond redemption**, he showed them **compassion and mercy**. **Not to glorify or dismiss** their sin, but to show them that **no sin could separate them from God’s love**.

- And grace should be our goal, as well. The **days are long gone** when we could **motivate** someone by **scaring or excluding** them (if those days ever existed outside of the arrogant minds of self-righteous Christians).

- Maybe you don’t know what I mean, well let me give you an **example of motivation by exclusion**:

- We’re on the inside but you’re on the outside. We’re right and you’re wrong. If you want to come inside, you need to be right. So just think right, believe right, speak right and act right and we’ll let you in. But if you don’t come in, you’re going to be sorry.

- Does your **evangelistic pitch** sound anything like that? Maybe it’s not so blunt, but does the underlying message of what you say to people sound like that? **You need to be Christian...or else?**

- I don't see Jesus using that method on anyone. Jesus **motivates much more by acceptance: grace**. He would **counter the motivation by exclusion** idea with something like this:
- We're a community bound together by faith love and commitment to God. You don't really have that faith, love or commitment but you're welcome here anyways. And if you're attracted by what you see, we hope you stay longer and make those values important in your own life. But even if you don't, you're still loved.
- See the difference? **Jesus always led people back to his grace**. His love. He didn't **threaten hellfire**, he **promised salvation**. He didn't make people **feel like outsiders** to **intimidate them into silent acquiescence**, he made them **feel like insiders** to **accommodate their honest difficulties**.
- He knew that sometimes **you have belong before you believe**, and was determined not to put the cart before the horse. He was less concerned with having the **right people** in his **group** and more concerned with making sure **the people** in his group found **the right way**.
- And he was more than happy to let them **stumble, struggle and doubt all along the way—even if they never accepted his grace**. Just look at **Judas**.
- Sometimes we're so concerned with **weeding out the Judas'** in our midst that we forget that we're **not Jesus** and we **can't know their hearts**. And even if we could, we forget that **Jesus never chased Judas away**.
- That's because **Jesus was never in a hurry**. He understood that **making a real, lasting shift in your worldview required more than a tract and the threat of hell**.
- He **never pressured** people into believing or agreeing with him and was **ok with letting people walk away**. He knew it **wasn't** about **winning or losing** or backing someone into a corner and saying "Ha! I win! You lose!" He understood that **giving people a win-lose situation will often just close them off to your message**.
- In fact, much of Jesus' methods **left people wondering**; with **questions**. Soren Kierkegaard described it like waiting in the bushes and as your friend walks by, you leap out and kick them in the rear then dive back into the bushes.
- Your friend stops and looks around, then goes on his way. But now he's wondering, "Am I being watched? Is something bigger going on here than I realize?" **Just look at this verse which is just so crazy:**

John 6:47-52

47 “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. 48 Yes, I am the bread of life! 49 Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. 50 Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”

52 Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked.

60 Many of his disciples said, “This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?”

61 Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, “Does this offend you? 62 Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again? 63 The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But some of you do not believe me.”

65 Then he said, “That is why I said that people can’t come to me unless the Father gives them to me.”

66 At this point **many of his disciples turned away and deserted him**. 67 Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “Are you also going to leave?”

68 Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. 69 We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.”

- I told you it was a crazy text. So right here, Jesus **confuses** not only the **random people** listening, but **some of his disciples walk away!** And what does he do? **He turns to the rest and says, “Aren’t you going to leave, too?”**
- **Jesus wasn’t in a hurry.** He wasn’t going to **force** anyone to believe and he wasn’t going to **offer salvation to anyone not willing to dig a little for it.** And by that I mean he **wasn’t** going to say “**Look, just say this little prayer with me and you’re golden. You’re totally in heaven**”
- The terms Jesus used to invite people to “believe in him” **hinted at something deeper** than being **baptized, confirmed and having the right church membership:** “**follow me,**” “**pick up your cross,**” “**walk with me,**” “**put my yoke on,**”—all pointed to the idea of a **process or journey**—which lines up with God’s vision of a family; a community.
- And typically, he had **more negative comments** for people who thought the way to God was **through rules, rituals and one-time commitments** than the people who **struggled and tried but failed.**

- Is it any wonder that **pushing** people to “get saved” and telling them to “act right” doesn’t work? **Even Jesus thought it was a bad idea.**
- And in case I was **being too subtle**, that means that being **baptized, confirmed and having a church membership** doesn’t mean **squat** in the Kingdom of God **if there’s not a relationship with Jesus motivating those things.** When the Bible says we’re **saved by grace** and not by **our works, our deeds**...it’s not kidding around.
- So that means that not only can **we** not find our way to salvation through those things, it also means **offering people a sinner’s prayer and a baptism** won’t help them if that’s all we do.
- Jesus understood this and **didn’t offer quick fixes**...he offered **friendship; love; family; healing...God.**
- In short, Jesus used no “method” when he evangelized. Rather, everywhere he went, he **simply engaged people relationally**—and on their level, with language they could understand.
- He **never** started out with **set line or a memorized pitch.** If they needed healing, Jesus healed them. If they needed a listening ear, he listened. If they needed some strong rebuke or encouragement, he gave that, too.
- And that’s **exactly what he wants us to do.** We **don’t** need to **know the Bible** forwards and backwards; we **don’t** need any **special skills** or talents; we **don’t** need to be **perfect**...Let’s look at a passage that I think wraps this all up in a **confusing, awesome little mess for us.**

John 4:5-26

5 Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. 7 Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Please give me a drink.” 8 He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

9 The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?”

10 Jesus replied, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.”

Remember what Kierkegaard said about leaping out the bushes?

--(Pretend to kick someone in the butt)--

11 “But sir, you don’t have a rope or a bucket,” she said, “and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? 12 And besides, do you think you’re greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?”

- There is an **important aspect of this conversation** here I want you to see. This woman has a **hostile** response to Jesus because she was a Samaritan and was used to be abused by Jewish people.

- This shows a subtle, but very important aspect of ministry and evangelism: **sometimes the questions people ask aren’t the questions they want an answer to. They’re just tests.**

- There are people in your life who—like this woman—**have been hurt** and abused by **Christians and Christianity** in their past, and the minute you bring up God, **they’re going to attack you and see how you respond.**

- And even though their question might be “You **don’t really believe** all that stuff about Jesus being God do you?” **The real question** is, “Are you **safe** to talk to, or are you going to tell me I’m a **sinner** and **threaten me with hell** like all the other Christians I’ve met? Or worse, just give me a **disapproving look** and **clam up**... like **I’m not worth the effort.**”

- They want to see if you can **show the sort of patient love Jesus is legendary for**—even to non-Christians—or if you’re going to get **defensive, go into debate mode** and try to **play the whole “I win! You lose!” game.**

- And how **you respond** can make all the difference. **How did Jesus respond?**

13 Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. 14 But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”

15 “Please, sir,” the woman said, “give me this water! Then I’ll never be thirsty again, and I won’t have to come here to get water.”

16 “Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her.

- I know **Jesus knows** what he’s doing, but you can’t help but think “**Jesus, what’re you doing?**” I mean, you got her? She’s **ready to believe and get saved!**

- **But Jesus wasn’t in a hurry.** He didn’t want a **quick commitment that yielded no real fruit.** For Jesus, this **isn’t about winning souls**, it’s about **helping people find God.** It’s about **relationship.**

- And so even though it **might offend** her, he asks about **her personal life.**

17 “I don’t have a husband,” the woman replied.

Jesus said, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—18 for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!”

19 “Sir,” the woman said, “you must be a prophet. 20 So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?”

21 Jesus replied, “Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. 23 But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. 24 For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

25 The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus told her, “I Am the Messiah!”

- Now Jesus’ words are a little harsh, but he accomplishes everything he wants to here, in terms of evangelism:
- He doesn’t rush her to a decision—**Jesus was in no hurry**
- **He engages her relationally**—He shows that he really cares about her, not just converting her, even when she’s asking for “living water”
- **He leads her back to grace**—He essentially says, “I know all about your past... and that’s ok. I’m not here to condemn you for it.”

- And her response? She starts **asking him spiritual questions** and begins to take **what he has to say seriously**.

- Then at the end, **she rushes back to town to tell people about this prophet she found**.

- Now maybe you’re thinking, “I can’t do that! I **don’t prophetically know** things about people’s lives like Jesus!”

- No, but **Jesus had just met this woman...you’ve known some people for years and never once engaged them in a discussion about God**.

- You may **not supernaturally** know things...but **you know things**. Their **struggles**, their **hurts**...maybe their **fears or hang-ups**.

- You've just got to **engage them relationally**—not because that's the trick, but because you genuinely care. What's wrong with showing someone that you actually love them?
- Then **be patient**. Give them time and space to think; kick 'em in the pants and hide; let them know you're safe to talk to about God.
- Then **lead them to grace**. If they're **hostile** to Christianity, **see through it** and let your speech be **all love**. If they're trapped in sin or feelings of worthlessness, express God's love to them in your actions: **hurt + hurt = hope, remember?**
- You don't have to **know what you're doing** to be used by God...you just have to **know someONE!**
- May you find your words full of patience. May you find a way to engage others spiritually. And may everything you do, lead people to God's never-ending grace.