

~ John 4:1-30, 39



Take An Interest In People

Our neighbors, John & Theodora Sickler, once had a Border Collie. Whenever we went to see them, the dog would go crazy with excitement about our coming! Until she was four years old, she got so excited about our coming, that she would wet on the floor, or my shoe, if it happened to be under her. Teddy hated to see us coming. The dog was, of course, always first to the door. When we came, her tail would wag wildly. She would rub up against us, giving us some sort of dog hugs. She whined, and squealed with uncontrolled delight, and when I patted her on the head, you would think I was the king of England & she had just received a title from me.

That dog really liked me --and I always liked her.

Here is why I liked her: *First of all* she had time for me. My coming was really no trouble or inconvenience for her. However, there is a *Second* more important reason. That dog had an insatiable interest in people, and it was all very genuine. None of her interest was contrived. Even when she became sick and old, she weakly greeted us.

Why do you suppose people buy dogs? Simple, they want something to be interested in them. A dog that is not interested in you is a real disappointment.

This is the primary criterion for all successful Christian ministry: Be genuinely interested in people. Take an interest in people. Take an interest in God's chief interest - *People*. People can tell if we are doing it for them, or for our own ego needs. All real Christian ministry & relationship must contain this ingredient. Fake is not "good enough" for God.

Of course, we Christians have many other strategies including: impressing people, entertaining people, trying to get people interested in us, and if that doesn't work, we have been known to try to scare them.

Here is the secret: People are not likely to take an interest in you and your Christianity, *unless you are interested in them.*

You can do more good in a month by being genuinely interested in people than you can in a lifetime of trying to get people interested in what you're doing.

The fact is this: people are not interested in you. They are not interested in me. They are interested in

themselves. According to Jesus, "No person ever yet hated his or her own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." *You can be sure Jesus was right!*

When you look at a group picture that you are in, who do you look for first? Have you noticed that if someone else is caught with a weird, funny-looking expression, it doesn't hurt the quality of the picture, so long as *you're* looking good? Have you ever watched people sorting through a new package of pictures? "Picture's no good." Why, "Well look, I have my eyes closed." "Oh that doesn't really matter, look how good I look."

Why should people be interested in you, if you're not interested in them?

This was the method of Jesus ~ John 4

After traveling by foot all morning in the Palestinian heat, Jesus was weary. In such cases, most of us like a little time to ourselves. If we are to visit, it might be relaxing to visit with a close friend, but certainly not a stranger. Yet, visit with a stranger is exactly what Jesus did. This lady would no doubt have remained forever unreached, her life would have remained dismal & cheerless if it were not for the fact that *Jesus took an interest in her.*

It was because of the interest Jesus took in her, that she took interest in Jesus. Sure, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

But just how do we take genuine interest in people?

First, We must not be above other people.

This is clear in all of scripture.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

Even when we give a gift to someone in need we are to give it as a debtor, so as to not smash their spirit.

"Let us not be desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another" (Galatians 5:26).
Important people are so annoying!

If we could pick the one fatal flaw of all of the fallen mass media ministry, it is this one thing: It was dripping with pride. It was *fantastic!* It was *great!* It was *powerful!* It was and is WOW! It was *intimidating* to anyone who disagreed with what it was saying in any way. We Christians have learned very well how to say, "To God be the Glory," while *we stand in the middle of all the glory.*

"Be of the same mind one toward another, Mind not high things, but condescend to people of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (Romans 12:16).

It was James who warned us to be careful about lifting some people above other people. About creating a system of honorable seating & rank within God's work (James 2). People have been ranked, and rated enough; they don't need to be ranked and rated by the church.

If we are to minister, we must do so as fellow human beings. Not as wise and powerful benefactors.

This woman is surprised that Jesus is treating her, a woman of Samaria, as a fellow human being. *We must not be above other people.*

Second, We must Listen.

James 1:19 says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, Let every person be swift to hear, *slow to speak...*" When you came into this world, you knew not one thing. How can you learn about the person across from you without listening? To listen is to take an interest.

Have you ever had this experience? You're talking to a person about something that is fantastically interesting to you. You're doing a wonderful job of expressing yourself; never did words come easier! Then at a pause, they tell you something that has *nothing whatsoever* to do with the topic?

Take the hint, they're not interested. They're not listening, and the whole thing is boring. They would rather be talking about themselves.

Jesus stayed around a long time to get her story. It came out slowly. People won't even begin to tell their story to people who *don't have much time*. ~ *Listen!*

Third, We must feel their hurt & walk in their shoes.

What is on their mind. They won't *always* tell you, even when you listen. However, there are some things you should just know. Talk in terms of their interest. *To be interesting - be interested*. Feel the pinch in their shoe!

When Paul spoke to the Greeks on Mars Hill, he talked with them about the monument *they* had built to the Unknown God. He started by speculating on what *their* Unknown God might be like.

How do they think?

For example:

A person is in the Bradford County Manor, no longer in the freedom of his or her own home. What is on his or her mind? Let me tell you: "Can you give me a ride home?"

A person has a retirement plan that is heavily invested in the stock market. The Dow drops 1,000 points in one day. What is on his or her mind? Simple, "What will happen to me?"

Over the years, a number of my friends have gone through the experience of divorce. What do you

suppose was foremost on their mind when that was happening?

A person is facing a quadruple by-pass surgery. What is on his or her mind?

Your friend works for a company that is in chapter 11. What might be on his or her mind?

Your friend's son or daughter just got shipped off to some war. Guess what's on his or her mind.

Your friend is going in to have some tests to follow up on some suspicious X-rays. What might be on his or her mind?

Mortgage rates are up, it has been 6 months since your contractor friend has had a substantial contract. What is on his mind?

Remember, a person is more interested in his or her own toothache, than they are in your great ideas or fantastic accomplishments.

Now, they might not want to talk about it; but, if you're going to take an interest in them, then you need to pay attention to *where they hurt*.

Some years ago I had an abscessed tooth, believe me, it kept my attention better than El Nino.

So, when Jesus talked with the woman at the well, the conversation eventually got around to what troubled her most. The failures & losses that she had experienced in life. The fact that she herself had a thirst, that water could not quench. This is when she knew that Jesus was interested in the things that hurt her most. ~ *Feel their hurt!*

Fourth, Let the other person be a giver. This gives them a margin of safety. Jesus gave us a fine example in John 4 when he said to the woman, "Could you get me a drink?" *Don't be afraid to be in their debt.* It is amazing how many grown-up people are still saying, "I'll do it myself!" It was the apostle Paul who said, "I am a debtor to every person, to the Jews & the Greeks." Learn how to say, "Would you please," "Would you be so kind as..." In ministry, always give the other person a chance *to be a giver.*

If it is true that it is more blessed to give than to receive, then give *them* a chance to be blessed.

Fifth, enjoy your relationships with other people.

Without question, the greatest thing about my job is that I get to be with people. I get to share their ideas, their dreams, their hurts, their Sunday meals, their Sunday meals.

Enjoyment is a state of mind. I enjoy choir practice, for a lot of reasons. First, I like the choir members. I like learning and singing the music --if it's not too hard. I like it that I'm contributing to a valuable ministry of the church. I like it that it fills the church with music. It is a hopeful kind of an activity.

Enjoy your ministry with people. Have fun doing your job. They can tell if it is a drudgery for you. Enjoy your relationships with people. Enjoy washing dishes or serving at a church dinner or fundraiser.

Some little things:

If we really want to do ministry for Christ we need to remember that it was He who hinted that a *glass of cold water* given sincerely to a thirsty person could do eternal good.

If we want to do ministry, we must do things that require time, energy, unselfishness, and thoughtfulness.

We must answer the phone in a tone that makes the person calling feel that we are going to be interested in what he or she has to say & that we are glad that he or she called.

Do you remember the TV series, *In the Heat of the Night* starring Carroll O'Conner. Remember how Chief Gillespie answered the phone? *Yeah, what.* I like him, but I'm not going to call him up on the phone. Not unless there's a murder to report.

We must notice what is the interest of the *other* person; that is the place to begin.

In his book, *What Life Should Mean to You*, Alfred Adler said, "It is the individual who is not interested in *his/her fellow person* who has the greatest difficulties in life and provides the greatest injury to others. It is from among such individuals that all human failures spring."

Now a question: Why should people be interested in what you have to say about anything, unless you are first interested in them?

This is not a rhetorical question. It is a question begging an answer. Now, according to the Bible, we Love Christ, *because* He first loved us. Our interest in him is born in *His interest in us*. I'll say it again: "Our interest in Him is born in *His interest in us*. "A person who would have friends must be friendly" (Proverbs 17:9). Jesus comes saying in John 15:15 "I have called you friends."

How can we ever expect to minister without this obvious and "all-too-often forgotten" paradigm? *Take an interest in other people*. Some people are so involved in *ministry*, that they have no time to *take an interest in other people*.

What was the result of the interest Jesus took in this woman? "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, 'He told me all that I ever did'" (John 4:39). Never forget that "we love Him because He first loved us." Let that guide your Christian life.

Work toward "caring about others" –That is what Christians do! Yes! That's what Christians do.