

## OPEN EYES, OPEN EARS, OPEN MINDS

There is a beautiful legend about a king who decided to set aside a special day to honor his greatest subject. When the big day arrived, there was a large gathering in the palace courtyard. Four finalists were brought forward, and from these four, the king would select the winner.

The first person presented was a wealthy philanthropist. The king was told that this man was highly deserving of the honor because of his humanitarian efforts. He had given much of his wealth to the poor.

The second person was a celebrated physician. The king was told that this doctor was highly deserving of the honor because he had rendered faithful and dedicated service to the sick for many years.

The third person was a distinguished judge. The king was told that the judge was worthy because he was noted for his wisdom, his fairness, and his brilliant decisions.

The fourth person presented was an elderly woman.

Everyone was quite surprised to see her there, because her manner was quite humble, as was her dress. She hardly looked the part of someone who would be honored as the greatest subject in the kingdom. What chance could she possibly have, when compared to the other three, who had accomplished so much? Even so, there was something about her the look of love in her face, the understanding in her eyes, her quiet confidence.

The king was intrigued, to say the least, and somewhat puzzled by her presence. He asked who she was. The

answer came: "You see the philanthropist, the doctor, and the judge? Well, she was their teacher!"

That woman had no wealth, no fortune, and no title, but she had unselfishly given her life to produce great people. There is nothing more powerful or more Christ-like than sacrificial love. (Brett Blair, [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com))

The king could not see the value in the humble woman. He missed the significance of the teacher. Often we miss the value of those around us. Many times, we miss the value of a mom or a dad, a spouse, a brother or sister, or even a best friend because we are so used to them being around us. Growing up I always had the nurture and care of my mother, she was tireless in her sacrificial love for my brothers and me.

But when I moved out of the house and got married, I discovered that I missed the value of my mother or at least taken her for granted. The saying is true that absence makes the heart grow fonder. So here's to you Mom on this Mothers' Day! Thank you for giving your life and love in unselfish ways and demonstrating the love of Christ in a prevenient sense in my life. And all of us kids say "Amen"!

But this sermon is not only about Moms who show us God's agape love, but also about how others demonstrate to us the grace of God in our life. How spiritual practices help us see and know the deep, deep love of Jesus and His steadfast presence in our lives. How God is calling us to be vessels of prevenient grace in other's lives, showing them the agape love of God and Christ's amazing grace, and offering them

the Risen Christ who lived, died, and rose again so they can be free from sin.

I heard a radio show on NPR last night about the story of George Price who was an American population geneticist, and he wrote a mathematical formula that stated that true altruism or sacrificially giving of your self is physically impossible. The formula dictated that we humans always want something in return. For example, if we sacrifice our life for our family, we are doing it unconsciously to keep our gene pool going, not out of selfless love.

Now before I changed the radio station in disgust, here's the interesting part of the story of George Price: he spent the rest of his life trying to prove his mathematical formula wrong. He gave everything he had to others until he was

broke, and living in an abandoned house with three walls and a half a roof. Other homeless people lived there with him and George Price continued to find food for them, clothes, shoes, all to his detriment. He didn't eat, hardly slept, and spent his time thinking and thinking of ways to prove his formula wrong. In the end, he became so depressed that he could not help the homeless that he took his own life. He is buried in an unmarked grave in St. Pancras Cemetary in North London, England.

I lift that story up for two reasons: One is that no matter what Price's equation says, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Jesus loved the world so much that he gave his life as a sacrifice for us, so that we would live in God's forgiveness and free from sin. The sacrificial love of God is demonstrated over and over again by people in my

life and in yours who sacrificially give of themselves and their resources, not so their gene pool or the memory of their deed will live on in story, but they have been changed by the grace of God.

Second, we are not called by God to give of ourselves over and over again until our tank is dry and then try to give some more. George Price made a fatal mistake by not having a well to draw from for his life, or a pipeline that ran through him to the people he was trying to help, or in the gospel of John, Jesus talks about a fountain of living water bubbling up within us.

Which brings me to my second point, Jesus had a pipeline, he had a well to draw from...God his Father. Every morning and evening Jesus went to an isolated place and

prayed. Jesus attended synagogue every Sabbath, he read the Scriptures and memorized them, and he knew when to withdraw from the crowds and retreat and spend time with friends in fellowship. God was Jesus' well, the source of his power, the anchor that kept him steady in his mission to preach the good news of God's kingdom and forgiveness of sin. We too must follow Jesus and have a well of living water, take advantage of God's ways to remain filled with the Spirit and His grace. One way is worship, you are doing it right now. Another is prayer, reading the Bible, fellowship with Christian friends, retreat... all of these ways we call the means of grace, or spiritual disciplines. When we are connected to the Source of all power, strength, resources, love, which is the Spirit of God, our tank will not run dry. We won't be trying to save the world on our own strength,

because we realize that Jesus is the One who saves, His Spirit is moving upon this world, all we have to do is follow where the Spirit leads us and be faithful. And God will provide all we need to fulfill the calling God has placed on our lives.

So we are not alone, Moms, don't try to do everything for your kids on your own strength and resources. You have a community of faith here that can teach you how to remain full of the deep, deep love of God as you selflessly give your life to your children. You have God and you have people here who are ready to help.

We are not alone, Church, we cannot feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and give water to the thirsty if we continue to collect the meager resources we have and

distribute them...and at the same time not connected to God from whom all blessings flow. We must stay connected to the means of grace and then watch the Holy Spirit move upon the people we care deeply about, and walk in step with the Spirit.

Finally, as people of God, filled with the Spirit, with open eyes, ears, minds, and hearts we must offer the Risen Christ to others in our community. I have two stories to help illustrate this point.

There was once a little boy who decided he wanted to find God. He knew it would probably be a long trip, so he decided to pack a lunch—four packs of Twinkies and two cans of root beer.

He set out on his journey and went a few blocks until he came to a park. On one of the park benches, sat an old woman looking at the pigeons.

The little boy sat down beside her and watched the pigeons too. When he grew hungry, he pulled out some Twinkies. As he ate, he noticed the woman watching him, so he offered her one. She accepted it gratefully and smiled at him. He thought she had the most beautiful smile in the world.

Wanting to see it again, he opened a can of root beer and offered her the other one. Once again, she smiled that beautiful smile.

For a long time the two sat on that park bench eating Twinkies, drinking root beer, smiling at each other, and watching the pigeons. Neither said a word. Finally, the little

boy realized that it was getting late and he needed to go home. He started to leave, took a few steps, turned back and gave the woman a big hug. Her smile was brighter than ever before.

When he arrived home, his mother noticed that he was happy, but strangely quiet. 'What did you do today?' she asked. 'Oh, I had lunch in the park with God,' he said.

Before his mother could reply, he added, 'You know, she has the most beautiful smile in the world.'

Meanwhile, the old woman left the park and returned to her home.

Her son noticed something different about her. 'What did you do today, Mom?' he asked. 'Oh, I ate Twinkies and drank root beer in the park with God.'" And before her son

could say anything at all, she added, "You know, God's a lot younger than I imagined." (Jef Olson, Hearts Burning Within)

The second story is from Dr. Tony Campolo, who is a world renowned author and preacher. In his film series, "You Can Make a Difference", he tells the story of a Christian colleague with a PhD. in English Literature who quit his job and became a mailman, because Christ opened up a new tomorrow in his life. Tony went to the man's apartment to try to persuade him to change his mind. Here is how Tony describes that encounter:

Tony says, "I couldn't change his mind, so I came back with the old Protestant work ethic thing. I said, "Charlie, if you're gonna be a mailman, be the best mailman you can be."

"He looked at me with a silly grin and said, 'I'm a lousy mailman.'"

"I asked, 'What do you mean, you're a lousy mailman?'"

"He answered, 'Everybody else gets the mail delivered by one o'clock; I never get back until about five thirty or six.'"

"What takes so long?" I wanted to know.

"He said, 'I visit! That's why it takes so long. You wouldn't believe how many people on my route never got visited until I became the mailman. But I've got this problem, I can't sleep at night.'"

"Why can't you sleep?"

"He said, 'Who can sleep after drinking twenty cups of coffee?'"

"I began to get the image of this mailman on the job. He was no ordinary mailman. I could picture him going from door to door and at each home giving more than the mail. I could see him visiting solitary widows, counseling troubled teenagers, joking with lonely old men. I could see him delivering the mail in a way that was extra-ordinary for the people on his route.

He's the only mailman I know that on his birthday the people on his route get together, hire out a gym, and throw a party for him. They love him because he's a mailman who expresses the love of Jesus everywhere he goes. In his own subtle way, my friend Charles is changing his world, changing the lives of people, touching them where they are, making a difference in their lives. It may not sound like

much, but that man who is delivering mail, like Jesus would deliver mail, is an agent of God who is changing the world."

One little boy shared his Twinkies and root beer with an old woman on a park bench, one old woman shared a beautiful smile with a little boy, one mailman shares time with people on his job, and people give their love and appreciation to a mailman who visits. Now some people may hear these stories and conclude that these are only nice encounters with good people doing good things. But that's not how these people see them. The little boy understood God who smiles, the woman saw God who sits with her and breaks bread with her, the mailman sees Christ in each person he visits and the people see Christ in him.

It all depends on your perspective, I guess, just like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They saw a stranger, a fellow traveler and a Jew, they shared with him their pain, and he shared with them the Scriptures and their hearts burned within them, they shared a room and a meal with him, and he took the bread, broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened to the Risen Christ! When we share ourselves, when we offer ourselves out of love that God gives to us, as we are filled with the Spirit and fill others with God's grace, even with Twinkies and root beer, a smile, a visit with someone in their home, we offer the Risen Christ to others!

And either people will recognize then the Risen Christ in their midst, or later as they look back on their life and see the prevenient grace of God who held them close in love

even though they had not realized it was God. But it doesn't matter when people see the Risen Christ in their lives, that's God's job in the Holy Spirit. But our task is to share Christ, to love others, to care for family and friends, and to give of ourselves selflessly out of the strength and power God gives to us through the means of grace and spiritual disciplines we practice each week. Then we will see Christ with open eyes, hear the song of God's love with open ears, and our minds will be filled with all of the knowledge and love of God, which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.