

Falling in Love with Jesus Without Overt Coercion

While praying for someone to be right with God, I began to think of testimonies given by others who describe the crisis they themselves experienced to get them in a right relationship with God. I was thinking of a young man who was climbing up the Gospel music world ladder with a half-hearted commitment. In his register of songs he would perform, he sang one entitled, *Whatever It Takes*. I recall the words being something to the effect; "I'll take heartache and pain, sunshine and rain; whatever it takes to cause my heart to break, Lord, that's what I'll be willing to do." The young singer was nearly killed in a tragic crash. While in traction in the hospital, hanging on to his life, he told his mother, "Mom, it's no longer, *Whatever it takes*," in reference to the song he had been singing across the country. In other words, he now knew what it would take- nearly his life. Illustrations like this are innumerable, so many in fact, that often when I pray, "Lord, bring this person into right relationship with You, Oh, Lord, whatever it takes...", I always feel a twinge of the fear of God for that person, hoping it would not take a crisis. For many, it will take a crisis. Through the manifold crisis of Joseph's life, he was able to say, "*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive*" (Genesis 50:20). The Bible also says, "*But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold*" (Job 23:10).

While praying for someone to be right this morning, the Lord circumnavigated my thoughts into a most delightful realm. He seemed to say to me, "How do people fall in love and marry?" Then using the parallel of Christ and His Church, it all made sense. So the Lord seemed to prod me to pray, "Lord, help them to fall in love with You, for who You are and for what You will do. Don't kill them or cripple them - just let them see You for who You are, without the drama of catastrophe." Here is what came to me in meditation:

1. We show interest and attraction.

When we first spotted the person we later married, he/she stood out in the crowd. We could be in a crowded room, but for us, they were the only person there. We wanted to be closer, take a closer look, hear the sound of their voice, see who their friends were and find out if they had a special friend who would tell us if they were already spoken for.

When Christ died for us, it was not a pretty thing... "*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed*" (Isaiah 53:5). Speaking of this event, Isaiah said, "...*he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him*" (Isaiah 53:2). When we view the cross, which is necessary for our salvation, we are heartbroken and it grieves us to see Jesus so mistreated and so hurt. Yet this is what makes him so attractive to the believer. He went through all that suffering for us. One day every believer will see Him in His resurrected glory. And we agree with the prophet who says, "*Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off*" (Isaiah 33:17). As the world still mocks Christ's passion, we concur with Peter who said, "*Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner*" (I Peter 2:7). Are we who believe not still caught up in the wonder of who He is?

2. We initiate an encounter.

When we are ready to move beyond interest, we diligently search for an opportunity to interact. I recall after I had begun to take interest in my wife, there was an opportunity for a group of college students to go up to Chicago to hold a service at the rescue mission. She was a pianist and I could lead singing, so our first date was one in which we "made beautiful music together." I still remember after the mission service we ate dinner at Berghoff's German Restaurant in downtown Chicago. I still remember the thrill of sitting next to her in route and coming home. I remember her whole demeanor, at the piano, in the restaurant around others and

the few times she and I talked. We talked about family, interests, up bringing, God and Church. The more I knew, the more I wanted to know. The more I was with her the more I wanted to be with her.

As I prayed for this one so in need of relationship, I began to imagine how they would initiate an encounter. They would show interest, and then take that first step toward the Lord. I know what happens whenever we step toward the Lord, *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8). Perhaps a casual reading of the Word of God that piques a further interest. Maybe going to church and the preacher says something about God that hits home and stirs us to learn more. Truly, to know Christ is to love Christ.

3. We respond favorably to their overtures.

May I see you again? If answered in the affirmative, the heart is set to pursue. If we hear, “Oh, I’m sorry I have plans, or not right now, or let me think about it”...then discouragement will come and with continual responses like that, the potential for relationship is chilled.

Song of Solomon 1:4 says, *“Draw me, we will run after thee....”* The pursuit by one you love is mesmerizing. In the same way, we have hundreds of songs in our hymnbook that speak of being loved by God and responding favorably to His love. Consider some of the lyrics of *O Happy Day*, “He drew me and I followed on, charmed to confess the voice divine, Happy day, happy day, When Jesus washed my sins away!”

4. We see each other regularly.

The natural process of responding favorably to loving overtures becomes a steady event after event, encounter after encounter. Time is marvelous superglue to relationships! The initial interest births encounter, the encounter births favorable response and the favorable response evolves into regular talks, dates and a number of other opportunities to know the person. In this process others are automatically eliminated. *“For they themselves shew of us ...how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”* (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Oh, how I pray for all who are away from God or in need of salvation to show the interest and go beyond the point of no return with faith. Keep attending church services, keep attending Bible Study, keep reading the Bible and other good books.

5. We reach a point of decision.

We reach a point of trying to discover if it is infatuation or the real thing.

We bask in the presence of who they are. We linger in contemplation of commitment. This is the time in a budding relationship when we know we will either commit or call everything off. This is a serious time of decision. Joshua said, *“...Choose you this day whom ye will serve...”* (Joshua 24:15).

6. We make full commitment.

When we fully commit to the one we are going to spend the rest of our days we say, “In sickness as in health, in poverty as in wealth, forsaking all others and cleaving to thee and thee only until death parts thee and me.” It’s a total sell-out. We say with the Shulemite, *“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me”* (Song of Solomon 7:10).

And so as I pray for those far, far from God, rather than pray the wrath of God to fall, I pray, “Lord, let them see you and fall in love with who you are!” “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans

2:4).

- Pastor Pope

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