

A "Heart For" Series #1
A Heart For People
By Bill Denton

Introduction

A. Illustration (One writer put it this way)

I have asked hundreds of people two questions: "Who has had a great influence on your life for Christ?" and "What qualities did this person have that enabled him to have such an influence on you?"

No one has ever said he was helped because the person was so intellectual or had such a dynamic personality or was so good-looking! Neither do people mention the syllabus they studied, or the hoops they jumped through.

What they *do* say is that it was their relationships with people and God that really mattered. "He really cared for me." "She had such a genuine interest in me." "He believed in me." "He had a close walk with God." "She took the time to listen to me." "She was open and honest."¹

B. When it comes to how we influence and affect the lives of other people, this is one of the most overlooked truths

1. It is at the foundation of the statistics that tell us that most people are Christians because of the influence of a friend or family member than any other person
2. It identifies the thing that makes us remember the teacher, the coach, the mentor, somebody – who had the single greatest impact on us and who sent us down a particular path of life
3. It is the unfortunate person who has never felt the power of a relationship with some other human being who seemed to have a special place for us in their heart

C. We frequently talk about the Great Commission passages, or we discuss the God-given responsibility we have to somehow help people see God's will for themselves

1. At the same time, we are frustrated by how hard the job is and how often we seem to fail to make much progress
2. We are often guilty of intense efforts to throw God at people, to batter them with the cross of Jesus, only to see them turned off and driven away
3. Much of the time, our failure may be the result of forgetting or neglecting this basic truth that what really serves as the catalyst for great spiritual success is the relationship we have with people
4. There is something even more basic than the relationship, for there is something that precedes the relationship – it's a heart for people that allows us to open up, to soften ourselves to receive people, and it is this heart for people I want to talk about today

¹*Discipleship Journal* : Issue 30. 1999 (electronic ed.). Colorado Springs: The Navigators/NavPress.

I. Jesus Demonstrated A Heart For People

A. Jesus demonstrated a tender heart, open to people right where they were

1. Illustration (Lee Brase)

Years ago I heard an educator say that you cannot teach people anything except what they want to learn. If someone is not a learner the only thing we can do for him is to try to motivate him to hunger for learning.²

2. Jesus had his greatest impact on people by making them hungry, and he made them hungry by showing that he had a heart open to them wherever they were

a. did he want to change them – absolutely!

b. but the route necessary to changing others ran straight through his own heart

B. You see Jesus' heart for people in the many ways he received them and made it possible for them to hear God's message

1. Mark 3:1-5

1 He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. 2 They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3 He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" 4 And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. 5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

NASU

a. here's a fellow whose hand was withered – a terrible condition

b. the Pharisees could only wait to see if Jesus did something for which they would accuse him (of doing something evil?)

c. Jesus' powerful question (paraphrased) – Is it lawful to do good or do harm; save a life or kill?

d. the Pharisees kept quiet and Jesus became angry – was it because those who should have had a heart for the crippled man didn't really care about him?

e. Jesus was grieved at their hardness of heart – there's the problem

2. Matthew 9:35-38

35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." NASU

²*Discipleship Journal* : Issue 30. 1999 (electronic ed.). Colorado Springs: The Navigators/NavPress.

- a. this is a wonderful explanation of Jesus' heart
 - b. he went about doing all sorts of things that helped people, touching them where they were, and recognizing the issues in their lives
 - c. the key word is compassion – helps us understand Jesus' heart
 - d. we sometimes miss the fact that in asking for workers to be sent into the harvest that the workers must have the same heart as the one who was at that time working to secure the harvest – Jesus
 - e. if we don't have a heart like his, we will never reap the harvest
3. I won't take the time today to read through the very many examples of the heart of Jesus, but just pick a gospel and read through it – watch Jesus interact with people – you can't miss his heart!

II. Paul Understood That A Heart For People Was Vital To Connecting Them With God

A. 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8

7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. NASU

- 1. Paul's effectiveness was based on his heart for people
- 2. It is this quality that so often goes missing in us
 - a. it goes directly to our attitudes toward others
 - b. it relates to how we treat others, our behavior toward them
 - c. it relates to what we're willing to do for others
 - d. whenever our relationship with others looks more like Pharisees than Jesus, then something is wrong with us

B. In the past, we have often put too much emphasis on knowing more than others, being right where they were wrong, winning the debates and discussions about religious subjects – all while losing ground, losing people, losing the very battle we thought was important

1. 1 Corinthians 8:1

1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. NASU

- a. a discussion noting the differences between the true God and idols is an important discussion
 - b. you'd think this is something a person ought to get right, and eventually Paul wanted the Corinthians to get to it
 - c. but Paul thought the complete answer did not lie in just knowing the right things, but in exercising love
 - d. why? -- because issues dealt with only on the basis of knowledge have a tendency to create more problems like pride and arrogance
2. having a heart for people and loving them allows truth to win without losing the person

C. Galatians 6:1-2

1. 1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. NASU
 - a. what do we do when we see someone caught up in sin?
 - b. sometimes people are treated harshly, unlovingly, without any heart at all
 - c. that sort of thing is simply counter to what this passage teaches
 - d. a heart able to exercise gentleness begins with an awareness of our own frailties
2. Mean, hard-hearted people simply do not have the ability to deal with others like a person whose own heart is tender and gentle

D. Colossians 3:12-15

1. 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. NASU
2. This whole passage, and every individual term Paul used to tell us the kind of people we are to be and how we are to treat each other is based on our having the right kind of heart
 - a. it's a "heart for people" kind of heart
 - b. the more we rid ourselves of hardness against others, critical and condemning attitudes, and anything that leads to ill treatment of others the more we're able to deal with people the right way
 - c. but we can't just eliminate the negative - we have to add the positives, and that's what this passage contains

Conclusion

- A. It may be that this problem of not having a heart for people is so difficult for us, that we're not even aware it exists
 1. Illustration (an Eastern writer put it this way)

Once when I was in the Himalayas, I was sitting upon the bank of a river. I drew out of the water a beautiful, round stone and smashed it. The inside was dry. The stone had been lying a long time in the water, but the water had not penetrated the stone.

It is just like that with the "Christian" people of the West. They have for centuries been surrounded by Christianity, entirely steeped in its blessings, but the Master's truth has not penetrated them. Christianity is not at fault; the reason lies rather in the hardness of their hearts. Materialism and intellectualism have made their hearts hard. So I am not surprised that many people in the West do not understand what Christianity really is. -- *Sadhu Sundar Singh, excerpted from Wisdom of the Sadhu, the Bruderhof Communities website*

2. Do you have a heart for people?
 - a. do you really love others? Do they know it or can they tell it?
 - b. are you patient and gentle, able to take them where they are and with compassion, deeply desire to help them
3. Or, is your attitude more akin to something opposite – if it is, your heart needs some work
4. Watch Jesus deal with people; watch Paul deal with people – it's amazing at what we see in them – that's what we ought to pursue

B. Invitation