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MANIFESTING CHRIST

The High Call of Every Christian Counselor

What does it mean to manifest Christ? What is required of Christian counselors and caregivers? *Webster's Revised and Unabridged Dictionary* defines the term "manifest" as, "making clear or evident to the eye or the understanding; to show or be distinctively perceived; to prove and put beyond doubt or question." It is also the root word in manifesto, which is a public demonstration or an openly declared statement. Christian counseling is a high and sacred calling—to humbly, yet transparently, represent Christ as His ambassadors to a lost and hurting world. Simply put, it is the ministry of reconciliation, and from the perspective of the Apostle Paul, "as though God was making an appeal *through us* [emphasis ours]; we beg you on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Jesus is our standard bearer, always sensitive to, and maintaining, a perfect balance, the One who was "full of grace and full of truth" and in whom these qualities were consistently "realized" or manifested (John 1:14, 17). We see His gracious interactions with those who needed an expression of kindness or gentleness and, at other times, giving a strong exhortation or challenge directed toward those who needed to be held accountable for their words and deeds. Each of us must likewise seek to balance the right characteristics of both grace and

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truth as we counsel others, even though we may naturally or instinctively lean in one direction. Some counselors may tend to be more priestly in their therapeutic approach, and some, more prophetic. Priests love to comfort the disturbed, while prophets love to disturb the comfortable. Both are important and necessary interventions, but the key is discerning the right application given the particular moment or presenting problem.

The essence of grace is the freely given, unmerited favor of God. On the other hand, truth can be viewed as an ideal or fundamental reality that stands apart from, and even transcends, one's perceived experience. These two essential qualities—grace and truth—along with the capacity and spiritual maturity to rightly employ them are what sets apart the Christian counselor. They allow us to become the eyes, the ears, the hands and feet, and ultimately, the love of God to those He brings and who need care and compassion. Ephesians 4:24 is an encouragement to “put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” In defending his grasp of truth in a dialogue with his peers, the Earl of Somerset reflected that it was “... so clear, so shining, and so evident, that it will glimmer through a blind man's eye” (Shakespeare, *The History of Henry VI*, Part I, Act II, Scene IV).

The implication here is that the manifestation of grace and truth in the counselor's life and work should be just that, visible, apparent, readily seen by all—in fact, so unmistakable that those who lack insight could still see and comprehend these attributes at some level. Paul understood this important principle in his discourse with the church in Corinth. He spoke powerfully on how the lives of the believers there were like handwritten letters that others could read and, hopefully, recognize in a positive way something about their walk of faith. Listen to his words, “You

are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men: being manifested that you are a letter of Christ cared for by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).

In essence, therefore, our goal is to become a reflection of Christ, the Wonderful Counselor. “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). This should be a normal outcome of our spiritual growth and sanctification since we were created in the Imago Dei. The counseling process, especially when it is based on the foundational principles of God's Word, is a progressive journey of self-discovery and change because, “He who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:21).

As counselors, part of our vital role is to help people correct their “vision” and walk in the Light of Christ. Some of our clients are near-sighted (they are overwhelmed by what's in front of them and can't see the big picture), some are far-sighted (they are in denial and can't see the log in their own eyes), and some are completely blind (they lack hope and faith and can't see through the darkness and despair at all). We have been given the privilege of being God's optometry assistants. He is the Great Physician, but He chooses to use us in helping people see things more clearly.

What if we viewed others through the same lens that Christ does? Would we see anything different? A number of years ago, I (Eric) had an opportunity to speak to almost a thousand pastors and ministry leaders at a Billy Graham training conference. Feeling a bit intimidated on what to say to a group of men and women who, collectively, had probably already preached and taught

on just about every subject, I struggled with the right message. It was only a few hours before stepping up to the podium when I felt that God gave me this simple, yet profound, thought—just tell them to look at others the way I do, to look at people through My eyes. I grabbed a piece of paper and started writing:

The world saw only that Jesus was eating with tax gatherers and sinners... but Jesus saw people in need of the great physician.

The world saw only a blind beggar named Bartimaeus shouting above the crowd and disturbing those around Him... but Jesus saw a man reaching out in faith and in need of mercy.

The world saw only a group of children annoying the Master... but Jesus saw their innocent trust and a kingdom that belonged to such as these.

The world saw only a crooked tax gatherer named Zaccheus becoming rich through the suffering of others... but Jesus saw a man ready to be broken with an act of repentance.

The world saw only the crowds pressing in on Him from all sides... but Jesus sensed the touch of His garment by a trembling woman.

The world saw only five loaves and two fish to feed so many... but Jesus saw a great multitude hungry and in need of compassion.

The world saw only a woman caught in the very act of adultery and deserving of condemnation... but Jesus saw a daughter in need of forgiveness.

The world saw only a robber crucified as a common thief... but Jesus saw a lost soul worth dying for.

This was an “aha” moment, and yet, how does it translate into our world of 21st century counseling and become relevant with the issues and problems that we all face every day? The scenes may change, but the principles remain the same. Perhaps the answer to the “What would Jesus do (or say)?” question would be more apparent if we first asked, “What would Jesus see?”

The world sees only a man dying with AIDS and whispers that he probably deserves it... but Jesus sees someone who's alone and afraid of dying.

The world sees only the alcoholic, lost and groping in the darkness... but Jesus sees someone whose life can be restored.

The world sees only the Christian leader who has stumbled badly and fallen before the eyes of so many... but Jesus sees someone who's worthy of grace and help in time of need.

The world sees only the prostitute standing on the corner... but Jesus sees a little girl who was sexually abused and desperate for her father's love.

The world sees only the rebellious teenager wanting to end his life... but Jesus sees someone who has never been accepted and starving for approval.

The world sees only the color of someone's skin... but Jesus sees a vessel fearfully and wonderfully made, created

in the image of Almighty God.

The world sees only the woman who's always anxious and depressed... but Jesus sees the single Mom struggling to survive and needing the support and understanding of others.

The world sees only the throwaways in prison, the crippled, the poor and the homeless... but Jesus sees precious souls who have yet to be invited to the banqueting table.

Imagine how our work with people could be radically different if we were willing to look beyond the outward appearance, read the meaningful narrative that exists between the lines, and moreover, fully sense and be in sync with the very heartbeat of God. Ultimately, to do so means we are capable of "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), having found the right balance in our calling as Christian counselors. ✕



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