

The Power of Perception

Jesus took deliberate steps to influence the public's view of His ministry.

As a television producer and media consultant in Hollywood, I understand that perception is my business. I deal in the visual world of products and people and how they are perceived by the viewing audience. Perception is critical in a media-saturated culture because reality is not based just on facts but also on how those facts are perceived.

I used to view perception as a negative and deceitful proposition. It can be, but like many things it has a flip side. I learned this when I discovered that Jesus took deliberate, out-of-the-ordinary steps to influence the public's view of His ministry and purpose. For example, He:

- » told some of the people He healed not to tell everyone about it (see Mark 1:40-44)
- » selected carefully the men who would be His closest associates (see Matt. 4:18-22; 9:9)
- » withdrew to remote places during the height of His popularity (see Mark 6:31-32)
- » chose His own method of triumphal entry into Jerusalem (see Matt. 21:1-10)
- » ordered Peter not to fight and allowed Himself to be arrested (see Matt. 26:47-56)
- » controlled His interrogation by Pilate on criminal charges by responding only to certain questions (see Matt. 27:11-26).

He did the unexpected because He knew His purpose. He refused to let others determine His destiny or the way He would be perceived.

Why did He care what people thought? Because He understood a principle: It's not just who you are—it's who you're perceived to be.

One of the greatest criticisms of the historical Christian faith is that it is littered with men and women who may have been sincere and genuine, but because they cared little for how they were perceived they ended up doing more damage than good.

What about your destiny? To what extent can you influence the way others perceive you? Here are three techniques you can use to express your faith and accomplish your calling.

1. Recognize that how you are perceived is critical. It doesn't matter if you have a passion for witnessing if people think you're pushy and an insensitive jerk. Take the time and effort to consider their perceptions so you can position yourself and your gifts in the best possible light.

It's not about ego or manipulation; it's about creating an environment in which you're appreciated. If you don't determine your future, you'll always be at the mercy of others who will.

2. Believe that God has called you to be a light. Light draws people; it doesn't repel them. Every day at the office, in school, at home, with your neighbors, you have the opportunity to influence people's perceptions of God and His ability to affect their lives.

Unless they perceive that His ability is of the life-changing sort, they'll never take the critical step of faith. Only God

can change hearts, but He allows us the gift of being active with Him in His plan.

3. Never forget that God is ultimately in control. Perhaps you're wondering: How do I discern between my attempt to influence others for good and my own ego? That becomes an issue of integrity. You need to daily pursue the God of truth and seek to express His purpose in every association, project and relationship.

Who you are is important. Your talent, your gifts, your life before God—all are critical because truth exists and God has called us to live at a remarkable level. But you should never underestimate the value of how you are perceived because we're also called to be witnesses of His life, death and resurrection. How that message is received by others can never be taken for granted.

Phil Cooke is a producer and media consultant to some of the largest and most successful churches and ministries in the country. He's president and CEO of Cooke Pictures in Santa Monica, California. Find out more at