

Is 'He Gets Us' Presenting a Jesus Who Is Too Much Like Us?

I appreciate every effort to make Jesus known to a world that does know who He really is, especially to a world that has false perceptions about Him. I appreciate those who are willing to think outside the box and find unconventional ways to get people interested in hearing about the Savior. And I appreciate Christians who are willing to invest large amounts of money to reach massive secular audiences.

But I don't appreciate efforts that, in the end, might do more harm than good.

I'm speaking here, of course, about the "He Gets Us" ad campaign, designed to tell a hurting and lost world that Jesus understands who they are.

As the different ads suggest, He knows what it is to be rejected and misunderstood. He knows what it is to be an outsider. He knows what it's like to be accused of being a lawbreaker and a miscreant.

The ads are saying, "Whoever you are, whatever you're going through, whatever you've done, He gets you. That's who Jesus is. Not only so, but He really loves you."

So far, so good, especially in 21st-century America, where millions of Americans know the Jesus of a political party or the Jesus of a corrupt ministry or the Jesus of an angry religious crowd.

By all means, let us help a watching world disassociate from *that* Jesus and let us introduce people to the Jesus of the Bible. And yes, let's do it one step at a time, making Him as

relatable and approachable as possible.

After all, there's a reason that the "sinners" of the day flocked to Him, including the dishonest tax collectors and the prostitutes and other social outcasts. And there's a reason that the religious establishment was offended by His actions, asking His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt. 9:11b, NIV). Or, as Jesus summarized what His critics said about Him, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19b).

I truly believe that if Jesus were physically here among us today, He would do the same thing, getting His hands dirty with the "sinners" of this world, spending time with many people that we would avoid, allowing His reputation to be tarnished. He wouldn't just attend our lovely church services.

Of course, as I have often pointed out, Jesus did not practice affirmational inclusion, meeting sinners where they were and affirming them in their sin. To the contrary, He practiced transformation inclusion, meeting sinners where they were and calling them to repentance and forgiveness and new life.

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But, again, in principle, I have no issue with the intent of the "He Gets Us" campaign. I have an issue with some of the campaign's messaging.

In short, we can present to the world a Jesus who is so likable that He is no longer the Jesus of the Bible, a Jesus who is so much like the world that the world recognizes Him as one of its own. At that point, what good is He? What good is a Jesus who gets us and relates to us and to whom we can relate if He is not also radically different from us, calling us to radical change if we want to follow Him?

You might say, "But that's not the purpose of the ad campaign. The purpose is pre-evangelism. It's not even entry-level evangelism. The purpose is to get people to think about Jesus in a new way, to be open to hear more about Him. We can then build on that and tell them the rest of the story."

But that, again, is to miss the point. If the relatable, likeable Jesus, the one who gets us and relates to us and meets us where we are is different from the Jesus of the Bible, how are we helping anyone?

For example, if I wanted to present a Jesus that the world would love, I could devise an ad campaign where He is marching with Black Lives Matter protesters or holding a pride flag at an LGBTQ march or escorting a young, pregnant woman into a Planned Parenthood clinic or chanting, "Free Palestine!"

Tens of millions of Americans would relate to that Jesus. They would even celebrate Him and say, "That's the Jesus I would follow—not the Jesus of those white supremacist, Trump-loving Republicans. Not the Jesus of those homophobic, transphobic, Christian hypocrites. Not the Jesus of those religious fanatics shouting outside abortion clinics. Tell me about this other Jesus."

In the end, though, we have simply substituted one misrepresentation of Jesus for another misrepresentation, further obscuring who He really is. (We could say we swapped the right-wing Jesus for the left-wing Jesus.)

And that's the problem with the "He Gets Us" campaign, despite its good intentions and despite some limited, positive fruit that the ads have probably produced.

Not only so, but the ads run the real possibility of making real Christians look bad, in particular, the ad that ran during the Super Bowl, sharing how Jesus washed feet rather than spread hate.

As Ryan Bomberger asked, why depict someone washing the feet of a woman in front of a Family Planning Center (in other words, in front of an abortion clinic)? What message does this send?

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And what does it say of the loving Christians who, year in and year, out share the gospel with those entering these clinic—not yelling or screaming or condemning but telling these women that there’s a better way?

Are they now the bad people because they’re not simply washing the feet of those about to terminate the life of their child? And can we even compare Jesus washing the feet of His disciples—an act of great humility and service—with someone washing the feet of a woman on her way to get an abortion?

And was there an image of someone washing the feet of an LGBTQ-identified individual? If so, does that mean that the aggrieved father speaking at a school board meeting and protesting the presence of biological males in the girls’ bathroom is not like Jesus? Does that mean that all Christians who do not affirm same-sex “marriage” are not like Jesus?

The reality, of course, is that Jesus did far more than wash the feet of us sinners. He died for us and paid for our sins—for the very worst of us and for the most despicable sins. The blood of Jesus truly cleanses us from *all* sin. Thank God!

But I fear that, when people wanting to find out more about Jesus through this ad campaign start reading the Bible for themselves, they’ll discover a very different Jesus. A Jesus who forgave the woman caught in adultery but who then told her to go and sin no more (John 8:1-11). A Jesus who said time and again, “Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, AKJV). A Jesus who told His followers, “If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me first” (John 15:18,

NLT). A Jesus who declared, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household’” (Matt. 10:34–36, NIV).

So, by all means, let’s help present the real Jesus to a world that does not know Him, to the unchurched and the dechurched. And let’s be willing to get out of our comfort zone to do so.

But let’s present Him accurately, lest in the end, we introduce people to a Jesus who gets us but cannot help us or transform us, a Jesus who accepts us as we are and leaves us there to die.

That is not the Jesus of the Bible, the real Jesus. Let us make *Him* known.

May I encourage all those involved in the “He Gets Us” campaign to give this careful and prayerful thought? You really can do a lot of good, but some changes need to be made.{eoa}

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