

‘Ravi Was Gospel-Centered’: How Ravi Zacharias’ Humility Won Many to Christ

Click [here](#) to read Ravi’s obituary and click [here](#) to read what other Christian leaders are saying.

My heart sank when I heard the news that Ravi’s cancer had spread and that there was nothing more the doctors could do. My wife, Karen, and I bowed in prayer asking our great God to grant comfort, strength, and to make His presence known to Ravi, his dear wife and family, his staff and ministry colleagues, and to the millions he has ministered to around the world through his years of extraordinarily fruitful ministry. Unless God says otherwise, soon our dear brother will step into the very presence of the Savior he has known, loved and served for most of his life.

I’ll never forget the first time I met Ravi. It was about thirty years ago. At the time, I was a visiting professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the Chicago area and Ravi was doing a lecture series on campus. As I listened to him speak, I was immediately drawn to and impressed by three things. First was his high view of the Scripture. Second was Ravi’s compelling intellectual clarity and logic. And third was his ability to convey a sincere love and concern for the people to whom he was speaking.

Frankly, it is this third observation that captured me. Certainly, all of us who heard him were impressed by his intellectual capacity and recall, but it was his authentic compassion that gave a kind of “heart credibility” to that lecture series.

We chatted a bit but we didn’t spend much time together during his visit to campus. Yet, his impact on me would be lasting.

Through the years our paths would cross and our friendship would develop. During the decade of the 90s we were on the speaker team at a number of the Promise Keeper (PK) events. Ravi, Tony Evans, and I were having a conversation during a break at a PK event in Dallas, Texas. Tony asked Ravi a question. Although I don't remember the question, I vividly remember how Ravi answered him. He tilted his head back, closed his eyes, and began quoting a lengthy passage from a book he had not read in years, including the page number! You got the sense that he wasn't trying to showcase his recall. He wanted to be helpful by giving a clear answer. And that he did.

I love the way Ravi related to those with whom he disagreed. I suppose at times it was tempting for him to use his intellectual gifts to "cut people down to size" or to demean or embarrass them by flaunting the superiority of his position. But he refused to do that. Why? Probably because Ravi is gospel centered. In other words, he didn't just want to win the argument or the debate, he wanted to win the person. He wanted them to encounter and come to know Jesus. So he responded to those who were on the other side of an issue or his position with dignity and respect.

An example of this is an event I attended several years ago on the campus of Georgia Tech in Atlanta. Ravi was sparring that evening with a very well-known atheist. As the evening progressed it became very clear that Ravi was better prepared and that his reasoning and arguments were much more compelling. But it also was clear that Ravi was building relational bridges during the debate. He did this by acknowledging common ground where he could and maintaining objectivity in his answers and generally demonstrating concern and regard for his "opponent". He also kept pointing back to the gospel. By the end of the debate, Ravi and this gentleman had a very warm friendly exchange.

A year or so ago I mentioned to Ravi that I have always been

impressed by his ability to not come across in an arrogant, dismissive way. I won't forget what he said to me. "Crawford, before I answer a question from a skeptic I visualize giving them a verbal hug." Think about it, a verbal hug. He also instructs his team members and others he has mentored through the years that when someone asks a question, answer the person and not just the question. Behind the question are experiences, pain, fear, and the stuff and drama of life. It is not just the question that matters, more importantly, the questioner matters.

Ravi Zacharias was one of the most authentically humble people I have ever met. God gave him an amazing platform of influence with a world-wide reach. The sheer number of people that he had the privilege of speaking to and influencing is mind-boggling. He was a best-selling author and knew some of the most influential people in the world (not an exaggeration). He influenced the thinking of literally millions. He has built an organization that has attracted some of the brightest Christian thinkers and communicators. His ministry is recognized as a primary resource to equip followers of Christ to effectively engage skeptics and present the hope of the gospel.

Yet, when people were with him, they were struck by the realization that Ravi held all of this with an open hand. One was struck by Ravi's gratitude to God for what He had done and the sense that Ravi counted it a privilege to have been used by God to reach and equip others. He didn't lead from platform or power. He realized that what had been given to him was a stewardship responsibility and not an entitlement. Ravi was a servant. He was approachable and as comfortable with a world leader as he was with a college freshman who's trying to figure out the meaning of life.

He had an others-orientation about him. When you were around him he didn't seem to be distracted. He had the ability to give focused attention and to make whoever was with him feel

as if they were a priority. This indeed is Christlikeness. The fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 are characteristics of Christ, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Ravi, thank you for your God-ward life and ministry. Your Christ-like life and example inspires me to run through the finish line. See you on the other side my friend and brother.
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