

This God Encounter Will Break Your Heart and Blow Your Mind

As I gave the barista my drink order that Sunday morning, I noticed a couple behind me who looked a little haggard. The woman had a legal-sized yellow pad and Bic pen in hand. I asked what they were having and put all three drinks on my card. As we waited in line for the drinks to arrive, all I could think about was that I might be late to speak at my friend's church there in Columbus, Ohio.

As we waited for our drink to arrive, the man asked, "So what's up with the coffee? Why'd you buy ours?"

I responded, "I like to buy coffee for people in line behind me—it's a small way to say, 'God is in love with you.' If Jesus were at Starbucks this morning, he'd be showing His love, not just talking about it!"

At that, the woman let out a loud, guttural cry—almost a groan but at high volume. It was loud enough that the dozens of people suddenly got quiet and looked at me as though I had caused this to happen. The woman was so spent from her wailing she was winded—as though she'd finished an aerobic workout. As she quieted down, he put an assuring hand on her back and said, "It's going to be OK, honey. It's going to be OK."

He continued with me. "Last night, our 19-year-old daughter went to a party. She took the drug Ecstasy. For whatever reason, the drug stopped her heart. She fell to the ground and died. We are here to plan her funeral service. As we pulled into the parking spot, my wife said, 'We are Jewish but aren't religious. We aren't faithful to go to temple. Still, I want to know where God is in all of this!'

"Then five minutes later, we stand in line, and you tell us this coffee is on you to show us God's love in a practical

way. Wow! We don't know what to say. Who are you? What do you believe?"

I directed him to my web site and assured him he could further connect the dots at .

After living around Jesus for three years, Peter understood that kindness is "missional" – that as we imitate Him by doing simple yet empowered good things, we will see the same results that followed Jesus. In a rather spontaneous message captured in Acts 10, Peter spoke to a group gathered at Cornelius' house. The high point of his message was Acts 10:38: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

I like the simplicity of Peter's summary. After spending three solid years with Jesus, Peter was able to cook all of that down to the simple call to do what Jesus did. The result of Jesus being anointed with the power of the Spirit was "he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil—for God was with him."

Jesus "went about."

This wasn't an idea to ponder and eventually respond to – or as it goes most of the time in life, to never respond with an action. To see the kingdom stirred, to be truly missional people, we must get out from behind our desks, our doors and our walls.

He "did good."

What all does "doing good" include? How many different, creative good things did Jesus do? Is there a limit to the creativity of God that Jesus carried out in the name of doing good with the kindness of God? John, in the last part of his gospel, stated hyperbolically that if all that Jesus said and did were recorded, the entire world couldn't contain all

that'd would be written. Jesus did certainly more than just 40 things. How can you creatively "do good" to those around you?

You and I can do the majority of those things as we also expand the kingdom. Doing kindness in a practical way opens a door to the heart of not-yet-believers (the ones on their way to personal faith but not there yet). I used to try to engage those folks in a "spiritual conversation" (code for arguing) about the good news of Jesus. The problem was, my approach to engaging actually felt like bad news to people.

A once-overlooked verse that has had a revolutionary effect on me is Romans 2:4. "The kindness of God leads to ... a radical life change" (NASB, MSG). I read this verse for years, but it didn't sink in till one day the light came on. To see others converted isn't an assignment from God that I can make happen; Holy Spirit is the one true evangelist. I can't bring anyone to Jesus on my own. However, I can lay out a trail of bread crumbs of kingdom kindness that result as we serve. Inevitably, people will "taste and see that the Lord is good."

At times, the culture around us will confuse and diminish the word "kindness." When we hear people speak of kindness, often what they mean is "niceness." Niceness is a great thing, but it isn't the same as the intentional, empowered kindness of God that leads people to a radical life change. God's kindness is something spiritual that also has a divine rooting in what's entirely practical. As we bring the kindness of God in practical ways, it nudges others toward Christ.

A Short Assignment

At lunch today or tomorrow, drive through Taco Bell during a busy time. Make sure there is a car or two behind you in line. When you go to pay for your order, tell the window person that you are also going to cover the meal of the person behind you. Tell that person what to tell that driver: "This is free as a way to show you God's love in a practical way." Often that

person will write all of that down and ask if they can repeat it to me. It's as if they are evangelizing someone else though maybe they don't get the message themselves quite yet!

Kindness brings encounters. Not only will the person behind you be nudged, your "designated" evangelist at the window might just come toward the Lord as well. To boot, it's easy to imagine that both the window person and driver end up telling the story of God's kindness to someone else later the same day. It's not every day that someone foots the bill for your Mexican food.

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