

9. Jesus Spent Time with People Needing Eternal Life

Today, we live in a very busy world. It seems like there is always more to do. It is very easy for Christian leaders and developing Christian leaders to become so busy that they think they do not have time to spend with people who are not yet Christians. In contrast, Jesus loved people and He purposely chose to make time to spend with people who needed eternal life.

Certainly, Christ was very busy. He knew that He only had three-and-a-half years of public ministry to complete the work the Father had sent Him to do. However, as Christ prayed to the Father the night before His crucifixion, He said, in John 17:4, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” In spite of the fact that Christ had to select and train the men who would carry on His work when He returned to heaven, Christ chose to spend much time with people needing eternal life.

The disciples were learning many things from Christ, and they did not want to have their learning interrupted. One day, Jesus was teaching the disciples in the area of Tyre and Sidon. While they were there, a woman of Canaan came to Jesus and asked Him to help her daughter who was vexed with a demon. Instead of seeing an opportunity to serve a woman and her daughter, who needed eternal life, the disciples did not want to be bothered. Matthew 15:23 says, “And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she cries out after us.’”

Christ took time and talked with the woman. The result is seen by the statement of Christ in Matthew 15:28. That verse says, “Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.” This woman was not a Jew. It would have been easy for Jesus to ignore her or tell her to leave. However, Christ spent time with people needing eternal life, and He wanted to teach His disciples, by His example, that they also needed to reach out to people needing eternal life.

In this case, we see that Christ was actually doing two things. He ministered to the woman and her daughter. However, Christ also showed the disciples, by His example, the need to spend time with people needing eternal life. The disciples did not want to be bothered by a foreign woman who had a daughter who was being tormented by a demon. Christ remained silent so that their attitude toward the woman would be revealed by their words. Christ both took time with this woman and showed the disciples, by His example, the importance of reaching out to those who had little or no hope. In the same way, we want to show developing leaders, by our example, the importance of spending time with people who have no hope and sharing with them how to have eternal life.

Jesus also spent time with groups of people needing eternal life. In Matthew 9:10-12, we read, “Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard that, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.’” As you can see by the statement of the Pharisees, they thought Christ was wasting His time by

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spending time with the tax collectors and sinners.

A meal provides one of the greatest opportunities to build relationships with people who need eternal life. Christ was taking this opportunity to show the disciples how to build relationships with tax collectors and sinners. The disciples were learning to sit and eat with people who needed eternal life. They were being shown how to build relationships with these people, so they could share eternal life with them. They were also being shown how to invite those people to repent and believe. Matthew 9:13 says, “‘But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’” Before the dinner was over, the tax collectors and sinners had the opportunity to believe in Christ, because He had chosen to spend time with them.

Jesus also chose to spend time with the scribes, because they also needed eternal life. One day, a scribe asked Christ what was the first commandment of all. Jesus answered, in Mark 12:29-31, by saying that the first commandment of all has two parts. “Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’”

After discussing this commandment with the scribe, Jesus said, in Mark 12:34, “‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ But after that no one dared question Him.” Jesus told this scribe that his answer showed that he was searching, and that he was not far from the kingdom of God. Because Jesus reached out to all people needing eternal life, Mark 12:37b says, “And the common people heard Him gladly.” The common people realized that Jesus had chosen to spend time with them, so they could hear how to have eternal life.

Christ also chose to spend time with the Pharisees, so He could share with them how to have eternal life. Luke 7:36 says, “Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.” Here, we see that Jesus had time to have dinner with a proud Pharisee who needed to have eternal life. This Pharisee even had a negative attitude toward Christ. Luke 7:39 says, “Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, ‘This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.’” Here, we see that the Pharisee had a negative, critical attitude, but Jesus knew that he needed eternal life.

In this case, Jesus gave Simon, and the other Pharisees, a short parable. Luke 7:41-43 says, “‘There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged.’” Jesus told Simon he was correct in saying that the one who is forgiven the most loves the most.

Later, Jesus showed Simon, and his guests, that He could forgive sins and give eternal life. Luke

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7:47-50 says, “‘Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’ Then He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Then He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.’” Simon, and the others, saw Jesus forgive the sins of the woman and give her eternal life. They saw that they could also ask Jesus to forgive their sins and give them eternal life. Jesus chose to spend time with Simon and his friends so they could see, and hear, how to have eternal life.

Just as Christ spent time with people, from many different backgrounds, who needed eternal life, we need to help developing leaders learn to spend time with people who need eternal life. We will show this to developing leaders as we model that one of our priorities is to spend time with people who have not yet placed their faith and trust in Christ. The best way to show developing leaders the importance of spending time with those who are not yet Christians is to take them with us as we visit those who are not yet Christians. They will see, by our example, what to do to develop relationships with those who are not Christians, and they will hear what to share as they listen to us.

At the beginning of this topic, we quoted John 17:4, where Jesus said: “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” The work He had been doing the previous three-and-a-half years was training the disciples who would continue His work when He returned to heaven. He trained them by taking them with Him as He spent time with people needing eternal life. We will train others by taking them with us as we visit those who are not yet Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you take developing leaders with you and show them how to build relationships and share the Gospel with those needing eternal life.