



Several years ago, when I was completing my training to become a mental health counselor, I worked for about six months as an intern at an inpatient mental health hospital. I was the therapist assigned to a unit that provided treatment for people with severe and persistent mental disorders. This population normally requires years of ongoing treatment due to the nature of their specific illnesses. As a therapist, I provided a safe place for people to talk about and work through some heavy issues.

One day after a particularly emotional session with a client who had suffered some very traumatic events, I asked my supervisor, "How do you do this every day? How have you managed to listen day after day to the hurt, pain, and trauma that people have suffered?"

Thirteen years later his answer continues to affect my view of ministry. "Chris," he said, "it would serve you well never to forget that you and I are only one life event away from being exactly where our clients are. We do not deserve the blessed life we live any more than our clients deserve to suffer from their illnesses. It is only by the unmerited grace of God that my life is what it is."

Over those years, I have repeated these words to myself a thousand times. “We do not deserve the blessed life we live any more than our clients deserve to suffer from the illnesses they suffer from.” I do not have a birthright that entitles me to the blessings of God. I am not a Christian because I am worthy of God’s favor. I am nothing more than the recipient of divine grace and unmerited favor.

Job understood this truth well when, after losing everything he owned, he declared, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the

LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). God was under no obligation to bless Job, yet He had chosen to do so. Now, due to a series of events that were out of Job’s control, his life had been turned completely upside down.

My former supervisor also understood this biblical truth, and it revolutionized the way he saw people who were hurting. He felt as though he had lived a blessed life, but this was not due to any merit he possessed. He also understood, like in Job’s case, that everything could change before the end of the day.

Application: What are some tangible ways in which God has blessed your life?

Spend a few minutes giving thanks to God for the way He has blessed you. Do not forget to acknowledge the truth that you do not deserve these blessings.

With this perspective in mind, a homeless person ceases to be a dirty, smelly nuisance. The immigrant struggling to communicate in English is no longer an annoyance. The Middle Eastern refugee is not a scary or dangerous person. They are all people, created by God (Genesis 1:26), who need to experience His grace and love.



Respecter of Persons

In James 2:1-4, the apostle addresses first-century Jewish Christians with these words: “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”

The Jewish Christians were guilty of showing favoritism to the wealthy while treating the poor as undesirable nuisances. It is not hard to hear the astonishment James expresses here. The Jewish Christians claimed to have had their lives transformed by Jesus Christ, and yet they had an attitude of favoritism. How can this possibly be? In verse 4, James declares that their motives were purely evil. These are strong words that deserve a significant amount of self-reflection.

Application: Are we guilty of showing favoritism to socially and economically elite individuals? Do we treat the homeless beggar with the same amount of respect as the wealthy business executive? According to Genesis 1:26, each person is created in the image of God and is therefore equally worthy of respect and kindness.



When our family first arrived in Spain, we wanted to learn firsthand about the plight of the refugees and immigrants whom we desired to reach with God's love. We had done a lot of research and knew what the statistics said about this people group, but we wanted to learn what their lives were really like.

Consequently, we began to serve as volunteers at various social outreach centers that were trying to meet the needs of hurting people. Most of our time was spent volunteering with a secular organization that distributed government-subsidized food to as many people as possible. Without a doubt, needs were met. However, two things quickly became evident to us: the needs far exceeded the current infrastructure, and, although these refugees and immigrants were receiving help, ever-present hopelessness haunted them.



Their stories were as different as night from day. Some of the refugees we met used to be wealthy professionals whose country had imploded due to civil unrest and war. Other people had fled the poverty and disease that plagued their villages; while others made

their way to a new country because they needed medical treatment that did not exist in their home countries. Although their histories were different, they all shared a sense of hopelessness and alienation.

So, when we set out to launch the outreach center (where we currently serve), our conviction was to serve each person with dignity and kindness because they have been created in the image of Almighty God. We greet people with a smile, and we call them by name. We are intentional in communicating to each person that they are welcome at the outreach center and that we believe each life has worth.

This is, after all, what our Lord had in mind when He commanded His children to love their neighbors as they love themselves (Leviticus 19:18b). Jesus later reinforced this idea when He declared this commandment to be second only to the command to love the Lord with all our hearts (Mark 12:29-31). The apostle James later deemed this commandment “the royal law” (James 2:8).

This commandment is easier to obey when our neighbor is from a similar socio-economic

background as we are and we merely need to be kind and polite to show them the love of Jesus. But how drastically does this commandment stretch us when we are called to love someone who has not bathed in a week and is desperately in



need of food to survive? Perhaps this same person is exceptionally lonely because they have been ostracized by society, and they truly need a friend. What does it look like to love this person?

Several months ago, a homeless man walked into the outreach center and asked if he could speak with me. I smiled and said, “Of course.” We stepped into a semi-private area and began to discuss some of his needs. I had known this man for several months at this point but had never had more than a simple conversation with him while he was picking up his weekly food allotment. Most

people stepped aside or ignored him entirely because he usually smelled bad, looked disheveled, and appeared to have a very loose grasp on reality.

That day I chose to take about ten minutes with him, and afterwards he collected his food and left. In the months that followed, I had more frequent conversations with him. Through the course of these exchanges, I discovered that this man is highly

educated, is a published author, and once had a good career. But several years ago, he lost his wife and daughter and was unable to rebound from the tragedy.

He is honestly not the easiest person to love, but God created him in His image. His life has value. Because of this, I choose to reach out to him with the love of Jesus and pray he will one day say yes to His offer of salvation.

Application: Do you have people in your life that are difficult to love? Explain.

Are there people you have failed to love because they are difficult people or are different from you? What is God asking you to do differently?



Ultimate Example

Read Luke 8:43-48. Jesus, our ultimate example of love, was walking through a crowd when an extremely sick woman sneaked up behind him and touched His clothes. Now, to say this woman was sick is an understatement. She had been chronically ill for years and had exhausted all possible medical

treatment. It appeared that she was doomed to suffer for the remainder of her days. To make things worse, her specific illness made her perpetually ceremonially unclean, which meant that she was ostracized from society and cut off from worshipping in the temple.

In an act of desperation, the

woman reached out to Jesus. Even though this meant that Jesus was also now ceremonially unclean, something that would have outraged the average religious leader of the time, Jesus reacted with kindness.

Once the woman revealed herself to Jesus, he tenderly looked at her and called her “daughter” (verse 48). By faith she was accepted by God, making her a recipient of His loving care.

About a year ago, an immigrant woman in her mid-sixties walked through the doors of our outreach center. She appeared physically exhausted, so we offered her a seat and a cup of water. After she caught her breath, we attempted to have a conversation with her, only to discover that she did not speak Spanish or English, only Arabic. Then another immigrant woman whom we had known for quite some time walked through the door, and she kindly agreed to translate for us.

This woman had arrived about a month ago seeking medical treatment that was unavailable where she lived. She had been diagnosed with cancer and coming Spain was her only hope for survival. Arriving alone, she went directly to the hospital where she was

admitted and stabilized. She is now dependent on the charity of others for survival.

We have prayed over her and had frequent conversations with her through translation and occasionally through charades. We have watched as this woman’s health deteriorates, knowing that Jesus is her only hope. Even though we are frustrated by our inability to communicate with her directly, we are thankful for each interaction God allows us with her. Jesus has not yet called her daughter, although He longs to do so. Neither has He healed her, although He is powerful enough to do so.

Showing the love of Jesus to this poor lady is not easy. It is emotionally exhausting to be moved with the love of Jesus for someone with whom you cannot directly communicate. The easy thing would be to say we are not equipped to minister to this lady; to shrug our shoulders and walk away.

But that is not what God has commanded His Church to do. We have been called to love those we encounter regardless of circumstances, religious background, ethnicity, or any baggage they may have.

We must never forget two biblical truths. First, we do not deserve God’s blessings any

more than the hurting people whom we encounter deserve to suffer. Second, we learn in James 2:9 that if we show favoritism or “have respect to persons, [we] commit sin” Let us strive to see people the way Jesus sees them and love them the way He does.

About the Writer: Chris and his wife Tori are Welch College grads. Chris served in both youth ministry and pastoral ministry prior to their transition to cross cultural ministry. They have been with The Hanna Project since 2012 and live and work among refugees in southern Spain. 

