

I was given a challenge quite a few years ago by a Christian brother now with the Lord. He observed that, although Christ presented Himself as the only answer to every individual He personally dealt with, each presentation was different according to the needs of that life. Christ Jesus would focus on some different aspect/attribute/quality within Himself which uniquely filled that individual need. (Much like the letters to the seven churches in Revelations chapters two and three – each message starts with some part of the image or words of the glorified Christ from chapter one. Each “piece” of Christ focuses on that church’s individual need.) My mentor gave me this challenge: “Look through the Gospels that display the life of Christ. Find out which of His attributes the Master used to meet which particular needs.” If I could learn this “secret”, he promised me, I would be better equipped to minister to people where they were. I would no longer be bound to a particular “plan of salvation”, but would be able to present the “MAN of salvation”, showing how He uniquely met the needs of any individual.

I began my research in the Gospel of John, looking at both the times when Jesus Christ presented Himself one-on-one as well as when he presented himself to groups. I was soon amazed to discover a pattern. Three reoccurring words or concepts were used to meet those needs. My study led me to conclude that all human needs fall separately or in combination into these three categories. Christ presented Himself as LIGHT, as LIFE, and as LOVE.

A person needing LIGHT recognizes he is in darkness. He is confused, having lost his way. He may admit that he is searching for a Guide, or at least a Guide Book. He has no answers or realizes that he has filled his life with false, empty answers. Fear binds him in chains to the cold blackness of the night. If offered a key, if shown a path that will work, a viable way of escape, he will gladly take it.

An individual needing LIFE is one in despair and guilt. The reality of death and its possible consequences can fill his mind. The future is dim and gloomy, being overshadowed by the deeds of the past. He needs to know that change is possible, that new beginnings can happen through a Savior who conquered death, and that in Christ the future can hold a brighter dawn.

A Person needing LOVE can be either a leader or the lowest of followers. He feels alone and wants to belong, to be accepted and cared for by something or Someone greater than himself. The twin hounds of rejection and the fear of rejection chase him from one relationship to another or, in some cases, force him into hiding. Anger and bitterness are his closest friends. Self-image may be his worst enemy. “God so loved...” is a balm to offer that aching and lonely heart.

Jesus Christ, as God veiled in human flesh, knew each individual’s needs before He talked to them. We, on the other hand, must learn to develop a Spirit-directed sensitivity to personal differences and felt needs. This can come as we become aware of these differences and learn not only to listen to the words people say, but also try to see the needs behind those words. Prayer must play an integral part in this process, for it is the doorway to sensitivity, both to God and man. I can offer you no slick formulas, impressive shortcuts, or lists of insightful “key” words. These gimmicks are not weapons found in the soul-winner’s arsenal. As spiritual master hunters we must face the Enemy and rescue those he holds captive armed only with a clear conscience, an open spirit, and a vital knowledge the living Word. We must know our Master so well that we can choose which weapon (characteristic or quality of Christ) is most likely to hit the target He has set before us. This is the way He presented Himself. It should also be ours.

Nicodemus, in John 3, came to Christ by night (Fear of the Group? Fear of rejection?) and said to Jesus, in so many words, “We know that you belong.” Christ’s response to him is filled with images of family and LOVE (John 3:16). He was offered the new birth into God’s forever family. Even the top teacher of Israel needed to find God’s love in a personal way.

The woman at the well (John 4) was offered “living water” - LIFE to overcome the guilt and death that filled her being. A mission and purpose were offered to her where before there had only been shame and hiding. (Respectable women normally did not have to go to the well in the noon-time heat.) This Christ

could bring change into her life! She could be different! There was so much of this hope found in this Stranger that she willingly discarded what she had for what she and others could become.

The man born blind (John 9) was shown the LIGHT of the world. He who had once needed a guide to even walk, now found a Guide to build his empty life around. He found a Good Shepherd (10) who could lead and would lay down His life for His sheep. All other leaders paled, casting shadows from the Light of One so dedicated. The man's darkness had ended; he had found illumination for his path.

It is important to note that throughout the Gospel, Christ, upon recognizing a person's need, did not just say, "You need Love. I can fill that need." Instead, He helped each individual recognize his or her own need and realize Him as its fulfillment by "softening" His approach with an illustration. To those needing LOVE and acceptance he was the Vine, the Giver of new birth, the Brother, and the Friend. To those needing LIFE He was Living Water, Living Bread, the Resurrection and the Life, and the Seed to be planted (12:24). And finally to those needing a Guide, He was the LIGHT of the world, the Good Shepherd, the Way and the Truth, the Follower of the Father, and the Obedient Son.

We need to learn to present Christ as He presented Himself. Most modern day "Plans of Salvation" present only a one-dimensional picture of our multi-dimensional Savior. They focus on one aspect of Christ (usually as the Giver of eternal life) and seem to think that a one-size-will-fit-all approach is the best way to go. I will grant them this, God has used them to equip His saints as soul-winners and to lead many to Himself. But I ask, how many more might have been rescued if they had offered the needy the right personally tailored medicine for their terminal illnesses? Would it seem too strange to our modern lips to offer a lonely man new birth or a place in the Vine? If so, maybe we could offer him a change to log into the Living Internet – to get connected to a "chat-room" where gender, race, or age make no difference; where all are accepted and welcomed into a living but invisible family. Such is the body of Christ.

Do we find it hard to tell a LIGHT-seeking friend of the Good Shepherd who wants to be his guide? Then offer to give her your favorite "online" address to the ultimate user-friendly source of Truth – a completely free sight with all the answers.

Does your friend seek LIFE but you are fresh out of Living Water? Offer him or her the ultimate free upgrade for their computer: a Disk which will instantly free up all of their memory: purge out all of the bad data from their hard drive; and guarantee that, once this Program is in place, even the most out-dated equipment will outperform anything now on the assembly line.

These are three illustrations from the life of a computer programmer, but God can use them to whet the appetites of those within my circle of friends, co-workers, and business acquaintances. I do not know what illustrations God has prepared in your life to show the modern world the reality of LIFE, LIGHT, and LOVE found in Jesus Christ (and therefore also in you!) Like the churches in Revelations, one or more of the attributes of Jesus Christ sum up the answer to whatever we are facing in our daily lives. Each trial that we face as believers is intended by God's hand to not only reveal Jesus Christ in and through us, but to us as well. What is He teaching you about Himself right now? Draw on these experiences. As He meets you where you are and uses life to reveal Himself to you, so you must meet others where they are and reveal Jesus Christ to them. Reveal Him as the only true Answer to whatever felt need they have.

This is not a "How To" lesson, for I don't have specific steps for you to take to accomplish my suggestions. Instead, it is an "Hey you, wake up" lesson. It is the passing on of a challenge that I received over twenty years ago. How did Christ present Himself to those He met? Let us learn from the Master. Let us willingly foster sensitivity towards God and man. Let us learn to meet needs by sharing Christ in all of His glorious attributes.

By the way, the scriptures call those three areas of need by another set of names which I neglected to tell you for the sake of newness and initial impact. They are "FAITH" (Light), "HOPE" (Life), and "LOVE". "Now abides faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13)