

More than skin deep

When I was growing up, there was a couple in my church that I wanted to be “just like when I grow up”! The husband was handsome, the kids adorable, the wife gorgeous. They were affluent, had a great house and car, were pillars in the church, and just seemed to have it “all together”. Imagine my surprise when years later the husband left the wife for a younger woman, the kids were grown and devastated, and the woman was left to struggle financially and emotionally. Things are not always what they seem, and neither are people! Some of the world’s most famous and beautiful we later find out are the most unhappy and unfulfilled...yet some of the most persecuted and destitute are the most joyful. I’ve come across people to whom I was so intimidated to share my faith, thinking, “Oh, they would never sense a need for God! They’ve got it all!” I’ve also caught myself with the mindset of, “Oh, they are so far gone...they’ll never repent.” I fear God was speaking of *me* when he said in I Samuel 16:7, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.”



Fellowship

1. Think back to your life as an unsaved person. What unfulfilled needs did you have?
2. Were your needs obvious or carefully hidden?



Discipleship

It’s so hard to see people as they really are! That must be why we’re warned to judge no one... and to leave that job to God! Only their all-knowing Creator can see inside the heart! Well, since Jesus was such a Master at interpersonal relationships and treating others with understanding and wisdom, let’s look at *His* example in order to glean some pointers in meeting their needs, no matter what the façade they show the world! The story is found in John 4:5-29 and shows Jesus with the Samaritan woman. As you may know, Jesus was tired from a journey, but still found the time and energy to enter into a divine appointment with a woman who needed the hope He had to offer. He sent the disciples away to find food, and asked the Samaritan woman (who came to draw water) for a drink. Since Samaritans were looked down upon and Jews didn’t associate with them, her shock was evident. Yet Jesus reveals Himself to her and offers her Living Water...even while she tries to change the subject and evade the truth.

Now, if I had been Jesus, I could have found many reasons to avoid this whole situation...just like I do in day-to-day opportunities! He was physically tired, of a different social class, and was not even “supposed” to talk to a “Samaritan”! He was a man, alone...talking to someone with a

sordid past! What might people have thought? When she acted uncomfortable and changed the subject, it allowed for a neat and tidy escape from going deeper and talking about real needs, *if* Jesus had been so inclined. But He wasn't! He loved her and knew she was thirsty. He had what it took to satisfy the thirst, and He wouldn't leave a hurting soul to go on in that need without offering the true and lasting solution: Living Water. We, too, are Jesus' hands and feet to our hurting world...sent to those hurting souls who long to be seen more than skin deep.

I so very much want to be the person to whom Jesus will say these words of Matthew 25:35, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." It's *fun* to give a starving person some food to relieve their misery, but I promise you...there is no greater joy than sharing Christ with hungry people! The pressure is not on you to change their life! That's God's job. You are just given the privilege of sharing the food. And remember, no matter what the outward appearance, *everyone* needs Jesus!

3. Read John 4:5-29. In verse 9, what was Jesus' first step (and first words) in making a connection with this woman?
4. Why do you think he shared his need?
5. How do you think the woman felt when Jesus did this?
6. In verses 10-15 of John 4, what did Jesus then do?
7. What did she perceive her need to be?
8. In verses 16-26 of John 4, how did Christ point out her real need?
9. Jesus knew her real needs and hurts. When she became uncomfortable with the conversation and tried to change the subject to an age old argument--he moved beyond it and again spoke to her heart. What examples can you think of where we need to do the same.



Ministry

10. What needs do you have that you are you hiding even from those in your group? If you feel comfortable, share them with your fellow group members...and see if there are needs of others *you* can meet as well.



Evangelism

11. Think of someone in your life who doesn't know Christ. What needs do you sense this person has?

Pause to pray for him/her and for opportunities to meet those needs.



Worship

12. Spend some time adoring the God who “knows all you’ve ever done” and loves you anyway!