



## Moving Beyond Transaction

We live in a decidedly transaction-driven culture. I do this, you do that, we go on our way. You have a transactional relationship with your employer. You invest your energies in the responsibilities you were engaged to accomplish; your place of employment compensates you in return. You have a transactional relationship with your town, county, state, and federal government. You pay taxes; those entities provide public services. You have a transactional relationship when you shop, go to the doctor, and get your car fixed. One party provides this, the other provides that, and both then go their separate ways until another transaction is needed.

Most of life in this society is transaction based. Transaction can make life more convenient, more efficient, and at times potentially more enjoyable. But it will never make life more meaningful.

Jesus summarizes the entire design of life in two commands: to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. God's basic wiring for us is to be relational.

As you think about your personal resolutions this first month of 2012, consider this one: resolve to be more about interaction and less about transaction.

A compelling encounter between Peter, John, and the lame beggar at the temple in Acts 3 illustrates the difference between the two. In biblical times, those with disabilities never expected interaction. They were shunned, ostracized, and ignored. They were judged and blamed for their own infirmities. They were used to living with rejection. And so the beggar here is simply looking for a transaction with those crowding around. I ask for money, some of you drop it in, and we all go about our lives.

It is interesting to note that even though the lame man calls out to Peter and John, he is so lacking in social confidence that he does not even look at them.

I have lived this story. My brother Mark has significant disabilities. I had my share of playground scuffles as a child taking on other kids who made fun of him. I've spent my life watching how people respond to him. He knows he is

treated differently and it shakes his confidence. He can barely look you in the eye. He knows some people stare. He knows some people get out of the immediate area as quickly as they can. He knows even the polite treat him as invisible; not knowing how to carry on a conversation, they mosey along as if not noticing him. Only a very few can overcome their discomfort with those with profound disabilities and enter in.

Jesus could. And Peter, in following Jesus, does the same. He intentionally undertakes an intensely personal interaction. Peter and John look straight at the man. And even then the beggar won't look at them. But Peter says, "Look at us," forcing eye contact, to make that human connection. After praying for healing, Peter takes the man by the hand, helping him stand. Touching a lame man and a beggar was unheard of, ostensibly making a person ritually unclean. Yet Peter, like Jesus, touches the man physically and touches his heart in the process. At the end of the story, the man, newly walking, is hanging on to Peter to steady his gait.

This is no mere transaction. While of course this encounter is about a physical healing, it is also about an intensely personal interaction that causes a broken person to tangibly feel the acceptance and embrace of God.

Notice this. Peter did not go out looking for this man. It happened in the normal course of life. On any single day, in any given interchange, you might be the precise person God has in mind to engage someone who is feeling less than worthy, or overwhelmed, or alone in the world. The only way to be ready is on every day, in every interchange, to raise the bar from an impersonal transaction to a personal interaction. Simple eye contact, a ready smile, and a personal word are the things God uses to change lives.

I have real hopes for what the Covenant can accomplish in 2012 to advance the work of the kingdom in the world. But I also know it only happens through countless faithful acts carried out by countless faithful people who engage people in need right around them. We all want to make a difference in the world. It happens in no small measure when we resolve to make a world of difference right where we are. ■

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