

WD September 11, 2023

## “Giving the Right Impression”

Ever get the wrong impression about someone or something? I have. I know this may be a shock to some but sometimes others get the wrong impression about us. So, how do we overcome it? That’s a bit of a challenge. But there is a way that may make it possible to get the right impression after starting with the wrong one.

Let’s have some fun first. I found a list of classified ads from newspapers that was on the internet I’d like to share with you today.

1. Wanted. Man to take care of cow that does not smoke or drink. –I didn’t know cows smoked and drank.
2. Try us once, you’ll never go anywhere again. -- Sounds dangerous.
3. Dog for sale: eats anything and is fond of children. –Not sure I want a dog that snacks on children.
4. Illiterate? Write today for free help.—I’m not sure how to respond to that one either.
5. Stock up and save. Limit: one. –Sounds like a minimalist add.
6. Man wanted to work in dynamite factory. Must be willing to travel.—Sounds like a blast.
7. Semi-Annual after Christmas Sale. – Doesn’t Christmas come once a year?
8. For sale: antique desk suitable for lady with thick legs and large drawers.—I guess its not sold until the fat lady sings.
9. We do not tear your clothing with machinery. We do it carefully by hand.—Yea, better to go slow rather than be in a rip/tear hurry.
10. Used Cars: Why go elsewhere to be cheated. Come here first.—Well, at least they are honest about cheating customers.

Each of these adds more than likely left something out or worded it in a way that communicates an unintended message that could give the wrong impression. That’s what wrong impressions do. The information is incomplete or it is inaccurate, or it is exaggerated in some way and that inaccuracy gets stuck in people’s minds. The wrong impression can come in a number of ways and for a number of reasons. The problem with starting with a wrong impression is that the message itself gets skewed or the person doesn’t get a fair chance. Such is also the case with the Christian faith with many.

Last week I attended the annual conference on Disaster recovery for the LCMS. One of the presenters who worked in a flood area in Missouri mentioned that some flood victims thought that his LERT (Lutheran Early Response Team) group were scammers. So, when help was initially offered, many neighbors refused. The LERT team started with the five houses that belonged to fellow Lutherans and little by little others began to ask for help too. As the months went on and work was getting done free news began spread. As the neighbors witnessed the efforts of volunteers, many of whom came from out of state just to help, those neighbors changed their minds. The HOA president was in the beginning extra skeptical but also heard the reports of the work, saw the daily volunteers, and investigated the work being done. The HOA president eventually softened and talked with the Coordinator and they became friends. In fact, it was discovered that that HOA president was a Lutheran who had wandered away from the church. When Easter service came around the HOA president was sitting in the pew next to the Coordinator. Great outcome.

Consider another example. In Acts 9 the Apostle Paul was met by Jesus on the road to Damascus and eventually Paul came to faith in the Lord and began to preach boldly. Ananias whom the Lord assigned as the first person to meet Paul was a bit nervous because of dangerous reputation Saul had earned for himself. In Acts 9:13-14 we hear, “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

The lord would go on to explain that Paul was “God’s chosen instrument to proclaim His name to the Gentiles and to the people of Israel.” Later in Damascus Paul would preach a powerful message with courage

and conviction. We are told in vs. 21 that the people were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” His reputation that preceded Paul began to change. After Damascus Paul preached in Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples but we are told they were afraid of Paul. At this point Barnabas advocated for Paul and the disciples welcomed him. And what’s interesting is how former allies tried to kill Saul. Once in Damascus and even in Jerusalem some tried to kill Saul because of his faith in Jesus. And the very people who once feared him, ended up protecting him.

The wrong impression of the church and of Christians happens for many reasons. The LERT volunteers who came only to provide free help to any who wanted it were at first believed to be scammers. But they took no one’s money. In fact, they paid for all the materials and provided all the labor and stayed until everyone who wanted help got it. They took Matthew 5:16 to heart. “Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven.” Each day they would pray out courtyard. Each day their trucks full of material would come in. Each day the volunteers would work with smiles and gratitude for the opportunity to help. Each day the neighbors were watching and some came to glorify the Lord.

For Saul his conversion shook Israel. Once the greatest champion for the high Priest and greatest enemy of the church his reputation preceded him in all Christian circles. After Saul’s conversion his reputation preceded him in a different way altogether. As an apostle for Christ Saul would no longer be ashamed to use his Greek name of Paul and seemed to prefer it. And because of Paul many came to believe in Jesus.

The bottom line is this: For us to give the right impression of our faith it must be visible and it must be real. Minds and hearts have the best chance of getting the right impression of us as Christians by our examples; by the way we love others. Of course, not everyone came to believe because of Paul’s conversion nor did every neighbor warm up to the efforts of LERT. But neither could deny that they saw it or heard about it.

Here's my point today. The hope is that by having the right impression as Christian people others gain the right impression of our Savior, Jesus. Being a witness is a high calling. On our mission trips to help others I always tell our groups that if we do it right Jesus will be the one that they give thanks for. Same is true for each of us every day. May the Lord bless the impressions we make on others for the sake of Jesus.

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John 3:30