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The Technique: The ABCs of Decision

When Jesus called us to follow Him in His work for humanity, He promised to teach us how to work with Him “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). Fishers of fish and fishers of men are not born; they are made. And the making begins with observing the Master at work.

In His ministry for souls, what Jesus *was* counted as much as what He *said*. Decisions were made, not only because of the facts He presented, but because of the man He was. Jesus won hearts through relationships as well as through truth. He identified with people. Persuasion involves both *logos* (knowledge) and *ethos* (confidence).

A person’s feelings may be positive or negative. Negative feelings can lead to a negative decision. Thus, not only message and messenger but method is critical in getting a positive decision. *How* we speak truth affects results; so does *when* we speak truth. A Messianic passage brings the above elements together:

The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how [method] to speak a word [what is said] in season [when it should be said] to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back [the kind of person Jesus was]. —Isaiah 50:4, 5

Each morning, in answer to His Son’s prayer, the Father revealed the “necessary wisdom” to secure positive decisions. The Father will also teach us what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. Some of us have not learned.

“I’m so excited with the truth,” a convert told me. “I’ve shared your tape on the mark of the beast with my Catholic relatives.”

The wrong message. The wrong time. The wrong way. And certainly a setback in relationships.

Speak “the truth in love,” advised Paul (Eph. 4:15). That’s

God's way to present beautiful truth through loving people. Decisions are rooted in interpersonal relationships. The more confidence one has in the messenger, the deeper the relationship established, the more likely there will be a positive decision.

Let's follow Jesus and observe Him using the *ABCs of decision*.

A—Acceptance. Jesus accepted men and women where they were. He ministered to them in the condition in which He found them. He did not work for change before establishing a relationship of confidence. He meets a woman of Samaria at a well. He establishes confidence by asking a favor when His countrymen would not even speak to a Samaritan. At the Pool of Bethesda Jesus meets a physical need before seeking a decision. With Nicodemus He consents to a private night meeting to preserve the privacy of the seeking Pharisee.

There are two ingredients in acceptance: agreement and approval.

1. *Agreement.* In seeking decisions, first find areas of agreement. A small agreement will open the way to larger agreements. To seek a decision by saying, "I disagree with you" fractures a relationship before it has had time to "set"; and broken relationships lead to negative decisions. A wise lady put it well:

Agree with the people on every point where you can consistently do so. Let them see that you love their souls, and want to be in harmony with them so far as possible. If the love of Christ is revealed in all your efforts, you will be able to sow the seed of truth in some hearts; God will water the seed sown, and the truth will spring up and bear fruit to His glory.
—E. G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 141

For example, an individual says, "I am looking forward to the rapture when earth's problems will be solved, and we will be caught up to meet Jesus." Your response might be "I too look forward to Jesus' return and the final end of sin. It's exciting to sense we are living at the end time." Although you may not agree with your friend on the manner of Christ's return, you surely do agree with him on the fact of Christ's return. Certainly there will be time to share straight forward Bible truth after a trusting relationship has been established.

2. *Approval.* When onlookers condemned Mary for "wasting" expensive ointment on His feet, Jesus praised her for her kindness. He told her her act would be remembered through the centuries as a symbol of loving kindness. Jesus complimented the centurion by declaring, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:10). "O woman, great is thy faith," He said

admiringly to the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:28). Repeatedly Jesus demonstrated acceptance by agreeing (when He could), by approving, by complimenting, and by appreciating.

Jesus even found ways to express approval of those who had reservations about Him. Speaking of a scribe who had been questioning Jesus, Mark 12:34 states, "When Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'" Jesus looked for a good point. He demonstrated approval. Don't be repelled by negative attitudes or actions on the part of others. They should not have to approve of you before you can approve of them. Do not appear shocked. Demonstrate genuine acceptance. Attempt to agree with them on every point possible. Look for something that you can express appreciation for, and then through little confidences and compliments, attempt to build a bond of unity. Remember, *you manifest acceptance by agreement and approval.*

To demonstrate acceptance of others, get them talking about themselves, their home, the town they live in, their work, family, or business, ideas, accomplishments, background, hobbies, or sports. Be genuinely open to learning from them and they will become open to learning from you. Your accomplishments should always be secondary and subordinate. The wise man put it this way: "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips" (Proverbs 27:2).

Be a good listener. Pierre Salinger, biographer of John Kennedy, described the interviews Kennedy had when he was President of the United States. He stated that Kennedy had the capacity to sit behind his desk and give you his full, undivided attention for the fifteen to thirty minutes that you were in his presence. Salinger says that Kennedy asked deeply penetrating questions about the topic, as if he completely identified with your needs and had nothing else to do but ask you about your point of interest. No wonder John F. Kennedy was loved by so many people!

Jesus accepted men and women where they were and began to build bonds of friendship that later would be bridges over which the truth could march into their minds.

B—Belief. This is the second key principle of our ABCs. Nobody is won by a person they do not like. Nobody likes a person they feel does not accept them. You must believe that individuals sincerely desire truth and want to follow Jesus, that they are winnable to Christ and His cause, that they are honest and desire to make the right decision. If you believe that men and women are hardhearted, unresponsive, and unreachable, your own atti-

tude will be reflected in the decisions they make.

Andrews University conducted a study of more than 8,300 Seventh-day Adventists in North American, including 320 different churches. Those churches and individuals who believed men and women were winnable were growing the fastest. The survey stated:

Some have called it the self-fulfilling prophecy syndrome, but simply put, there is a strong correlation between a pastor's belief that his church can grow and the degree to which it does grow. Those pastors, and we might add as well, church members, who rated their church's growth potential highest were experiencing rapid growth in membership.

—“Major Church Growth Study Completed,”
Institute of Church Growth Newsletter February, 1981

Jesus also illustrates this belief principle. He saw people not only as they were, but as they could become. When He looked at the woman at the well. He saw, not an outcast coming from the lower level of society, but a woman who had been hurt and bruised, and He reached out in love. Jesus saw Peter, not as a rough and outspoken fisherman, but as a mighty preacher. He saw Joseph of Arimathea, not as a sophisticated, wealthy businessman, but as a master who loved his servant. He saw Nicodemus, not as a leader of the opposition filled with religious bigotry, but as one who desperately needed to have a new heart. Jesus saw the best in people. He believed in them, and He confidently expected them to make a decision to follow Him.

Here is a Bible trivia question for you. Who was the first missionary Jesus ever sent out? Peter. . . John. . . The 12 apostles. . . The Seventy. . . No! Guess again! The first missionary Jesus ever sent out was a mad man turned messenger—a lunatic turned disciple. Jesus saw in a wild, long haired, raving, screaming demoniac enormous potential for the Kingdom of God. Converted, he became a powerful witness. In fact, he did a work even the disciples were unable to do. What a God! What a Saviour! He constantly transforms the most unlikely prospects, sending them out to touch others with his healing love.

C—Confidence. In leading men and women to decisions for the Master it is imperative that we act confidently, as if it were impossible for us to fail or be disappointed. Expect the person to make the decision. People often act the way we expect them to act. Have you ever noticed that when you smile at people they nearly always smiles back? Friendliness begets friendliness, trust begets trust, and confidence begets confidence. Christ believed in people and anticipated a positive response. He brought out

the best in them. Thus they rose to His expectations.

The book of Acts records the greatest church-growth explosion in history. Acts 2 says 3,000 were baptized on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 4 indicates that the church swelled to 5,000 shortly thereafter. If you add women and children, that would mean at least 7,000 to 10,000 believers. Moving through the book we read, "The church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria . . . was multiplied" (Acts 9:31, RSV). Again, "You see, brothers, how many *thousands* there are among the Jews of those who have believed" (Acts 21:20, RSV, emphasis supplied). The Greek word is "myriads," and it means tens of thousands. Astounding growth! Why?

Here's one of their secrets: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that *they will hear it*. . . . Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, *with all confidence*, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:28, 31). Like Jesus, the early church taught with confidence—confidence in the Holy Spirit that wherever He sent them He would be present to impress hearts; confidence in people, that they would hear and make right decisions.

Putting it all together, to be a successful soul winner: *accept* men and women as they are by being agreeable and expressing approval; *believe* that they are sincere and genuine; *confidently* expect them to make right decisions. Put these ABCs of decision into practice and watch God work through you.

Continuing Education Assignment

1. Jesus won people through what He was as well as what He taught. Which characteristics of your personality, working in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, have you found most helpful in persuading people to decide for Christ?
2. Which characteristics attitudes have been preventing people from deciding for Christ?
3. Decisions are rooted in interpersonal relationships. People are not won to Christ by a person they do not like. Review one of your recent soul winning contacts and list what you did or could have done to establish a warm personal relationship.