

“THE ISSUE IS NOT THE ISSUE”

BEING DISTRACTED BY SYMPTOMS

So many times people who come to us for help will present with a specific issue that they believe is the major source of their problems, and if this issue can be effectively dealt with, their lives will be considerably better. These presenting issues are varied in nature and may include, for example, such things as anger, fear or anxiety, depression, hopelessness, relationship conflicts, obsessions or compulsions, bitterness or unforgiveness, problems with intimacy, and using food, sex, alcohol, drugs, busyness, work, church or other things to avoid dealing with pain. At these times, however, what is often overlooked is the fact that the issue we’re struggling with is only a “symptom” of a deeper issue, and if God simply changed or took away the “symptom,” the real issue would still remain within us.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

I remember many years ago when I sought help from a Christian Counselor and I was quite sure I knew the primary source of my problems. I thought I had it figured out! It only took a short while for this astute and Godly man to share his opinion as to the core of my own issues, and, you guessed it—his assessment was different than mine! Although I was surprised at first, I opened my heart and my mind and yielded to what he was saying and his initial evaluation proved to be accurate. It wasn’t that my initial assessment was totally invalid. It just wasn’t the primary or most important issue to deal with. If I would have insisted on being “right” in that situation, my own healing would have been delayed. I never forgot that “lesson” that day, as it continues to remind me of how little we truly know of the deeper things of our own heart and how important it is to receive Godly wisdom and insight.

REVEALING THE DEEPER NEED—THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Although Jesus dealt directly with the issues that came before Him during His ministry, He often would go “beneath the issue at hand” to reveal the deeper truth of the situation or problem. For example, when He dealt with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-26), He didn’t focus on the issue of her sin—having had five husbands and now living with a man to whom she was not married—but rather He shares His heart regarding worship and the “Gift of Life” that is available to her. Yes, He did point out the truth of her past and the issue at hand, but He did so in a way that allowed her to reflect on her own situation—and He did this by the revelation He received from the Father. He didn’t call her to repent. He didn’t share the “plan of salvation.” He didn’t pray with her. He shared from His own heart and it revealed hers. From that place she responded with passion to share this “Good News” with everyone in the town.

WE CANNOT IGNORE THE ISSUE AT HAND

As we ask the Lord to help us see the deeper and most important issues in our relationships with others, we do not ignore the issues or symptoms at hand. In some cases the current issue that is up front may be destructive to the person or to others (i.e. severe anger issues, substance addictions, abuse of different types) and

appropriate boundaries or safeguards must be put in place. Even if the symptom or issue up front seems to have been resolved, the “real issue” behind the problem behavior usually still remains and will inevitably surface again if not addressed.

“THAT’S JUST THE WAY I AM”

Sometimes we will hear an individual share in the counseling environment—especially in dealing with a marital problem—“that’s just the way I am.” This is usually stated in the context of discussing a behavior that others—especially the other spouse—find unacceptable. Although we don’t ascribe to this type of explanation (more on this in a future writing), if we simply focused all of our attention at that time on that unacceptable behavior in order for it to cease (although stopping the behavior may be imperative), we would miss the opportunity for the deeper healing that is available and offered to us by God the Father, through Christ. As you seek to develop greater intimacy in your relationships, hear the words that are spoken (the issue at hand) but ask God what is often being stated (the heart issue) that is not being verbalized.

PRAYER

Please join with me in prayer . . . Father I want to know Your heart more and to respond to others from that place. Please help me first to see how my words and actions sometimes reveal the issues in my own heart that need your healing touch. Help me to receive this input from others that You have placed in my life. As I allow You to work in my own heart, please help me to see the deeper issues of the heart in those that You’ve called me to. Help me to walk as You did—“full of Grace and full of Truth.” Give me Your eyes to see, Your ears to hear, and Your heart to understand—all for Your glory and the restoration and reconciliation of those You love.

From the Father's Heart,

Jerry Basel