

Date: January 3, 2021

Scripture: John 1:1-9, 10-18

Title: ACTING ON GOD'S MESSAGE?

Bill called his parents to wish them a happy New Year, and his dad answered the phone. Bill asked him, "Well, Dad, what's your New Year's resolution?" Dad answered, "To make your mother as happy as I can, all year." When mom got on the phone, Bill said, "What's your resolution, Mom?" She answered, "To see that your dad keeps his New Year's resolution." Our topic for today is communication, an important topic in the family, in the workplace, and even in the church.

Have you ever sent a message and wondered if it got through? Maybe you emailed a colleague and didn't hear back from them. Maybe talking to your kids is like talking to a brick wall. Real communication doesn't happen when a message is sent; real communication happens when a message is sent and then that message is received in a timely and accurate manner. And I would add, really effective communication occurs when someone sends a message, someone else receives that message in a timely and accurate manner, and then *acts* on it. When a message results in action, *that's* effective communication.

Georgia Sadler is a nurse in San Diego, California, and she was on a mission to raise awareness of diabetes and breast cancer rates among Black women in her community. So Sadler began by setting up informational seminars in churches all over San Diego. But she could hardly get anyone to attend the seminars. Her message was so important. How could she get her community to receive it and act on it?

Sadler, instead of setting up any more seminars, came up with the ingenious idea of training local hairdressers to talk to their clients about diabetes and breast cancer. Hairdressers are natural communicators. They hold positions of trust in women's lives. So Sadler ditched the informational seminar format and hired a storyteller to train the hairdressers in discussing health issues like diabetes and breast cancer with their clients. Rates of diabetes testing and mammograms rose significantly in the communities where Sadler trained hairdressers in her communication technique.

When you really care about getting your message across, you have to get creative about it. Imagine how disappointing it is, to send out an important message that never gets through. I think about important messages not getting through, when I read our Bible passage for today. Because these first few verses in John, are meant to be a message of love, even if they start out somewhat confusing for us. John 1:1 reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Note that in writing "the Word," John is talking about Jesus. Pastor John Piper puts it this way. He says, ". . . Jesus himself in his coming, working, teaching, dying, and rising, was *the final and decisive message of God.*"

Did you get that? Jesus himself is the "final and decisive message of God." God sent us a message. But, as we noted, real communication only happens when someone receives the message in a timely and accurate manner. And really effective communication, only happens, when the recipient receives and *acts* on the message. So,

what about you? Do you want to head into this New Year with a message from God? These verses from John, have some exciting things to tell us.

The first thing John tells us is: **When we look at Jesus, we see God's plan for our lives.** From the beginning of time, God planned for us to be God's children. We see it in verse 12 : "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God . . ." Everyone who receives Jesus as Lord, gets adopted into God's family, and into God's love.

Simon Hall, a chef in Knoxville, Tennessee, says his family and friends worried about him when he decided to adopt two sons in 2017. As he says, "Nobody can truly understand why I did what I have done, but I did it on faith. I did it on intuition."

Hall, a single man with a successful catering company, was taking on a big responsibility when he adopted the two brothers from the county foster care system. And that responsibility grew even bigger when Hall discovered that his two new sons had four more siblings separated into various other foster homes in East Tennessee. Hall's budget and his schedule were already pretty tight, but his heart was full of love and compassion for these children. They were meant to be a family, and if he was willing to make the sacrifice, they could be reunited. So Hall petitioned the court to adopt all six children in the family. As he says, ". . . in the end I knew that this was what I was supposed to be doing, and I knew that they were supposed to be together. I just knew that they would heal in my home."

Notice his heart-felt words: "I just knew that they would heal in my home." From the beginning of creation, that was God's plan for us. To adopt us into His family, where we could find healing in God's home.

Why would an eternal God create beings made in His image, breathe His own life into them, and then leave them to die? The answer is, God didn't. God made us for eternal life. Before the creation of the world, God also worked to create us for abundant life. So, the first thing John tells us is: When we look at Jesus, we see God's plan for us. He planned to bring us into God's home.

The second thing John tells us is: **When we look at Jesus, we see God's love for us.** John 1:14 reads, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Not just, "I have come to visit you," but "I have come to live with you." Instead of waiting for you to come to me, I'm coming to meet you right where you are.

I think most of us start off the New Year searching for something. Maybe we're searching for closure from this past year. Maybe we're searching for understanding or forgiveness. Some of us are searching for a second chance to get things right. Maybe some of you this morning, don't even know if you believe in God, or if God believes in you. You want to believe that God is real, but you don't think you're good enough for God to notice you. In your mind, all the smiley, sincere, Bible-quoting people around you, are who God came for. But you, have a lot of work to do on yourself, before you can even think, of asking for God's attention.

I'm here to tell you, you've got it all wrong. This Bible passage makes it clear. God came to live in your neighborhood. God came looking for you.

Janel Perez is a nurse practitioner in Los Angeles. She could perform her duties in a nice hospital or a private clinic. Instead, she has spent years working among the homeless population on L.A.'s streets. In 2011, she assembled a mobile medical team to provide medical care and housing for homeless veterans in L.A. Janel doesn't wear a nurse's uniform. She wears jeans and T-shirts and tennis shoes. She carries medical supplies, in a battered backpack.

Many of the homeless veterans she's trying to reach, suffer from mental illness or addictions or post-traumatic stress disorder. So Janel works hard to gain their trust. She brings along sandwiches. She sits and listens to the veterans' stories. It may take months of visits and conversations, before a vet will let her take their blood pressure, or give them some medicine.

She tells of encountering a homeless Air Force veteran, suffering from schizophrenia, who had lived on the streets for twenty years. Janel found him a safe place to live, but he still didn't trust her. He refused to use the electricity in his new apartment. He refused to let Janel treat his schizophrenia with medication.

To gain his trust, Janel sat on the floor of his apartment each week, and listened to him tell stories of his life. Week after week, this nurse practitioner sat on the floor of his apartment, and just listened. Finally, she gained his trust. Today, this veteran's schizophrenia is controlled by medications. He's living independently in his own apartment. He has reconnected with his family. He has a brand new life, because one woman came to him, where he was, and never gave up on healing him.

John writes, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The eternal Creator God put on our human flesh, with its squishy, itchy, weak and annoying imperfections and walked in our shoes. He experienced hunger and thirst, frustration and weakness, loneliness, overwhelming pain, and loss. And God did it all so God could show us, that we don't have to go searching for an unknowable God. God came looking for us. When we look at Jesus, we see God's plan for us, and we see God's love for us.

And finally, when we look at Jesus, we see God's gift to us. In Jesus, God poured out grace on us. He flooded this world with grace. The word Grace means "loving-kindness" or "merciful kindness." Verse 14 says that Jesus came to us "full of grace and truth." Jesus came to show us the heart and character and mind of God. And all those qualities were compressed into these two words: grace and truth.

In December of 1772, an Anglican priest was preparing his sermon for the first Sunday of the New Year. His text was First Chronicles 17:16-17. In this passage, Nathan the prophet tells King David, God has promised David's descendants would always serve as the kings of Israel.

Remember David's past. He was a humble shepherd boy, when he was first chosen by God. In spite of his many sins, such as adultery and murder, God was committed to working through him. Talk about grace! I can't even imagine the awe and humility, David felt when he heard God's promise. And in these verses, he responded, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me thus far?"

That Anglican priest reading the story of David was a man named John Newton.

He could relate to King David. Newton had been a violent slave trader. After he gave his life to Jesus, it still took him many years to awaken to the evils of the trade. But, once he fully confronted his sins, he left the slave trade and wrote an influential pamphlet exposing the suffering aboard the slave ships. This pamphlet was distributed to every member of the British Parliament, and helped influence the eventual outlawing of slavery in Great Britain. John Newton could never forget the burden of sin, that was lifted from his shoulders by his Savior, Jesus Christ. So, imagine how King David's words sounded to John Newton that day: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me thus far?" So, with this repentance and gratitude fresh in his mind, Newton began writing the words to a hymn he would teach his congregation on that New Year's Sunday:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound/That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found/Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear/And grace, my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear/The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares/I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far/And grace will lead me home.

Most of us want to start off a new year with clarity. If there's one area of your life, where I hope you have total and complete clarity, it's in your view of God. This is the one issue, that will affect every other area of life, so it's essential, that you understand who God is, and what God's plans are for you. God has a plan for you, a plan to adopt you into God's, family and have a loving relationship with you. The eternal Creator God, wants a relationship with you. God loves you that much. And God has gifts of loving-kindness and mercy and truth, for all those who believe in, and receive Jesus, as their Lord and Savior.

Can you hear me now? God sent you a message. I hope you've received it. But the real test of effective communication is, whether you act on it. Now that you've received God's message, will you choose to submit your life, to Jesus as your Lord and Savior by Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world? Amen.