

Last Sunday, we were chatting around the tables downstairs during Sunday LIFT. We were joking around, and Linda said something snarky. I playfully shot her a look. She said, “Oh, I know that look. That’s the teacher look.” So much can be communicated non-verbally through a look. I remember shrinking when my dad would give one of his disproving looks. I knew I had disappointed him, and he didn’t have to say anything. It was all communicated through that look.

Friday night, Andy & I went to see a comedian, John Crist, at Shadow Mountain. He is a Pastor’s Kid, was homeschooled, and pokes fun at Christian culture. When he started the show, he was trying to warm up the audience, getting everyone excited and cheering. He said, “Let me hear from all the Christians!” The place burst with cheers. I saw where this was going, and I just couldn’t resist. He then said, “Let me hear from the non-Christians!” I’m sure he was totally expecting crickets, but I cheered. In this sold-out Worship Center, I was the only one who yelled. Rest assured, I am a Christian...I just sensed the audience there was not going to play along, so I couldn’t help myself. He and Andy were dying laughing, but I could feel the shock and horror from everyone around us. If looks could kill, I was murdered. How dare I joke about such a thing! That was all communicated by the way they looked at me.

And, on a positive note, you can usually tell when people love each other by the way they look at each other. There is something in their eyes that lights up. So much is communicated through a look.

That’s what I noticed in this passage. The rich man came to Jesus and asked what he could *do* to inherit eternal life. He had been *doing* all the right things, keeping most

of the commandments. Notice, however, that Jesus only mentioned 6 of the 10 commandments. He didn’t mention the first two, which are “You shall have no other gods before me, and You shall not worship idols.” What do you think was this man’s god that he worshipped? Yes, his wealth. But, instead of condemning the man for his shortcomings, Jesus looked at him and loved him.

He gave him a long, loving look, and then spoke the truth in love. *The Message* translation says, “Jesus looked him hard in the eye – and loved him” (v. 21). That got me thinking, do we look at people “hard in the eye” and when we do, do we still love them? Looking at someone “hard in the eye” is taking the time to really look at someone. Many times, we’re so busy, we don’t stop to actually look at whom someone is or what they actually need. We say ‘hello’ and move along, if that. Many of our relationships are superficial because it takes time to really invest in getting to know someone. When we do stop long enough to look at someone, we often make judgments based on what we think the person needs. Or, we use our own experiences as a standard, and we tell them what they need to do to make changes. We don’t give them a long, loving look, seeing their struggles and loving them anyway.

Jesus shows us what a long, loving look actually looks like. Taking time, not being rushed or distracted, looking someone in the eye, even when it’s hard, and really seeing who they are...and then being honest with them in a loving way. This is hard for us because sometimes we don’t want to deal with the possible conflict or fallout when we tell someone the truth. We ignore the situation. We enable the person by helping them make excuses. We don’t hold them accountable. If we do hold them accountable, we say it in a very harsh tone, and the message is not well-received. When

Jesus looked at the man, he saw the one thing he lacked, the one thing that held him back, the stumbling block that kept him from receiving eternal life, yet he loved him by telling him what he needed to change.

Because Jesus wanted him to receive eternal life, he took the chance and told him the truth. But, Jesus told the man what he didn't want to hear. Just as many of us don't want to hear about our weaknesses and shortcomings. The man "was shocked and went away grieving" (v.22). Following Jesus was going to cost him a lot. Some interpret that the man was not able to pay the price, that he loved his possessions too much because he went away grieving. But, I think this is a normal reaction that we all would have if Jesus told us to sell all our possessions to follow him.

I think the man had a crisis of faith. What Jesus told him to do was never mentioned in any of the laws that he had been taught in his faith and were following his whole life. He was never told to give all his possessions to the poor. So, I'm sure he had to process all this.

Anyone who is grieving or has grieved a loss knows that it's a process. There's denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But, really, the process of grief is learning how to let go and move on in this new phase of life. *This* was a new way of living. I'm sure the man had to go through some of these stages before his heart could really understand and accept what it meant to inherit eternal life, what it meant to let go of what was holding him back.

The rich man wanted to know how he could receive "eternal life," so his easy, comfortable life could continue. He didn't really understand what it would cost to receive his inheritance of eternal life with Christ. None of us can *do* anything to earn an inheritance from Christ. An inheritance is a gift that we receive, and it only comes

after we have lost someone. In this case, it only comes when we have lost ourselves, a life centered on us. When we let go of whatever keeps us from following Christ, we receive our inheritance, freedom in Christ.

Jesus looked at the man long and lovingly, just as he does us. The rich man's stumbling block was his wealth, that he made a priority in his life. So much so that it had become an idol that he worshipped. There are many things that possess us, things that we place a higher priority in our lives than Christ. Even so, Jesus looks at us and loves us. In that look, he takes time to look us in the eye and to see us for who we are, and loves us anyway. He wants to give us our inheritance of eternal life. So, he speaks lovingly to us, nudging us to give up whatever is coming between us, whatever is preventing us from receiving his love.

Just as Christ takes a long, loving look at us, we can do the same with others around us. With Christ's help, we can extend the same grace to them that Christ extends to us. No more busyness, no more condemning or judgmental looks. Just long, loving looks that encourages them to open their hearts to receive Christ's love. Let's take a moment to think of one person in our lives that needs a long, loving look from the divine, that we can extend this week.