

CHAPTER 8

Lead with Humility and the Opposite Spirit

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Understanding how blessed we have been by God changes the way we interact with each another

At The Message we like to think of ourselves as ‘mates on a mission.’ But this, like most things, is easier said than done. It takes effort to foster a true sense of family and keep this combined with a sense of purpose in our work. It means we need to stay tight as a team, no matter what. For us, leading and living with the ‘opposite spirit’ is core to the way we interact toward another other, our partner ministries, individuals and organisations.

Allow me to give you a practical example...

BEING THE MESSAGE

A few years ago I had a very undramatic crash in my car. It was nearly Christmas and I was about a quarter of a mile from home. It was dark, it was raining, I was in a queue of traffic, and I was looking out of the window. But it was the wrong window – I was looking out of the side window when I should've been looking at the traffic! And then the inevitable happened. The car in front of me moved off, I pulled away as well, then the car in front stalled and I rolled gently into the back of it.

This was a very low-speed accident and really there shouldn't have been much damage, apart from the fact that the car I rolled into was a 1989 Vauxhall Nova. The Vauxhall Nova was built like a tank with a rubber bumper the size of Wales. The front end of my much newer car ever so gently nudged underneath the bumper of the Vauxhall Nova. Of course I immediately got out, walked to the car in front, tapped on the window and said, 'I'm terribly sorry. Merry Christmas,' with a sheepish smile on my face.

'Why did you do that?' she said (the driver being a young lady).

'Honestly, because I wasn't looking,' I said.

'Well, shall we look at the damage?' she said.

'That's a good idea,' I said. And we both walked round to the back of her car together.

She had got off very lightly – her car was pretty badly beaten up anyway. In all honesty it was probably only worth about £500. She even said that as we looked at the cars together. 'I don't think my car has any damage,' she said. 'You've not been so lucky though have you?'

It's fair to say she was right. While there was no visible damage to her car, the front of mine had turned into something roughly resembling a pterodactyl. You see, my car had a high-tech feature called

a crumple zone, designed to absorb impact in the event of a bad accident or to keep you safe in your car when you crash headlong into another vehicle or indeed a wall. It seemed, in fact, that on this occasion it had over-performed. Nearly the whole front end of my car was folded up into a kind of twisted sculpture. An absolute nightmare.

I was gutted about my car but relieved about hers. She agreed there wasn't any damage to her car, and we happily swapped numbers just in case. About a week went past, and I hadn't heard anything else from the young driver of the old Vauxhall Nova.

But then I got a text message which went something like this: 'I had my car professionally assessed by a mechanic, and it seems there is over £500 worth of damage to my car. But if you send me a cheque for £100 then we can forget all about it.'

Now of course, this is a classic minor scam and merely an opportunistic way of getting some easy money from someone.

So this is where living with an opposite spirit comes in. I knew I had to get a grip on my heart. What is the point in preaching a message of grace if I can't even deal with a simple issue like this? So, I put myself metaphorically into the corner and gave myself a very strong talking to. I sent her a text back so I could go down and drop her off some money. Except that I didn't write a cheque for £100, I wrote a cheque for £150 instead.

I drove around to her house, which was easy to find because I saw her undamaged car on the driveway. Anyway, I knocked, and when she came to the door I said, 'Here is the cheque you asked for, but I put extra money on it by way of an apology. Sorry again for inconveniencing you. I just want to bless you.'

‘What do you mean you want to “bless me”?’ she said.

‘Well, it’s just the way I want to live my life,’ I said.

‘What do you mean?’ she said.

‘Well, actually I’m one of those Christian type of people,’ I said.

‘A Christian?’ she said.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘and I’m sorry I crashed into you.’

‘Bless me?’ she said.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Anyway, here is the cheque—it’s only an extra fifty quid but I hope it’s useful coming up to Christmas with a car to repair.’

She looked at me blankly for a moment – and then sort of went a bit weirdly pale as she looked down at the cheque and saw the title ‘Reverend Carl Beech.’

I’ll be honest with you, part of me wanted to say something like, ‘And if you steal from a man of God you could be struck down by lightning, many bad things could befall you and your family.’ But of course, I didn’t. Instead, I smiled sweetly, turned on my heel, strode back past her undamaged car to my pterodactyl and drove away.

Inside, I was thinking that she probably wouldn’t cash the cheque. I was thinking that she would be so overcome by grace and the love of Christ that she would never be able to pay the cheque in. I was wrong. She paid the cheque in later that afternoon, going by my bank statement. But I think it was worth the risk. Let me explain.

Let’s imagine a scenario. Let’s pretend that I had stood my ground and refused to give her the money, instead arguing it out and pointing out the error of her thieving ways. Let’s then imagine that a year or two later she encounters you, and you invite her to an Alpha course. But she turns to you and says, ‘I met this Christian minister

once – in fact I actually tried to rip him off. Turns out he was a total pig, a really aggressive guy.’ Well, that would really shipwreck your evangelism, wouldn’t it?

Alternatively, you might meet her one day and invite her to the Alpha course – and she remembers this crazy guy that she tried to rip off, but who instead confounded her. I think she’s much more likely to attend an Alpha course or respond to the gospel one day because I did something crazy like give her a few extra quid. It was worth the risk. What I did there was effectively ‘put a stone in her shoe’ – I think she now has a permanent gospel limp. She will be wondering what on earth I was all about. I mean, who does stuff like that? I’ll tell you who does stuff like that – we do!

CHANGING THE GAME

At The Message we want to be people who live with an opposite spirit. Jesus said, when someone forces you to go a mile, go the extra mile. When someone wants your shirt, give them your cloak as well (Matthew 5:40-41). This is what we do – it’s how we live our lives. It strikes me that daily we have opportunities to react to situations in a radically different way to most people.

Now, to live this way is extremely tough. It seemingly goes against every instinct. Everything in us wants justice in these sorts of situations. Everything in us wants the truth to be known. We want people to recognise the folly and error of their ways. We can’t bear the fact that someone is walking around having got the upper hand over us. We can’t bear the fact that we have looked weak or useless or behaved like a doormat stamped into the ground. But that’s because

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we have lost sight of the bigger picture. The bigger picture is that our lives are all about Christ and are lived out before an audience of One.

Just think about it for a moment – it is said by Jesus, that ‘the meek will inherit the earth’ (Matthew 5:5). Perhaps if all of us tried to live with an opposite spirit there would be a grace revolution that could transform towns and cities.

With that in mind I’m going to list a few scenarios where the opposite spirit could really change the game. It’s tough and it takes a strong and courageous heart to have the opposite spirit in the face of injustice and hurt. But that’s what it is to be a follower of ‘The Way.’ Here are some situations that might resonate with you:

- You get an inflammatory email that you instantly want to respond to with defensive venom and correction.
- You hear a rumour or a bit of hearsay about yourself that is grossly unfair, wounding and exposing.
- Someone posts something online that offends you or isn’t true. Instant response is of course available for the world to see.
- Someone stabs you in the back at work who you trusted or thought was a friend.
- Someone parks across your driveway, blocking you in.
- Someone corrects you publicly and you feel vulnerable, undermined and humiliated.
- You have a great idea for something, then someone else steals the idea and does it for themselves, claiming all the glory.
- Someone gets the credit for something you did.
- Someone takes your parking place.

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The list is endless and I could go on and on and on and on. But I won't, I will just say this: think and act like one who has a Saviour and is saved by grace, then respond in a manner befitting.

My Bible tells me God made the heavens and the earth. It tells me that he made me, and that he made you. It tells me that he knows every hair on your head, every word on your tongue, and in fact every detail of your life. It tells me that he loves you and that he loves me. My Bible tells me that we only exist because of his grace. Nanosecond by nanosecond he sustains us. Should God want to shut the whole show down, he could. It is only because of his grace that you can read this, have an opinion, and have the freedom to choose how to act in any given situation. He has asked us to live and act with grace.

THE HIGHER PATH IS THE NARROW PATH

When we truly realise just how blessed we all are to even draw another breath, it really puts in perspective how silly it is when we get the hump over minor stuff. To take the higher path (which is in fact also a very narrow path according to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7), is to overlook an insult, to suck up an injustice, to not defend yourself, and even to speak well of those who have antagonised you or made your life difficult.

So here are my tips for living 'the Way' in response to the list above:

- Take a deep breath. Don't reply by email. Arrange to see them face-to-face.
- Overlook the insult.
- Give the benefit of the doubt, believe the best.

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- Don't row online. Don't escalate things.
- Talk to the person who did it, not 15 other people.
- Be polite, ignore it if it only happens once.
- Don't just go round to tell them about the car – ask them for a meal at the same time.
- Cheer them on.
- Cheer them on again.
- Find another parking space – and pray for them.

I think I might be able to guess what you're thinking. You're thinking that's mad and a great way to become a professional doormat. You may be right, but I would rather save my emotional energy for a fight that really matters. Frankly, parking spaces, someone pulling a fast one, someone getting more recognition than me, or a rude and factually incorrect email just don't seem that important when you consider how much grace God has shown us. Besides, putting stones in people's shoes is actually quite a lot of fun.

Here's some more 'opposite spirit' choices:

- Give the benefit of the doubt.
- Practise outrageous generosity in word or deed. Be the first to pay for people. Don't quibble the bill in a group, just make up the difference.
- Lend without expecting back.
- Complain very rarely.
- Lose an argument every so often and if you are ultra-competitive, let other people win sometimes. It's good for you.

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- Be gracious to all you meet and be gracious about everyone you've met behind their backs. If you slip up, apologise. If you are misunderstood, don't defend yourself.
- Associate with people who aren't like you and who challenge your 'sophistication'.
- On the ratio of listening to speaking: listen more.
- Honour and prefer others above you.
- If you find yourself jealous of someone and making comparisons, say beautiful things about them publicly.
- Do humble things.
- Do not gossip.
- Clear the air quickly.
- Ask for forgiveness when you mess up.

Living like this not only fosters a great place to work, but really pleases the Lord as well.