

Supplementary Chap 33b

Is *This* What You Christians Do?

Daniel, a young man in his mid-twenties, came to me for psychiatric care for a miserable combination of anxiety and depression. He told me that he had “tried everything,” including many different medications in combination with many different types of psychotherapy. He was deeply discouraged, and even though he was an agnostic and knew that I integrated faith into my work, he was in my office because people he knew well and trusted had strongly encouraged him to try working with me before giving up all hope.

After hearing his story, and asking questions to clarify diagnostic issues and details regarding previous treatment, I offered my thoughts: “The therapy approach that I find to be most effective includes a major faith component. I realize that you don’t believe in God, but I would recommend that we try this approach anyway. It usually works, even for people who aren’t religious, and when it does work, it is less painful and more effective than any other psychotherapy modality that I am aware of.” And then I briefly explained the Immanuel Approach, including how it would involve talking directly to Jesus, and I described exactly what it would look like for us to use it as the psychotherapy component of his treatment plan. I ended with, “So my proposal is that we just give it a try and see what happens.”

His response was something along the lines of, “Hell Dr. Lehman, I’ve already tried everything else and I still feel terrible. I’m gonna shoot myself in the head if you can’t help me. I’ll try anything—I’ll talk to the Pillsbury doughboy if you think it’ll do any good.”

Thankfully, he had a very positive experience with the Immanuel Approach. First of all, he was able to perceive Jesus clearly and able to establish a strong interactive connection. It was actually kind of funny when we went through the initial steps for the first time. After picturing himself inside of a positive memory, describing the details, and then inviting Jesus to be with him, he suddenly got a startled expression on his face and exclaimed, “Whoa! *Jesus* is in my memory!” With just a tiny bit of humor in my voice, I commented, “But I thought you didn’t believe in God or Jesus.” To which he responded, “Yeah, I know I said that, but Jesus is in my memory—He’s standing right in front of me!” Still with a tiny bit of humor in my voice, I asked, “How do you know it’s Jesus, since you’ve never met him before and you didn’t even believe he was real until a minute ago?” To which he

promptly replied (as if he were talking to a slow-learner who was struggling with the basics from second-grade Sunday school), “Dude! When the Son of God is standing in front of you, you know who he is!!”

At the beginning of each session, I helped Daniel to establish an interactive connection with Jesus and then coached him to ask Jesus for guidance and help regarding the next step forward. The Lord led him to a series of traumatic memories that turned out to be the underlying source of his anxiety and depression, and all of his anxiety and depression symptoms progressively resolved as we worked with Jesus to resolve the underlying traumas.

Daniel became increasingly encouraged and grateful with each session, and toward the end of the fourth or fifth session he suddenly paused, looked me right in the eyes, and with this poignant expression of astonishment, curiosity, and wonder on his face and in his voice, asked me, “So is *this* what you Christians do?” I asked for clarification, “I’m sorry, I’m not sure I understand what you mean?” He continued, “This thing we’ve been doing in these sessions—this thing we do with Jesus—is *this* what you Christians do?”

I stumbled a bit in surprise, but eventually answered, “Yeah. I mean, there’s more to Christianity than just this piece, but this is the most important piece.” And then he asked, “So if I’m a Christian, can I keep doing this?” When I answered, “Yes, of course,” he promptly responded with, “So can you let me be a Christian? How do I be a Christian—what do I have to do to be a Christian? Can you help me be a Christian, so that I can keep doing this thing with Jesus?” I had a bit of a lump in my throat, so it was a moment or two before I was able to reply: “Absolutely. We can take care of that right now if you want to.”

Does one even get credit for sharing the gospel when it is this easy? I could not help wondering, “How many people are there who would happily follow Jesus if they could just meet Him? If they could just experience His tangible, living, interactive, loving, personal friendship presence?”