

“Persistent and Persuasive”

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Matthew 15:21-28*

Fathers, sons, daughters, just in case you haven't heard, today is Mother's Day.

Now, this advice might be too late, but allow me to share, (according to the most up to date data on the web) some of the worst Mother's Day gifts. (Not in any particular order of "worst")

1. Tickets to a Jonas Brothers' Concert.
2. Now unless Mom has mentioned that she would love to have a little help with her weight, her facial blemishes and/or hair, it would be best to stay away from anything designed to let her know where she could use a little improvement. (Well, there goes Shawn's Cooking 101 cookbook.)
3. Gender neutral sleepwear – granny pajamas, snuggys, and/or anything designed to make Mom look more like a stuffed toy than a woman – are generally not the way to go.
4. Another type of gift for Mom to avoid on Mother's Day are "Cleaning Products" – enough said.

Thank God for our mothers! (Granted there are exceptions, but across the board, Thank God for our mothers!)

I recently came across some books on Mothers. Interesting titles: Motherhood is not for Whimps, Nap Time is the New Happy Hour, I Was a Really Good Mom Before I Had Kids and It Gets Easier, and Other Lies We Tell New Mothers.

Mothers are great! Multifaceted! Multitasking!

A Junior High Science teacher was teaching her class on the properties of Magnets. The next day she gave the students a quiz. The first question: "My name begins with an M, has six letters, and I pickup everything. What am I?" Half the students in the class wrote "Mother."

How true, even picking up after Dad.

The University of Michigan conducted a nation wide survey in which they asked thousands of girls between the ages of 11 and 18 what they would like to be in adult life. 80% expressed a desire to be like their mothers! 80%!

A major influence on a son is his mother! That is certainly true for me! Mothers, besides being loving, nurturing, caring, understanding and a plethora of other great attributes are persistent and persuasive. A mother, when wanting something for her child/children will move heaven and earth to get what's needed. She will persist! She will also be very persuasive. Did I hear an "Amen" from the men?

Thinking about mothers and this habit of persistence and persuasiveness, I've been reading this new book by a mother (I know this because her "dedication" in the book is to her "...three hunnybunns, Stephanie, Christian

and Jaidan. There is nothing more precious than each moment I share with you – every minute away from you proves that.”)

Her name is Tonya Reiman, and the book’s title is The Yes Factor. Get What You Want. Say What You Mean. The Secrets of Persuasive Communication.

Did you know according to studies at Princeton University, our initial judgments of another person are formed within one tenth of one second. One tenth of one second! Wow! Non-verbal communication says much ; posture, facial expressions. There are 43 finely tuned muscles in the human face that can be combined and reorganized into ten thousand possible combinations of expressions. In just one single interaction with another person, about one thousand non-verbal factors contribute to convey your message.

This book is about learning how to gain confidence and to make a lasting impression by combining verbal and nonverbal communication. Not a bad goal when looking for a job, meeting new people – personally and socially.

But the title of the book and its overall theme is what caught my attention for today.

The Yes factor!

Being persuasive and persistent. Getting to Yes. Getting what you want. How to be better at that. Did you know that legs and feet can tell you a lot about someone? When you are speaking to another person, look at his feet to see which direction they are pointed. If they are pointed toward you, he is probably interested in you and what you are saying. If they are pointed toward the door – ouch – probably wants to be somewhere else.

Now, I’m not checking your feet, but I want us to check out a conversation between Jesus and an unnamed mother. A mother who was decidedly persistent and persuasive. (A mother, and her story assisted the early church in opening Jesus’ message to the world.) She would not take “no” for an answer! She was determined to get to the yes factor!

You realize that during Jesus’ ministry there was a great division between the Jews and the Gentiles, between the Jews and all the others. (This wasn’t unique to Judaism. Ancients, even some moderns – divide their group identity in such a stark way.)

So here we go.

Jesus is on the move. He and his disciples leave their territory, and venture into a foreign place. (The Gospel is setting up an eventual change that will take place in the future – early Christian movement – the inclusion of non-Jews.) They are out of their element. One can wonder “why?” “Why go out of Israel? But we know, just as the later author knew about the coming outreach for the gentiles. Jesus left that place...entered the area of Tyre and Sidon, the place of the “other.” And, just then a Canaanite woman (who lived there) appears and quickly gets Jesus’ attention (shouting), “Look out!” A non-Jewish woman is carrying on and making her way to Jesus. Not a good or pleasant scenario – if you are out of your element, and it’s a Canaanite (one of the worst Gentiles) and it’s a woman! She shouldn’t be anywhere near Jesus! My goodness what about social decorum? What about the rules? Even Canaanites know better! Don’t they?

But there she is, shouting at Jesus, this foreigner, but apparently she knew something about him. “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.” (“Son of David” – she knew his background.) And here it is, Mom – you know what’s going on, you know the stakes. Even Dad’s neighbors can figure it out.

Mother's daughter is sick, very sick! Hey! What else would Mom do? A healer, a deliverer is in town – "By God, I'm going to him! No matter what, he and I are going to meet!"

Jesus hears her plea, and quickly responds and heals her daughter! Not quite. Friends, this is (and has been) a very difficult text. Jesus hears this mother's cry for help with her tormented child, and Jesus is silent!! Not a word. Time passes. The mother is standing up close to Jesus – her soul exposed, but I'm pretty sure her feet are pointing directly toward Jesus. She is intent, and intense! Silence...Her eyes, filled with tears, her mouth quivering, a little fearful, but with resolve.

The disciples standing nearby but with feet pointing in all other directions. Finally, breaking the silence. Not Jesus, but his holy, sacred disciples get to him and gingerly sway him to help the poor mom.

Again, not quite! Disciples then and now, often miss the point and mess up the big picture.

Breaking the silence the disciples... "Send this screaming foreigner away. Her shrills are maddening!" (But – this is her territory. No matter.) Jesus looking into her eyes, perhaps turning from her; "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

Jesus is shutting her out. She interrupts, she falls to her knees, after all this is her child!

"Lord. Help me!" And Jesus (reflecting the momentous change – for inclusion but, not yet realized, and confusing to us) says, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

What?!

Again try, try to sense the divide back then, the mistrust the fear of the other. But the story is to bring about this enveloping of the other into Jesus' story, Jesus' movement. "I came to Israel. What I have is for these children not the "dogs" the "other". Perhaps, perhaps Jesus is testing his disciples. Maybe. But how powerful is this episode?

This foreign mother will not give up, she will not be intimidated by insults or anyone, or anything, not her gender, her nationality, not disciples, not Jesus.

It's her daughter!

She blurts out, "Alright! Alright! But even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. I'll take the scraps. That will be enough." And no silence here. Perhaps Jesus was testing the mother. How far would she persist? How persuasive would she be? Well for this mother, it was a no brainer – It was her child!

No silence. No more silence! Jesus then witnesses to the future of the Christian faith – its inclusion, its coming to understand the necessity to include the Gentiles, the Canaanites. How powerful. How heartfelt. How penetrating.

"Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish!" Jesus and this mom got to Yes!

This mother, foreigner is declared by Jesus to have great faith! How difficult just moments ago. In an instant all has changed!

Jesus' ministry – his followers were going to expand to all the world. No longer would such terms as "dogs" be appropriate. Instead – Brother and Sister would bless the Christian lexicon.

Great is your faith!

And her daughter is made well!

The importance of getting to “Yes”, of being persistent and persuasive varies. But there are some issues that demand that we stand toe to toe; persist and persuade!

Thank God for this Mom who displayed her great faith, who helped open the way for all of us to be called the children of God through Jesus Christ!

Happy Mother's Day!

Amen.