

Lesson Six
Shrewdness and Innocence



DID HE JUST CALL ME A SNAKE?

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them,

"Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Matthew 10:5-20

A FEW OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PASSAGE

- Jesus is sending the disciples out on their own for the first time. They won't be under his direct control and he won't be there to first hand address issues and concerns.
- Not everyone will receive what the disciples have to say. It may cause controversy.
- Just as sheep are overmatched by wolves, so with the disciples in the world. The wolf was often used metaphorically to describe false prophets or a general menace—in this case opposition from Jewish adversaries.
- "So be" (? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?) is a present active imperative—it is a command: "In light of the context that I'm sending you into, I am ordering you to become..." It wasn't a suggestion.

- “Wise” (? ? ? ? ? ? ?) is used frequently in the NT with a range of meanings— understanding, wise, intelligent, discerning, sensible, thoughtful, prudent. “Snakes” were the very symbol of cunningness.
 - Same word “wise” is used to describe:
 - Wise man builds house on rock (Mt 7:24)
 - 5 Wise virgins have a supply of oil (Mt 25:1ff)
 - Wise/faithful steward watches for master to return even late at night (Mt 24:45ff)
 - Wise manager who cancelled debts to gain favor (Lk 16:8ff)
 - Not just “human wisdom” but wisdom which takes full account of the entire situation and acts according to Godly principles.

“Innocent” (? ? ? ? ? ? ?) means unmixed, pure, untainted. “Doves” were often use to symbolize purity and the nation of Israel.

KEY TRUTH

As followers of Christ we are given a two-fold command
to both shrewdness and innocence.

To fail at either disobeys a specific command of Christ.

Most of the time we err on the side of innocence. We refuse to listen to, watch or take seriously what is happening in culture thus “washing our hands” of it. Holiness gets defined almost solely in terms of “avoiding” or “abstaining” from gross sin, rather than as developing the wisdom/shrewdness to interact with potentially harmful material. We need to know not just when to run, but when and how to stay and participate wisely.

SOME TIPS

- How seriously is the other person trying to make an intelligible point? For instance, is the nudity contained in a movie necessary to overall story telling venture, or is simply gratuitous? To the extent that an author or director is trying to make a serious point, I try to give them more latitude to do it.
 - Caution: There are some things which will harm our souls and must be avoided. What are they? That will depend to a large extent on who you are and where your relationship with God is at the moment.
- How would the idea, concept, or argument be received by someone who has no commitments to Christ? If a book or movie contains mildly offensive material (profanity, a course joke) which a non-Christian would not balk at, but does contain an overriding message which will allow me to sow, I try to use the material to sow. If I force a moral issue before the person has any moral grounding, I am not only not sowing, I’m not being shrewd either.
- Am I watching, reading, participating for entertainment purposes or for cultural watching purposes? There is a difference between vegging out in front of the TV and intentionally watching a program which we may not agree with in order to understand someone else’s point of view.

- Does the potential harm to me (or my family) negate the possible good that can come from my participation? Our goal is to be innocent not naïve. I don't have to be naïve about the fact that men go to adult sites on the internet. At the same time I should be innocent about them.

There is also a sense in which we need to develop our ability to withstand cultural denigration. If we are new at this, then we need to be careful how we cut our teeth.

E.g of MTV. Kids watch it. Period. Like it, hate it, forbid it, they will still watch it. Our goal it to build into them the tools to deal with what they are seeing, and when needed to turn it off.

It is a mistake to never let them watch just as it is to let them watch without equipping them.

CASE STUDIES

LOST

In Lost a group of people have survived a plane crash and ended up on a deserted island. In their struggle for survival, they have discovered many strange things about the island and themselves. In this episode Hurley (the heavysset man) interacts with a fellow cast away Libby (young lady) and Dave (the guy in the bathrobe).

Questions

- About the listener's background

- Asking the listener's opinion/advice

- Involving the listener's imagination

- Asking for the listener's emotions

Agreements

THE HISTORIAN by Elizabeth Kostova

The story of *The Historian* traces one man's mysterious search through history and puzzling events to try and uncover the truth about his missing academic mentor, the legend of Dracula based on what can be known from historical research, and the mysterious woman who joins him on this odyssey. This excerpt takes place, very early in the story.

Paul has just been mysteriously and anonymously given a rare, very old book with a single woodcut of a dragon in the center pages. When he brings this book to his trusted and loved Ph.D. advisor, Professor Rossi, he learns that some time ago Rossi also received a similarly old book with the exact same woodcut picture in it. Rossi spent an intense period of time many years ago trying to discern the origins of the book, but eventually gave up the investigation. Here he tells Paul about his conclusions; Paul is the narrator.

Questions

- About the listener's background

- Asking the listener's opinion/advice

- Involving the listener's imagination

- Asking for the listener's emotions

Agreements

WHAT DOES THIS REALLY LOOK LIKE?

Taken from Finding Common Ground by Tim Downs, p. 161ff.

John: Hey neighbor!

Jim: Man, I hate getting up when it's still dark.

John: Can you believe it? God goes to all the trouble of designing a universe where the sun comes up every morning and what do we do? We invent alarm clocks to get up while it's dark!

Jim: Ain't it the truth.

At breakfast, John scans the morning paper. He makes a mental note of two articles that he can use later in the day. He takes a few minutes to pray before he leaves for work. He prays for his wife and his kids, and he remembers to pray for his next-door neighbor, whom he has invited to church on Sunday. There is a honk as John's car pool arrives. They talk on the way to work.

Margaret: Did anybody catch Jerry Springer last night? They did a piece on "remarried men telling their wives that their divorce was never finalized."

John: I know people who love that show and people who hate that show. What do you think, Margaret?

Margaret: I think people make a big deal out of nothing. Most of it is just staged, anyway. It's no different than professional wrestling.

Joe Bob: Now, hold on there.

John: What would you do if you found out your husband was still married to someone else?

Margaret: I think I'd kill myself. Or I'd kill him. I don't know what I'd do.

John: I think what we could use is a rulebook for marriage.

Margaret: You can say that again.

Joe Bob: Are you saying wrestling is fake?

At work, John is doing performance reviews, and he is making some suggestions for improving an employee's performance. Last month John recommended that she read First Things First by Stephen Covey, which the employee greatly enjoyed.

Maria: I think that book changed my life. Stephen Covey must be a genius to come up with that First Things First.

John: He didn't come up with it. Would you like to see someone else who wrote about the same thing before him? (John takes a book from his shelf.) Listen to this: "Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose both first and second things."

Maria: That's great! Who wrote that?

John: A guy named C. S. Lewis wrote it over fifty years ago. It's from an essay he wrote called "First and Second Things." Here, you can borrow it. If you like it, I've got some other books by Lewis that you'll like even more.

During the day, John takes a minute to drop in on a friend whose wife is in the hospital.

John: I saw an article in the paper this morning that made me think of you. Some studies have shown that patients who are prayed for actually recover faster than those who are not.

Eddie: Sounds great. Do you know anybody who prays? (He laughs.)

John: (He laughs too.) I do. Personally, Eddie, I don't think prayers heals people; I think God does—and He listens to prayers. I just wanted you to know that Mary and I are praying for your wife every evening before bedtime.

Eddie: (After a long pause) Thanks. I appreciate that.

At lunch, John sits with a friend who, like John, coaches his son's soccer team.

John: How do you deal with a kid who has no respect for authority?

George: I've got a couple of kids like that.

John: It seems to me that I'm doing a lot more than coaching soccer; I'm trying to impart some basic values to the kids.

George: I never thought about it what way.

John: What sort of values do you want to build into your team?

George: Well, let's see...I suppose team work and self-control...maybe drive and determination...

John: Good ideas. I never knew soccer was such a spiritual game.

That afternoon, John drops by the office of a co-worker.

John: I've noticed from some of the decorations in your office that you're Muslim. I'd love to learn more about the Muslim faith. Can you give me anything to read?

Kajik: Oh yes, I could do that. (He reaches for a book on his shelf.)

John: I'm very interested in spiritual things, and I thought you'd be a good source. Would you mind if I had some questions for you after I read this?

Kajik: Perhaps we could have lunch sometime.

That evening, three of John's neighbors drop by. They've decided to meet once a week for Video Night; their goal is to systematically rent the American Film Institute's 100 greatest movies of all time—John found the list in last week's newspaper. This week it's the Marx Brothers in "Duck Soup." Next week it's "Ben Hur." Just before bedtime, John prays for the people he encountered