

No Free Lunch

My employee, Rob, had a terrible time with negativity. In almost every conversation he would eventually start dwelling on the negatives. He had so many good things going for him and great potential to be an outstanding salesman, but his sarcasm and negative attitude really repelled people. One day, several of us decided we would try to help Rob turn over a new leaf. One morning as we opened the store we told him that if he could last the two hours until noon, without saying anything negative, we would buy his lunch for him. Poor starving high school student that he was, he readily agreed to our challenge.

The morning passed slowly for Rob and several times he started to say something negative and caught himself mid-sentence. We were sure the incentive of a free lunch would motivate him, but by 10:45 he was noticeably irritable and eventually he began to fidget and shake like a drug user suffering withdrawal. Finally at about 11 AM, he gave up. "I just can't stand it" he exclaimed, "It's not worth it. I just have to say something negative!" Sadly, Rob had discovered that if he eliminated criticism and negative comments from his thoughts and speech, he had nothing left to think or say. He had been practicing this bad habit for so long that even at the young age of 16, he found it a difficult habit to break. I'm sure the he was popular in school because he had a "Dis" ready for every person or occasion. I can only imagine what Rob would be like 10-20 years further down the road of life as an employee, as a husband or as a father. The negative had dripped and dripped in his life until a Grand Canyon of doubts, fears and cynicism had been cut into his life on both the human and spiritual level.

Clearly this is representative of the challenges we face in a ministry of encouragement. We must first realize that we ourselves have the need of regular spiritual encouragement. Our busy schedules, our pride and a thousand other things may come up in our lives and try to thwart that but we need to persevere. Next, we must realize that are dealing with others that may have had little modeling or encouragement from their parents and others in their lives. Clearly the media and those around us at work often don't provide positive examples but may instead model a negative or critical spirit.

When we come to into someone's life and tell them that we can see God working in their lives, we are helping them build a monument or "a pile of stones" to represent what God is doing in their lives just like Joshua had the Israelites do. Those stones were collected from the middle of the river and transported to dry land to signify all that God had done for them. This resulted in a memorial that lasted for that generation and for future ones.

Helping someone to recognize God's working in his life is the path by which that lifetime Grand Canyon of discouragement can be filled back in. This is indeed something that will bring benefit to this man or woman and to the generations that follow.

JOS 4:4-7 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

Richard Lewis
Pathway Christian Church
Riverside, CA