

*Is our meeting felt needs sufficient for introducing new truths to a culture?*

Everybody has felt needs and having felt needs is natural. But what are felt needs? A felt need can be food and water, since we may be hungry and thirsty, or medical attention, because we hurt. It also can be employment, since we don't have a job, or security, since we live in a hostile environment. Many times we just need someone to listen and simply show us some love. God, as our creator, cares about all these issues. So, a holistic approach to helping people engage with their creator is foundational. Consequently, ministry is most effective when we are meeting real felt needs as a starting point. As we begin meeting needs of people, it reveals that we care for them. Then our caring can serve as a door opener or a bridge to start developing relationships and this helps people to be open to the values we have and our God. In reality, though not acknowledged, the most real need that all of us have is the need for God's redemption. If we first try to meet needs that people don't recognize as needs, sadly they may ignore our message. They also may reject us and our message, if people sense an ulterior motive. Meeting felt needs is obviously part of effective ministry, but effective ministry goes far beyond meeting felt needs.

I heard a young person tell the story that he felt that no one ever heard him, including his parents and friends. They all had a lot they wanted to tell him. They told him what he needed to change about his life, but they never took time to listen to him and hear his story. Consequently, he was drawing inward further and further, even to planning in some way to end his lonely life. His cry was for someone just to show genuine love by willing to listen and get to know him. I wonder if this may not be the cry of many individuals, as well as even many people groups worldwide. From this story, we can learn that we first of all need to listen to those we want to serve. In other words, we need to hear their story and in a deeper sense even feel their hearts. Then we have the beautiful opportunity to respond by showing God's love. This may be by simply crying with them, hugging them, or just by quietly being with them. (I am still learning this as a husband in relationship to meeting the needs my wife may have.)

Later, possibly after even several years, people may be open to hear a story from me that connects to their story. A man from Brazil served cross-culturally in a Middle-Eastern community operating a pizzeria. During the first few years he got to meet lots of people and he listened to many of their stories. He also joined them in their social activities where they shared their cultural and religious stories. It was only after three

years that he was invited to share his stories. At this time the people were finally ready to hear from him. Since he had heard many of their life stories, he chose to share stories from his life, which included his walk with God.

Jesus also connected with people by meeting their felt needs, yet His stories equally point out that sometimes people were only interested in God meeting their earthly needs, which were only temporal. Many things we feel as needs are real needs, but some are not. We should be careful to consider if a particular need really will help people. Otherwise it can give a false perspective of God. So, our meeting felt needs should not be an end in itself. Rather, it should be part of a greater love that extends to helping people discover that as God is glorified in and through them, that this will meet their innermost needs now and for all eternity. This is what Jesus modeled and so should we.