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The Other Side of the Road

1105-B

**Series: Why Do You Run When I'm Crying
(The Caring Church in a Hurting World)**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The Other Side of the Road

You've met the Anderson family. They live in your suburb. They have three children, a boy seven, a girl ten, and another girl who is thirteen going on thirty. (You know the age.) Bob Anderson, the dad, has been an engineer with Drawing Board International for seventeen years. You may know Sue Anderson, the mom. She earned her degree in car-pooling from the Institute of Near-insanity, and got her Doctorate from the Kreative Kitchen Kulinary Klub. She did her thesis on "seven hundred ways to use hamburger helper". It turned out to be such a classic that the price of ground beef went up 10¢. You get the idea. This is a typical suburbia success story. Two cars, three dogs, and seven credit cards, everything needed to qualify for the Gallup Poll's "average American family census."

But last fall, conditions in the Anderson household took a different kind of turn. Bob's company, who did most of its work with oil-drilling companies, experienced a dramatic downturn and went bankrupt, taking with it men like him who had considered their careers unshakable, and their retirement as a matter of fact. About a month later, Jennie Anderson, Bob and Sue's youngest, took sick with an unknown illness. They did not have health insurance and were forced to take her to the County Welfare Hospital for treatment. Both of the Andersons' three-year old cars began to display symptoms that could lead to terminal engine disease. They suddenly became the possessors of a swimming pool, which turned up in the living room when it rained and found that they had terminal roof rot.

It was about this time that our seemingly "perfect family" began to fall apart. Bob began to withdraw and stopped communicating. Sue began to question how hard he was trying to get another job, and seeds of bitterness began forming. Before long, they were talking divorce, and their whole world had begun to crumble.

Sue, in desperation, called their pastor. He was out of town for two weeks preaching in another city. She was referred to the Visitation Pastor, whose father had just taken ill, so he was unavailable for over a week. When he did arrive, he seemed

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preoccupied, distant, and cold. He offered to arrange a counseling session in three weeks, and suggested that she read I Peter 3. Frantic for help, Sue called one of the elders of the church, but he was about to leave on vacation. He recommended a book for her to read, and asked her to call the church office to leave a message after she had finished it. By now her mind was reeling, and Bob, now suddenly disinterested in spiritual things, was showing signs of strange behavior. It appeared that nothing short of a miracle could save their marriage and their sanity.

The miracle arrived in the form of a couple that Bob and Sue had met only once while Bob was in a Bible study with the Men's Christian Business Group. Their names were Ed and Marge. Ed and Marge were members of another church not far from the Anderson home, whose doctrine was considered "suspect". Not dangerous, mind you, but it didn't fit the straight and narrow, to be sure. Ed and Marge, however, were unaware that they didn't measure up, doctrinally. They just loved the Lord. They had heard that Bob and Sue were hurting, so they rushed over to help.

Ed began meeting with Bob every other morning for breakfast, trying to deal with his discouragement and his anger. Marge called a friend who worked with the Health Department and arranged for better care for the daughter who was sick. Ed's brother owned a garage. He, too, was a Christian, so he took a look at the sick cars and arranged a less painful kind of auto-surgery. Soon both of the battered buggies were operating again. Ed's pastor called and came to the house once a week to meet with the family to try to put the pieces of a once-happy marriage back together again. Their church had formed an Agape job placement service. They searched until they found Bob a job with the city doing engineering for the water board.

Little by little, their world began to take shape again. Little by little, their marriage was restored. Their self-respect returned. Their walk with God began to blossom in a way it never had before. The folks at their church were skeptical, of course. Word had it that they were attending "that" church, and "that" church didn't dot all the "I's" and cross all the "T's" the way they did. But you, know, somehow, to the Andersons, the issue wasn't theological, it was practical. These people cared! In fact, when their pastor finally did come by, weeks later to see why they weren't in church any more, Bob's answer was a classic. He said, "Pastor, I love you, and I love your church. You gave me a foundation for my

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faith, and taught me the basic principles of the Christian life. My only problem is, when I needed you, you were on the other side.” The pastor flinched. He interpreted “the other side” to mean some kind of doctrinal difference. “The other side?” he responded, almost angrily. “Yes, Pastor, read Luke 10 again. You’ll find what I meant by ‘the other side.’”

The pastor’s head dropped. He didn’t need to read Luke 10. He had it memorized. He had preached it many, many times. He knew now what Bob meant by “the other side.” Do you? He meant “the other side of the road.” Maybe we’d best read Luke 10 again ourselves as we conclude this twelve-part series on Why Do You Run When I’m Crying: the Caring Church in a Hurting World. For the sake of clarity and time, we’ll look at Luke 10:25-37 from the paraphrased Living Bible. It reads like this:

One day an expert on Moses’ laws came to test Jesus’ orthodoxy by asking him this question: “Teacher, what does a man need to do to live forever in heaven?”

Jesus replied, “What does Moses’ law say about it?”

“It says,” he replied, “that you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, And you must love your neighbor just as much as you love yourself.”

“Right!” Jesus told him, “Do this and you shall live!”

The man wanted to justify his lack of love for some kinds of people, so he asked, “Which neighbors?”

Jesus replied with an illustration: “A Jew going on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes and money and beat him up and left him lying half dead beside the road.

“By chance a Jewish priest came along; and when He saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road, and passed him by.

“A Jewish Temple-assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but then went on.

“But a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw him, he felt deep pity.

“Kneeling beside him the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his donkey and walked along beside him till they came to an inn, where he nursed him through the night.

“The next day he handed the innkeeper two twenty-dollar

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bills and told him to take care of the man. 'If his bill runs higher than that,' he said, 'I'll pay the difference the next time I am here.'

"Now which of these three would you say was neighbor to the bandit's victim?"

The man replied, "The one who showed him some pity."
Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

(Luke 10:25-37 TLB)

You see, Bob and Sue Anderson were beaten up by the bandits of life and left by the side of the road to die. It was as though it were all over for them: their marriage, their careers, and their self-respect. Like that unsuspecting traveler in the story, they had been stripped of all they had worked for and dreamed of. All hope seemed to be gone.

As is so often the case, so many of those in the organized church are so busy, and have so much to do, that even though they really care, they either don't care enough or they don't have time enough to get involved. So they passed by on the other side. They kept their distance, thinking all the while, "How sad what's happening to poor Bob and Sue."

On the other side — that's where we are so much of the time when people are hurting. We see them, or do we? We hear them, or do we? We have all kinds of theological gems to toss their way, or to toss out behind their backs, but it's so costly to get involved, to cross over to their side of the road.

We've looked for twelve lessons now at the hurting of this world, and at what often appears to be indifference on the part of God's people. We have heard the weeping of the world ask the question, "Why do they run when I'm crying?" We looked at who the hurting are. We looked at hurting children, the hurting elderly, and the hurting handicapped, to name a few. We looked at God's perspective of ministering to the hurting. We looked at how to listen, how to love, and how to be a friend. The question we must ask ourselves in closing is, so what? Are we going to leave this subject and go on and say, "Well, I'm glad that's behind us. That was an unusual study, now let's get on to something theological." Or are we going to do something to become doers of the Word?

While we were in the middle of this study, I had a visitor come up to me at the end of one of the lessons and make the

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statement: “This is an interesting study. But tell me, will it make any lasting difference? A year from now will any of these people be responding to the people around them differently than they do now?” I couldn’t answer him. I don’t know. But if it makes no difference at all, then we’re just playing games. We’re spending our time with rhetoric rather than with reality. It would seem that we all have better things to do than that. So the purpose of this last lesson is to put in concrete some principles and some plans to leave this place and do something to meet the needs of a hurting, crying world.

I -WHAT THOSE WHO KNOW SHOULD SEE

This story loses so much because of its familiarity. We’ve heard it so many times that we don’t know what it means. Or, we know so well what it means that we don’t stop to implement it. We assume that because we know it, we do it. Bad theology. Bob’s pastor knew it from memory! The elder had taught a Sunday school lesson on this very passage. That’s one of our problems as “evangelically-literate” believers in this twentieth century of Christian radio, Christian television, tapes, books, and movies. We are the most informed generation in Christian history. But somehow, knowing is not enough. The world, strangely enough (and we never seem to comprehend this), is not interested in what we know, but in how what we know affects them.

It all began when a man who wanted to know about salvation approached Jesus with a logical question. He said, in effect, “I want to spend eternity in heaven. How do I get a ticket?” Jesus answered Him with a question as He often did. He asked, “What does the Bible say?” The man knew what the Bible said. The Bible said to love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Then the Bible said to love your neighbor with the same affection and commitment you give yourself. “Good answer!” Jesus responds, “you get an A+ on knowledge. Now go do it.” Of course, the man couldn’t. That was the point. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit he didn’t have the capacity to love. So he decided to play word games with the Master. He said, “Okay, I’ll do that, provided you tell me just who is this neighbor I’m supposed to love?”

“Good question!” Jesus answered, “Let me tell you a story.” He loved to do that! So He began to weave this illustration which is so much like the modern-day parallel we used to begin this

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lesson. He began, interestingly enough, by looking at the cast of characters.

As examples of how not to do it, Jesus used those who should know better. He did that all throughout Scripture. He took the religious professionals, or those with knowledge of the Word who didn't live it, and He used them as overhead transparencies on the projector of reality to show that it isn't what you know that pleases God, it's how what you know affects your life. Now don't get me wrong. If you don't know it, you can't do it. Studying the Scriptures regularly, consistently, and intensely is very important or we wouldn't be here. But, Beloved, all that does is equip you to be the believer you are. If you and I don't live out, in obedience, on the stage of life what we know, we become the Pharisees of our day. We become hearers of the Word that are intensely accountable but ridiculously ineffective.

This is a parable of what those who know should see. Those who have the Mind of Christ should see every hurting soul they pass. Jesus did. They should see them with the eyes of God. They should be moved with compassion the way God is. If they are indeed moved with compassion the way God is, they cannot help but do something to and for the people they pass that hurt.

"Those who know" are the religious establishment of our day: we evangelicals who wear our theology on our sleeves and plaster bumper stickers on our cars. We judge the credentials of a pastor by what seminary he graduated from and his effectiveness by how big a church he can put together. Jesus wouldn't even be able to be a candidate in most of our churches, let alone be accepted.

In the Master's time, the priest and the Levite were the best illustration to use. The priest hurried past the man. You know why? Why, he might be dead, that's why. If the priest touched a dead man, he would be ceremonially unclean for seven days. Useless in the temple, what an embarrassment! Doctrinal purity was more important to him than flesh and blood. Ceremonial holiness was more important to him than the Holiness of God demonstrated to a dying man. So he hurried by. He had so much to do. There was, no doubt, an elder's meeting at the synagogue in an hour. Perhaps he was the secretary, so if he was late, who would there be to write down the minutes? I mean, after all, first things first.

The next traveler to pass by was the Levite. Apparently his

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curiosity was more intense than the priest's, but his commitment to his neighbor was no different. It says, "He looked, then passed by on the other side." He may have been afraid. It would have made him vulnerable to stop. Oftentimes bandits would leave a man half dead as a decoy so that when someone else would stop to help them, they had another one to beat and rob. At any rate, having looked, he downshifted his Honda, slipped the clutch, and hightailed it towards the Jericho freeway as fast as he could. "Poor guy," he may have thought, "wonder who did such a terrible thing?" The point is, "Those who should know didn't see." They saw a catastrophe. They saw a wounded human being. One even looked closely enough to realize the guy was probably still alive and breathing. But they didn't see God standing alongside the man saying, "Here is your opportunity to let Me be Myself in you. Here is the reason you are in the ministry. Someone has a need. Meet it." Those who knew missed it. And so often, those of us who know better, and are more accountable because we do, are the last to get involved. We're too involved being spiritual, like the priest and the Levite, to be spiritually available to the hurting and the dying.

II- MOST FAMOUS MUGGING

So here we have witnessed the most famous mugging in history and have seen organized religion's solution to the problem: run as fast as you can to church and get involved in your "spiritual activities" lest you become vulnerable or contaminated.

But Jesus goes on. Here comes a third traveler, a hated Samaritan, one whose background was demonstrably different. Remember Jesus' encounter with the woman of Samaria in John 4? The Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans. Nothing. But this Samaritan didn't know better. He didn't stop to think about denominational limitations or theological differences. He saw a human being almost dead. It became his second nature to do whatever it took to meet his needs. I want us to look at some principles that emerge from the Samaritan's ministry in Luke 10, and use those to finish this look at the crying of our day. I want us to look at someone who, when a need arose, didn't stay on the other side of the road.

1- This man had no credentials but the love of God. He graduated from the wrong seminary, went to the wrong church, and had the wrong philosophy of ministering. And yet, according

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to Jesus, he pleased the heart of God far more than those who knew more than he did. Why? He was obedient. This beaten, dying nobody may have been an angel unawares. God was not impressed with the priest's commitment to his priestly duties at the expense of human need. God was not impressed with the Levite's willingness to look closer and then walk away. He was only impressed when somebody let God be God enough to demonstrate the reality of His love.

2- He assumed the posture of a servant. It says that when he saw the man, he was moved with compassion, and he knelt down beside him. He took upon himself the form of a servant. Isn't that a strangely familiar phrase?

3- He got his hands dirty. He didn't call EMS. That would have been an act of mercy, and it would have been safer. He didn't flag down a passing motorist and tell them to call for help. He didn't stop to say last rites over him or find out who to call for next of kin. He stooped down and soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged him. He got his hands dirty because a real live human being was hurting and if he really cared, he had to get involved. He touched him. That's what he did. He touched him, a dirty, bleeding, dying man. God's man touched him. Jesus liked that. That phrase, too, seems strangely familiar.

4- He risked his reputation. He put him on his donkey. and walked along beside him. Not only was he not afraid to walk, he was not afraid to be seen with this bedraggled, beaten man. He stayed with him through the night binding his wounds. It says he nursed him through the night. No telling what his friends might think. He laid aside his reputation. That, too, sounds amazingly familiar.

5- He made himself vulnerable. He didn't limit his involvement by what he could see. By faith, he committed himself to go the distance, to finish the job. He said to the innkeeper, "Here, I've got to go now, but here's my Master's Card. Whatever it costs to see that he's well enough to go on his way, do it. Charge it to my account." He counted the cost then paid the whole price without wavering. That, too, sounds wonderfully like the one who found us by the side of the road, took on the posture of a servant, got involved, risked His reputation, made Himself vulnerable, and said, "Whatever it costs to heal this child from the malady of sin, I'll pay the price."

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6- Jesus quietly said to the man, “Now you know what to do. Go do it.” This man walked away. He didn’t have the Holy Spirit to enable him to be a good Samaritan. It all made no sense to him. But if you’ve accepted Christ as your Savior and have invited Him to live out His life through you, Beloved, this statement is for you because you have the POWER to do it.

III- THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROAD

Now, you know what to do. Go do it. You know there are hurting, dying people all about you. Some are dying physically. Many are dying emotionally, spiritually, financially, or circumstantially. They are lying by the side of life’s highways bleeding to death, waiting for God to come to their rescue.

And yet all too often, like the priest in the story, we pass by but don’t dare to get involved, because it will render us unclean. It will take away from the effectiveness of our religious service. It will take time we need to meet or do or decide or organize or whatever else it is we do to keep the church operative in this twentieth century. Beloved, if we’re too busy running the church to get involved in people’s lives, we’ve missed the reason the church is here. Better one less meeting, or one less agenda, or one less planning session, and one more bleeding, dying soul rescued. We sometimes get so involved in setting up the machinery, we forget to turn it on!

Or like the Levite, we stop to look, count the cost, and decide not to become vulnerable after all, because what might people think? Where would it end? I mean, what if it takes longer than I expected, and this guy reaches my credit card limit at the Holiday Inn? Or what if this guy gets well and decides to camp on my doorstep for counseling? I mean, “Gimme a break. He’s not my kind.”

The problem is, Beloved, we spend most of our time as Christians, on the other side of the road. We talk about ministering. We read books about ministering. We even teach lessons about ministering. But when we actually see somebody dying, we think sending a sympathy card is the ultimate in involvement. As we pass by on the other side of the road, they can be heard, in muffled tones. Their arms are outstretched as much as they can be, and their voices, though weak, are saying.

“Why do you run when I’m crying? Why do you pass by on the

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other side when I'm dying?"

I would like to close this lesson and this series with one final observation. It is this: I believe there are two ways for God to get our attention to teach us how to minister. One is through His Word. We read it. We hear it. We study it. We obey it. We listen and we let Him be Himself in us. We turn knowledge into understanding and then we personalize it. We turn understanding into wisdom; we let the Mind of Christ control us. We learn how God feels about life's hurting, and how God ministers to life's hurting. We let Him do it through us. That's one way.

The other way, if we do not respond to the first, is for God to take us circumstantially through the kinds of battles others go through. Then, when we see them crying, we can relate to their suffering, and we cannot help but enter in.

Some of you know exactly what I'm saying. Some of us know exactly what I'm saying. Let's look at II Corinthians 1:3,4 again paraphrased in my own words: "The God of all comfort comforts us, so we can finally understand how to comfort others who are hurting the way we did."

It's more painful. It takes longer and affects more people. But sometimes, that's the only way we'll get the picture. Haven't you noticed, that when you are suffering that the ones who really understand are so often those who have been there? And haven't you noticed that when you and I, who are so quick to pass by the crying and the dying finally become the victims, how quickly we want to know, "Where's the church?" Beloved, we're the church. The church is where it's always been, where you and I have always been: on the other side of the road. With this poem, we conclude this series:

ACTIVE, ACTIVE, CHRISTIANS

Active, active, Christians,
That's the measure of our age.
Hurrying, scurrying Christians
Playing out on life's great stage.

The drama of discipleship
The only way they know to,
Sure to never, ever, miss
A meeting they can go to.

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Frantic, running, Christians.
They're intense, and yes, they're trying.
But they're running oh so fast that they
Don't hear the one's who're crying!

They don't see that weeping mother.
They don't hear that crying lad.
They don't even stop to notice
That broken-hearted dad.

They pass by the dying, aged
Whose great quest has been denied,
And to miss unpleasant contact
They walk on the other side.

There the road is filled with socials,
And less unpleasant things.
There the pathway's lined with busy-ness
And all that lifestyle brings.

So they never even notice
Those who hurt and those who cry.
For by gently crossing over
They can smile as they pass by.

Till that awful, fateful day, when
A circumstance so grim
Brings a storm to bear on their life
And the world beats up on them!

Suddenly, it all looks different
As those thunderbolts are flying!
And the harried Christian wonders,
"Where's the church, now that I am crying?"

Then, in tones, heard through the thunder
A voice not e're denied,
Whispers, "Child, they're where you've always been...
They're on the other side."

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