

My years between college and The Navigators were spent working construction. This wasn't a glamorous job. Enduring the summer's heat and the winter's cold, I installed aluminum siding, shingled roofs, and hung gutters. There was one advantage--I got to be an insider with some interesting characters. Take Jerry and Mike.

Jerry was my crew leader. Just released from Air Force duty, he was struggling to support a young family. Mike was a recent college grad with a degree in philosophy. This job was a hoot! Walking a third-story scaffolding, we debated God, talked about marriage, or reviewed the latest movie. Jerry and Mike soon became my good friends. Then the question came.

"Bill, why don't you join us for a drink after work next Thursday." I offered an excuse the first time they asked but realized that I had to make a decision. Would I join them at the local bar for drinks after work? Did I have the freedom in Christ to do this?

While the New Testament doesn't record Jesus visiting a bar, He did frequent parties. After deciding to follow Jesus, Matthew threw a party for his friends to meet this new Rabbi (Matthew 9:9-13). This was not a Sunday School picnic. All kinds of unsavory people showed up--"tax collectors and sinners." Jesus was sitting in the smoking section and the religious conservatives called him on it. "No upstanding rabbi would associate with these kind of people," they implied (Matthew 9:11). After all, association leads to spiritual contamination.

As insiders, we will face moral and conscience challenges in relating to lost people. Moral challenges are pretty straightforward. We must respond in obedience. However, challenges of conscience in social settings are more difficult. I think Jesus navigated through social challenges by three simple principles.

- **Be comfortable but not conformed.** Jesus was comfortable with all types of people. Luke records that "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1). Jesus was socially comfortable with lost people without conforming (Romans 12:2) to their morals.
- **Be insulated but not isolated.** Jesus believed that sanctification--being set apart for God--was about character and not about place. He prayed for His followers to be sanctified so that they could be sent to the smoking sections of the world (John 17:17-19). He was insulated from sin's dangers but not isolated from people. Sometimes separation is needed (Genesis 39:12) but this separation is usually from sinful believers not unbelievers (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).
- **Be compassionate but not condemning.** When challenged by the relationships He kept, Jesus compared these unsavory friends to patients needing a doctor (Matthew 9:12). The issue wasn't condemnation for what they had done but compassion for their condition. I have to remind myself that people aren't the enemy, sin and Satan are the enemy.

Jesus was the consummate insider. With lost people, our Lord was socially comfortable without compromising His standards. He chose to insulate Himself from sin rather than safely isolating Himself from people. Above all, Jesus chose compassion over condemnation.

So . . . did I go to the bar? Did I have a drink with Mike and Jerry? Did I become the designated driver? What would Jesus do? As an insider, what would you do?

