

How Jesus changed a mind

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Few leadership challenges are tougher than leading people into change.

No wonder. The thought of change creates uncertainty about the future. And uncertainty about the future creates fear about the change. In order to protect themselves from what they fear, people polarize around a position—for or against the change.

Delay Judgment

The temptation at such times is to demand people follow you. And yet, another approach may work better. Instead of forcing a commitment, ask everyone to delay judgment until more questions are asked and answered.

At times Jesus drew a line in the sand and told people they were either with him or against him. On those occasions he left no middle ground. But there were other situations where he interacted with people over time.

Nicodemus

My favorite example is how Jesus handled Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Nicodemus first met Jesus under the cover of darkness. On that occasion he told the Lord, "No one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2).

Jesus could have picked up on that statement and talked about his identity. Instead, he explained that to enter God's kingdom, a person must be born again. Unlike the combative encounters Jesus had with other Pharisees, the one with Nicodemus was tame.

Something Happened

And while the Pharisee may not have followed Jesus that night, something happened. We know this because later when the Jews were plotting against Jesus, Nicodemus asked, "Does

our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (John 7:51). Nicodemus urged them to delay judgment, the very thing he was doing with Jesus.

After the Crucifixion

After the crucifixion, Nicodemus joined Joseph of Arimathea and the two prepared the Lord's body for burial. It seems the Pharisee had made up his mind. He embraced Jesus and the change he brought.

That delay was crucial because it gave Nicodemus time to further examine Jesus. Time to reflect on what Jesus said about being born again. Time to consider if his previous assumptions about knowing God were correct.

Room to Process

In the face of unsurpassed social and religious pressure, Nicodemus remained open to the possibility that he could be wrong. Instead of backing him into a corner, Jesus gave him room to process--time to consider a viable alternative to his previously held assumptions about how to know God . . . assumptions about the identity of the Messiah.

Sometimes the best way to lead into change is ask people to delay a decision until more questions are asked and answered.