

Q&A: How do we hold both conviction and humility?

Sarah, responding to my previous post, asks:

Hi Will, could you write another blog post on what conviction and humility look like? Speaking truth to power as you say.

Conviction is essential for obedience; it doesn't forsake humility. And if we are saying and doing things that our society agrees with, they will recognise humility. But if we are humbly speaking God's truth that is at odds with the world around us, it won't be liked, it will be hated, and the world won't see any humility at all because we are pointing to an authority higher than all others. We endure, we bless, we answer kindly, we are humble. But we will have to be prepared to not be seen as humble whilst we are bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus?

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog or asked of me elsewhere and posted with permission. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]

Thanks Sarah, and to others who have asked me if I could follow up on my previous post that deals with a perceived incoherence between two aspects of the gospel:



1. The truth-claim that Jesus is Lord. (The *message* of the gospel).
2. The character of humility. (The *mode* of the gospel).

As a wise friend commented, "Great stuff, Will. You outlined the dilemma well. I'd like to hear a fleshing out of the solution a bit more." This is my attempt.

I'm not going to ground this attempt in anything more profound than my own experience and an aspiration towards common sense.

It begins with an agreement with the premise of the question: the Christian call is towards both conviction *and* humility. These two are not at odds. In fact, in the Christian worldview, **conviction and humility cohere**, that is, they go together and can't be separated.

And I also agree with the premise that, in the end, the fact of this can't be determined by other people; it is centred on Jesus. This is point of contention, perhaps. Almost by definition, humility involves an awareness of others, a willingness to listen, to be open to being changed and moved by someone and not hardened towards them. Paul is right: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians 2:3,4)

The key to my thoughts is this: our other-awareness derives from our Jesus-centredness. That is, our humble approach towards others, in the end, relies upon us being found in Jesus, for Jesus, to Jesus. That is, **our conviction about the gospel is the source from which our humility derives**. There are a number of senses to this:

Firstly, there is a sense in which **Jesus is the greatest example of humility**. We saw that in the previous post when we looked at Philippians 2:6-8. To be apprentices of Jesus is to have the same "mind of Christ" and approach others in his mode. This is essentially "WWJD", which isn't always easy to practice: sometimes being silent, sometimes speaking up, sometimes standing against, sometimes

submitting. Whatever the exact behaviour, the heart is humble.

Secondly, there is a deeper sense in which **Jesus enables us to be humble**. Humility is aware of others, but there can be a flip-side to that. I am also other-focused when I am driven by fear, pride, panic, hate, lust, and so on. If my sense of identity and worth is bound up in others, then it is impossible to be truly humble. If my identity is other-centred then any actions I do, even if they are nice and acquiescent will be at least tinged by self-preservation or self-fulfillment. Rather, if Jesus has captured my life (Galatians 2:20) then I am his and his alone; therefore I am *free* of obligation towards anyone else. I owe my eternal life to no-one else. Therefore *I am free to be humble*. John 2:24 describes this of Jesus, who in his humility, “would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people.” He was free of them, he was free to love them.

Thirdly, there is a similar sense in which the **Spirit of Jesus compels us to be humble**. There is a conceptual and practical aspect to this. Conceptually, the gospel is a great leveller: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Practically, we trust that the Spirit of Jesus is at work in us. “Christ love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14a), says Paul, and he is right. However that compulsion is manifest – speaking, listening, acting, resisting, or simply solidly *being* – Jesus doesn’t just show us the way and give us the freedom to walk it, he leads, guides, propels us forward. The more we look to him, the more we are moved by his humble, life-giving Spirit.

I think the the premise of Sarah’s question is right. Our humility towards others rests upon our dependence on Jesus. Because of this, we cannot, in the end, measure the “success” of our humility by whether it is recognised or not. It doesn’t

mean we ignore others, or dismiss other's opinions and beliefs – after all, Jesus, didn't do that. It *does* mean we don't fear others, slip into their traps, or concur with their brokenness; we are embraced by Jesus first, and we love others out of freedom.

And it won't always "work." It didn't work for Jesus. "If the world hates you," Jesus said (John 15:18), "keep in mind that it hated me first."

Gill and I have certainly known what means to be rejected. It does lead to some soul-searching. Many times, we have fallen short of the humility of the gospel, and have not been careful enough in manner or mode. Sometimes, we have compromised on the truth. At other times, I have had to conclude that I could do no more: My physical size has had me perceived as overbearing, and I can do little about that. I inhabit the role of vicar, and sometimes people respond to previous negative experiences of other vicars, and I can do little about that. All I can do is focus on Jesus and seek to be more like him.

But when it works, it works! I received a voice message today from a friend of mine. Here is someone who is fully committed to the gospel, and feels very free to share it. But there is no sense (beyond ordinary human brokenness) that that conviction is not manifest in a Jesus-centred humility. Take a listen to Uncle Nige:

<http://briggs.id.au/jour/files/2020/02/Nige20200222.mp3>

And finally, I was struck today by an article that summed it up really well, from the point of view of Adam Neder, a Christian teacher. He conceives of humility as an *awareness of our weakness*, and therefore a dependence on the Spirit.

Many of us who teach Christian theology are keenly aware of

the poverty of our language in comparison to the reality of God. We try our best to speak truthfully and faithfully, but our words often seem thin and unreal, they taste like ashes on our tongues, and we wonder if our teaching will add up to anything more than wasted time. In extreme cases, this trajectory of thought and feeling can lead to a deadening acedia that takes root within us and leaves us hopeless or in despair.

But an awareness of our dependence on the Spirit moves us in the opposite direction. It eases the pressure by displacing the teacher from the center of the educational process. It relativizes our weaknesses. It does not eliminate them, and it certainly does not excuse them, but it assures us that God rises above them. And this awareness becomes an essential source of freedom and joy for those who believe and depend on it, whereas for those who do not, teaching can become a burden too heavy to bear—at least for teachers who want their students to know God personally.

Humility is an awareness of the “poverty of our language” and a “displacing the teacher from the center.” When we come full of ourselves, with controlling systems, asserted techniques, and market-proven strategies, we are missing the mode of the gospel. When we come dependent on the Spirit, that is the power and freedom to humbly gift ourselves to the world. Whether the world receives us or not is not for us to know or control.

That then is the only “solution” I can offer: Jesus first, the rest of it will follow.

Image credit: Pjposullivan

Is the Gospel a Power Play?

The perceived incoherence of belief and humility.

The heart of the gospel includes a *mode* as well as a *message*. Jesus is the substance of both of them.



The mode of the gospel is one of humility. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,” Paul exhorts us in Philippians 2:3-11. “Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves... have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:... he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.”

Here is what theologians call *kenosis*, the self-emptying character of the gospel. Jesus, who had the power to command twelve legions of angels, doesn't use the sword (Matthew 5:52-53) but lays down his life. This is the Teacher who sets the example of washing feet (John 13:1-17). “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,” he says to his disciples when they jostle for position, “whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:26-27).

We, who follow Jesus, are meant to reflect this mode. It's why we wince when there is hypocrisy in our midst, when we see the drippingly wealthy lifestyle of televangelists, or the coercive and oppressive legacy of Western colonialism. We align more clearly with the likes of Mother Teresa or William & Catherine Booth, and above all recognise that the greatest gospel heroes are usually unknown and unsung.

It isn't always simple. Jesus' humility, particularly during his passion and crucifixion, was one of complete surrender to the will of God; he was acquiescent, and was "led to the slaughter... like a sheep silent before her shearers" (Isaiah 53:7). At other times, he is forceful in his actions and language, particularly towards those who exercise and abuse their power. He turns over the tables of the exploitative money changers (Matthew 21:12-13). The pharisees and teachers of the law are "snakes", a "brood of vipers" and worthy of judgement (Matthew 23:33-36).

When we consider these oppressive people, we agree with Jesus' actions. Whatever humility means, it doesn't mean being a doormat, or agreeing with oppression. In fact, **our postmodern world might give us an insight that Jesus appears to be addressing: truth claims are power plays.** By asserting what they declare to be *true* (in how the temple operates, or in the application of God's law), Jesus' opponents are constructing a social framework in which they get to have power and influence. Jesus is right to undermine it!

But here, if we are not careful, we run into an incoherence. Because the gospel is not just the *mode* of humility, it is a *message* of truth. Its shortest declaration is three words long: **Jesus is Lord. We are making a truth claim.**

We don't want to lose humility. Should we therefore refrain from laying out this truth? Let us not fall into the trap of the Pharisees and assert our truth, especially when we inhabit a dominant or privileged Christian position in the Western World. Would it not be more Christ-like to withhold our voice, and be silent like lambs?

Perhaps we should not only lay aside our voice, but be aware of our own heart and attitude. Jesus was humble, so why should we be so arrogant as to hold that we have any particularly correct insight into the ways of the world, the way of God, and the wisdom of what is and what might be? Jesus was self-

effacing, so if we speak his name, we must be doing it for our sake, not his. Evangelism itself, therefore, is a form of oppression. We should lay down our power-claiming truths even within the confines of our heart; we should let go of our beliefs.

Thus, we arrive at our incoherence: For the sake of the gospel, we should stop sharing the gospel. Indeed, for the sake of the gospel, we should stop holding to the truth of the gospel.

If there is a defining dynamic of Western church life, this is it. We want Jesus, but we're embarrassed to believe much about him, let alone speak of him. What if we're wrong? We could so much damage!

I understand the dilemma. After all, other ways of resolving the incoherence may not be particularly attractive to us:

We could modify our sense of Jesus' example of humility and so be less humble ourselves: If he was humble at all, it was an acquiescence tightly attached to his self-sacrificial death on the cross – something he *chose* to do, and therefore a demonstration of his power and strength. The kingdom of Jesus is muscular and assertive: it lays a claim on truth, and on our lives, and dictates some specific ways of living. This world is caught up in a war between good and evil, and we must fight for righteousness in every area of influence: politically, financially, sociologically. This isn't dominance for its own sake, it's justice. We must protect the innocent, particularly the unborn, and hold back the warped worldviews that will pollute the world of our children.

I'm sure you've heard this rhetoric.

We could modify our sense of Jesus' claim to truth and so have less to believe and say: If he made any truth claims about himself at all, they were probably misinterpreted by his biographers, and later given the authority of holy writings by

power-hungry men. Jesus is not *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life (John 14:6), and if he said it, it only applies within the Jewish world that he inhabited, and he never meant it absolutely. Jesus may have claimed authority in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 28:18) but he meant it subversively, that we might further his Kingdom the way he intended: through dialogue with the oppressed, and inclusion of those discarded by society. The Kingdom of God is made present wherever the compassion that Jesus exemplifies is exercised by any of God's creatures.

I'm sure you've heard this rhetoric also.

Both extremes in this dialectic have a degree of appeal. But it's not a coherent resolution. Within the church, we find ourselves lurching between nihilism ("We can't really know or be anything, let us just be, resting in the empty and meaningless") and more explicit forms of control ("This is how it is, now get on and make the church bigger, don't fail or we will lose influence"). In over-simplification, it's so-called liberalism on one end, and traditionalism (even modern market-driven traditions) on the other.

The synthesis is where we need to be. Neither Jesus' humility, or his claim to truth, can be modified without losing the essence of who he is, and the gospel we believe.

This comes when mode and message combine. As we saw above, Jesus operates in humility. At the same time, Jesus surely does make truth claims about himself. His declaration to the Jews in John 8:58 – "Before Abraham was, I am" – is undoubtedly a claim to divinity. John 14:6 is unequivocal, "No one comes to the Father, except by me." Even the example of humility in Philippians 2 is not a denial that Jesus is "in very nature God", but an exposition of how Jesus didn't *cling* to it for self-grandeur. **We are not nihilistic. Jesus is Lord.**

Jesus is the only one who can lay claim to holding “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matthew 28:18) and do so with humility. Why? Because he is the only person for whom that is true, and who holds it rightly and justly and appropriately, and not by some pretense.

To hold that Jesus is Lord, therefore, not only speaks truth, it also embraces humility. If Jesus is Lord, then I am not. If Jesus mediates the way, the truth, and the life, then I can not. It sets the mode of the gospel: I can not speak the truth in and of myself, I can only seek to echo his words. I can not heal and transform, I can only seek to reflect his heart, and point others towards his safe life-giving arms. I can not untangle the warp and wefts of injustice and human brokenness, I can only, daily, seek to follow the lead of the Spirit of Jesus. **We are not authoritarian. *Jesus is Lord.***

If we really hold to the truth of Jesus, we will be committed to humility. We will entrust others to his care, not try to control them. We will speak truth to power, without fear or favour. “We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly” (1 Corinthians 4:12-13). How? Because it’s not about us, it’s about Jesus. We live for Him.

The mode of humility involves a self-surrender. The message is that Jesus is the Lord. The two together is the heart of the gospel.

Q&A: How can we best share

the good news with friends who are indifferent due to self-reliance?

Sarah writes:

Hi Will,

How can we best share the good news with friends who are totally indifferent to the message of the gospel? Particularly when the indifference is due to self-reliance (working hard, planning ahead and being the best they can be in the responsibilities and relationships they have).

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]

Thanks Sarah. An interesting question. Allow me to answer it generally, and then more specifically.



Generally speaking: My first inclination is to say, “Perhaps you can’t, you may have to wait for the right time.”

Don’t get me wrong here, I’m not suggesting that sharing the good news of Jesus is a bad thing to do; it’s just that at any given time it may be that you’ve said and done all that you can.

I think of Jesus with the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-27. This young man was pious and upright, yet the gospel for him

was “‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’” Jesus delivered that message with a more perfect understanding than any of us could ever muster. Yet the man still walked away. And Jesus let him.

I think of Jesus’ instructions to the disciples that he sends out to the villages in Luke 10:1-23. They had a gospel of peace to proclaim, which they did. Yet Jesus fully expected that in some places they would not be welcomed and their peace would “return to them.” Their instruction was to move on.

Now, I recognise that in both these cases, even though Jesus is talking about *people* who are indifferent to the message, that is not quite the same as *friends* who are indifferent to the gospel. So there’s nothing here that should suggest a “moving on” from the friendship or anything like that! Friendship is valuable for its own sake. Be friends with your friends. Pray for your friends. Share your life with your friends.

But there *is* a certain wisdom in knowing that there *is* a time and place for explicit evangelism, and that may not be right now! Within a friendship, it may be that at some point the wisdom of 1 Peter 3:15 will apply: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

More specifically you mention the particular circumstance “when the indifference is due to self-reliance (working hard, planning ahead and being the best they can be in the responsibilities and relationships they have).”

Thank you for this. What you have done is an important part of the *missiological* task, which is to consider your context and to be aware of the prevailing presuppositions, assumptions, motivations and patterns that manifest in its culture. It’s remarkable how often this necessary work is

overlooked.

You have identified “self-reliance” and it is, indeed, prevalent in our culture, including within the church. We often find that our *talking* about the gospel is ineffective because, *functionally*, the culture we embrace as Christians and as a church proclaims its self-reliance more loudly.

Having identified this characteristic, what you are able to do is to be deliberately *counter-cultural*. This means we think about how our life can proclaim *faith* and *dependence* on God, and we turn aside from self-reliance. This consequentially means that we need to be *real*, vulnerable, and emotionally honest.

After all, when our friends get to the end of themselves, (which we all do at some point), what will we say and do? A false-gospel of self-reliance in the name of Jesus (“Let’s buck up and smile and get on with life”) will not bring any sense of hope, peace, or restoration, and certainly not conviction and repentance. Rather, our readiness to “give an answer to everyone who asks” will need to take the counter-cultural form, that shares in the suffering (“I’ve been there also, my friend.”) and lays hold of hope (“This is where I lean on Jesus.”)

So adding to your general readiness to share the good news, put your missiology into practice. Reflect on yourself and your culture. Be counter-cultural and Christlike. Come in close to the real world of your friends, *especially* when that’s a costly hard thing to do. Walk the hard roads next to them. Simply live out your faith.

Q&A: Should we pray for blessings for unbelievers?

Sarah A writes:

Hi Will,

Should we as individuals or churches offer prayer for unbelievers for God to intervene in day to day challenges or bring his blessings on a situation?

I completely appreciate that the motivation to offer this is loving and evangelistic and that God of course can use these interactions for his glory.

But is it right to be offering this kind of prayer? It seems to be offering prayer for what God can do rather than seeking him for who he is. Clearly an unbeliever's first and greatest need is to come to repentance and find Jesus. To me, offering prayer for problems or asking for blessings seems to put God in the role of fixer with the Christian acting as an intermediary therefore bypassing the need for a relationship between God and the one who wants prayer. But we know that only Jesus is the intermediary between man and God and the promise of Hebrews 4:14 – 16 is for Christians who now have access to the throne of God to receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

1 John 5:14 – 16 tells us that if we ask anything according to God's will, he hears us. So does God hear these kind of prayers?

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]

Thanks Sarah,

Great question. In summary, you ask “Should we pray for

unbelievers for God to intervene or bring blessings?" In summary, my answer is "Yes." Does he "hear these kind of prayers"? Yes, but as with all pastoral encounters, praying for someone in this way comes with a responsibility to exercise care, faithfulness, and discernment.

There's a lot going on behind this answer, though, and I'd like to unpack it if I may. The first thing to consider, although it may seem like a simplistic question, is this:

What do we mean by "unbeliever" anyway?

I'm not sure I actually like the term "unbeliever" as it's a little denigrating: everybody believes in *something* after all.

But clearly we do need to grasp some sort of distinction between those who do and do not believe those things that *Paul* tells us are of "first importance", "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day." We are at least talking about those who do not have a personal faith in Jesus.

That's simple enough. If we start there, it is biblical example that leads us to conclude that praying for someone who doesn't have this faith is not only permissible, but it is often desirable.

Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus himself intervened in the lives of many who had not yet put their faith in him in a formal sense. Similarly, in *Matthew 10*, he commissions the disciples to go and "freely give" just as they have "freely received" and in practice that means that they are to "heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons." I think that puts us in the ballpark of "praying for God to intervene in day to day challenges and to bring his blessings on a situation", to use your words.



I find the example of Peter and John in Acts 3 particularly informative. Here the lame man does not ask for salvation, not even healing; he is simply asking for money. Peter and John do not take the opportunity to evangelise to him (although the end result has the man dancing in praise to God), rather we get the following famous line (emphasised below):

*When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!' So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, **'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'** Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.*

This phenomenon appears to be writ large in Acts 5:12-16 where we read that "a great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured." None of this appears to depend on those involved having a pre-existing state of belief in Jesus. In fact, usually the intervention and intercession *leads* to belief.

We could just about leave it there, but **let's push a little deeper.**

That push begins with something of a counterpoint to what I've just suggested: You see, one problem in using the examples I have is that all those who are being blessed are, in some

way, *already part of the people of God*. That is, they are members of the Jewish people, under the covenant promises of God. The miracles, blessings, and interventions that we see being ministered through Jesus and his disciples are not so much prayers for unbelievers, but a demonstration that God's promises to his people have been fulfilled.

This, itself, is gospel: The kingdom of God is here, the blessings of the covenant are fulfilled in Jesus; enter into the hope of your people. Or simply, in application, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"

In some sense, then, these blessings and interventions are "in-house." The covenant blessings come to God's people when the covenant is obeyed, (just consider *Deuteronomy 28* if you have the time). It is no surprise, then that these blessings of healing, restoration, and divine intervention are made manifest through the faithful *obedience* of Christ, especially in his death. The blessings now flow, through him, to the "*lost sheep of Israel*". Examples such as the healing of the lame man in Acts 3 are not so much about "praying for unbelievers who are on the outside" but "demonstrating that the gospel is true on the inside."

But that doesn't mean I've contradicted myself. What we've done is dug down to the roots of the gospel, and found them grounded on the covenant promises of God. So let's go back to that covenant:

What is at the heart of the promises of God?

Look at the covenant that God makes with Abram (later called Abraham) in *Genesis 12*:

*'I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and **you will be a blessing**.
I will bless those who bless you,*

*and whoever curses you I will curse;
and **all peoples on earth**
will be blessed through you.'*

Here's the impetus: Whatever blessing comes to God's people, it is to flow out into the world. Whatever blessing we have in Christ, we are to share it.

So perhaps we should turn to a different biblical example to interact with your question. Consider something like Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman in *Matthew 15* as he heals her daughter. This example is particularly telling: Both the woman and Jesus make a point about blessings for those who are currently *outside* of covenant grace. The dialogue about Jesus only going to the "lost sheep of Israel" and whether or not she might "eat the crumbs that fall from the table" serves not to diminish but *amplify* the faith she has exhibited outside of the fold. She was not yet been brought into the fold, so to speak, but the blessings can and do *flow* to her. Her prayer *was* heard and it was answered. Jesus is simply doing what the promises of God demand; sharing the blessing.

So our very foundation, the grounding of God's words of promise that sets the shape of who we are in Jesus, shifts us to look outwards. Seeking the blessing of those who are "outside" in some sense is not just one possible outworking of our own belief and covenant inclusion, it's *essential* to its very character. We bless because we are blessed, we freely give because we have freely received. **We, who are in Christ, are to act as he acted, and continues to act through his Spirit in us.**

To pray for a person who is not yet "in Christ" doesn't usurp Christ's role as an intermediary, it *exercises* it, as long as we pray according to his character. We can only pray from the basis of the covenant blessing we have in him, i.e. we can only pray in *his* name. To offer to pray for someone in their

circumstances, is therefore an act that *reveals* Jesus more than it hides him. To pray for someone in their circumstances is to act *according to* the promises that God has fulfilled in Jesus, not against them.

That's the foundation I'm coming from, in answering your question. There are, however, a couple of things to tease out:

Firstly, you write *"It seems to be offering prayer for what God can do rather than seeking him for who he is. Clearly an unbeliever's first and greatest need is to come to repentance and find Jesus. To me, offering prayer for problems or asking for blessings seems to put God in the role of fixer with the Christian acting as an intermediary therefore bypassing the need for a relationship between God and the one who wants prayer."*

I think I get what you mean, but excuse me if I miss the mark.

Clearly, our longing for people to share in the blessings of God is ultimately met if they, too, become a part of the covenant people; if they turn to Jesus in faith, and receive forgiveness, renewal, and all the other things. But we cannot separate prayer for other forms of blessing from this. If comfort, healing, or divine intervention comes from answered prayer, this is more likely to draw people to the ultimate blessing rather than hide it. To separate prayer for salvation from prayer for blessing in general creates a **false dichotomy**.

But **secondly**, your concerns are valid, and should remind us to **be careful** in how we pray. In some way, this is why I bother to go to some of the depths that I do in answering these sorts of questions. If we pray as if "God is a fixer" then that is the "gospel" that we will proclaim in those prayers; and, especially in the event that the "fix" doesn't come as we thought it might, we might *hinder* people's view of God.

But if we pray from an understanding of who we are in Christ,

covered by his grace, filled with his spirit, inheriting his blessing, that is what we reveal. We know how we pray for ourselves and for our fellow brothers and Christians, with confidence in God's character, with an understanding of how he works all things together for good, with an assurance of God's love even in the midst of suffering. We pray from the same place when we pray for those who don't share this understanding, and we must be additionally careful to ensure that this understanding, and our meaning, is clear.

I've seen it done badly. I've also seen it done well. I've been to big events where it's all about the guru fixing things on some messiah's behalf. I've also been to big events where sweet prayer and intercession has been offered, and things were gently and clearly explained along the way; the heart of God was spoken of, shared, manifested.

In short, wisdom is required. Whether it be a "Healing On The Streets" ministry, or an opportunity that comes from a conversation with a friend, as we come to our Father on their behalf, we need to ensure that our words help them to come along with us.

In the end, that's the sweet childlike dynamic on which it all rests. We have found the one who is our, Saviour, Lord and Leader, who has the words of eternal life, the blessings of eternity. In him we are caught up into our Creator. This is a precious, beautiful, sacred thing. It's not ours to hide, but we share it carefully, with wonder, joy, and delight. And who knows what our Lord will do?

Q&A: How should we speak when confronted about Harold Camping?

Anonymous asks: *How do you think we should respond, when confronted about him [Harold Camping] and others? One 'whacky' minister, gets more media attention than a million faithful followers or a thousand faithful preachers(from my experience) and the faithful witness of neighbours is undone by the preaching of someone who seems to be seriously misguided, but offers the nightly news a dramatic sound bite.*

Thanks for the question. It's actually something I've been reflecting about the recent "big day" in hindsight.

One obvious form of response was mockery. Sometimes this was taken to extraordinary lengths. And it's not necessarily an invalid response. The prophecy and the underlying framework is worthy of derision and "Don't listen to this fool" is an appropriate pastoral message. Some people did seem to enjoy it a bit too much though and I don't think that's helpful.

I also suspect that there was a flurry of mockery in order to set up a clear demarcation to non-Christians – "Yes we're Christian, but we're not like those whacky Christians – haha, how foolish they are." Sometimes this came across as the wannabe-cool-guy in the playground laughing at his embarrassing younger brother to earn kudos. Not a good look.

And it was probably not very effective or needed. Those non-Christians who understood the demarcation would have continued to understand. Those non-Christians who didn't care would continue not to care. Indeed, some of the anti-Christians I follow simply didn't get it ("I'm not raptured yet."

Seriously, not even Harold Camping was suggesting you would be!) and continued to lump the serious Christians in with the

whacky ones.

The best response I heard was on the radio – I can't remember who it was now, if someone remembers, please remind me – and it was a simple response that clearly portrayed the mainstream Christian gospel and expressed genuine pastoral concern for those who would have their faith shaken when the prophesy failed.

So, to answer your question: I think the way to respond is with clarity about the truth – and the error being put forward – without mockery or derision, and something positive about how you live your life for Jesus.