

THE COMPASS

**SHOCK TALK: Straight From Jesus' Mouth**

Part 6:

## Rewind!

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Stephen Sondheim — you know that name, right?

One of the greatest musical theatre geniuses of our lifetime.

He wrote *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park With George*, *A Little Night Music*; he wrote the lyrics to *West Side Story*.

But in the middle of all these enormous hit musicals, Stephen Sondheim did have one clunker.

It's a musical called *Merrily We Roll Along*, and the unusual thing about this show is that the story is told backwards.

The opening scene is the final moment of the story.

Then you see what happened just before that scene.

And then what happened just before that.

Until finally, at the end of the show, the final scene reveals what happened first.

And people *hated* it.

The show bombed.

Because when people go to the theatre, they don't want to know the end from the beginning.

For two hours or so, you want to be held in suspense.

The beautiful thing about theatre is that it's not real life.

In real life, everyday life, it's the opposite. We *want* to know the end from the beginning. But we *can't!*

It's after I get into some situation that I look around and go, How did I get here? Then I look back over the past few days, and I'm like, Oh yeah, that's how I got here.

It's good to look back and track ourselves like this sometimes.

If I pay attention to this, over time I may see patterns emerging. Patterns I want to change. Or patterns I want to reinforce and strengthen.

Jesus sort of showed us the way on this, one day while he was staying in the town of Capernaum.

In fact, if we look at this account kind of like Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along* — if we start at the end and work backwards — no, it won't make for very good musical theatre; but we may learn a couple things that will help us.

In the final scene of this story (**Mark 1:39**), Jesus is traveling all over the state of Galilee, explaining God's design, meeting their needs.

He was on a mission, and his mission was not really very complicated

He was doing the same two things that he told us are **what life is really all about:**

**Thing 1 and Thing 2 — loving God by loving people.**

His mission was the same as ours. He showed us; we replicate what he did. He loved people, met their needs, didn't condemn them for their failures, laid down his life for them — and that turned out to be the most glorious life he could have possibly lived.

In the same way, we're designed to love people — meet their needs — not condemn them for their failures, but to lay down our lives for people — and even though our culture tries to sell us on the priority of receiving rather than giving, the priority of comfort and pleasure rather than generosity and sacrifice — this is actually the most rewarding life we can possibly live.

OK — time to rewrite. Let's back up the tape a bit, and look at what happened just prior to this.

In the scene just before this, Jesus is saying to his pals, **“Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mark 1:38).**

Jesus had a mission — he knew what his mission in life was — but he wasn't satisfied with how he was achieving his mission.

He wasn't satisfied with his loving-God-by-loving-people quotient at the moment.

He was willing to do whatever was necessary to fulfill his mission — and he recognized that if loving people was his goal, then where he was at the moment — the town of Capernaum — wasn't the ideal place to be.

Jesus was sitting there in Capernaum, a lovely seaside resort town.

The people loved him there, he could be comfortable here.

But then he ruins it.

He wants to move. “Let's go somewhere else!” he says.

You and I sometimes find ourselves in Capernaum too.

When I focus on my mission in life — when I really think about how well I'm loving God by loving people — sometimes I have to admit, Hey, I'm not really on this.

I'm more about my own pleasure right now. I'm more about getting than giving. I'm more about comfort. Or — I'm avoiding that opportunity to love someone who needs love. Or — I'm just doing the routine; I'm not proactively loving people.

So Jesus says, “Let's go somewhere else.”

Why? Where has he been?

Let's back up. Rewind!

In the scene just before this **(Mark 1:36,37)**, Jesus is off someplace by himself — long enough that his voicemails are piling up, his inbox is maxed out, people are asking all over the place: Where's Jesus? Where'd he go?

A few of his closest friends come looking for him.

Finally they find him.

Hey! his friend Simon says. “Everyone is looking for you!”

Pretty soon, a crowd is forming.

And when they figure out that Jesus intends to bail out, they try to talk him out of leaving **(Luke 4:42).**

The people were comfortable having him there with them.

He was doing good things for them.  
 Healing their sick relatives and friends, giving troubled people a hopeful new  
 perspective on life.  
 They were feeding on him.

But when Simon and his buddies said “Everyone is looking for you,” they really didn’t  
 mean *everyone*.

They meant themselves.

You’re feeding us, Jesus, and we want you to keep right on feeding us.

Us. Our little group. Our club.

If Simon literally meant *everyone*, then he would have been as restless as Jesus —  
 because *everyone* didn’t live right there at the beautiful seashore in comfortable  
 Capernaum.

There were people with needs beyond the borders of that resort town.

God’s definition of “everyone” is very different from mine.

My tendency is to think of myself, my family, my church, people who are *like me*.

We see this pattern all the time.

I have needs, I somehow come to recognize that God is my provider, I come to God, I  
 start walking with him, he changes my life — beautiful.

But then I want more. I want to keep this thing going for myself.

What I’m missing is that I’m not designed for intake, intake, intake.

I’m designed for flow-through, flow-through, flow-through.

**I’m designed to receive from God and to give to others — as a continuous conduit  
 of God’s love and blessing.**

If I don’t love people — if I don’t share this amazing love with other people — I will just  
 bloat up with God’s blessing!

I’ll get fat, self-satisfied — and pretty soon, I’ll wonder why I feel so dry. So flat. So  
 lifeless.

It’s because the life I’m living isn’t the life Jesus lived as an example for me.

When his loving-people quotient got too low, he said, “Let’s go somewhere else.”

You’re being fed? Fine. You’re going to continue to be fed.

But what about the hungry people? I need to find some of *them* to feed.

What about the hurting people? I need to find some of *them* to heal.

What about the skeptical people? The outcasts? The embarrassments? The socially  
 unacceptable ones? The badly behaved ones? The utterly unlovable ones?

I need to find some of *them* to love.

**It will almost always be easier for me to sit back and absorb God’s love than to  
 look for ways to express God’s love to others.**

It’s easier not to serve.

It’s easier not to mess with people who have needs.

Easier not to make an impact in someone else’s life experience.

It’s easier not to think about “What does God want to accomplish through me in this  
 situation?”

Easier not to think about “How can I be of the greatest value to this person? How can I  
 love the most authentically?”

Jesus could have been comfortable hanging out by the lake in Capernaum.  
 Catching some rays, sipping drinks with little umbrellas in them.  
 Why didn't he?  
 What spurred him to action?  
 What motivated this sudden urge to move on?  
 Let's back up one more verse.  
 Rewind, please!

In the scene just before this one, it's very early in the morning: still dark.  
 Jesus wakes up in the house where he's been staying, with a friend there in  
 Capernaum, and he leaves the house all by himself.  
 He goes off to a solitary place, and he starts praying.

Which may seem a little weird, because Jesus was God's own Son — God in human  
 form.

But this is just another way in which Jesus shared in our human experience.  
 He was encased in this human body, processing life with this human brain — and he  
 had to go through a lot of the same stuff we have to go through in order to get  
 connected and stay connected to his Father.

Even Jesus needed to get alone with God, to get the distractions flicked off, to get his  
 lenses re-focused, his radio re-tuned, to get his heart refueled.

Again and again, throughout the historical accounts in the Scriptures, we see this  
 picture: Jesus getting away by himself, spending time alone with God. To deepen  
 his relationship his Father.

In fact, the one word Jesus used more in the accounts of Scripture than any other  
 wasn't love, or life, or anything else — it was *Father*.

It was this open channel with God that fueled Jesus' mission of loving people.

Jesus had come from heaven, a perfect place — to planet earth, full of imperfections,  
 distractions, trouble, conflict — and in this chaotic, problematic environment, he  
 needed to consciously reconnect with his Father, to keep a channel open and  
 clear between himself and God.

Jesus knew His mission; but he needed deep, intimate, ongoing communication with his  
 Father in order to stay focused on accomplishing it — and he needed a steady  
 flow of God's love, God's power, coming into his own heart in order to have the  
 strength and the stamina to keep loving people who were *so unlovely*.

And so do I.

I need it more than Jesus needed it, I think!

Because if Jesus, as perfect as he was, needed a real and intimate and ongoing  
 relationship with God, how much more do I need the same thing!

But do I push for this? Not all the time.

There are long passages in my life where I sort of ... "forget" God.

He gets kind of vague; I let him float to the back of my mind. Like when you really want,  
 say, some fancy gadget for your kitchen, and you finally buy it, and then the day  
 comes when you want to use it, and — *Where did I put that thing?* — You're  
 looking in drawers, in the cupboard....

It was important back in the beginning — but in the interim, it sort of slipped off the  
 radar.

When I go awhile like this and don't think much about my relationship with God, I find that I naturally run out of love for people.

I go flat.

Sure, life goes on — writing, teaching, wife, children, job.

But I'm flat.

I can teach it but I can't live it

I can "do" ministry but I can't love people very well.

I love my wife but pretty selfishly.

I'm raising my children but not very enthusiastically.

I'm working my job but every little problem makes me cranky.

I'm doing the routines, but the routines are annoying me.

My perspective gets more and more grim.

If I keep going like this, I'm a burnout waiting to happen.

See, God created me totally dependent on him.

Every success I have, it comes from him.

But the more success I have, the more comfortable I get, and the less I consciously rely on him.

And then I find that I'm thinking and planning and working and ministering and living in my own power — and my own power runs out.

But when I get one-on-one with God — and wait a minute now, I don't even necessarily mean slipping off to a private place and closing the door and kneeling down and "praying," although I've done that and it can be great — but way more often, I'm just talking about consciously talking with God one-on-one.

Taking some alone time, and intentionally reminding myself who my Provider is. Who my Source is. Who's in control of my life. Who's bringing me the good things that are coming to me.

Thanking him. Acknowledging him. Re-orienting myself to a deliberate recognition of how dependent I am on him.

When I do this kind of focusing — like in the car, or as I'm at my desk working all alone, or in the morning as I'm getting ready for the day — I often find that God re-charges me.

I sense his love for me, and I tune in to my own unworthiness — how fortunate I am — and I find that there's more of his loving flowing through me when I deal with other people.

I love my wife less selfishly.

I'm more patient with my kids.

I extend more grace to people when they come to me for counseling.

It's because I'm not just trying to "be nice" to them, under my own power; *I'm giving them what I've been given.*

I'm giving them what I'm *being* given.

I'm in the flow of God's love — it's like a river; there's power in that current — and they're just caught in the same stream.

When I'm in that flow, I feel the power of that current. It's the power of God's love — not just a religious cliché: it's practical.

I find that **God's love charges me.**

It empowers me to love people — and not grudgingly, but joyfully.

And when I love people — when I get outside myself, move my emphasis off of my own pleasure, meet other people's needs instead of looking out so much for my own — I'm doing what I was designed to do; so I feel "right."

My own experience has proven to me that **we can't just be about the tasks of our faith.**

**We have to be about the relationship of our faith.**

We can program the coolest church services, we can build the most awesome church building, you can perform in the best Christian band, or the hottest Christian drama troupe, or I can be the most brilliant teaching pastor, or we can engage in the most wonderful corporate worship, or we can do the most comprehensive and systematic study of the Bible — but it's all still off-key, it's ultimately unsatisfying, and it will eventually just wear me down, if I'm not receiving God's love as an individual, and letting that love flow out of me into the lives of people in need all around me.

I can be doing good. Jesus was doing good in Capernaum.

But the longing of God's heart is for the best.

The good is the worst enemy of the best.

When Jesus got alone with God, I imagine him saying,

Father, refuel me. Refocus me. Refine me. Let me love people the way you love people.  
Make me about Thing 1 and Thing 2.

That's the prayer I find myself needing to pray, just about every day.

Father, don't let me slip back into being all about my own stuff.

Make me what you want me to be. Put me where you want me to be. Empower me to do what you want me to accomplish — in my family, on my job, in my church, in my relationships, in my thought life, in every detail.

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If we turn around and look at the scenes of this story in their proper sequence, we wind up with Jesus busting out of Capernaum.

Spreading the Good News about how God loves people.

Setting people free from the bondage they'd been living under.

Living in the power of God's love. Expressing the power of God's love. Connecting people to the power of God's love.

That's a rich life. That's the life I want to be living.

My goal this week is to tune in more personally to God.

Get into the flow of his love.

Get out of my comfort zone.

And get my loving-people quotient up!

How about you?