

DAYS of HOPE

August 2021

Passionately communicating the love of God to hurting kids in a gentle way

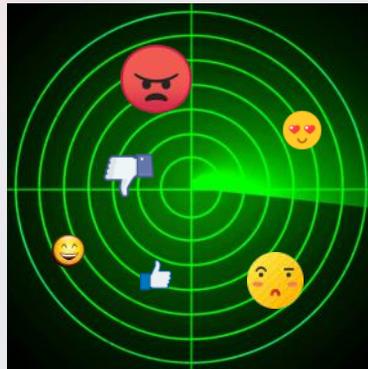
An Ocean of Opinions

by Jon Wells

What do people think of you? *My brother is mad at me right now. My neighbor seems to get along with me pretty well, and the girl at work seems indifferent.* You and I have a radar system (of sorts) that is perpetually scanning those around us to get a hint of how they feel about us. Do they like me? Are they irritated? Some of us have a super fine tuned system for reading those around us. Others are less intuitive, plodding through life wondering what all the fuss is about.

But forget about everybody else. *What about you?* What do people think about you? From kids who are teasing one another at recess to high school students whose lives are dominated by the ebb and flow of peer pressure, our lives are constantly affected by this simple question. Just as the moon brings the tides, the opinion of others invisibly pushes and pulls at our every decision, coloring every moment for better or worse. I suppose your answer to the question depends on how far into your own story you have gotten at this point. Those of you who are still students obsess over the

opinions of classmates and perhaps a teacher or two. Maybe the impression you make on that special girl in algebra is a big deal right now. Marriage changes this equation entirely. What does your spouse think of you? *I'm pretty sure she likes me, let me check!* Raising children takes this thing to a whole new level, and your daughter's opinion of you will shift as she moves through the years. Infants worship their parents. Of course they also sometimes rage. Two year olds have an opinion of mom, and it is not always pretty.



Little boys hit a stage where they are convinced that dad is bulletproof. I remember when Lincoln was three or four years old. We were out on the farm attending to a heifer who was in bad shape. She had lost a calf a week prior, and now she was paralyzed. After a week of daily care she was showing no signs of improvement. I remember making the decision to go ahead and put her down. At that point it was an unfortunate kindness—she was not going to be able to walk again. I instructed Lincoln to stay in the truck, I got out and loaded the pistol, and shot the poor thing in the head. As I was hooking up the chain to drag her off, I heard his squeaky voice yelling from the cab of the truck.

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The Storm

by Logan Stark

We are in trying times, aren't we? COVID, political unrest, everyday struggles, isn't it so easy to be engulfed in all of the chaos—the fear? That is why, I'd like to take a moment to remind us of a simple but great truth. That no matter what storm we are in—Jesus is greater.

And when he [Jesus] got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (Matthew 8:23-27).

Just like the disciples, we are caught in a storm. Some are in harsher waters and other in calmer, but a storm nonetheless. However, we worship the one who is greater than the storm. When will he calm it? When will it end? I don't know, but I do know this. No storm lasts forever.

Some storms last months, others years, but every storm has an end. One day, so too shall this storm pass. Until then, I would like to encourage you to stay strong and courageous. Love your neighbor, don't give up praying, and know that we worship the one who is greater than anything that we're facing.

“That’s amazing! You’re the best at shooting a cow ever! You got a headshot!”

As we drove out of the field with the carcass in tow, I was working through my frustration with losing this heifer. Lincoln was waxing eloquent about how great I am at shooting cows! More recently we were riding the four-wheeler over some big hills that really scared him. When I dropped him off at grandma’s house at the end of our ride, he asked where I was going.

“I have to go back and help those guys work on the fence.”

“You gotta go back to those big hills?”

“Yes.”

Lincoln pulled me close and whispered the next phrase. “Dad, don’t die.” I started to laugh at the statement until I saw the look in his eyes. He was dead serious. You see, there is a window of time where little boys are convinced that dad is superman. So if you ask me what people think of me, perhaps I can pull that one out. The only problem is, those glowing reviews fade over the years. Raising teenagers can be a lesson in living with people who do not like you very much. Although Darla and I have been blessed in this area, we are not totally exempt. No parent gets through this gauntlet untouched. Raising kids means there will be some tough days, and parenting teenagers is one of those tough seasons. What do people think of me? *Don’t ask my sixteen year old!*

The advent of social media has put a fine point on this issue. Those who are willing to submit their daily experience to the ‘digital friend machine’ are met with a chorus of responses. In fact, social media companies have built multi-billion dollar business plans on the reliable human need for positive reinforcement. Like dogs begging for the next treat, we will do almost anything for that little blue thumbs up. What do people think of you? *Let me check my feed.*

Matthew records a private moment when Jesus addressed this issue in the sixteenth chapter of his gospel.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”

I love this passage. It says so much about Jesus and his intimate group of friends. Notice that their response to Jesus did not include any insults. Jesus had been making waves and attracting attention. Pharisee and Sadducee leaders were questioning this new teacher, some even accusing Jesus of Satanic possession. Jesus had pretty much been kicked out of his little hometown, and his mom and siblings had recently showed up trying to talk some sense into him.

In light of these things, Jesus’ question around the campfire that night was a loaded one. *Who do they say that I am? What do they think of me?* I wonder how much awkward silence followed his inquiry. I’m not sure which of the disciples was in charge of PR at that point, but the only honest answer was not very appealing.

“Well, Jesus . . . here’s the deal . . . The head guys in Jerusalem think you’re possessed and the Nazareth city council just passed a new ‘Jesus ban.’ But on the upside your mom just thinks you’re a little touched in the head. Now we are working on some focus group feedback that says we can improve your ‘likeability’ factor if we can just . . .”

No one seemed courageous enough to give voice to the bad news, so the answers that they offered reflected the glowing reviews of the fans. Peter quickly cut through the blather with a reply of his own. I’m not sure that he even understood the weight of his response in the moment he said it, but Peter offered up the only relevant answer to the question. *You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.* Jesus seized on it

Ocean of Opinions continued . . .

and pointed out why it was relevant. Peter had given voice to the Heavenly Father's answer to the question.

In a world where we obsess daily over the opinions of those who surround us, Jesus had the insight to look to the Father and ask this crucial question. *Who am I? What do you think of me?* Those who have the courage to bring their question to the Father can hear an answer that makes the chattering opinions on social media fade into obscurity. Like Jesus, you and I have fans who are more than willing to flatter. All of us also have detractors who might lodge a complaint if the opportunity presents itself. *But what does the Father have to say about me?*

Such a move seems risky. The Father knows all of my baggage. He knows how many cookies I have stolen from the cookie jar, and between you and me, it is a lot! It is easy to get a positive review from an ignorant judge. (That's the very definition of social media.) But asking God what He thinks of me? I know what I think of me, and it isn't very pretty.

If I bring this question to God . . . who am I? . . . What do you think of me? . . . would He bless me or curse me? Thumbs up or down? Or would he just silently unfriend me?

You and I find ourselves adrift in an ocean of opinions, some good and some bad. I would suggest that there are a few (a very few) people whose opinion really matters in your life. The rest are just empty chatter. But there is one opinion, one review that has the power to pull us out of this swamp and give us solid footing on which to stand.

Jesus, who am I? Father, what do you think of me?

Those of us courageous enough to bring the question are often surprised by the answer.

Thanks for helping us share the
Good News with hurting kids!



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HOPE