

The Jerk-O-Meter is being developed and improved by researchers at MIT. The Jerk-o-meter analyzes speech patterns and voice tones and rates how engaged people are in a conversation -- on a scale of 0 to 100 percent. The jerk-o-meter program uses algorithms to measure levels of stress and empathy in a person's voice and tracks how a person is speaking. The Jerk-O-Meter monitors the conversation, if the user's attention strays, a message pops up on their phone that warns, "Don't be a jerk!" or "Be a little nicer now" That is what would happen for sure when certain of us receive a call from a telemarketer!

At the other end of the scale a score closer to 100 percent would prompt, "Wow, you're a smooth talker".....

You can also setup the jerk-o-meter to monitor the person you are calling. Then it could tell you that the person that you are talking to is disinterested – it could send you a message saying, “Do you want to hang up!” Or even worse or better you could have the jerk-o-meter send a message to the person on the other end of the line saying, “He buddy – pay attention - don’t be a jerk!”

Just maybe the presence of the jerk-o-meter might have prevented the first son from saying “No!” to his father when he was asked to go work in the vineyard. And just maybe the jerk-o-meter might have picked up the real disinterest of the second son who assured his father verbally – “yes, yes, I’ll go!” but who seemed never to have any intention to go work at all.

Here is a question for you: How do children and teenagers and husbands(?) respond when they hear the call “Dinner’s Ready” or “It’s time to leave?”

That’s it – they answer, "Coming . . ." or “Just a minute”.

Then what happens? Well there then follows another 5 or 10 minutes of reading or whatever enjoyable thing they were doing. It is as if the response "Coming . . .Just a minute" would put off the inevitable task of setting the table, leaving for dinner at the in-laws when the game is on TV. Likely all of us know the limits that we can push certain people.

Let’s take a survey?

Mom- how many times will she accept a “coming” before she gets really mad?

Dad?

Teacher?

Coach?

What about the Pastor? Oh, I’m coming.... But, but, but

What about when your deacon calls or a member of your DeaconCare leadership team, asking for just a few minutes of your time to assure you of the love and concern of the church and inviting you to consider being more fully involved?

Or when one of our elders contacts you asking you to commit your time and skill to some much-needed ministry?

Or in the coming weeks when a member of your church serving on the stewardship committee calls asking you to turn in your pledge?

Oh it's coming but you know I don't have all the time in the world and there is this thing I have to do at the club or at school or at the mall!

What about God? When God says, "It's time.... It's time to pay attention... It's time to be faithful.... It's time to get involved..."

Is our reply? You know God, I am gonna do better, I'm planning to be more regular at worship **but** you see ...

I mean to pray, I mean I do pray and read my Bible... **but...**

I will volunteer next week, next month, next year... **but...**

God I'm coming..... **but...**

Who are we kidding? God doesn't need the jerk-o-meter to know that we are not being fully open and honest. God sees the extent of our response and God sees through the smoke that we attempt to blow covering our failure to trust and obey!

The Good News in Jesus' parable is that having a change of heart and mind is acceptable to God. It is possible to change our minds and do the right thing! In fact God positively encourages us to change our hearts and minds and start living in a new way.

In our own lives we know great joy when this happens – when there has been a long estrangement between friends, parent and child, or siblings and a change of heart bridges the abyss – we are so glad. When someone ends a pattern of behavior that will destroy them – we are heartened. When an old wound between old friends is finally excised – oh what relief!

When God looks us straight in the eye, when God smiles and winks at us, when God impresses upon us the need to adopt new ways, when we look God back and see compassion not anger we know that God is ready to let us start all over again! That God is more than ready to move more deeply into discipleship. With God we can reconsider and accept. While it is not enough to merely say the right thing, it is possible to recover from half-heartedness or even from a too hastily uttered "no." God takes not the first word but the final word – the word that sends us forth on an adventure of discipleship. Remember Jesus wants followers, not admirers.

Some of us do not step forward and do the work that God has set before us because we assume that someone else could just as easily do it. It is what psychologists call the "bystander problem." In one particular experiment, the psychologists had a student pretend to have an epileptic seizure while he was alone in a room. When one person was in the room adjacent to that student's room, that person hurried in to help the suffering student 85% of the time. But when the person in the adjacent room was given the impression that four other people were also overhearing the seizure, they came to the student's aid only 31% of the time.

The bystander in Jesus' story – the one who was all mouth – he did no work that day in the vineyard, even though he had declared with his words that he would go work, he did nothing, he wasted his time and his father's time.

In the ongoing story of Jesus, the story of Jesus in the world today, the story of Jesus here at OAPC and here in Rock Hill there are no roles for bystanders. Sure we can't all do everything but we all need to do what we can do!

We can all pray – we can all participate joyfully in worship – we can all care for others – we can all pay attention to God’s Word – we can all encourage one another – we can all contribute out of our financial resources. We can’t all take part in every mission endeavor but we can help those who are able to serve ensuring they have resources to give and share and offer. Bystanders might be admirers but one thing is for sure they ain’t followers. Thank God, Jesus was never a bystander, if Jesus had been merely a bystander we would be in a heap of trouble!

Over the last few weeks and months we have seen the slogan of the Red Cross put into action in so many ways – their slogan “We’ll be there!” In response to tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and wild fires the Red Cross has made good on their promise: “We’ll be there!” These words declare that this organization is dedicated not to thinking about helping people but describes their firm resolve act.

When God calls us – and God will call and God is calling - God is always asking us to be there –living out our faith, serving God in all things, following the example and the lifestyle of Jesus.

Over this month we have reflected on the gift and calling of God towards wholeness and healing. We have seen and heard of the love and mercy of God – that God’s abundance well exceeds mere fairness; we sought to gain comfort from God’s vision of goodness and hope on the anniversary of 9/11; we responded to the call to pray with faith for the wholeness and healing of individuals and the world by gathering as a community of faith last Sunday evening to pray for many, many people; to live out and into faith by praying with the laying on of hands for many members of our church and people from across our community. All this we did recognizing that it is God’s desire, intention and plan to bring us and the world to the wholeness and healing that is God’s plan for the whole of creation.

After one of my sermons this month a member of our church remarked that it was a stewardship sermon without the mention of the word “stewardship.” I think this was an astute observation because since God expects us to be devoting ourselves to the purposes of sharing and pointing to the wholeness and healing that God has for all – this is our stewardship of our time, our attitudes, our passion, our living.

I glimpse the wholeness and healing to which God is calling us in several places in the life of our church...

In Together on Wednesdays as we welcome all ages to eat and meet, to make music and learn together, to pray, to worship, I see the huge possibility of a deepening of community life.

In the continued welcome extended by our youth group to all the youth of OAPC and beyond, I see a fellowship of love, care and support for youth and their families.

In the repair and upgrading of the concrete ramp, allowing better and easier access to the facility especially for those using a wheelchair or a walker.

In the Service of Wholeness and Healing last Sunday all present were moved in their inner core, by the range of people and the extent of the needs for which we prayed; by the awareness of the intimate presence of God with and for us all; by the gift of faith and care that moves us to care for the other.

Stewardship, good stewardship, our good stewardship makes all these things and everything we are and do possible. In our stewardship over the last two years our congregation has taken some very important steps forward, even in the midst of economic uncertainty.

In the summer of 2009, when I began my work as Pastor the congregation was about \$40,000 short of the resources to complete its \$60,000 pledge to Our Presbytery's Capital Campaign for Bethelwoods and New Church Development – thanks to the generosity and faithfulness of members, we have paid this mission commitment in full and ahead of schedule! In the summer of 2009 the outstanding balance of the Park Avenue Rental Property was right at \$260,000 – today, thanks to the faithfulness and generosity of members the balance is \$70,000. Imagine if the federal government could deal with deficits in the same way.

As we look forward, as we anticipate all that God is inviting us towards, in wholeness and healing, as we anticipate the start of our centenary celebrations next year it would be great to see the remaining debt on our property cleared – that would be the \$70,000 on the rental property and the debt we owe ourselves for the renovation of this beautiful Sanctuary – for which we have borrowed \$180,000 from ourselves still to be repaid. Wholeness and Healing asks and invites us to pay close attention to all the ways that we use the resources with which God has blessed us. May God lead you and all of us to that place where we are free to look into and step into the future.

Today, Tomorrow, Always, God isn't going to ask,
'What did you dream? What did you think? What did you plan? What did you preach?'

With the jerk-o-meter turned on, ready to analyze our words, God is going to ask

'What did you do?'

 'What are you doing?'

 'What will you do?'

'Will you get engaged in living out the promises of your faith?' and so discover the fullest extent of God's love for you and share that love with and for the world.

'Will you come work in my vineyard today?' Amen.