



# The Journey of Thomas

## Transparency

By John J. Smid

James 1:19-20

*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*

To be transparent means to be free of pretense or deception. As Christians we are often accused of being arrogant, or plastic. We have been called hypocrites. We are sometimes accused of being unrealistic and fake. Transparency renders such accusations without merit. Living a life of transparency is one "clear" enough that God can write on our lives His message, but to have enough substance to be the vehicle that He wants to use.

As a Christian, if I am not careful, I can easily put myself above someone else because I can be judgmental towards others, seeing what they are doing compared to what I am not doing. In my younger years while I was living a very rebellious life I would often grade those around me in such a way as to make myself out to be better than they were. I would say to myself, "Well at least I'm not like that". Here I was sleeping around, drinking, lying, and many other despicable things but at least I didn't do that! Well, it was the "that's" that I was tempted to do next and often did.

Being transparent is going deeper than **honesty** or **authenticity**; to be "clear" through and through. It means to not cloud up my life with pretense and deception. This doesn't mean I lose myself and become so invisible that there is no substance to my life but rather allow others to see my true self infused with the spirit of Christ when I communicate with them. For example, when I was in school the teacher would use an overhead transparency to write on with the so that we could see what she was saying to us; or to draw an example of what he imparting to us.

Transparency also means that we are of such a special design that the purposes are clear for how God wishes to use us. We also know the limitations of our lives and therefore we have an understanding of how we are not to be used. Again, referring back to the transparencies my teacher used, there are transparencies for color enhancement or to change texture. There are permanent transparencies so the message is never lost, and there are erasable ones that can be used over and over again.

I have a friend who is a part of our home group. I can't tell you the number of times he has come to report some interesting, God inspired, divinely appointed opportunity to help someone, to encourage someone, to pray with someone, or just to tell someone he loves them. His life not only challenges my selfish heart, but it challenges my ears to hear from the Lord and obey what He is asking of me.

A transparent life does not demand its purpose, but is available to be used when appropriate to do so. Just recently, I was driving down the street and saw someone I knew in the car near me. I saw him turn into a fast food restaurant for lunch and thought of the transparency of my friends

openness to being flexible. I drove by thinking, “I should call him to tell him I saw him”. I didn’t have his number with me, so I decided to make a u-turn (legally!), go back and say hello in person.

I went in while he was in line. He asked if I was eating as well. I said, “No, I saw you come in and decided to stop in to say hi”. He said he didn’t typically go to lunch at that time but was glad that his day turned out differently because it gave him the opportunity to share a little time together.

As it turned out, this was a great blessing for both of us. It is not usual for me to go out of my schedule or convenience to do this. But my friend’s life and the blessings he receives from living ready and available make me want to have some of what he has. That day, I got a taste of what can happen if I listen and move according to the opportunity that comes my way.

I am picturing in my mind a stack of brand new transparencies all ready for their uses to be discovered. As we line up our lives, is it possible to wait, to ponder, to be ready for our Heavenly Father to take us off of the pile when he needs us? Are we available and ready?

I remember getting into a pile of transparencies and found one that was not clean and had to put it back for a later time when it could be cleaned up. When I am ready to use one, I need a clean one right then.

I’ve also found that there are the ones that are wiped clean to use over and over. There is also the one right out of the box that I have used for the permanent printing purposes. I can’t say the used ones are less valuable than the brand new ones. Each one has its own place. But sometimes I think I’d rather be the older ones. I would see a whole lot more that way. The new ones might be permanently printed on and then put away in a file box only for only special occasions. Each of us has our own special place in the kingdom!

I have missed opportunities for my Father to use me because I just wasn’t ready yet. I must understand that He will do the cleaning when the time is right. I guess in the end, living a transparent life means I have to learn to be flexible and ready to be used at any given point for whatever He wants.

## *Whatever Lord!*

If I am going to grow in my passionate response to the Great Commission, I will have to open my heart to living a transparent life. Loving others and sharing the life of Jesus with them through my life will not often be convenient and will likely call me to make a u-turn on short notice.

Another form of transparency is being free to alter a challenging situation rather than to continue in it. I have learned a great tool that has helped me on numerous occasions to ward off an argument or a conflictive conversation. I call it the “24-hour rule”.

Prov. 25:8 (NAS)

*Do not go out hastily to argue your case. Otherwise, what will you do in the end when your neighbor humiliates you?*

One day I opened up a dialogue with my wife in which I felt indignant and smugly correct about the conflict. As I continued to attempt to prove my point, my wife said, “John, I’ll have to think about what you said and I’m not going to continue the conversation at this time. I’ll get back to you tomorrow with my thoughts”.

I felt shut out and even more indignant, but I couldn’t argue with someone who had just said, “I am not going to respond.” At the same time, I felt free from the discomfort of my own challenging perspective and glad that she had the forethought to utilize this tool.

The next day, in that same integrity, she came back to me after both of us had time to process. We discussed the matter quite differently this time than we were trying to do the day before.

There are two elements to this particular tool that make it work.

- Number one, a willingness to establish the boundary that comes with the tool in the middle of an emotional discussion.
- Number two, having enough conviction and integrity so as to not forgo the discussion but to bring it back up so as to resolve it the next day.

This tool, as simple as it is, will work with parents and children, spouses, work situations, and any other situation that can become unhealthy if it continues without a healthy process. This tool values the person who is conflictive because you are saying to them that you really want to take the time to think and pray about what they have said. It also values them because it can keep them from continuing in a conversation they both of you may regret later, and requires transparency.

**Prayer for today:** Lord, help me to live my life in such a way that you can pick me up anytime and pour your life into mine. Lord, help me to be patient for the cleaning that you desire when it is the right time and place. Help me Lord to be flexible and ready. Prick my ears to your heart each day, Lord. Open my eyes to see what you see and give me the courage to pursue it.

I ask you to give me the quickness of mind to stop a negative conversation from being regretful and to value myself and the person enough to pray it through and work it out with them the next day.

**Practical Application:** If you find yourself in a conflictive conversation this week where you feel defensive and tell the other person you're not going to respond to the discussion for at least 24 hours. Then do as you have said and return to them with your response after you have prayed about it and gotten some perspective.

Find three biblical standards you have broken in your life and tell someone about them and the ways you have suffered consequences as a result of your actions.

Write three feeling statements regarding the concept of personal honesty:

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_

About my last conflictive conversation

Because \_\_\_\_\_"

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_

About the last time I saw something I could have done to encourage someone and didn't

Because \_\_\_\_\_"

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_

About developing a more flexible lifestyle

Because \_\_\_\_\_"

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