

Why God wants you to be a little impractical

Looked at from one angle, it's pretty clear Christianity wasn't made for rigid planners.

In the Old Testament (cf. Ex 3:1-12), the Lord didn't tell Moses at the burning bush, "Get all your ducks in a row and then go to Pharaoh and"

In the New Testament (cf. Mt 4:18-22), Jesus didn't say to Peter and Andrew, James and John, "Finish this season's catch and then in a month or so come follow me."

Impractical, right? "Ready or not, there you go!"

This isn't to say God doesn't make sense sometimes. It's just that in so many areas – plans, wisdom, priorities, events – his ways are not our ways (cf. Is 55:8). And his ways, so often, are hard to understand, except in hindsight.

"Love your enemies and pray for them." "Be meek." "Put yourself last." "Be a servant to all."

Again and again throughout Scripture, over and over in our own lives, it seems that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are telling us to do something that ... how to put this?

Makes. No. Sense.

Why, for instance, would you pray for your enemies? Unless maybe you pray that they "get religion" and then feel like dirt for all the horrible things they've done to others. To you. Yeah, that would be all right. A big, fat dose of guilty conscience to knock them right on the seat of their pants.

That, we can see. The other – to somehow care about them – is right on the edge of beyond comprehension. And sometimes way

over the line.

Oh, yes, fine in theory but just so impractical, leaving ourselves open to all kinds of complications and pain.

Then again, it must be noted that God has been pushing his method not just in his words but in his deeds.

Yes, in his deeds.

Impracticality of Jesus

Think about Jesus' life.

Let's make the Savior of the world a human being and send him via a poor couple in a poor town in a poor country. Wait! And make it a country that's under the heel of a huge and powerful empire that has no problem crushing people like bugs.

Perfect.

And let's have that Savior spend the first 30 years of his 33-year life in just about complete obscurity. Yes, angels, shepherds, Magi and a flight into Egypt. And a little time in the Temple at age 12, but other than that ... zero.

Flying far below even a first-century Palestinian grid.

And then that Savior comes on the scene and chooses 12 disciples who, apparently, didn't need to submit resumes. It can seem more like Jesus bumped into them and said, "Hey, you!"

So why would we think our lives – why would you think your life – will be different? And how can you better pay attention to God asking you to be impractical sometimes, and then following through on his – saying "harebrained" is probably blasphemous, right? – creative suggestions? Here are three things to consider.

1. Take comfort in the fact God is a big-picture guy. A creative, big-picture guy. It's not that he's playing chess while we're playing checkers. Closer to he's playing chess, and we're gnawing on a checker piece. And drooling.

God understands that we don't get it. If he had wanted us to completely get it, he would have created us to completely get it while on earth. (Later in heaven, yes!) But he didn't. So we don't.

Apparently, there's a reason he wants us to be impractical for him. Or, to quote St. Paul, be "fools on Christ's account" (1 Cor 4:10). And, possibly, that has something to do with our needing not to have more faith but to better use the faith we have in order to become more serious about loving and serving him by loving and serving other people.

Evil people, bad people, selfish people, really annoying people. His people. His children.

And in doing that, we're becoming more like him.

2. There's a big and important difference between – what to call this? – "spiritual impracticality" and just plain stupidity. Or stupidity and laziness. (Again, to St. Paul who pointed out he earned his keep by making tents – Acts 18:3).

You know people who have been, and still are, spiritually impractical. You do. Most likely, once a year someone in your parish gets up during Sunday Mass – at the invitation of the pastor – to talk about stewardship and making the financially dicey decision to donate a set percentage of their income to the church.

Yes, on one level, that's just crazy talk! On another, it's not. Not when they share a bit about the fruits that have come from that sacrifice. And how they've continued it for years and, sometimes, upped the amount.

Talk about being impractical! Money is tight, prices are going up, so let's give away more. In order to – in their own words based on their own experience – get more.

More what?

Joy. Peace. Graces. Blessings.

Also (and they don't say this) to get to be more like God.

3. It's the saints who really figured out this spiritual impracticality business and really exploited it. For others and, in a good way, for themselves, too.

For some, it meant giving up their lives as martyrs. For others, it was focusing day after day on doing God's will.

Really. Pick a saint. Any saint. Read their biography and you'll see what fools they were – how impractical they were, for Christ.

And among those stories (or "hagiographies" if you want to sound really highfalutin), are some who admitted they wanted to become saints and set their minds, hearts and souls on accomplishing that.

As can we. As can you.

Not that you'll get canonized and have a parish named after you with your photograph prominently displayed in the church's side alcove. ("Oh, no, not that one! My face looks so fat!")

But you will have a feast day. Nov. 1, the feast of All Saints. The feast for all the souls in heaven. For all those men, women and children who were just so ... impractical.

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A little Advice on Being An Impractical Practicing Catholic

1. Embrace the fact that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Peter, Andrew, James and John appears to be impractical at times. One example, to Abraham: "I will give you a ton of descendants, but go kill your only son.

"Huh?"

Ask yourself: What's God saying to me right now?

Odds are he isn't telling you to heed the words of actress Bette Davis in "All about Eve," but she does have sound and comforting advice: "Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night."

A fool for Christ? It's going to be a bumpy life.

2. Notice a little impracticality leads to a little more impracticality. It seems a bit sacrilegious to put it this way, but those early impracticalities could be termed "gateway graces." Just a taste and then, before you know it, you're hooked.

You're not surprised God asks you to do something that not too long ago would have been laughable. Now, yes, it's a challenge, but one you're anxious to get started on. You're comfortable with a leap of faith from a higher cliff. Past jumps assure you *Deus providebit* – God will provide. You just have to hang on to your hat.

3. One who is spiritually impractical is seldom bored. It seems there's always something new and exciting (that is, terrifying) just around the corner. That may be because once you've accomplished a particular task or made it a part of your routine, God whispers, "Hey, you know what would really be a hoot?"

This isn't to say God actually uses the word "hoot," but he's certainly familiar with the concept.

What might your next challenge be? Heaven only knows. And, at the right time and in the right place and right way, heaven will let you know.

And when that happens ... say a little prayer, and buckle up.