

JESUS - THE MODEL OF
ASSERTIVENESS

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Jesus - The Model of Assertiveness

Most people perceive Jesus Christ as a passive personality. But a closer look reveals His life example and teachings to be assertive. With reference to the “Passive-Assertive-Aggressive” continuum and chart on page 2, the person of Jesus is centered and balanced in the assertive realm. Indeed; if the core intent of assertiveness is “to communicate”, then Jesus truly is the Teacher.

For the Christian this difference; Jesus being an assertive person rather than passive, is of the utmost importance. This is particularly true when successful, permanent behavioral modification is necessary. As the Apostle Paul commands: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:1). The depth of this imitation is described in a letter by Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God...” (Galatians 2:20). For the Christian, self is put to death so the character of Christ can be developed in the individual. In another passage the Scripture speaks of God’s pre-determined purpose for the believer “to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). Therefore, the goal and orientation of the follower of Christ would be to strive toward an assertive, rather than a passive (or aggressive), life style as his behavioral norm.

Was Jesus Passive?

The intent of passive behavior is “to please,” and its goal is to avoid conflict.¹ With these definitions as a context, Jesus was certainly not passive. Jesus states in Matt 10:34: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” The Scripture defines the sword as the “Word of God” in Ephesians 6:17, which divides men out as either for God or against Him -- there is no middle ground. In describing this situation John relates in his Gospel account chapter 12, verses 42-43: “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of man rather than the approval of God.”

Jesus obviously did not come to please as shown by his description of the commitment and sacrifice required to be one of His followers. In Matthew 10:37-39 He states: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me and he who does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.” Many Bible translations insert a footnote into Jesus’ statement of the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:26 because it comes across so severely: “If anyone comes to Me, and does not *hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brother and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” The insert for the word “hate” often reads “i.e., by comparison for his love for Me.” Jesus did not try to please by lowering the standards for discipleship to generally acceptable levels, which would have nullified the truth of His Lordship.

One of Jesus’ noted followers, the Apostle Paul, writes: “Be imitators of me just as I also am of Christ Jesus” (I Corinthians 11:1). As an imitator of Christ, Paul was certainly not trying to please others in the sense of passive behavior. After stating “As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received let him be accursed”, Paul goes on to say: “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal 1:9-10, respectively). It is important to note here that the Greek word *anathema*, which is translated “accursed” in this text, is the strongest word of condemnation available to Paul in the Greek language.

Was Jesus Aggressive?

At the same time, Jesus did not come to forcefully dominate or unnecessarily humiliate anyone, as would define aggressive behavior. In answering Pilate's questions as to whether or not He was a king, Jesus replied: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews..." (John 18:36). The evening before, when the Jews had arrested Jesus, Simon Peter had cut off the right ear of the high priest's slave in trying to prevent the Jews from taking Jesus. But Jesus put the slave's ear back on and told Peter: "Put your sword back into its sheath; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you not think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then shall the Scripture be fulfilled, that it must happen this way?" (Matthew 26:51-54, see also Luke 22:50-51, John 18:10-11).

Rather than dominate, or even to do His own will, Jesus intent was to submit to the will of His heavenly Father. Just previous to His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus "fell on His face" and prayed to God: "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). The cup here refers to suffering a cruel death on the cross and taking the sin of the world upon Himself, and thereby being totally separated from His Father for the first and only time in eternity. Jesus consistently taught and lived the fact that He came to earth to do His Father's will, not His own. For example, during one lengthy discourse He specifically states: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 6:38).

Jesus often taught non-aggression. In His first recorded sermon, often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, He preached: "Blessed are the poor [lowly] in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", "Blessed are the gentle [meek], for they shall inherit the earth", and "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5:3,5,9 respectively). Later in that same sermon Jesus stresses the difference between the Old Testament and New: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist him

who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:38-41). Many have mistakenly taken these verses to have Jesus teaching passive behavior, but the context reveals that these teachings are instead a positive, active response to aggressive behavior from others. This response, correctly applied is intended to reduce aggression.

Two examples come to mind with regard to Jesus’ living His teaching against aggressive, domineering behavior. On one occasion, when Jesus was rejected by the inhabitants of a certain village, James and John asked Him: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54). To which Jesus answered: “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:55-56). In another instance “there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be the greatest. And He [Jesus] said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called “Benefactors” But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22: 24-27). It is important to note here, that at the meal Jesus was the waiter, or server, and also washed the disciples feet afterwards! [See Mark 14:22-25 and John 13:4-17].

Was Jesus Assertive?

Jesus’ true purpose and intent was to communicate, as evidenced by His words and actions. Assertiveness is defined as “a direct and honest communication of who you are and what you are.”ⁱⁱ The intent of assertive behavior is to communicate in direct and appropriate ways.ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus modeled assertiveness and routinely taught its principles to His followers.

Jesus spent a great deal of time trying to teach others who He was and the nature of His mission. Statements such as: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6) and “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies” (John 11:25), are examples of His assertive statements. Even in the face of stoning by His adversaries, Jesus had the courage to state: “I and the

Father are one” (John 10:30). At another point, after arguing with the Jewish rulers He said to them “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am”

(John 8:58). The phrase “I am” clearly communicated to the Jewish mind that Jesus was Jehovah in the flesh.

Communication was at the heart of Jesus’ very being. John 1:1 states: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus is identified as “the Word” later in the text: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth”...“grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1: 14,17). The Greek word translated as “the Word” is *logos*, which basically means “information”. W.E. Vine defines *logos* as “the expression of thought; as embodying a concept or idea.”^{iv} Jesus then, in and of Himself, is the communication of the Creator to His creation. Jesus explains this truth very pointedly in a dialogue with Philip the Apostle: “‘If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him and have seen Him!’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord show us the Father, and it is enough for us!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father...’” (John 14: 7-9).

Both friends and enemies addressed Jesus by the title “Teacher”, or Rabbi in the Hebrew. He was constantly making disciples or students during His ministry. After His first sermon, as recorded by Matthew, the following observation is made: “The result was that when Jesus finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:28 & 29). Even the professors of Judaism came to Him to learn: “... Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a Teacher; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with Him’” (John 3:1-2). After giving Nicodemus a lesson, “Nicodemus answered and said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered and said to Him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?’” (John 3: 9-10).

The one true Church that Jesus established is primarily a school. Jesus called his followers “disciples”, which means “a student or learner”. One well-known statement exemplifies this: “If you abide in My Word, then you are truly **disciples** of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall

make you free” (John 8:31-32). To those who would come after Him to build His Church, Jesus commands: “Go therefore and make **disciples** from all the Nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you...” (Matthew 28: 19-20). Also each of the offices, or positions of work responsibility, within the Church have specific teaching roles assigned. Evangelists are assigned to teach those outside the Church, Elders or Pastors are to teach those within the Church, and Teachers minister wherever and whenever needed.^v

Certainly then, Jesus exemplifies assertiveness through His life, teaching, and legacy of the Church. His primary intent was the communication of truth, rather than to either please or dominate others. He existed as a man for the expressed purpose of the Creator God’s communication of Himself to that part of the creation created in His own image, namely mankind. For His followers this is a call to perfection, or completeness, of which assertiveness is a necessary component.

Examples of Assertiveness Techniques

During His life Jesus modeled an assertive approach to interpersonal relationships and communication. He consistently utilized what social and behavioral scientists today would refer to as “assertive techniques,” “tools,” or “skills.” These techniques include “Broken Record,” “Fogging,” “Self-disclosure” or “Free Information,” “Negative Assertion,” “Workable Compromise,” “Verbal Confrontation,” “Action,” and “Silence.”^{vi} The following Scripture texts exemplify how Jesus utilized various patterns of assertiveness powerfully and effectually in His ministry.

Broken Record

Psycho-therapists often cite the “Broken Record” technique as one of the most common and effective means of assertiveness. The Broken Record technique consists of verbally repeating your position over and over, ignoring all side issues brought up by the other person, sticking to the point of the discussion in a calm, persistent manner.^{vii} In essence the person sounds like a broken, or skipping, record. The Scripture records instances in which Jesus not only employed such a pattern Himself, but he also taught this skill to His followers.

A most notable example of Jesus using what psycho-therapists today would label “Broken Record” is found in John 8:12-59. Amid His opponents’ accusation and harassment, Jesus consistently maintains that He is the Messiah, or Christ. Jesus repeats His claim persistently by using various titles or phrases, including; “I am the light of the world”(v. 18), “the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me”(v. 18), “If you knew Me, you would know My Father also” (v. 19), “I am from above...I am not of this world” (v. 23), “I am He” (v. 24), “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He” (v. 28), “He who sent Me is with Me” (v. 29), “I speak the things which I have seen with (or ‘in the presence of’) my Father” (v. 38), “I proceeded forth and have come from God. . . He sent Me” (v. 42), “He who is of God hears the Words of God” (v. 47), “I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father” (v. 49), “if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death” (v. 51), “it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’ ” (v. 54), “but I know Him. . .but I know Him, and keep His word” (v. 55), “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (v. 56), and “Truly, truly, I say to you before Abraham was born, I am” (v. 58). Note the title “I am” to the Jewish mind refers explicitly to Jehovah God and is a reference to Exodus 3:14 where God declares His name is “I am who I am.”

In this example Jesus repeats His position over and over while His opponents tried to side-track Him. His opponents twice accused Him of having a demon (vs. 48/52). In our culture this is comparable to being called “psychotic” or “crazy.” Also at one point He was called a “Samaritan,” (v.48), which was a racial slur in that society. During the course of this conversation Jesus repeatedly maintains the fact of His being the Messiah in a calm, persistent manner. One psycho-therapist writes, regarding the Broken Record technique: “By practicing to speak as if we were a broken record, we learn to be persistent and stick to the point of the discussion, to keep saying what we want to say, and to ignore all side issues brought up by the person we assert ourselves to. In using Broken Record you are not deterred by anything the other person may say but keep saying in a calm, repetitive voice what you want to say...”^{viii}

Not only did Jesus exemplify the Broken Record technique of assertiveness, He often taught such a pattern of persistence. When asked by His disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray,” Jesus shared the following illustration. He said to them, “Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and

shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. And I say to you, keep on asking and it shall be given you; keep on seeking, and you shall find; keep on knocking, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:5-9).

In another instance, Jesus taught what amounts to the "Broken Record" by means of a parable. Luke 18:1-8a records the following; "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, 'There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for his elect, who cried to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them. I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily.'" Here Jesus shares that even the Father condones and responds positively to this form of assertiveness! So, Jesus not only exemplified the assertive technique of "Broken Record," He also regularly taught this type of assertiveness to His followers.

Fogging

"Fogging" is another prominent assertiveness technique prescribed by psycho-therapists, which Jesus modeled centuries ago. This technique instructs people to confront "negative criticism by calmly acknowledging to your critic the probability that there may be some truth in what he says, yet allows you to remain your own judge of what you will do.^{ix} The term "fogging" is not used here with the concept of a "smoke screen" or confusing the issues, but instead in the sense of diffusion or de-escalation of aggression.

Jesus exemplifies such a “Fogging” pattern when He faced temptations from the devil in the wilderness shortly after His baptism. Matthew 4: 5-7 reads: “Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE CONCERNING YOU’; and ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, LEST YOU STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’ Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’ ” In this text the devil is tempting Jesus, to which the Lord replies: “On the other hand, it is written...” (v. 7). Here Jesus acknowledges the Scripture which the devil uses and thereby implies the probability that there may be some truth to what he says. But Jesus does not jump off the temple as the devil tries to manipulate Him to do; thereby remaining his own judge of what He will do. Then Jesus states an overriding principle of Scripture: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (v. 7).

Describing the fogging technique, one psycho-therapist writes: “Here, you calmly acknowledge whatever shred of truth there might be in what the other person is saying. Acknowledging does not mean giving in, though. It can be very effectively combined with broken record.”^x This is precisely what Jesus accomplishes in John 10:22-38. Jesus maintains His position that “I and the Father are one” (v. 30), “I am the Son of God” (v. 36), and “the Father is in Me, and I in the Father” (v. 38), throughout the dialogue. When the Jews prepared to stone Him, Jesus asks them “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” (v. 32). They reply it is not for His works, but that: “You, being a man, make yourself out to be God” (v. 33). At this point Jesus acknowledges their Law, and admits the possibility of blasphemy. Then He shows the Jews that their own law called the prophets out as “gods” (vs. 35-36). The result was that the Jews did not stone Him, and the Scripture goes on to record: “He [Jesus] alluded their grasp” (v. 39). Consistent with this example, a modern Psycho-therapist writes: “Fogging effectively stops communication before the other person can escalate a disagreement.”^{xi} Jesus did exactly that in this text.

In another instance, Jesus demonstrated the fogging technique of assertion very subtly, yet very powerfully. The account reads: “And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the midst, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught

in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?’ And they were saying this, testing Him, in order that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And when they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she had been, in the midst. And straightening up, Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?’ And she said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more’” (John 8:3-11).

Initially when asked about His judgment in view of the Law of Moses, instead of verbally answering, Jesus wrote on the ground with His finger, just as His Father originally wrote the ten commandments on stone. In a very subtle way Jesus is agreeing that the seventh commandment did condemn adultery, and the Law was clear that adultery was punishable by death. When those questioning Him persisted He replied: “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). Jesus implies agreement with their accusation and the stipulated punishment along these lines: “Yes, the Law of Moses condemns the act of adultery. But my question to you regards the fact that no one has been able to keep the Law of Moses perfectly!” Hence the statement as to who would qualify to start the stoning. Jesus asserts Himself as the One who originally wrote the Law, and refuses to yield to their testing Him with it.

Again Jesus’ use of what amounts to fogging stopped the opposition in their tracks. This effect is the intended outcome of the fogging technique. After all of her accusers leave the scene, Jesus reiterates the purpose and intent of the Law of Moses: “From now on sin no more” (v. 11). The assertion here contains the original intent of God - to define acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, then give the individual the time and motivational incentives in order to meet the standard.

Self Disclosure

A third assertive technique, which most psycho-therapists cite is “self-disclosure”; which is often associated with “free information.” Self-disclosure “involves disclosing information about yourself,”^{xii} which is of a

personal nature and often relates to the information the other person has disclosed about himself. The objective of self-disclosure is to make “others deal with you as a person instead of a stereotype, a number, a faceless part of the crowd.”^{xiii}

One incident in particular clearly depicts the self-disclosure pattern of assertiveness: when Jesus stood before Pilate and was being condemned. John 18:33-38 records the following narrative: “Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?’ Pilate answered, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.’ Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘So You are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is the truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no guilt in Him.’” It is important to note at this point that Pilate was a hardened Roman governor who indiscriminately crucified dozens of men a day (often times more than a hundred a day) in order to keep his authority in occupied Palestine.

At first Jesus does not answer Pilate’s question regarding His being a king directly. Then when He does answer, Jesus gives him additional information on His kingdom which spikes Pilate’s interest. Upon Pilate’s query; “So you are a king?”, Jesus gives him a direct answer along with personal and somewhat profound information that His mission was to “bear witness to the truth”(v.37). Even today the allusion to absolute truth, of any genre, has a tendency to take people aback. After dismissing further dialogue with the quip “What is truth?”, as any Roman materialist would do, Pilate makes the out-of-character statement: “I find no guilt in Him.” Truly, the self-disclosure information offered by Jesus made even a person such as Pilate stop and deal with Him as a person.

The purpose of self-disclosure in assertiveness is to help others understand that you are an individual and desire to be interacted with on a personal basis. Jesus was certainly successful in doing this with Pilate.

Pilate even tried to get Jesus released while facing the Jewish mob. Then when the Jews leveraged Pilate into condemning Jesus he still wrote an inscription and put it on the cross which read: “JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” The account goes on to record: “And so the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, ‘Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews’; but that He said, ‘I am King of the Jews.’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written’” (John 19: 21-22). In this case the assertiveness of Jesus gained His objective of being officially proclaimed to be the King by the Roman governor!

Negative Assertion

We can find examples of a fourth assertiveness technique, negative assertion, in Jesus’ teachings. Here the assertive person acknowledges the other party’s position or criticism, then graciously offers new or additional information.^{xiv} This serves to take away any defensiveness on the part of the other person(s), while asserting one’s own position.

In one case the sect of the Sadducees questioned Jesus with regards to the impossible situations that could arise if men had life after death; they themselves not believing in the resurrection of the dead. The following text shows how Jesus handled the situation: “Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), and they questioned Him saying, ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN’S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; and the second and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. Finally the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the *passage about the burning bush*, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him.’ And some of the scribes answered and said, ‘Teacher, You have spoken well’” (Luke 20:27-39).

In answering the question posed by the Sadducees, Jesus first acknowledges the facts regarding marriage in the physical realm. Then He shares the fact (new information) that in the life to come individuals do not marry, but are like angels. Jesus goes on to correct their disbelief in the resurrection of the dead by quoting from the writings of Moses, whom the Sadducees had previously quoted to make their case. Jesus then concludes that since God is the God of the living, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must still be alive - even though they had physically died long before Moses' lifetime.

Negative assertion can be found in Jesus' skillful handling of this situation. First he agrees with the Sadducees with regards to physical marriage. Then he offers new information with regards to no one marrying in the next life, which neutralizes their hypothetical situation with the seven brothers and one wife. Finally Jesus uses the common ground of Moses' writings to prove the resurrection of the dead unto the next life. The use of "negative assertion" here must have been effective, for the scribes answered: "Teacher, You have spoken well" (v. 39).

Workable Compromise

Another generally acknowledged assertive technique is known as "Workable Compromise." In this case, a person asserts himself by offering the other person (who is often being aggressive or pushy) a practical compromise. It is important to note that psycho-therapists recommend this type of assertiveness when self-respect is not in question.^{xv} Jesus often offered solutions, which are comparable to workable compromise, in response to opposition and to solve dilemmas regarding authority.

In one such instance tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus submitted to paying a temple tax. Desiring to avoid conflict, Peter says yes. When Peter returns to the house where Jesus was staying, Jesus confronts Peter with the question: "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" (Matthew 17:25). Peter answers "From strangers", to which Jesus replies: "Consequently the sons are exempt" (Matthew 17:26). Jesus then goes on to submit the following compromise: "But lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater. Take that and give it to them [the tax gathers] for you and Me" (Matthew 17:27). Here Peter is able to save face,

although he is forced to confront the fact that he was wrong to commit Jesus to the tax. And the tax-gatherers are appeased in the receiving of the money. Here the compromise solution offered by Jesus is both effective and compassionate.

Secondary Assertive Techniques

Psycho-therapists have also defined and classified several secondary assertive techniques or “tools”. These include appropriate “verbal confrontation,” “action,” and “silence.” These assertive techniques are often considered “tools” by psycho-therapists because they effectively vent frustration and prevent the build up of anger within the individual which potentially could result in inappropriate behavior(s). These secondary assertive techniques are also exemplified in the life of Jesus.

Verbal Confrontation

A classic example of Jesus confronting someone verbally is found in Luke 7:36-50. The text reads as follows: “Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee’s house, and reclined at the table. And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ And he replied, ‘Say it, Teacher.’ ‘A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?’ Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have judged correctly.’ And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for my feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been

forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little. And He said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven.' And those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man who even forgives sins?' And He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.' ”

In this case Jesus obviously becomes irritated at Simon the Pharisee's self-righteous attitude and verbally confronts him. Jesus bluntly states: "Simon I have something to say to you" (v. 40). Rather than fretting about the situation, or letting His frustration build, Jesus confronts Simon and communicates His perspective. Immediacy in verbal confrontation, as well as bluntness, allows the individual to vent his frustration in an appropriate manner. This takes courage and self confidence to be sure, but with conscious effort this skill can be developed.

Action

Jesus also asserted Himself through decisive action. Jesus' cleansing of the temple is an example of assertive action. The account reads: "And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money-changers seated. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise.' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'ZEAL FOR THEY HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME'" (John 2: 13-17).

Assertive action must be appropriate to the situation in order to be truly assertive rather than aggressive. Ephesians 4:26-27 puts it this way: "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down or your anger; and do not give the devil an opportunity." Jesus was very zealous for the temple in Jerusalem, calling it "My Father's house." His assertive action in the temple that day prevented a build up of anger which would have made Him vulnerable to the schemes of the devil. So it is with us, indignation towards that which is wrong must produce a proper action response.

Silence

Another assertive tool which Jesus exemplified came in the form of remaining silent when a verbal response was expected or even demanded. An example of this comes when Pilate sent Jesus to Herod for judgment. The Bible text reads: “Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. And he questioned Him at some length; but He [Jesus] answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate” (Luke 23:8-11). In this example Jesus asserts Himself by **not** responding verbally; either to Herod’s questioning or the accusations of the priests and scribes. Silence allowed Jesus to distance Himself from them and communicated that He would not participate in their games. This concept of distancing, or rising above the situation, and dealing with issues and/or people while not being totally caught up in them, is foundational to all the assertive techniques.

Distancing

The concept of “distancing”, or personally disengaging from a situation, undergirds all of these assertive techniques. When distancing a person mentally steps back from the scene at hand and surveys the situation from the third-person perspective.^{xvi} This stopping and analyzing allows one to deter the escalation of anger within himself and diffuse any potential conflict with others. He thereby gains control of his own behavior, and can go on to effectively assert his position as the situation demands.

The importance and power of distancing relative to assertive behavior is exhibited by Jesus as He hung on the cross. He not only endured, but overcame physical pain, emotional shame/despair, and spiritual separation from His Father through distancing. Not succumbing to these severe conditions, He instead asserted Himself in love and concern for others. After being beaten, mocked, spit upon and nailed to a cross, Jesus cried out: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). This, even as the soldiers who crucified Him were gambling for His garments right below Him!

Separating Himself from the agonies of the cross while hanging there,

Jesus even thought of His mother's needs before His own. As the first-born male child, according to the Jewish religion, He was responsible for taking care of His parents in their old age. Seeing His mother in the crowd below, Jesus committed her care to the Apostle John. The Scripture records the following: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own *household*" (John 19:26-27).

Jesus' assertiveness, as achieved through distancing, obtained His desired result. He was well pleasing to His Father in heaven (Philippians 2: 8-11) and the people witnessing His crucifixion were also affected. Even the hardened centurion charged with the responsibility of executing Jesus that day exclaimed at His death: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).

Christians are taught to follow this example of Christ; his strategy of distancing followed by assertiveness in order to overcome adverse conditions and the natural tendency to become entangled in sin. The apostle Peter teaches: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (I Peter 2:21-24). The Apostle Paul commands assertiveness with these words: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

When seen in light of distancing, Jesus' command to "not resist the evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matthew 5:39/ Luke 6:29) can be understood as an assertive posture. In turning the other cheek when struck, the victim of aggression asserts that he will not engage the aggressor in like manner, nor will he seek to escalate the conflict. An aggressive mode of behavior would have the one initially struck engaging in striking the other person back in retaliation. The passive mode of behavior would have one fleeing, or at least backing away from the one who struck him. The assertive response would be to stand one's ground and put forth the other cheek.

Depending on the situation, the individual turning the other cheek may follow up with any of the assertive techniques described above or a combination of them. One possibility would be remaining silent, while staring resolutely into the eyes of the aggressor. In one incident after Jesus was arrested and was answering the questions of the high priest, “one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, ‘Is that the way You answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?’” (John 18:22-23). This example could possibly illustrate several assertive techniques; including fogging, negative assertion, or even workable compromise. If one is to effectively communicate the Gospel of Jesus, such assertiveness must be consistently taught and applied.

Conclusion

Although Jesus gave up His rights and privileges to become a man, as explained in Philippians 2:3-8, this doesn't extend to the point of being a passive “doormat”. And neither is the follower of Christ expected to be passively used and abused. Often times this misconception forms when people, as Christ's followers, are called to lay down their lives in service to Christ and their fellow man. Consistent with the passive model of behavior, many well-meaning followers of Christ allow themselves to be used and abused by others in order to please. This is not the intent of Jesus' teachings. Neither self-respect, nor respect from others, can be gained through being passive. The chart on page two graphically shows this to be true. Instead; appropriate, assertive behavior yields strong, balanced individuals in Christ.

The misconception of depicting Jesus as passive, rather than assertive, may have serious behavioral and social ramifications. As people are taught to follow and emulate Christ in their daily lives, the difference between the passive and assertive manifests itself significantly.

According to the chart on page two, the passive mode of behavior must consistently yield negative results. These include anxiety, disappointment, self-depreciation, frustration, conflict, and confrontation. This very well may explain why normally quiet, peaceful individuals suddenly blow up and even act violently. The pressure and turmoil of every day life builds up over time within the passive individual, until it can no longer be contained and then he explodes.

On the other hand, the assertive approach to life and everyday affairs provides many positive results. According to the chart on page two assertiveness yields appropriate communication, confidence, self respect, respect from others, fulfillment, and improved relationships. If this information is correct, then apprehending the abundant life must include assertiveness.

Application

For the Christian oriented person in need of assertiveness training, the life examples of Jesus provide an excellent source of material. The Scriptures can and should be used in solution to behavior modification in such cases. One could even propose that the Scriptures were **designed** for such training.

Assertiveness training provides an effective vehicle to a more abundant life. Consistent with this fact, Jesus proclaimed to the people who chose to follow Him: “I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). May we claim the victory, while our Creator receives the Glory.

It is the author’s hope that this paper will be a bridge; helping the psycho-therapist who is unfamiliar with the Scriptures, and the Christian who is not acquainted with these modern constructs of psychology.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ<http://www2.pstcc.cc.tn.us/~dking/assert.htm>, pg. 2.

ⁱⁱIbid., pg. 1

ⁱⁱⁱIbid., see chart.

^{iv}W.E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. IV., pg. 229.

^vJay Wilson, Christ's Church-The Church described in the New Testament, pg. 11-12, 17.

^{vi}List formulated from files and interviews with Vim Tesar, November/December 2001.

^{vii}<http://www.healthlibrary.com/reading/banyanIII/5sec2.htm>

^{viii}Ibid.

^{ix}Ibid.

^x<http://www2.pstcc.cc.tn.us/~dking/assert.htm>, pg. 4.

^{xi}<http://www.therapy-now.com/TherapyNowASSERTADV.htm>, pg. 2.

^{xii}<http://www.healthlibrary.com/reading/banyanIII/5sec2.htm>

^{xiii}<http://www2.pstcc.cc.tn.us/~dking/assert.htm>, pg. 4.

^{xiv}Vim Tesar, interview on "Negative Assertion", January 7, 2002, questions on January 15, 2002.

^{xv}<http://www.healthlibrary.com/reading/banyanIII/5sec2.htm>

^{xvi}Vim Tesar, interview on "distancing", November 21, 2001, December 12, 2001, January 22, 2002.