



Building Bridges: *Excerpts from a Chapel Address*¹

Ted Ward

When I die, I want three words etched into my tombstone: “He built bridges.” Our task as Christians is to build bridges between various sectors of people—moving ideas back and forth among sectors. There are certain satisfactions in bridge building:

1. Contact. There is a sense of fulfillment as we bring people into a sharing, developing contact with sources of knowledge, with ideas, with others, with the experiences of others that can make a difference in their lives.
2. Link. There is satisfaction from establishing humane contact between self and others who are not always in Christ. We accept persons as humans of worth and potential. We embody compassion, a concern that is for all.
3. Traffic. There is the satisfaction of stimulating a flow of traffic of ideas, thoughts, and experiences. All parties involved in this process, because it is a mutual process. Both sides become more significant because they are in relationship.

Good bridge builders share the following characteristics:

1. They have had experiences worth sharing.
2. They are humble enough to find the reality of the terrain and deal with it.
3. They have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Tolerance for ambiguity is how comfortable you are when you can't find a clear answer. The temptation in verbal interactions is to feel we have the answers before we know the questions.
4. They respect the needs of people. Jesus allowed people to present their needs from their perspective and dealt with them beginning from that perspective. Jesus allowed people to probe their way through their own ambiguity. Sometimes he let them “go out into the night” in their ambiguity (e.g., rich young ruler). Jesus had a profound respect for the process of development itself. He had respect for needs and the way people understood their own needs.
5. They walk alongside people, and share life with them. Bridge builders don't stand apart and throw messages into their situation. Note that God wanted a compatriot in Adam—sharing a walk. And Jesus spoke of the *paraclete*, the One who would come alongside.

Ted indicated that he had 5 pieces of “advice” from his cross-cultural experience. He had time to give only two.

1. Accept the reality of others' viewpoints. Cope with other people's perspectives.
2. Appreciate the other's experiences. Paul was a master bridge builder and cross-cultural worker. For example, Acts 17 (Paul in Athens) is an example of the way Paul searched for and found a way into another's experience. 1 Corinthians 9: 19ff is a description of Paul the bridge builder; and Philippians 2 shows Paul encouraging others to be the same sort of bridge builder Jesus was.

¹ Ted Ward. Transcribed excerpts from “Building Bridges.” Chapel address, Grace College of the Bible, February 27, 1981