

Pain in the Neck

"Sergio, you have a pain in the neck because you ARE a pain in the neck."

I didn't actually say this to Sergio, but the idea was tempting. This Ecuadorian gentleman was about 60 at the time. He had found Christ recently and was known in the church as a bit cantankerous. Considering his previous lifestyle, this could be described as a vast improvement.

I had just stepped behind the pulpit that Sunday morning when he approached, walking down the center aisle with a slight limp. Apparently he thought this was the appropriate moment to request prayer for his affliction. After all, we had an open invitation for people to ask for prayer, but I had forgotten to specify exactly when.

Sergio had been a bit feisty with his family that week, and a mature believer had counseled him about his temper. My attitude toward him was not improved by his approach at an inappropriate moment in the service.

But a thought struck me. This was a perfect moment for a little exemplary counseling, brief but effective, to implant a lesson indelibly on his mind. I could help him grasp a possible correlation between his problem and the need to repent.

But several new converts were present, and I feared intimidating them about requesting prayer. So I decided to go through the motions and forget the counseling for the present.

My faith was firm, though. Firmly negative. In view of what he had put his family through that week, it was perfectly clear that God was NOT going to heal him.

Perhaps that is why I felt annoyed when God healed him.

Clearly God is not accountable for anything he does, no matter how incongruous. But I felt that I deserved at least a small bit of explanation. So that afternoon, I spent time in study of the Scriptures, with the prayer, "For what good reason, Lord, did you heal Sergio?" I then prepared to ponder this inscrutable mystery.

It took most of the afternoon, but I came up with two explanations that I suspected the Spirit was whispering to my heart. It seemed the Lord was saying, "First, you are not an adequate judge of who should be healed." Second, it is fortunate that I am not limited to YOUR faith as a means of healing."

"Well," I replied, "I was just asking."

Since then, I pray for everyone without question and leave the motives and outcome to God. It saves a lot of time on situational analysis. Much more efficient.

I wondered if my own attitudes compared favorably with Sergio's that week. The question seemed purely academic, however, and I dismissed it from my mind, thankful that I was rarely a pain in the neck like he.

One thing puzzled me, though. Why had God not healed me of my hay fever? Another mystery to discuss with the Father some Sunday. Eventually such a Sunday came about, but the answers are rather personal, and I prefer not to discuss them right now.

