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A GENERATION IN NEED!

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Tactile Curiosity

Stringing beads on a cord of curiosity.

I am a very multi-sensory person. If I can see, hear, smell, taste and touch something I can often use the physical to explore and reveal deeper meaning and value in the spiritual. And then, if I can find a way to connect this with a thing called curiosity... well... I have a new way to engage others with the gospel. So I have a set of prayer beads that I made for myself a number of years ago. At the end of this string of thirteen beads there is a loop, so I can easily slide them through the handle of my backpack and then through the loop to secure them in a very prominent and "curious" setting.

Allow me to share with you what a typical conversation often looks like on campus when curiosity collides with the purpose and meaning of my prayer beads:

What's that hanging on your backpack?

Oh these?... well these are prayer beads that I made. Each bead represents something special and means a lot to me, in fact one of them is actually connected to you. Would you like to briefly hear the meaning connected to each bead? *(This has now connected them personally and the same curiosity that started the conversation is about to move to the next level. - One word of caution, this must be both true and genuine and cannot be manipulative.)*

That sounds interesting, sure, what is the meaning of each bead?

Well I'm a very tactile person, so I made these beads to help me pray for people and things that I care about. This first bead I'm holding represents my wife Annie. When I pray, I hold onto this bead

and roll it around between my fingers and pray for her. I pray that she would be blessed and that she would grow closer to my Lord and that our marriage would be protected and blessed. And I won't let this bead go until I have really probed my heart and mind on how to pray for her. And then when I'm ready to move on, I slowly move my fingers to the next bead which represents my son Jeremiah. I hold onto this bead and pray that he too would be blessed, that he would be a good student of life, and that his decisions would be godly ones, and that he too would grow closer to my God, and grow in His



love. Then as I work my way down the next three beads my prayers are similar and yet very specific, because they represent my three other sons, Joe, Dave and Sam. And I pray for them with all my heart.

The next three beads are intentionally shaped differently and placed in the center with five beads on each side of them to represent the oneness of God and the triune relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So I spend time moving and kneading these three beads slowly between my fingers in a spirit of praise and gratitude, praying that God would be the center of my life. I patiently thank God for each of the first five beads that represent my family and in this same spirit of

gratitude I move on to the next five beads, which brings me to you...

This bead represents my ministry, the students, staff, faculty, and friends that I have on campus. So this bead represents you... And while holding this bead I've prayed for you to understand more of who you are, and what you are meant to be in Christ. I pray that you would discover an always deepening Christ-centered spirituality and that you would be blessed. This bead is very important to me because you are very important to me. Then when I am finished with this bead I move on to the next bead that represents those who pray and support our ministry, the people, churches and companies that sacrifice financially to enable me to be on campus to share my life and Christ with you. I am always amazed at how the body of Christ supplies the resources needed for a salary and for expenses like buying you a coffee, or lunch, or even the funding for you to go on a retreat. This too is a very important bead to me. Then when I am done here, my fingers move to the next bead that represents my circle of family and friends. I pray here for my sister who is fighting cancer, my friend who is looking for employment, for my other sister, and brothers, for my in-laws and friends as God leads. Then the next bead represents governments, local and global. I pray over world issues, and concerns brought out in the evening news... and then I hold the last bead. This oddly-shaped bead represents me and when I get to this bead I go back and pray for each bead again but this time from the view of how I can be used by God in their lives. I pray that I would be a better husband, dad, minister, support raiser and gratitude expresser, a better brother, and in-law, a better friend and neighbor, a better citizen and global activist, and a better follower of Christ in every way... So

that's the story of the beads. What do you think?

The response I receive is always one of deeper interest, and I often hear things like, "That's cool, I should do something like that." I have even been known to open someone's hand and carefully place my beads in their palm, while slowly closing their fingers on the clump of beads. I tell them, "I think you should keep them." I have plenty of beads at home and I can just make another set. I have never had anyone refuse hearing about the beads. Merging curiosity and the authentic love of Christ is such a powerful combination!

In an email one student wrote, "Thank you for coming and visiting me at the hospital. That was really kind of you and also thank you for letting me borrow your prayer beads."

Another student wrote in a paper for the class I teach, "My most memorable part of the Christianity section was when Professor Shea shared his beads that he carries around every day."

And the impact of the beads even extends beyond the campus! Shortly after teaching a conference on "How to engage our culture," where I shared as an example how my beads can be connected with curiosity, this was posted on their church's Facebook page:

"I wanted to make prayer beads as a draw for people on Community Day and also as a tool to witness--thank you, Joe Shea for that GREAT idea! As I walked into the store very concerned about my lack of crafting and wondering how the Lord was going to help me put my idea into a usable tool, I explained to a friend my idea of a "camo" colored type of prayer bead that we could hand out to military families. We found the perfect parachute cord---camo colored! We found camo colored beads and now comes the BEST part! We were looking for a red bead to add to represent God's love for us. As we perused the bead aisle, we just about tripped over a young woman and another lady. We all laughed that we were looking for similar things and they wanted to know what we were going to do with our beads. We began to explain my con-

nection to the military, our participation in Community day and the prayer beads. The younger of the two was newly married to a man who is currently serving.....hmmmmmm, do you think it's possible God had us there on this day to meet this young woman and her mother? Anyway, she was really curious about the beads and what they stood for. I told her they had no power, they were just a reminder for me as I pray for my son who is currently deployed. I then went on to tell her what each bead stood for.....the first is his mind, I pray daily that God will protect his mind and head from injury and keep it clear and ready. The next is his body, I pray for his body to stay strong and healthy and ready to go. The next is his spirit, I pray that God will keep his spirits up and keep him joyful and at peace. The next is for his spiritual growth, I pray that he will see God's hand every day and that he will take time to read his Bible and spend time with the Lord. The last large bead represents his family. I pray for their safety and for all of the same things above I pray for him. The last two beads are red and gold, the red represents the love God has for him and his family and the gold bead represents how God sees him and his family.....more precious than anything in the world. The girl and her mom listened and liked the idea. I'd love to say that right there on the spot we prayed and led them to the Lord. We did not, but we did plant a seed and I was able to try my prayer beads! And I was able to share with them about the Lord and the Prayer Warriors ministry and I was able to give out contact information! The same girl came and found us after in the store to talk more about the Prayer Warriors and to help us with the bead search! She then told me about another friend of hers whose husband is currently serving overseas. They have a new baby the father hasn't met yet. I promised I would pray for her and the things we had talked about and she promised she would contact me and let me know how she is doing, she will be moving to be with her husband in a few days. Sorry to be so wordy, but this was just too exciting not to share!"

So how can you use curiosity to engage others with the gospel? I lay awake at night thinking about new ideas, then after trying them, I teach them to other students, churches and groups. If you would like to invite me to speak at your church, group, retreat or organization I would

love to hear from you. If you want to share with me your ideas for using curiosity I would love to hear them too!

=== JOE ===

Annie's Corner:

It has been busy for the Shea household this year. Our son David graduated, Sam has two yeas left and then all four will be out of high school! Jeremiah, Joey and now David are involved in the ministry attending our summer college bible study. Dave is also concentrating on his Jamaican trip in July. He is going with the youth group from our church and is excited to see what God has planned for him there. He would like to thank all the people who made it possible for him to go. He had to raise \$1500.00 for the trip and through some of our supporters, supporting churches, friends and family he has raised everything needed to go. When he gets back, he will send an update to those who helped. We ask for your prayers while he is there July 21-28th. We pray for God's protection for the whole group, for their travels and for the good He has planned. We hope you all have a wonderful summer we look forward to all God has planned for us! Thanks again so very much for all the support and prayers!

=== Annie ===

Shea's current support status 76% Additional support needed \$2,778
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