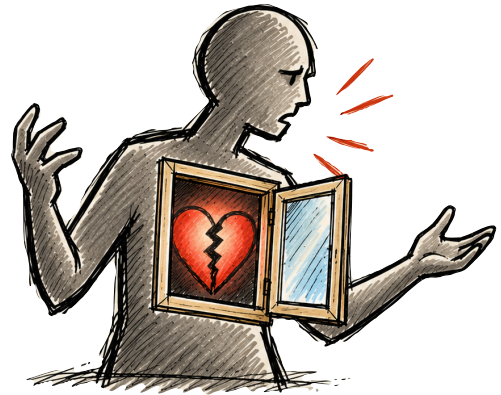


BEHAVIOR IS A WINDOW, NOT A VERDICT

What we see on the surface rarely tells the whole story.

In a previous Field Note, *The Four Languages of the Harvest*, I explored four ways the harvest is constantly communicating with us: *Words, Behavior, Expectations*, and *Pain*. Learning to recognize these languages has helped me listen differently to the people around me and become more curious about what might be happening beneath the surface.

I went deeper into the language of Words in another Field Note called *What Do You Mean By That?* Words like *love, respect, God, sin*, and even *church* can mean very different things to different people. Before assuming we understand what someone is saying, it helps to become curious about what they actually mean.



This Field Note goes deeper into another of those four languages: **Behavior**.

One of the things I have learned from hundreds and hundreds of conversations in the harvest is that people are always communicating, even when they aren't saying a word. Sometimes their behavior is saying what they don't know how to put into words.

The person who seems angry may be hurting.

The person who keeps everyone at a distance may have learned that getting close to people isn't safe.

The person who laughs whenever the conversation becomes serious may be uncomfortable with what they are feeling.

The person who immediately becomes defensive when God comes up may have a story you know nothing about.

The person who seems completely uninterested in Jesus may actually be very interested but terrified of where that curiosity might lead.

We see the behavior, but we don't always see the story beneath it. That's why I have learned to think of behavior as a window, not a verdict.

A verdict tells me I have seen enough to reach a conclusion. A window tells me there may be something more to see. That's an important distinction in the harvest.

It is remarkably easy to see someone's behavior and decide what it means. They're angry. They're resistant. They're selfish. They're cynical. They're difficult. They're not interested.

But those are conclusions.

Holy Curiosity slows us down long enough to ask a different question: *What might be happening beneath the surface?*

That question has changed countless conversations for me.

Instead of reacting to someone's anger, I can become curious about it.

Instead of being offended by someone's language, I can listen to what they might be trying to communicate.

Instead of assuming someone's resistance means they aren't interested in Jesus, I can wonder what experiences have shaped the way they see Him.

This doesn't mean behavior doesn't matter. It doesn't mean everything someone does is healthy or good. Jesus never ignored what people did. But He consistently saw more than what was happening on the surface.

He saw Zacchaeus in a tree and saw more than a corrupt tax collector.

He saw the Samaritan woman at a well and saw more than her complicated relationships.

He saw Peter after his denial and saw more than his failure.

He saw people others had already reached conclusions about and somehow saw something more.

That is the kind of vision I want to develop.

Kingdom reconnaissance isn't simply noticing what people do. It is learning to pay attention to what their behavior might be revealing.

Behavior can be a clue. It can point toward fear, disappointment, loneliness, shame, longing, distrust, hope, or a question someone hasn't found the courage to ask.

When we become curious instead of quickly reaching conclusions, people become people again. Not problems to solve, categories to sort, or projects to complete, but people with stories.

So the next time someone's behavior catches your attention, resist the temptation to immediately decide what it means. Stay at the window a little longer.

Pay attention.

Ask a question.

Listen to the story.

There may be much more happening beneath the surface than you can see.