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The WiredWORD

Following Violent Removal of Legally Seated Passenger, United and Two Other Airlines Change Policies

The Wired Word for the Week of April 23, 2017

In the News

In the wake of an incident aboard a United Express aircraft that some describe as "customer abuse," United Airlines, along with Delta and American Airlines, have announced policy changes intended to ensure that such an incident is not repeated.

The incident occurred at O'Hare International Airport, on the evening of April 9, when police forcibly removed passenger David Dao from United Express Flight 3411, operated by Republic Airline on behalf of United Express, a regional branch of United Airlines. The forced removal came after Dao refused to depart the airplane upon the demand of management, who had ordered him and three other passengers already on board and in seats they had paid for to vacate them to make room for four Republic Airline crew members being shuttled to the flight's destination, Louisville International Airport, to staff another flight there.

United says the four passengers were randomly chosen after no one on board volunteered to give up a seat in exchange for an \$800 travel voucher, a hotel room for the night and a seat on a flight leaving more than 21 hours later.

Three of the bumped deplaned as ordered, but passenger Dao, a physician, explaining that he needed to see patients in his clinic the next morning, declined to leave the aircraft. When he persisted in his refusal, United Airlines staff requested assistance from Chicago Department of Aviation security officers, who then pulled him out of his seat. In the process, his face hit an armrest and his mouth was bloodied. He apparently became unconscious. The officers then then dragged him by his arms on his back down the aisle and off the plane in full view of onlooking passengers, some of whom protested his treatment.

Following Dao's removal, some other passengers, apparently distressed by the incident, voluntarily left the aircraft. Four Republic Airline staff then sat in the vacated seats. Shortly afterward, Dao somehow managed to re-board the aircraft, saying repeatedly, "I have to go home." Eventually he collapsed in a seat and was removed from the aircraft on a stretcher. Dao was taken to a hospital with injuries, according to his lawyer, requiring reconstructive surgery, including a broken nose, loss of two front teeth, sinus damage and "a significant concussion."

Other passengers used cell phones to record the violent removal, and video of the incident soon went viral on social media, resulting in widespread outrage both nationally and abroad. Politicians expressed concern and called for official investigations. President Donald Trump criticized United Airlines, and called the treatment of their customer "horrible." The three officers who removed Dao from his seat have all been placed on administrative leave pending review of their actions.



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United CEO Oscar Munoz issued an initial statement that appeared to justify the removal of the unwilling passenger, referring to it as "re-accomodating the customers." He also sent an email to United staff commending the crew's actions for following established procedures, and referring to Dao as "disruptive" and "belligerent." Two days later, after receiving extensive sharp criticism for his seemingly tone-deaf and unsympathetic reaction to Dao's treatment, Munoz released an additional statement, apologizing and promising that this type of incident would never happen again on United aircraft. He added, "No one should ever be mistreated this way."

In asking passengers to deplane to make room for crew being shuttled elsewhere, the airline claims that the staff was acting legally and according to established procedures. Other legal authorities claim that the legal provision being used by the airline applies only to overbooking by paying passengers, and does not apply to staff relocations. It doesn't appear, however, that anyone envisioned that mandatory surrender of a seat would result in this kind of outcome.

Per the policy changes just announced, United will no longer allow crew members to displace customers already on a plane, Delta is now willing to pay up to nearly \$10,000 to get someone to give up a seat, and American promises it will never bump a passenger once the passenger is seated.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[3 Airlines Change Policies in Wake of United's Passenger Dragging Incident. CBS News](#)
[United Airlines Passenger Suffered Broken Nose, Concussion. CBS News](#)
[United's Apologies: A Timeline. New York Times](#)
[What Would It Take for Customers to Boycott United? The Atlantic](#)

The Big Questions

1. In corporate or government policies -- any policy set for a bureaucracy -- can the "Golden Rule" apply or do general policies have to be so broad that the Golden Rule cannot be considered? Explain your answer. Comment also on the cynical substitute for the Golden Rule that "They who have the gold make the rules."
2. When has someone's sincere apology to you restored a relationship? When has your sincere apology to someone restored a relationship?
3. When has a mistake on your part caused unintended harm to someone else? How did you respond? How do you wish you had responded?
4. Is the apology and policy change a sufficient response to the airlines incident? Why or why not?
5. What do you think Jesus would say about this incident? Why? What do you think he would say about your actions that unintendedly harmed others? Why?



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Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Acts 16:37-39

But Paul replied, "They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves." The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. (For context, read 16:16-39.)

This may be the biblical passage that most closely matches the United Airlines situation. Paul and Silas had been publicly beaten and imprisoned overnight on trumped-up charges. In the morning, the magistrates decided to quietly release them, but Paul would have none of that. He answered as quoted above, and the magistrates, facing a kind of PR nightmare for mistreating Roman citizens (as Paul and Silas were), came personally and delivered a direct apology.

We have no way of knowing whether the apology was sincere or merely given to save themselves a reprimand from Rome, but their words and actions were now right.

Questions: Does it matter what the motive for an apology is as long as the words and actions are right? Why or why not?

Proverbs 22:1

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. (No context necessary.)

This verse is instructive in that it affirms the great value of a good reputation -- which applies whether we're talking about our personal standing or that of a corporation. The proverb implies that when one's reputation is sullied, something of worth has been taken from that entity.

Questions: What other losses often follow the loss of a good reputation? Should this be motivation for corrective measures? Why or why not?

Joshua 20:2-3

[God said,]"Say to the Israelites, 'Appoint the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, so that anyone who kills a person without intent or by mistake may flee there; they shall be for you a refuge from the avenger of blood.'" (For context, read 20:1-6.)

"Cities of refuge" were sanctuary communities established in ancient Israel to which a person who accidentally killed someone could flee to be protected from revenge killing by the slain person's relatives. The intent was clearly to say that there was no intent to slay the other person. Note that the verses above even use the term "by mistake."

Most people assume United Airlines' policy of bumping seated passengers was a business decision having no intent to physically harm customers, as happened to Dao. So in that sense, perhaps what happened to Dao can be considered a mistake of the policy, though many would say there was too little common sense used in the application of the policy this time.



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Questions: When have you had to make a personal policy change because of negative unintended outcomes from your practices toward others? How was the new policy an improvement?

1 Samuel 26:21

Then Saul said, "I have done wrong; come back, my son David, for I will never harm you again, because my life was precious in your sight today; I have been a fool, and have made a great mistake." (For context, read 26:6-25.)

During the period when King Saul, jealous of David because of the latter's popularity, was pursuing David to kill him, David had an opportunity to slay Saul instead, but refused to do so. When Saul learned of this, he made the statement above to David.

Saul's words were right, and perhaps even his intent at that moment, but he soon resumed his attempt to kill David.

Questions: When have you not followed through on what you promised in an apology? What should you do about that now? Jesus tells us to forgive 77 times, but generally speaking, how many times will you let a friend, relative or business wrong you before you say enough is enough?

Matthew 7:12

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (No context needed.)

This is what has been called the "Golden Rule." Its application to today's news story is probably obvious, but note that Jesus added the words "for this is the law and the prophets." The law and the prophets was another name for the Scriptures that were available in Jesus' day -- essentially the Old Testament. So Jesus was saying that treating others as you would like to be treated is the essence of the Old Testament laws. Thus the Golden Rule is not merely a nice suggestion; it is the very heart of scriptural morality.

Questions: Regarding the airline incident, how might the Golden Rule have been applied by the airline staff? by the officers? by other passengers? by Dr. Dao? What constraints might have kept each of these parties from applying Golden Rule-type actions?

When has consideration of the Golden Rule caused you to change the way you deal with children? with fellow adults? with customers? your practices as a customer (such as tipping)?

For Further Discussion

1. Discuss together what elements make for a good apology.
2. Apologies can make some degree of restitution and can open the way for reconciliation. But they cannot always undo all harm and fully restore trust. What does it take to restore that?
3. Do you or have you worked for an airline or other business that provided service to thousands of customers each day? Are there horror stories you can share about the behavior of customers?
4. Have you ever felt you were mistreated during air travel? Did you feel the same after some reflection?



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5. TWW team member Frank Ramirez wonders if a better strategy for the airline in this situation would have been to simply say the flight wasn't leaving until there were four volunteers and up the ante for the payout. Might some version of that help in situations of conflict you encounter, and if so, how?

6. Some observers suggest that the apology by the airline CEO was "too little, too late." Is it ever too late to apologize, and if so, why? Is it ever too late to make a course correction in your life, and if so, why?

Responding to the News

Consider whether and to whom you might need to make an apology and toward whom you might need to make personal policy changes. Ask God to help you see and follow through.

Prayer

O God, help us to be generous in our judgments and willing to learn the facts before placing blame based on appearances alone. Move us to be quick to apologize and make restitution when we have hurt someone. Let the example of Jesus, O Lord, always guide our behavior toward others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Other News This Week

New Church Draws Interest in the Windy City

Editor's Note: TWW selected this story for the express purpose of considering how churches can convey the timeless gospel in changing times by adapting methodology. This is not meant as an endorsement of this group's understanding of Christianity.

In the News

It's not every day that a new church start-up is highlighted on a nationally televised broadcast, especially before it has even held its first official service. But that's exactly what happened when the Today Show featured Gilead Church Chicago in an Easter week segment.

Craig Melvin asked co-founders Rebecca Anderson, who was ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Vince Amlin, a UCC (United Church of Christ) minister, about their vision for East Rogers Park "congregation in formation" on the north side of the city.

"We believe God welcomes all -- and we have the stories of Jesus hanging out with all the 'wrong' folks to prove it -- and so we do too," said Anderson. That's why they held a preliminary get-acquainted meeting in a bar, hitting their attendance goal of 120 (in January!) right off the bat. A non-religious setting removes the barrier that traditional Christian architecture can pose for some people, Anderson continued, "people who were wounded by Christianity."

The Gilead Church Chicago website states: "We want to be church for and with people who've been turned out, turned off or just left cold by church." Their goal is to create a "creative community of Christian faith" where all are welcome.



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Anderson's background in farming, storytelling and comedy and Amlin's interest in creating intentional Christian community led to a plan to build a spiritual community in which participants tell true stories about their own experiences; grow, eat and share good food; and worship together. In this way, they say they seek to "do justice ... [and] bring joy and fun back to faith."

The stories provide a kind of catharsis so that one person's confession of imperfection can be owned by listeners as their own confession. When one of the ministers acknowledges that "we all have stories like that," the speaker and listeners can then hear the words of assurance that God offers pardon to all. Then as participants pass the peace, they receive and extend that pardon and mercy to one another, saying, in effect, "we heard your story and we still like you."

According to the church website, "we believe that ... every story is a God story. God is present in our ordinary, everyday lives ... Telling our stories helps us see the holiness we may have missed ... the Spirit's fingerprints on our days ... It lets us claim our daily grind as a spiritual journey. It changes the way we live, and frequently, it saves our lives."

Sharing food together at Gilead has almost a sacramental aspect, as the church website states: "There are few things more sacred than growing, cooking, and sharing food with one another. ... Food is worship and service when we give away the produce we've grown ... And it's relationship when we deliver a casserole to the new parents trying to stay afloat. Food is even evangelism, when you leave church telling friends, 'You have to taste the pie my minister baked!' We believe eating is a spiritual practice."

Worshiping together "beautifully" involves participants bringing "songs, and poems, and art, and jokes that make you feel like you're standing on holy ground. Things you find and things you make." The community then works to "stitch them together" into a kind of spiritual quilt that becomes the church, "and watch God show up."

The name of the church -- Gilead -- provides insight into how the co-founders understand its purpose, as the church website indicates: "It's a Spiritual about making the wounded whole [a reference to the song 'There Is a Balm in Gilead.'] It's a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about seeing the sacred in the ordinary, [referring to a novel called Gilead, written by Marilynne Robinson, which won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.] It's a pharmaceutical company [Gilead Sciences, Inc.] that makes lifesaving medication for those living with HIV. In the Bible, it's a place where healing happens, where medicine grows on trees [Jeremiah 8:22]. And the place where a man named Jacob wrestles with God and gets blessed. [Amlin explains that Gilead was a region east of the Jordan River that contained many towns including Peniel/Penuel; the Jabbok River mentioned in Genesis 32:22 in the angel-wrestling story ran through Gilead, dividing it in half. See Genesis 32:22-31.]"



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The church has set May 7 for its official launch date.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Today Visits the Church That Holds Its Services in a Pub. NBC Today Show](#)

[Gilead Church Chicago. Gileadchurch.org](#)

[Chicago New Church Start Attracts National Attention Before First Worship Service. United Church of Christ](#)

[The Gospel Blimp -- Or, A Dummies Guide to Overcomplicating Evangelism. Anchored in Christ](#)

The Big Questions

1. "It could be a really nice supper club. What makes it a church?" asked Today reporter Craig Melvin. How would you answer that question about your own faith community? What makes a church more than a really nice supper club?
2. How do you define the mission of the church? What is the essence of Christ's message?
3. Who is responsible for carrying out the church's mission, and how specifically should that mission be advanced?
4. Should we change our ministry model or methods to communicate the timeless message of the Gospel to new groups of people more effectively? Why or why not? If so, what changes might be warranted in your own church and community?
5. What different ministries has your church attempted? What have you learned from trying different models of ministry?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Isaiah 43:18-19

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;

now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness

and rivers in the desert. (For context, read 43:1-7 and 14-19.)

God promises to bring his people back from exile, restoring their hope after years of separation from their land. When he says, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old," he is referring to the losses and sorrows of their time of discipline.

But in verses 16-17, he reminds them of the way he delivered them from Pharaoh's army when they escaped from slavery in Egypt through the path God made through the mighty waters of the sea. That happened in the past, but the prophet uses the present tense, "Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea." In other words, God is still the same today. He still acts to deliver his people.



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Questions: Do you feel like your church is in a place of exile and incompleteness, or have you reached a kind of promised land, or are you somewhere in between? What new thing do you think God is about to do in your midst? What makes it hard to perceive that new thing? How have you seen God act to give your congregation hope in the past? What can you learn from that part of your church history that will help you believe God's promises to help you now and to give you a future and a hope?

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (For context, read 28:16-20.)

After Jesus' resurrection, before he ascended into heaven, he gave his disciples instructions as to the nature of their mission. Those of us who are his disciples today have inherited that same mission. The main imperative in this passage is the command to make disciples. The other verbs (go -"as you are going," "wherever you go", baptizing, and teaching) help us understand how we are to accomplish that objective.

Questions: What is a disciple? How did Jesus make these men into disciples? What can we learn from him about the process of disciple-making? What does Jesus' authority have to do with our mission? (What is the "therefore" there for?) Why does Jesus urge his disciples to remember his constant and unfailing presence with them as they seek to carry out their commission? What does the awareness of Jesus' authority and presence mean to you as you seek to obey his command?

Mark 2:16-17

When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (For context, read 2:13-17.)

Luke 14:12-13

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." (For context, read 14:1-14.)

We offer two examples of Jesus sharing a meal with people. In the Mark passage, he is eating at the home of Levi, tax collector-turned-disciple, who has invited "the wrong kind of people" to dinner. But Jesus doesn't hesitate to sit at table with them.

In the Luke passage, a leader of the Pharisees has invited Jesus to dinner. Jesus uses the occasion to warn against hypocrisy, pride and self-seeking, urging his host and others present to show love, consideration and hospitality to those who have no way to reciprocate.

Questions: How does your church use food in its ministry? Is your ministry involving food intentional or accidental? Who is invited to functions involving food at your church? Would



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you say most of those present are "your friends, family, or rich neighbors," or "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind"? Who are the modern-day equivalent of "tax collectors and sinners" in your community? Are they present at your table? Why or why not?

What turns a meal into something more than a chance to indulge yourself and satisfy your appetite, to transform a meal into a sacred event or holy encounter? What would motivate you to include the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, tax collectors and sinners when you share a meal together? What happens when you sit together at table that might not happen otherwise?

John 21:4-6

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. (For context, read 21:1-6.)

In one of Jesus' resurrection appearances, Jesus met seven of his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. The disciples had gone fishing at night, but caught nothing. Yet when they obeyed Jesus, they had completely different results.

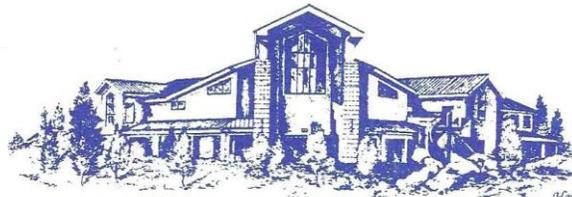
Questions: What did Jesus tell the disciples to do that was the same as what they had done before? What did he command them to do that was different? What do you think Jesus wants us to keep doing when we are discouraged about the lack of growth in the church, and what do you think he wants us to do differently?

Acts 2:42, 44-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. ... (For context, read 2:41-47.)

After Peter's inaugural sermon on the Day of Pentecost, about 3,000 people were baptized and added to the church. The new believers were incorporated into the church by learning what the apostles taught, by praying together, by sharing meals, including the Lord's Supper, by sharing resources with one another according to each person's needs, and by praising God.

Questions: How does the description of the activities of the early church mentioned here compare with what Gilead seems to be attempting in Chicago? What activities of the early church as described in this passage does your church still practice? How have those activities been adapted, if at all? If your church has de-emphasized or discontinued any of these activities, should you attempt to revitalize them? Why or why not?



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For Further Discussion

1. In the satirical book turned into a movie, *The Gospel Blimp*, by Joseph T. Bayly, a group of Christians become convinced that they can accomplish the task of evangelizing their community by buying a blimp from which to broadcast Bible verses over a loudspeaker and drop gospel tracts on their neighbors (see link above). How might this parable apply (or not apply) to Gilead? To your own church's attempts to be faithful to your mission?
2. How can you fight the creeping suspicion that nothing really works to grow the church and that no matter what you try, you are facing a losing battle in a culture that seems bent on racing away from the church? What would motivate you to keep trying different methods to proclaim the gospel of salvation through Christ?
3. What personal story would you share with your church family if you knew you would find acceptance and not condemnation, welcome and not rejection, mercy and not judgment?
4. What in your opinion makes worship truly beautiful?
5. Describe a moment in worship that felt truly sacred, not only to you, but to the entire community of faith. What made that experience holy?

Responding to the News

Consider who you might invite to the next meal event at your church, home, or restaurant, that you normally never would think of inviting.

Prayer

Lord, just as you have invited us to partake of your gracious table of mercy, give us eyes to see those who have been left out of the celebration, feet to run and mouths to issue your invitation, that they may find welcome, acceptance, nourishment and fellowship in your presence and in the company of your people as well. For your glory we pray. Amen.

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