

SESSION 8



MUD

Introduction

As human beings we can't help but respond when someone does something kind for us. Someone holds a door open, or gives way in traffic when they don't have to: We feel good. We feel just a little better about the world. A friend calls to say you have been on their mind, they have been praying for you and wondering if you need any help with anything. It's a lovely thing. We warm to their attention. Maybe there have been times when someone has paid a bill or offered accommodation. Such random acts of kindness are a real blessing and thankfully many Christians are very good at this kind of thing. There are many good, caring people in the world but when, as followers of Christ, we engage in such activities and gestures they can also act as great witness to the kind of people we are and the compassion we have for others, *because of our Christian faith*. In turn, a person might be drawn into exploring what we believe.

Based on our good witness there may be many others who are drawn closer to God. But the question inevitably has to be asked: 'When we engage in acts of kindness toward others, is this evangelism?'

Focus

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17).

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.
Job 1:21

God, in love and mercy, blesses us greatly and it's a wonderful thing when we give to others in return. Yet whilst we are serving the community in our soup kitchen we only need look down the road and see that many non-Christians are engaged in other similarly 'good' activities.

Whether they believe it or not we know that every human being is created with something of the image of God in them (Genesis 1:26). It's therefore natural then that people of other faiths or of no faith at all, are equally zealous in their endeavours to help and appease the suffering of others.

Remember again the correct definition of evangelism: 'The act of proclaiming or spreading the Gospel.' How does this fit with our good deeds and acts of kindness? The answer is surely that it can, sometimes does and really should, but when there is no proclamation of the Gospel, any act of kindness is just that, and that alone. It is *not* evangelism. The book of James handles this topic extremely well. It talks a lot about faith and works.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2: 14–17

Good works are vital to the Christian life. However, the danger comes when we call our good works evangelism. Once again the devil is smiling at the thought that Christians believe good works are evangelism. When Christians consider their good deeds to be evangelism the Gospel is left un-proclaimed. Meanwhile Christians believe themselves to be 'doing evangelism' when they are caring for others so they don't even consider or recognise the need to go further and share the Gospel.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

James 1:17

God has given us so much. The Bible is His love story for us and we are the continuation of that story in the here and now. Our compassion for others is rooted in our very being which is made in His image. We have an abundance of wealth, both physical and spiritual. So when we share our physical wealth we must also consider the higher value of sharing our spiritual wealth. What greater gift can we give another than an introduction to their salvation?

Discussion

1. Take time to make note of the many blessings in your life and how you might share more with others.
2. What are the consequences of calling good works evangelism?
3. In what practical ways could you combine good works and the spreading of the Gospel? E.g. Handing out Gospel tracts with free drinks at a community fete.
4. Read the book of James 2:14-26 making special note of the verses that talk about the importance of faith and works.

Bible Parallel

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6–15, Matthew 5:16 and Hebrews 13:16

These portions of Scripture talk about doing good in order to bring about a response of thanksgiving to God by those who received the blessings through our good works.

We read in Hebrews that God is well pleased with our sacrifices when we 'do good' and share what we have with those in need. But we must bear in mind the difference between bread and seed mentioned in 2 Corinthians 9:10. Bread is for consumption. Seed is for sowing. And when seeds are sown in obedience to the Good News, it will bring forth a harvest for the kingdom. In other words, our acts of good works to the needy and the poor should not be focused purely on their physical needs but also their greater spiritual need of a Saviour.

So while we look for opportunities to give alms to help the poor and needy, are we also performing our priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel in season and out, to heal the broken hearted, bring sight to the blind and set free those who are oppressed?

Further discussion and personal contemplation

We must differentiate what Scripture deems as our 'good works' from the other charitable efforts of non-believers. Discuss how our good works, offered in the name of God, bring opportunities for sharing the Gospel?