

3. Christians Grow by Visiting

Step 1 of these lessons on Christian growth presented the case for attending the services of the church and admonishing one another to do likewise. Step 2 showed that for Christian growth to happen, each one of us must edify and build up the other. That lesson showed how the acts of worship build up individual Christians and the church.

Now this 3rd lesson shows how visiting fosters Christian growth. Multiple good happens when Christians visit. Common sense says that the visitor is helping the one visited, but just the opposite occurs also as the visitor benefits hugely. Certainly, the sick receive needed care; widows and orphans cheer up; and strangers find a friend. However, the overwhelming good is to the visitor and not to the visited. This contrary to what is ordinarily expected creates an exponential growth for both the visited and the visitors. For the visitors, this comes from empathy—a word that means “understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another” (Webster’s Online Dictionary). Concerning visiting, Jesus defined the path of Christian growth and salvation for visitors, providing the case for the double good of visiting.

Salvation Depends on Double Good of Visiting

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus established the connection between visiting and salvation. In Matt 25:34-40, Jesus described those who receive the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven as those who visit with strangers, the sick, and those in prison:

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

As one might expect, the righteous disciples were somewhat bewildered for they had not visited the Lord in any of these circumstances; and so they responded:

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Then the Lord declared the great truth of double good:

40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Visiting others is visiting the Lord. Our salvation depends on it.

In Matt 25:41-46, the Lord pronounced the curse of eternal fire on those who do not visit and take care of those in need:

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

Those on the left, the condemned, were just as mystified as the righteous were and responded:

44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

To which the Lord replied:

45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The good of visiting to feed the hungry, to cloth the naked, and to visit the sick and imprisoned comes with the territory of Christian living. The responsibility never goes away, yet with it comes the greatest Christian growth and service to the Lord and Saviour.

As We Have the Opportunity, Let Us Seek the Double Good

As the days of our Christian life come and go, we may lose the urgency to visit those in need, made a clear necessity in the Lord's parable. Paul warned us to not grow weary in doing good in Gal 6:9-10:

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Each and every opportunity to do good to all people makes the obligation to grow through visiting a daily event in our lives. The power to visit and give becomes the power to grow as Christians.

The Hebrew writer expressed this need in regards to brothers, strangers, and prisoners, in Heb 13:1-3:

13 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

In the close of this passage, the writer included empathy as a condition for us all: "As if you yourselves were suffering," he said.

James 1:27 includes this requirement of empathy as we visit the orphans and widows:

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

The New King James Version translated the Greek word for *look after* as *visit* in James 1:27:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

The visitor is to feel the distress of widows and orphans and to take care of their needs. Christian growth requires the development that comes from visiting where we empathize with those in need and do something to relieve that need.

The Christian's Reward Comes from Visiting and Taking Care of the Needy

Faith depends on the good works that come from visiting. Christians cannot see human need and look the other way. James made the connection in James 2:14-17:

14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 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? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Christ spoke with all authority when he said in Matt 25:34:

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Study Questions Taken from the Scriptures

Empathy is a word that means "understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another" (Webster's Online Dictionary).

1. Matt 25:34-40: What will the Lord say to those on the right? What had they done?
2. Matt 25:37: When had they done it?
3. Matt 25:40: What did the King say?
4. Matt 25:41-46: What did the King say to those on the left?
5. Matt 25:44 How did they answer?
6. Matt 25:45: How did the Lord reply?
7. Matt 25:46: Where will those on the left go? Where will the righteous go?
8. Gal 6:9-10: What will happen at the proper time? When are we to do good? To whom?
9. Heb 13:1-3: How are we to act toward strangers? How does this passage address empathy?
10. James 1:27: What is pure and faultless religion?
11. James 2:14-17: When is faith dead?
12. Matt 25:34: What is the Christian's inheritance?