

Caring For The Lost
December 6, 2015

In the November issue of Readers Digest this year was an article giving people's experiences of someone being kind to them. One woman was \$12 short of enough to buy her groceries. So a man behind her paid it. Another person was lost on the highway. She called road service for help and they tried calling the police to help her, but the call would not go through. So the operator told the driver that she wasn't far away and was getting off work. About ten minutes later she showed up and the driver followed her, not only to the right road, but the right exit. These and other stories make up the article of people doing acts of kindness for others.

Kindness is supposed to be one characteristic of Christians. It is supposed to be one of our characteristics because it was a characteristic of Jesus. Jesus was always being kind to people in need. He was known for such deeds. He healed people. On two occasions He fed a crowd of people. These were miracles that you and I cannot do, but He did not have to do such miracles. Jesus could have done other kinds of miracles, miracles other than healing and feeding people. The miracle Jesus did the most was to serve the needs of people. Jesus was kind to others.

As followers of Jesus Christ, kindness should be a characteristic of Christians and churches. One church recently encouraged families to decide together on a kindness project. Some of the projects families came up with included making ornaments to give to firemen, picking out food at the grocery store to give to a needy family, picking up trash in the neighborhood, painting over graffiti in the neighborhood, providing dessert for their favorite mechanics, and writing letters to children in hospitals.

These are the kinds of things churches should be known for. Too many churches are known for things they oppose. Jesus' followers should be known for helping others. This is part of missions. **Missions is about taking the good news of the kingdom of God to all people in the world.**

Jesus was all about missions. Missions creates interest in the good news of the kingdom of God. When Jesus helped others, it created interest in His message. His message was the arrival of the kingdom of God. We too have the good news about the kingdom of God to share. We too do acts of kindness to win a hearing for our message. **Emmanuel Baptist Church is a missions church in many ways.**

We are a missions-founded church. Our church was started by the missions efforts of others. In 1978 there were plans on the books for several huge housing developments to be built in western Anne Arundel County, including Piney Orchard, Seven Oaks, and Russet. Our part of the county was going to explode with new housing. Several Baptist leaders realized the need for more churches to serve the growing population and Emmanuel Baptist Church was started. A core group of people began meeting in April of 1979. Missions started this church. We are a missions-founded church.

We are a missions-focused church. Together, we engage in different kinds of kindness service to others. We help people keep their heat on, prevent homelessness, feed those without enough to eat, clothe those who need clothes, provide school supplies, and more. All of these are acts of kindness to those in need. In all of these we hope to win opportunities to share Jesus with those we are helping.

We are a missions-partnered church. We are a Southern Baptist Church. Southern Baptists are all about missions. The Southern Baptist Convention exists for the purpose of missions. The Southern Baptist Convention is made up of independent churches pooling money together for the training and sending out of missionaries to the four corners of the earth. Aside from that purpose, the Southern Baptist Convention would not exist. There would be no Southern Baptists aside from the purpose of doing missions together. Every Southern Baptist church is fully independent of any outside control. The Southern Baptist Convention has no authority over our church, or any Southern Baptist church. Our church autonomously chooses to partner with other Baptist churches for the purpose of missions. That is why, and how, we are a Southern Baptist Church.

We are a missions-founded church. We are a missions-focused church. We are a missions-partnered church. And **We are a missions-giving church.** We are not just focused on doing missions here in our church context. We give financially to our missions partnerships.

We have always given at least 10% of undesignated monies to missions through the Cooperative Program.

In addition we sponsor **three special missions offerings** each year, one for missions work in Maryland/Delaware, one offering for missions work in North America, and the current one, during December, for missions work in the rest of the world. We are also part of a local partnership of churches, the Arundel Baptist Network, for missions work in the greater Anne Arundel county area. We are a missions-giving church.

So in many ways we are a missions church. We must continually stress missions. That is one purpose of the church. What can harm our missions-focus is emphasizing one purpose over another. We must maintain a balance between missions to make followers of Jesus and the maturing of those who are already followers of Jesus. Or to put it in other words, we need to emphasize both evangelism and discipleship. Churches become ineffective followers of Jesus when they stress one over the other.

Discipleship focuses on the spiritual needs of us inside the church. Missions focuses on those outside of the church. To remain effective as a missions-church we need to be people who have missions-hearts.

This morning we see an example of such a heart in the book of Romans. We see a man who identifies greatly with the need of his neighbors. The man Paul is writing this letter to the Christians in Rome. At one point in the letter, you see his missions-heart.

Romans 9:2-4 (NIV) I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

Paul has an intense desire to see his fellow Jews saved from their sins in Jesus as he himself has been. Some of them were ready to hear and believe this good news. Yet many of them were indifferent to it. Paul had experienced their indifference repeatedly as he went from city to city preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. Some, angered by his preaching of Jesus, tried to kill him.

These are the people he cares so much about. He did not care less for the non-Jews, but there was a special place in his heart for his own ethnic group. He could almost hope that God would send him to hell in their place.

A young woman I knew years ago, when she was in college, cared enough about her friends, that she would grab a cigarette from their mouths and begin smoking it herself, telling them she would rather die of cancer than see that happen to them. She was trying to communicate her love for them.

Paul says he almost wishes he were going to hell in their place. Have you ever prayed such a thing for a loved one? I am sure some of you have. Your child or spouse was ill and you prayed, "God, let me be sick instead of him. Make her well and me sick in her place." You know that kind of love. Have you ever felt that for lost people?

Many of you have a family heart, loving those in your family. Some of you have a church heart, loving those in your church. Some of you have a Southern Baptist Heart. How many of us can say we have a missions-heart, really feeling Jesus' love for lost people?

Paul has a missions-heart towards people he does not know personally. He could wish that he was sent to hell in their place. He knows God will not do that, but he has that intense desire for their salvation. He is ready to do whatever God calls him to do to be a part of their coming to Jesus. Indeed, we can read that he did everything but die for the purpose of missions.

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 (NIV) Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

His missions-heart was proven in the things he suffered for Jesus. Jesus does not put all of us in such situations of suffering, but He does expect us to adopt His missions-heart for others. Jesus had a missions-heart. He is seeking to develop in us a missions-heart also. As a Jesus follower, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is leading you to care about people. Kindness is a characteristic of Jesus. A missions-heart is a characteristic of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is working to grow the heart of Jesus in every Christian.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The Holy Spirit is working to produce in us all of these characteristics of Jesus and more. Therefore, these characteristics are markers that we can use to measure our Christian maturity. You should see these growing in you. Others should see these growing in you. I have often shared stories of just such change in some of our members. They saw Jesus' character in others or others saw Jesus' character in them. And notice of that change led to opportunities to tell someone about Jesus.

Here are nine characteristics to mark your growth as a Christian. I would add another today, a missions-heart. Use these to personally evaluate your spiritual growth in Jesus. You might let others evaluate you too.

To what degree have I become more loving this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become more joyful person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become more peaceful person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become a more patient person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become a kinder person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become a more moral (doing the right thing) person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become a more faithful (keeping your word) person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become a more gentle person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become a more self-controlled/disciplined person this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

To what degree have I become more concerned about the need of lost people for Jesus this year?

none a tiny bit a moderate bit a lot

Do you care about lost people coming to Jesus? Is that care growing in you? The Holy Spirit is leading you to do sacrificial acts of kindness for the purpose of missions. Have you noticed that? Are you listening to Him?

We have had people be saved in our church and then want to be part of some program to help others find Jesus. That is evidence of a missions-heart. Is there such evidence in you?

If you don't care about lost people yet, that is a sign that you are either very young in Jesus, or resisting the work of the Holy Spirit in you. If you were growing as a Jesus follower, you would be becoming more like Him. A long-time Christian who does not have a missions-heart means you are not growing to become like Him. You must be resisting what the Holy Spirit is trying to

do in you. You can either resist the Holy Spirit or yield to the Holy Spirit. Even long-time Christians can resist the Holy Spirit. Maybe you are doing that.

We are approaching the time of year for self-examination. The questions I've given you this morning can be part of that for you this year. I'm not talking about making resolutions.

Resolutions are where you work to improve yourself. Resolutions are about you trying to make a better you.

People make such resolutions such as the following:

"I'm going to be more patient with others."

"I'm going to exercise everyday."

"I'm going to start eating healthier."

Notice that each thought is about fixing oneself. However, the Christian truth is that you cannot make yourself more like Jesus. You cannot make yourself have a missions-heart. You cannot make yourself care about lost people. God can produce a missions-heart in you, but you cannot. **Getting a missions heart is the supernatural, spiritual work of the Holy Spirit. It takes that kind of power to produce that kind of change in us.**

What we can and must do, is decide we want to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Following Jesus is a daily decision. Every day you get up and must decide who you are going to serve that day. Will you follow Jesus or someone else? Will you serve Jesus today, or sin inside of you? Paul also writes of his own struggle with sin in his letter. Paul struggled with sin just like we do.

Tomorrow when you wake up you can decide you want to follow Jesus tomorrow. It isn't too late for today either. You can decide right now if you will follow Jesus the rest of this day. Sin in you is saying, "No, it's Sunday. Take a day off. Take a day for yourself. You deserve it. You need a break. You are too busy other days to live for yourself. Do it today. You went to church in the morning. Live for yourself in the afternoon and evening."

That is what sin in you is saying. Don't listen to that voice. Instead, choose right now to follow Jesus, to serve Jesus, to live this day with Jesus. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you, to change you, to give you the heart of Jesus.

Christianity is a supernatural religion. It is not a religion based on what you can earn for yourself. There is nothing you can do to earn a place in God's presence. But He invites you into His presence through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. If you will trust in Jesus today for the forgiveness of your sins, God will forgive you, save you, put His Spirit in you, and begin the work of transforming your heart. If that is your desire this morning, then there is a sample prayer to help you pray your heart to Jesus today.