

Why We Do What We Do

In recent years, our congregation has experienced a renewed desire to reach out in many different ways to the community around us. As their pastor, I say this, not boasting, but in grateful humility. It is indeed a great privilege to try to serve a body of believers who have developed this kind of servant's heart. These efforts range from various means of communicating God's word, to sharing prayer requests and church information, to ministering to the poor and needy. More than once over the last couple of years, I've been asked about some of these things. Typically, the questions would be along the lines, "why is your church doing all those things" or, "what kind of results have you seen". These are actually pretty good questions to consider, but perhaps from a different standpoint than the manner in which the questions have been asked. The purpose of this short article is to consider those questions but first, allow me to describe some of these things that I'm talking about.

Some of the efforts our church supports have been ongoing for several years, like our monthly newsletter and our weekly radio program. These have been supported in the past by former pastors as well as other elders. Our weekly article in the local newspaper began more recently but has been running for almost ten years now. Even more recently, we created a church website and a Facebook page, both of which have been very beneficial additions to our means of communicating with the world around us. Some of the activities we've been involved in are of a physical and material nature. A few years ago, we began keeping a pantry at the church. We keep it stocked with canned goods and other non-perishable items, as well as toiletries and baby items, to assist those in need when the opportunity arises. It is actually quite surprising how much assistance is provided through this seemingly small effort. For many years, the ladies of the church have provided fruit baskets to the elderly around Christmas. This past Thanksgiving was the second year in a row that the church delivered meals to the elderly and needy in the community. Over the last several years, our efforts to help provide Christmas gifts to needy families, mainly through the local schools, have increased dramatically. In addition, we have provided some assistance to the local elementary and primary schools for basic school supplies for some of the needy families in the community. And of course, many in the congregation do things like this individually on an ongoing basis. Basically, whatever opportunities we have as individuals to share the gospel by word or to demonstrate the gospel by deed, our church looks for those same opportunities to minister collectively as a body.

So, why are we doing these things? And what kind of results have we seen? As I said, these are good questions to consider. One identifies motivation and the other attempts to identify the value of the effort we make. With any effort we're involved in, we want to see positive results, right? After all, whether or not we continue the effort largely depends on the results, right? Or at least, that is normally our thinking. But here is the key... if the motivation for the things we do in our service to the Lord is not correct, then we will *never* have the correct view of the results. In fact, we will be looking for the wrong *kind* of result. And if we *think* we see the result we're looking for, we'll never be satisfied with that erroneously perceived result. I have had more than one well-meaning elder from sister churches say to me something like this: "I've tried all of those things down through the years and none of them have ever brought one person into the church." That kind of highlights the problem, doesn't it? In reaching out to the world around us by whatever means or work or effort or activity... is our motivation simply to get new church members? Of course not! Wrong motivations are almost always associated with failed results. And in this case, if our motivation is simply to try to bring people into the church, its not surprising that we would be dissatisfied with the results. Eventually, because we didn't achieve what we set out to achieve, we will cease from continuing the effort altogether. We will decide, since it didn't appear that God was in the matter, that the effort wasn't something we should have been doing in the first place. Unfortunately, someone might observe the activities of others and erroneously assume they know their motivation. We might even try to impose our thinking on others... and it all started with having the wrong motivation. Let's consider this question of motivation.

Why do we do the things we do with respect to communicating the gospel? I think the best answer to this question is another question... What does the gospel mean to you? When I seriously meditate on the answer to that question, I can only come to one conclusion: the effort we make to share the gospel with others is a direct reflection of what the gospel means to us. What have you received through the message of the gospel? Comfort, peace, joy, deliverance... What does God's word do for you? Strengthens, encourages, consoles, instructs... How would you get along if it was taken away from you? How much more complete is your life because of the gospel and the word of God? Now, take all the answers to these questions and consider: aren't there many more people out there who would be blessed in the same way you have been through the gospel message? But they have not enjoyed those blessings because they have not had the privilege of hearing the glorious gospel of the grace of God. Or they have not been on the receiving end of someone demonstrating the gospel through their benevolent manner of life. Consider these words as we think about the importance of communicating God's word: "Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27); "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life..." (Philippians 2:15-16); "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt.11:5); "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing" (1Thess.1:8). The gospel is the light that reveals God's wisdom and power in salvation, and it is the well-spring of hope and comfort in this journey of life. Others need it just as much as we do!

Why do we do the things we do with respect to the physical needs of others? In Matthew 25, Jesus described various works that His sheep were involved in, and in that passage (v.33-40) Jesus makes it clear that those works were simply the manner of life of those sheep. They had the right motivation and were not focused on the result. They weren't even focused on those who were on the receiving end of their good deeds. Ministering to others in need was just a part of who they were; it came naturally; it was from the heart and they weren't looking for anything in return. Think about the parable of the Good Samaritan: one man helping another man, and the two would have normally despised each other. That man had nothing to gain and had no reason to expect even a simple 'thank you'. But he helped him; and not just in the short-term, but he committed himself to helping that man in the long-term as well. In 2Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9, Paul commends the churches of Macedonia for their efforts to help supply the needs of the poor saints. They contributed beyond what Paul thought they were capable of doing; they being in poverty themselves. But there we find the key again... "if there be first a willing mind"; and "a cheerful giver"; one who is purposely acting upon his heart's desire to minister to others. Galatians 6:10 tells us, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith", letting us know there are always opportunities out there for us to help others if we simply keep our eyes open for them. Having this heart for other people shouldn't be an occasional effort; it should indeed be our way of life: individually and collectively.

What about the results? Well, what results are we looking for? In Acts Chapter 2, we see the early Church focused on praising God. Their desire to praise God moved them to a devoted life of discipleship that included a commitment to Christ, a commitment to God's word, and a commitment to minister to those around them. They were in favor with the people around them because of this way of life. And what do we see? Their motivation matched the results! They achieved the result they were seeking - to glorify God! But what else also happened? The Lord added to the Church! We realize this was an extraordinary time for the church, but has the principle changed? Does the Lord add to a church just haphazardly? Or does the Lord add to a church where the congregation seeks to worship Him and to glorify Him through faithful and obedient lives? Consider the familiar words of Jesus: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city

that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let you light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt.5:16) Here it is... the what, when, where, how and why with respect to our discipleship. We are salt and light. We have a responsibility to live up to. God has called us to life and to action. He has called us to bring glory to Him within our own lives and through our influence on others. The main point is, our focus should be to bring honor and glory to God in every aspect of our lives, as individual members of the body of Christ and as the body of Christ collectively. If that is our focus, God will be pleased. God might be pleased to add to our church, but even if He withholds that blessing, our focus should never change; neither should our zeal in making the effort to serve others diminish.

I close with this solemn warning to the shepherds of Israel found in Ezekiel 34. God said “woe be to the shepherds of Israel...” and He gave many reasons He was not pleased with those who had been given the responsibility to oversee the flocks. “The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost...” Because of the shepherds’ neglect, the sheep were scattered and lost, and they fell prey to the beasts of the field. The reason I close with this is because a flock cannot be a healthy flock without the oversight, leadership, guidance, care and concern of the shepherd. Oh how our pastors need the prayers and support of the flocks they serve in this respect! What a serious work and responsibility the ministry truly is! Paul told the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:28) to “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” A flock must be healthy in order to function as it should and to fulfill its intended purpose. Think about what Paul is telling the ministry. The pastor of a church must first recognize his own weakness and from whence he draws his strength. He must then recognize the needs of the flock, which is impossible to do without being in the midst of them and spending much time with them. Finally, the pastor must recognize Who has placed him in the position he is in, and for what purpose. As he more fully recognizes these things, the pastor is blessed with a greater sufficiency of what he needs in order to feed and guide the flock so that it can be healthy and fruitful. When this is the condition of the flock, then the motivation for what we do and the results of what we do will be the same - God’s glory! Then, as Ezekiel wrote, there shall be showers of blessings! Matt Jordan, pastor