

WHAT CAN I DO FOR CHRIST?

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on November 28, 1954 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC.

One of the most valuable religious papers which come to my desk is the "Christian Chronicle," a weekly newspaper which presents the happenings throughout the entire church. In its pages we read, from week to week, of the major happenings among the churches not only in this country but throughout the world. We have read for some time of the nationwide radio and television broadcasts known as the "Herald of Truth." We have read of various missionaries returning from foreign fields, telling of the great gains that have been made for Christ. Elsewhere we have also seen some of their moving pictures, portraying with a high degree of reality the wonderful work that they have been able to accomplish. We have also seen the pictures of new church buildings in many sections of our own country and in foreign countries as well. We have read from time to time of the beginning of new orphan homes, new homes for the aged, and also the beginning of new colleges in which to train our young people.

As the average Christian reads of these great achievements it is quite possible that he may say, "These are all wonderful, but they are beyond me. What can I do for Christ?"

The Church Is A Body

In writing to the Corinthians the apostle Paul compared the church to the human body, pointing out that as the human body has many members with different responsibilities, so also the church has many members, each of whom has a special work to do. In writing to the Romans he used the same general illustration in these words: "For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another. And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting; he that giveth, let him do it with liberality, he that ruleth with diligence; he that showeth mercy with cheerfulness." (Rom. 12:4-8).

We cannot all be missionaries. We cannot all be elders. We cannot all be preachers and give our full time to the Lord's work. We cannot all be teachers. We cannot all start orphan's homes, or homes for the aged, or colleges. Some of us must do the vital work which supports and makes possible these notable accomplishments. An army cannot proceed successfully in the field without a host of workers at home. There are many things which all of us can and must do in order for the Lord's work to continue. The following suggestions are some of the things that are within reach of all of us:

Suggestion No. I--Be A Bible Reader

In working for the Lord, it is obvious that we must go to the Lord for instructions. A regular and careful reading of his word gives us the directions which we need to carry on his work. Not only does it guide us but it also serves to "recharge our batteries," so to speak, thus giving us a new enthusiasm for the work. In order to work for him we should take advantage of every opportunity to attend a Bible class or a worship service or to spend a quiet period with an open Bible. Just as we cannot go from Nashville to New York without reading the signs, we cannot go from Nashville to heaven without the Lord's direction.

Suggestion No. II--Pray often--For Others

Most of the prayers that men offer are directly, or indirectly, for themselves. We need to pray more often for others. We need to pray for those who face severe problems that are beyond their strength. Just this week a woman called twice, without giving her name, to ask that I pray for her as she faced a severe problem which was bearing down upon her. We need to pray for those who are weak and who often fall into sin. We need to pray for those who are seriously ill. Perhaps it will encourage us to pray for others if we remember that Jesus prayed for us: "Not for these only (the apostles) do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word." (John 17:20). As someone has said, "More is wrought by prayer than the world dreams of."

Suggestion No. III--Gear Your Giving To the Need

There are two directions which a man may face when he considers giving of his financial means to the Lord. He can either face in the direction of his own pocketbook, thinking in terms of how much he has which he can comfortably give to the Lord, or he can face toward the needs and visualize the purposes for which he gives. The latter is by far the best way, for not only will it mean more to the giver, it will also mean more to those who are in need.

Winnie Rhoads in the October, 1953 issue of the "Christian Woman" magazine said: "Imagine you are a missionary, you are thirty miles from the nearest town in Africa. You are without electricity and you carry your water one-half mile from the nearest stream or river, and boil it for home use. Imagine that you are keeping fifty native babies and that you are trying to build a nursery for them.

You are about ready to put the roof on, but you are waiting for funds from the congregations in the States, back home. Imagine how you would feel, when the mail arrives, if you should open a letter and find \$10.00 inside; open another and find \$25.00; and another and find \$8.00 (\$43.00 total). Before the week was over you would have to use most of that for dried milk for the fifty babies because your two cows had become ill, because you couldn't afford proper rations for them, because you weren't able to buy the tools last year to make enough hay to last through the season; and in the meantime, seventeen of the children had become ill and you needed medication for them. Suppose you were in Africa opening the letters. How much could you use? Send it! You're here and you have it--send it. By doing so you are just as much a missionary as the man who holds the little black swollen leg and pours red medicine into the wound." When we visualize the need we will receive more good from our giving, give more generously, and give in a more acceptable manner in the sight of God.

It is important for us to know that the great bulk of the giving in the church comes from people with relatively small salaries, but deep consecration to the Lord. There are just not enough rich people to carry the financial burden of the church. Those who are wealthy often have many pressures of a financial nature unknown to the rest of us, which prevents them from giving as generously as they would like or as others might expect. When all is said and done the great bulk of the giving comes from those of moderate income. Make all the money that you can honorably make--then give generously to the Lord.

Suggestion No IV--Take Time For People

One lady has suggested that when the housewife carries out the garbage in the morning that instead of hurrying out as if she hoped that no one might see her, she ought to take time to speak to the neighbor beyond the fence. These three-minute conversations, in which we ask the welfare of our neighbors and friends, often pave the way for Christian influence later on. It might well be remembered that Christ always seemed to have time for people, and never found anyone too insignificant for his attention.

Suggestion No. V--Leave A Trail of Happiness Behind

When you go to shops, stores, school, or business, make people glad you have come. Some people have the knack of bringing cheer wherever they go and leaving people feeling better and happier after they are gone. Jesus was the most sought after dinner guest in Jerusalem in his day.

Some leave this trail of happiness behind by the giving of simple, inexpensive gifts. A gift to a child may not only brighten the child's day, but warm the hearts of the parents. Others do the same by the giving of a word of encouragement to those who are discouraged. It is well to remember people's names and ask about their welfare. We tell our children the story of Johnny Appleseed, the man who went through the country planting seeds, for the benefit of those of later generations. As Christians, all of us ought to plant seeds, literally and otherwise.

Suggestion No VI--Dedicate That Extra Bedroom To The Lord

In most of our houses there is an extra bedroom which we use for relatives and friends who drop in occasionally. However, it is vacant through most of the year. Use it for the Lord. Sometimes we might wish to invite into our homes the relatives who bring their loved-ones to the various Nashville hospitals. It may be a wife from McMinnville who has placed her husband in the hospital, and who must spend several days or even weeks in Nashville. She not only needs a place to sleep, but the encouragement and strength that we Christians can give. We can also use that extra bedroom for Christians who visit from time to time. This is especially true during the time when Christians from many places congregate in Nashville for lectures or special meetings. It is also true during evangelistic meetings in our home congregation. There also is a possibility of using the bedroom for those who are in need, whose houses have burned or who in some other way have a special need.

In the Bible we are told the story of the Shunamite woman who erected a room for the prophet Elisha. She and her husband not only built the room but equipped it with a bed, a table, a seat, and a candlestick. (II Kings 4:8-16). She was blessed of Jehovah for her unselfish service.

Suggestion No VII--Dedicate A Corner of Your Dining Room Table to the Lord.

One message of the Lord, as recorded by Luke, is rather difficult for most of us to face squarely: "When thou makest a dinner or a I supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor rich neighbors; lest hapily they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; because they have not to recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just." (Luke 12:12-14). We have a responsibility in view of this passage to invite into our homes those who are in need.

It would seem that this responsibility would reach not only those who are in need but also to the many who are in spiritual need. By inviting a family into our home for dinner we may open their hearts to accept the invitation that we later give them to go with us to the church services. Many an initial contact has been made through such a means, which later resulted in souls being saved.

Suggestion No VIII--Remember The Young People

Most of us are interested in the young people of the church, though most of us seldom find time to show that interest in a very concrete way. We need to help them with their parties, picnics, hikes, trips, and other recreational activities. These young people are pure and fine and only need the assistance of us who are mature Christians to guide them away from the sensual and worldly pleasures which surround them, to the higher and more worthy recreations.

One father in this congregation took four boys, including his own son, on a special trip to Chattanooga last year. He took them on the trip simply because he wanted to show his interest in them and to encourage their faith in him.

Suggestion No IX--Visit Those Who Are Ill

Any time one might wish to visit in one of the Nashville hospitals he will find at the central desk a listing of 25 to 30 names of those who are members of the church. Whenever he might wish to go, there are always more needing to be visited than he can possibly visit. We need to visit and encourage and to strengthen those who are ill. We need to visit and supply their needs. Sometimes they would appreciate someone reading to them, either from the Bible or some interesting secular source. Sometimes they need to have letters written for them. Sometimes they need to have errands run or shopping done. Sometimes families need to have food prepared and brought in, especially when the mother is ill. We need to be concerned about those who are ill.

Suggestion No. X--Use Your special Talent For The Lord

One woman of this congregation arranges flowers, not only for the church, but for others who are expecting guests. One young girl of this congregation has access to the names of newcomers in this area of the city. She supplies the names of those who are members of the church to the church office, enabling us to visit them and invite them to the services here. Two ladies of the congregation spend one day each week helping in the church office, addressing envelopes, mailing out sermons, and other necessary work.

One elderly lady of this congregation sews and makes little dresses for the orphans. She reminds us of Dorcas of the New Testament who was remembered after her death for "the good works and almsdeeds which she did," When the apostle Peter came at the request of two brethren, "All the widows stood by weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." (Acts 9:36-39). Several men who have been salesmen, or in other ways have met the public through many years of work, have been most skillful in the personal work program which the church carries on. These men have a great deal of skill in carrying on conversations and in guiding people toward making the decision to become Christians. Others have special opportunities or talents along still other lines, but all of us have some ability or some position which the Lord can use. Some have influence by which they may be able to help others in securing jobs or in bettering difficult situations which they face.

Conclusion

Let no Christian ever say, "There is nothing I can do." We at home are rather important people. God needs us. Our background training and our present situations open up many avenues of service which no one else can render. Jesus once said, "He that is least among you all, the same is great." (Luke 9:48).

I remember reading a story some years ago about a very special kind of scales by which Christians were measured. When a Christian stepped on the scales he was enlarged or reduced in size according of God's estimate of him. Some of those who had been highly regarded in the church while living here on earth sadly shrank until they were midgets. Others grew in stature. The most striking transformation of all was a little old lady, hardly known by her fellow Christians. When she stepped on the scales from the tiny little person that she was thought to be, she grew into the biggest Christian of all. The most important servant of God may not be the preacher or the teacher or even the elder, but some quiet unassuming Christian who is doing his or her part in carrying out the Lord's work to the best of his ability.