

## How should we get involved with hurting people?

By Bob Young

I have written before about the danger of mixing evangelism and benevolence both in ministry and in mission efforts. My observation is that some are “evangelized” because they understand (correctly or incorrectly) that they are more likely to receive benevolent help (food, physical needs, medicine, etc.) with a positive response to the message of Jesus. Such “converts” often do not remain faithful. To avoid the possibility of a “mixed message,” some have rejected benevolence as a legitimate activity in mission work. On the other hand, because we are Christ-followers, we want to reflect the attitude and actions of the one we follow—one who was sensitive to the physical needs of those he encountered. Keeping in mind the need to balance these two possibilities, how should we get involved with hurting people? First, believing that God can bring profound change in someone’s life through us. Second, recognizing that we are not the deliverer (Messiah). Third, with a great deal of caution.

Here are five principles for being involved in the lives of hurting people.

First, the greatest and most important things we can do for hurting people is to consistently and patiently direct them to Jesus. Like the men carrying the paralytic on the mat, do everything you can to bring the person to Jesus. Keep praying, encouraging, and living by example. Keep talking about who the true Deliverer is. Keep pointing toward the only One who will never let us down. God must be part of the benevolent effort from the beginning. If not, we are practical atheists, doing only what any good benevolent organization could do (and could probably do better than we will do it).

Second, we can make a difference in the lives of hurting people by our example. We can show them a different way of life by the way we live. We must make clear that we live as we do because we are Christians. Those involved in missions must go as Christians, and not just as good people.

Third, we can help hurting people through our prayers. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about how his trials helped him comfort them, and how their trials would be a comfort to others, he said: “On Him we have set our hope that He will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:10-11). We have the opportunity and responsibility to help one another in prayer.

Fourth, we can build up hurting people by giving encouragement. Some words are encouraging but do not have anything to do with Jesus. The encouragement we want to share is Christian encouragement that makes clear that Jesus is at the center of all we do in life. The Bible is filled with words of encouragement that we can share, even as it encourages us to be encouragers. Satan wants to discourage hurting people and convince them that they are hopeless.

Fifth, we can help hurting people experience changed lives by sharing biblical advice and counsel. Those who share biblical advice and counsel must be examples. That we are on a mission field does not allow us to cut corners—such advice is best given by those who are trained. I have seen the power of professional counseling, sharing things with an unbiased person who is bound by professionalism to keep confidences and who has experience.

God is the deliverer. The Good News of Jesus is always at the center of valid ministry and missions. We must guard against the possibility that those we help will see us as deliverers. It is about God—first and always.