

## The Questions

I hurt for orphans and abused kids in Honduras and want them to have opportunity and fulfilled purpose here on earth. Is that wrong?

Our whole family has had the opportunity to see lots of less fortunate folk... (kids, babies, abused girls, addicted adults etc.) Would make sense for these less fortunate people to really believe all they needed was God? I have to work, eat, be responsible, care for others.

Are those kids facing the [sin] of their parents and society as victims? If they understand that all they need is God then [will] earthly purpose, food, shelter, clothing opportunity be given to them?

## Spiritual vs. Physical

We saved these questions for today because there's a lot under all of these questions that aligns with our heart for Be the Church Sunday. There's a tension we feel in the Church between preaching the Gospel and serving our community. We feel it when we talk about Jesus, when we say that our lives are nothing without Christ, but then we go to Honduras or Benin and encounter people whose lives really are nothing. We wonder how they can even hear God speaking to them over the growling of their stomachs.

We feel it when we serve, too. When we go out to do some good work, like we are this morning. We think, Does shoveling mulch really make any *real* difference? Am I making any sort of eternal impact?

This is a real tension. It's not an easy one to grasp, and we usually split into two camps [graphically I wonder if we can represent a split somehow that will later resolve into two sides of the same coin or something, to show that both sides are right, but they're wrong so long as they exclude the other side] - some of us tend towards the spiritual. We believe that no matter how bad someone's earthly life is, the most important thing is to embrace the Gospel of Jesus. We might call this the Sharing camp.

Others of us fall into the other camp - we see real human suffering, injustice on a massive, systemic scale, and we know these things don't honor God. We believe that God wants to make a real difference right now, that Christianity isn't about waiting around for Heaven, that Jesus' abundant life starts now, and it shouldn't include swollen bellies. We might call this the Serving camp.

(And sure, a lot of us aren't in either camp... we're caught in that gray area between, wondering what following Jesus really looks like. Caught in that tension you could hear in those questions.)

We tend to think of the Sharing camp as Spiritual, and the Serving camp as unspiritual. Sharing people tend to emphasize things like reading scripture, prayer, going to Church - "spiritual" stuff. Serving people tend to be a lot more practical. Food drives, shoveling mulch. Holding babies and building houses. "Unspiritual" stuff. [maybe put all those things on each side? or represent it graphically somehow? A bible vs. a pile of mulch?]

That's a false dichotomy. The truth is, *everything* is Spiritual, and *everything* is Practical. The people in the Sharing camp know that all those "spiritual" things are meant to make a real,

practical difference in how we live. And those in the Serving camp know that feeding children and working the Earth can be deeply spiritual activities.

*Real sharing is serving, and real serving is sharing. [Here's where you can bring them together.]*

That's hard for us to believe, because we live in that other world, where everything is divided up. We've been taught to divide our whole world into different compartments, and especially within the Church, we have clear boundaries between "spiritual" and "unspiritual" things. Even our week is divided up that way - we have Spiritual Sundays and Unspiritual work days every other day (with maybe a little dab of Spirit on Wednesdays). "Spiritual" is what happens inside the walls of this building, and everything else - "real life" is unSpiritual. It's like the game of Life - our jobs, our kids, our vacations, all the ups and downs of the days between finishing school and retiring, all of it is *outside* our faith. It's just normal, everyday life. It's unspiritual. No wonder our faith ends up looking like that too. We have our pure, Spiritual faith and then all the works that we do as Christians. Because we cling so tightly to Saved by Grace, we keep works in the Unspiritual camp (*maybe put the split graphic back up? To put "Faith" on the Spiritual side and "Works" on the UnSpiritual side? Or don't switch to the combined graphic yet? Whatever is less confusing.*)

But the Scriptures don't make that sort of distinction. The whole purpose of the Gospel is transformation - it's rescuing you, me and the whole of creation from the consequences of Sin - Death. We are all being brought out of Death and into Life. We are all being transformed into the image of Jesus.

And the Scriptures recognize that what we do is essential to that transformation. Reading the Scriptures can teach us how to look like Jesus. Prayer should shape us into a person like God. But so can shoveling mulch. So can building houses, feeding kids and loving orphans. Your job, your marriage, your kids, your schooling, your retirement, and everything in between. It's all Spiritual. God cares about all of it.

Our Service can be Spiritual. What we do can and should transform us into people who look more like Jesus.

I know that's a tough pill to swallow. It runs against what we've always thought, how we order the world around us. But consider with me James' words to us in James 2:14-20. <pause> James is asking the same questions we are: Is the Christian life faith? Or is it works? Isn't our journey just the Spiritual? James answers yes, but everything is spiritual!

*What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"-- but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds." You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless? -- James 2:14-20 (NLT)*

If you share in such a way that you are not serving the people with whom you're sharing then you're not sharing the Gospel. If you just say, "God bless you. I'll pray for you. I'll pray that God send you food," but you don't give them food, then your blessings are empty and your prayers are pointless. Sharing should transform (both you and the person you're engaging). If our sharing doesn't serve, then it's not transforming. And that means our Sharing isn't Spiritual. We can actually share the Gospel in such a way that there's no good news in it.

But we can say the same of our Serving. If all we do is give out some food, build some houses, we're not essentially any different from a contractor or a Kroger. We must serve in such a way that we are sharing Jesus' transformational good news. If we don't, then our Serving *is* unspiritual.

**Real sharing is serving, and real serving is sharing.**

This is why we at Beaver Creek Nazarene don't serve according to how much someone *deserves* our service. So often Christians are tempted to approach serving according to who is the most deserving, not according to need. We look at the homeless and think, It's their choice to be on the street. If we help, they'll just keep doing drugs. We don't want to help the poor because that's the government's job. We don't want to work in the parks because we pay taxes, so the city should have enough money to do it themselves.

So often we filter our desire to serve through the other person's worthiness. We judge whether they deserve our service.

Thank God that's not his attitude towards us! God didn't look at us lost in our sin and say, Well, it's your own fault. You got yourself into this mess. You don't *deserve* to be saved from it.

God didn't look at us and say, I gave you the law. I showed you what a holy life looks like. It's up to you now.

No... God became one of us - he went way outside his comfort zone - and came not to be served, but to serve. God gives to us regardless of whether or not we're worthy (and that's good news!).

I gave a talk similar to this at my old campus ministry, and a couple of days later, my friend Cody stopped me. He told me that he'd been walking downtown when a homeless guy asked him for money to buy food. Now, Cody knew that if he gave this guy money, he'd probably just buy booze with it. So he had a choice. Did he refuse the man money, maybe tell him about Jesus instead? That'd be the Sharing option. Or he could just shrug his shoulders and give the guy \$5 - that'd be the Serving option. And Cody knew neither of those had any chance to transform the guy.

So Cody told the guy to wait there, and he hopped in his car and went to Wal-Mart. He bought a small bible, a huge sandwich and a pair of boots (because it was February and the guy was wearing old shoes). He put them all in a bag, went back and found the guy. He handed over the bag, and offered the man his blessing.

I have no idea what happened to that man, but I know that Cody was living out James 2. He refused to choose either side of the argument. Instead, he walked a hard middle line that cost him a lot more time and money than just Sharing or just Serving would have. But in his actions, he demonstrated the transforming Love of Jesus.

That's the kind of Church we want to be. We want to share the Gospel with our community in such a way that their needs are met. And we want to serve our community in such a way that they are transformed by the Gospel of Jesus.

There's doesn't have to be any such thing as spiritual and unspiritual. All our practical serving can be Spiritual And all our spiritual sharing can be Practical.

Because real sharing *is* serving and real serving *is* sharing. So as you go to your sites today, remember that we go as the Church of Jesus Christ here in Beavercreek, OH. This is the community to which God has called us, and we want to transform our community with the utterly spiritual, totally practical good news of Jesus.

Go today, and live out your faith. Go show me your faith by your works.

<Prayer>