

Visiting the Sick

No act of mercy is more universally appreciated—or accessible—than visiting the sick. Yet many of us shy away from doing it. Why?

“I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; . . . Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matt. 25:36, 40).

“. . . If she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work” (1 Tim. 5:10).



As creatures of flesh in a cursed world, we navigate life’s journey with a variety of unpleasant companions: illness, disease, injury, old age. These afflictions are physically and mentally draining. Often the victims are too weak to care for themselves.

On such occasions, a timely visit from a friend can help the ailing to weather the storm. There is so much we can do to render assistance to the suffering. We can provide meals, watch their kids, do their laundry or other household chores. Sometimes just a simple chat is enough to lift their spirits. This is especially true for the old and feeble, who enjoy reminiscing about years gone by, a pleasant exercise that will brighten their day.

There is nothing newsworthy in any of these acts of love, but they make a world of difference to the recipients. Their physical ailments may be beyond our ability to cure, but our involvement at

least conveys the message that they are not forgotten, that they are not carrying their burden alone. Indeed, Jesus views these acts of mercy toward others as extensions of our love for Him.

We benefit from these visits, too. Helping others just *feels* good. It restores a sense of purpose in our lives, a conviction that our presence in this world makes a difference, that our lives really do matter. At a deeper level, helping the sick also leads us to reflect on our own mortality. We come away from these exchanges with an appreciation for the frailty of life, and a deeper gratitude for the good health we enjoy.

Despite all these positive outcomes, some Christians shy away from visiting the sick. Why?

In some cases, people simply don’t care. If we shrug off the pain of others with a casual “that’s too bad,” we suffer from a bad form of selfishness. The only cure for this obstacle is a recalibration of our faith. Remember, it’s *Jesus* we are neglecting here.

Others claim they are too busy. Jobs, family obligations, household chores, hobbies, and a host of other activities crowd out time that ought to go toward helping others. But we make time for whatever is important to us. If we recognized the value of this good work, we would find the time to do it.

Others avoid this work because they feel awkward in the presence of the afflicted, especially if the sickness is serious. “I don’t know what to say” is a familiar refrain among this group. But we learn what to say in these circumstances the same way we learn how to ride a bicycle—with practice. Just jump in and *do it*.

There is one more excuse I have heard several times over the years, especially when dealing with terminally ill friends: “I want to remember them the way they used to be.” That sounds so noble and compassionate. But think about it: Whose welfare are we looking after with that viewpoint? *We’re thinking only of ourselves, not the sick person*, and that attitude turns the whole affair upside down. Our duty is to help others in their affliction, not to protect our own comfort zone. The greater question ought to be: *What will the dying person remember about me?*

Visiting the sick is, in every sense of the word, the Lord’s work, a simple act of faith that all of us can perform. Let us be busy in this good work, with cheerfulness and enthusiasm.

— David King