

Going Around Doing Good

Teaching With Projects

by Ronald G. Davis

Learning Bible content is never intended to be an end in itself. Notable atheists and agnostics have shown skill in quoting Scripture, but their knowledge of God's Word has not accomplished what it can do and is designed to do. Ephesians 4:11, 12 says the gifts given to the church are meant to prepare disciples for works of service. Every believer should closely resemble the Master, who is characterized as one who "went around doing good" (Acts 10:38).

Any study about our Lord or his church is going to focus on actions, not just doctrine. While there is an emphasis on the divine power and design required to accomplish good works, we must note also the motive. Deeds, whether in service or worship, are done out of a heart of compassion. Jesus went around doing good because he is good. So must be his disciples.

In addition to the knowledge and belief objectives every adult teacher has for his learners, he certainly will have basic behavior objectives. What good is knowledge unless it builds faith? What good is faith if it does not issue forth in good deeds of service?

Plans and Projects

Teachers want results. Teaching by projects is a logical culmination of wanting results. Projects can be designed for learning groups (the whole class or small groups within the class) or individuals. Some can be accomplished in the classroom; some require learners to leave the classroom with intentions—intentions to do good. Some require presents, tangible evidence of loving grace; some require presence, simply "being there." Some are long-term and time-consuming; some are "along-the-way" interludes.

In any lesson series, the perceptive teacher will ask, "What can I have my learners do—or at least recommend they do—that will demonstrate they are learning the truths of our texts?"

The Least of These

Matthew 25:31-46 is Jesus' story of the sheep and the goats. He tells us that when we serve the least of the least, we serve him. This is a good time to engage your group in random acts of kindness.

For example, what deeds of kindness can be done for parents who are struggling with the panic and disruption of an ailing child? Will something as simple as addressing a "Thinking of You" card from the whole class be of value? Will such occasions demand that the class consider a system of once-a-week child-care provision to enable parents a time of personal respite? Will a monetary gift from the class (or simply a wholesome game or toy for a child) prove to be an encouraging act of worth? Does the church need a support group for parents in such

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circumstances, and how can an adult class give impetus to such a ministry? The teacher may be nothing more than catalyst in such activity, or he may need to become the “project manager,” seeing to all the details necessary to maintain the service.

Doubt and Encouragement

In Matthew 6:6-18, Jesus taught what an appropriate fast is and is not. In our lesson on these verses this month we encourage students to plan a personal fast. But one value of a fast is that it provides extra time in a person’s schedule. How can this time of personal devotion be turned outward into service to others?

Testimony is a key to faith development. All through the Gospels men and women build faith in others by affirming what Jesus did for them. Jesus warned his followers not to boast about fasting, but the time vacated by fasting from food or an activity can be used to testify of God’s work to others.

A simple card and note from a friend who has experienced the loss of a loved one and felt the comforting hand of God’s Spirit may be just what a struggling believer needs at a time of personal loss. Sending an impersonal sympathy card—even if it carries a personal signature—will probably leave the same sense of isolation and loneliness it finds. But a personal “I-know-what-he-did-for-me” card brings both association and fellowship.

On the Road

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most influential stories of Scripture. Many organizations have been founded to model the behavior of the hero of that story.

Sometimes we are simply unaware of the needs on the highways and byways of our own community. A study of this parable could be supplemented by a visit to a local food bank, nursing home, or homeless shelter. Perhaps a one-time road trip could become a recurring class service project.

Memorable Images

Many adults spend leisure time pursuing arts and crafts. The perceptive teacher will look for ways such interests can be applied to group studies. Whether in the visual arts, graphic arts, musical arts, or construction arts, interested group members could produce a variety of useful and aesthetic items in relationship to truths being studied.

Some of the most memorable visual images in Scripture are found in Paul’s description of the believer’s armor. In connection with this lesson, badge and button makers could produce something as simple as a pin with a drawing of one of those pieces of armor on it. These simple designs can be given to class members as reminders (and conversation starters) about strategies for fighting the powers of darkness.

But why stop there? There is no end to how images elsewhere in Scripture can be communicated. A musically talented learner could write a simple chorus on a key verse, such as Mark 5:36: “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” Teaching it to the class would add the double blessing, first to the composer, and then to the class.

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A model-building enthusiast could provide a replica of a first-century fishing boat for illustration in a lesson on Matthew 13, Mark 4:35-41, or John 21:1-14.

A person who enjoys graphic design on the computer could prepare a number of items for group distribution in relation to Bible texts studied. A decorative and laminated bookmark with a key verse could encourage Bible memorization and use. A sheet with a border of human eyes could become a “Thank You, God” log of things a person sees for a week for which he or she is most thankful. This could be used for a follow-up on a lesson that includes the healing of a blind person. A skilled photographer could provide images of people being baptized for use in a lesson that includes the baptism of Jesus or of any of the many occasions in Acts that includes believers being baptized.

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Give your learners something to do. Give them something good to do. You may be surprised at the learning that comes, at the growth that occurs.