# THINGS HOME MISSION CAN LEARN: SERVE

*Posted on November 23, 2017 by Eddie*

If you just preach the word but donâ€™t do the deeds then you are not credible, if you just do the deeds without preaching the word then you are not audible.
**Category:** Church: UK

When we lived in Gouabafla, I'd often spend an hour or so in the late afternoon chatting to people while cleaning up wounds of one sort or another. I treated machete wounds, abscesses, tropical ulcers and all sorts of things. I'm not medically trained, I'm just a bloke who knows a bit about first aid and who (unlike anyone else in the village) had access to basic medical supplies.

More importantly, I couldn't claim to be in the village to share the love of God through the Bible and yet ignore the suffering that was all around me. I couldn't do much about the poverty in the village, or the endemic corruption that reinforced that poverty, but I could clean out a dirty wound, treat it with antiseptic and put a clean dressing on while showing people how to treat their own wounds in future.

Since the start of the modern mission era, missionaries and mission agencies have realised that social action of some sort needs to accompany gospel proclamation. Now, huge quantities of ink have been spilled discussing whether or not social action should be classed as mission, but no serious writer denies that Christians should help the poor and needy in one way or another,

Living in a rural African village the needs around me were obvious, this may be less so in a middle-class setting in the UK (which is why we need to study the situation). However, the need to serve people is still there. Let me give three simple reasons:

- Jesus did it. He didn't just preach and teach, he healed people. If we are following in the steps of our master, we can't ignore this part of his life and work.
- If our message is that God loves people, then this will ring pretty hollow if there is no evidence that we love them, too.
- The commonest charge against Christians in the UK is that we are hypocrites - the way to disprove this is to make a positive impact on the needs of our society.

These arguments are summed up in a quote that one mission agency leader said to me during my research:

> *If you just preach the word but donâ€™t do the deeds then you are not credible, if you just do the deeds without preaching the word then you are not audible.*

So what can churches do? Obviously the answer depends on the size and capacity of the church and the situation in which they find themselves, but here are a few thoughts.

Providing a location for a chat and a get together for people who might otherwise be isolated is a great way to serve. This can be in the form of lunches for retired folk or mums and toddler groups. Some churches have reached out to immigrant and refugee communities by providing English language tuition (which means investing in training for the teachers) or simply opening up the opportunity for English language conversation practice (which means investing in a kettle and some

teabags).

More formally, there are schemes run by organisations such as Christians Against Poverty and Street Pastors that churches can get involved in and support.

While there is a need to integrate service and evangelism, mission agencies have made mistakes in this area and those doing mission in the UK would be wise not to repeat them.

- The term "rice Christians" refers to people who make a profession of faith simply in order to get stuff from missionaries. Now, it's unlikely that anyone in the UK will claim to have become a Christian just so that they can ensure a supply of cheap coffee and biscuits. However, we have to avoid the impression of pressuring people to convert because we are helping them.
- The other side of the equation is that it is all too easy to concentrate on the social action side of things and to allow gospel proclamation to be sidelined. I've written on that here.

So what can your friendly neighbourhood missionary contribute to this effort? Again, probably not much. However, if you are doing some work with refugee or immigrant communities, someone who has lived in another culture and who speaks another language or three might be a really useful person to have around. If I am anything to go by, one of the things that returned missionaries really miss is the opportunity to interact with people from other languages and cultures.

**Posts In This Series**

- Introduction:Â I believe that the skills and experience of cross-cultural missionaries are crucial to the future of the church in the UK: the start of a blog series....
- Go:Â When push comes to shove, there is one basic difference between long-term, cross-cultural missionaries and the average church member. ...
- Study:Â How well do we understand the culture that surrounds us?...
- Contextualise:Â When Paul spoke to a Jewish audience, he started off with the story of the Jewish nation, when speaking to Greeks, he worked from inscriptions on statues and Greek poetry. ...
- Serve:Â If you just preach the word but donâ€™t do the deeds then you are not credible, if you just do the deeds without preaching the word then you are not audible....
- Don't Look Down: Looking down on a class of people, and holding them in contempt for their reading habits, has far more to do with liberal, middle-class prejudice than it has to do with Christianity.Â  ...
- Speak:Â To a newcomer, a phrase such as "we will now enter into a time of worship" conveys far more background information about the person using it than it does about what is going to happen next in the service. ...
- Religion:Â Learn from people who have been there and done that....
- Stories:Â Taking one of Jesus' amazingly creative parables and turning it into an alliterated, three-point, logical sermon has to be the ultimate in literate processing. ...

- Pray:Â It would be easy - very easy - for a Western rationalist to dismiss all of this. I'm a biologist, I know what causes diseases! ...