

# A Simple Cup of Water

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The heat index on that summer afternoon in Texas was 105 degrees. A slight southerly breeze offered the only relief from an otherwise miserable day. My teenage daughter and I were returning from a doctor's appointment. The air-conditioned comfort of the minivan I was driving offered a welcome respite from the sweltering heat. On this particular day, that trusted vehicle which was mere clicks away from registering 200,000 miles and had transported my family faithfully for years stalled unexpectedly. Fortunately, I was able to maneuver the lifeless mass of steel to a side street that was clear of the adjacent freeway traffic. A call to my mobile carrier's roadside assistance program began a two-hour odyssey of waiting for a tow truck to transport the disabled vehicle to a nearby repair shop.

The failure of the van's alternator had drained the very life from its entire electrical system, rendering everything electrical useless. We found ourselves sitting there with emergency flashers that were inoperative and power windows that would not roll down. Meanwhile, the helpful folks with roadside assistance told us to "stay with the vehicle until help arrives." I personally could manage a twenty to thirty minute wait in the heat, but my daughter was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Noticing an IHOP restaurant nearby, I encouraged her to walk the less than fifty yards and inquire if she could sit in the air-conditioned foyer while we waited for help. When the pleasant voice from roadside assistance informed me that the original wait of less than thirty minutes was being extended by an additional hour, I chose to join my daughter in the oasis she had found.

Entering the foyer of the restaurant, I was greeted by my daughter's smile. Before the door had closed behind me, a gentleman approached through the second set of doors. Carrying a paper cup and a drinking straw, he greeted me with the words, "You look like you could use this." The unsolicited offer of a cup of cold water from the manager of the establishment in which we had sought shelter from the heat caught me off-guard. In the ensuing conversation, he revealed that he was pursuing a seminary education while working at the restaurant. He described his love for people and the opportunity that his work provided to witness to a wide range of individuals in a non-confrontive manner. To him, in spite of the restrictions his work placed on his education, he viewed his work as his ministry for the present time.

What struck me about what some would describe as a random act of kindness was that, for him, it was unpretentious and sincere. He never encouraged us to come into the restaurant as customers. To the contrary, as his responsibilities called him away from our conversation, he offered that if we needed anything else we should inform a member of his wait-staff. His demeanor during our encounter was reminiscent of the example of our Lord. Individuals whom Jesus would meet as He traveled the countryside experienced His unconditional acceptance and genuine concerns for their felt needs. His approach to the question of one's salvation was typically predicated by the establishment of a rapport with the individual, an appreciation of their life circumstances and their physical needs.

The example of Jesus and the nameless restaurant manager challenges us to reconsider our approach to others in offering the Gospel. I have no doubt that in some circumstances, success can be realized in efforts to bring others to salvation through a confrontational methodology. Gospel tracts and "cold-call" evangelism still have a place in our outreach to the unsaved. However, it is my contention that today's highly impersonal society in which neighbors are strangers to one another requires a return to the basics of evangelism as modeled by Jesus. By teachings and example, Jesus shared a methodology of concurrently addressing the physical and spiritual needs of the unsaved to the Twelve and to subsequent generations of disciples. In His encounters with sinners, and our conversation with the nameless restaurant manager, a vital prerequisite to the offering of living water was figuratively demonstrated - the offering of a simple cup of water!

