

COMING WITH AN OXYGEN TANK

By Roger Campbell

Several years ago, over eight thousand miles (c. 13,000 km) away from where we live, my wife and I sat and talked with a gospel preacher and his wife about their impressions of the United States after they visited here not long before we were with them. I do not recall everything that they said that day, but I clearly remember one matter that made a mark on their thinking. When visiting in the States and attending the services of God's church in a few different states, more than once they saw Christians attending services who came carrying, pulling, or pushing their oxygen tanks. These two saints of God returned to their homeland on foreign soil and told their brothers and sisters that in America, members of the church, despite their obvious health issues, come to services even when they have to bring an oxygen tank with them! What they observed made a positive, lasting impression on them.

At our congregation, it is quite common to see more than one fellow soldier of the Christ attending a public service of the church, despite having to lug along an oxygen tank. Other congregations have members who do the same. What is going on with these people? Why do they insist on coming to services even when breathing is not all that comfortable for them? Toting an oxygen tank is not the prettiest sight, but while humans look on outward appearance, "the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Pushing, carrying, or pulling an oxygen tank may not always be convenient, but Jesus' followers learn to deny self and take up their cross for Him (Luke 9:23).

When oxygen tanks are in use, at least some of them are not silent when they pump oxygen. However, thoughtful members of the church do not count such a sound as a distraction. Rather, to them it is a sweet sound – a sound which indicates that some precious brother or sister has made an extra effort to be present to worship the Almighty.

It is also true that oxygen tanks may cause some people to look (and maybe some kids will even stare and point when they first observe them) at the tank and the person connected to it, but the example of a child of God acting as the light of the world sends a powerful message (Matthew 5:16). Brothers and sisters who attend services with their oxygen tanks show us that we can do a lot of things if we really want to. [While in this article we are talking specifically about those Christians who have to deal with oxygen tanks, the same thoughts apply to every child of God who puts forth a great effort to attend services despite having to deal with serious health issues or other matters which limit them]. Seeing a brother or sister in the Lord come to services toting an oxygen tank encourages the rest of us to be more committed. It reminds us of the first-century churches of Macedonia which, despite their "great trial of affliction," still "first gave themselves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:2, 5).

You and I just never know how far-reaching our influence might be. That holds true for influence that is good, as well as for influence that is rotten. Remember, the ones who were so impressed and encouraged by oxygen-tank-carrying saints live over eight thousand miles away

from those whom they saw using the oxygen tanks. The word about us gets around. Should this not cause all of us to give a special effort to be the right kind of example?

There are many members of the church who do, indeed, have health issues or other matters out of their control that prevent them from attending some or all of the church's gatherings. On the other hand, it also is true that more than a few of Jesus' disciples throughout the world skip some Bible studies or worship services of the church simply because . . . are you ready for the real reason . . .? They do not attend them because they do not really want to be there. Yet, many of my precious brethren in the Christ who struggle with serious health issues are present every time that it is possible, they come on time, and they cannot wait until the next time that the church will assemble together. And, do you know why these folks do it, over and over and over? Because they are committed to the Lord Jesus and they want to be present. There you have it.

I thank God for all of His priests who set a good example for me and others. That includes those who suffer with breathing problems, but would you look at that, here they come anyway, lugging that oxygen tank. Now, brother or sister, if you are blessed with good health, what did you say it is that really keeps you from attending Sunday assemblies of the church? Or coming to midweek services? Or attending special activities like a gospel meeting, lectureship, or VBS? Eyes are watching, ears are listening, and hearts are pondering what they observe in us. Honorable conduct sends a powerful message (1 Peter 2:12).