

What's in a name?

“A good name is better than precious ointment,” (Ecclesiastes 7:1 English Standard Version)

Mention Hawaii, and you probably think of golden beaches and palm trees. Talk about Belson, and the horrors of a concentration camp come to mind. Think of Rolls Royce and an image of a reliable luxury car is conjured up.

When something - or someone - is mentioned, we immediately have a picture associated with that name.

So, what do people think when our name is mentioned? Is there a good - or bad - reaction?

In Ecclesiastes 7:1 English Standard Version, we read that “A good name is better than precious ointment,”

Normally, we associate ointment with a medication we might put on an insect bite, a burn or a wound. In other words, ointment helps to heal, to soothe, to make better.

In Old Testament times, ointment could mean more than that. Alongside healing properties, ointments were used as perfumes. Often a cone of ointment was placed on the forehead of meal guests. As people became hotter, the ointment melted and would trickle on to clothing producing a pleasant and relaxing odour.

Often the ointment was very expensive and yet, we just read, a good name is to be rated as being even more precious.

What does it mean to have a good name?

In Acts 4, early church leaders were in prison. Clearly that could be discouraging to members. But in verse 36 we read about “Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement)...”(ESV)

Here was an individual who was so encouraging that he was given a new name – the son of encouragement. So when Joseph's name was mentioned, people thought of him as Mr. Encouragement.

We receive a good name in the same way. It's our reputation – the way we act, speak and generally conduct our lives that determines whether we have a good - or bad - name.

For example, a good name comes by being reliable, turning up for appointments on time or fulfilling commitments. Maybe we gain a good name by being generous – either with praise or physical blessings.

On the other hand, our name may not be good. And has become associated with sarcasm or negativism.

So, are we positive – like the healing properties of ointment, or negative causing pain and discomfort? Just what do people think when they hear our name?