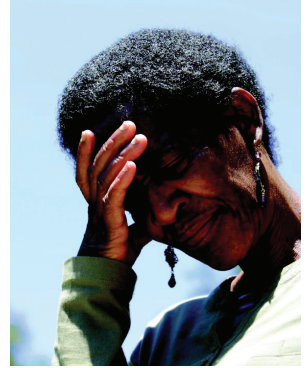


Doing Good Well



Thirty Daily
Meditations
on
Developing
a Biblical
and
Focused
Discipline
of Good
Works



Herb Reese

Doing Good Well

Also by Herb Reese

*Developing a Men's Team Ministry
to the Distressed
In Your Church and Community*

(Video and Workbook)

Doing Good Well

Thirty Daily Meditations
on Developing
a Biblical and Focused
Discipline of Good Works

Herb Reese

New Commandment Men's Ministries

Doing Good Well

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To my wife, Patti,
whose love and
sacrifice for this man
have made this
ministry to men
possible.

About New Commandment Men's Ministries

New Commandment Men's Ministries helps churches recruit, train, organize and deploy teams of men who permanently adopt the widowed, single parents and others in their church and community with long term needs. New Commandment provides churches with a three hour training session—called an orientation—that emphasizes the biblical teaching on the love of Christ, the role of good works in the Christian life, and God's heart for the widowed and single parents. New Commandment then invites men to donate three hours of time, one Saturday morning a month, and forms those men who respond into teams of four.

On service days, all the teams meet at their church at 7:00 AM for prayer, bible study and last minute planning. At 8:00 AM the men split up into their teams and go out and work in the home of their care receiver until 10:00 AM. They do basic tasks around the home that the care receiver cannot do. Most tasks, such as cleaning out gutters and raking leaves, require no skill. Every month, the teams return to the same care receiver, so their ministry to their care receiver lasts for years.

At the end of each service time, the men pray for their care receiver as well as for the street the care receiver lives on. If there are other widowed or single parents on the block, the team is encouraged to make its services available to them. In this way, teams can begin ministering to others up and down the street and their work becomes an outreach ministry for the church.

To date there are 1,500 men donating 30,000 hours of service annually to over 500 care receivers in 22 states, 18 denominations and 70 churches. These churches range in size from 50 to 7,000.

Orientations can be done in three ways: by purchasing a Quik Pak that includes a video of the orientation and twenty workbooks, by participating in a community wide multiple church orientation, or by utilizing one of New Commandment's regional ministry associates to do a live orientation for a single church.

New Commandment Men's Ministries is a Colorado 501 c(3) non profit corporation located in Colorado. Additional information can be found at NewCommandment.org.

Introduction

This book has been written with the conviction that every church that names the name of Jesus can and should be a showcase for jaw-dropping, awe-inspiring and Christ-exalting good works. Unfortunately, as we know all too well, rare is the church that is renowned for its good works. Truth be told, most people, whether church goers or not, can rattle off a list of embarrassing behaviors Christians in their local churches have done, from the pastor who ran off with the church pianist to the congregation that split over what color of carpet to put in the sanctuary.

Often, when a church does get around to doing good, it's usually in the form of fleeting and superficial kind gestures, such as flowers, cards and meals for a grieving spouse or quarterly oil changes for single moms and widows. There certainly isn't anything wrong with these acts of kindness. In fact, we need to keep doing these kindnesses, and even more besides. But they hardly address the deepest longings of a hurting heart—to know and to be known, to be able to depend on someone, and to know that the person you are depending on would lay down his life for you if he had to.

Fortunately, the Lord is raising up hundreds of Christian men across the nation who are taking seriously the biblical challenge to do good works. They have learned that by forming teams and focusing their time and effort on one person with long term needs—such as a widow, widower, single parent or someone who is disabled—they can in fact begin to meet their care receiver's many needs. These men are coming to know their care receivers deeply, they are committing to serve them for years, and they are assuring their care receivers that they will never walk away from them with an unmet need in their life.

The results of such devotion and service are often dramatic. It is not uncommon to see care receivers collapse in tears of joy when they talk about what their team is doing for them. Pastors call me with exciting stories of churches renewed and revived. Neighbors wonder who those men are that keep showing up at the widower's home next door. Soon other churches in the community get involved so that what was once, say, five teams serving five care receivers on five blocks in a community, is now

thirty, forty and more teams serving the same number of care receivers on the same number of blocks. We see this process happening all over the country, in church after church and in community after community.

Now, when the conversation degenerates to the subject of Christians acting badly, I respond in this manner: “Yes, it’s sad to see believers acting that way. But on the other hand, have you heard about the Christian men who helped two single moms in their church purchase their own homes?”

Similar stories of men doing good well are multiplying rapidly, as you will see in the rest of this book. I get to meet many of these men and hear their stories as I visit churches around the country that have started this ministry. Sometimes I even get to meet the care receivers these men are serving. While all the stories in this book are true, they represent only the tip of the proverbial iceberg—not an iceberg that is melting, but an iceberg that is getting larger.

This book has been written for two audiences. The first audience is comprised of those men who have gone through the three hour orientation course on men’s team ministry to the widowed and single parents, have joined a team and are either already serving a care receiver or are about to do so. In the orientation, we spend quite a bit of time talking about the love of Christ, but we don’t have enough time to thoroughly cover the biblical concept of good works. This book is intended to make up that deficit.

The second audience this book has been written for is more general in nature. This audience is comprised of those believers who seek to gain a thorough knowledge of good works and who want to do something practical to put that knowledge into action. They may decide to form a team of their own, or they may get creative and do something else.

Whichever the case may be, my prayer is that this book will give every believer who reads it a lifelong zeal for doing good well.

Herb Reese
President, New Commandment Men’s Ministries
June, 2007
Broomfield, Colorado

My Other Team Members*

1. Team Caller Name:

Address

Home Phone:

Cell:

Email Address:

2. Name:

Address

Home Phone:

Cell:

Email Address:

3. Name:

Address

Home Phone:

Cell:

Email Address:

Our Care Receiver

Name(s):

Address:

Home Phone:

Cell:

Email Address:

Names and Contact Information of Close Relatives:

*New Commandment Men's Ministries strongly recommends background checks for all team members and the oversight of all teams by a local church. See *Developing a Men's Team Ministry* workbook for other recommended policies.

Day 1:
**Stop
Working**

Every now and then, when I speak on the topic of good works, I ask my audience a trick question: How many ways are there to gain eternal life?

And the answer I always get back is: one.

Technically, that is incorrect. According to the Bible, there are two ways to gain eternal life. The first way is the way we are *supposed* to gain it. And the second way is the only way we *can* gain it.

The way we are supposed to gain eternal life is by doing good works. The Apostle Paul makes this clear in Romans 2:6,7, "God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life."

Jesus responds the same way when asked by the expert in the law, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the law?" Jesus asks. When the man quotes the two greatest commandments, Jesus agrees. "Do this and you will live," he said. (See Luke 10:25-29.)

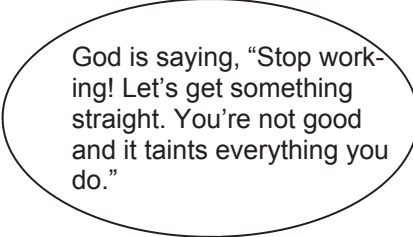
So the way we are supposed to gain eternal life is by doing good works. But there are two problems. In God's sight, we're not good people. And we ratify this reality by failing to do the good he wants us to do.

“But people cannot do any work that will make them right with God. So they must trust in him, who makes even evil people right in his sight. Then God accepts their faith, and that makes them right with him.” Romans 4:5 (The New Century Version)

This “little detail” about human nature and our works surfaced when a wealthy ruler asked Jesus the exact same question as the expert in the law, but prefaced it like this: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Listen to how Jesus responded: “Why do you call me good. No one is good—except God alone.”

The Apostle Paul makes the same point in Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, not even one.”

It’s as if we’re tone deaf but trying to audition for the lead part in an opera and the director is putting his hands to his ears and yelling, “Stop! Stop! That was terrible!”



God is saying, “Stop working! Let’s get something straight. You’re not good and it taints everything you do.”

That’s the way it is with God and our good works. We cannot gain eternal life by working because we have a nature that is contrary to Gods’ and our works fall short of what He requires.

And that brings us to the second way to gain eternal life, which, in practice, is the only way we can gain eternal life.

That way is by acknowledging that we are not good people—that we are, in fact, wicked people who have done bad things—and then placing our faith in God’s provision for our sin, Jesus Christ.

Paul makes this second way to gain eternal life clear in Romans 4:5, “To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

So do you think your good works are going to get you to heaven? Think again. God is saying, “Stop working! Let’s get something straight. You’re not good and it taints everything you do. You are incredibly mistaken if you think doing a few superficially nice things are going to earn you eternal life with Me in heaven.”

No, it’s only when we come clean with God, acknowledge that we are sinners who think, say and do evil all the time, and then trust in His provision for our sin—Jesus Christ’s death on the cross—that we can even begin to do the things that are pleasing to him.

My Observations

Were you aware that there are technically two ways to gain eternal life?

If the only way we can in reality gain eternal life is by placing our faith in Jesus Christ, then why did Jesus and Paul say we should gain eternal life by doing good?

What is the difference between viewing human nature from our perspective and viewing human nature from God's perspective?

My Application

Do you know for certain that you have eternal life and that you will live forever in heaven with Jesus Christ?

Have you accepted God's provision for your sin by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as the one who died for you on the cross?

Digging Deeper

The “expert in the law” who asked Jesus how to gain eternal life, cited in Luke 10:25-28, was part of an inquisition team sent from Jerusalem to test his orthodoxy (a common practice of the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious elite in Jerusalem). These “experts in the law” were trying to trick him into saying something that would be self incriminating. But Jesus turned the tables on this particular “expert” by asking him to summarize the Law of the Old Testament, which included the command to love your neighbor as yourself. In a tit-for-tat, the “expert” asked Jesus to define who is a “neighbor.” The famous story of the Good Samaritan was Jesus’ response.

You can read the entire account in Luke 10:25-37. As you read it, summarize the actions of someone whom Jesus cites as one who did indeed “love his neighbor as himself.”

Then note that Jesus forced the “expert” to acknowledge that the Samaritan was more orthodox than the Jewish priest and Levite—that the Samaritan, not the priest or Levite, had eternal life. This admission would have been considered heresy by the Sanhedrin back in Jerusalem. It might even be possible that the “expert in the law” was himself the Levite in the story. If that were the case, then Jesus was forcing him to condemn himself.

What Jesus was doing was showing that even those considered to be the very best in society can have an ignorance of God’s heart that results in a callousness toward others, verging on negligent homicide.

We are way too impressed with ourselves and way too obsessed with impressing others, Jesus is saying. This self righteousness blinds us to our responsibility to care for the needs of others and has alienated us from God.

Day 2:

Okay, Now Let's Get to Work

I live in what must be the men's ministry capital of the world: Broomfield, Colorado. Broomfield sits fifteen miles northwest of Denver and fifteen miles southeast of Boulder. Within a one hundred mile radius of Broomfield, there are probably a dozen men's ministry headquarters.

One result of all this men's ministry is that you can walk into almost any restaurant in Broomfield on any given morning and see men meeting for bible study, men meeting for accountability groups, men meeting for prayer—you name it. If you wanted to, you could spend every day of the week in a men's group. Our church even has a Thursday evening worship service just for men.

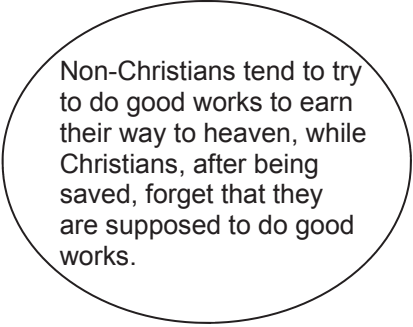
Of course, men meeting together is a wonderful thing. Studying the Bible together, praying in a small group, talking over our issues with other men—this is all a necessary part of what it means to be a Christian man in the twenty-first century.

But unfortunately, we men don't often get beyond sitting in meetings. A social worker in Dallas once told me, "The reason I'm not a Christian is because I don't want to spend eternity in one extremely long meeting!" This man had only a caricature of what Christians do, but one can understand why he saw us this way.

The Bible tells us that God has saved us to do more than just sit in meetings. Originally,

“God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:8-10 (The New Living Translation)

God intended for us to gain eternal life by doing good, as we saw in the last meditation. But since the Fall, gaining eternal life by doing good is impossible because we're not good.



Non-Christians tend to try to do good works to earn their way to heaven, while Christians, after being saved, forget that they are supposed to do good works.

Instead, we have to be saved. And we're saved by trusting in Jesus Christ. But now that we're saved, God wants us to do the good works he planned for us to do in the first place. The irony is that non-Christians tend to try to do good works to earn their way to heaven, while Christians, after being

saved, forget that they are supposed to do good works.

So the command for us is simple: now that you're a child of God, start working! Start serving the widowed, single parents and others with long term needs. It's okay, even necessary, to sit in meetings. But it's not okay to *just* sit in meetings.

Get up. Get out. And do good.

My Observations

How does Ephesians 2:8-10 tie together 1) God's desire for us to do good, 2) our inability to do the good he wants us to do, 3) the solution to that problem, and 4) God's continued desire for us to do good?

According to Ephesians 2:10, how does God view us?

How are we, as God's "masterpiece," to express that reality in the everyday world?

The "good things" we're to do, are they accidental or intentional?

My Application

Add all of the hours you spend sitting in church related meetings per month (Include worship, Sunday School, home groups, etc.).

Now add all the hours per month you spend doing good works. How do they compare?

Do you feel you have a balance? If not, what do you need to change?

Digging Deeper

References to “good works” and “doing good” are numerous in the Word of God. The pervasiveness of these concepts are one indication of how important good works are in the believer’s life. To gain a better understanding of good works, look up each passage and write a brief summary. Then develop an outline of what you have learned.

References to “good work” and “good works” in the Bible:

Matthew 5:16; 26:10 (Mark 14:6)
Acts 9:36
Romans 2:7; 11:6
2 Corinthians 9:8
Ephesians 2:10
Philippians 1:6
Colossians 1:10
2 Thessalonians 2:17
1 Timothy 2:10; 3:1; 5:10; 5:25; 6:18
2 Timothy 2:21; 3:17
Titus 1:16; 2:7; 2:14; 3:1; 3:8; 3:14
Hebrews 10:24; 13:21
1 Peter 2:12
3 John 5

References to “do good” and “doing good” in the Bible:

Psalms 34:14; 36:3; 37:3; 37:27
Ecclesiastes 3:12
Isaiah 1:17; 41:23
Jeremiah 4:22; 10:5; 13:23
Matthew 5:44; 12:12 (Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9)
Luke 6:27, 33, 35
Acts 10:38
Romans 7:21
Galatians 6:9
Ephesians 6:8
2 Thessalonians 3:13
1 Timothy 6:18
Hebrews 18:16
James 4:17
1 Peter 2:14, 20; 3:6, 11, 13, 17; 4:19

Day 3:

What is “Every Good Work”?

As Sarah's* team members sat for the first time in the living room of her home in Houston, they learned that this widow and single mom was dealing with two tragedies at once: her husband had just been killed in a car wreck and her body was rejecting a liver transplant she had recently received.

Because of her husband's death, Sarah was going to have to move to a new location and because of her continuing liver disease, she was also in need of a live liver donor.

Live liver donations have revolutionized the way people with liver disease find new livers. In the past, livers were transplanted solely from cadavers. But this drastically limited supply. Now modern medicine has developed a second source for livers: physicians take half a liver from a live liver donor and give it to the person who needs a new liver. In time, the two halves of the healthy liver grow back to full size in both the donor and the receiver. Because Sarah's liver rejection was in its advanced stages, Sarah's second liver was probably going to have to come from a live liver donor.

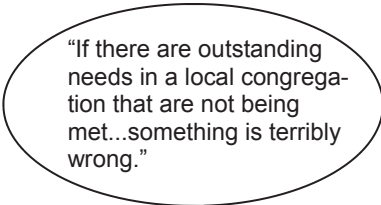
How would Sarah's team respond to someone in such need?

*The name and some details have been changed.

“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things in all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”
2 Corinthians 9:8
(New International Version)

The first thing the team did was help Sarah move to a better location. Then, when Sarah had to be hospitalized, the team visited her in the hospital. But the team didn't stop there. They became advocates for Sarah and put the word out to the other men in the ministry that Sarah was in need of a live liver donor with B+ blood type. They didn't plead, beg, badger or harangue the men. They just informed them of the need.

The result was that one of the men on Sarah's team and a man on another team both volunteered to be live liver donors for Sarah.



"If there are outstanding needs in a local congregation that are not being met...something is terribly wrong."

Turns out, at the last minute, Sarah's need for a liver was supplied by a cadaver. But the willingness of these men to donate half of their own livers demonstrates an important biblical principle: we are to be ready for

"every good deed."

As 2 Corinthians 9:8 promises, and as the experience of this team in Houston demonstrates, when we step out in obedience to meet a need, God will enable us to "abound in every good work."

That phrase, "every good work," is an important one. It occurs nine times in the New Testament. What it refers to is the ability God gives every congregation to meet every outstanding need in its midst. In this way, the congregation is to be able to say, "There is not a needy person among us" (Acts 4:34). To accomplish this, we must be ready "for every good work."

In other words, if there are outstanding needs in a local congregation that are not being met by other members of the congregation, something is terribly wrong. No matter how severe those needs may be, God expects us to be ready "for every good work." And if we are not ready or willing, then we have a grossly distorted concept of what the Christian life and the body of Christ are all about.

My Observations

How many times does the word “all” occur in 2 Corinthians 9:8?

Why do you think this is so?

If we step out in faith to meet a need in our church, what does this verse say God will do?

My Application

Are there needs in your congregation that are going unmet?

If so, list the most serious. Be as specific as possible.

What is God calling you to do to address those needs?

Digging Deeper

Below are the nine passages that mention “every good work.” Read them carefully. Which ones associate good works with being pleasing to God? Which ones associate good works with mature (i.e. “perfect”) believers? What would be the implications if we were ready for most good works, but not all?

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things in all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:8 (New International Version)

For this reason, since the day we heard it, do not cease praying for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:9-10 (The New King James Version)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (English Standard Version)

A widow who is put on the list for support must be a woman who is at least sixty years old and was faithful to her husband. She must be well respected by everyone because of the good she has done. Has she brought up her children well? Has she been kind to strangers? Has she served other Christians humbly? Has she helped those who are in trouble? Has she always been ready to do good? (Literally, “ready for every good work”) 1 Timothy 5:9-10 (NLT)

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. 2 Timothy 2:21 (New American Standard Bible, 1995)

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (King James Version)

They claim to know God. But they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, and disqualified to do anything good. (Literally, “every good work”) Titus 1:16 (International Standard Version, NT)

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work. Titus 3:1 (New King James Version)

And the God of peace...make you perfect in every good work to do His will, doing in you that which is well-pleasing before Him. Hebrews 10:20-21 (Young)

Day 4:

Your Church is A Covenant Community

“Mary” had been a member of her church for thirty years. Recently her husband died. Having heard about men’s team ministry in another church, she asked her pastor if her church could help her.

Her pastor responded that, no, they would not help her because they wanted to focus their attention and energy on youth.

When Mary told the pastor at the other church, that church’s men’s ministry took her on for a few months with the hopes that doing so would shame Mary’s church into serving her. It worked. Mary now has a team from her own church!

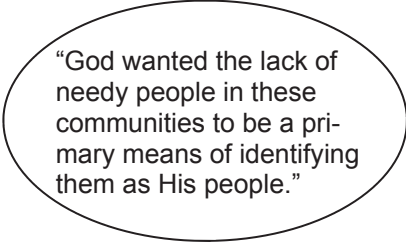
Your church is a covenant community, just as Israel in Old Testament times was a covenant community. A covenant community is a group of people bound together by an agreement. For example, many subdivisions have signs that read, “This is a covenant community,” meaning that certain rules and regulations have been agreed to by the property owners and are enforced in that subdivision.

In both the covenant communities that God established with Israel and the church, God required the members of these communities to care for those members who were in need. God wanted the resulting lack of needy people in these communities to be a

“*If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.*” Deuteronomy 15:7-8 (English Standard Version)

“*Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God’s love is not living in that person.*” 1 John 3:17 (New Century Version)

“*There were no needy persons among them.*” Acts 4:34 (New International Version)



“God wanted the lack of needy people in these communities to be a primary means of identifying them as His people.”

primary means of identifying them as His people.

Your work with your care receiver is a specific response to God's command to care for those in your midst who are in need. As your example multiplies throughout your church

body, your individual obedience becomes corporate obedience on the part of your covenant community, ultimately reaching the point where your church is able to say, “There is not a needy person among us.”

It is this lack of need in your midst that sets you apart as the people of God and draws unbelievers to you as they see your selfless and sacrificial lifestyle.

My Observations

In Deuteronomy 15:7-8, what temptation does God command us to resist when it comes to our response to fellow believers in need?

Summarize John's restatement of this same principle in 1 John 3:17.

Why was it so important for the early church to be able to say, "There is no needy person among us"? Acts 4:34

My Application

You are a godly man who wants to obey the Lord. Suppose there are, in fact, people with outstanding needs in your congregation. What is your plan of action?

Can you accomplish the plan alone?

How can you enlist the help of others?

Digging Deeper

Did the first believers after Pentecost form a communistic community in order to achieve their rightfully proud goal of there being no needy person among them? That is, were new converts required to sell all of their possessions when they became believers and donate them into a common pool? A first reading of Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35 might give that impression.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Acts 2:44, 45 (New International Version)

No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. Acts 4:32 (NIV)

There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Acts 4:34, 35 (NIV)

But in Acts 5:1, Peter himself made it clear in his rebuke of Ananias and Sapphira for lying about the sale of their property that no one was forcing anyone to sell their possessions.

Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? Acts 5:1 (NIV)

A closer examination of the Greek grammar of Acts 2:45 reveals that Luke is using what is called “iterative (repetitive) imperfects” to describe their selling activities: “They kept selling their possessions and goods.” That is, as a need arose, such as someone dying of starvation, believers would voluntarily sell something to meet the need. So what Luke is describing is an attitude of commonality, not communism. This interpretation is confirmed in Acts 4:34, 35, where the text reads, “*from time to time* those who owned land or houses sold them.”

Many of the early believers were extremely needy people who came from the temple area: beggars, widows, the lame. Those who had property were not required to sell it when they joined the community. But the needs were so overwhelming that they often did—not out of obligation, but out of their newfound love for their fellow believers in the Lord.

Day 5:

Righteousness 101

“I went to bible college for four years, but I was never taught this.”

“Todd” was a young man who was a new recruit in the Westminster, Colorado Fire Department. His church in Boulder had just started a men’s team ministry to their widowed and single parents.

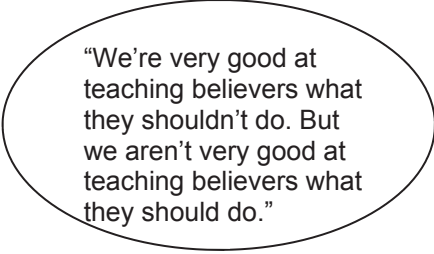
Todd and his team had also just done something I’ve never heard anyone else do: he and his fellow team members met together for a couple of months and reviewed all of the scripture we covered in our orientation—*twice*.

And in spite of the fact that Todd had recently graduated from a solid, bible teaching school that taught the word of God to him in depth for four years, he had never gained an understanding of how pervasive the idea of practicing good works towards widows, fatherless children, immigrants and the poor is throughout scripture.

Unfortunately, Todd had not been given “*all that is needed to do every good work,*” as 2 Timothy 3:17 states. And Todd is not alone in his experience. There is a pervasive ignorance throughout the local church on the topic of good works. The result is that the church has been handicapped when it comes to ministering to those in its midst with long term needs. No one knows what to do with these people.

“*All Scripture is given by God and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right. Using the Scriptures, the person who serves God will be capable, having all that is needed to do every good work.*”
2 Timothy 3:16, 17 (The New Century Version)

We use the inspired word of God to teach doctrine, including the doctrine of salvation by faith apart from works. We use it to reprove believers for their rebellion and to correct their faults. And we should do all these things. But we are not using God's inspired word to teach believers about the importance of good



"We're very good at teaching believers what they shouldn't do. But we aren't very good at teaching believers what they should do."

works *after they are saved*. And the irony of 2 Timothy 3:16 is that being able to do every good work is to be the culmination of a Christian's life!

We're very good at teaching believers what they shouldn't do. But we aren't

very good at teaching believers what they should do. The result is a great tragedy in the local church, with the most needy and desperate having their needs either going completely unmet, or the church attempting to meet those needs in superficial and ineffective ways. And all the while we wonder why the world thinks the church is irrelevant.

My Observations

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, what is the basis of the Bible's authority?

How pervasive throughout scripture is this authority?

What does the authority of scripture imply for your life?

My Application

On a scale of 1 to 10, how thorough would you rate your knowledge of the Word of God?

In what ways has the Word of God reproved and corrected you?

Why do you think the church has been so weak in equipping believers for every good work?

Digging Deeper

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the Bible is ultimately a good works manual. It doesn't tell us how to live the good life. It tells us how to live a life that is good. Because all of the Bible comes from God, all of it is helpful to us in accomplishing this goal.

The word of God is a tool that provides us with a world view that is true to reality (doctrine). It tells us about the nature of God—that he is infinite, personal and holy, the nature of God's ways in this world—that he is sovereign, loving and faithful, and the nature of our souls—that we have been created in God's image but are sinners in need of redemption from God's wrath through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Then the Bible confronts us about specific sin in our lives (reproof). It never flinches. It never glosses over. It goes directly to our inner person and speaks to our conscience. It shows us how we have raised our rebel fist in God's face and it calls us to repentance and faith in Christ.

But God's word doesn't stop there. It goes on to deal with our faults and foibles (correction), those areas of weakness we would rather just live with. It doesn't settle. It insists that we be perfect like Jesus Christ.

And then, finally, it tells us we are ready (equipped) to do good and it shows us time and again what the good is that we are to do. It gives us real life models, examples, teaching, history, and ultimately, it gives us Jesus Christ and the church.

The church, then, is to be a "good works factory," a place where the word of God is taught in its entirety, where people are brought to faith in Christ and are then sent out to do good works. Doing good works is how the early church grew and spread. Doing good works is how the church today will grow and spread.

Day 6:

Be an Advocate

Bill McMullen* and his team have a daunting task: protecting Mary and Susan—Mary's bedridden, severely mentally and physically handicapped step-daughter,—from Mary's ex-husband, Tom.

Tom is Susan's natural father and has joint custody of her with Mary, along with visitation rights. But Tom refuses to do his part to care for his daughter. His attitude toward his daughter is "Just let nature takes its course." Tom hates Mary for all of the time, money and effort she has dedicated toward caring for her.

So whenever Tom comes over to visit his daughter, he does "projects" around the house that look like he's fixing things. But what Bill and his team have discovered is that Tom actually seems to be sabotaging the house.

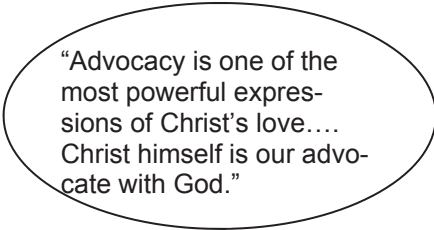
For example, Bill checked out the breaker box that Tom had been working on the previous month and discovered wires that had been loosened so they would eventually short out. On another occasion, Tom said he was going to remodel the bathroom, came over and tore it out, and then left most of it unfinished for months. When he did start working on it again, Tom installed a bathroom light switch for Mary *inside her shower*.

*Names and details have been changed.

“Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows.” Isaiah 1:17 (The New Living Translation)

Being an advocate for someone means we take on their problems as our own. It means we represent their best interests by “pleading their cause.” Running interference against an ex’s antics is one example of what it means to be an advocate.

Another example of advocacy is the team at Washington Heights Baptist Church in South Ogden, Utah, that painted the interior of their care receiver’s apartment and did other improvements. As a token of appreciation, the landlord raised her rent. So what did



“Advocacy is one of the most powerful expressions of Christ’s love.... Christ himself is our advocate with God.”

her team do? They found her another apartment and moved her—and it was cheaper and better to boot.

Advocacy is one of the most powerful expressions of Christ’s love. Knowing

that someone is on your side and is going to fight for you and not abandon you when friendship becomes costly is extremely comforting. Christ himself is our advocate with God, as John says in 1 John 2:1, “If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Your advocacy for your care receiver is bringing her joy and peace, the same joy and peace you have because of what Christ Jesus is doing for you in the presence of the Father.

My Observations

How is the phrase “learn to do good” in Isaiah 1:17 defined in the rest of the verse?

How does the rest of the verse explain in concrete terms what seeking justice and helping the oppressed mean?

Why do you think God specifically points to widows and orphans in this passage?

My Application

In what ways may your team’s care receiver need you to be an advocate?

Advocacy requires knowledge and understanding of your care receiver. What other qualities may be necessary to fulfill this role?

Digging Deeper

The person (or people) your team is serving is in a tough situation. Perhaps your care receiver is a single mother with two young children who is also a high school dropout and making only minimum wage. Or perhaps your care receiver is someone who is disabled and confined to a wheelchair. He may have sufficient funds from Social Security, but he needs help doing things around the home. Or perhaps your care receiver is a widow who is well off financially, but has lost her husband and is in poor health and is all alone in a large home with no nearby relatives to come to her aid.

Whatever the case may be, all of these people need an advocate and that is why your team has been assigned to him or her. *You* are now their advocate. So what does an advocate do? One source defines an advocate this way:

An advocate is one who speaks on behalf of another, especially in a legal context. Implicit in the concept is the notion that the represented lacks the knowledge, skill, ability, or standing to speak for themselves. Common advocates include lawyers, activists, and public relations consultants. (Wikipedia:Advocate)

The Bible contains some great examples of advocates. Judah advocated for Benjamin before his seemingly hostile brother, Joseph in Genesis 43:3-10. Esther advocated for the Jews in Esther 5:1-8 and 7:1-8. Moses advocated for the Jews in Numbers 14:10-19. And Jonathan advocated for David in 1 Samuel 20:1-34. Job beautifully describes his advocate “on high” in Job 16:19-21.

Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend. (New International Version)

Your advocacy for your care receiver continues a long tradition of believers acting on behalf of others. And it mirrors our relationship with Jesus Christ. By your advocacy, you communicate a very important message, that Christ himself stands in the very presence of God to act and speak on her behalf.

Day 7:

Teamwork is Good Work

“Go ahead, try to shoot me again! I can’t believe you’re such a bad shot” Dave, still waving his gun, taunted the police officer to finish him off. The officer had been called to Dave’s home on a domestic violence call and now he and Dave stood face to face in Dave’s living room

Finally the police officer obliged and shot two more times, this time hitting Dave in the brain and then, as he spun around from the impact, in the back. The gunshot wound to the brain sent Dave into a coma for weeks. When he woke up, he discovered he was paralyzed and would be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

In the aftermath of that tragic confrontation, Dave’s wife divorced him and Dave sunk into despair and depression. Finally, someone shared Jesus with him and Dave came to faith in Christ. Suddenly his life was filled with hope again.

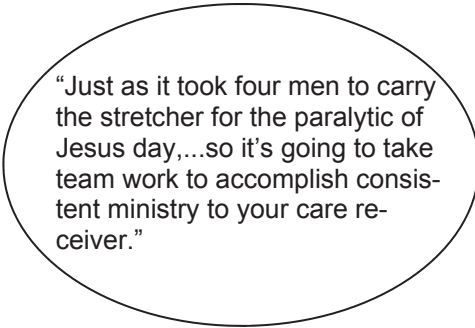
In the church Dave began attending, Fairview Bible Chapel in Boulder, Colorado, he met four men who became his support team. Social services provided Dave with an attendant to care for him during the week. But on the weekends, he had no one to fill that role.

Enter Dave’s team. For over ten years now, his team of four men have rotated through the month. Each Sunday morning, one of them goes to Dave’s home, wakes him up,

“And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Mark 2:3-5 (English Standard Version)

helps him get ready for the day, gets him into his wheelchair, transports him to church, takes him out to lunch, and then takes him back home.

It is that kind of consistent ministry over years that we are aiming for with your care receiver. Your widow, widower, or single parent doesn't need hit or miss ministry. He or she needs your team to be consistent.



“Just as it took four men to carry the stretcher for the paralytic of Jesus day,...so it's going to take team work to accomplish consistent ministry to your care receiver.”

Consistent ministry over years can't be achieved alone. Just as it took four men to carry the stretcher for the paralytic of Jesus day, and just as it takes four men to min-

ister to Dave, so it's going to take teamwork to accomplish consistent ministry to your care receiver. There are going to be times when you will be sick, called out of town, or have family responsibilities. But because you are part of a team, you can rely on your fellow team members to provide for your care receiver when you can't.

But remember, your team is counting on you being there when you are able to make it. When you carry your part of the load, it makes the burden easier for everyone involved.

Teamwork truly is good work.

My Observations

In what way were the men who were carrying the paralytic exercising faith?

Which did Jesus consider to be more important, the physical or spiritual needs of the paralytic? Why?

Name some other teams of men in the Bible that God used.

My Application

Which is more important, that your care receiver be ministered to physically or spiritually?

In what way is your team doing the same thing the four men were doing with the paralytic?

In what ways do you bring your care receiver into the presence of Christ as a team?

Digging Deeper

It may sound trite, but in a sense, we can think of the Trinity as a team of three. In respect to our salvation we see this team in action when the Father sends the Son to be the savior of the world, the Son gives himself as a sacrifice for our sin, and the Holy Spirit regenerates and indwells the believer.

And in creation we again see this team in action when God says "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."

And then out of the "teamwork" of creation comes the "teamwork" of marriage: a man and a woman uniting, becoming one and pro-creating children as a result (Genesis 2:24).

King Solomon vividly describes the wisdom of teamwork:

Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. And on a cold night, two under the same blanket can gain warmth from each other. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back to back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple braided cord is not easily broken. Ecclesiastes 4:12 (New Living Translation)

Interestingly, most major spiritual advances recorded in the Bible are associated with some very famous teams:

The Exodus:	Moses and Aaron
The beginning of the Davidic Line;	David and Jonathan
The start of the prophetic age:	Elijah and Elisha
The ministry of Jesus:	Jesus and the Disciples
The expansion of the church:	Paul and Timothy

Your team has been formed to accomplish something very profound: to love a widow, widower, single parent, or someone else with a long term need exactly the way Jesus wants you to love them. You should expect the results of your teamwork to be just as profound.

Day 8:

The Needs of Those Who Are Around You

“I’m going to be evicted from my home in three days.”

The half paralyzed man leaned on his cane as stunned silence filled the room. I had just finished my orientation on ministry to the widowed and single parents and this widower wanted to know if we meant business.

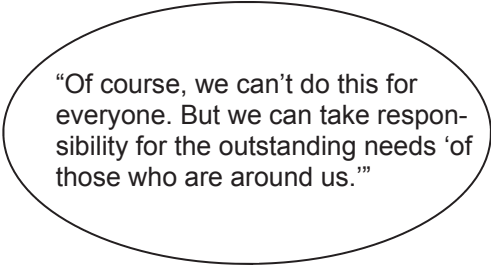
Clearly, the men of North Huron Christian Center *did* mean business. First they banded together and bought his home, preserving his equity. Then they paid cash for a smaller mobile home and moved him into it. Then they fixed up his first home and resold it, recouping their investment. And finally, they did some research and discovered that this gentleman was eligible for Social Security survivor benefits. As a result of their efforts, he is now self sufficient in his own home with no mortgage.

As believers, we have a dual responsibility. We must bear our own burdens, and we must help bear the burdens others aren’t able to bear. We are to meet our own needs *as well as* the outstanding needs of others. Of course, we can’t do this for everyone. But we can take responsibility for the outstanding needs “of those who are around us.”

Your team has been assigned your care receiver because he or she has lost a husband, a wife, or a parent. Or perhaps they

“You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Acts 20:34-35 (New King James Version)

are suffering a permanent disability. As a result, they may have needs they can't meet. These needs may be physical and financial in nature. Or they may be primarily emotional, social and spiritual in nature. Whatever the case may be, meeting them consistently requires your dedication and commitment. It requires your time and physical effort.



“Of course, we can't do this for everyone. But we can take responsibility for the outstanding needs 'of those who are around us.'”

This can be hard work. It isn't easy to get up early one Saturday morning a month, especially after a hard week at work. But it is necessary and significant work that brings a surprising reward.

In this passage, Paul quotes Jesus' famous saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” As you minister to your care receiver, the joy and peace you experience every time you leave their home is proof of Jesus' words.

My Observations

How did Paul point to himself as an example of meeting the needs of those who are around us?

How does Paul describe those who are in need?

What is the promise Jesus gives to those who give?

My Application

We are to meet the unmet needs of those who are around us. Make a list of “those who are around” you. Include family members, neighbors you know, friends at work and fellow believers.

How many are there? Are there any outstanding needs?

What can you do to help meet those needs?

Digging Deeper

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain’s sarcastic response to God’s inquiry about his brother, Abel, as he lay dead in the back forty revealed his fratricidal attitude toward his own flesh and blood. “Am I ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of my brother? No, I am not! Go find him yourself!” Cain was saying to God.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” The answer modern society encourages us to give to that question is, “No, I am not ultimately responsible for my brother. The government is ultimately responsible for my brother.” Our culture holds to the doctrine of “benign self interest”—as individuals pursue their own self interest without causing injury to others, the result is the common good. People such as the elderly and single parents who cannot meet their own needs will have their needs met by the government, which has the ability to pass laws and levy taxes to meet those needs.

In some ways the doctrine of benign self interest has succeeded. Historically, Americans live in an incredibly prosperous society. Poverty is at or near record lows. We have systems and institutions for caring for the sick and elderly. Government has freed us to enjoy “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

On the other hand, the doctrine of benign self interest has resulted in some serious negatives. Our society is highly materialistic, yet very impersonal. We are relationally challenged, isolated and lonely. The number of people living alone has skyrocketed. Divorce is still a serious issue. And the best many people can do to experience a sense of community is visit their local Starbucks every day for a cup of latte. And on top of it all, our government is going broke, leaving the promise of “social security” in doubt.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” The answer the Bible gives to that question is a resounding yes. We as individuals are indeed ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of those “who are around us.” And as we take up the challenge to care for others, the result is a living, vibrant, interpersonal community called the church.

Here are some passages that teach about our responsibility to others, especially to our fellow believers:

Philippians 2:2
1 John 3:16-18

2 Corinthians 8:13
James 2:14-17

Day 9:

Their Unmet Need or Their Every Need?

“Helen” had her to-do list all made out. It was her team’s first visit and she couldn’t wait for them to get started. But when her new team looked at the list, they were startled at what they found: “Install central air conditioning. Remodel kitchen. Stain backyard fence. Put in sprinkler system.”

Suddenly, her team had to make a decision. Were these legitimate needs? Or were they unrealistic expectations?

Clearly, Helen misunderstood the nature of her team’s mission. Her team wasn’t there to satisfy her every want. Rather, it was there to fulfill unmet needs. Had Helen asked her team to repair her heating unit in the middle of January, that would have been a different matter.

The situation Helen’s team found itself in raises an important issue: at what point are we to bear another’s burdens and at what point are we to consider bearing those burdens an imposition?

On this issue, scripture seems to be contradicting itself. On the one hand, it says we are to carry one another’s burdens. But on the other hand, it says each of us is to carry his own load. So which are we to do?

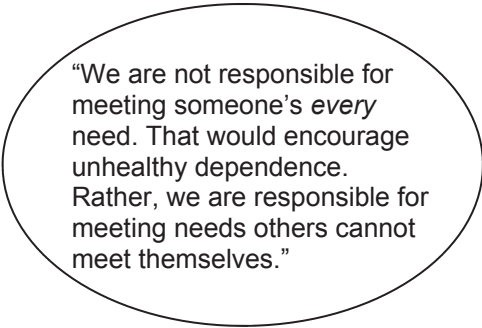
But it’s not really a question of which we are to do, but rather a question of discernment.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.... all must carry their own loads.” Galatians 6:2, 5 (The New Revised Standard Version)

As we know, the “law of Christ” is his command to love one another *as he has loved us*. That is, to love each other by personally identifying with, committing to and sacrificing for each other the way Christ has done for us. In this process, we take final responsibility for needs others cannot meet. If we cannot meet those needs out of our own means, then we advocate for them until we locate provision for their unmet need. In this way, we “carry” their burden as if it were our own.

On the other hand, we have our own burden to carry as well. We are responsible for providing for our own needs. So we work at our jobs and in the home. We provide “food and covering” for ourselves and our families. This is the burden we carry for ourselves.

But might there not be people who are lazy and are not willing to carry needs they could and should be carrying but don’t want to? Are we responsible for carrying those burdens?



“We are not responsible for meeting someone’s *every* need. That would encourage unhealthy dependence. Rather, we are responsible for meeting needs others cannot meet themselves.”

The answer is no, we are not. The apostle Paul specifically warns us not to condone slothfulness in the Christian community: “We command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle.” He goes on to say in 2 Thessa-

lonians 3:10, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

So we are not responsible for meeting someone’s *every* need. That would encourage unhealthy dependence. Rather, we are responsible for meeting needs others cannot meet themselves. It is those burdens we are to bear.

My Observations

Do you feel Helen's team had a legitimate concern?

How would you have responded to Helen's requests?

Why is bearing one another's burdens related to the law of Christ?

My Application

Which of the following do you feel are genuine needs and which aren't?

- A broken dishwasher
- Planting a rose bush
- A car in disrepair
- Unpaid medical bills
- A hole in a wall
- Adding an additional bedroom

How do circumstances affect whether or not something is a need?

How does your relationship to your care receiver affect your desire to do things for him or her that you otherwise might not do for a stranger?

What outstanding needs does your care receiver have? Be as specific as possible.

Digging Deeper

Indiscriminate generosity always leads to abuse. That kind of generosity is never enjoined in the Word of God. In fact, it is strictly prohibited. It is only those who are widows “indeed” who are to be put on the list for total financial support (1 Timothy 5:3). And Paul reminds the Thessalonian believers that if “a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The problem of idle believers mooching off of the rest of the church must have been fairly pervasive in the Thessalonian congregation, because Paul devotes significant space to it in his second letter to them:

Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right. Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (NRSV)

The refusal of some believers to work was such a threat to the viability of the Thessalonian church that Paul prescribed ostracism to combat it. In language reminiscent of his speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:32-35, he reminded them of his own example of hard work, and reissued his command not to let idle brothers eat food in the common meals they shared together.

The purpose of your ministry to your care receiver is not to promote idleness, but to meet real needs and to exalt our Lord Jesus Christ in the process.

Day 10:

Deeds Appropriate to Repentance

“Dennis Harland” was an owner of a successful business in Reno, Nevada. Since he had arrived early for my workshop, I struck up a conversation with him. Soon Dennis was eagerly telling me the story of the day he came back to the Lord after years of living a carnal life.

He said he was sitting in the grandstands at the Daytona 500, enjoying the race and minding his own business when a complete stranger walked up to him and asked, “Are you Dennis Harland?”

“Yes,” he answered, puzzled at how this man knew his name.

“I have a message to you from the Lord,” he told Dennis. Then, looking him straight in the eye, he boldly declared, “The Lord says, ‘This is your last chance. If you don’t repent, you’re going to die.’” Then this complete stranger began to list the exact sins Dennis had committed.

“He told me, ‘You’ve done this and this and this and this,’” Dennis said in an animated voice. “And it was exactly what I had done.”

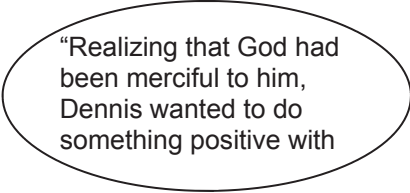
Then this man, who turned out to be a landscape architect from south Florida, said to him, “If you don’t repent, you’re going to lose your business, your wife, your kids and your home. You’ll live in a cardboard box

“I kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.” Acts 26:20 (New American Standard Bible)

under a bridge and then you'll die!"

"Suddenly," Dennis said, "my hand that was holding my beer began to shake uncontrollably and I realized right then that I had to make a decision."

And the decision Dennis made was to indeed repent.



"Realizing that God had been merciful to him, Dennis wanted to do something positive with

Realizing that God had been merciful to him, Dennis wanted to do something to show that his repentance was genuine. That's when he heard about our ministry working with the widowed and single parents.

"I figured this was something I could do," Dennis said.

Good works do not save us. But they are an indication by which we understand that we have been saved "by the skin of our teeth," so to speak. A deep and profound understanding that we truly deserve God's judgment and have been let off scott free naturally results in a desire to serve and please Him.

Genuine repentance never occurs alone. It is always followed by performing "deeds appropriate to repentance."

My Observations

Summarize Paul's message.

Besides Jews, to whom did Paul also deliver his message?

When you think about the story of Dennis Harland, what was the indication that Dennis' repentance was genuine?

My Application

Have you ever had a period in your life when, after becoming a Christian, you stopped walking with the Lord?

What did the Lord do to get your attention and bring you back to himself?

How has your life changed as a result?

Digging Deeper

James 2:14-26 is a difficult passage because in it James seems to be contradicting Paul and John's insistence that salvation is by faith apart from works of righteousness. (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16) In verse 24, James states, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."

The apparent discrepancy can be resolved by distinguishing between faith as mere mental assent to a set of doctrines and faith as active trust or reliance on someone. Believing *that* something is true is not the same as believing *in* it or *on* it. One can believe *that* a plane can fly you from your current location to China. But it is only when you do the work of getting on the plane that you demonstrate that you believe *in* it—that you are willing to entrust yourself to it.

In the same way, believing a set of doctrines about Christianity is not saving faith. James points this out in verse 19, "Do you still think it's enough to just believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror!" We've all met people like this when we try to witness to them and they say, "Sure, I believe that. I'm a Christian." But in our heart we know they aren't because they're just giving mental assent—lip service—to a set of doctrines.

Saving faith is trusting *in* or *on* Christ to save us from our sins. James is saying that kind of faith is demonstrated by our acts, just as faith *in* a plane is demonstrated by the act of getting on it. And one of the most evident ways of demonstrating that you are relying on Christ to save you is by ministering to those in need who are around you.

Dear brothers or sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone. Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, it isn't good enough to have faith. [As mere mental assent] Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless. James 2:14-17 (The New Living Translation)

Day 11:

Make the Widow's Heart Sing

"I want you to know that this ministry has changed my whole outlook on life." Ruth said with a serious look on her face. This was unusual, because Ruth is one of the most joyful and godly Christian widows I have ever known. Yet, here she was, curiously introspective.

"Why Ruth," I said "I would think that if there was anyone who didn't need their outlook on life changed, it would be you."

"No," she said, looking even more serious. "It has."

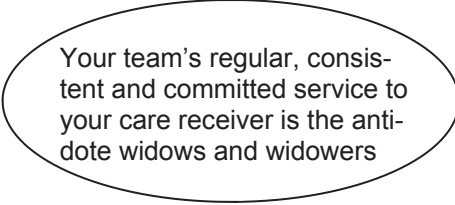
Sometimes it's hard for us to understand how meaningful this ministry is to the widowed and single parents. Those of us who are married and have children—"family men" we're called—lead very full lives. We have our work, our family, our church, our hobbies. We have regular social interaction almost every moment we're awake. People need us and depend on us. We get positive feedback—and negative feedback. In short, we have a *life*.

In old age, all of that changes. The kids grow up and move out. We retire. The health we take for granted begins to fade. And then the ultimate loss—our loved one dies. Suddenly, hours that were packed with too many things to do and too many people to see are gaping holes waiting to be filled.

“Anyone who heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me praised me, because I saved the poor who called out and the orphan who had no one to help. The dying person blessed me, and I made the widow's heart sing.” Job 29:11-13 (The New Century Version)

Isolation, loneliness, boredom, poor health—all of these things all too often accompany growing old in America today. The effect these negative experiences have on a widow or widower's spiritual and emotional health can be overwhelming: depression, in-

security and fear of the future are common among the elderly.



Your team's regular, consistent and committed service to your care receiver is the antidote widows and widowers

Your team's regular, consistent and committed service to your care receiver is the antidote

widows and widowers truly need. It is not just a Social Security check in the mail each month, or an occasional visit by your pastor, but *the love of Christ* they crave.

And the love of Christ is exactly what you are showing. And in the process, you are making your care receiver's heart sing.

My Observations

List the various things Job did for those in distress.

How does Job describe the response of those he helped.

In the story about Helen, why do you think her whole outlook on life changed?

My Application

Have you ever experienced extended periods of financial deprivation, ill health and/or intense loneliness?

To what extent do you think your care receiver is dealing with these issues?

Have you noticed a change in his or her attitude since your team started working with them?

Digging Deeper

God created us to be social creatures. “It is not good for man to be alone,” God said in Genesis 2:18. It should not be surprising, then, that recent research has documented significant health benefits to the elderly from religious participation. One example is a report about a study published in the July/August, 1999, issue of *Journal of Gerontology*:

Koenig, lead author of the research report, said it is the fourth major study published in the past two years documenting a relationship between religious attendance and longer survival. Participating in religious services is associated with significant health benefits in elderly people, even when you take into account the fact that religious people tend to start out with better health practices and more social support,” Koenig said. The current findings build on a series of earlier studies at Duke and elsewhere showing that religious people have lower blood pressure, less depression and anxiety, stronger immune systems and cost the health care system less than people who are less religiously involved.

Consequently, it is important to understand that our ministry should not just be to those who are financially deprived, but also to those who may be well off financially but who have no relatives nearby to care for them. This type of social deprivation can be deadly.

The above article goes on to report specific statistics related to the mortality of those who are not participating in a church setting:

Of the 1,177 subjects who died during the 6-year study period, 22.9 percent were frequent church attenders compared to 37.4 percent who were infrequent attenders.

“God sets the lonely in families” (Psalms 68:6). Your service to your care receiver is one of the means by which He is accomplishing that. You can’t begin to imagine how significant your team’s involvement in his or her life is until someday you, too, experience loss and loneliness. But you can know that your faithful service is extending their life and bringing joy to their heart.

Day 12:

Influencing an Entire Nation

When it comes to helping people with long term needs, like widows and fatherless children, the church in America has allowed itself to be co-opted by the federal government. There's Social Security. There's Medicare and Medicaid. There's Aid to Families with Dependent Children. There's food stamps. You name the problem and Washington has a social program for it. So why should the church worry about the elderly or the fatherless when the government is caring for them?

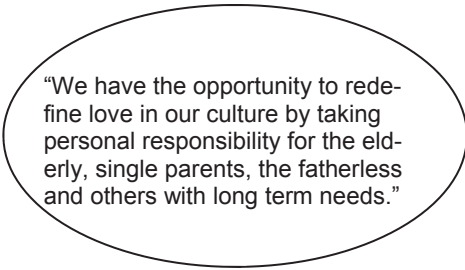
I'm not taking a political position on whether or not these programs should exist. But I do want to point out the elephant in the room: our federal government is broke and on the verge of bankruptcy. It has over promised and under funded its social programs. Every politician in Washington knows this reality will soon come crashing down on us as the first of seventy-five million baby boomers retire in a few years and begin drawing on their expected benefits. No politician has even attempted to propose a solution because they know that real solutions will involve pain and inflicting pain on the electorate is political suicide. (See, for example, "On U.S. Debt, It's All Quiet on Presidential Campaign Trail," USA Today, April 25, 2007, p. 10A)

Enter the church.

“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”
Matthew 5:16
(New International Version)

I believe the church has a wonderful opportunity to regain moral influence in our culture by addressing this problem head on. Believers need to “learn to do good.” We need to understand that God intends the church, not the federal government, to be “the final safety net.”

We have the opportunity to redefine love in our culture by taking personal responsibility for the elderly, the fatherless and others with long term needs in our congregations. America’s concept of



“We have the opportunity to redefine love in our culture by taking personal responsibility for the elderly, single parents, the fatherless and others with long term needs.”

love is feeling oriented and transient in nature. Such a shallow understanding of love will never provide a foundation for the sacrifices that will be needed by our culture in the near future.

The Christian conviction, however, that real love is personal, committed and sacrificial is sufficient to meet the need...when it is practiced. And we must be clear that practicing it will not be easy. In fact, it will be very costly.

It is common now for churches to spend millions on buildings and programs—and almost nothing on the people in its midst who are in need. I know of one church that has spent *ninety million dollars* on its building program. And the result? Lawyers from the surrounding community are wandering its halls looking for ways to sue it so they can force it out of the area.

The church needs to change its priorities, fast. We need hundreds of thousands of churches in America to begin showing sacrificial, committed love to millions of people with long term needs. In short, we need to rescue our country with the love of Christ.

America doesn’t need more social programs or more money to fund them. It can’t afford them anyway. What it needs is to know that the love of Christ is real; that it is the most valuable gift anyone can give, and the most precious possession anyone can have.

And God has put you here to prove it.

My Observations

What do you think about America's social programs and the church's relation to them?

Do you agree or disagree that the U.S. will soon start experiencing severe fiscal difficulties as the baby boom generation retires?

There are over 300,000 churches in America. How many people with long term needs would each church need to adopt to serve 2 million of them. How many men would it require to form a team of four for each of them?

My Application

Do you think "rescuing America with the love of Christ" is too idealistic?

How can you influence your church to focus more on the needs of those who are in distress?

How many teams do you think your church can ultimately recruit?

Digging Deeper

Is America about to experience a time of serious need? I don't want to be a purveyor of doom and gloom, but no nation ever experiences consistent prosperity forever. We tend to think that it is our manifest destiny to always have an abundance. After all, one of our biggest problems in America today is obesity. And when it comes to money, we spend it like there's no tomorrow.

But there is a tomorrow and soon the chickens are going to come home to roost. God may enter into active judgment on America, or He may just let our nation suffer the natural consequences of its own actions. Whatever the case, eventually circumstances may become very difficult for us. And as we saw on 9/11, the nation's circumstances can be transformed in one day.

So here is the question: can God provide for the pressing needs of His own in the midst of destitution and even judgment?

The answer the Bible gives us is a resounding yes. Sometimes God provides for the pressing needs of His own miraculously. As we witness when God sent manna in the wilderness for the children of Israel. But more often, God provides for the pressing needs of His own *through the obedience of His own*.

For example, it was the obedience of Joseph that enabled his brothers and Jacob to survive the famine sweeping the ancient Near East at the time.

It was the obedience of the widow at Zarephath that enabled Elijah to survive the famine God was using to judge Israel.

It was the obedience of the believers in Asia Minor and Greece that enabled the saints in Jerusalem to survive a serious famine in the first century AD.

And it was the obedience of the Philippian church that enabled Paul to survive the difficulties he experienced in Thessalonica.

All of these examples point to one important fact: should America fall into a time of serious need and even judgment, God can use the obedience of believers like you to provide for His own and to penetrate a hardened and rebellious culture with the gospel.

Day 13:

Taking Final Responsibility

I arrived in the auditorium ten minutes before the worship service was scheduled to begin. As I went to take my seat, I noticed Bill and three other men standing in the aisle talking to each other. They were all members of Dorothy's team, one of the care receivers at our church.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Dorothy's getting on in years and she's talking about moving into an extended care facility," Bill explained.

Bill and his team members had been serving Dorothy for four years, ever since she was eighty-two. Dorothy and her team had just celebrated her eighty-sixth birthday at Olive Garden. I had gone along for the festivities and it was obvious that she and her team members had grown very close.

"Since Dorothy's going to have to sell her home," Bill continued, "we're making plans. We're arranging for a realtor to go by and we're also checking out local extended care facilities for her."

As Bill and his men continued talking, I couldn't help thinking, "Dorothy's team is taking final responsibility for her! These men are treating Dorothy like she's their own mother. In fact, they're relating to each other like they're real brothers."

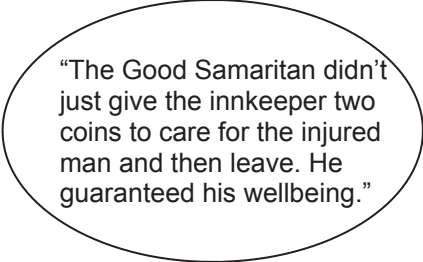
“The Samaritan went to him, poured olive oil and wine on his wounds, and bandaged them.

Then he put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he cared for him. The next day, the Samaritan brought out two coins, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.'”

Luke 10:34-35
(The New Century Version)

And that's the radical nature of Christian good works. It means we take final responsibility for someone. The Good Samaritan didn't just give the innkeeper two coins to care for the injured man and then leave. He guaranteed his wellbeing: "If you spend

more money, I will pay it back to you when I come again."



"The Good Samaritan didn't just give the innkeeper two coins to care for the injured man and then leave. He guaranteed his wellbeing."

The Good Samaritan saw the injured man's need through to completion. One would think that the innkeeper, being a Jew himself, would have taken re-

sponsibility. Or perhaps the injured man, assuming he recovered, should have taken responsibility. But the Good Samaritan didn't wait to see. Instead, he volunteered himself.

Taking final responsibility is what Christ is calling each of us to do for our care receiver. Then, and only then, will we be loving the way he commanded us to love.

My Observations

Summarize everything the Samaritan pilgrim did for the injured Jew.

What effect do you think the Samaritan's actions had on the inn-keeper?

What effect do you think the Samaritan's actions had on the injured man after he recovered and on his family?

By taking final responsibility for the injured Jew, what was the Samaritan proving?

My Application

Do you really think it's possible for you and your team to take final responsibility for your care receiver? Why or why not?

In reality, what does taking final responsibility entail? Be specific.

By taking final responsibility, what effect do you think this will have on your care receiver and your care receiver's family?

Digging Deeper

So what does “taking final responsibility” really mean? What kind of liability is the church assuming for those with long term needs in its midst? Is taking final responsibility for these people the same as taking total responsibility for them?

What taking final responsibility means is that the church acts as an overseer for the normal social systems that should be in place to provide for those believers who have needs they cannot meet. If one of those social systems fails, the church then offers itself as support in its place.

The social systems we are talking about are the family and extended family of the believer in need, then available charities and finally, government resources. The church does not step in and take the place of these resources as a first resort. That would be taking total responsibility. Rather, the church checks to make sure these resources are functioning on behalf of the person in need. This “checking function” is what Paul was doing in 1 Timothy 5:16 when he wrote: “If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need” (New International Version).

Should these resources fail, the church itself assumes the financial support for the needy believer—i.e. “those widows who are really in need.”

A prime example of the church stepping in when the family wouldn't is Jesus on the cross assigning the care of Mary to John: “When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, the disciple took her into his own home” John 19:26-27 (New International Version). Jesus had other brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3). But entrusting to them the care of his mother at this time would not have been appropriate.

Your team is acting as an agent of the church and, as such, is “overseeing” the care of your care receiver. By taking final responsibility, you are offering your church as a guarantee that, should other resources fail, the church itself will be there for her.

Day 14:

Live to Give

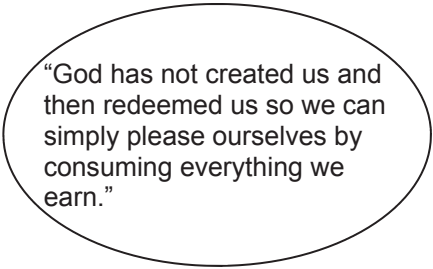
There's a front page article in the Denver Post today contrasting the giving rates of two towns in Colorado, one extremely conservative and the other extremely "progressive" (i.e., liberal). Turns out, the 2,000 residents of Fowler, Colorado, lead the state in generosity, giving a whopping average of 7.6% of their income to charity, while residents of Nederland, Colorado, lead the state in stinginess, shelling out a mere 1.5% of their income to charitable causes.

As the Denver Post points out, "Conservative Fowler, with its 10 churches and a struggling farm economy, opens its wallet wider than anywhere else in the state. Progressive Nederland, which is developing into a wealthy bedroom community to Boulder, keeps the tightest grip on its purse strings" (April 15, 2007).

Christianity in the first and second centuries AD was primarily a lower class religion of slaves, beggars and other social outcasts. Many were so poor they subsisted through theft and prostitution. When these people came to faith in Christ, one of the first lessons they were taught was that everyone can contribute something. They were given a solid work ethic and encouraged to live below their means so they could have enough to give to those who were even worse off than they were: people like widows and orphans.

“He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.” Ephesians 4:28 (New American Standard Bible, 1995)

It's heartening to see that same Christian ethic of sacrificial giving surviving to this day in churches and in the communities where churches still have major influence.



"God has not created us and then redeemed us so we can simply please ourselves by consuming everything we earn."

It is that same ethic of sacrificial giving that is at the heart of this ministry. God is calling each one of us to work hard and to live below our means so that we will have something to give to those who are in need. In the same Denver Post article

quoted above, Darrell Johnson, pastor of one of Fowler's 10 churches, states, "People in Fowler see themselves as producers rather than consumers. There is incredible strength in that."

God has not created us and then redeemed us so we can simply please ourselves by consuming everything we earn. God has called us to give back—to Him and to those around us who are in need.

My Observations

Someone who steals is probably poor themselves. Are you surprised at this command that they should not only stop stealing, but “have to give” to those who are in need?

In what way would a former thief, who now gives out of his surplus to those who are in need, be doing deeds “appropriate to repentance”?

Why do you think the people of Fowler, Colorado, with their lower incomes, were more generous than their higher income counterparts in Nederland, Colorado?

My Application

What percent of your income do you give away?

How do you compare with the people of Fowler and Nederland, Colorado?

Do you see yourself primarily as a producer or consumer?

Digging Deeper

Why is it that believers of lesser means are almost universally more generous than those believers who are better off? The primary reason seems to be related to faith.

Believers who are poorer have to live by faith on a day to day basis. So giving of their meager possessions to meet someone else's need, even when they themselves have almost nothing to give, is simply an extension of the faith they exercise every day anyway. Believers who are better off, on the other hand, tend to place more trust in their possessions. Hence, keeping more and more of those possessions becomes paramount.

Notice how Paul describes the giving of the impoverished believers in Macedonia to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem.

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own they urgently pleaded with us for privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. (2 Corinthians 8:2-4, NIV)

Now consider the command Paul tells Timothy to give the rich under his charge.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, but to put their hope in God, who richly supplies us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share. (1 Timothy 6:17-18, NIV)

On the one hand, the impoverished Macedonian believers pleaded for the privilege to give, while on the other hand, the rich believers in Timothy's pastorate had to be commanded to give.

Jesus himself noted the difference in giving patterns between the wealthy and the poor in Luke 21:1-4.

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in everything she had.... (ESV)

Day 15:

The Long Haul

When I think of faithful men, I think of my father. In his late teens Dad was thrown into the role of provider for his mother and four younger siblings when his father died of TB at an early age. To help with family income, he started working for a title insurance company in Los Angeles at the age of twenty and retired from the same company forty-five years later.

Dad was married to my mother for fifty-five years until she died. He lived in the only home he ever owned for fifty years.

But the most amazing thing of all was his commitment to the Lord and to the church. Dad became a Christian as a young teen and was a member of his church for eighty-four years, until he died at the age of ninety-nine.

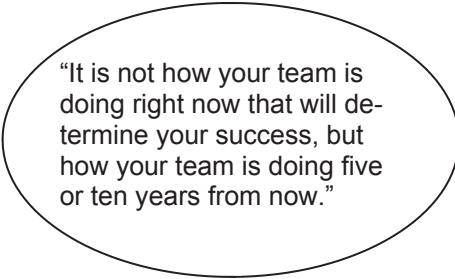
And he did all of this in the tumultuous twentieth century culture of Southern California. Through the depression, WWII, Vietnam, riots, the sexual revolution, the Cold War—it didn't matter what, Dad was always the same, faithful man of God. He was, in the deepest sense, truly countercultural.

Your team has been given a trust. The widow or widower or single parent that has been assigned to you has infinite value in the sight of God. As C. S. Lewis has pointed out, if we could see them just for a moment

“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” 1 Corinthians 4:2 (The New International Version)

in the glorified state they will soon be in, our first impulse would be to fall prostrate before them in fear and awe.

This trust you have been given has one requirement: faithfulness. It is not how your team is doing right now that will determine your success, but how your team is doing five or ten years from now. Will your team be faithful *to the end*?



“It is not how your team is doing right now that will determine your success, but how your team is doing five or ten years from now.”

It is this long haul view of service that is absolutely critical to an effective expression of the love of Christ for your care receiver. And it is this long haul view that is so revolutionary and

distinctive in our ephemeral, throw away culture.

In the hands of faithful stewards, the love of Christ becomes a powerful and potent medicine that brings healing to the hearts of people who have been torn by grief and despair.

My Observations

What was the trust the Apostle Paul had been given?

What is the first and foremost requirement for being given that trust?

How would you define faithfulness?

My Application

Who are the people in your life who have been most faithful to you?

What effect have they had on you?

Do you find it hard to imagine your team existing five, ten or even fifteen years from now?

Assuming your team does exist for that long, what impact would you expect it to have on the life of your care receiver and those who know her?

Digging Deeper

The beauty of men's team ministry to people with long term needs is that it is an investment of time that meets the needs of your care receiver and as a result builds stronger and stronger relationships as the years go by. Just as depositing twenty dollars a month into a savings account will start to accrue interest and grow into thousands of dollars over decades, so investing two hours a month into the life of your care receiver for years will yield incredible benefits over time.

Sometimes I ask the following question of men's groups: What do you want to say you have accomplished ten and twenty years from now? For most men's groups, thinking ten and twenty years down the road is inconceivable. They would be thrilled if their men's ministry simply existed next year, not to mention actually accomplishing something decades from now.

But what if one or two decades from now the men in your men's group are able to say: "I and my team have seen to it that the needs of our care receiver have been met. Not only that, we have encouraged others to do the same, so that there are no longer any needs in our congregation that are going unmet. And because of our example of love and sacrifice, we are seeing many in our community come to faith in Christ."

Now that is an accomplishment any men's ministry can and should be proud of.

The critical factor in this, of course, is our faithfulness. The issue isn't that we don't know the solution to the needs of those who are around us. The issue is whether or not we are going to apply the solution for their needs that we already have—the love of Christ—in a faithful and consistent way.

My challenge to you is to keep your eyes on the goal of years of faithful service to those in your congregation and in your community who are in need. If you do this, you will certainly reap incredible fruit and in the end you will hear those wonderful words of our Lord, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

Day 16

No Little People, No Little Places

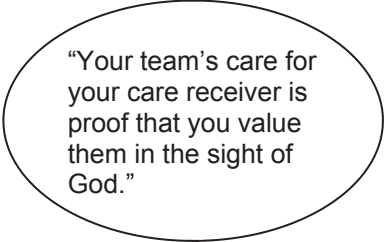
“Doris” is a widow who lives in Quincy, Illinois, a town of about 40,000 people nestled alongside the Mississippi River in the west central part of the state. Doris has a very unusual team. It’s made up of three physicians from the local clinic. A fourth member is the son of a physician. So every month Doris receives a “house call” from three doctors and the son of a doctor!

A team of four men, three of whom are physicians, visiting the same widow every month for years may seem like ministry overkill. To a certain extent, it is. On the other hand, this team is sending a very important message to its community: every person has infinite value in the sight of God and no one is too important or too valuable to serve them.

Francis Schaeffer, the influential Christian philosopher who ministered during the middle of the twentieth century, has a famous sermon entitled, “No Little People, No Little Places.” He and his wife, Edith, began their ministry in a remote village in the French Alps based on the principle that no one is insignificant. They began taking in visitors from all over the world and wound up having an influence far beyond their little ministry called “L’Abri.”

The world and even the church send all kinds of subtle and not so subtle messages

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 (New King James Version)



“Your team’s care for your care receiver is proof that you value them in the sight of God.”

that the elderly, the widowed, single parents and the poor are not important demographics. Whether it’s in the form of the programming on TV and the advertising that sponsors them, or the ministry programming in our churches, these classes of people just don’t generate the in-

come or the volunteers or the “image” these institutions think they need.

We have a mantra that the future of our church lies with our youth. But I often tell groups of men that the future of the church lies not with our youth, but with our widows. Because someday we’re going to die and leave our own wives as widows. How the church treats widows today is how the church will be treating our wives when we’re gone.

Your team’s care for your care receiver is proof that you value them in the sight of God. At this time in life, they need to know that they have infinite value because they are immortal souls, created in God’s image. Because they have come to faith in Christ, they face an eternal destiny of glory and joy.

My Observations

Describe God's "marketing plan" according to 1 Corinthians 1:26-28.

Why do you think God chooses to work in this way in the local church?

Do you think it's ministry overkill to have three physicians minister to one elderly lady on a monthly basis for years? Couldn't their talents and time be better used?

My Application

Who receives the most attention and ministry in your church?

Who are the people in your church that might fit the descriptions given in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28.

How do you see ministering to them being central to God's plan for your church and community?

What emphasis is your church putting on them at the present?

Digging Deeper

It is the weakest in our congregations and communities that give us the greatest opportunity to experience God's love and power. When we ignore and marginalize these people, we rob ourselves of spiritual riches far beyond anything we could possibly imagine and turn our churches into sterile, dead meeting places for the materially content and socially connected.

The Bible is filled with examples of God turning to the weakest of the weak to demonstrate his power and glory.

God used a forgotten foreigner imprisoned in a dungeon in Egypt whose name was Joseph to save not only his family, but the entire nation of Egypt from starvation (Genesis 37-47)

God used a shy and fearful man who was the least respected in his family, whose family was from the weakest clan in the smallest tribe of Israel—a man named Gideon—to deliver Israel from foreign enemies. (Judges 6:1-7:25)

God used a childless and helpless widow, a foreigner named Ruth, to provide for Naomi and become the matriarch of the line of David and of Jesus Christ. (Ruth 1-4)

God used a starving widow in a foreign country whose name we don't even know to provide for Elijah during a famine in Israel. (1 Kings 17:7-24).

God used a shepherd who was the youngest of seven sons and whose name was David to begin the Davidic dynasty.

God used the most rebellious of sinners, who was also a poor public speaker with a severe eye disease, whose name was Paul to become the greatest missionary of all time.

We think the future of the church lies with our youth, and with families, and with the suburbs. But that is not true. Certainly we must not ignore these needs in our church. But the true future of the church lies with the poor and the weak in our midst. It lies with widows and fatherless children. It lies in the blighted areas of our cities. It lies with the ability of God to bring redemption and life to sinners and outcasts.

Day 17:

Put the Fun in Funeral

We've all been to them: the funerals of those who have died tragic deaths, the still-born infant, the family killed in an auto wreck, the suicide, the husband and father who died suddenly of a heart attack. These are terrible, even horrible events. We walk into the funeral home slowly, reluctantly, and, most of all, speechless: at a loss to know what to say that could possibly comfort the family. For some of us, these have been the funerals of our closest loved ones.

If you have recently suffered a tragic loss, then please understand that I do not want to minimize your grief and suffering. My prayer is that, as time passes, you will come to know the peace and comfort that only Christ can give.

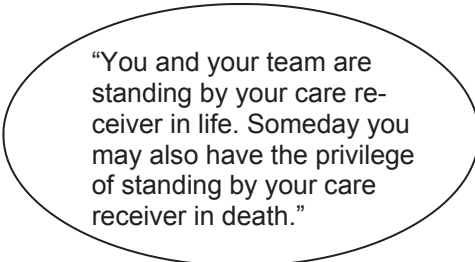
But there is another kind of funeral that I want to talk about here. It's the type of funeral which many men's ministry teams with elderly care receivers can begin to look forward to.

I say "look forward to" because these funerals often are funerals of joy. These are the funerals of elderly saints—believers in Jesus Christ who have lived long and good lives in faithful service to our Lord. And the men ministering to them have been faithful in their service too.

My mother and father both had funerals like this. At those funerals, our family and

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (New King James Version)”

friends shared the knowledge that Mom and Dad were in heaven with Jesus and that we would soon see them again. We had blessed memories of lives well lived. Yes, it was sad to see Mom and Dad go. But their funerals were also joyful and, yes, even fun.



“You and your team are standing by your care receiver in life. Someday you may also have the privilege of standing by your care receiver in death.”

And now, as some of our teams are beginning to witness the passing of their care receivers, they, too, have been able to experience the “fun” in funeral. In fact, they are seeing that their faithful service over the years has added deeply

to that fun because everyone at the funeral knows who they are and what they have done for their care receiver.

One pastor told me that the week following the funeral of one of his members, the daughter, who lived out of town, came to his office and cried tears of thankfulness for an hour. A team from his church had been ministering to her mother before she died and she couldn't believe how faithful they had been.

Then she wrote out a check for \$3,000 to the men's ministry and apologized that it wasn't more.

You and your team are standing by your care receiver in life. Someday you may also have the privilege of standing by your care receiver in death, rejoicing in the hope of seeing her in heaven and knowing that your faithful service to her has brought honor and glory to Jesus Christ.

My Observations

In what sense were the Thessalonians Paul's glory and joy?

Why did Paul call them his "crown of rejoicing?"

What is Paul referring to when he talks about Christ's "coming?"

My Application

Do you think it's crass to talk about some funerals being fun?

Have you ever been to one that was? If so, what was it like?

Is your team or any of the other teams at your church ministering to an elderly person? If so, what impact do you think that team's current ministry is going to have on the funeral?

Do you think there will be natural opportunities to witness as a result?

Digging Deeper

A Christian physician once told me that he could easily tell which of his terminally ill patients were believers and which were not. “The ones that are not Christians get very agitated and are terrified of death and the ones that are Christians have a peace and an assurance about them and often even look forward to death,” he said.

All believers know that death is not to be feared. Believers have a peace about them when they face death that unbelievers do not have because, while we may not be looking forward to the process of dying, we have a hope and an anticipation of what comes after it. We know we are going to be in the presence of our savior, Jesus Christ. And because we have placed our trust in Him, we know our sins are forgiven and washed away. Sin will not be an issue when we stand in the presence of our Lord. Instead, we will be transformed directly into the image of Jesus Christ.

See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:1-3 (English Standard Version)

Of course, we want to make sure that all of our care receivers know how to have eternal life—by placing their faith in Jesus Christ as their savior from sin (John 3:16)—and that they have in fact done so.

Then, as your care receiver nears the end of his or her life, your obedience to Christ becomes a practical demonstration of a love that will be revealed in its fullness when they stand before him. By loving them *as Christ has loved us* you are giving them comfort and assurance that they will continue to experience that love after they die, only in a more intensely personal way in the very presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for all of eternity.

Nothing could be more fun than a funeral like that.

Day 18

His Yoke is Easy

“The amazing thing to me,” Bill said, “is that serving Dorothy hasn’t seemed like we’ve been sacrificing at all. When we’re doing things around her home, it doesn’t really feel like we’re even working.” Bill Nicholson was talking about his team’s work with Dorothy Nickerson, a single woman in her eighties whom they had been serving faithfully every month for four years.

To be sure, Bill and his fellow team members had indeed been sacrificing for Dorothy with their time, labor and money. Dorothy herself told me once, “I was a single mother and I attended a couple of churches after World War II. But never has a church served me or met my needs the way this one has.”

Yes, theirs was real sacrifice that was meeting real needs, but because Bill and his fellow team members had learned the secret of serving someone *with the love of Christ*, their sacrifice hardly felt burdensome at all.

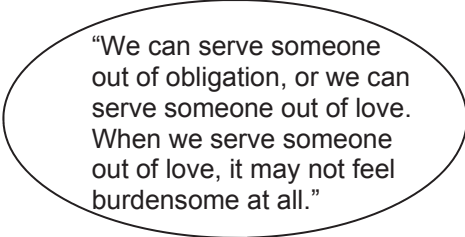
Ever think that your service to your care receiver is too easy? After all, it’s only once a month. You’re only spending two hours at his or her home. You’re working on a team with three other guys. You may hardly break a sweat.

Perhaps you walk away thinking, “Surely loving someone the way Christ has loved us

☞☞ *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*” Matthew 11:28-30 (New King James Version)

can't be this easy, can it? I must be leaving something out."

But Jesus himself said it would be easy: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." You serve your care receiver, not because you have to, but because you love him or her and because you love the Lord. Paul put it this way, "*Through love*, serve one another." What he meant was, we can serve someone out of obligation, or we can serve someone out of love. When we



"We can serve someone out of obligation, or we can serve someone out of love. When we serve someone out of love, it may not feel burdensome at all."

serve someone out of love, it may not feel burdensome at all. Rather, it is a joy and a delight.

You have freely chosen to obey Christ and have taken on the burden—the "yoke"—of someone else. But in sharing that yoke, you have found it to be a joy and a delight. Your gentle and humble spirit mirrors Christ's. And you have found rest for your soul.

My Observations

How does Jesus' compassion for humanity shine in this passage?

List some of the reasons people can be so burdened.

When Jesus talks about "rest for your soul," what does he mean?

My Application

Have you ever had to serve someone out of obligation? What was it like?

As you and your fellow team members serve your care receiver, do you feel obligated to do so?

Did you realize before you did this ministry that loving those in distress could be so refreshing and rewarding?

In what ways have your team members lightened your load with your care receiver?

Digging Deeper

What amazes most ancient historians is how naturally the early church grew during the first three centuries of its existence. At every turn it faced searing opposition from without and heresy and schism from within. It had no armies, no schools, no buildings, no specific national identity. Its leaders were regularly martyred, its converts ostracized. Yet, from that first Pentecost day onward it continued to expand exponentially until it ultimately overwhelmed the entire Roman Empire.

Why?

I believe the primary reason why the church was so successful is because believers in the early church truly knew how to love each other the way their founder and savior, Jesus Christ, taught them, and then they went about practicing it on a daily basis. It was their distinctive way of loving that both set them apart from their culture while at the same time drawing others to them. Listen to this first description of the early church in Acts 2.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:46-47 (New International Version)

There are many things that were lost to the church in the Middle Ages that the modern church has gradually regained, including the doctrine of justification by faith, the centrality of the Word of God, the priesthood of all believers, the worldwide missions movement and the importance of the Holy Spirit. I believe something else we need to regain is a practical understanding and expression of the love of Christ.

Jesus' "yoke is easy." This means that when Christians love like Jesus, they are in their natural element. Christ's love is not some unattainable ideal or sentimental feeling. Loving people like Christ—by identifying with them, committing to them and sacrificing for them—is exactly what people *need*. As believers realize how simple it is, and then do it, the Lord will be daily adding to our number too.

Day 19:

No Big Deal

As I entered the front door to introduce Etta Delaney's team to her for the first time, she collapsed in tears. "I know this is scriptural, but I never thought it would happen to me," she said.

It's sad that many care receivers, upon learning that they are going to receive a team, act surprised. They know the word of God teaches that we are to care for them, but they really don't expect it.

Often their response is to compliment us over and over again. Of course, there is nothing wrong with expressing appreciation. But there is a problem that can come with compliments.

The problem with compliments is that they assume doing good is out of the ordinary; that serving the widowed and single parents is not normal behavior.

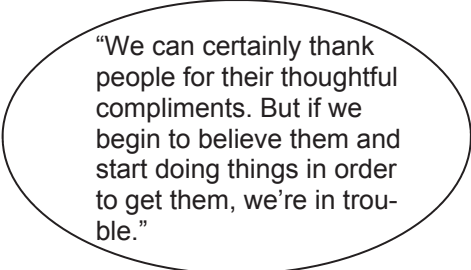
But obedience to Christ's command to love as he has loved us should not be considered out of the ordinary.

For example, suppose someone was riding in the car with you and when you arrived at your destination they said, "I want to thank you for stopping at all the red lights."

What would your response be? You'd be surprised that they would even bother to

“So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'” Luke 17:10 (New American Standard Bible, 1995 ed.)

comment on it and you'd probably say, "Of course I stopped at all the red lights. That's what I always do." And you'd probably be a little offended because they'd be implying that you normally don't stop at all the red lights!



"We can certainly thank people for their thoughtful compliments. But if we begin to believe them and start doing things in order to get them, we're in trouble."

In the same way, obeying Christ should not be seen as out of the ordinary. Rather, Jesus tells us our attitude should be, "It's no big deal. Serving widows and others in distress is just what we're sup-

posed to be doing." We can certainly thank people for their thoughtful compliments. But if we begin to believe them and start doing things in order to get them, we're in trouble.

My Observations

What response does Jesus say is the appropriate one to give when we finally obey Him?

Is this command given for partial obedience or full obedience?

What does the term “unworthy slave” imply?

My Application

Was your care receiver surprised when you began serving her? Should she have been?

If a person does good in order to be noticed and praised, what does that imply about him?

How have you responded to your care receiver’s gratitude in the past?

How do you plan to respond to her now?

Digging Deeper

There was a time in America when churches did not have the following:

- Sunday school
- Multiple worship services
- Overhead projection
- Electricity
- Central air conditioning
- A youth program and a youth worker
- Short term missions trips
- Vacation Bible School
- Multiple ministerial staff
- A band
- AV recording equipment
- A web page

But now you can walk into almost any church and see most if not all of these elements in that church. We simply take them for granted. At first, many of these elements were considered radical. But now they are just part of the assumed things that churches do. They're "no big deal."

New Commandment Men's Ministries has been encouraging churches across the country to develop long term ministries to the widowed and single parents for over four years now. As a result, about 70 churches in 22 states are now serving people with long term needs. But most churches still do not have anything like this ministry. Many are still focusing on special project ministries for people with long term needs that amount to little more than kind gestures.

I believe all of that is about to change. I see encouraging signs that national men's ministry organizations and entire denominations are taking notice and understanding the significance of relational team ministry as opposed to project ministry when it comes to the widowed and single parents.

Soon men's team ministry to the widowed and single parents will be just one more of the assumed things churches do. And it, too, will be "no big deal."

Day 20:

Wait, Don't Faint

It didn't happen immediately, but over a period of three years the men at First Presbyterian Church in Quincy, Illinois, have come to have a huge impact on their entire city of 40,000. First, one of their teams was comprised completely of physicians serving a widow, making their care receiver the only woman in the United States to be receiving three house calls a month by doctors.

Another widow put in her will that her team members be pallbearers at her funeral. So at the funeral, her team members "carried her" in death just as they had carried her in life, giving a powerful testimony to everyone present of what the love of Christ means.

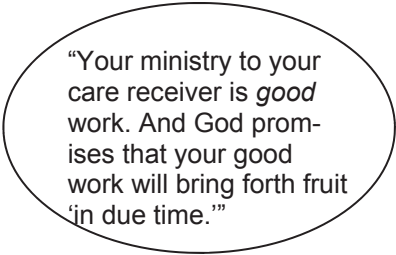
Eventually Quincy's newspaper, The Herald Whig, got wind of the ministry and printed a front page story about it.

Soon, other churches began adopting the ministry. Madison Park Christian signed up 40 men. And now one of the largest church in Quincy, The Crossing, is planning on starting the ministry.

Long term ministry to the widowed and single parents requires patience. This is not a ministry that immediately generates a lot of high profile fireworks. Your monthly service may not seem significant at the moment. But the word of God promises that it will pay off over time.

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9
(English Standard Version)

There will be periods when you will wonder whether or not your effort is worth it. You may even grow weary and tired. But your ministry to your care receiver is *good* work. And God promises that your good work will bring forth fruit “in due time.”



“Your ministry to your care receiver is *good* work. And God promises that your good work will bring forth fruit ‘in due time.’”

What is that fruit? It’s an encouraged and blessed widow, widower or single parent. It’s a testimony of love to everyone he or she knows. And it’s people coming to Christ because of your faithfulness.

This promised fruit is to those who “do not faint.” It isn’t guaranteed. It depends on your faithfulness and persistence over time. So don’t grow weary and quit. Serve your care receiver faithfully, month in and month out, year in and year out. And in due time, you too will reap.

My Observations

What does Galatians 6:9 imply may happen as we go about doing good?

What is the promise to those who are tempted to grow weary of doing good?

What is the condition to that promise.

My Application

Men's team ministry is a long term ministry to people with long term needs. Do you think you may struggle with weariness as the months and years wear on?

What can you do to help relieve that weariness?

What kind of fruit do you think God is going to give as a result of your faithful service to your care receiver?

Digging Deeper

Patience is in short supply in America today. We live in a hectic culture. We have drive thrus for food, banking, prescriptions, laundry, you name it. We have instant access to just about any information in the world. We can download our entertainment from anywhere and enjoy it anywhere. We Instant Message and Text Message our friends. We can hop on a plane in the morning for a meeting a thousand miles away and be back home in the evening in time to tuck the kids into bed. In short, if we do or want something, we expect to do it or get it *now*.

Serving the widowed and single parents, on the other hand, is time intensive—the more time you invest over years, the greater the result. Serving your care receiver for three or four months will produce one result: probably a few projects completed and a thank you note you can carry around in your wallet. Serving your care receiver for three or four years will have a greater result: a testimony of faithfulness and love to her and to all she knows. But serving your care receiver until she no longer needs you—say for ten or fifteen years or for however long it takes, will have the greatest result of all: proof that the love of Christ is real and is the greatest asset anyone can have.

The results of your labor are not immediate, but when they come they will most certainly be very profound. The longer you serve and the more patient you are, the greater those results will be.

Day 21:

Good Works, Pure Heart

It's fascinating how often moral purity and good works are coupled in Scripture. Our passage, James 1:27, which talks about "pure religion" and keeping oneself "unstained by the world" is an excellent example. But there are others as well.

"Learn to do good," God commands in Isaiah 1:17, "...Help the orphans. Stand up for the rights of widows." Then He goes on and promises in that famous passage, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow." (New Century Version)

In Titus 2:14, Paul states that Jesus not only gave himself for us in order to acquire a "special people, zealous for good works," but also that he might redeem us "from every lawless deed and purify" us. (New King James Version)

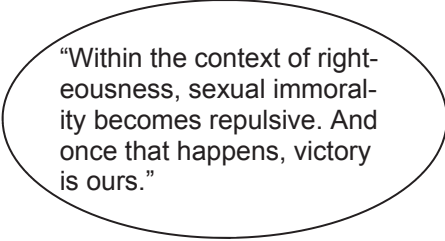
And in Romans 6:18, Paul reminds us, "You were set free from sin and became the slaves of righteousness." (Today's English Version)

Christians in New Testament times lived in a culture that was just as pagan and godless as ours. They faced the same kinds of temptations as we do, especially in the area of sexual sin. But they knew a secret to victory that modern believers sometimes forget: that victory over sinful temptation

“A religion that is pure and stainless in the sight of God the Father is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” James 1:27

(International Standard Version)

comes when we focus our attention and efforts on doing good.



“Within the context of righteousness, sexual immorality becomes repulsive. And once that happens, victory is ours.”

For example, “Helen,” a former prostitute, showed up at church wearing a hardened demeanor that masked a deep sense of guilt and desperation. The pastor shared the gospel with her several times, but she couldn’t understand how God

could possibly forgive a sinner like her.

Eventually he assigned Helen a team of men, and for the first time in her life, guys showed up at her door who wanted to serve her out of love instead of abuse her out of lust.

Soon Helen’s whole countenance began to change. As these men lovingly served her month after month, Helen began to understand grace and came to faith in Christ.

Sometimes a believer can become obsessed with sin because he’s focusing on the very thing he is trying to avoid. The biblical principle, however, is that faith in Christ brings freedom to do good, giving us the opportunity to focus on the positive instead of the negative; what we can do instead of what we can’t do.

One of the reasons we focus on men in this ministry is because Christian men are having such a difficult time with the constant sexual bombardment our culture is delivering. When believers are given something positive to do, the negative becomes easier to avoid.

Believers doing good works provide a context with which to view evil. Within the context of righteousness, sexual immorality, and indeed all evil, become repulsive. Once that happens, victory is ours.

My Observations

Can you think of other biblical passages that talk about good works and moral purity?

Were you aware that almost all pagan worship involved prostitution?

How does this fact help explain the grip pagan idolatry had on the ancient world?

My Application

If faith in Christ, a new birth, the presence of the Spirit of God, and doing good enabled early Christians to break the bonds of their ingrained cultural evil, do you think the same can happen now?

Do you struggle with pornography?

Is your participation in ministering to the widowed and single parents helping you “contextualize” that sin so that it is becoming repulsive to you?

Are you able to talk about these issues with a trusted fellow believer?

Digging Deeper

So how does a believer become a “slave of righteousness” when sin has had such a grip on his life? The answer is summarized in Romans 12:1:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (New Revised Standard Version)

What Romans 12:1 is summarizing is the privilege every believer has, as a result of God’s gracious forgiveness, to give his physical body over to God in physical acts of righteous service. In doing so, the believer experiences freedom from physical sin. Paul describes this emancipation from sin more extensively in Romans chapter 6. Verses 19-22 are key to this passage:

Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness [i.e. wild partying, visiting prostitutes at the local temple], so now offer them in slavery to righteousness [i.e. serving widows, meeting the needs of the fatherless] leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. (NIV)

Paul is saying that it is your physical act of serving your care receiver that “enslaves” you to righteousness and produces personal piety (holiness) in your life, giving you a first hand experience of what eternal life is like. Just as physical acts of sin produced in your life a lust for more sin, so physical acts of righteousness produce in your life a craving for more righteousness—you become a slave of doing good!

There are at this writing 1,500 men that we know of serving the widowed and single parents. To date we have yet to hear of any impropriety or immorality. I believe the reason for that is that this ministry contextualizes sin and reveals it for what it is—repugnant and vile—and shows us that the will of God is indeed good and perfect.

Day 22:

The Woman at the Well Effect

It's interesting to observe the responses of care receivers when they realize what a valuable asset they have in their team of men. Take, for example, Kathy Chavez.

Kathy, the neighbor of a single woman in our church by the name of Tracy, had been raised in a Christian home but had fallen away from the Lord. We had assigned Tracy a team and her team promptly began praying for the block they were working on, which, of course, included Kathy.

One day Tracy asked Kathy if she would like to share her team with her and Kathy accepted the invitation. The thought of four men working around her home once a month sounded good to her.

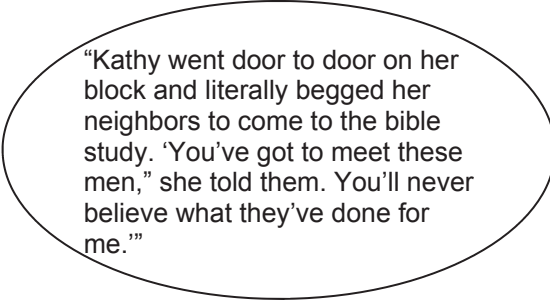
So Tracy's team started working around both Tracy and Kathy's homes and after a few months Kathy went to the men on her team with a request.

"Would you start a bible study in my home?" she asked. Through the love and service of her team of men, God had been working in her heart and she wanted to grow deeper in her renewed walk with the Lord.

The team agreed to do a weekly bible study with Kathy and they started making plans. But what happened next caught everyone by surprise. Kathy went door to door on her block and literally begged her neighbors to

““The woman said, ‘I know that the Messiah is coming.’ (Messiah is the One called Christ.) ‘When the Messiah comes, he will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus said, ‘I am he—I, the one talking to you....’ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to town. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Do you think he might be the Christ?’” John 4:25, 26, 28, 29 (The New Century Version)

come to the bible study.



“Kathy went door to door on her block and literally begged her neighbors to come to the bible study. ‘You’ve got to meet these men,’ she told them. You’ll never believe what they’ve done for me.”

“You’ve got to meet these men!” she told them. “You’ll never believe what they’ve done for me.”

Being on the receiving end of the love of

Christ is truly a life transforming experience. The woman at the well couldn’t believe a Jew would speak with her, not to mention someone of messianic character who knew everything about her and yet who loved her anyway.

The church greatly underestimates the power of the love of Christ to evangelize. Kathy’s testimony to her neighbors on her street spoke volumes. Those men could have gone door to door themselves and handed out tracts. But doing so wouldn’t have held a candle to the power of Kathy’s testimony.

When we serve those in need the way our Lord wants us to—through his revolutionary love—we have seen the response to be exactly like that of the woman at the well: they run into town and drag people to Christ.

My Observations

Why was Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well so radical?

In what way did Jesus perceive her deeper need?

How did Jesus graciously and yet firmly deal with the woman's sin?

Can this give us insight into how we can preach righteousness without alienating people?

My Application

Have you observed kind gestures to have the same effect as Christ's love?

Why or why not?

Have you observed "the woman at the well effect" in your own team's ministry to your care receiver?

Digging Deeper

Ten times more verses in the New Testament are devoted to exhortations to love compared to exhortations to evangelize. This disparity does not mean the early church didn't evangelize. What it does mean is that it knew that obeying Christ's command to love as he has loved us made evangelism extremely easy.

Like the woman at the well, people in our day also thirst for and crave Christ's love. When we give it to them, it's like giving them a bullhorn for the gospel. They can't stop talking about it. We have seen this time and again. This revolutionary, sacrificial love was a secret the early church exploited to great benefit, and it's a secret we need to exploit as well.

To understand the relationship between evangelism and the love of Christ, look up each passage below and then write your own summary.

Passages that contain commands to evangelize:

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 1:8

2 Timothy 1:8

Philemon 6

Passages that contain commands to love:

John 13:34-35; 15:9-13

Romans 12:9-13; 13:8-10

1 Corinthians 13

Galatians 5:22

Ephesians 3:19; 5:1, 25

Philippians 1:9

Colossians 1:4, 8; 2:2; 3:14

1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:12; 4:9-10

2 Thessalonians 1:3

1 Timothy 1:5; 4:12; 6:11

Philemon 5, 7

Hebrews 13:1

James 2:8

1 Peter 1:22; 4:8

2 Peter 1:5-7

1 John 2:10; 3:11-20; 4:7-5:3

Day 23

Precooked Good Works

Wally was an unusual addition to his team at Christ Community Church in Greeley, Colorado. Unusual because Wally was confined to a wheelchair. When he showed up at our orientation, I wondered how much use a man in a wheelchair could be.

Turns out, Wally has been extremely useful. His team is assigned to a woman who had been in an auto accident a year earlier—and wound up in a wheelchair. So each month, while his team members do chores around her home, Wally maneuvers himself into her living room and talks about life between two wheels.

“God has made us what we are,” the Bible says. How true. Since we are all unique in our personalities and abilities, each team is unique as well. And each care receiver being ministered to is also unique. It’s fascinating to watch how, over time, the ministry each team has to its care receiver becomes unique and distinctive too.

It’s as if that widow, widower or single parent is receiving a personal outfit specifically tailored exactly to their measurements. I see this over and over again. It becomes clear that God has prepared the team for the care receiver and the care receiver for the team.

The good deeds we do are not accidental.

“God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.”
Ephesians 2:10
(Today’s English Version)

They are part of an eternal plan written and directed by God. These good deeds express the very love of God to the people around us. Good deeds are the reason we have been saved and are to be the focal point of our lives. “He has created us for a life of good deeds,” the Bible says.

“Good deeds are the reason we have been saved and are to be the focal point of our lives.”

Do you want to have a ministry to a person that reaches to the deepest level of their being? Then show them committed, sacrificial

love through good deeds and watch how God perfectly matched you to the need.

No one could ask for more meaning or purpose in life than that.

My Observations

What is the relationship between what we are in Christ and the good works God has for us to do?

What priority does this passage give good works in the Christian life?

How much preparation has God given to these good works?

My Application

How does the concept that there are specific good works that God has already planned for you to do affect your outlook on this topic?

What kind of special gifts are you and your team members bringing to your care receiver?

Have you sensed an appropriate fit between those gifts and the needs of your care receiver?

Digging Deeper

It's hard for us to really believe that the God of the universe concerns himself with the trivia of human lives, like a broken window in a single mom's kitchen or the faded and peeling paint on the exterior of a widow's house. The thought that God's doesn't care about these things makes it easy for us not to care. But we're on dangerous ground if such is the case. The Bible makes it very clear that God is in fact very interested in such minutiae and that, consequently, we should be too.

It is because God knows such seemingly insignificant things as when a sparrow falls to the ground and how many hairs we have on our head that we are not to worry, Jesus says (Matthew 10:29, 30). God saw to it that the number of fish Peter and the disciples caught following Christ's resurrection—153—got into the Bible. We know that Paul wanted Timothy to bring his coat and his scrolls and parchments and that he wanted Philemon to prepare a guest room for him only because God felt it was important for us to know these details.

The fact of the matter is, God is extremely concrete. He doesn't like it when we merely espouse an ideal of love. He wants acts, deeds; specifics matter to him.

Take the biblical story of Ruth, for example. There she is, walking along, going out to the barley fields. She is doing a good deed on behalf of a widow named Naomi by gleaning barley in the fields for her. A native of Moab and a widow herself, Ruth has just accompanied her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem. As she walks along to glean in the fields, she has to choose which field to go into. All history hinges on this decision. If she turns one way, she will remain simply one more poor peasant girl. But if she turns the other way, she will become the matriarch of the line of David and of the messiah. As it turns out, she "happened" to turn into the field of Boaz, the Bible tells us. And the rest is history.

Ruth's simple good deed had eternal consequences because God had "planned it beforehand." your simple, seemingly insignificant acts of kindness and love have the same kind of eternal consequences because God has planned them beforehand as well. That broken window? That faded and peeling paint? They have more significance than you realize.

Day 24:

Zealous for Good Works

Ila Foley was in her late fifties when she bought her first home. She had been saving for years on a secretary's salary. This intrepid woman had married young and then watched her marriage fall apart after her husband suffered total amnesia from an auto accident. A second marriage on the rebound also didn't work out.

Through all of this, Ila came to the Lord and started traveling to India once a year on short term missions trips. Over the years, Ila has led hundreds of Indians to Christ.

Back in America, Ila was enjoying the only home she ever owned, especially since she had received a team of four men from her church to help her out with repairs.

There was just one problem. Ila was struggling with her new budget and falling about \$200 short each month. She still had extra savings after buying the house, but she was gradually whittling it down.

When her team learned of the situation, they began thinking of ways they might be able to help. Remembering that Ila's home had an unfinished basement, they came up with a plan: they'd put a rental unit in the basement!

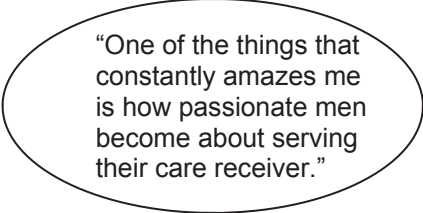
It was an audacious plan. But the team knew that if they succeeded, Ila would be

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.” Titus 2:14 (American Standard Version)

able to rent the basement out for \$500 a month and her financial ills would be solved.

It took them eighteen months, but Ila's team did indeed build out her basement. They put in a living room, a bedroom, a bathroom and a kitchen. Ila covered the cost of most of the materials with

her savings, the rest was donated by a builder and the men provided the labor and expertise.



“One of the things that constantly amazes me is how passionate men become about serving their care receiver.”

One of the things that constantly amazes me is how passionate men become about serving their care

receiver. They know this person is depending on them and that Christ is honored when they respond faithfully. Given that kind of responsibility, men rise to the task and often become fanatical about what they do.

That kind of dedication is exactly why Jesus Christ redeemed us. He delivered us from doing iniquity and has made us zealous about doing good.

My Observations

In Titus 2:14, what are the two reasons Christ gave himself for us?

A zeal for good works is evidence of what?

In what sense are good works a part of our sanctification?

My Application

Do you think it's possible to be involved in morally impure things and also be zealous for good works?

What do you like about your ministry to your care receiver that makes you eager to do it?

In what ways are your fellow teammates going to benefit from your zeal?

In what ways is your care receiver going to benefit from your zeal?

In what ways will Christ be honored by your zeal?

Digging Deeper

What makes believers zealous for good works?

What made three of David's mighty men so passionate that, when he was at war and simply voiced a desire to drink water from the well at the gate of his hometown, Bethlehem, they risked their lives and broke through enemy lines just to bring him back a drink? (2 Samuel 23:14-17)

What was it about the impoverished Macedonian believers that drove them to give so much to the collection of the saints that they put their own wellbeing at risk and put to shame their wealthier counterparts in Corinth? (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

What motivated Zacchaeus to climb a tree just to see an itinerant preacher, host him in his home and then announce to all the citizens of Jericho that he was giving away half of his possessions to the poor and quadruple in restitution anything he had taken from others by fraud? (Luke 19:1-10)

What compelled Paul to overcome unimaginable opposition, dangers, trials, threats, torture and imprisonment and traverse entire continents again and again for the sake of the gospel?

What motivated all of these believers was love,—love for the Lord and love for others. David's mighty men loved him. That's why they risked their lives just to get him a drink of water. The Macedonian believers loved the Lord and Paul ("they first gave themselves to the Lord and then to us," Paul would marvel) and it was that love that drove them to fanatical financial sacrifice. Zacchaeus loved Jesus and Jesus' message. It was his love for both that drove him to publicly repent of his sin and make restitution. And Paul loved Jesus Christ. "The love of Christ compels us" he would say to the Corinthians when explaining why he was "out of his mind for their sake" (1 Corinthians 5:13, 14).

Because we are in this ministry obeying Christ and loving the widowed and single parents the way He has commanded us to, it is not surprising that the men involved do in fact become fanatics about good works. Believers don't have to be browbeaten or coerced to do good works because zeal is never in short supply when it is Christ's love that is being poured out.

Day 25:

A Servant Heart

The first time I met Percy Wills, he burst out in song, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Him all creatures here below...."

Percy was a Canadian missionary with Shantyman's Mission, a mission that worked with rough and tumble loggers in the ruggedly beautiful woodlands of Vancouver Island. I was on a high school missions trip that summer with several other high school students from my church. Percy had just picked us up at the ferry in Victoria and we were all immediately enthralled with this jovial and kind man of God who led us in hymn after hymn as we drove back to his home.

Percy had one of the most unusual ministries I have ever heard of. His mission had purchased a large boat for him to sail up and down the coast of Vancouver Island. He would stop at various locations, preach and then join in cutting wood, cooking dinner, working in the garden, or doing whatever needed to be done. After years of service in this way, Percy had won the hearts of thousands and had seen many come to the Lord. At one point, he was even asked to run for governor of British Columbia.

Percy was in his sixties by the time we had our impromptu worship service in his car. It was not long after our visit that we heard

“So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you must also wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, so that you may do as I have done to you.” John 13:14, 15 (International Standard Version, NT)

about his retirement, and the humorous story of the dinner that was given in his honor.

It turns out that when the time came for the honors to be given to

“All night long Percy had been serving the very dinner guests who had come to honor him!”

Percy, he was nowhere to be found. Percy's chair was empty and no one had noticed where he had gone.

Finally someone discovered him in the kitchen cooking with the kitchen help. All night long Percy had been serving the very dinner guests who had come to honor him!

That, my friends, is a servant heart.

May his tribe increase.

My Observations

Describe what the disciples' feet probably looked like before Jesus washed them.

When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, what message was he sending to them by his actions?

Did Jesus also wash Judas' feet? What does this imply?

My Application

If you were invited to a meeting where you knew your feet were going to be washed, what would you probably do before you went?

Do you think Jesus intends for us to literally wash one another's feet? Why or why not?

When you first started serving your care receiver, was there anything you were asked to do that you thought was beneath you? (Be honest!)

In what ways has this ministry helped to change your attitudes about serving others?

Digging Deeper

One of the key passages in the Word of God on having a servant heart is Philippians 2:2-11. This passage begins with an admonition from Paul to humbly consider others better than ourselves and to look out for their interests, not just our own.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil. 2:2-4 (NIV)

It's clear, then, that if a group of believers is to experience the type of humble concern for one another that Paul is talking about, then there must be a general attitude of humility that pervades the entire group, a humility with limitless depths. Such a humility, Paul goes on to say, is a shared communal attitude molded on the example of Jesus Christ.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Philippians 2:5-7 (NIV)

Paul begins by exhorting us to have the same attitude as that of Jesus Christ. And what kind of attitude did Jesus have? Paul explains that Jesus was the very nature of God and was equal with God (reminiscent of John 1:1, 2). In view of his divine position, Jesus had every reason to *not* humble himself, *but he did anyway*. He didn't care about his status. Though he was God and equal with God, he didn't hold onto it.

The point is that having a servant heart always goes against a rational view of ourselves. We all have good reasons why we should not serve others. And Jesus had the best reason of all—he was God. But he didn't care. And not only did Jesus not care about giving up his status. He also didn't care about how low he would go in his debasement.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Philippians 2:8 (NIV)

There are four levels of Christ's humiliation in this passage, each lower than the other: man, servant, death, and finally, death on a cross. Jesus kept going down and down and down and down. *That* is the attitude of a servant and follower of Jesus Christ. There is no baseline below which a Christian will not humble himself any further. When fellow believers share this attitude, wonderful things happen in their midst.

Day 26:

No Task Too Small

Most men deeply appreciate being able to minister on a team to people with long term needs. But every now and then I hear of someone who gets disgruntled.

One example was a retired Marine colonel in California who joined a team ministering to a widow in his church. His pastor told me that one day, while he and his team were cleaning their care receiver's carpets, he just up and quit.

"I can hire someone to clean her carpets!" the colonel told him in disgust. "This is a waste of my time. I have better things to do."

Of course, the goal of this ministry isn't necessarily efficiency. The goal is love. True, we could hire someone to do most or all of the things we do for our care receivers. And the person we hire might even be able to do them better. But just getting things done isn't the point. Rather, the point is that we want our care receivers to know that we care for them, that we understand their need in a deep and profound way, and that we are committed to them, even to the point of sacrificing anything for them.

In this sense, then, no task is too small. Even giving someone a cup of water can convey love. Jesus himself says that such an insignificant act will not go unnoticed.

“If anyone gives you even a cup of water because you belong to the Messiah, I assure you, that person will be rewarded.” Mark 9:41 (The New Living Translation)

But if we have an exaggerated sense of our importance, as the Marine colonel apparently had, some things can seem too small. He was used to ordering his men to do cleaning, not actually cleaning things himself.

“Humbling ourselves with small and unimportant tasks in service to others doesn’t mean we ourselves are small and unimportant.”

Maybe we’re used to having things done for us. If we are, serving others can be excruciatingly painful. It can seem like we are being unnecessarily humiliated.

When I married my wife, I swore I wouldn’t clean the toilets. I’d been a janitor for five years while I was in school and I had seen enough of toilets! For years my blessed wife put up with my arrogant attitude. But Patti commutes to work five days a week now and I office out of our home, so guess who cleans the house—including the toilets!

Serving others may be humiliating, but such humiliation is not unnecessary. In fact, humility is a prerequisite Christian virtue. We cannot follow Christ without washing each other’s feet the way he did.

Humbling ourselves with small and unimportant tasks in service to others doesn’t mean we ourselves are small and unimportant. On the contrary, in Christ’s economy, it means we are great.

My Observations

In our last meditation we focused on a servant heart. In this meditation we are focusing on small tasks. Why does Jesus use the word “even” in this passage?

What is the requirement that turns small deeds into future rewards?

What does it mean to do something in the name of Jesus?

My Application

List some of the things you have done for your care receiver.

What are some of the least important of these things?

If you have done them in the name of Jesus, what does Jesus promise you?

By being willing to do even these small things, what are you communicating to your care receiver?

Digging Deeper

Detailed work is quality work.

I do a lot of traveling with this ministry. And since I travel, I stay in many hotels. Upon entering the room I'm spending the night in, it takes me only seconds to tell whether or not I'm going to enjoy my stay. Is there an odor in the air? Is the A/C unit too loud? Is there mold in the shower? Any one of these details, and many more, affect my impression of the room. An alert hotel manager and staff always attend to the details of cleaning because they know the impact even one of these seemingly small details can have on guests if they don't meet with expectations.

The servant of Abraham knew the importance of details when seeking out a wife for Isaac. Listen to the criteria he used to know who would make a proper wife for his master's son as he asked the Lord for guidance:

Let the girl to whom I shall say, "Please offer your jar that I may drink," and whom shall say, "Drink, and I will water your camels"—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to your master. Genesis 24:12 (New Revised Standard Version)

The servant was looking for a wife for Isaac who had an attention to detail. In this case, it was the detail of his camels needing water besides himself. It would require extra work to water his camels. In fact, it would require a lot of extra work. She would have to draw water from the well again and again to water the servant's thirsty camels. But it was a detail she was willing and eager to attend to. And it was not beneath her to do it, even if the man she was doing it for was just a stranger in the desert.

It is that same kind of attention to detail that God is looking for in your work with your care receiver. It is finished details that show our eagerness to serve, our willingness to do whatever it takes to please. Perfunctory work is not good work. It brings dishonor to God and to your care receiver. Making sure the loose ends in your care receiver's life are tied up is what communicates care and love. Toward that end, no task is too small.

Day 27

A Few, Well

My wife, Patti, is a very talented woman. Just ask any of her 2,000 patients at the clinic where she works. One of Patti's special gifts is knowing how to be someone's friend, as those of us on the receiving end of her friendship know so very well. She has a way of making you feel completely accepted and loved. She sees things from your perspective. She always believes the best about you. And she'll defend you like a junkyard dog.

Patti collects friends the way an archaeologist collects ancient artifacts, meticulously excavating a coin here, a pottery shard there, and then carefully treasuring them for the precious possessions they are. Some people have many superficial friendships, but Patti focuses on a few whom she loves extremely well.

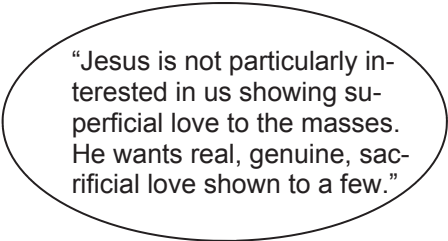
Loving a few well is precisely what Jesus set out to do the night before he died.

Jesus in John 13:1 is transitioning from his public ministry to his private ministry. He has taught the crowds, performed public miracles... and been rejected by the nation. He will not usher in the promised new kingdom, at least not just yet. Instead, he has something more important to do: he wants to love a few, well. He sets as his goal to show his twelve disciples "the full extent of his love."

“Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He now showed the disciples the full extent of his love.”
John 13:1 (The New Living Translation)

Then in utter humility Jesus washes his disciples' feet and tells them they should do the same. Next, he gives them a new commandment and a new covenant. After that, he gives them the Spirit and prays for them. Then comes his ultimate act of love: he humbles himself even further by dying for them, even allowing himself to be crucified on a cross. (Of course, Jesus was dying for the sins of the whole world. But we must understand that He was also dying *for His disciples*.) And finally, not leaving them hopeless, he appears to his disciples as the risen Lord.

Jesus indeed loved a few, well. He showed *them* the full extent of his love.



“Jesus is not particularly interested in us showing superficial love to the masses. He wants real, genuine, sacrificial love shown to a few.”

Just as Jesus showed a few disciples the full extent of his love, he has called us to love a few well too. We cannot love the world as ourselves, but we can love our *neighbor* as ourselves.

We cannot bear everyone's burdens. But we can bear *one another's* burdens. We cannot wash everyone's feet. But we can figuratively wash *each other's* feet. We cannot love all women the way Christ loves the church, but we can love our *wife* the way Christ loves the church. And while we are to do good to all, we are especially to do good to those *who are of the household of faith*.

Jesus is not particularly interested in us showing superficial love to the masses. He wants real, genuine, sacrificial love shown to a few: our family, a couple of neighbors, a fellow worker, someone in need at church. If you added them up, there'd probably be about a dozen—like Jesus had. And then having loved our dozen well, he wants us to encourage others to do the same—just like Jesus encouraged the disciples to do what he did.

Your team's service to your care receiver reflects this philosophy. Your mission is to love one person—a person in your church or community who is in need—exactly the way Christ wants you to love them. And then, having done that, to encourage many more to follow your example.

My Observations

What are the indications in John 13:1 that Jesus' death on the cross was about to happen?

In spite of his imminent death, what was Jesus most concerned about?

Reading further in John 13, what was the first thing Jesus did to show his disciples how much he loved them?

My Application

If Jesus' primary purpose was to prove how much he loved "his own," what should be our purpose toward those who are around us?

Who are the "few" God has put in your life to love?

In what ways is your service to your care receiver proving the depths of Christ's love to him or her?

Digging Deeper

“God so loved the world that he sent his only son....” True. But before God loved the world and sent his son, He loved a few, well.

Enoch, we are told twice in scripture, walked with God. God loved Enoch so much for walking with him that he “disappeared” him—he just took him away. No deathbed, no funeral, no grave, nothing. Enoch was just gone. Genesis 5:21-24

In a world destined for judgment, God showed his love and mercy to Noah by having him build an ark. He loved Noah so much that he didn’t want him to drown with the rest. God’s love for one person preserved the existence of Noah’s descendants. Genesis 6-9

God chose Abram in Ur and brought him to a land of promise. He showed him his love by establishing a covenant with him. God promised Abram a great nation, a great name and great descendants. Then God gave Abram a new name, Abraham, and a son, Isaac. God did this for one person—out of millions and millions of people on earth at the time.

After Abraham died, God continued to focus on just a handful of people, including Isaac, Jacob, then Joseph and his brothers. For hundreds of years, it looked like the plan of God was going absolutely nowhere. And yet God patiently stressed quality over quantity, loving just a few, but loving them very well.

Even after Abraham’s descendants became a great nation numbering as many as the sand on the seashore, God continued to work primarily with just a few: Moses, David, Elijah and the prophets. God kept refocusing, honing his love.

And finally, the ultimate expression of his love—Jesus Christ—was born to Mary and Joseph in a feeding trough in Bethlehem. This supreme demonstration of God’s love confined himself to one point in space and time. When he became an adult, Jesus ministered to thousands. But in the end, Jesus, too, pinned his entire ministry on loving only a few, but loving them very well.

And he left them with this command: “As I have loved you, so you must love one another”—love a few, well.

Day 28:

A Good Works Pandemic

“Great sermon, Pastor,” Norma said as she went out the church door. “And by the way, I want to volunteer to help with the youth group.”

While we were always looking for help with our youth ministry, Norma, everyone agreed, was a stretch. She was in her sixties, had asthma and emphysema.

But Norma’s team of men had been faithfully ministering to her for a couple of years and she wanted to return the favor somehow. Working with the church youth group seemed to her to be the best way to do it.

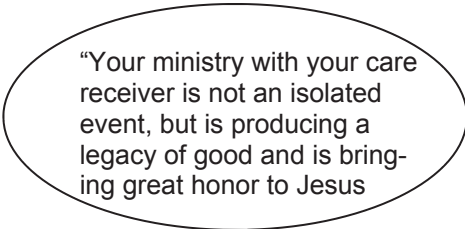
Despite our reservations, we couldn’t say no and soon Norma was showing up on Thursday evenings and hanging out with our teens. To our amazement, she became a wonderful grandmother figure to our junior high girls. They loved her!

Good works, we have seen, inspire more good works.

Another example of how infectious good works can be is the widow whose team ministered to her for four years. In response, she “adopted” a family with two year old twins and donated four hours of babysitting time *every week* so the mother could get out of the house and have some time to herself.

“Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds.” Hebrews 10:24 (The New Living Translation)

And then there was the wife of a soldier in Iraq who was being served by a team from her church. She took it on herself to organize other women in the church to volunteer to take the elderly grocery shopping and transport them to doctor's appointments.



"Your ministry with your care receiver is not an isolated event, but is producing a legacy of good and is bringing great honor to Jesus

We could go on and on. Just as "bad works"—say, a murder—can motivate others to do "bad works"—such as a revenge murder—so good works produce their own chain reaction of good.

Your ministry with your care receiver is not an isolated event, but is producing a legacy of good and is bringing great honor to Jesus Christ.

My Observations

Summarize in your own words the command in Hebrews 10:24.

What does the phrase “love and good deeds” imply about love and good deeds?

Does God intend good deeds to be primarily the product of individuals, or of a community of believers?

My Application

In what ways are you and your fellow team members encouraging each other to love and good deeds?

Have you been able to influence other men in your church to participate in your ministry to the widowed and single parents?

Have you observed any “chain reactions” as a result of your good deeds?

Digging Deeper

The Thessalonians were hard workers, not just in a physical sense of worker output, but in a spiritual and emotional sense of love expressed in deeds that are motivated by faith. This is how Paul described their work:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 (New American Standard Bible, 1995)

Paul praised the Thessalonians for their *work* of faith, their *labor* of love, their *steadfastness* of hope. Theirs was an active faith expressed in deeds of love. It was hard work. But the rewards were extremely satisfying. Paul went on to describe the effects of their work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope:

You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God. 1 Thessalonians 1:7-9 (NASB, 1995)

The Thessalonians were so zealous in their work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope that they actually inspired other believers to the same type of living. The result was that their testimony spread throughout the Greek world and beyond. The love of Christ is a powerful advertisement for the gospel. When non believers see it, they are so amazed by it that they immediately begin describing it to their friends. That's exactly what happened with the Thessalonians.

I often hear reports from others about men's team ministry in their community. They can't believe men would take an interest in widows, single parents and the poor *for years and years*. I don't have to say a word. These people eagerly report it to *me*. The word of the Lord is sounding forth from these teams. And the word of the Lord will be sounding forth from your team as you, like the Thessalonians, demonstrate *your* work of faith, *your* labor of love and *your* steadfastness of hope.

Day 29:

Through Love Serve One Another

Maybe it was because my mother wasn't Norwegian. I don't know. But the reality was that Grandma Reese never thought Mom was good enough for her beloved firstborn son, Bernhard.

No matter what she did, Mom couldn't cook well enough, keep house well enough, or raise five children well enough to please her mother-in-law. By the time I came along—I was born when my parents were in their forties—Mom and Grandma had managed to achieve a chilly truce. Though she lived only four blocks away from us, they rarely spoke and we socialized as a family with Grandma only on holidays.

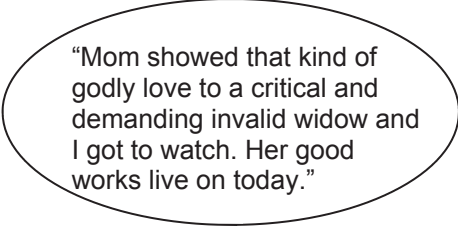
So it was rather startling when Mom and Dad announced that Grandma Reese was coming to live with us—as an invalid. Grandma was in her nineties and had grown feeble. She could no longer care for herself and would have to go into a nursing home if we didn't intervene. Mom, who had a revulsion for nursing homes and had cared for her own mom and dad at home, insisted on taking her in.

One would think that this act of love would have been a turning point in their relationship. Perhaps this would be the moment when they both would come to appreciate and accept each other for the wonderful women they were. But it wasn't. Grandma

“Love is patient and kind.... Love is not ill-mannered or self-ish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs.... Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

was still the same demanding and critical mother-in-law that she had always been.

And yet, day after day, my mother served her without complaint.



“Mom showed that kind of godly love to a critical and demanding invalid widow and I got to watch. Her good works live on today.”

We took the table out of the breakfast room and had a rented hospital bed placed there instead. I can still see Mom leaning over Grandma’s bed, patiently feeding her.

As I think back on that time, I realize now that my passion for caring for people with long term needs came out of experiences like that.

God’s love for us never fails. It’s always patient and kind. It doesn’t keep track of wrongs suffered. Mom showed that kind of godly love to a critical and demanding invalid widow and I got to watch. Her good works live on today.

May your good works for your care receiver—and for all those around you—have the same effect.

My Observations

Do you think the kind of love being described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is meant for relationships that are doing well, or for relationships that are doing poorly?

Summarize the qualities of the love described in 1 Cor. 13:4-7.

In what sense does this love form the basis for our good works?

My Application

Do you have any relationships in your life like the one between Grandma Reese and her daughter-in-law?

What kind of love is God asking you to show them?

What good works might you do for them to show that love?

Does this mean things are going to automatically get better?

Digging Deeper

I call agape love tow truck love. It's the kind of love you summon for relational wrecks. It's amusing to me how we have this idealistic view of agape love as it is expressed in 1 Corinthians 13. We read this passage at weddings, we put it on greeting cards with doilies. We think it's intended for the perfect marriage, the perfect relationship, the perfect love of our life. We view agape love the way we view a fragile orchid, capable of existing only in the most protected and nurturing environments.

But Agape love doesn't flourish in perfection. 1 Corinthians 13 was not written for people with perfect relationships. Far from it. Just think of the Corinthian church itself. Paul was writing to a group of believers who were at each other's necks: they were divided, suing each other, getting drunk in each others' homes. Someone was going to bed with his father's wife. They were abusing their spiritual gifts and spiritual freedom. The church was a mess.

Into this chain reaction of relational heaps Paul called in the "agape love tow truck" to straighten everything out.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (The New Living Translation)

It is precisely those situations where we are tempted to be impatient, unkind, jealous, arrogant, proud and rude that agape love flourishes. Agape love is the antidote to hate.

It is in *that* kind of love that we are to "serve one another." Our good works can be a healing balm in hurtful relationships. In fact, our good works can be a healing balm on an entire church, even a community. Perhaps someday, they will be a healing balm on our nation.

Until then, "*through love* make it your habit to serve one another." Galatians 5:13 (International Standard Version)

Day 30:

The Ultimate Deed

I met Jack Glubrecht at a pastor's Prayer Summit in the Pacific Northwest a few years back. Jack and I were being served lunch at the same table, only Jack was sitting in a wheelchair deftly using his partially paralyzed arms.

"Could you reach into my backpack and pull out my drinking cup?" he asked me.

I zipped open his backpack and found a cup with an abnormally large handle, gave it to him, and introduced myself. As we got to know each other, I asked Jack about his disability and he told me this amazing story of tragedy and love.

Jack was a youth pastor at Northwest Hills Church in Corvallis, Oregon, until an accident changed everything. Jack was on a water skiing retreat with his youth group. During his turn riding on an inner-tube pulled by the ski boat, he fell and broke his neck, partially severing his spine.

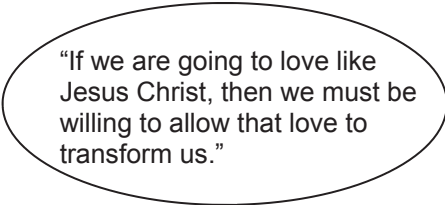
The prognosis wasn't good: Jack would never walk again and would spend much of his time in severe pain.

"How would Jack's church come to the aid of someone with such great need?" I wondered as he told me his story.

What the church did was provide Jack's

“This is how we have come to know love: Christ gave his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” 1 John 3:16 (New American Standard Bible)

salary as a love gift while waiting almost five years for his disability claim to be approved and paid. During those five years it became obvious that Jack could no longer be their youth pastor. After the state declared Jack "Permanently Totally Disabled," the church asked him to serve as the volunteer director of their Compassion Ministries. (Can you imagine being a person in



"If we are going to love like Jesus Christ, then we must be willing to allow that love to transform us."

need, showing up at the church and winding up talking to Jack? That would put everything in perspective!) Jack also does counseling and weddings.

But the church didn't stop there. The congregation helped remodel Jack and his wife, Melanie's, home to make it accessible. And here's the amazing part: men from the church volunteered to help Melanie with Jack's daily care.

Eventually, Jack and Melanie moved into a five bedroom home that they share with longtime friends, Chris and Cathy and their two daughters. The two families share house "duties" and Chris can help with Jack's care. Wow!

Good deeds can never be mere token gestures. If we're going to follow Christ, then we must be willing to follow him wherever that leads us. If we are going to love like Jesus Christ, then we must be willing to allow that love to transform us. Melanie, the church, and the family that they live with allowed their love for Jack to change their lives.

And that is what we must be willing to do as well.

My Observations

Christians believe that the very essence of love has been demonstrated in what way?

Christians believe that in response, they are to do what?

Think about the couple that moved in next door to Jack and his wife. In what ways did this couple allow their love for Jack and his wife to change them?

My Application

Do you feel that you have a good understanding of the love of Christ?

Are you willing to lay down your life for someone?

If your care receiver became destitute, what does this verse say we are to do for them?

What is the difference between mere token kind gestures and the love of Christ?

Digging Deeper

Count the cost, Jesus warned those who were thinking about becoming his disciples. In blunt terms he demanded, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” And then a little later he repeated the demand, “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27-33).

When we set out to love someone exactly the way Christ has commanded us to love them—by identifying with them, committing to them and sacrificing for them—we are setting out on a journey that is very similar to the journey the disciples found themselves on when they began to follow Christ. They didn’t have a clue where their journey would take them. They only knew that they had been taken captive by this man Jesus and that they were willing to do anything to be near him.

Loving the way Christ has loved us is very much like the journey the Twelve set out on two thousand years ago. We cannot know in advance where such a love is going to take us. We cannot predict the outcome of following this kind of love to the very end, just as Ruth couldn’t predict the outcome of her love for Naomi, and Jonathan couldn’t predict the outcome of his love for David. All we know is that our greatest fulfillment and destiny is to see Christ’s love through to completion, and that the process of doing so may cost us everything we have, including our own lives.

In short, Christ-like love requires faith, obedience and sacrifice. It is unsettling not to know where you are going to wind up in life when you are being asked to lay it down for someone else. Insecurity is the main culprit that keeps us from loving like Jesus. With great love comes great risk.

You have set out to love like Jesus Christ. In this ministry, you are directing that love to a widow, a widower, a single mom, a single dad. *But in all of life* we would hope that you have set out to love as Christ has loved us the others God has given you as well—your wife, your kids, your neighbor, your fellow worker, your friend, even your enemy. That overwhelming love which has been given to you in Christ is calling you to do things you would never have dreamed of doing otherwise. And you know you wouldn’t trade it for anything.

"The studies are terrific! The stories that begin each one are captivating, well-written, and to the point. Each unit is short enough to invite engagement, but deep enough to stimulate one's thinking."

Dr. Don Sunukjian
Chair of the Christian Ministry and Leadership Department
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Carol Stream, Illinois

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Herb Reese, in *Doing Good Well, Thirty Daily Meditations on Developing a Biblical and Focused Discipline of Good Works*, shows us the uniqueness of Christian good works as he discusses questions such as: What are good works? What are good works supposed to accomplish? And how are we to do good works? Herb uses true, heart warming stories that pointedly illustrate the principles he is explaining. Included with each meditation are personal study and application questions as well as a section of in-depth analysis.



Herb Reese is a graduate of UCLA and Dallas Theological Seminary and has done additional graduate work at the University of Texas at Dallas and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. After pastoring three churches in Texas, Illinois and Colorado over twenty years, Herb founded New Commandment Men's Ministries in 2003. Herb and his wife, Patti, have three children. They live in Broomfield, Colorado.



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