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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

Our world has changed drastically in a very short time. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in lost jobs, cancelled travel plans, unplanned separation from friends and family, and much more. Something as simple as going to the grocery store is not as simple now as it was just 6 months ago. Gone are the days of accidentally bumping into someone and saying, "Sorry." Everyone is 6-feet apart now. It is so much easier to read a face than it is to read eyes, but gone are the days of seeing a smile on someone's face, or pain, or anger – the common view now is mask-covered faces. Covid-19 has changed our experience in day-to-day life.

The vast majority of churches indefinitely postponed in-person assemblies. I am thankful for the ability to meet on Zoom and similar software for Bible classes and for YouTube, Facebook, and other platforms which allow for sermons to be livestreamed from the preacher's office to the congregation's living room. But virtual assemblies are not the same as gathering with brothers and sisters in person. Fortunately, many places have opened up and in-person assemblies are happening again, albeit, modified. People who not too long ago were hugging, shaking hands and patting backs are now standing (and sitting) 6-feet apart. Covid-19 has, at least for the present, changed our experience of worship.

Amidst all the changes, let me proclaim loudly, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Much earlier in the book, the author cited from Psalm 102, "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail" (Hebrews 1:10-12).

God is the same. His word is the same. His promises are the same. The hope of heaven is the same. The value of souls is the same. The spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus are the same. In a world that is changing, seemingly by the day at times, what a blessing to have the LORD as our solid and unchanging refuge.

We appreciate our writers who study diligently and pull together in

a cohesive fashion material which will be helpful to others have hopefully help us to GROW. We are thankful for you, our readers, and your continued interest in GROW magazine. If you have found it to be useful, please feel free to share it with others. Forward the notification email, post a link to social media, print out a copy and hand it to someone. GROW magazine is a free e-publication. Share it to your heart's content!

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender
William J. Stewart

Effective Fervent Prayer

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

There are several occasions in Scripture where Old Testament people and events are used to provide lessons about faith in the New Testament. For example, the circumstances in Elijah's life as recorded in 1 Kings 17-18 are the backdrop for a great lesson prayer in James 5.

In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah foretold a drought which would come. However, James tells us he prayed for the drought (James 5:17). Why would he pray for a drought? It was a punishment upon the people of Israel for their sins (1 Kings 16:33; Deuteronomy 28:22, 24). It should have persuaded them to repent. Three and a half years later, we read of Elijah's showdown with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. God was faithful, giving his prophet victory over the false prophets of Baal. As a result, the people's hearts turned back to the Lord (1 Kings 18:37-40). Thus, it was time for Elijah to pray for the rains to return. Notice from 1 Kings 18...

THE PROCLAMATION OF FAITH (1 KINGS 18:41)

Elijah believed that it would rain. The prophet expected God would bring an end to the drought because of the LORD's victory that day and the turning of Israel's heart back to the LORD. He knew God promised restoration of blessings to the land if Israel returned to God (Deuteronomy 4:29-31; 30:1-5). Even though Israel had departed from the LORD and the curses pronounced against them were engaged (Deuteronomy 28), Elijah believed God's promise and proclaimed it publicly.

THE PRAYER OF FAITH (1 KINGS 18:42-44)

Believing and declaring that God would restore the rain, Elijah then ascended to the top of Mount Carmel, *"bowing down on the ground, and put his face between his knees."* He



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prayed. As he had formerly prayed in earnest for the drought to come, now he petitioned God for the drought to end.

"Go up now, look toward the sea," Elijah commanded his servant. *"Nothing,"* came the reply. Six times, the servant was sent to look toward the sea, and six times the servant reported there was nothing. There was no physical evidence available for Elijah to lay his expectation upon – the skies were blue and cloudless. However, his faith was secure in the promise of God.

"Go again," Elijah commanded, a seventh time. The servant came back, excited, *"There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!"* How many are ready to declare a heavy rain, having seen a single cloud in the sky, a cloud small enough that it can be hidden behind your hand? Elijah was, and he did. He urged Ahab, *"prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you!"*

That small cloud was evidence enough for him to declare God had answered his prayer – it was going to rain!

THE POWER OF FAITH (1 KINGS 18:45-46)

Elijah believed it would come to pass. He

prayed that it would come to pass, and at the sight of one tiny cloud, he knew it had come to pass before a single drop of rain fell. *“Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain.”*

Elijah’s prayer was answered! But why? Was it because he was a man through whom the Lord performed miracles? No. Was it because he was a prophet, and thus knew about future events? No. How is it that this man of God prayed for rain, and it rained? Hear the words of James:

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (5:17-18)

There was no special power or ability in Elijah’s possession affecting the rain on that day. James reveals it was because he was a righteous man who prayed for God to bring forth rain according to the promise of God. If we pray in faith and according to God’s will (1 John 5:14-15), we will see the fulfillment of prayer as Elijah did.

In James 5, the writer used Elijah’s prayer of faith as a springboard to look at various situations in the Christian’s life, such as times of suffering, sickness, and the confession of sins. Notice a few thoughts on each of these.

PRAYER IS A HELP IN TIMES OF SUFFERING

There are numerous examples in Scripture of individuals who, in difficult circumstances, turned to God in prayer. Paul and Silas were singing and praying at midnight in the inner prison at Philippi (Acts 16:25). Jesus, agonizing about the trial which was ahead for Him *“...prayed more earnestly”* (Luke 22:44). The prophet Jonah *“...cried out to the LORD...”* from the belly of a great fish (Jonah 2:2). On many occasions, the Psalmist found solace by bringing his trials before the God of

heaven (Psalm 18:6; 50:15; 118:5). If we are suffering, we ought to bring our cares to the Lord, for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). When we’ve laid our burdens before Him, we can experience *“...the peace of God which surpasses all understanding...”* (Philippians 4:6-7).

PRAYER IS A HELP IN TIMES OF SICKNESS

What sickness does James have in mind here? Is he speaking about physical ailments or spiritual troubles? Certainly, either could be under consideration. If we are suffering physical infirmities, we ought to bring such before the Lord. He has the power to heal the body and can affect our bodily health for good. If we are physically ill, then we ought to petition God’s favour. However, it seems more likely the thought on the mind of the inspired writer was spiritual illness. In calling for the elders, one is calling for those who are charged with shepherding the flock (Acts 20:28). James seems to have the spiritually weak in mind because he tells his readers to call for the elders, the mention of possible sin, and the need to confess sin, and pray for one another.

If we are spiritually weak, we need to enlist the help of those who are spiritual to build us up (Galatians 6:1). The Hebrew writer encouraged us to *“...make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed”* (Hebrews 12:13).

PRAYER OF FAITH WILL SAVE THE SICK

Again, the application in verse 15 could be either physical or spiritual. Still, given the context, spiritual sickness seems to be the intent. If we are aware of one who struggles in the faith, we should be praying for that person. *“The prayer of faith will save the sick.”* Cain asked the Lord, *“Am I my brother’s keeper?”* The answer is yes. In the household of faith, we are our brother and sister’s keeper. Thus, when one is struggling or perhaps even turned from the faith, we should seek to turn them back (James 5:19-20).

1 John 5:16 says, *“If anyone sees his brother*

sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and he will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that." If one has given in to temptation, if one has stumbled in the faith, we need to pray for that one. Both James and John tell us our prayers can affect the spiritual well-being of others.

CONFESS YOUR TRESPASSES ... AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

This instruction demands that there be great trust and confidence with our brethren. Many may shy away from sharing their struggles, fearful that such could be publicized. Or wanting to maintain a certain stature in the eyes of others, one might be ashamed to reveal their inner conflicts. James' intent is to enlist the help of others to strengthen us in the faith and prepare us for eternity. Confessing to one another is not about finding new topics for

gossip. It is not about discovering information to blackmail another via gossip. The purpose of the command is to help one another overcome sin. We see an example in Acts 19:18, where we read, "...many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds." They did not hide their faults but confessed them. They sought the help of their brethren. Notice the result:

"Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:19-20).

May we see the great power of prayer, and learn to be effective and fervent in prayer so that God may accomplish great things in us and through our petitions.

Effective Bible Classes: The Teacher's Responsibilities

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

"...the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."
(2 Timothy 2:2)

The apostle Paul urged Timothy to teach others so they could teach others, who could teach others, and so on. Teaching God's word is important, and doing so effectively is essential. No matter what the venue, whether it is a kitchen table or a lecture hall, we want to be successful teachers. Herein we will focus on ways for teachers to make their Bible classes the best possible learning environment.



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humbly. If we want to be a showman, join the circus. We need to check our ego at the door (better yet, long before we ever get to the door) because the occasion is not about us, but about the profitable study of God's word.

STUDY. STUDY. STUDY.

It is imperative to be familiar with the text or topic that we are teaching if we are to be an effective teacher. Effective teaching requires reading (and rereading and re-rereading). But reading is not enough. If we are going to teach a Bible class, then of necessity we must study

to do so. Preparation is key. Paul admonished Timothy:

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"
(2 Timothy 2:15).

RESPECT THE OPPORTUNITY

Years ago, I overheard a young man claim that he could be ready to teach a Bible class in under 10 minutes. His claim was not a matter of only having ten minutes available (ie. being called to fill-in for an emergency). He bragged that he could "chat it up" through the Bible class period for 30-40 minutes with little to no preparation. He had the gift of the gab; I'll give him that. However, such a cavalier attitude towards the teaching of God's word is repugnant. It makes the occasion about the speaker and his ability to wow people (or more likely himself). That kind of attitude takes the focus away from an intentional and purposed study of the Scriptures.

If the brethren have entrusted us (greater still, God has entrusted us) to lead a Bible study, we owe it to the Lord, our brethren, and ourselves to take the opportunity seriously and

Or, as the KJV reads, "...study to shew thyself approved..." Get into the text such that the text gets into you. Check out multiple translations. Look into the meaning of Greek or Hebrew words. Make sure you are acquainted with parallel texts. We cannot share what we do not already know, nor can we adequately express it unless we first have a solid handle on the text or topic.

WHAT IS THE POINT?

Friend, there must be a point, a purpose, a reason, a lesson. A Bible class must have a goal – there must be a useful application for our class. Imagine sitting in a class looking at 1 Chronicles 1-5, reading through genealogy after genealogy, noting this name, and that name along the way. And then, without any application or indication of relevance for your life, the instructor thanks you for your time and invites you to come back next week to study 1 Chronicles 6-9. Are you expected to be in next week's class?

A class without a point will cause those in attendance to question the point in attending the class. A Bible class without a point is pointless (pun intended).

How is the text pertinent to our current situation? What lessons of faith can be drawn from the text? How did the people in the text succeed or fail in their faith? How can their success or failure instruct us in our walk of faith? That is the goal of Bible study – to help us grow in our faith.

PAY ATTENTION TO STRUCTURE

Suppose a brother who is well-versed in the Scriptures is leading a class. His knowledge of the Bible enables him to supplement the primary text of the class with quotes from other places in Scripture. However, his manner is rugged and his class doesn't flow well. His thoughts and words may make perfect sense to him, but in the course of sharing them with others, the lack of cohesiveness and smooth transitions will impede attendees from benefiting. A teacher may have great points to share with the class, but a muddled presentation will impair his ability to be an effective teacher. Outlining is important.

I'm in favour of taking a leisurely Sunday afternoon drive to get a glimpse of this or that, U-turning here or there, following trails to the left or the right – but don't do these things in Bible class. Benjamin Franklin is credited with saying, *"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."* Plan out your class. Know where you are going, how you are going to get there, and then go there. Leave some flexibility for class

discussion, if it is an interactive class, but even then, emphasize the need to stay on track.

Devise an outline that is easy to follow, which is logical and progressive. Regarding textual studies, as we read and reread (and re-reread) the text, what I typically refer to as "God's outline" will often become apparent. The Holy Spirit was not haphazard in the process of revelation. There is always a flow to the text, a coherent development that leads to the focal point. Let's find and use "God's outline."

FOCUS ON JESUS

In my "Introduction to Revelation" class, the thought I leave participants with as we embark on the wonderful journey that is the Revelation of Jesus Christ is this: *"If our study is not focused on Jesus, then we have missed the focus of the book!"* Allow me to illustrate: Revelation 1 makes specific reference to Jesus in verses 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 17, and 18. And then, at the close of the book, chapter 22 refers explicitly to the Lord in verses 12, 13, 16, 17, 20, and 21. If, in the course of our study of the book of Revelation, we get so caught up in the images, numbers, and activity that we fail to see the Lord in the text – we've got off track and missed the point.

The same is true about any book or topic we might pursue in our Bible classes. Do not lose the focus on Jesus, who is our Creator, Sustainer, Messiah, Saviour, Advocate, Judge, etc.. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"...I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified..."* (1 Corinthians 2:2). That doesn't mean we don't talk about or study anything else – but inevitably, all things we study in the Scriptures are going to come back to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. God's plan to redeem us in Christ has been from the foundation of the world. Foreshadows, allusions, and prophecies about the Messiah are prevalent in the Old Testament. And then, when we come to the New Testament, though the inspired writers address a myriad of topics, they always come back to Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Focus on Jesus.

Dangers In Worship: Self-Made Religion

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One of the greatest privileges given to the children of God is the opportunity to draw near the LORD to worship Him. God is the object Whom we center everything around, most notably our worship (Psalm 150). We should always be eager to worship God and should do so with enthusiasm and zeal! We should invite others to worship the God of heaven. Our worship of God appears as a sacrifice before the throne of heaven (Hebrews 13:15). Worship will involve our emotions, but it must also engage our minds! Our prayers and singing should be the result of careful meditation of the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 14:15). We must worship God by following the truth revealed in the word of God.

Worship is a tremendous blessing. We can draw nearer to God through worship. However, many people seem to think it does not matter how we worship, so long as we make some effort to worship. This assumption treats God as if He were under obligation to accept our worship. A friend of mine once told me all that mattered was that we worship God; how we worship God did not matter. Nadab and Abihu made the same indignant mistake when they offered unauthorized worship (Leviticus 10:1-2). Sadly, it is not uncommon for people to treat God and the blessing of worship the same way today.

Paul warned the Colossian brethren, “These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Colossians 2:23, NASB95). Worship is something that can be abused if we are not careful. It is easy to confuse self-centeredness for our good intentions to worship the Creator (cf. Philippians 3:19). Religion that is motivated by selfishness is easy to become involved in but can be difficult for us to change. We must be humble and



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honest with ourselves as we look within our hearts and minds.

WORSHIP ACCORDING TO OUR INVENTION

Paul warned about “self-made religion” and worship based upon the will of human beings and not upon God’s word. Self-made religion is when we worship according to our thoughts and our inventions. There are many specific examples we could point to which demonstrate these selfish inventions (examples include instrumental music, preaching that is politicized or more like motivational speeches). However, this article will look at the subject more broadly. We want to understand the underlying principles of why such practices are wrong.

When we worship God, we are worshiping the Holy One (Isaiah 47:4). In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel forsook the worship of God and turned to idols. They attributed the power of the One, True, and Living God to idols of gold and silver, crafted by the hands of men. They treated gold, silver, and wood as if it were on the same level as God! This demonstrates one of the most significant faults in self-made religion: we treat God as **common** as earthly materials. When we treat God as common as earthly materials, we will treat Him **casually**.

When we treat God casually, it will ultimately lead to treating Him no different than how we treat other people. Therefore, God loses any special place of honor.

How do we treat God casually and as something familiar? The amount of time that we spend preparing to worship God reveals how special we think God is. When we want to succeed at a business opportunity or to make a good impression with someone, we will prepare ourselves. We will try to better ourselves, look presentable, be rested, and ready to make a good impression. Worship is an intentional act — it does not happen on accident. If we do not prepare ourselves for worship, then it indicates that we view God as someone ordinary. Whether it is our intention or not, by our lack of preparation, we are communicating that we do not have time to honor the Lord who loved us and saved us.

Preparing our minds and bodies is essential for proper worship. Being prepared for our Bible classes and worship services is vital if we are going to please God with the fruit of our lips. It can begin by getting a good night's rest before worship. Dressing in a way that gives honor to God is integral to showing the Lord honor. While the way we dress is not about a specific dress code and requiring people to worship God in a three-piece suit and a fancy dress, it is about looking at how much time and thought we put into preparing ourselves for worship. We must not treat God casually, as if He were just as common as lounging around the house in our slippers and pajamas.

Another dangerous and destructive element in worship is when the **worship service reflects more of our interests and desires than it does about God**. Worship, at its heart, is about sacrifice. God becomes the very center of our worship. He is the only One worthy of being praised and worshiped. Therefore, when we worship, we should focus on pleasing Him. However, if we are not careful, it can be easy to divert our attention away from God without realizing we have done so.

Preaching and teaching should be focused on

God's word. The pulpit is not to become a social commentary for current events, politics, and social justice. It is not wrong to refer to current events and contextualize the application of God's word. Still, the work of teaching is a work to point people to God, which involves turning away from this world.

Still, another example might be in our singing. The spiritual songs that we sing in worship should be filled with edifying, thought-provoking lyrics. A catchy tune certainly does not hurt, and familiarity with the song is helpful, especially in a congregational setting. But we sometimes focus so much on singing the same songs because "everyone knows them" that we forget that worship is about praise and thanksgiving to God. It is possible to sing a new song or an unfamiliar song and still worship because we are not singing to ourselves — we are singing to God.

Let us be careful not to become centered on ourselves; the LORD must be the center of our worship. It is God who sent His Son to this world to die for our sins. God and Christ deserve honor and praise (Ephesians 1:12).

WORSHIP ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD

Worship in harmony with God's word will be worship that magnifies God as holy and special, not common and casual. And our worship will be centered around God and Christ — their roles in salvation and the instruction of God's word.

Jesus taught that true worship is done in spirit and truth. We want to be people who are committed to true worship. However, true worship does not happen without intention and careful preparation. We must be people that understand God and His word. We must be committed to following Him.

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people, the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 'God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth'" (John 4:23-24, NASB95)

The Necessity of Good Works for the Child of God

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Like many other biblical subjects, the topic of good works generates much confusion and debate. What exactly is a “work?” What makes a work “good?” Why are good works so important for Christians? And how might “good works” generate controversy?

The simplest definition of a “work” is something one does. According to such a definition, virtually everything we do is a “work.” This fact leads us to what Paul tells us in Colossians 3:17, “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” The conclusion is that everything we do is a work, and these works must be done according to the authority of Jesus.

Our society makes its distinctions between good and bad works. This thinking leads people to decide that their status with God depends on how many “good” works they do, at least according to their definitions. Yet, just because work may seem good to us does not always make it good work to God.

Before we look at what makes a work good in God’s sight, let’s think about what the Bible teaches regarding the importance of good works.

- In Ephesians 2:10, Paul says, “*For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*” Paul tells us that good works are part of our DNA. God created man and, in that process, instilled in him a desire to do good works. The fall of man does not change God’s will for us, but our rebellion against God ignores it.
- Christians are to maintain good works as we live for God. In Titus 3:8, “*This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you*
- Paul encourages faithful women to “*adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness*” and to **accompany their modesty with good works** (1 Timothy 2:9-10). Their effort to conduct themselves modestly is a work in itself.
- Paul admonished Titus in 2:7, “*in all things showing yourself to **be a pattern of good works.***”



4 via Tom Parsons | Unsplash.com

*to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should **be careful to maintain good works**. These things are good and profitable to men.”* In Titus 2:14, Paul urges those who have been redeemed by Jesus and purified for Himself as His own special people to be “**zealous for good works**.” We are not merely to do good works but to be *on fire* to do good works. After all, if we were created for good works, shouldn’t we desire to do them?

- The Hebrew writer in Hebrews 10:24 urges that we “*consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.*” Some of our good works are works that stir up good works in others.
- And how could we forget the bedrock principle that James gives us in James 2:26, “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also?*” There is no more explicit statement on the need for good works anywhere in scripture. In verse 18, he says, “*I will show you my faith by my works.*”

What are some of the important qualities of good works?

- Jesus taught in Matthew 5:16 that we should “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*” Good works are not to be done openly merely for the reward (Matthew 6:1-4), but they should be seen and **point others to God**. Peter begs his beloved brethren to “*abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*” He continues his plea, “*having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation*” (1 Peter 2:12). Similarly, Peter says in 1 Peter 3:16 “*that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*” The effect on those who do not believe and who see one’s good works should be threefold: to cause them to be ashamed, to point them to God, and to bring them to a desire to rekindle good works in themselves for the Lord.
- 1 Timothy 5:25 states, “*Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.*” This statement agrees with Jesus’ saying that we should let our light shine in order that our good works may be seen so that God is glorified.

So, what are good works in God’s sight? Let’s start by looking at some actual good works in the Bible.

- Recall that in John 9, Jesus healed a blind man. In John 10:31, the Jews had had enough of Jesus’ teaching and took up stones to stone Him. Jesus asked them in 10:32, “*Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?*” Ignoring the works Jesus did, they replied that it was not for good works but blasphemy that they took up stones. As we know, all the works of Jesus were according to the will of the Father and, therefore, good. We may not do miracles today, but if we want to know what makes a work good, the best place to start is in the deeds of Jesus. We see good works in His love for all and in His desire to teach others about the kingdom. He displays good works in His efforts to heal and help those in need and His sacrificial death for all of us.
- Tabitha was said in Acts 9:36 to be “full of good works and charitable deeds...” What was it that she did? Verse 39 recalls the beautiful works of this woman, “*And all the widows stood by weeping, showing the tunics and garments which [she] had made while she was with them.*” Tabitha devoted herself to helping other women by making clothing for them. She did what she could, which is integral to our good works.
- Paul speaks of a widow who should be taken care of by the congregation in 1 Timothy 5:10. She must be “*well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.*” Paul says that child-rearing, hospitality, taking care of the saints, and relieving the afflicted are all good works. This list is not every imaginable good work. Paul adds, “*if she has diligently followed every good work.*” This statement is a catch-all phrase, including any other relevant good work not specifically mentioned.

- Paul commands the rich in 1 Timothy 6:18 to be “*rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.*” What those whom God has blessed materially do with those blessings should be a source of good works. The Scriptures do not leave us guessing as to what to do with our material blessings. See Acts 4:32ff for a start.

We could certainly look at other deeds such as “visiting widows and orphans in their distress” (James 1:27); husbands’ love for wives and wives’ respect for husbands (Ephesians 5); the active, working relationship between brethren (Romans 12:9ff and Philippians 2:1-3); and so many more. And we should make a study of the actions of Jesus. All of this paints a pretty broad canvas as to what good deeds are. And we are brought back to Colossians 3:17. When everything we do is in harmony with God’s word, then it is a good work.

These concepts present a problem for some. The wide-open nature of the description of good works in scripture is still not wide open enough. We must add what we consider to be good works to the mix. Several things might appear to be good works by human standards. Things such as, raising money by car washes and bake sales, using the weekly contribution to God to provide meals or, worse, to build gymnasiums and kitchens to bring in the “unchurched.” We must always remember that we do not define what constitutes a good work; only our heavenly Father can do that. He created us for good works, and therefore, is the author and judge of what constitutes a good work.

Another problem for many is a belief that because works cannot save, good works only start after salvation. This misconception is why some conclude that baptism is only a good work to be done after one is already saved. It is true that no work of ours can save us, but is it true that our works only begin after we are saved? The problem with this thinking is that it ignores the fact that we are created for good works. Additionally, Jesus says something revealing in John 6:28-29. The people asked Jesus, “*What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?*” Now, if they are asking about the works of God, they are inquiring about good works. And in verse 29, Jesus answered and said to them, “*This is the work of God, that you **believe in Him whom He sent.***” This statement makes several points: 1) We are not totally depraved because we can choose to believe. 2) Faith, itself, is a work. Therefore, our work is involved in our salvation. 3) Since faith is a work unto salvation, baptism is also a work legitimately involved in our salvation (just as repentance is).

In summary, everything we do is a work. Our works should be good, according to God’s definition of good, and should not be hidden but plentiful. Our good works should cause those who do not believe to be ashamed, to point them to God, and to bring them to a desire to rekindle good works in themselves for the Lord. Our good works should stir brethren up in their love for God and to their good works, which are essential for the one professing to follow the One whose food was to do the Father’s will (John 4:34).

Into All The World

KEITH SHARP | MOUNTAIN HOME, ARKANSAS

“Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’ (Mark 16:14-15).

My first overseas preaching trip was in January 1992, when Lowell Blasingame and Albert Dabbs took Tom Kinzell and me to Nigeria to spend four weeks teaching classes for preachers and preaching to Nigerian churches. It was an overwhelming experience. I struggled with seeing the poverty, filth, violence, and government repression, along with strange food and customs. I had to remind myself that I was not there to help the poor and diseased to overcome their sad plights or to press for freedom from repression and crime. As great as those needs were and are, my job was more important. My job was to help teach people made in the image of God how to go to heaven. This is the greatest need throughout the world.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

While the Great Commission was primarily given to the apostles of Christ, secondarily, its commands are to all Christians (Matthew 28:19-20). We are also obligated, as we have the opportunity and ability, to “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15). How are we to accomplish this daunting goal?

FIRST CENTURY CHURCH OUR MODEL

The Jerusalem church is a model for us in this as well as in other matters. This congregation is the preeminent example of success in local evangelism (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). But the brethren in Jerusalem were guilty of spiritual nearsightedness. The apostles had



5 via Lisa Moore | Pixabay.com

been directed to preach, not only “*in Jerusalem,*” but also “*in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). But it took a great persecution to cause them to be scattered beyond Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). When this happened, the disciples went everywhere, preaching the word (Acts 8:4). They traveled “*as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word*” (Acts 11:19). As the result, “*the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord*” (Acts 11:21). The Jerusalem brethren also sent out the evangelist Barnabas “*to go as far as Antioch.*” His preaching greatly encouraged the new converts to faithfulness. Thus, “*a great many people were added to the Lord*” (Acts 11:22-24). Only when the brethren in Jerusalem zealously took the gospel into other places were they truly successful at evangelism.

The congregation at Antioch followed the example of the church in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were eminently productive in their preaching efforts in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). But the Christians at Antioch were taught by the Holy Spirit not to be selfish in the use of the enormous abilities of these inspired evangelists. Rather, the Spirit directed them to send these men out to take the gospel afar

(Acts 13:1-3). Upon the preachers' return from foreign lands, the brethren at Antioch were anxious to hear of their work, so they assembled for this purpose (Acts 14:26-28). How many churches today are too selfish to share their evangelist with others and too unconcerned with hearing reports about preaching in faraway places? Later, Paul and Barnabas left Antioch again, this time separately, to preach abroad, each taking another evangelist from Antioch (Acts 15:30-41).

What was the result of these zealous efforts? Around A.D. 30, the Lord commanded, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* About A.D. 60, one generation later, when Paul wrote to the Colossians from prison in Rome, the gospel had gone into *"all the world"* (Colossians 1:5-6). It had been *"preached to every creature"* (Colossians 1:23). In one generation the first-century church fulfilled the Great Commission.

FOUR KEYS

How was the New Testament church, beginning with a little band of twelve *"uneducated and untrained men"* able to accomplish this incredible task? There were four keys to their success. The holy, loving, faithful lives of the disciples were a living demonstration of the effects of the gospel (Acts 2:42-47). They were so zealous to reach the lost, they preached everywhere, even in the face of bitter persecution (Acts 8:1-4). The only tool of evangelism they employed was the gospel (Acts 11:19-21). And the only organization they formed for evangelism was the independent local congregation (Acts 11:22).

OUR OPPORTUNITY

If first-century Christians could take the gospel to the known world in one generation without the use of automobiles, airplanes, radio, television, the internet, or the printing press, what should we be able to do with the aid of all these means of swift, easy, safe transportation, and mass communication? If the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) enabled evangelists to travel throughout the Roman Empire with the gospel in the first century, what should the collapse of the barriers of tyranny do for us? If the Koine Greek language as the lingua franca (international language of commerce and trade) provided first-century disciples a medium through which to preach to the world, what should the English language occupying the same position provide for us today?

It is yet *"God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13). He is even now *"able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us"* (Ephesians 3:20). The gospel has the same power to save today that it had almost two millennia ago (1 Peter 1:22-25). If we use the same four keys first-century disciples employed, they will open the door to the salvation of a lost world now, as they did then.

CONCLUSION

The Master urged the twelve, "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest" (John 4:35-36). Brothers and sisters, look at all the poor, lost souls where you live, in your country, and throughout the world. Let us take them freedom from sin in our time.

A Wondrous Prayer: Colossians 1:9-12

BRIAN V. SULLIVAN | JORDAN, ONTARIO

Thinking about someone is great; loving them is essential, but praying for them shows the place they hold in your heart. When Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, it was not just a case of thinking about them or being content to declare he loved them. He gave us insight into what his prayers were for them to God.

Although Colossians 1:9-12 is all part of an extended sentence, our interest in this item is in the first verse of this section. Paul wrote, *“For this reason we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease to pray for you, and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, and all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (NKJV). Before we discuss those things, let us observe what Paul believed will result from these things.

Read Colossians 1:10-12, and you see that knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:9) would equip them so *“that you may walk worthy of the Lord.”* They would be able to *“fully please Him”* by *“being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (v 10). They would mature so that they would be *“strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.”* The Colossians would be better equipped to handle the day-to-day challenges of being a Christian in a contrary world. These things would result in them having *“all patience and longsuffering with joy.”* Their growth would help them remain steadfast and bear with the challenges of each day and find joy in knowing they were doing what God desired (cf. Acts 5:41-42; Philippians 1:27-30). Their confidence in God would be evident in



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two things: they were *“giving thanks to the Father”* – Whom they were serving through Christ (Colossians 1:12). And they saw themselves as *“partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light”* (v 12).

Did you realize that the same prayer for increased knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding can bring about similar development, confidence, and hope in us? Most Bible students can immediately recognize that it is in the Father and the Son (Jesus Christ) *“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2:2-3). So our

source for *“wisdom”* and *“knowledge”* is easy enough to identify, and access, for the Father and the Son have made known these things through their inspired word (the faith, Colossians 2:2-10; 1 Corinthians 2:7-13).

“Knowledge” concerns the facts, the data upon which our faith is established (Romans 10:17). We increase knowledge by diligent study (*“give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine,”* 1 Timothy 4:13; *“meditate”* or think often and seriously about them, 1 Timothy 4:15. Paul encouraged Timothy to *“Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God, a worker that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,”* 2 Timothy 2:15). *“Wisdom”* is the practical application of knowledge. It is directing our steps in accord with what we know. Returning to 1 Timothy 4:15-16, we read: *“Meditate on these things, give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all”* and *“take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both*

yourself and those who hear you" (NKJV). We often encourage people to grow in "knowledge" and "wisdom" but what about the third component? Most people skip over "*spiritual understanding*" because it may be more difficult to explain, but should it be? The Bible heart involves our intellect and thinking ability (receiving and retaining knowledge); our will or purpose (applying what we know or have learned of the will of God); and our emotions (whether we love or hate, sorrow or rejoice, like or fear, etc.).

To comprehend "*spiritual understanding*," kindly turn to Psalm 119 and consider what it declares. Observe with me that verses 97-100 set before me the advantages of knowledge from God's law, commandments, or precepts. Then, verses 101-102 set before me the practical application of that knowledge through the wisdom imparted and applied in my daily

life. Finally, take note of verses 103-105, where we have reached the level of "*spiritual understanding*" to be convinced "*how sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.*" God's law is not just a series of "*thou shalt not's*," as so many suppose. God's word builds within me an "*understanding*" that causes me "*to hate every false way.*" God's glorious word is "*a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*"

When we attain "*spiritual understanding*," it helps us comprehend God's plan for our lives, teaches us how to avoid temptation and sin, and prepares us for the world to come. We conclude that instead of the Bible being a burdensome, arduous taskmaster it is a wonderful guide to the richest, fullest, and most blessed life we can live in a hostile world. May God bless you with "*knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding*" in Jesus' name, Amen.

OCTOBER 2020 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE	What does God want of you? <u>Jeremy Woodman</u> will use Micah 6:8 to unravel the answer to this great question.
CHURCH ARTICLE	The New Testament refers to the church as the body of Christ. <u>Shane Carrington</u> will direct us in a study on the meaning and significance of this description.
WORSHIP ARTICLE	<u>Jim Mickells</u> will focus on what the Scriptures say about the collection for the saints.
APPLICATION ARTICLE	<u>Sean Cavender</u> will look at Paul's instruction as given in Romans 14 regarding matters of opinion or personal faith and make application for our modern time.
EVANGELISM ARTICLE	<u>William Stewart</u> will consider the use of video and live-streaming as a tool for evangelistic outreach.
BEYOND THE BASICS	<u>Tom Rainwater</u> will begin a series of articles addressing the grief, suffering, and pain which comes with the loss of a loved one.



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