

"THE GREAT LIFE (#2): DO GOOD"

(Luke 10:25-37)

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[PROPS NEEDED: Veggie Tales Video; "Doing Good" Ministry Slides]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 8-13-23]

--I--

1. [11am ONLY... Read Text (NRSV): Luke 10:25-37 and Pray.]
2. [VIDEO: VeggieTales "Love Your Neighbor" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLxt6-1dzwQ>) (Time: 1:18)]
3. Today we're continuing a series in which we're exploring three principles outlined by the founder of Methodist Christianity (John Wesley) that -- when practiced consistently -- can enable us to experience "The Great Life" with God and others.

A--Last week, we said that these three principles are merely another way of stating Jesus' "*Great Commandment*"¹ (Love God; Love Neighbor), and that the first principle (what Wesley called "*Doing No Harm*") is nothing more than the *first part* of "*loving our neighbor*."

B--But the *second aspect* of "loving our neighbor" is the focus of *today's* message.

1--In the "VeggieTales" videoclip that we just saw, we heard that "loving our neighbor" means "*lending a hand*."

2--Well, John Wesley had another phrase for that same thing: he called it "DOING GOOD" to all people, in all times, places and circumstances.

C--So today, I want us to talk first about what that principle means, and then give a few suggestions for how we go about practicing it in our lives today.²

--II--

4. Let's begin by talking about what "*Doing Good*" actually means.

A--Jesus shares *his* understanding of what it means in what we've come to call "*The Parable of the Good Samaritan*" found in today's scripture from Luke 10:25-37.

[9am ONLY... Let me read it for you: "25 *Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* 26 *He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"* 27 *He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."* 28 *And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."* 29 *But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* 30 *Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.* 31 *Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.* 32 *So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.* 33 *But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.* 34 *He went to him and bandaged his wounds,*

having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise. ""]

1--Here we have a religious leader again trying to trap Jesus into giving a particular definition of "neighbor": ...one who is righteous and outwardly religious *just like them!*

2--But Jesus doesn't take the bait. Instead, in this story the "neighbor" -- the one who "did good" -- is neither the religious *Priest* nor the pious *Levite*, but a hated and despised *Samaritan*, who was considered to be a half-breed because he was neither fully Jewish nor fully Gentile.

3--So, Jesus here not only turns the definition of "*neighbor*" on its head, but also the meaning of "*doing good*"-- in this case, "doing good" is no longer defined by what's comfortable and desired by *US* (illustrated by the actions of the Priest and the Levite), but by what is needed and required for the well-being of *OTHERS* (illustrated by the actions of the Samaritan).

B--In the strictest sense, then, "***Doing Good***" is exactly *opposite* the perspective that we were warned last week to guard *against* -- I.E., that "Doing Good" is "***Anything that loves our neighbor enough to put they and their needs first, ahead of even our own desires and comforts.***"

C--Author/Bishop Reuben Job says that "[*Doing good*] will mean that the common good will be my first thought, and what is good for me will become a secondary thought." ³

1--This may mean, for example, that at Sunday morning worship or another church function, *before* we start up a conversation with our *friends*, maybe we *first* seek out & welcome *guests*.

2--It may mean that we may ask that person of a different race or ethnicity out to lunch with our family after worship, or to be our guest at Sunday School or in our small group.

3--It may mean wearing a mask or getting a vaccine for the sake and safety of *others*, even if we don't think we need it for *ourselves!*

4--It may mean that we not only *invite* our next-door neighbor, loved one, or work or school mate to worship with us, but that we may even worship with them at a service that's *different* from the one *we* usually worship in IF we think it'll help them experience God *more easily*.

5--And I could go on, but you get the idea.

5. So, notice here that "Doing Good" starts with the very *difficult* challenge of last week ("Doing no harm") and then takes it to the *next level!* ⁴

A--Think about it: while "doing no harm" mostly requires us to *refrain from* or *avoid* the doing of certain negative things (e.g., *passive* behavior), "doing good" requires the deliberate, intentional *doing* of certain positive things (e.g., *proactive* behavior).

1--For example... If we've just witnessed a car accident in front of us, it would certainly be noble not to want to do anything to make matters *worse*; But if all we do for the victims is "*do no harm*," then we haven't really helped them, have we?

2--No, as today's story of the Good Samaritan illustrates, being a "good neighbor" requires that *in addition to* "doing no harm", we *also* get out of our comfort zones and ACT in positive ways which may *feel* uncomfortable! ("*lending a hand*" as the "VeggieTales" video put it!)

B--Yet, since the scriptures tell us that God always *equips* those whom He *calls*,⁵ then if we're called to step outside our comfort zones to "do good" for other people, then we can also be assured that God will give us the strength and ability to do those things.⁶

6. Let me offer *two suggestions to help us to better practice this principle* in our lives today.

--III--

7. The first is to **HAVE OTHERS HOLD US ACCOUNTABLE FOR OUR "DOING OF GOOD."**

A--Now, some may view this as invasive... that "*it's nobody else's business the good I do for others*", and that we'd rather be anonymous about the good things we do for others.

1--And this is noble enough. After all, in Matthew 6, regarding the example of almsgiving, Jesus told his disciples, "*don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing*" -- as if others should not know about the good that we do.

2--But its important to point out that this passage is not talking about *personal accountability* for doing good, but about NOT using our good deeds to *trumpet* what a good *person* we are!

3--Hebrews 10:24, after all, says, "*let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds...*", meaning that one function of Christian community (e.g., small groups, Sunday School classes, etc.) is to lovingly encourage & challenge each other specifically to "do good."

4--This is why for both the early Christians and early Methodists, this kind of intimate accountability was one of the direct reasons for the transformation of both the Roman and English societies to the cause of Christ in their respective times.

5--Both of these groups understood that while most of us have good *intentions* to "do good," quite often we need prompting from *others around us* in order to turn good *intentions* into good *deeds*.⁷

B--So, let me ask: WHO is holding *you* accountable for the doing of good deeds in the name of Jesus? Your spouse? Your Sunday School class or Bible Study group? A prayer group that you're in? WHO?

1--One of the great joys and blessings of my life has been *my weekly covenant tele-group* that meets every Friday at 1:00pm -- a group of fellow clergy in which we hold each other accountable not only for avoiding temptation/evil, but also for the doing of good things.

2--You see, even for those in ministry, good deeds don't always "just happen." No, for myself and for ALL of us, they often require gentle encouragement and prompting from *others*.

3--And that's precisely why I believe every one of us needs a small group in which we can not only fellowship and be supported, but also be challenged -- "*provoked*," as the scripture says -- "*to love and good deeds*."

4--Are you in such a group already? If not, talk to myself or other staff about how you can do it.

8. A second suggestion to help us get better at "doing good" is for us to **ACTIVELY LOOK FOR WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.**

A--You and I don't need to wait for opportunities to "do good" to *come to us* -- we should instead go looking for *them* -- for us to BE the positive change that we're longing to see in our world! ⁸

B--In two weeks, we'll be having something called Mission Sunday -- a day for us all to hear and learn about many of the various mission ministries and projects that our church hosts or partners with.

1--I want to invite and encourage us all not only to present and learn about these, but (if we're not already) to get involved in one or more of them -- things like our work at Eastgate community through O'Rourke ministry, our ministry partnership in El Salvador, or Trinity Table, or Operation Christmas Child.

2--Or maybe its as simple as giving to our "Compassionate Care Fund" on Communion Sundays to help needy families in our community, or staying after worship to help pack lunches or other mission kits when we have those available.

C--The point is that when you and I do things like these (even when they're inconvenient to us!), not only do our acts bring transformation to the lives, but it builds bridges of hope and trust for them to receive a touch of love from God -- we literally become the hands and feet of Jesus to them! ⁹

--V--

9. So, you see, "doing good" by living for others *first* can be an extremely challenging way to live.

A--But Jesus' response to the man in today's story tells us that it's a way of life that's not only *possible*, but also one that's *essential* to our spiritual well-being.

B--And... (#1) by *having others hold us accountable for our doing of "good deeds,"* and... (#2) by our own *proactive search for opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others,* ...

C--...The good we *do* (along with the harm we *avoid*) comprise the first two steps to "*The Great Life*" with God -- a life where we seek to truly love God and "love our neighbor."

10. [PRAYER: "O God, more than simply avoiding harm to others, help us to actively seek out, find, & then practice intentional acts of love, good, and kindness towards them. Help us to 'provoke' one another as believers in this important task, knowing that our good intentions will often remain only that so long as we try to 'do good' by ourselves. Empower us to join with others in finding ways to make a difference in our world that we might be like salt & light - like a city set on a hill for you, shining for all to see your love & compassion. Let us 'do good' to others, so that they might be drawn to you & your grace & presence. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen."]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Found in Matthew 22:36-40

² In Wesley's words, "As you have opportunity, do good of every possible sort and as far as is possible to all people" [Wesley, "The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies" (1743), Paragraph 5].

³ Reuben Job, Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), p. 43.

⁴ As with the first step, "doing good" may be easy to *understand*, but a lot harder to put into *practice*.

⁵ Read 1 Thessalonians 5:24.

⁶ It is harder partly because of the many **OBSTACLES** we have to overcome in "doing good."

For example, we may *fear that "Doing Good" may require too much effort, and take us too far outside our comfort zone.* Yet, behind our fear and reluctance along these lines is often merely a selfish desire to be "in control" -- to know where we're going and what it'll cost to get there. And if we determine that it'll cost too much mentally, physically, emotionally, financially, or spiritually, we may simply choose not to do it because we fear losing control. Remember, however, that the Bible says that *"perfect love casts out fear"* (1 John 4:18), and this means that God will be with us even as we step beyond what we are comfortable.

A second obstacle is the *fear of our good deed being rejected or mismanaged by others*: what if we're ridiculed or poked fun at because we tried to be nice to someone? What if our attempt to compromise is seen as a sign of weakness? What if the good we do is misused in ways that we don't approve (for example, money given for food is used to buy drugs instead)? And because of these fears, sometimes we choose not to do a good deed at all! Yet, the scriptures also say that our desire and call to "do good" shouldn't be limited by the responses or actions of *others*, but by *our* response to the "good" that God gives (and has given) to *us*. After all, can any of us truthfully say that *we've never* ourselves rejected or mismanaged something good that God gave *us*? Of course not! We've all mismanaged God's good gifts occasionally. Therefore, we have no business judging others by whether or not they will do the same with our acts of kindness or goodness. And remember, too, that Jesus himself calls us not only to love our *neighbors*, but to love even our *enemies*, and to pray for those who use and misuse both us and the good things we do for them (Read Matthew 5:34-35). Galatians 6:9-10 encourages Christians to have this same kind of attitude in their actions, and it is reflected in a famous poem called "Thoughts to Ponder," as well: *"People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered. Love them anyway. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway. If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds. Think big anyway. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for some underdogs anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway"* [James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 54].

A third (and perhaps greatest) obstacle to "doing good" is the *fear that answering its call will overwhelm us*. After all, the needs of people and the world are so great, and our own resources are so small, that if we choose to "do good" to all people, then *where* do we draw the line? Perhaps it's easier to do nothing (or at least not do very much). I can relate to this... there have been times in my career when I haven't set up enough boundaries -- when I haven't said "No" to enough things (even good things) -- and have found myself close to burn-out because I'd given myself away to the point of not having anything left for me or my family. But remember that in his own quest to "do good" to as many people as possible, even Jesus set limits and boundaries, and encouraged his followers to do the same. Even he took time away from the hectic pace of ministry to replenish his own soul and needs (For example, read Mark 6:31-32 and 45-46). And that makes the words of author Edward Hale so true: *"I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And that [that] I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the grace of God, I shall do"* (Edward Everett Hale, cited on the "One Act of Kindness" website at www.oneactofkindness.org). Bishop Reuben Job explains it this way, *"Taking appropriate care of self and living selflessly are not opposites. Rather, they are each essential elements of a healthy & productive life"* (Job, [Three Simple Rules](#), p. 46). Other authors have reflected similar notions, as well: *"Since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstances, are brought into closer connection with you"* [Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430), cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry #9673]; *"Do not wait for extraordinary circumstances to do good. Try to use ordinary situations"* [Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763-1825), cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry #5058].

⁷ In today's "Walk to Emmaus" Christian renewal movement, in the weekly reunion group agenda, there is a section titled "Call to Discipleship" that asks the following questions: *"At what moment this week did you feel you were responding to God's call to be His disciple? Where did you participate in being the church this week? The heart beat of Christ? What have you done during the week so Christ will be better known and loved your family, vocation, community, small group, Christian community?"* In other words, these questions are meant to allow group members to hold each other accountable for their "doing [of] good" each week.

⁸ Here are several resources available for free or purchase that can help us in intentionally "Doing Good":

* Learn the concept of "servant evangelism" in the landmark book Conspiracy of Kindness by Steve Sjogren (available from www.cokesbury.com, or from <https://stevesjogren.wordpress.com/servant-evangelism/>)

* Read many examples of "Acts of Kindness" at <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas>

* Learn about the work of the "Random Acts of Kindness Foundation" at www.actsofkindness.org, and of "One Act of Kindness" at www.oneactofkindness.org

* Practice "Pay it Forward" -- don't pay "back" the person who made you a gift but instead pay it "forward" to someone new ' pass on to someone else the good deed given to you.

* Do a search in any web engine for "Christian acts of kindness" and find a variety of other ideas

⁹ Imagine the impact it would make if all the 1200 members of our church got involved in "doing good" for others throughout this community -- doing things like this not because we *want* or expect something in return (even them starting to come to our church), but *simply because* we want to reflect Jesus & live out his call to "*love one another as I have loved you*" (Read John 13:34).