

GROWING IN GOODNESS

2 Peter 1:5-7

By Andy Manning

INTRODUCTION

After you have died and gone to heaven, how do you want to be remembered?

In Acts 9, the Bible tells a story about how we should all want to be remembered.

Acts 9 tells the story of the church in Joppa, which is a city in Israel, Northwest of Jerusalem, on the coast of the Mediterranean.

And in the church in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha who had gotten sick and died.

So the other disciples send for Peter, and Peter comes to Joppa and raises her back to life.

I want to read the text to you, and I want you to notice how Tabitha was remembered after she died. Act 9:36-39 (CSB).

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which is translated Dorcas). She was always doing good works and acts of charity. 37 About that time she became sick and died. After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who urged him, "Don't delay in coming with us." 39 Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

How was Tabitha remembered? At the end of verse 36 it says that "she was always doing good works and acts of charity."

And then later in the passage it gets more specific about some of her good works. She ministered to the widows in the church by making them “robes and clothes.”

She was such a blessing to the widows, in fact, that they were weeping.

It has been said that when you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced; live in such a way that when you die the world will cry and you will rejoice.

That was the case with Tabitha. She was so devoted to good works that not only was she remembered for good works after she died, but people wept for her because she was such a blessing to them.

“Always doing good works and acts of charity.”

That’s exactly how God wants you to be remembered when you die.

That’s what God wants your reputation to be.

God wants you to be such a blessing to people that when you die they weep, not feeling sorry for you, but for their own loss.

SCRIPTURE

Turn with me now to **2 Peter 1:5-7**. We are studying a passage that contains eight virtues. Let’s read it together.

“5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, 6 knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, 7 godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

These are eight virtues, or Christlike character traits, that we are commanded to make every effort to cultivate.

The first is faith, which is what we looked at last week. Faith is confidence in God, that He is who He says He is, and that He will do what He says He will do.

The second virtue in the list is goodness. Today we're going to talk about to grow in goodness.

WHAT IS GOODNESS?

So what is goodness?

Goodness is not referring to being morally upright.

This is what we usually mean when we say, "He's a good boy. She's a good girl. He's a good man."

We're usually referring to the quality of being well-behaved and obedient, or morally upright.

But the Bible has words for moral uprightness – words like righteousness and holiness. Goodness refers to something different.

Goodness is defined best in the story of Tabitha. **Always doing good works and acts of charity.**

When you think about goodness, think good works, and good deeds; think acts of charity; think "do-gooder."

Goodness is the quality of being helpful;

it is the quality of always being ready and willing to lend a helping hand.

Always be ready to help people in need.

That's the definition of charity; voluntarily helping people in need.

Some people never help anyone but themselves. They never lift a finger or exert any effort unless it will personally benefit them. Before they do anything to help someone they ask, "What's in it for me?" "What do I get out of it?"

But a person of goodness is the opposite; they are very helpful; always ready and willing to lend a helping hand.

Goodness is the quality of being a servant.

It is the quality of always looking to serve others, rather than being served.

Some people don't serve anyone but themselves. They are self-serving.

If they do serve someone, they expect recognition, praise, and a good reward.

They announce it to the world. "Look everyone! I just served somebody. I just helped somebody. I just did a good deed!" That's not the quality of the goodness.

The quality of goodness is about living to serve, rather than be served.

That's what Jesus did.

If anyone deserved to be served and waited on hand and foot, it was Jesus.

But Jesus devoted Himself to serving others.

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

On another occasion Jesus told His disciples that the true definition of success and greatness was a life of service; a life of good deeds.

Matthew 20:26 "... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."

He also said that this is what defined a good leader – someone who always looked to serve the people under his care.

Mark 9:35 “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all.”

Goodness is about living as a servant of others.

Galatians 5:13 “Serve one another through love.”

Goodness is can also be defined as carrying other’s burdens.

Galatians 6:2 “Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

What is a burden? A burden is a problem that is too heavy for someone to carry on their own.

So goodness is when you come alongside someone and help them carry their burden.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF GOODNESS

Let’s look at some specific examples of goodness in the Bible.

John 10:32 Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father.” Jesus was talking about His miracles in which He cast out demons, healed the sick, relieved suffering, and raised the dead. So goodness can mean helping the sick.

If we go back to the story of Tabitha in Acts 9:39 it says that she was making robes and clothes for widows. So goodness can mean meeting the needs of the poor and needy.

In Acts 20, Paul was reminding the Ephesian elders that when was with them, he did not rely upon the support of the church, even though he could have, but set an example for the church by working to support himself. **Acts 20:35** “34 You yourselves know that I worked with my own hands to support myself and those who are with me. 35 In every way I’ve shown you that it is necessary to help the weak by laboring like this and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, because

he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” So goodness can mean working hard to earn a good living and then using your extra money and resources to help the needy.

Later Paul told Timothy to command the rich people in the church to do just that. **1 Timothy 6:17-18** “17 Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share.” So goodness is connected with sharing and generosity to the needy.

2 Corinthians 1:4 “He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” You’ve probably heard the saying, “We are blessed to be a blessing.” That is what Paul is saying here. God comforts us in our affliction so that we can then comfort others in their affliction. The word “affliction” means “something that causes pain or suffering” (Google). So goodness can mean comforting those who are experiencing pain or suffering.

In 1 Timothy Paul describes the traits that a widow in the church must possess in order to qualify for church support. **1 Timothy 5:9-10** “9 No widow is to be enrolled on the list for support unless she is at least sixty years old, has been the wife of one husband, 10 and is well known for good works—that is, if she has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints’ feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to every good work.” Notice that Paul gives examples of several good works.

First, goodness can mean bringing up children. The Bible actually says that being a devoted and responsible parent is a good deed. And it really is. Being a devoted parent is a blessing to the children, and to society as a whole.

Second, goodness can mean hospitality. When Christians are in a tough spot and need a temporary place to stay, hospitality is sharing your home with them.

Third, goodness can mean meeting the needs of people in your church family. Paul calls this “washing the saints’ feet.” That’s a general term that refers to helping other church members when they are in need.

And then finally, goodness can mean helping the afflicted. Once again, affliction means “something that causes pain or suffering” (Google). So helping the afflicted means helping people who are in pain and suffering.

Probably the most well-known example of good works in the Bible is the story of the Good Samaritan. One time my youngest son, Reiton, told me that this was his favorite Bible story. This is a good one. The story is told by Jesus in Luke 10:30-37. A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. “They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead” (v. 30). A couple of people – a Jewish priest, and a Levite – passed by, but they didn’t stop to help. But then a Samaritan man passed by. What’s amazing about this story is that the Jews and Samaritans hated each other and refused to have anything to do with each other. But Samaritan man, it says, had compassion. Let me read **verses 34-37** to you. “34 He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. 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. When I come back I’ll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.’” So here we see that goodness can mean using your time, money, energy, and resources to care for someone in peril and distress.

So that’s what goodness is. Always doing good works and acts of charity.

GOODNESS IS NOT OPTIONAL

An important point that I want to make is that goodness is not optional; it is commanded. God wants every Christian to be like Tabitha; to be remembered for always doing good works and acts of charity. Let me show you what I mean.

Galatians 5:22-23 says that goodness is one of the fruits of the Spirit. In other words, one of the goals of the Holy Spirit within you is to help you grow in goodness.

Galatians 6:10 “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.” Here is simple command to do good works for everyone, especially fellow believers.

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.” Christ didn’t merely save us so that we could escape hell and go to heaven. He saved us so that we would do good works.

1 Timothy 2:10 says that Christian women are to give more attention to doing good works than focusing on their outward appearance.

1 Timothy 5:9-11 says that for a widow to qualify for the church’s support, she must be well known for good works, and be devoted to good works.

1 Timothy 6:18 commands those who are rich to be rich in good works.

Titus 2:7 says that church leaders are to set the example in good works.

Titus 2:14 “He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.”

Titus 3:1 “Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.” All believers are commanded to be ready for every good work.

Titus 3:8 “This saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works. These are good and profitable for everyone.” Here we see that all believers are to devote themselves to good works.

Titus 3:14 “Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works for pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 “24 And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, 25 not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of

doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

Now let’s go back and look more closely at a few of these verses. **The Christian’s call to goodness can be summarized with four words.**

1. Rich.

1 Timothy 6:18 commands us to be rich in good works.

In other words, we are not to do one good deed a year.

Good deeds should permeate our lives.

We should always be doing good deeds.

Good deeds should be a major part of our lives.

2. Eager.

Titus 2:14 says that Christ saved us so that we would be eager to do good works.

The word “eager” means “wanting to do something very much” (Google).

This word speaks to our attitude toward good works. When we do good works, we are to have a good attitude about it.

We are to do good works as if we would rather be doing nothing else.

To do a good deed with a bad attitude is a bad deed.

3. Ready.

Titus 3:1 says we are to be ready for every good work. In other words, Christians never take a day off from doing good works. We are always ready and eager. We are ready to serve any day, anytime, anywhere, anyone, in any way. We are ready, and we are eager to do good works.

4. Devoted.

Titus 3:8 says we are to be devoted to good works.

The word “devotion” speaks to the idea of priority.

Our priority as Christians must be to do good works.

This means we should always be actively looking for ways to serve and help people in need.

So what is the Christian’s call to goodness? We should be rich, eager, ready, and devoted to good works. Obviously goodness is a big deal.

WHY IS GOODNESS IMPORTANT TO GOD?

Why is goodness such a big deal to God? Two big reasons.

1. Goodness glorifies God.

God created us to glorify Him – to display His moral nature through our lives by imitating Him.

1 Chronicles 16:34 “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever.”

We are to be characterized by goodness and good works and good deeds because that’s God is like, and He wants the world to know it.

2. Goodness enhances our evangelism.

We are called to bring people to Jesus.

Matthew 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

If our lives are characterized by good deeds, then our evangelism is much more persuasive.

People are much more likely to accept Christ if they see God in us rather than just hear about Him from us.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

But that brings up another question. What's in it for us?

We should grow in goodness simply because God commands it and because it pleases and glorifies God.

But there are some kickbacks for cultivating goodness.

1 Timothy 6:18-19 “18 Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, 19 storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.”

Do you see the benefit of goodness? Doing good works is the way that we store up eternal treasures for ourselves in heaven.

We gain entrance into heaven by faith, and not by good works.

But the size of our heavenly reward is determined by our good works on earth.

So what kind of reward do you want in heaven? What kind of heavenly treasure do you want?

HOW TO CULTIVATE GOODNESS

Now let's end by getting practical. Here are a number of principles to help you grow in goodness.

- 1. Purify yourself from anything dishonorable.**

2 Timothy 2:21 “So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”

Do you need to be pure and holy in order to do good works? Yes and no.

On the one hand, anyone can do a good deed, no matter who they are. A pimp can do a good deed by helping someone in need.

But on the other hand, to accomplish the purpose of good works, which is to glorify God and to enhance our evangelism, then you need to be holy.

When a bad person does a good deed, people are helped.

When a righteous person does a good deed, God is glorified.

2. Study the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

How does Bible study help you to do good deeds?

The Bible teaches us the definition of good. Through the Bible we learn God’s character, and we learn how to best minister to people and help them.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Many people have been hurt in the name of good intentions. That’s because good intentions are not enough to help people. It’s not enough to want to help people; it’s not enough to just do something; to really help people, you need to know how. That’s where Bible study comes in.

Bible study is what turns good intentions into good works that help people and glorify God.

3. Go to church.

Hebrews 10:24-25 “24 And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, 25 not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

This verse tells us what we need to do to grow in goodness. Christians need to watch out for one another to prove love and good works. They need to encourage and motivate each other.

How does that happen? When we gather together. Christians are to gather regularly to encourage and motivate each other to do good works.

4. Don't think too highly of yourself.

Galatians 6:2-3 (NLT) “2 Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. 3 If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.”

Pride is the greatest obstacle to good deeds. Pride is when you think too highly of yourself.

When you think too highly of yourself, you think you are too important, or too wealthy to serve others.

When you think too highly of yourself, you see many tasks as beneath you.

If you think too highly of yourself you will miss many opportunities to serve.

5. Don't do good deeds for bad reasons.

There are two bad reasons to do good deeds. Personal glory, and merit.

Matthew 6:1-4 “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. 2 So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people.

Truly I tell you, they have their reward. 3 But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

There are two reasons not to do your good works for personal glory.

First, you will lose your heavenly reward.

Second, you will miss many opportunities to do good. Most opportunities for serving others will go unnoticed and un-thanked by men. But God will notice and reward you.

Ephesians 2:8-9 "8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— 9 not from works, so that no one can boast."

We are not saved by doing good works; we are saved by the good work of Jesus Christ. And we receive the gift of salvation by trusting in what Jesus has done for us rather than what we can do for Him.

6. Don't drop your load to do good deeds.

Galatians 6:2 "Carry one another's burdens." **Galatians 6:5** "For each person will have to carry his own load."

There is a difference between a burden and a load.

A burden is problem that a person cannot carry by himself.

God calls us to help people with overwhelming, overbearing burdens.

But in the meantime, we are also called to carry our own load.

Your load consists of your responsibilities. My load includes providing for my family, being a good husband and a good father, taking care of my parents, being a good pastor and a good employee, taking care of my health, and abiding in Christ. Those are examples of my load; my responsibilities.

I must not drop my load in order to carry someone else's burden.

There is a difference between good works and first things.

Good works are good things.

First things are priorities; they are the best things.

It is possible to be so devoted to good works that you neglect first things – your health; your marriage; your kids; your finances; your job; etc.

If you continue to neglect your load in order to carry someone else's burden, eventually your load will become a burden that crushes you.

7. Be careful about carrying another person's load.

Remember, we are called to carry one another's burdens, but we are each called to carry our own load.

Be careful that your "good works" don't consist of carrying another person's load.

In other words, be careful that you are not taking care of someone else's responsibilities.

That is not goodness; that is enablement.

You are called to love your neighbor; you are not called to be your neighbor.

In other words, be very careful about doing for people what they should be doing for themselves.

Why? Two reasons.

First, if you are carrying someone's load, then you will not be able to help people with real burdens.

Second, if you are carrying someone's load, you are enabling them to be lazy, irresponsible, and disobedient.

Remember, God wants us each to carry our own load.

God uses the weight of our load to build our muscles and grow us.

But if you are carrying someone else's load, then that person is being disobedient to God, and they are missing out on the blessings of carrying their own load.

8. Play favorites.

When it comes to doing good deeds with your time, money, and energy, it is okay to play favorites.

You can't do everything. You can't say yes to every need, to every opportunity, to every person asking for a helping hand. You don't have enough resources.

So you have to choose. How do you choose? The Bible tells us.

First, give special attention to needs in your church family. **Galatians 6:10**

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith."

Just as I would focus on meeting the needs of my kids before your kids, we are called to focus on the needs of our church family before we focus on the needs of our human family in general.

Second, give special attention to urgent needs. **Titus 3:14** "Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works for pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful."

You will have to use your judgment, but don't waste your resources on lesser causes.

Everywhere you turn these days, people are asking for money.

Different groups of kids are always on the street asking for money for different things.

Sometimes they offer to wash your car, and sometimes they just stand there with their hand out.

And the need is never urgent. It's usually to fund some trip they want to take.

When you check out at a store the clerk will ask you, "Would you like to donate an extra dollar to this cause, or that cause?"

When you go to work your coworkers are asking you to buy candy or raffle tickets for their kid's school.

People are always asking for money. And that's okay.

But you are not obligated to give to every cause. You can't.

Give special attention to needs in your church family; and give special attention to urgent, pressing needs.

Let me put it this way. Saying "No" does not make you a bad person, and saying "Yes" doesn't make you a good person.

CONCLUSION

So Peter commands us to make every effort to cultivate the virtue of goodness – always doing good works and acts of charity.

Let's go back to Tabitha for a moment. When she died, she was remembered for her goodness.

What about you? If you died today, how would people remember you? Would it be for your goodness? Would you be remembered as someone who was always doing good works and acts of charity? May it be so.