

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

(Luke 10:25-37)

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[LaGrange First U.M.C.; 8-13-17]

--I--

1. Read Text (NRSV): Luke 10:25-37 and Pray.

2. [STORY OF A LITTLE BOY'S "ACCIDENT"]

Nine-year old Johnnie was sitting at his desk in his 3rd-Grade classroom one morning when all of the sudden he notices that his legs and pants are all wet -- he's had an "accident." Now, it's been years since this happened last, and that makes his embarrassment even worse. He knows that if the others boys find out, they'll tease him, & if the girls find out... well, he'll become the laughing-stock of the school!

So, in desperation he puts his head down and begins to pray, "*Dear God, this is an emergency! I need help now, or I'm dead meat!*" As he ends his prayer, he eyes his teacher heading straight for him, sure that's he's been discovered. But just before the teacher reaches him, a classmate named Susie who's carrying a water-filled fish bowl trips and dumps the water into Johnnie's lap. Well, he pretends to be angry, but all the while is saying to himself, "*Thank you, Lord! Thank you!*" The teacher rushes him to another room to change clothes, and for the rest of the day instead of being the object of ridicule, Johnnie is an object of sympathy, with people *now* teasing Susie for being such a clutz!

Finally, at the end of the day, as they're waiting for the bus, Johnnie walks over to Susie and asks, "*What happened this morning? Why did you trip?*" And Susie leans over and whispers back, "*I wet my pants once too.*"

3. Ok, so some of you won't think that that's the most appropriate story to tell in church, but it *is* real life, and it does highlight the point that if we *look* hard enough, there are *always* opportunities to do good for others, *if* we'll only take the risk of doing them!

A--Today we're continuing our series called "**Steps to the Great Life**", in which we're exploring three principles outlined by the founder of Methodism John Wesley to help us have a "great life" with God.

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

(And if you didn't get a bookmark of these from last week, please pick one up in the Narthex)

C--The *second* dimension is today's focus: "**DOING GOOD**" to all people, in all times and places and circumstances. I want us to talk about what this means, and then give a few suggestions for its practice today. ¹

--II--

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

A--Well, 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.

1--Here we have a religious leader again trying to corner Jesus into giving a particular definition of "neighbor": ...one who is righteous and 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 Priest nor the 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--And 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* (as illustrated by the actions of the Priest and the Levite), but by what is needed by *OTHERS* (as illustrated by the Samaritan's actions).

B--So in the strictest sense, then, "***Doing Good***" is exactly *opposite* the attitude we were warned against last week, in that it is "***Anything that loves our neighbor enough to put them and their needs first, ahead of even our own desires and/or 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." ²

1--So this may mean, for example, that at Sunday morning worship or Wednesday night dinner, *before* we start up a conversation with our *friends*, we *first* seek out and welcome *guests*.

2--It may mean that we may ask that person of a different race or nationality 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 that we not only invite our next-door neighbor or loved one to worship with us, but that we may even take them to a service that's *different* from the one *we're* comfortable in IF we think it'll help them experience God more easily.

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

5. Now, one thing to notice here is that "Doing Good" starts with the very difficult challenge of last week and takes it to the *next* level!

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 *doing* of certain positive things (e.g., *active* behavior).

1--For example... If we've just witnessed a car wreck right 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* seek to get out of our comfort zones and ACT in positive ways which may *feel* uncomfortable!

B--And yet, since the scriptures tell us that God always *equips* those whom He *calls*,³ then if we're called to step outside that comfort zone to "do good" for someone else, we can be assured that He'll also give us the ability to see it through.⁴

6. Now I'll be the first to admit that, as with the first step, "doing good" may be easy to *understand*, but a lot harder to put into *practice*. So to help out, let me offer *two suggestions for better practicing this step* 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.*"

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

2--And that's because the early Christians and early Methodists both understood that while we all have good *intentions* to "do good," quite often we need prompting from others around us in order to turn good *intentions* into good *deeds*.⁵

B--In fact, Hebrews 10:24 even says, "*let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds...*", meaning that one of the functions of Christian fellowship (e.g., small groups, Sunday School classes, etc.) is to lovingly encourage and challenge each other specifically to "do good."

C--So, I want to ask: WHO is holding *you* accountable for the doing of good deeds in the name of Christ? Your spouse? Your Sunday School class or Bible Study group? A prayer or covenant group that you're in? WHO?

1--You see, good deeds don't always "just happen." No, they often need gentle motivation from others.

2--And that's precisely why each 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.*" (It's why we're offering our Fall Bible study opportunities even now)

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--We don't need to wait for opportunities to come to us -- we should instead go looking for them... to create the positive change we're longing to see!⁶

B--In your bulletin today there's an insert that lists some of the ways you can intentionally "do good" in our world today through a few "ministries that matter" from our church to our community.

1--Imagine the impact it would make if all the members of LaGrange First UMC got involved in "doing good" for others throughout this community through these ways, doing them 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 and live out his call to "*love one another as I have loved you.*" ⁷

2--You see, when we do any of these, not only will our acts bring a just a bit of transformation to the lives of others, but it will also build bridges of hope and trust for them to receive a touch of love from God -- and we will literally be the hands and feet of Jesus to them!

--V--

9. You see, it's true that "doing good" by living for others *first* is 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 so, (#1) by *having others hold us accountable for our doing of "good deeds,"* and (#2) by our own *active search for ways 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 active seek out, find, and 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. So help us join with others in finding ways to make a difference in our world that we might be like salt and light, like a city set on a hill for you, shining for all to see your love and compassion. Let us 'do good' to others that others might be drawn to you and your grace and presence. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*"]

11. SUGGESTED TRADITIONAL CLOSING HYMN: UMH#399, *Take My Life and Let It Be*

ENDNOTES:

¹ 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].

² Reuben Job, Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), p. 43.

³ Read 1 Thessalonians 5:24.

⁴ 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 selfcentered. 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 its 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 Acts of Kindness" website at www.oneactofkindness.org/religious_institutions.asp). 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 (354430), 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 (17631825), cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry #5058].

⁵ In today's "Walk to Emmaus" 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.

⁶ "Doing Good" Resources:

* Learn the concept of "servant evangelism" in the landmark book Conspiracy of Kindness by Steve Sjogren (available from www.cokesbury.com, or from www.servantevangelism.com)

* Read over 100 examples of "Planned Acts of Christian Kindness" at www.servantevangelism.com/matrix/matrix.htm and even more "Personal Acts of Christian Kindness" at www.acts18.org/products.htm

* 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

⁷ Read John 13:34.