

Top Ten Good Things To Do • Ephesians 2:8-10

One of the most important teachings in the Bible appears in Ephesians 2:8-9. It says, “. . . *it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*” This is the Bible’s teaching that we cannot rescue ourselves from sin and eternal death by being good. Salvation from sin and becoming a Christian is possible only because of God’s generosity. It is no because of anything good that we do. No matter how hard we try there is no way we could ever earn a relationship with God that would last for eternity. This is a basic and essential truth of Christianity.

We must not stop reading, however, until we see what the bible says next in Ephesians 2:10: “*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” In other words, doing good works will never make anyone a Christian but real Christians will always do good works. In fact, one of the proofs that somebody really is a follower of Jesus Christ is the good that person does. So, real Christians do good! And we are going to look at the Top Ten good things we can do.

Number one on that list is to tell God, “I love you!” Actually, Jesus said this is number on his Top Ten List of Things To Do. It was in response to a question from a lawyer who may have been working on a Top Ten list of his own. The lawyer asked him, “*Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?*” And Jesus replied in Matthew 22:37-38, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.*”

God loves us and God wants us to love him. It is most about the actual loving with heart, soul and mind. But, it is also about telling. There is

something powerful and intimate about saying, “I love you!” Just as we like to hear those three wonderful words, God likes to hear us say them to him.

You probably know the story about the husband who never told his wife that he loved her. One day she confronted him. He explained that he had said “I love you” on their wedding day 38 years before and he would let her know if anything changed.

That is not good enough in a personal relationship. Lovers say the words often.

Let me tell you some things I do. When I take communion and drink the cup in memory of Jesus I silently pray and say, “I love you.” When I pray in the morning I tell God, “I love you.” When I am driving alone in the car I tell God in short simple prayer, “I love you!” Sometimes I say it

out loud. (If you are ever driving in the next lane and read my lips, I am not talking to you!)

Telling God “I love you” is number one on the Top Ten List of Good Things To Do. Tell him of-

ten. Tell him now! Right where you are, pray your silent and sincere words telling God, “I love you, Lord!”

Jesus’ next words were about loving others. Matthew 22:37-39 tells us that:

Jesus replied: “*‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*”

Throughout the Bible God shows a compassionate bias toward helping the poor. Jesus repeatedly benefited the poor. The New Testament church constantly gave money and helped the poor. It is what Christians do.

How could we do that? Give money to charities that benefit the poor. Share job information

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with the unemployed. Mentor refugees who don't know how our system works. Oppose greed at the expense of those with little money and power. Be an advocate for poor people at your business. Support fair wages for workers, including a generous minimum wage. Show compassion toward immigrants, including those who are undocumented. When is the last time we helped a poor person? Without a doubt, helping the poor is one of the Top Ten good things God wants us to do.

Number three is to be baptized. Here is how it works. Baptism in the Bible is the Christian's way of declaring faith and solidarity with Jesus Christ. It is Jesus' idea! Not only was Jesus himself baptized in the Jordan River but he was very clear about the importance of baptism for Christians when he spoke his words of commission in Matthew 28:19-20:

“ . . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

While some Christian traditions practice baby baptisms, consider getting baptized as your own choice rather than your parents' choice.

Pat Summerall, the famous sports announcer, battled alcoholism and finally came to personal faith in Jesus Christ in his late 60s. Here is what he said about his baptism as a believer: “I went down in the water, and when I came up it was like a 40-pound weight had been lifted from me. I have a happier life, a healthy life, and a more positive feeling about life than ever before.”

Many people have told me that their baptism as a believer was one of the single best day of their entire lives. It was a significant and powerful spiritual turning point for them. I have never had anybody tell me that they later regretted being publicly baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ. It delights the heart of God and it is clearly one of the Top Ten good things a Christian can do.

Number four is to give away something valuable. This may be hard for some of us to understand, but it is actually an astonishing spiritual and personal experience. You see, we tend to be more greedy than sacrificial in our giving. So,

once in a while, give away something that is really valuable to you. Not for tax deductibility. Not for thanks. Just to give it away. It will change you forever.

There are many interesting examples of this. King David once paid 50 shekels of silver as an offering to God. When he was discouraged from giving David said, “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God offerings that cost me nothing.”

When I was a young pastor a woman put her diamond engagement ring in the offering. It was a major decision for her but impressed me for a lifetime.

Osceola McCarty lived in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Her entire life she had one job: laundry. For decades she washed laundry by hand for fifty cents per load. She saved a little of her income every week. When she retired at age 87 she asked the banker how much she had. The banker told her she had \$250,000. She gave \$150,000 of her savings to fund scholarships for African-American students at the University of Southern Mississippi.

My father-in-law used to get two weeks of paid vacation every year. He used one of those weeks to drive a bus to transport children to summer Vacation Bible School. Half of his vacation every year he gave away to serve others.

Number four is not a suggestion to give away a lot. It is a call to give away something you consider valuable. It will change your life.

Number five is to forgive someone who didn't ask. In the Lord's Prayer we ask our Father in heaven to forgive our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Here is how it works. Choose someone who has hurt you, offended you, cheated you, upset you, disappointed you or simply ripped you off. Whether they ask or not, forgive that person. Let it go. Give it to God. There may be no need to tell the person you have forgiven. The real forgiveness takes place in the heart and it will immediately show up in attitudes and actions toward the forgiven person. Forgiveness is a very good thing to do.

Number six is to offer to pray for someone else—at work; at school; next door; even a stranger. Tell someone you will pray for her and

ask, “What would you like me to pray about?” Ask someone you know if he would like your prayers. Then do it. Pray!

Charleen and I went to eat at a popular Eden Prairie restaurant with some out-of-state guests. We were seated, ordered beverages and the meal and were talking together. One of the men spoke to our server and asked her when the food would arrive. She said, “In just a few minutes.” He said, “Fine because we want to have a prayer shortly before we eat and I was wondering if there is anything you would like us to pray about for you.”

I was a little taken back. I feared she would be offended. To the contrary, her whole demeanor changed and she said, “Would you pray for my mom?” She then explained her mother’s medical problem and was delighted that a customer cared enough to pray for her mom.

Want something really good to do? Offer to pray for someone else.

Number seven is to tell somebody about Jesus. This is one of the very, very best things any Christian can ever do. But, honestly, for many of us it is kind of scary. So, think it through. Pray for God’s words to say. Look for the right time and opportunity. Keep it simple. Focus on someone with whom you already have established a relationship. Tell about the difference Jesus has made in your life.

You don’t have to have all the answers. Nobody has all the answers. You may tie it to a book you read, a movie you saw or an invitation to church. Think how great it will be that you have been the messenger of God in communicating the good news of Jesus. Someone or many may spend forever in heaven with God because you told them about Jesus. And, by the way, who would be a good person for you to tell?

Number eight is to volunteer. Americans are among the very best volunteers in the world. And the number one place in America where people volunteer is in the context of the church because churches are essentially volunteer organizations with a vast array of opportunities—opportunities

to befriend people, to pray for people, opportunities to be ushers, teachers, counselors, musicians and a whole lot more.

At Wooddale Church we have a pastor who specializes in volunteer ministries. She is not an advocate for positions to be filled but for those who want to volunteer. She matches up the person with skills, passions, gifts and interests with tasks and people who could use those interests and abilities. Sort of a volunteer placement service!

But, volunteering does not need to be in the context of the church. Out in the community there are all kinds of opportunities for volunteering. So, volunteer to tutor immigrants, work in an inner city ministry, answer phones for some charity.

If you have a professional skill offer pro bono service for somebody who could not afford it. If you are among those rich folk who would rather give money and let someone

else volunteer, think again. Money is good but never enough. Do good personally!

Psychiatrist Carl Menninger was asked what someone should do who feels on the verge of a breakdown. Menninger answered, “Lock your house, go across the railroad tracks, find someone in need and do something for him.” You may discover that the person that benefits the most when you volunteer is you.

Related to that is number nine: teach a child. Once again, you can do this in the community, but I particularly encourage you to teach a child in the context of the church. Most people come to personal faith in Jesus Christ as children. Childhood shapes a lot of life and teachers shape childhood. Whether it’s a baby in the nursery, a third-grader in a classroom or a junior higher at camp, you can make a lifelong difference.

Let me tell you what has happened in America. For decades, women were the ones who did much of the teaching in the community and the church. But as women have entered the workforce and become extremely busy, fewer

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volunteer. Busy parents want someone else to teach their children because they are tired. So we are at a time when teachers of children are more needed, have greater influence and are in shorter supply.

It is very rewarding, but it is no always easy. Without a doubt, teaching a child in Sunday School or in the community is one of the absolute Top Ten good things for a Christian to do.

Number ten is very different. It is get a will. Admittedly, this may not be on everyone's list. If you are young, have more debts than assets and are single without children there may not be much point. However, if you are an adult and own a house, car, retirement plan, other assets or have children you should have a will. If you don't you are not being the best steward of what God has entrusted to you.

In your will, provide for your family but also provide for the advance of the cause of Jesus Christ. Include the church or other Christian organizations that you trust and know will use your money well to make more disciples for Jesus.

Don't procrastinate on number ten. See an accountant, financial planner and lawyer to find out what you should do. For example, if you have

a 401k retirement plan you may be able to do greater good by willing it to a church or charitable organization than having family members pay all the taxes that will come due. Many Christians are surprised how well they can provide for their families and bless others for many years to come.

That's ten and time is up. This is only intended to prime the pump. Do all ten and pray for ten more ways you can do good things for God. Remember the words of Ephesians 2:10: “. . . we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

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