

## Growing in Christlikeness (6): Good Works

### Matthew 5:14-16

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; <sup>15</sup> nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see **your good works**, and **glorify your Father who is in heaven**.

### Galatians 6:9-10

<sup>9</sup> Let’s not become discouraged in doing good, for in due time we will reap, if we do not become weary. <sup>10</sup> So then, while we have opportunity, **let’s do good to all people**, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

### Introduction

Growing up in Korea, I went through the public school system. In middle school, we had a weekly “moral lesson” class—not religious, but rooted in Confucian teachings. I still remember some of those lessons: honoring your parents, respecting teachers, obeying authorities, and more. One of the sayings that stuck with me was, “Do one good thing every day.” At that time, I didn’t really question it—I simply followed the instruction, thinking, “If it weren’t good, they wouldn’t teach it.”

Now, more than fifty years later, after encountering biblical teachings like today’s passages, I’ve started to reflect more deeply: Why are good works important? What do they look like in the life of a believer? And how should we live them out as followers of Christ?

This morning, I am finishing my sermon series “Grow in Christlikeness.” I want to focus on another clear sign of growth in Christ: good works. When you truly mature in Christ, your life naturally bears the fruit of good works.

### Content

#### Definition of Good Works:

Before I dig deeper, let me be clear about what I mean by “good works.”

In simple terms, good works can be defined as “*kind acts that help others*.” That’s a decent definition, but I prefer the one Scripture gives us. Titus 3:8 describes good works as “things that are excellent and profitable for everyone.” In other words, true good works are not only pleasing to God in Heaven, but also beneficial to people.

#### Why Good Works?

Why do we need good works? After studying Scripture and praying for God's wisdom, I discovered three key reasons.

First, **good works are for our own good.** Good works help us grow in our walk with God. We all know that doing something kind for others often makes us feel good inside. But that feeling isn't the real reason we pursue good works. Rather, good works serve a deeper purpose: *they help guard our hearts against sin.* When we practice doing good, it redirects our focus away from ourselves to others. It also keeps our selfish nature from sliding further into corruption. In other words, good works are a spiritual safeguard that strengthens our walk with God.

This is how it works: when we do something good for others, our attention shifts away from ourselves and toward their needs. They keep us from living a self-centered life—unless we're doing them for self-promotion (e.g., In Jesus' time, some religious leaders went to the marketplace/street corners and did blow a trumpet before they helped the poor. They did so to be praised by people—Matthew 6:2). Good works also strengthen us by providing positive reinforcement in our moral lives. Simply “not doing harm” is passive; actively doing the good is far more powerful and life-giving.

Imagine trying to keep a boat in one place out in the middle of the ocean. Without an anchor, the waves will soon carry it away. The same is true of our moral and spiritual lives. Our selfish nature, left unchecked, will pull us farther from God. But good works, like an anchor, hold us steady and keep us close to Him. Along with personal holiness, they serve as one of the strongest defenses against moral decay in our lives and in society. Truly, good works are good for us—they keep us near to God.

Next, **good works are good for those around us.** This truth is simple: when we do good, others are blessed. No one would call something “good” if it caused harm. By their very nature, good works bring help, encouragement, and benefit to the people who receive them.

Third, and most importantly, **good works are for the Lord.** In simple terms, they bring glory to God. Whenever we, His children, do what is good, it delights our Heavenly Father and brings glory to His name. Scripture reminds us that God created us in Christ Jesus for good works and for the blessing of the world (Ephesians 2:10). It's part of our spiritual DNA along with love and creativity. God has called us to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. Just as the inventor of the light bulb expects it to shine when connected to power, so God expects His people to shine with good works in a dark world.

In fact, Jesus declared, “*You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:14). Let that sink in—we are the light that this world cannot live without. Imagine the earth without the sun: it would remain in total darkness. Even long stretches of cloudy weather can weigh us down; e.g., I recall a November in Michigan one year when 29 out of 30 days were overcast, and many people grew discouraged and depressed. In the same way, without God's people living

out good works, the world becomes a gloomy and hopeless place. But when we shine with our good works, we reflect God's glory and bring His light to those who need it most.

Let's remember: **our good works bring glory to God**. That is why Jesus commands us to let our light shine—so that others may see our good deeds and give praise to our Heavenly Father (Matthew 5:16). It's much like when children achieve something wonderful—it reflects honor on their parents. I still recall my own mother's pride when her two sons were admitted to a prestigious college in Korea; her joy overflowed because our success brought her honor. As long as we remember that **good works are not about us**, we will do well. They are all about God and His glory.

But here's an important reminder: while good works are good and necessary for the world and for us, they are never the condition of our salvation. We are not saved by our own good works, no matter how many kind or moral things we may do. Scripture is clear: salvation is a gift of God's grace, not something earned by human merit (Ephesians 2:8–9). Only through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, received by faith, are we made right with God. Good works flow out of that salvation—they are the fruit, not the root, of our standing with God.

Two important points stand out in Matthew 5:16: **your** light must **shine** before others so that they see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

First, let's talk about "Your" light here. Every child of God is called to shine "their" own light. Notice that Jesus says, "let **your** light shine"—**your** light, not someone else's. If you are a child of God, you have a light to shine. Some of us may have bigger lights, others smaller, but each of us has our own light. Your mission, your calling, is to let that light shine to those around you.

Second, the Greek word *λάμπω* (*Lampsato*) means "to shine," and it is the root of our English word *lamp*. Imagine a lamp in Jesus' time—the area it illuminated was not vast, only a few feet around it. The lamp on its stand was enough to light a small room. In the same way, each of us is called to shine where we are—not globally like the Sun, but locally, like a lamp in the corner of a room. Let your light shine wherever you live, stand, and walk: at home, at school, at work, at church, and in your community.

## Types of Good Works

What qualifies as a good work? There are many possibilities, but here is a simple guideline: *whatever you do or say that pleases the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:31) and benefits others is a good work*. In other words, anything that brings honor and pleasure to our Heavenly Father and serves His purposes qualifies.

Most of us think that charity works are good works and stop there, but the Bible gives us many broader examples: love and pray for your enemies, and do good to them

(Matthew 5:44-45; Luke 6:35). Forgive those who have wronged you. Work diligently with your own hands—not only for an honest living but also so you can share with those in need (Ephesians 4:28). Honor your parents (Ephesians 6:2). Care for orphans and widows. Even offering words of encouragement counts as a good work.

### God's Promise

Remember this: whatever good you do, God promises to reward you. He will honor your deeds with glory, respect, and peace (Romans 2:10). Try doing what is good **in secret**, especially prayer, fasting, and helping the needy: then God will surely reward you openly (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18).

### Conclusion

I want to close with a quote from John Wesley on good works:

*“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”*

Wesley truly lived by these words. Throughout his life, he did all the good he could, every day, until his final moments. Even at his funeral, following his instructions, six homeless men were hired to carry his casket, each paid a pound (in 1800, a pound was ‘six days wages for skilled tradesman.’ [https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result---in today's worth \\$720 in the US: \\$15/hour times 8 hours=\\$120/day times 6 days=\\$720](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result---in%20today%27s%20worth%20$720%20in%20the%20US%3A%20$15%2Fhour%20times%208%20hours%3D$120%2Fday%20times%206%20days%3D$720)).

His life was a testament to a life devoted to good works, pleasing to the Lord.

May God guide us to live in the same way, shining His light through our actions.

So how will you shine your light this week?

Maybe it's visiting someone who's lonely, writing an encouraging note, or forgiving someone you've held a grudge against. Ask God to show you one good work you can do this week to shine His light.

Amen.