

Why So Many Modern Christians Neglect This Biblical Command

Stories of rancor, abuse, accusations and threats fill the airwaves and social media every day. It seems like everywhere we turn there is more bad news. But we are a Good News people. Instead of focusing on the bad, Scripture urges us to tell and live a different narrative. In Hebrews 10:24 we are told to “consider how to spur one another to love and to good works.”

When is the last time you actually did that?

Every day we consider a lot of things: what to eat, who to hang out with, what route to drive, what shows to watch and more. Rarely do we consider what Hebrews 10:24 urges. But we can start right now!

As we consider, think about how to personalize a response that is unique to you. After all, we are one body with different parts, having different gifts (Rom. 12:4-8) so there is no one size fits all response!

Notice that Hebrews 10:24 addresses everyone who truly confesses Jesus as their Savior and Lord. No one is exempt.

The passage is other focused, “spur one another on”, encourage, cheer, even urge one another—to love and good works, or deeds. Simple words to say, but when lived out, life-changing and Good News for everyone you touch.

The best way to “spur” others on is to live it out as an example. Show them how it is done, and let them see the amazing results.

The “love” referred to in Hebrews is *agape*, selfless love—sacrificial and unconditional. It is the love God has for each of us. He loves unconditionally, and He gave His Son to

sacrifice for us and take away our sins. A description of *agape* love is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a:

Love suffers long and is kind; love envies not; love flaunts not itself and is not puffed up, does not behave itself improperly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love never fails.

It's a tall order, but we are called to grow in *agape* love; and with Christ living in us, the Holy Spirit working through us, and surrounded by others of like mind, it is possible.

Hebrews 10:24 says we must spur one another on to good works, or deeds, as well. When we operate in *agape* love, good deeds are the supernatural result. But it is not natural for us. So Isaiah 1:17a tells us to "learn to do good."

In our busy, responsibility-filled lives, it is easy to ignore when the Holy Spirit nudges us to do something. Instead of obeying, we may say a quick prayer, give a small donation, send a "caring" emoji or make an internal promise to do something later.

It is sin nature to focus only on our needs, wants and desires with little regard for others. We must put on a God's new nature, which teaches us to live differently. Ephesians 4:22-24 says we have been taught, "that you put off the former way of life ... and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new nature, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.

Since it is so unnatural for us, we are told to spur one another on in this type of love and good deeds! Practice it; ask others to hold you accountable for that type of love;

don't participate in things that are divisive or negative; invite friends and family to join you in practical ways; expect good out of each other; honor others who are doing good and encourage others to practice it too. Learn together!

When I was in graduate school, some friends invited me to join them in an outreach to a drug-infested, low-income community. I had zero desire and lots of good excuses, but I went to an informational dinner so I could say I considered it. That night, God touched my heart, and I fell in love with the children I met there. For the next seven years, long after I graduated, I spent hours every week teaching kids about Jesus, helping them with homework and mentoring them in life. Many accepted Christ, and the day the first young man went to college was a time of celebration for us all! Those experiences changed my life, too, and pointed me to missions and ministry. But I never would have gotten involved and served out of God's *agape* love without encouragement from my friends.

I have found that simple obedience with humility, even when I don't feel love, allows the Holy Spirit to change my heart of stone into a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). God gives us His *agape* love when we willingly obey Him in "learning to do good." A natural outcome of having selfless love will be good deeds.

Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Love or good deeds?

When your motivation and instinct are love—for family members, friends, co-workers, strangers and even those you don't particularly enjoy—you will want to be truly helpful. Not for your sake, but for theirs. Love will flow out of you in ways that are personal, practical and tangible—good deeds. Of course, sometimes the Lord nudges us to do a good deed, and we do it simply out of obedience; if it is done selflessly, He uses it to expand our heart of love for others. He did it in my life when I stepped out of my comfort zone to mentor a

group of kids that needed to experience His love tangibly.

Good deeds come in all shapes and sizes. So, let me share stories of a few more.

- Vickie was flying home to Houston shortly after Hurricane Harvey. On the plane, she met a young mom and her son who were headed to M.D. Anderson for cancer treatment. All the hotels were full of first responders and people whose homes were flooded, so they had no place to stay. Vickie opened her home to them while they were in town for treatments and developed a deep friendship with the family. She was able to share the love of Jesus with them through the slow decline of their oldest son and his transfer to heaven (he accepted Jesus in the midst of his illness). She is still friends with them and encourages them in their faith.
- After the death of Freddie Gray while in the custody of the Baltimore police, rioting and violence broke out in the city. In the midst of the rioting, Somebody Cares Baltimore Director Matt Stevens and over 100 pastors of all ages, ethnicities and denominations marched the streets with linked arms, in contrast to the violence. Church, ministry and city leaders put themselves in harm's way to reach out and bring peace. And church volunteers came early the next morning to clean up from the evening's activities and just show love to people. They handed out cold bottles of water to police officers there to prevent further rioting and to frustrated community members gathering to mourn. Their loving presence helped calm a tense situation that could have become much worse.
- Yemi, a pastor in a rural Muslim village in Africa, experienced a lot of persecution from the local Imam. When given the chance to choose children to receive the life-changing gift of a goat through Call of Hope, he included the daughter of the Imam. It stunned this man

to see Christian love extended to his family in spite of the way Yemi had been treated. This good deed opened the door for conversation and changed the attitude of the village toward Yemi; and ultimately toward the message of the gospel.

- Years ago, Doug Stringer was a frequent guest on a call-in radio show in Houston. One of the regular callers was very anti-Christian and often called in to rail against Doug and other guests. But when Doug heard this man had AIDS, could not pay his electric bill and was about to lose his power, he and the ministry's staff and volunteers pooled their money to anonymously pay the bill. Not long after that, he called the show again to harass Doug. During the conversation, Doug felt led to graciously share how God loved this young man so much that people he hated had paid his electric bill. He was flabbergasted. A short time later, before he entered the gates of eternity, this young man gave his life to the Lord.

Not every good deed leads immediately to a radical change of heart, but God will use each one to work in us and others for His purposes, in His time. In a world where selfishness and division are the norm, we will easily stand out. When we encounter others with an attitude of love and a sincere desire to do them good—we become Good News people to them, and often have the opportunity to share the Good News of Jesus, too! {eoa}

Listen as Doug Stringer shows how to be the Good News to all people. How does your attitude and agenda line up with God's heart?

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