

# *Good Works*

## What's Your Reputation?

by Carolyn Mahaney

What one word best describes your perception of the following women?

Lucille Ball  
Mother Teresa  
Rosa Parks  
Madonna  
Michelle Kwan  
Gloria Steinem

Now, whether your depiction was favorable or unfavorable, the common feature of all of these women is that they have a reputation. And though we may never have given it much thought, we do too.

So what are *we* known for? How would our family and friends describe us?

Scripture has already defined what a godly woman's reputation is to be. As Nicole pointed out yesterday from 1 Timothy 2:9-10, we are to be known for our good works. And what is so helpful, the first epistle to Timothy goes on to provide an actual list of good works to which we are to be devoted. We find this list in 1 Timothy 5:9-10:

*Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.*

This verse explains which widows are eligible to receive help and care from the church if they have no other means of support. Now if you are not a widow who is sixty years of age or older, you may be wondering how this verse applies to you. Consider for a moment: If a sixty-something widow is to have a reputation for the good works found in this passage, then she must have been giving herself to them when she was young. Wouldn't you agree?!

So regardless of our age or our marital status, let's see to it that we are working on our good works! Let's make for ourselves a reputation for...

- \* Bringing up children
- \* Showing hospitality
- \* Washing the feet of the saints
- \* Caring for the afflicted
- \* Devoting ourselves to every good work

We will spend the next few days considering how we can excel in these good works.

## Bringing Up Children

by Janelle Bradshaw

*“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.” 1 Timothy 5:9-10*

As we continue our series on good works, you may be wondering why the youngest daughter with only one baby is covering the point about “bringing up children”. I was actually wondering the same thing myself, and so I checked in with Mom for some clarity. I received a most helpful explanation. This “bringing up children” thing is not just for those with biological children. This command found in 1 Timothy applies to ALL women. The Greek word used in this phrase implies cherishing, nurturing, and the giving of personal attention. We do not have to give birth to our own child to fulfill this good work. In fact, several of the commentaries I studied on this passage referenced women taking in orphans. (It was common in that culture for unwanted children to be sold into slavery or abandoned altogether.) This clearly illustrates that this command is applicable beyond caring for one's own children.

Fast forward to right now. How can we put this good work into practice in our varying seasons of life?

For moms, we have instant application. You are to cherish and nurture those kiddos under your very own roof. But there may be other children God would have you give personal attention to: an un-churched neighborhood kid, or the child of a single parent in your church, or nieces

and nephews. Some of you may even be called to take in foster children or adopt an orphan.

If you are a teen or single woman, consider babysitting. For most of my teen and college years I babysat my little brother and four cousins once a week so that my parents and uncle and aunt could get some time alone. These kids are all grown up now and babysitting others, but we share many fond memories of our times together. Beyond babysitting, think about serving in your church's children's ministry or even sponsoring a child through a trustworthy mission organization. By volunteering at a local crisis pregnancy center you can help rescue the unwanted children in our culture today.

Finally, for those of you with grown children, may I throw something out to you? How about applying this verse by mentoring some of us young girls who have no idea what we are doing? I would be lost in this motherhood job right now if it wasn't for my mom and her practical wisdom and care. Whether advising me on scheduling or just holding Caly so that I can nap, she's still practicing this good work of nurturing children. (Thanks, Mom!)

Do you see the broad application contained in this verse? Nurturing the next generation is an exceedingly important good work that ALL women are called to fulfill. Maybe that's why it's first on the list.

## Showing Hospitality

by Kristin Chesemore

“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.” 1 Timothy 5:9-10

A picture is sometimes worth a thousand words, and so is a real-life illustration. To consider our second good work of hospitality, I want to share the following story from Edith Schaeffer's life, found in her book, *The Hidden Art of Homemaking*.

"There was a railroad running through the town, Grove City, where Fran [Edith's husband, Francis Schaeffer] was pastor after he graduated from Seminary. Often hobos or tramps—rather derelict-looking older men, unshaven and ragged of clothing, who traveled by

riding on the bottom of freight cars, or hidden inside an empty one—came to our back door asking, “Cup of coffee, ma’am, and maybe some bread?”

“Wait a minute,” I’d reply, “just sit down there, I’ll fix you something.” It was too dangerous to invite such a stranger in, alone with small children; but it would have been wrong to send him away.

I would get out a tray, put the kettle on, and look in the fridge for some left-over soup. Into a small pan would go the soup, with the gas on under it. I would cut bread, enough for two big sandwiches (not too thin, he’ll be hungry) and wonder what sort of a home he had had when he was a little boy—and wonder who he is, or whether maybe he is an angel in disguise!... A diagonal cut through the first sandwich showed red tomato and green lettuce attractively displayed in the slash. The walnuts crunched as the knife went diagonally through the second sandwich. Alternating these four triangles on a lovely dinner plate came next, with pickle trim on one, and parsley on the other. Now for the steaming hot soup left over from our lunch. I would put a good bowl of this on the tray, and the children would help me fix a tiny bouquet of flowers nested in an ivy leaf.

“What’ll he *think* of all that, Mummy?” Priscilla would ask with big, wondering eyes.

“Well, perhaps he’ll remember something in his past—perhaps he had a very nice home once, where he had meals prepared for him. Anyway, he’ll stop and *think*, and we’ll give him this little Gospel of John to read while he is eating. He can take it away with him and, who knows, perhaps he’ll do a *lot* of thinking, and some day, *believe*. Anyway, he may realize we care something about him as a person, and that’s important.”

Priscilla would hold the screen door open as I took it out, and watch his surprised face as he saw the tray.

“For *me*? Is this for me?”

“Yes, and the coffee will be ready in a minute, eat the soup first. This Gospel is for you, too. Take it with you. It really is very important.”

All this for a tramp? Flower arrangements for a tramp on a rainy day? Why? Is it worth it? Is it just romantic? Does he even notice? If the Bible is true, this is the way to be doing something “unto Jesus”, and at times perhaps to entertain an angel.”

“What a waste of time!” some might remark. But the ‘waste’ is what brings forth the most amazing results, many of which are hidden from us in this life.” (Taken from *Hidden Art* by Edith Schaeffer. Copyright © 1977 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Now, I'm no Edith Schaeffer. Not even close. And with sharing this story, I'm definitely not encouraging any woman to offer a strange man hospitality when you are alone. Mrs. Schaeffer's illustration takes place in a different time and age.

However, I am inspired by her story. I'm inspired to show hospitality as an extension of my husband's ministry. I'm inspired to open my home to those who need to hear the gospel. And I'm inspired to put in the extra effort to make my meals attractive and tasty. Not because it's romantic or sentimental--as Mrs. Schaeffer points out--but because it can bring glory to the gospel. For this reason, I want to follow Mrs. Schaeffer's example and excel in the good work of hospitality. I hope you're inspired by her story too.

## Washing the Feet of the Saints

by Carolyn Mahaney

*“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.” 1 Timothy 5:9-10*

Hmmm...washing the feet of the saints. How do I perform *this* good work? All of the other good works in this verse seem realistic and doable; but bathing a fellow-Christian's dirty, smelly feet seems a little outlandish.

Actually, it's really not all that peculiar. And most likely we are carrying out this good work already. All we need is an explanation of what foot-washing really means in order to know if we are fulfilling this task.

This is where biblical commentators can help us out, and Pastor John MacArthur does just that in his commentary on First Timothy (p. 208). He provides both the context and clarification for a widow having “washed the feet of the saints:”

That menial task was the duty of slaves. Since the roads were either dusty or muddy, guests entering a house had their feet washed. Paul does not necessarily mean that she actually did that herself each time. The menial task of washing the feet spoke metaphorically of humility (Jn. 13:5-17). The requirement, then, stresses that a widow

have a humble servant's heart. She gives her life in lowly service to those in need.

So, we see that “washing the feet of the saints” is a willingness to give ourselves to any menial task that would serve another Christian in need. It could be as simple as what my daughter Janelle did for my other daughter, Kristin, yesterday.

Because all of our husbands have been out-of-town this week at the Together for the Gospel conference, my daughters and I snatched some time “together for fun.” Yesterday morning, we took all of the children out for breakfast and to a park. At one point during our outing-- while Kristin was taking Andrew to the restroom--Janelle noticed that Liam needed a diaper change. Now, this was no ordinary messy diaper. It was, shall we say, a blowout. Yet Janelle cheerfully did this dirty job to care for her sister.

I'm sure she thought nothing of it, but through this simple act Janelle was, in fact, “washing the feet of the saints.” That's the idea behind this particular good work. It involves doing the humblest, most menial, and sometimes even downright dirty tasks in service of others. It could be making a bed for a person who is ill or scrubbing toilets for a woman with an extra-heavy workload, or changing a diaper to help out a mother with small children.

We should never think we are above doing these “foot-washing” kind of jobs. Neither should we underestimate their significance. Even the grubbiest of tasks are holy, if done for the glory of Jesus Christ. After all, didn't our Savior Himself stoop to wash the feet of his disciples? We should consider it an honor to do dirty jobs for Him.

## A Very Different Hobo Story

by Kristin Chesemore

After my post on Edith Schaeffer's hospitality, I received the following email from our dear friend Rebecca. It is a sobering reminder of how a lack of hospitality can actually reflect negatively on the gospel. May it provoke us all to be diligent to show practical love and hospitality to others.

Kristin,

As you shared this story, it reminded me of another story told by a hobo. He was my brother-in-law. He left home when he was 15

during the depression. (Yes he was a good bit older than my sister-in-law-- my husband's sister.) He left to ease the strain of feeding a large family and rode the rails around the country. He often begged for his food. At one time when I was drawing him out about his beliefs in God, he shared a story of begging at the home of a Christian. He received a bag that was heavy and he was eager for the food. When he opened it, he found mostly tracts and a small piece of dry bread. He told me somewhat bitterly that he threw it all away. That experience among others stayed with him and seemed to embitter his heart toward Christians. I know that he is ultimately responsible for his decision to reject Christ, but how differently might he have been affected had he met Mrs. Schaeffer. Now, who am I to judge the person who gave him the bag of tracts, they probably had difficulty providing for their own family and judging that "man does not live by bread alone" did what they knew to feed his soul. He went on to lead a prosperous and productive life as far as earthly possessions went. However, I am sorry to say, that when he died, to my knowledge he never did receive the Bread of Life offered by our Savior.

Thanks for continuing to point us to the gospel and how we can participate in its spread!!

Rebecca

## Caring for the Afflicted

by Nicole Whitacre

*“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, **has cared for the afflicted**, and has devoted herself to every good work.” 1 Timothy 5:9-10*

As we single out our fourth “good work,” observe, if you will, to whom this assignment is given. Caring for the afflicted isn’t primarily the responsibility of the government or the United Nations. It’s not exclusively the domain of pastors. This good work is *our* duty and responsibility. We as women are all to be members of the Coalition of Caring for the Afflicted.

But you don't need me to tell you this. While we don't all gravitate toward doing the "good but dirty" works Mom described last week (I wasn't about to arm wrestle Janelle over who would change that messy diaper), I don't know a woman alive whose heart doesn't break over the suffering of people near and far. We are nurturers by nature. God made us that way.

Where we can run into trouble is determining who, when and how to care. Suffering is all around us in this fallen world. Physical, financial, spiritual, practical, and relational hardship is closer than your neighborhood Starbucks. But as one wise man said (probably better than this): "Need doesn't always imply responsibility."

We are all responsible to care for the afflicted. However, we are *not* responsible to meet every need at every time in every place, all by ourselves. Rather, we must work together, each faithful to do our part. We must prayerfully exercise wisdom when practicing this good work.

When my colon ruptured three days after Jack was born, I was suddenly one of the afflicted--weak, afraid, in terrible pain, unable to hold my little son. Of course Steve, Mom and Janelle bore the primary burden of caring for Jack and me. I am always in their debt. But the care of the saints from two churches—Sovereign Grace Church of Fairfax and Covenant Life Church—was of indescribable comfort and help.

I carry around snapshots in the wallet of my mind: Mark and Jane, the night before their wedding, bringing a chair for Steve to sit in by my hospital bed; the collection of money from our care group to help with expenses; the room full of cards and flowers; Uncle Gary and Aunt Betsy driving from Maryland to console me when I ended up back in the hospital; a phone call or visit from a friend when I was recuperating at Mom and Dad's house; the cards from children, from singles, from friends, from people I hardly knew; the church members who packed up our apartment, and unpacked and painted our town house; the "Scriptures of Hope and Encouragement" from Steve and Denise (my elementary school teachers who share in the fellowship of the afflicted); the diapers and formula from Mrs. Mensah; the people who told me they prayed for me, even in the "watches" of the night; my cousin Melanie willing to give blood for my transfusion; Kristin, buying me pretty things to cheer me up; Dad reading Spurgeon to me by the hour.

In physical as well as spiritual weakness, the care I received from each and every person was significant. What might have been a "small" good work to them (like praying or writing a note) was an indescribable blessing to me.

Of the many lessons learned from this trial I hope I have learned how to more effectively care for the afflicted. I no longer underestimate even the simplest expressions of kindness and compassion. I don't profess to excel in this good work. But I know countless people who do, and I want to join their coalition.

## Devotion to Every Good Work

by Janelle Bradshaw

*“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.” 1 Timothy 5:9-10*

This final phrase—“has devoted herself to every good work”—may appear, at first glance, to be a little vague. Kinda like what happens when I can't come up with a concluding sentence for one of my posts, so I just tack on something nice-sounding but essentially meaningless.

Not the case here! There is nothing vague about this concluding remark. Paul is making a very clear point. In case we got the idea that we could check off one of each of these good works and qualify as a godly woman, Paul raises the stakes considerably. He says the godly woman is *devoted* to good works. As one commentary describes it, she is “energetically and diligently giving herself” to this stuff. I can imagine this woman constantly looking and listening, ready to serve upon discovery of the slightest need.

Do you remember the t-shirt that was popular a few years back with the slogan that read, “Life is Tennis (or Basketball or Fishing). Everything else is just details”? Well, here Paul is saying that the godly woman's outlook is: “Life is being devoted to good works. Everything else is just details.”

Bringing up children, showing hospitality, caring for the afflicted—these aren't things the godly woman does one time, like a community service requirement. Good works are what she is giving her life, energy, time, and heart to. Good works are what she is all about.

But there is one other word that makes this phrase even more powerful. Yep, it's that little word “every.” Every, quite simply means every. It doesn't mean some or most, but every. The godly woman doesn't limit

herself to good works that are easy, or get her the most attention, or are her top favorites. She practices good works of all kinds. And we can safely assume that they aren't all pleasant.

Not such a vague phrase after all, huh?

I think John Wesley's well-known quote expands nicely on what Paul is saying here.

“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 you can.”

Cause everything else? It's just details.

## Run!

by Nicole Whitacre

Now that we've spent two weeks exhorting you (and ourselves!) to have a reputation for good works, I want to give a warning. Run! Run away from them as fast as you can!

No, I'm not contradicting everything Janelle said earlier today about being devoted to good works. I'm in full agreement with Scripture: we should give every last drop of energy to doing good works.

But, I know how it happens with me.

After I've done a good work, I want to add it to my collection. I put it on my soul's mantle and I polish it and step back to admire it. *What a godly woman I am for doing such a good work! How nice it was to receive the thanks and appreciation of others! What a noble, self-sacrificing person I am!*

When I'm thinking like this, I've so missed the point.

Good works are not an occasion for self-congratulation. They are a reason to marvel, once again, at my Savior. Only because of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross are my sins forgiven--not because of any good work I have done or will do. Only His grace motivates me to a life of good works. Only because of Christ's mercy are my good works pleasing to the Father. Only His power sustains me for a lifetime of good works to His glory.

Instead of exalting in my good works, I should be reveling in the Good Work of Christ that has totally transformed my life.

I must follow the example of one David Dickson who said: “I make a heap of all my bad works and all my good works and I flee them both to Christ.”

Yes, I should devote my life to good works in order to bring honor to my Savior. But at the end of the day, I must remember that it is only because of my Savior that these good works are pleasing to God. And I must flee all my good works and run to Christ.\*

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