

7.31.22 If You Want a Profitable and Productive Life, Do This Titus 3.1-11, 14
Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

At the end of your life, what would you like to be able to say about it? What would you like people to say about you? I think most people want their life to count for something, to feel like your life matters, that it's made a difference, that you made the most of your time on earth and hopefully left the world a little better than you found it. Much of the Bible is about how to lead such a life, one that is profitable and productive, not in an economic sense, but a life of loving and vital relationships and connections with other people, meaning, value, contentment, and purpose. This is true of the part of the Bible we've been in the last few weeks .

First and Second Timothy and Titus are called "Pastoral Letters" because they're written to an individual, not to churches, on the subject of **how to lead a church** in a proper way so people will live profitable and productive lives as part of God's family. The purpose of the letters to Timothy and Titus is to guide and direct pastoral activity which is why the duties and responsibilities of church leaders are written about more in the pastorals than in any other books in the New Testament, although the metaphor of pastor or shepherd doesn't appear in any of them.

Last week if you read 2 Timothy you heard how the faith that lived in Timothy first lived in his grandmother Lois, then his mother Eunice. Timothy and Titus are among the best representatives of perhaps the third generation of disciples of Jesus. The issues involved with transmitting faith from generation to generation were beginning to be understood. All three of these letters were written at a time in which the survival of the Christian community seemed to be a long shot. The churches were small groups of believers meeting in homes, not large established institutions with a solid financial foundation. We know from history that things were about to get much worse for these early Christians as they would face a period of persecution.

What do we know about Titus the recipient of this letter? **Titus** was a gentile, probably converted by Paul, who spoke of him as **"my true child in a**

common faith” (Titus 1:4). Titus is frequently mentioned in the letters of Paul, especially **Galatians and 2 Corinthians**, as one of his trusted helpers [“**As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker in your service**” (2 Cor. 8:23a)]. Titus was sent on two urgent missions to the unruly church in Corinth, first entrusted with delivering a very confrontational letter from Paul (2 Corinthians 7:6-16) and then he had the task of gathering the Corinthian financial offering to help the poor in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:16-24). That’s a tough assignment! Titus had been left on the island of Crete and given the responsibility to oversee the organization of the churches on that island. That’s where he was when he received this letter. Later, according to 2 Timothy 4:10, Titus went to Dalmatia, what is today Croatia.

The letter to Titus provides advice about the kind of persons qualified to lead the church, warnings about false teaching, and guidance for different groups in the church (older men, 2:1-2; older and younger women, 2:3-5; younger men, 2:6-8; and slaves 2:9-10), to make clear that in light of Jesus’ work of redemption on the cross on their behalf, **that believers should be zealous for good deeds** (2:11-15). Chapter 3 says it’s the duty of Christians to be good citizens because of God’s grace shown to them (3:1-7) and emphasizes the importance of **right belief leading to good deeds in Jesus’ name**. The letter warns the church about becoming entangled in arguments that divert energy and distract attention away from the cause of Christ. Listen to **Titus 3:1-11, 14 where Titus is being told what to share with people in the church about how they are to live as followers of Christ**.

“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to **be ready for every good work**, 2 to **speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone**. 3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. 4 But when the **goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior** appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but **according to his mercy**, through the water of rebirth and renewal by **the Holy**

Spirit. 6 This Spirit he poured out on us richly through **Jesus Christ our Savior**, 7 so that, having been **justified by his grace**, we might become **heirs according to the hope of eternal life**. 8 The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to **devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone**. 9 But **avoid stupid controversies**, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are **unprofitable and worthless**. 10 After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do **with anyone who causes divisions**, 11 since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned. 14 And **let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive.**”

In these verses from Titus 3 we’re given a brief summary of Christian belief and what that belief should produce. It’s about **who we were, what God did, and what you are to do**.

Who We Were

You may think that you live in a time filled with more violence, rudeness, and hatred than most and it’s pretty bad. But in verse 3 writing about himself and the members of the church Paul writes that ***“We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.”*** That description basically describes a lot of everyday human behavior. Even a brief look at the news on any given day shows that Paul’s description is accurate.

With all the terrible and incomprehensible things that happen it’s important to remember your own failures so that you don’t despair and rant excessively over other people’s sins while being blind to your own. We also don’t want to grow hopeless or cynical about the power of the Spirit to change even the most challenging person. Many of us would have to admit we’re not successful at even doing the few things Paul mentions in the first couple verses of Titus 3 ***“to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.”*** I would guess many of us struggled to do that this last week,

maybe even this morning! Paul uses **eight descriptive terms** (verse 3) that get worse as they go to track the history of human sin. This description of **who we were** was accurate in the first century and still is today. Yet it's amid the mess of human ignorance, selfishness, violence, and sin that God's grace appears.

What God Did

Paul says the undeserved, unmerited loving kindness of God our Savior appeared right in the middle of the mess of the world and our lives. Thanks to God's mercy, new life and new birth that put you right with God are available. God saves us by a renewing bath of baptism, cleansing us from sin and enabling a new life in the Spirit, in which we become beneficiaries of a great inheritance. I saw a bumper sticker that said, "*Where there is a will...put me in it!*" That's what God has done. You're not saved by any wonderful deeds you've done, but by God's mercy in Christ. That's the message of the gospel (verses 5-8) – **cleansing** (forgiveness), **birth** (washing/baptism), and **new life** (by the power of the Holy Spirit). The source of our hope is that we've believed God's word about **who we were** and **what God did** for us regardless of who we were and what we did. The question then becomes **what are you to do** now?

What You Are To Do

The key connecting phrase in Titus chapter three is "**good works (verses 1, 8, & 14).**" It's too bad that some people associate "**good works**" with the mistaken idea that we can "work" our way into heaven. God has taken the initiative in mercifully and lovingly reaching out to us in Jesus Christ through whom we are forgiven, reconciled to God, and empowered and commanded to live a new life with the help of the Holy Spirit. Humility marks our life of discipleship because we recognize how undeserving we are and how far God has gone to extend life and hope to us all. **You're saved by God for a purpose** beyond just personal eternal fire insurance and as the letters in the New Testament make clear over and over again **that purpose is to do good.**

It's unfortunate that some people use the phrase "do gooders" in a negative or put down kind of way because according to so many of the letters in the New Testament **good works, doing good, is the way you demonstrate**

that you're saved, it's the way you express your godliness, it's the way others know you have a transforming relationship with Jesus. Good works are the way godliness expresses itself in the wider world. Your good works are the expression of your relationship with Christ, your priorities, and your attitude. **You're not saved by your good works, but your good works demonstrate that you're saved.** Listen to **Titus 3:8, 14** again, **"Be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone. Let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive."**

We devote ourselves to good works to meet urgent needs so that we're productive followers of Jesus and productive members of our communities. You're not to waste time and energy in pointless quarrels, stupid controversies, dissensions, or anything that's divisive. Paul is writing with a sense of urgency - **Speak evil of no one, he says, avoid quarrelling, be gentle, show courtesy to all.** Life is too short. There's too much important work to be done. Christians can be guilty of spending their time arguing about and debating about things that unchurched people don't care about at all instead of devoting ourselves to good works to meet urgent needs.

Good works are excellent and profitable for everyone to be a part of – whether it's telling others about God's love in Jesus, making a meal or sharing food, visiting folks who are grieving or sick, giving someone a ride, giving your time and service as a volunteer, supporting mission partners in providing basic life needs like clean water, food, education, and health care. These are things that we're called to do, **we're to be energetically engaged in doing good** – whatever is profitable and excellent.

When you respond to needs it's an opportunity for you to grow in grace and in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. A man named Sundar became a convert to Christianity and decided to stay in India to be a missionary and bear witness to Jesus. One late afternoon Sundar was traveling on foot high in the Himalayan Mountains with a Buddhist monk. It was bitter cold, and the

night was coming on. The monk warned that they were in danger of freezing to death if they did not reach the monastery before darkness fell.

It so happened that as they crossed over a narrow path above a steep cliff, they heard a cry for help. Deep down in the ravine a man had fallen, and he lay wounded. His leg was broken, and he couldn't walk. The monk warned Sundar, *"Do not stop. God has brought this man to his fate. He must work it out by himself. That is the tradition. Let us hurry on before we perish."* But Sundar replied, *"It is my tradition that God has brought me here to help my brother. I cannot abandon him."* So, the monk set off through the snow, which had started to fall heavily.

Sundar climbed down to where the wounded man was. Since the man had a broken leg, Sundar took a blanket from his knapsack and made a sling out of it. He got the man into it and hoisted him onto his back, then began the painful and arduous climb back up the path. After a long time, drenched with perspiration, he finally got back to the path, struggling to make his way through the increasingly heavy falling snow. It was dark now, and he had all he could do to find the path. But he persevered, and although faint from fatigue and overheated from exertion, he finally saw the lights of the monastery.

Then he nearly stumbled and fell. Not from weakness; he stumbled over an object lying in the path. He bent down on one knee and brushed the snow from the body of the monk who had frozen to death within sight of the monastery. And there, kneeling on one knee in the snow, he said aloud to himself the scripture (Luke 9:24): *"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it."* And he understood what Jesus meant and was glad that he had decided to *"lose his life"* for another.

Years later, when Sundar had his own disciples, they asked him this question: ***"Master, what is life's most difficult task?"***
(How would you answer that question, *"What is life's most difficult task?"*)
Sundar's answer was, ***"To have no burden to carry."***¹

¹ William J. Bausch, *A World of Stories*, pages 323-324.

The letter to Titus teaches that the grace of God trains us to do good, to bear other people's burdens, to care for people in need, to contribute to our community and our society in a positive way and by doing so we give glory to God and bear witness to the truth of what we believe. **If you want a profitable and productive life – do good and help to bear the burdens of others.**

Prayer:

“In the face of all our realities:

We are the people who heal each other,
who grow strong together, who name the truth,
who know what it means to live in community,
moving toward a common dream
for a new heaven and a new earth in the power of the love of God,
the company of Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

- Dorothy McRae-McMahon

Blessing: Grace be with all of you. (Titus 3:15)

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. If someone asked you how to live a profitable and productive life, how would you respond?
2. Do you have any one in your life who supports you as Titus helped Paul? Who is it? What qualities make someone a trusted helper? How are you fulfilling that role for others?
3. Paul writes in Titus 3.2 that you are *“to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.”* How well would you say you're doing that in person and online?
4. How does Paul describe his condition and that of the people in the church before they had a Savior (see Titus 3.3)?
5. According to Paul what has God done to save us (see Titus 3.5-7)?
6. Paul states that considering Jesus' work of redemption on the cross on our behalf, that believers should be “zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11-15). Why do you think Paul says so much about good works and deeds (2.7, 14, 3.1, 8, 14)?
7. How does your life reflect that you have been saved?