

# PERSPECTIVE

JUNE 2016

## THE GLORY OF WORK



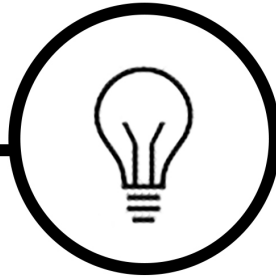
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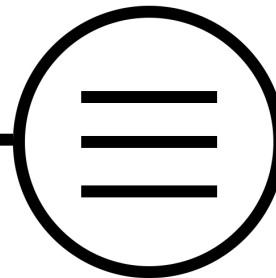


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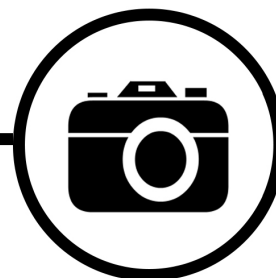
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## The Glory of Work

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have give you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.*

**Genesis 1:28-30**

*And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

**Genesis 3:17-19**

*Servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

**Colossians 3:22-24**

The Bible is not silent when it comes to work. Work cannot be separated from life. We see from Genesis 1, it is part of God's good plan for his creation. We may often think of work as an evil that, like asbestos, needs to be removed from our lives. Work can feel like poison when you are sitting in traffic on the way to the office, mulling over the last awkward conversation with your boss, and wondering why your wages don't seem to keep up with your expenses.

But work is good. God wove it into the fabric of his created order. God made us and imbued us with a tremendous capacity for work. As hard as work may be, it is incumbent upon every Christian to understand, be thankful for, and worship God through the work he has given us to do.

Work is glorious. It is never to be done for our glory, but for the glory of Christ.

### Where the church has failed

Sadly, churches and pastors do not teach on work as often as they should. The Christian pollster, David Kinnaman, argues in *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church*, that churches have failed to show young adults how the gospel applies to their day-to-day vocation.

There is some truth to what Kinnaman is saying. Churches that focus on getting kids saved may not be as careful to show them how to live as a redeemed worker in a fallen world. This is something the church must attend to; we need wisdom in how to connect faith and work. For this reason, I'm thankful for recent books like *The Gospel at Work* by Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert, and *Every Good Endeavor* by Tim Keller.

But the church ought to do more than simply show how the gospel fleshes itself out Monday through Friday. We must realize how Christians in the marketplace struggle to live up to the gospel they profess. One of the failures I've observed in churches is *the failure to understand the temptations workers face*.

When I was in seminary, I worked for an online journal designed to minister to pastors. The website had numerous articles on many different topics and one of the topics was work. Under this category the publisher wanted articles on the topic of bribery. I struggled to understand why Christians needed special instruction about bribery. Surely, I thought, this is a pretty simple problem that can be easily addressed with the exhortation: don't engage in it! Nonetheless, the publisher, a former CEO of a Fortune 500 company, insisted we write on this topic. I complied.

Years later, when I found myself pastoring Mount Vernon in metro-Atlanta, a church many professionals call home, I understood: bribery is a temptation workers face every day. It's not easy to remain faithful to Christ while vendors offer bribes. Harder yet is having to tell your boss you won't give bribes to gain or retain a client.

Bribery is just one example. The church is called to apply the Bible to every corner of our lives. This requires being aware of the temptations Christians face, wherever they work.

There is a second failure we need to be aware of, *the failure of churches to teach on the inherent nobility of work*. Without intending it, churches have elevated the office of pastor in a way that has subtly diminished the role of those who work outside of pastoral ministry.

Over the course of church history, there has been a divide between the clergy and the laity. This divide erupted in the Middle Ages between the priests who had the responsibility of dispensing the sacraments and the people who received them. The chasm widened when the Catholic Church decreed only priests could drink the cup and eat the bread of the Lord's Supper. They prohibited the laity from drinking the communion wine.

Such a debate may seem like ancient history, but this kind of thinking, though addressed during the Protestant Reformation, lingers today. Men and women in the workplace often feel the work they do is not nearly as important as the work of a pastor or someone on church staff. This is, at least partially, the failure of pastors to explain the nobility of work.

I'm sure there are more failures than this. But these two—the failure to understand the temptations Christians face at work and the failure to teach on the nobility of work—suffice to show us that work is something we need to think and talk about more.

Though I can't address these failures completely in a brief article, I can encourage us to think rightly about work and begin a conversation that God may use in our church to help us all work—in the home, marketplace, and church—for the glory of God.

To that end, I've devised the following acronym to frame four crucial topics for our understanding of work in the twenty-first century: W—wearing; O—order; R—redemption; K—kirk (kirk is the Scottish word for church, and it's the only way I could make the acronym work!)

### **Wearying: work is wearing**

Millennials are often accused of trying to get out of work. They expect to get that corner office without a great deal of toil. They've been told if they find the right job they'll never "work" a day in their life. Contrast this with the WWII generation that grew up in the shadow of the Great Depression and expressed thanks for any job that paid the bills.

Adam undoubtedly worked very hard prior to the Fall. Sadly, when sin entered the world the ground would no longer give up its fruit easily: "By the sweat of your face," God told Adam, "you shall eat bread." Work is wearying. Computer programs don't program themselves. Skyscrapers don't build themselves. Fields don't farm themselves.

This is something we all need to hear. As a pastor, whenever I'm tempted to whine about the difficulty of my work, I'm reminded how so many teachers at Mount Vernon work full-time jobs and prepare lessons for Wednesday evening or Sunday morning. Sunday School teachers prepare lessons between lunch and soccer practice, between diapers and dishes, or between dinner and bedtime. They work hard all day long in the home or at the office and then, they work even more to spiritually feed children or adults at church.

This is a good reminder for all of us. We may be tempted to complain, for many reasons, about our jobs. But the perfect job will be tiresome and challenging. Work is wearying.

### **Order: work is how we bring order to a fallen world**

God charged Adam to name the animals. Adam organized what God made for him (Gen 2:19). Adam did this, showing there is inherent value in classifying, organizing, and making even more fruitful what God made. This is part of what theologians describe as the "cultural mandate" whereby God commanded those made in his image and likeness to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). But this was only the beginning. Adam would soon be married, have children, farm, and cultivate God's beautiful creation, bringing order to a landscape God handed to him on a silver platter.

Sin changed the location and the difficulty of this work. Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24). The work they would now engage in would be harder than ever. But the cultural mandate remained. Humanity would till soil, store grain, build houses, and even cities, all in the name of bringing order to a fallen world.

I've had the opportunity to know some men who had, what the world would consider, very important jobs. In Washington, DC, I worked for a United States Senator. He wielded great power as the chairman of the Appropriations Committee. His decisions charted the course of billions of dollars in federal funding. This

money preserved national parks, protected borders, and funded cancer research. The publisher I mentioned earlier ran American Standard, a huge faucet, toilet, and sink company. He is well known as an efficiency expert. Decisions he made lowered costs on products each and every one of us use every day. A few weeks ago, I participated in the funeral service of a dear member of our own church who once presided over Exxon, at the time the world's largest company. He labored to produce energy that literally fueled economic growth around the world.

All these men rose to the highest ranks of their profession. They brought order to the world on a vast scale. The world valued what they did. And yet, according to the Bible, the clerk at your local post office, the plumber who installed your toilet, and the gas station attendant where you fill up each week, is bringing order to the world, too. They might not be leaders in the world's eyes, but they are stewards of creation in the eyes of the Lord. In their own way, to the degree appropriate to their position, they are bringing order to a fallen world. Their work is valuable.

The mother training her child, the mason building a wall, the doctor prescribing medicine, the accountant documenting receipts—all of these individuals are carrying out the cultural mandate. They are making culture by organizing the bits of the world God has entrusted to their care. This is good and noble work.

### **Redemption: work is done in light of redemption**

Mount Vernon is an evangelical church. We exist because of the evangel, the Good News. The Good News is simple but profound: each of us was born in a state of sin as rebels against a holy God. God made us to honor him with all of our lives, including our work, but we failed to do this well. Instead, we lived life for our glory instead of his. Because of this sin, we all deserve death and eternal judgment. A holy God is just to punish a rebellious people. God, in his loving kindness, provided a way of escape for sinners. He sent his only-begotten Son into the world—the God-man, Christ Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life. He never sinned. He always perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, doing the very work God entrusted him to do. Yet Jesus died a criminal's death. On the cross he bore the penalty for the sins of everyone who would ever turn and trust in him. He did this to redeem us from our sins, so that we could have everlasting life and fellowship with God. The resurrection is evidence that Jesus is both Savior and Lord, and the power of the

resurrection is the power believers have to live and to work for God's glory.

This is the gospel story. It's what we gather each Sunday to sing and pray and think about together. Every Christian I know wants to live a gospel-centered life, but we struggle to know what this looks like when we aren't lined up in pews or huddled together in small groups talking about the Bible.

How does redemption affect our work? As a pastor, this answer is fairly obvious. All of my days are spent planning, preparing, and promoting gospel work in our church, our community, and the nations. But what about those who are called to spend most of their time working in the home or in the marketplace? They can't spend all their moments reflecting on the gospel.

Some people think God gave them a job to share the gospel with their co-workers. That may be true; God's plan may be for you to corner your colleague with the Good News. However, theologically, that isn't *fundamentally* why you are there. You are at work to bring order to a fallen world. You have a task to complete. As a cog you play an important part in a larger machine that is serving a purpose. This is all part of common grace. It's called "common" because it is grace shared by everyone, Christian or not.

But there is another kind of grace called special grace. This grace is "special" because it is reserved for the believer in Jesus Christ. Special grace includes the power God gives us to live out our redemption at work by honoring Christ in our work. Only the Christian can exercise this special grace. Only a disciple can live out his redemption because only the disciple of Christ has been redeemed. Having been redeemed he can now "work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (Col 3:23). The Christian knows that at work he is not fundamentally serving his employer. Rather, he is "serving the Lord Christ" (Col 3:24).

Isn't that amazing? I suppose we could say that the work of the non-Christian CEO of the world's largest company is inferior to the work of the Christian janitor in the world's smallest company. This particular janitor can do something that particular CEO can't: he can work for the Lord. The CEO may be leaving his mark on human history, but the janitor is living out his redemption and, in so doing, is pleasing the Author of history. Which do you think is more important?



You may struggle with how the gospel relates to your daily work. Realize that when you file that project or complete that report or make those peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, you are not only bringing order to a fallen world (common grace), you are working for the glory of God (special grace). Common grace explains what you do. Special grace explains how and why you do it. You do it for the glory of God. This is not a cliché; it's how you live as a redeemed individual on the face of the planet. As you work for Christ and not your supervisor, you are living out your redemption.

People often tell me their work isn't as important as my work. They don't come out and say it so baldly, but I know that's what they are getting at. I'm a pastor, and they assume in the grand scheme of things the way I spend my time must be better than the way they spend their time. If God were handing out awards, they're sure I'd be given some serious brass while they'd get nothing more than a participation ribbon. But that's not true!

Whatever your job, if you do it for the glory of God, it pleases your heavenly Father just as much as my work pleases him. All work done by the redeemed and for the Savior is glorious.

#### **Kirk: don't neglect the kirk (church) as a crucial sphere of work**

For some, work crowds out involvement at church. Many are so committed to the vocation God has called them to, in the home or the marketplace, they leave no time for investing in the church of the living God. Sometimes this is simple laziness—it's a matter of not prioritizing the church in one's life. Other times, it's the result of misunderstanding the fact that God calls each of his children to be part of the building up of the local church. In that sense, every Christian is to be a church worker.

There are many who feel like they have the time, but they don't engage in the life of the church because they don't think they're wanted, needed, or useful. The church has often not been helpful here. By perpetuating the clergy/laity divide, leaders have sadly led people away from robust church involvement. Some people think that since they are not in pastoral ministry, since they cannot teach, since they don't have a spiritual gift others value—like the ability to engage in conversation with new people, the ability to organize a luncheon, the ability to share the gospel with strangers—they must not have much to offer a church. As a result, they do little more than attend. They devote themselves to bringing order to a fallen world through their vocation (common grace) while they

neglect the work God has called them to in a local church (again, special grace).

All of us should regularly assess the depth of our involvement in the life of a local church. This is true of pastors and members alike. Pastors need to reconsider whether they have somehow professionalized the ministry by treating their involvement in the church merely as a job. This isn't the way the Apostle Paul treated ministry, he invested himself heart and soul in churches throughout Asia Minor.

But we should all assess our role in the church. Do we see the church as a sphere of employment that should occupy our time just as our vocation and our home occupy our time? I think we should.

Before I move on, let me say that there are seasons in life that will dictate our level of involvement in the life of a church. Let me give you an example. When I was finishing up my doctoral studies in seminary, I made the decision to stop attending the Wednesday evening service for a season. I led my family to church faithfully on Sunday morning and evening, but in order to finish my dissertation while helping my wife care for three very young children, it seemed wise to stay home on Wednesday nights. As someone used to being at the church every time the doors were open, it was an adjustment. Looking back, this was a season where the work of my vocation (dissertation) and home (wife and kids) needed some time I had previously devoted to the gathering of the church.

There is, of course, a world of difference between the Wednesday gathering of the church and the Sunday gathering. We gather Sunday morning at the command of our King (Heb 10:25). We gather on Wednesday evening out of prudence (wouldn't it be wise to come together mid-week and study the Bible again?). Sunday morning attendance is ordered; Wednesday is optional. We need to be open to seasons of life that inform our schedules in the office, the home, and the church.

However, as you consider what your work looks like in a local church, consider this reality: you will be attending a weekly gathering long after your children are grown and out of the house and long after you stop going to the office. In other words, for most of us the work of being part of a local church will outlast the work we get paid to do as well as the work of raising little children. For those of you beginning a career or a family, this is hard to imagine. But it's true! Will you be prepared to serve the

church when you are no longer going to the office and your kids are grown up and out of the home?

Growing up I had Matchbox cars whose wheels could be wound up so when they were set on the ground they would speed away by their own power. It would take a few seconds to get them ready, but when the wheels were tightly wound, at just the right time, they could go an extraordinary distance. This is a picture of how we can prepare for those days when we are no longer needed at the office, no longer needed (at least the same way) by our kids, and are ready to devote greater amounts of time and energy to the local church. If we spend our most fruitful years neglecting church service, not only will we be ignoring good work God has called us to today, we will be making it harder to faithfully serve the church tomorrow. Every year of church is like winding up those wheels one more time so we will be filled with such knowledge of and love for the church, that when the day comes we can speed into church ministry. In those days we won't be asking how the church can serve us. We will, instead, be primed and ready to serve the church.

The church is a crucial sphere of work today. But the investment we make in the church today when our time is under greater constraints will prepare us for service in the church when we are under fewer constraints.

**Moving forward with our W.O.R.K.**

God has given each and every one of us important to work to do. We should brace ourselves because it will be wearying. We should see the value of work, recognizing God calls all workers to bring a certain amount of order to his creation. We should work with our redemption in view, understanding our Lord is pleased when we work for him. And we should see the kirk (church) as an important sphere of our work—however busy we may be.

What can you do, very practically, if you are struggling to see the value of your work, at home, in the marketplace, or in the church?

- ✦ Reflect on how hard Jesus worked for you. It is no accident that Jesus is described as having “endured the cross”—it was wearisome work to die for the sins of his people (Heb 12:2). There is something refreshing and even invigorating about recognizing that as hard, difficult, and even painful work may be, it is not as hard as the work Jesus performed in saving his people.

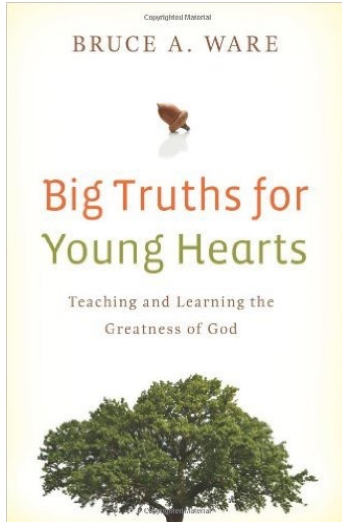
- ✦ See the pursuit of the Lord as real work. To make a point about what matters most in life, Jesus told a crowd, “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has set his seal” (John 6:27). Of course, this doesn't mean we should quit our day job. We should, however, remember that there is a spiritual work that is of the utmost importance. It's a work no one else can do for us—it's the work of entrusting ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not to say we can earn our salvation. It is to say we can devote ourselves to those spiritual graces God uses to grow us in godliness: meditating on Scripture, praying to the Father, Son, and Spirit, and gathering with his people.
- ✦ Get to know the work of your friends. What we “do for a living” is not out-of-bounds when it comes to having gospel-centered conversations. In addition to asking how your friends are doing spiritually, consider asking them how they are glorifying God through their work at home, in the marketplace, and at the church. All work done for the glory of Christ is worth talking about.
- ✦ Beware of finding your identity in your work. This is perhaps one of the greatest dangers of the age in which we live. More than ever, we tend to find our self-worth in our performance at work, whether that work is as a mother, an engineer, a pastor, or even a Sunday School teacher. Neither the common or special grace of work is to define us. We are defined by Christ alone; our righteousness is found in him. Pouring hours into your vocation or your church will not make you a better Christian. Some people drown their sorrows in a bottle of beer while others drown them in a few extra hours at the office. Don't let that be you. As important as work is, it will never fulfill us. Only Jesus can do that.

~Aaron Menikoff

## ***Big Truths for Young Hearts: Teaching and Learning the Greatness of God***

Written by Bruce Ware

Bookstall Price \$14



In a recent Sunday School class, one of the main ideas was that theology is for everyone, and this book was written because theology is even for children. The subtitle to *Big Truths for Young Hearts* is “teaching and learning the greatness of God.” As we teach our children who God is and what He has done, we pray that God will change their hearts, save them, and foster a strong, deep love for him. But this first begins in their minds. Knowledge precedes love. If we want our children’s hearts to blossom in love for God, we must water their hearts and minds diligently with the Word of God.

The book is divided into ten topics having to do with four different aspects of the gospel: God, Man, Christ, Response. Each topic has 6 lessons—perfect for a lesson a day and a topic a week for families with older children. At the end of each lesson there are application questions and a key verse that are useful to aid in discussion. In our family, we made a jingle or phrase of the main idea of each lesson to repeat for review. Also, learning about theology topically can be a helpful aid in family prayers. For example, after learning about an aspect of God’s character, how wonderful then to praise God with that attribute in mind together as a family.

Parents who have older children will find the book especially useful, either as a resource to use with family devotions or perhaps to form the content for a one-on-one discipleship with a child. Bruce Ware does a wonderful job of writing with simplicity on the other side of complexity. New Christians or adults who didn’t grow up with good teaching at home will also benefit. Finally, adults who have the privilege of teaching children would benefit from the book in preparation for teaching, especially becoming more comfortable with certain theological content or using examples from Ware to explain different truths.

This is a wonderful tool to assist us as parents and adults in the church as we work toward the goal that our children and others might know God, grow to love and fear Him, and seek to follow and obey Him.

– RECOMMENDED BY CHARITY ROE

### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

“Many of our family vacations have involved long drives in the car. In order to make good use of the time together while driving, my wife, Jodi, would make copies of portions of Scripture that we would memorize as we drove past yet more cornfields. One summer, our psalm to memorize was Psalm 103, and I can tell you that we all loved reading, memorizing, and discussing this wonderful psalm.”

–Topic 3: Creator and Ruler of All

## 2

“Seeing the Father as the One highest in charge and having authority over all is important for many reasons. One way it helps is in how we think of prayer... Why would Jesus instruct us to pray to the Father? - Simply because the Father is the One who has the highest authority of all. Even the Son right now, who is over everything created, sits at the “right hand” of the Father (Eph. 1:20), indicating that the Father is the highest of all.”

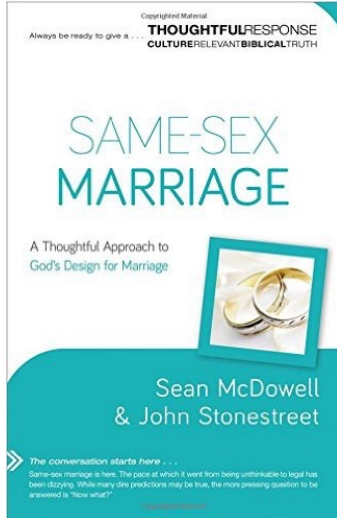
Topic 2: God as Three in One



## Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage

Written by Sean McDowell and John Stonestreet

Bookstall Price \$11



Last summer, the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage. Though this ruling came a full year after this book was published it only confirmed the authors' understanding of the overwhelming tide of culture on this issue. They agree with many who believe that the push to legalize same-sex marriage "will go down as one of the most significant social revolutions in human history" and that "the speed at which same-sex marriage went from unthinkable to unquestioned is unparalleled in modern memory." So, why resist this cultural tide? Because "it

matters," the authors say. Throughout the book, they strive to answer the question, what now? How can the Church best respond in the midst of this changing environment? What will Christian faithfulness look like once new definitions of marriage and sexuality replace those that have undergirded our society for so long?

McDowell and Stonestreet put forth a compelling case for the necessity of marriage as the one-flesh union of a man and a woman for life, and offer us a way forward in repentance and faith. Their focus is not so much against same-sex marriage as it is for the hope Christ offers the world. In fact, the book is packed with truth, hope, joy, and love. As the authors say, "The most important question is not 'What are we going to do about same-sex marriage?' It is 'What are we going to do about marriage?' Christians are called to do the hard work of modeling biblical marriage if we want to rebuild a culture in which the differences between a marriage as it was created to be and same-sex marriage are obvious."

As Christians, the question is not if, but when we will have to share our views on same-sex marriage. This book will help you think clearly, compassionately, and courageously about how to engage the new reality of same-sex marriage. "As a Church and as a culture, we are headed into uncharted waters. But we need not despair. Yes, same-sex marriage is here. It will do us no good to run from culture, pretend this is not true or cry foul. The real question is, 'how will we respond?'"

– RECOMMENDED BY RICK HUTCHINS

### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

"There is no path forward to building a strong marriage culture that does not begin with a revival of God's people to His design for marriage."

–First Things First: The Call to Repentance, p. 100

## 2

"Those who do not understand and cannot articulate the meaning of marriage will either be unwilling or unable to stand against that which compromises it. The deafening silence from so many Christians about same-sex marriage indicates they don't understand what is at stake."

–Giving Marriage Back to the World: Suggestions for the Long Haul, p. 128



<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

– Romans 12:9-10

In Romans 12:1, Paul said you are “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” He describes what that looks like in the following verses. Worship to God is always lived out horizontally in relationship to others. In Romans 12:9-10, we are given five commands that show what it looks like to live in worship to God.

“*Let love be genuine.*” Our love for one another, particularly in the church, should be genuine, not hypocritical. We should not say we love our brothers and sisters and then betray our words with our actions. The genuineness of our love will be proven in action. How have you tangibly loved another member of MVBC this week?

“*Abhor what is evil.*” Those who love genuinely should also hate the evil that defiles and destroys their love. We are not to simply dislike but abhor evil, the evil in our world, our hearts, and our relationships. Is there evil that you tolerate? Pray that you would hate it.

“*Hold fast to what is good.*” Christians are to be people who love what is true, noble, and good. Sadly, many Christians today simply reflect the world’s values and priorities. Others often have a reputation for what they are against instead of what they are for. In a postmodern

culture that believes truth is relative and celebrates what is ignoble, we must be people that “hold fast to what is good” (and true and noble).

“*Love one another with brotherly affection.*” We are commanded, again, to love one another, and it is to be with a familial love and affection. God adopted us and made us his sons and daughters and brothers and sisters to one another. What is your affection like for brothers and sisters at MVBC? Pray that it would grow.

“*Outdo one another in showing honor.*” We live in a highly competitive culture. We are told from a young age we must outdo others if we want to succeed in society. But the Christian life is one of humility and service. As Christ always sought to bring honor and glory to his Father, so we are to deflect all honor from ourselves and give it to others. How have you practically served another to show them honor?

– BRAD THAYER

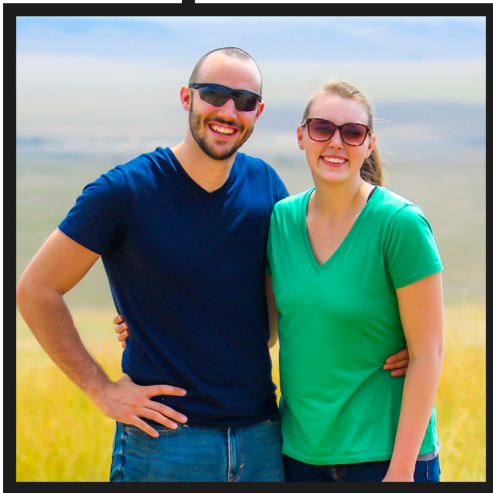
Graphic courtesy of [www.depravedwretch.com](http://www.depravedwretch.com). For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit [www.theversesproject.com](http://www.theversesproject.com).

# NEW MEMBERS

Alex and Erin Basurto



Karon Green



Alex and Liz Freemon



John and Holley Johnson

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:35





*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH