

A hand is shown placing a green block on top of a stack of other colorful blocks (orange, blue, yellow, red). The background is white.

PERSPECTIVE

JUNE 2017

DON'T BE A DO-GOODER

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS ON GOODNESS

CONTENTS



ARTICLE 1

Don't Be a Do-Gooder: Pastoral Reflections on Goodness

by Aaron Menikoff



BOOK HIGHLIGHT 5

Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did

by Randy Newman

Recommended by Meg King

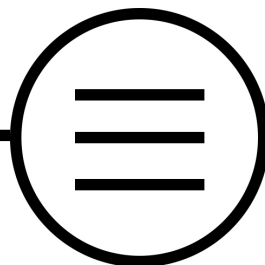


BOOK HIGHLIGHT 6

Sermons of the Great Ejection

by Various Authors

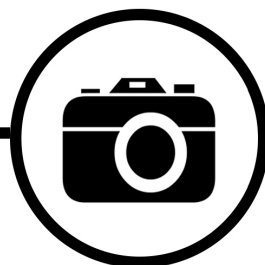
Recommended by Scott Sullivan



FIGHTER VERSE DEVOTIONAL 7

Proverbs 1:10

by Brad Thayer



NEW MEMBERS 8

Patrick & Kaila Caudill; Nadine Epperson;
Kyle Gross; Delaney Harrison;
Trisha Mukherjee; Garner, Linda, and
Mary Louise Sanford

Don't Be a Do-Gooder: Pastoral Reflections on Goodness

The word, good, is nearly meaningless today. The cook will take it as a criticism when you tell him dinner was simply good. He'll think if you really liked the meal, you'd have said it was terrific, fantastic, or awesome. Compared to adjectives like these, "good" is average at best.

This deflated understanding of good makes it harder for us to appreciate the Bible. For example, when Paul lists "goodness" as a piece of the fruit of the Spirit, we're unimpressed. We know goodness matters, but it's no longer vibrant and colorful. "Good" is like a white towel that's been washed so many times it's faded to a dull gray.

It's time to recover the meaning of good.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Who cares? Why is this a big deal? What's really at stake? Maybe a story will help set the stage.

Dave entered church ministry at twenty-two. He aspired to make the world a better place. He had thought about other vocations: medicine, politics, and law. All good choices, but none dealt with the nitty-gritty details of the soul—which Dave cared about more than anything. He went to seminary, and eventually took the pastorate of a small, urban church.

Dave's weeks were full. Every Tuesday night he gathered a small group to pray for the church and the city. He spent Wednesdays teaching at the vocational rehab center. On Thursdays he volunteered at an after school program. Dave labored Friday to prepare Sunday's message. Mondays he packed his schedule with meetings, and then prepared to do it all over again. Dave wanted to serve others. He strove to make a difference. He longed to do good.

As the years went by, Dave didn't just grow tired, he grew bitter. People weren't as thankful as he expected them to be for the investment he made. Kids on the street rarely responded to his message. He began to wonder if his work really mattered. Dave cycled through bouts of depression. He tried to make the world a better place, but ministry felt like sopping up the ocean with a sponge.

What went wrong? Somewhere along the way, Dave neglected his own heart. He devoted himself to good works, but failed to pursue the internal, spiritual fruit of goodness. Dave was a do-gooder who boiled ministry down to a list of tasks to be accomplished. He *did* good, but he wasn't *full* of goodness (Rom. 15:14). Dave spent so much time inspecting his good works, he forgot his need for God "to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Before we can help Dave, we must hit reset on the meaning of good.

RECOVERING THE MEANING OF GOOD

One of Jesus's most memorable encounters started with a man who asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19) We'd expect Jesus to disclose the secrets of the kingdom of God, or perhaps to exhort him to be born again. Instead, Jesus rejects the question itself: "And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.'"

Let that sink in. "No one is good *except God alone*."

Clearly, the man tried to be respectful. He sought to honor Jesus as a wise rabbi, a teacher worth listening to. But this honorific greeting betrayed a low view of the word good and, consequently, a low view of God.

All theological and moral failures stem from the refusal to come to terms with the nature of God. We too easily neglect the scope and significance of God's holiness, power, love, and justice. God is so pure we can't even comprehend him. King David sang of God's goodness: "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable" (Psa. 145:3). Trying to exhaust the goodness of God is like giving a toddler a pick and asking him to empty a gold mine; he may start, but he'll never finish.

Thankfully, the Bible is full of individuals who tasted and saw that the LORD is good (Psa. 34:8).

Jethro filled his bucket with gold when Moses explained how God saved Israel: "And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex. 18:9). Aware of the Exodus, Jethro realized there is none like God. God alone saves. No one else can be truly trusted. No one else can be truly adored.

When Job questioned God's goodness, the LORD shut him down, "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right" (Job 40:8)? God revealed his character to Job, and Job responded appropriately: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5–6).

To say God is good is to assert that he is without fault, without an ounce of error, without a speck of deceit. God never makes a bad decision, never thinks a spiteful thought, and never leads anyone astray. He is a Father who only serves and blesses his children. Human fathers discipline out of anger and spoil out of laziness. God does neither. He is the perfect mixture of tough and tender, firm and affectionate.

Imagine a sea that stretches for eternity without a single wave—infinately long and wide but as smooth as glass. God is as holy as that water is still. He is as merciful as this sea is deep. It's no wonder after reflecting on God's grace Paul exclaimed, "Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways (Rom. 12:33)!"

"Good" is that quality of God that encompasses his divine character—every attribute of our Triune God summarized in one simple word. Modern day English speakers might say God is awesome. But in the words of Jesus, God is good.

With that in mind, consider how every Christian is to be filled with the spiritual fruit of goodness. We aren't just to do good works; our spiritual veins are to flow with the very goodness of God.

ARE YOU A DO-GOODER?

A lot of us are a lot like that pastor, Dave. I know I am! I want to please people. I try to preach helpful messages. I hope to make a difference in the lives of others. You might be like this, too. You may work hard to encourage your friends—an unsolicited phone call, an encouraging text, an invitation to dinner. Maybe you pour into your kids—changing diapers, helping with homework, shopping for a dress. Perhaps you labor to build the church—teaching Sunday school, discipling a new believer, serving in the nursery. Each of these actions is a very worthy endeavor.

And yet none of these actions bridge the gap between you and God. As "good" as they may be, they are not *good*

the way God is good. *You* are not good the way God is good. The moment you weigh your merit by your productivity, the instant you compute your value by the number of good deeds done, you miss the most basic Christian truth: the goodness of God is not a mountain to be climbed but a gift to be received. "The fruit of the Spirit is . . . goodness" (Gal. 5:22).

The better we know God is good, the less likely we are to be impressed with our good works. That doesn't mean we should stop working. By no means! It does mean our works can only be good if they are the outgrowth of a good God working through us (Eph. 2:10).

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Earlier generations of Christians carefully explained how good works could, in fact, be good. Their statements sound a little strange to modern ears, but the truths they summarized are jewels of divine wisdom to be cherished.

The authors of the Second London Confession, an old statement of faith, said good works are only good if they spring from a faithful and sincere heart.¹ Good works "are the fruits, and evidences of a true, and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brothers, adorn the profession of the Gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God." Good works are both a necessary and valuable component of every believer's life.

However, as the authors clarified, good works have their limitations; they can't earn one a seat at the table of salvation. Our good works won't cause us to merit eternal life because no matter how good they are, they pale in comparison to God. The more you understand how good God is, the sillier it is to think your good works can impress him. "The infinite distance that is between us and God" cannot be bridged by a million faithful sermons or a trillion service projects. This is why we need the cross of Christ. His good death, not our good works, secures our forgiveness.

Does that mean our good works are worthless? Not at all! The Second London Confession rightly asserts we can truly please God. When our good works are performed rightly, from hearts full of faith, God looks "upon them in his Son [and] is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere." In other words, by God's grace, our works really can be good—pleasing and acceptable to God.

And this leads to a crucial question. How can I know my good works stem from a sincere heart? Look no further than the spiritual fruit of goodness.

HEARTS OVERFLOWING WITH GOODNESS

For your works to be sincere, the Spirit has to be at work in you. For your works to be truly good, your heart has to be full of goodness (Gal. 5:22)—and this is God's gift. Of all the pieces of the fruit of the Spirit, none is as foundational as this one.

We need God to change us from the inside out. We need him to not only give us new life, but to sanctify our heart. Sincerity isn't the result of will power. It won't be found by showing up early at the office, going another week without blowing up at the kids, or another month without looking at porn. Sincerity is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Only those whose hearts are filled with goodness are sincere.

We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:9). We do good works because the Spirit fills us with goodness; and when this happens, little by little, God makes us more like him.

When you understand this, it puts all of your good works in perspective. Instead of being discouraged by your minimal impact on the world around you, you can be encouraged by the maximum impact of the Spirit in you. The sincerity that makes our good works valuable comes from a heart overflowing with the goodness of God.

And where do we see the goodness of God most clearly? In the person and work of Jesus Christ. A heart filled with goodness desires to know and experience more of him. Before we lift our finger to perform a single good work, we should pray for the Spirit to wrap our heart around the cross of Christ. Let this be our prayer for goodness:

Help me to find in his death the reality and immensity of his love. Open for me the wondrous volumes of truth in his, 'It is finished'. Increase my faith in the clear knowledge of atonement achieved, expiation completed, satisfaction made, guilt done away, my debt paid, my sins forgiven, my person redeemed, my soul saved, hell vanquished, heaven opened, eternity made mine. O Holy Spirit, deepen in me these saving lessons.²

Jethro rejoiced in the goodness of God who saved Israel. How much more can we rejoice in the goodness of a God

who saved us and now lovingly works his goodness *within* us?

HOW CAN I GROW IN GOODNESS?

Even as you read this article, there is other work you need to do. You may have a husband or wife to serve, a family to care for, or a friend to encourage. How can we keep from being overwhelmed at the job ahead of us? How can we keep from growing bitter when the task seems so large and our efforts so small? We need to grow not only in *doing* good, but in *being* good. We need the spiritual fruit of goodness. How can you grow in this?

- ✦ *Devote yourself to soul work.* If you are a Christian, hit pause on the good works you have to do, and meditate upon Christ as the atoning sacrifice for your sin. This could mean recommitting yourself to daily, personal devotions. It may mean taking a day to reassess the state of your spiritual life. We live in a hectic, connected world that does not lend itself well to soul work. Find a way to pull away from the crowds, like Jesus did, and do business with your heavenly Father. This takes time. A careful reading of *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines* is a good way to start.
- ✦ *Meditate on God's character.* This is a much-neglected practice. We are quick to thank God for his work and slow to marvel at his nature. A heart filled with goodness understands (as much as is humanly possible) what it means to say that God alone is good. If you pray through the acronym A-C-T-S, try extending the time you focus on A, "adoration."
- ✦ *Deflect praise.* A heart full of goodness knows that God alone is good and he, therefore, alone deserves praise. It's easier than you think to get addicted to affirmation. We all want to be recognized. The wise Christian can both receive encouragement and praise God at the same time. The failure to deflect praise will eventually lead to bitterness when the praise doesn't come.
- ✦ *Plead with God for a deeper understanding of the cross.* Those who most appreciate what Jesus did for them will pour out their lives in good works for others. They will do so expecting nothing in return but the eventual affirmation from him who matters most, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:23) Those with hearts full of

goodness are blown away to know their good God
suffered and died for them.

~Aaron Menikoff

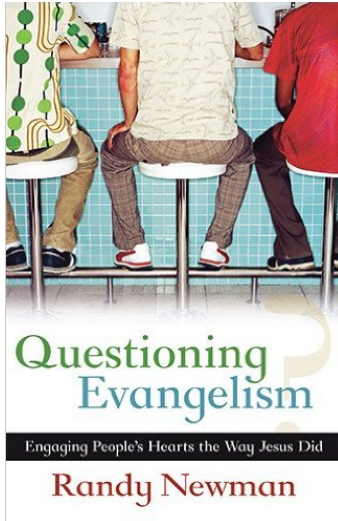
¹ See chapter 16, “Of Good Works,” in *The Second London Confession*. Found at <http://www.1689.com/confession.html>. Accessed May 30, 2017.

² “The Spirit’s Work,” in *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, ed. Arthur Bennett (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1975), 31

Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did

Written by Randy Newman

Bookstall Price \$18



Quick, turn the page! This is a review of a book about EVANGELISM! [cue suspenseful music] You know, that dreaded spiritual discipline that makes us want to go hide in the corner. If you're anything like me, the thought of evangelism makes me feel panicky and guilty all at the same time. "I need to evangelize more." "I just need to evangelize!" "How do I evangelize?" "What will they think of me?"

Randy Newman's book *Questioning Evangelism* has been a breath of fresh air for me. This book serves as an encouragement to go beyond simply

presenting the gospel to engaging non-believers' hearts and minds with the gospel. We often get lost trying to have all the right answers to the hard questions that come up against the gospel. Instead, Newman says, we ought to be the ones asking questions in conversations that lead to more conversations.

Newman isn't making a case for evangelism in this book—that's a given for him. He's advocating for another means of evangelism: asking questions. Have you ever noticed in the gospels that Jesus often responded to questioners with more questions? Why did he do that? Because he was engaging with the person, not the argument. Their heart was his aim and should be our aim too.

Questioning Evangelism is truly helpful, biblical, and FUN! Newman peppers his pages with conversations that practically demonstrate his principles. (A particular response from Aunt Vivian had me laughing.)

So, in the spirit of this book, I'll leave you with a question. What about God and his gospel has particularly captivated you? Do you want to share that?

— RECOMMENDED BY MEG KING

Excerpts from the Book

1

"I'm proposing a style of evangelism that is a dialogue more than a sales pitch. I'm pleading for conversations that lead to conversations, rather than presentations that lead to preconceptions. I'm encouraging the use of questions more than the use of answers."

—Why Are Questions Better Than Answers?, p. 37

2

"[W]e should approach evangelism with wisdom. This means that we become people who incarnate the gospel and speak of it freely because our hearts and minds have been captivated by it."

—Solomonic Soulwinning, p. 40

3

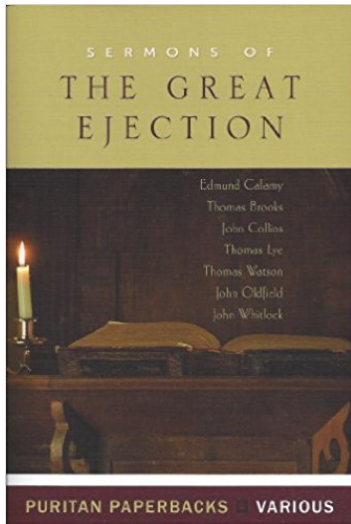
"If our goal is to avoid conflict, we need a different message [than the gospel]. If, on the other hand, our goal is to be truthful (something more difficult than open minded) and loving (something far better than tolerant), then we have the perfect message and ideal model of how to proclaim it."

—Why Are Christians So Intolerant?, p. 91-92

Sermons of The Great Ejection

Written by Various Authors

Bookstall Price \$14



The Act of Uniformity of 1662 prescribed that any minister in England who refused to acknowledge and conform to *The Book of Common Prayer* by August 14, 1662 would be ejected from their ministries by the Church of England. Over 2,000 evangelical ministers left their flocks rather than conform to what they saw as extra-biblical rules and regulations. *Sermons of the Great Ejection* is not the history of this tragic event but rather gives the reader an insight into the hearts and minds of the men that were affected. The book is a collection of seven sermons or writings

by seven prominent Puritan pastors such as Thomas Watson and John Whitlock. Each sermon is preceded by a brief biography of the pastor. The book concludes with an interesting catechism that outlines the “nonconformist’s” opposition to the Act of Uniformity and the direction the Church of England was moving.

The Bible tells Christians they should expect persecution from both the outside world (John 15:18) and from within the church (Acts 20:29-30). These sermons are the words of men facing persecution from people claiming to be brothers and sisters in the faith, and their watchword was to “preach as never to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.” Each of these sermons clearly express these men’s hope in the comforting hand of divine providence in the midst of difficult times and hardship.

Why should we read a collection of sermons from 1662 in 2017? To one not acclimated to reading Puritan writings, these sermons are a great introduction to Puritan preaching. The sermons are saturated in biblical exposition and practical application. Christians today continue to endure persecution and these words of warning, exhortation, and comfort are as applicable today as they were 355 years ago. These “last words” in opposition to conformance with “mainline” Christianity apply today as Christians face issues such as gender identity and same-sex marriage. The overall message of these sermons and this book is the timeless exhortation to “stand firm in the faith,” and this is a message that can’t be repeated enough in the times we live today.

– RECOMMENDED BY SCOTT SULLIVAN

Excerpts from the Book

1

“Take more pains and make more conscience of keeping yourselves from sin than suffering, from the pollutions and defilements of the day, than from the sufferings of the day. This legacy I would beg that you would consider; take more pains, and make more conscience of keeping yourselves from the evil of sin than the evil of punishment, from the pollutions and corruptions of the times than the sufferings of the times.”

– Thomas Brooks, “A Pastor’s Legacies”, p. 39

2

“Arm yourselves with resolution to suffer for the faith of the gospel and for the ways of Jesus Christ. As you should love the truth above your lives, so labour to be made willing to part with life, estate, liberty, anything to keep the ways of Jesus Christ.”

– John Collins, “Contending for the Faith”, p. 75

3

“Let me repeat my request to you all. Let none of you stumble or take offence at our sufferings...Let not our enemies rejoice or censure us, let not our friends sorrow as without hope, but let all wait and observe the issue, and I doubt not but God in his own time will manifest to the world, that his intentions (even in this thing) were good towards his faithful ministers and waiting people.”

– John Oldfield, “Stumbling at the Sufferings of the Godly”, p. 213



My son, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.

-Proverbs 1:10

Proverbs is a book of wisdom instructing us how to live in a way that honors the Lord. We become wise by first fearing the Lord. Solomon said, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7). Before we ask God to make us wise, we should ask him to give us a fear of him. Pray, “Lord, help me not to be a proud fool that despises wisdom but a humble follower of Jesus that fears you and desires wisdom.”

The simplicity of verse 10 teaches that we are not naturally wise because of our sin. Solomon is a father addressing his “son.” Children are not naturally wise and should not be left to “follow their heart.” They need parental instruction, even in the simplest of things. The command in verse 10 is not complex. It is told with such clarity and simplicity because sin makes us dense and slow to understand. We need clear, direct, and simple instruction in order to be wise.

One implication of this proverb is that friends matter. Those whom we hang out with influence us to either greater obedience or disobedience. Just to be clear, we’re all “sinners.” But within the context of Proverbs, “sinners” refers to those who sin habitually and are unrepentant. Their lifestyle is marked by sinning; it’s antithetical to the way of wisdom.

Part of what makes sinning so enjoyable for them is the company of fellow sinners. Greater joy comes when it’s done with others. That’s why they entice others to join in. Sinners love the sin but love it even more when it can be enjoyed and put on display before others. They love the affirmation at times more than the sin itself.

Christian, God made you for community. God himself enjoys perfect fellowship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He said that it was “not good” that Adam was alone, so he gave him Eve (Gen. 1:18). He promised Abraham many descendants (Gen. 15:5). Jesus gathered the twelve disciples as friends and companions during his earthly ministry. The church is a family of faith in covenant to help one another “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.” Therefore, we should not pull away from others for fear of being enticed but should invest more deeply in godly relationships.

Who has influence in your life? Who “entices” you for good or ill? Thank God for that trusted, godly friend. In turn, don’t entice one another to sin but exhort one another to greater holiness. Sinners love the companionship of others. But saints love their fellowship more. There is more joy in it; there is more selfless love. Most importantly, within the saints’ fellowship there is the experience of the gospel’s transforming power.

– BRAD THAYER

NEW MEMBERS



Patrick & Kaila
Caudill



Nadine Epperson



Kyle Gross



Delaney Harrison



Trisha Mukherjee



Garner, Linda, and
Mary Louise Sanford

