

AGENT PROVOCATEUR  
Acts 9: 36-42

When Laurie and I were first married we had a terrible bed. I don't know where we even got it but we had this hand-me-down double bed that I called the Valley of Death. It was terribly lumpy and it was so worn out in the middle that both of us would roll down into the middle. It was awful and we didn't sleep very well as a result. We had a friend who somehow found out about our problem and gave us a new queen sized mattress that was terrific. We slept on that mattress for the next 15 years! What a difference it made, and it was due to a simple act of kindness on the part of a friend.

Years later when both of our kids were in college Laurie and I went through some fairly intense financial pressures. College expenses can do that to you. At one point when it was the worst we had a number of things go wrong. Car problems, home maintenance problems and we hit a point where we had no idea what to do to meet those expenses. One night our doorbell rang. I went to answer the door, but when I opened it no one was there. There was just a paper bag sitting on the porch. I opened the bag and discovered some rocks inside...along with \$1500! Some kind soul had anonymously left that money on our doorstep.

I could tell you more stories, but those were just two instances in our lives when we were the recipients of kind deeds by brothers and sisters in Christ. What an encouragement those people were to us. What a difference they made in our lives. Today we're going to look at the example of a woman who made a difference in the lives of others by doing deeds like that. We'll find her story in Acts 9:36-42.

**TABITHA MAJORED IN GOOD DEEDS**

This is fairly early in the history of the church. Peter, one of the original apostles and the most prominent leader in the church, was traveling around ancient Israel visiting and encouraging believers. He had arrived at the town of Lydda.

Meanwhile, in the coastal town of Joppa, which is today a part of Tel Aviv, some events involving a woman named Tabitha were transpiring. Tabitha was also known as Dorcas. Those were the Aramaic and Greek words for gazelle, so her name was really Gazelle. She turned out to be as graceful as a gazelle, not in the way she moved but in the way she lived.

Luke, who wrote Acts, tells us that this woman was “full of good works” and did many merciful things for the poor. This was her character. If there was a family that was suffering illness or death or had a child born without fail Tabitha would bring them meals. The person who suffered a financial setback was not surprised when Tabitha, who had little money herself, pressed some cash into his or her hand and said “wish I could give you more, but know I’m praying for you. I’ll try to do more when I can.” The family that was so poor they had no clothes for their growing children were the grateful recipients of robes that Tabitha had sewn for them. The person feeling discouraged or lonely could count on Tabitha to drop by just to spend time together. Where there was a need, there was Tabitha. She did her deeds quietly, never interested in acclaim or notice, simply wanting to help in whatever way she could.

If you went to college you had a major. But that wasn’t all you did. I majored in mathematics. That wasn’t one of my saner decisions. I ended up taking what seemed to be an infinite number of calculus courses, courses on probability and statistics, numerical analysis, abstract algebra, operations research and others. I had more math classes than anything else. That didn’t mean that was all I took. I had classes on Shakespeare, the modern American novel, astronomy, U.S. history and ancient middle eastern history, on economics. Think of Tabitha that way. She had a life. She did lots of different things, but she majored in good works. What she did most was give to other people, usually in very practical ways. Chances were on any given day she would be engaged in doing some good deed for another person.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had said those words that have been the spark for this series of sermons. “You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world.” Then he said, “**Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven**” (Matthew 5:16). Tabitha took that to heart. Her life was all about doing good deeds. It was what she was known for.

What is your distinguishing characteristic? I suspect if someone asked people who know me what my distinguishing characteristics are they likely would say something like, “Well, he really believes in and talks a lot about the grace of God through Jesus Christ, he loves his wife and his kids, and he has a serious addiction to sports.” I admire Tabitha because if you asked people about her they would have said, “she is forever doing something for somebody else.”

Unfortunately Tabitha became very ill. We don’t know what disease overtook her, but whatever it was, it was fatal. She died. Verse 37 says her body was washed and

placed in an upstairs room. That was an unusual thing to do. In ancient Israel they didn't embalm bodies, so the practice was to bury them immediately. Putting her body in an upstairs room made no sense in that day.

### **TABITHA HAD A BIG IMPACT**

That impact can be seen in several ways in this passage. The first thing we notice is what Tabitha's Christian friends did after she died. We've already noted that keeping her body in a house was a highly unusual action. Without embalming in a relatively warm Mediterranean climate they didn't want to leave dead bodies lying around because bad things started happening to them fairly quickly. So why did they keep Tabitha's body upstairs instead of following the usual custom and burying it immediately? That odd action was prelude to another unusual act. Verse 38 tells us that the disciples had heard that Peter was in Lydda about 10 miles away. So they sent messengers asking Peter to come.

Why did they do that? Did they want him to come conduct a funeral for Tabitha? No, they sent for Peter because they were hoping he could do something about Tabitha's death! That's a bizarre idea. She was dead! That's a condition people don't recover from. They believed that followers of Jesus will be raised from the dead just like he was, but not immediately. They were all familiar with the fact that Stephen, one of the great leaders of the church had been killed and had stayed quite dead. They knew that was the norm, even for believers in Jesus. They had no reason to think that Peter could do anything about Tabitha. Yet it seems clear that they were hoping that this long shot would pay off. Who knows? We know that Peter is healing people. God seems to have given him power over disease. Maybe he can bring someone back from the dead.

Do you think they did that for every member of their church who died? Do you think that whenever someone died they sent for an apostle to see if he could raise that person from the dead? The answer is no. This story is recorded in Scripture because it was so extraordinary. Other people died and left the survivors grieving. They were no doubt greatly loved. But their survivors didn't entertain the idea that maybe they could be raised from the dead. However Tabitha made such an impact on people, she was so beloved by everyone, that when she died they simply could not accept it. They said, "We have to try something. Maybe it's absurd, but let's at least ask if Peter can do anything."

So Peter came. When he arrived they took him to the room where Tabitha's body was. We see another evidence of her impact in that everyone was crying and

showing Peter the clothes that she had made for them and given to them. I've been to several funerals recently. No one likes to go to funerals, but it's actually a good experience for us. A funeral or memorial service confronts us with the big picture, with deep questions of life. What do you want to happen at your funeral? What do you want people to say when they are summing up your life? Wouldn't it be awful if no one was especially sad that you were gone? Wouldn't it be horrible if there wasn't much to say about you because honestly you just lived for yourself and didn't have much effect on anyone else?

I've mentioned before the saddest funeral I ever was a part of the deceased was "successful," but pretty much wasted his life. The only thing people could remember him for was his golf game. It was pathetic. What do you want people to say when you're gone? He was a nice guy? He had a great investment portfolio? He sure loved his San Diego Chargers? Or would you like them to miss you for something more meaningful because you had impacted their lives? If we want to be missed because we gave so much to people, then we're going to have to Give to them. We're going to have to think about what they need and give to them, serve them as a way of life. We will have to live the way Tabitha did, at least to some degree. She was at the other extreme of the spectrum from the guy whose most noteworthy quality was his ability to hit a little white ball with a club. When she was gone people were devastated and weeping. They couldn't bear to let her go.

There's a story out of the old west about a wonderful, long-suffering woman who was married to a man who was selfish, mean, and spiteful. At one point the cantankerous old cuss became seriously ill. Finally he expired and the locals quickly put him in a pine box and carried his body to the local cemetery. As they were nearing the graveyard one of the pallbearers stumbled over a rock and fell, causing the casket to drop to the ground and break open. When it did the man they had thought was dead suddenly woke up, sat up and began swearing profusely at everyone. The man's poor wife had her husband back, and it wasn't good news. No one was happy to see this man back among them living, least of all his wife. Several months later the man became ill again, and once again seemed to die. Again he was placed in a pine box and was carried to the cemetery. As the approached the entrance the widow couldn't help herself. Without thinking she cried out, "Watch out for that rock!"

That was not what happened with Tabitha. Peter told everyone to leave the room. Then he got down on his knees and prayed. After that he simply said, "Tabitha, get up." And she did! Is this a fairy tale? Some think so, yet Luke was a sober

historian. He was a doctor, not some superstitious person given to flights of fancy. He recorded this story of this random woman that we would otherwise never have known anything about because the story was so astounding. This woman did so much for other people they couldn't bear to part with her, and for whatever reason, God enabled Peter to do the miraculous and return her to life.

There was an explosion of joy. Where no one was happy to see the mean old misanthrope alive again, everyone was thrilled to have Tabitha back. Word of her revival quickly got around. Verse 42 says, “**This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.**” Once again Tabitha had big impact on people. It all started with her incessant penchant for good deeds. If we want to have an impact on others, a good place to start is observing what a huge effect Tabitha had on people and noting how she did that.

### IMPLICATIONS

#### WE ARE ON EARTH TO DO GOOD FOR OTHERS

This is not about doing good works as a way of impressing God and earning our way into his kingdom. It is crucial to understand that what Tabitha did started with the fact that she knew God loved her and forgave her. She knew that Jesus Christ was God's Son, that he came to this world to give her what she could never earn for herself, which was forgiveness for all the wrong she had ever done and God's unconditional love and acceptance of her. She had been given assurance of eternal life. Her life was changed by that. She had peace and hope and joy because of what Jesus did for her, and she wanted to thank him. Her way of doing that was to give to others with the mercy and grace God gave to her. Her good deeds were not a way to get God to love her, but were a result of the fact that he loved her and had already forgiven her in Jesus Christ.

Tabitha never read Ephesians 2:10, but she understood its message and lived it out. This powerful verse follows on the heels of verses 8-9 where Paul tells us that we forgiven and welcomed into God's kingdom by grace through faith and that our salvation is a work of God. Then he says, “**For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**”

Author and pastor John Piper said, “God's revealed will for you is that when you get up in the morning you don't drift aimlessly through the day letting mere circumstances dictate what you do, but that you aim at something.” All right, but what are we to aim at? Ephesians 2:10 says the one thing is to do good works. It is to do good for people. That's why you're alive! God not only created all of us, he

also in a sense has re-created us in Christ. He has given us a new life. He has given us that new life not so that we can simply row our boat gently down the stream, sort of floating along through this world. He had a purpose in creating and in re-creating us through his grace. It is that we would, like Tabitha, go through our days doing good for other people.

This is a message that is quite consistent in the Bible. Galatians 6:9-10 says, “**Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**” Hebrews 10:24 says, “**Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.**” The old King James translation of that calls on us to think about how we can “provoke” one another to love and good deeds. It calls on us to become agents provocateurs, agents who incite others to action. The best way to incite others to action is by example. That’s our plan. We’re to be like secret agents planted in this world with a plan to foment a revolution, a revolution of goodness and love. It is a revolution in which people so continually do good things for other people that they will be astounded. They will shake their heads in wonder, but they’ll also be inspired. 1 John 3:17-18 says “**If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.**”

One of the current trends in the church is to organize programs of doing “good deeds.” We’re going to get people together to serve a meal at the Rescue Mission or something along those lines. These are good things. They encourage good deeds, and that’s wonderful. But notice that Tabitha’s good deeds were not part of a program, they were a way of life. They were a function of her character that came out in all her interactions with others. She didn’t sign up for a program. She simply lived continually thinking of how she could give to others.

Someone might say “so is this like that bumper sticker that tells us to do random acts of kindness?” It’s not contrary to that idea, but it goes way beyond it. It calls us not to random acts of kindness, which sort of suggests that I’m going through my day pursuing my business and on occasion I might randomly do something kind for someone else. This is about the kind of people we are. There is nothing random about it. It is about purposefully, intentionally seeking to do good to other people as a way of life. It is understanding that this is the reason I’m alive! I’m not going about doing my business and occasionally deviating from it to help someone else. This is my business! It’s why I’m alive! I’m here to do good to others, not to

take care of myself and on occasion from my surplus maybe to something nice for someone if my mood is right.

In his book, *Authentic Faith* (p. 113), Gary Thomas says, “We must be aware of the warped spirituality that separates ‘the spiritual life’ from our life of caring for others.” He calls that self-based Christianity. He goes on to say we need to take all the good things we’ve learned about growing and maturing in Christ and “put them to use by reaching out to those who need God’s love the most” (p. 114).

This kind of life is not always easy or gratifying. If we do good deeds for what we get out of it or for some desired result we are actually trying to manipulate or use others instead of love them, and we will likely be disappointed. I read an account by a pastor named Steve Shepherd that demonstrates this. He had a neighbor who did not mow his lawn. It was becoming an ugly, overgrown eyesore on the street but he seemed not to care at all. One day Steve was mowing his yard and thought that he could do a good deed for his neighbor. He thought he would do something that would get his neighbor’s attention and show him that Steve cared about him, maybe even give him an opportunity to tell him about Jesus. He went over and without fanfare mowed the guy’s yard for him. Nothing happened. Not a word from the neighbor. A few weeks later the grass was getting awfully shaggy again, so once again when he was mowing his lawn he went next door and mowed the neighbor’s lawn once again. Still nothing from the neighbor. No thanks, no acknowledgement whatsoever. Several weeks later he mowed the neighbor’s lawn for him again. Shortly after that the neighbor moved away without ever saying a thing! It happens. So we need to remember we do good deeds for others because that’s what God has called us to do.

The opportunities for good deeds are so abundant around us that the biggest problem for us is not to find some to do today but to narrow the field down to what we can actually accomplish. One recent Sunday morning Laurie and I were driving in toward the chapel. As we were coming off the freeway we saw a car stalled on the Lomas Santa Fe Drive off ramp. It was in a somewhat dangerous place, so I pulled over. Laurie and I got out and helped the driver push his car off the ramp and around the corner to the side of the road on Lomas Santa Fe. We had at least gotten him out of a potentially dangerous spot, but his car was still not working. I asked him what happened and he told me that he had been driving on the freeway when all of a sudden the engine just died and wouldn’t start again. He was quite distraught. He asked if we had jumper cables, which we do. However, I was faced with a problem. I have the keys to the chapel and I needed to get there to open it so

that the worship team could get in and start preparing for our services. In that situation I was literally the key person. If I stayed there to help the guy I was going to create a lot of problems for a bunch of people. But the parable of the Good Samaritan kept bouncing around in my head. A couple of religious guys passed by the victim of the mugging because they had to do their religious thing. I couldn't let that be me. Unfortunately there was another problem. I suspected that jumper cables wouldn't help. If his car just died while it was running on the freeway that had to be something other than a dead battery and I knew I wasn't going to be able to do a thing for the guy. Dilemma. Finally I said, "Look, I have to open our church building for some people who will be waiting for me to let them in so they can prepare for our worship services today. It's not far away. So I'll go do that then I'll come right back and do whatever I can to help you." He said that would be fine (what else could he say?) so we got in the car and drove to the chapel. I opened the door to the building and left Laurie there then headed back to see if I could help the stranded motorist. I'm going to be honest here. As I drove back I prayed, "Lord, you know this is a really bad time for me to have to do this. I've got a lot to do this morning, but I think you want me to do this good deed. However, I've got a problem as you know. I'm useless with cars. So I need your help on this big time. Whatever is going to happen needs to happen fast. It would be great if somehow he didn't need my help, maybe there will be someone else more useful already there." When I got back where we had left him he was gone. Apparently he had been able to get his car started somehow without my help. I cannot tell you how much I thanked God for that! But we made an effort at doing good.

This secret agent life of good deeds isn't an on and off thing. It's something we live 24/7. It will be how on a daily basis we relate to siblings, parents, children, spouses, neighbors, friends, even roommates. My last roommate before I got married was a guy name Nick. Nick was a great guy. Easy to get along with, smart, good sense of humor. But he was human and had his odd habits. One of them was he never really cleaned his bathroom. We each had our own, so I chose just to ignore that until the EPA came in and said it was a toxic waste site and they were taking over to clean it up. Well, it wasn't that bad, but it was disgusting. However, I just warned guests not to go in it and we lived with it. But he had another trait that grated on me. He would not rinse out his cereal bowl in the morning. He'd eat some cornflakes for breakfast then just leave the bowl on the table with a little bit of cereal still in it. Now that's not the worst sin in the world. He wasn't a serial killer (pun intended) or anything. But when I got home in the evening those flakes had dried and hardened on the bowl. Simply rinsing the bowl would have taken 30 seconds, but by the time I got to the bowl in the evening it required dynamite to



blast those flakes off the bowl. I could just ignore it, but if I did, pretty soon our kitchen would be packed with dirty bowls. It was embarrassing because we had people in the apartment a lot. I asked him repeatedly to just rinse the bowl. I even demonstrated for him how quickly it could be done, to no avail. I tried subtle hints, like waiting until he was in the apartment and saying, “leaving cereal in the bowl is FROWNED ON IN THIS ESTABLISHMENT.” Didn’t help. Then you start thinking those weird thoughts. He’s doing this just to annoy me. Or he thinks I’m his servant and it’s my job to chisel the flakes of his cereal bowl at the end of the day. You start plotting ways to start guerilla warfare and get back at him. Then came that moment when it hit me, I’m on earth to do good deeds to others. Maybe the best way I can provoke him to good deeds is by simply doing what I’m here to do. Wash his cereal bowl with a cheerful spirit because that’s why I’m here, and do it every day. So that’s what I did. It didn’t make any difference, but I kept doing it. Then it hit me that I could do even more. I could, gulp, boldly go where no one dared go before, his bathroom, and I could clean it. So I did. I know you’re hoping for the happy ending where he finally started rinsing his cereal bowls. He never did. But cleaning the bathroom did blow him away. And when I moved away to start my life here in San Diego, we parted great friends. He was one of the groomsmen in my wedding.

The opportunities are out there. All we need to do is open our eyes. Laurie and I have been amazed by good deeds that have been done to us. Recently our garbage disposal died and we had to put in a new one. Jeff Anstett told us “just go to Costco and buy one and I’ll put it in for you.” So he took time out of his day to come to our house, crawled under the kitchen sink and put in our new disposal. Sometimes the good deeds are a lot closer, like for a spouse or a child or parent. In fact that’s a great place to practice just looking for ways to serve someone else. I like to do little things for my wife just as a way of expressing that I’m thinking about her. Laurie and I both wear contact lenses which we have to take out at night and store in disinfecting solution. It takes only a moment to get her lens case out, put some of the solution in it and set her glasses out so that it’s all set up for her to take her lenses out. It is just a tiny gesture to tell her that I love her and want to serve her.

In his book, *Guerilla Lovers* (p. 94), Vince Antonucci relates a story of an amazing good deed some friends of his did. A group of them had decided to start a new church service in a pub. One of them, a girl named Samantha, noticed that a bartender was pregnant. It turned out that the girl had been a stripper. She had become pregnant which meant she could not continue her chosen profession so she

became a bartender. Samantha would talk to her each week and began praying for her. She asked God to help her see how she could show this woman God's love. He gave her a great idea. Throw a party for the woman. Samantha shared her idea with a number of other women and they got on board immediately. They went out and bought a big load of baby shower presents. Samantha then called the pub manager and asked if he would call the bartender and request that she come in an hour early. He complied and told the bartender it was really busy and they needed her in early. She came rushing in to find a nearly empty bar, and five Christian women with a table full of presents and food for her. She stood there stunned and speechless, unable to grasp what was happening. She couldn't understand why people who didn't even know her would throw a party for her and give her gifts. Furthermore, these were Christians, who are not known for their support of strippers, bartenders or women who get pregnant outside of marriage. The woman didn't know that God loved her, but she found out for the first time what it felt like to discover that maybe he does.

#### GOD WANTS US TO CARE FOR THE POWERLESS

Tabitha exemplified a particular way that God wants us to do good, and that is to do good for the poor, the powerless and the downtrodden in this world, those who are without privilege and influence. This is a common theme in the Bible. In the Old Testament you will see often appeals to care especially for the widow and the orphan, those who were most vulnerable in ancient societies.

Ezekiel 16:49 is a somewhat startling verse. It starts off, “**Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom.**” That's attention getting because it says Israel's sister was Sodom. In other words, Israel was related to Sodom and a lot like them. That's not good news for a nation that was supposed to be God's chosen people, given that Sodom was known for receiving special judgment from God because of their degraded moral condition. We know about Sodom and Gomorrah. They were a deeply depraved culture, morally as corrupt as any ever, so much so that God destroyed them. He wiped them right off the face of the earth because they were so bad. If God thinks you are even remotely related to them you're in a bad place.

But look at what Ezekiel says the sin of Sodom was. It was not what Israel expected, nor was it what we expect to hear. “**She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; They did not help the poor and needy.**” Uh oh. Overfed and unconcerned. They didn't help the poor and needy? That was it? Um, that's a problem because it hits awfully close to home. No culture in history has been as

overfed as ours is, and it is all too common for us to be unconcerned about the poor in the world. If that's true that makes us the sister of Sodom!

Well, yes, but you see that's all that Old Testament stuff. We're living in the new covenant and aren't under the law. In Galatians 2 Paul wrote about his early days as a follower of Jesus. He began telling Gentiles about how they could be welcomed into the kingdom of God fully through trusting in the grace brought to them by Jesus Christ. No need now for the Law of Moses. This caused some controversy because a lot of Jewish people felt the message should be that one needs to believe in Jesus, yes, but one needs to add that to keeping the Law. After all it was God's Law divinely revealed back in Moses' day at Mt. Sinai. Paul went to Jerusalem and discussed this with Peter and James. Those great leaders agreed that Paul was right. It was faith in Jesus that mattered, not the rules of the Law. Gentiles don't need to concern themselves with the rules of the ancient Law, nor does anyone for that matter. So they agreed that Paul should keep going and tell Gentiles this good news. However, the great leaders of the church did have one stipulation. In verse 10 Paul wrote, "**All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor.**" In God's new covenant he still wants us to especially care for the poor.

You most likely know the statistics. 26,500 children in the world die every day of preventable diseases. That's nearly 10 million a year. If you make \$50,000 per year you are in the top 1% in the world! Americans spend \$705 billion annually on entertainment and recreation. Americans spend \$65 billion on jewelry. According to *Businessweek* in 2011 we spent \$41 billion on our pets.

The issue here is not just dealing with poverty and disease. It also involves the spiritual dimension. As impoverished as much of the world is, its spiritual poverty is even greater. We have both a call and an opportunity to make a difference in this world by ministering to both the physical and the desperate spiritual needs all over the world. The picture can be somewhat overwhelming at times because the needs are so massive. At times the problem might seem so intractable that we become paralyzed. I could give every dime I have to the poor and it wouldn't put a dent in the problem, so what are we to do? We can think about three crucial ideas:

First, maybe I can't solve all the problems in the world, but I can help one person. That's a place to start. It may not change the world, but I can help change life for one individual and that's worth doing. Second, we are making a measurable difference. Through humanitarian efforts the child mortality rate in the world has

been cut in half since 1970. That figure of preventable child deaths of 10 million is depressing, but in 1960 when world population was much lower it was 20 million per year, so that has gotten much better. The percentage of the world's population classified as hungry has fallen from 33 % to 18% in the past 40 years. In 1975 only 35% of people in developing countries had access to clean water where in 2007 that had risen to 80%

Christians are making a difference. Last year *New York Times* editorial writer Nicholas Kristof, who is not a Christian, began a column noting that many evangelical Christian leaders act hypocritically and don't look anything like Christ. But then he wrote this, "But in reporting on poverty, disease and oppression, I've seen many others. Evangelicals are disproportionately likely to donate 10 percent of their incomes to charities, mostly church related. More important (they) go to the front lines, at home or abroad, in the battles against hunger, malaria, prison rape, human trafficking or genocide, and some of the bravest people you meet are evangelical Christians who truly live their faith. I'm not particularly religious myself, but I stand in awe of those I've seen risking their lives in this way and it sickens me to see that faith mocked at New York cocktail parties."

Finally, in his book, *A Hole In Our Gospel* Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, says that \$65 billion could end the most extreme poverty for a billion people on the planet! Stearns says that if Christians in America, who have a total annual income of \$2.24 trillion, increased their given to alleviating suffering overseas a few percent they could do dramatic things. Stearns says that \$65 billion (the amount Americans spend on jewelry each year) "could eliminate the most extreme poverty on the planet for more than a billion people." Talk about making a difference in this world!

We can make a difference in the world. There are so many ways that you and I can do that. We can minister to the poor right here in this country through the Bridge of Hope ministry, among many others. Our missions team is looking at some very exciting opportunities that you'll be hearing about in the near future. But you can also choose to help through ministries like World Vision and Compassion International that offer child sponsorships and many projects.

In his book, *Authentic Faith* (p. 126), Gary Thomas wrote, "If there is no evidence of social mercy in your life, if there isn't a single poor person, prisoner, man or woman with a disability, or refugee who can stand up and testify that you lived out and continue to live out your faith with compassionate care, then know this:

Scripture, the Christian classics, and contemporary faith all stand in one accord to challenge the sub-Christian religion that you have adopted... This might seem like a harsh statement, but you cannot read Scripture with any honesty... without being challenged by how central a compassionate outreach to the poor and needy is to the gospel message.”

I want to issue a challenge for each of us today. Make it a goal to do one good deed for someone each day this week. It could be as small as writing a note or calling someone just to express encouragement, or perhaps giving someone some money that they need, or even just a small task of serving a person. Then I would also like to challenge you this week to do one thing to help a needy person in this world. Perhaps that would be a gift for a downtrodden family, or maybe it will be sending some money for a child in another part of the world. The needs are easy to find, make it a goal to do something to meet a need.