

# God's Blazing Grace

©**Jiří Moskala**, Th.D., Ph.D.

Dean, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology

Andrews University

Probably all Christians know a song entitled “**Amazing Grace,**” which explains that divine grace is amazing because God is able to save broken, sinful people, and especially “a wretch like me.” Bible scholars and theologians describe God’s grace as “blazing, extraordinaire, intense, living, surprising, astonishing, glorious, sacrificial, working, redemptive, or blistering.” Bonhoeffer speaks about “**costly**” **grace** in contrast to “**cheap**” **grace** that does not demand authentic obedience in following Jesus. These different adjectives characterize God’s precious gift to humanity from various angles but do not do justice to the complexity and depth of this priceless commodity because no one term can adequately express its profound meaning.

- See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995).

- The word grace is very rich with different nuances and connotations because God’s grace is a pregnant term with a vast array of meanings. The apostle Paul speaks about “**the immeasurable riches of his grace**” (ESV, NAB, NRS, RSV) expressed in God’s kindness toward humans (**Eph 2:7**). Translators render the Greek expression *hyperballon* (a present participle of the verb *hyperballo*), translated above as “immeasurable,” in a variety of ways. God’s goodness is demonstrated toward us by “the exceeding riches of His grace” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, YLT), “the greatness of his grace” (CEB), “the surpassing riches of His grace” (NAS), “the incomparable riches of his grace” (NIV), or “the incredible wealth of his grace” (NLT).
- During His earthly ministry, **Christ was the embodiment of God’s grace** (John 1:14, 17). The Holy Spirit is “the Dispenser of divine grace” for He is called “the Spirit of grace” (Zech 12:10; Heb 10:29) since it is He who “takes the ‘grace of Christ’ and confers it on us.” It is significant that the term grace occurs in the Bible for the first time in the biblical account of the Flood. In this story, it is described that Noah found grace in God’s eyes (Gen 6:8) in the midst of God’s judgment upon the sinful world.
- The biblical texts are quoted from the NIV unless it is indicated otherwise.
- L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 426.

- The term grace (Hebrew *chen*, signifying “favor, kindness, charity, elegance, acceptance, benevolent action, goodness, charm, beauty, loveliness”) is derived from the root *chanan*, “to have mercy, be gracious, graciously provide, take pity on, show compassion, long for, inclined towards, or stoop in kindness to another person.” The equivalent to *chen* is the Greek term *charis*. Grace is God’s unmerited gift or favor, and it is an expression of His love toward humanity. Grudem defines it as “God’s goodness toward those who deserve only punishment” because they are sinners. Berkhof explains: “**It is God’s free, sovereign, undeserved favour or love to man**, in his state of sin and guilt, which manifests itself in the forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its penalty.” God gives grace to humans even though they do not deserve it. His kindness is shown to all people.
- God’s grace is always surprising and shocking, and it disturbs and may even offend some people. Confrontation with God’s favor humiliates because we want things we deserve and work for. Accepted grace takes our breath away, and we stand before the God of grace (1 Pet 5:10) in awe for His grace is always given in abundance. Paul explains that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20 ESV).
- There is only **one grace of God**, but it has many functions and flavors. God loves everyone without exception (John 3:16; Rom 5:8), died for all (Titus 2:11), and wants to save all (1 Tim 2:3–4). He freely gives people whatever is needed. The common or universal grace is a description of God’s beneficence to all, and it may lead people to salvation when they accept God’s goodness and benevolence. Common grace sustains life in general and needs to be differentiated from special grace. Let us unlock the wealth of divine grace with its multifaceted roles. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 239.
- L. Berkhof, 427.
- L. Berkhof, 435.

# How does grace work in our lives?

1. God cares for the physical life of our world and its inhabitants by **universal or common grace**. God's love is universal for He is good to everyone: "The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made" (**Ps 145:9** ESV). Jesus confirms that God provides in His generosity the basic blessings of life to everyone even though they are wicked (**Matt 5:45–48**). Daniel said to Belshazzar: "You did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways" (**Dan 5:23**). Apostle Paul underlines that our breath and movement is in God's hands (**Acts 17:25, 28**). God shows His mercy and gives gifts to all people, not only to believers. Each person experiences basic blessings that come from God (James 1:17). There are many natural graces of God: we can breathe, see, hear, smell, taste, touch, move, think, speak, feel, write, communicate, remember, love, create, reproduce, receive sunshine, rain, etc. God gives all of these and much more freely even though humanity is sinful and in an antagonistic or indifferent attitude toward Him. Theologians have recognized different aspects of common grace besides sustaining conditions for humanity's physical life, like God restraining His wrath, limiting evil, illuminating people with truth, goodness, and power (Ps 117:1–2; John 1:9; Rom 1:19–21). Murray describes common grace as "every favor of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God."
  - John Murray, "Common Grace," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 96. On common grace, see especially, Berkhof, 432–446; and Gruden, 803–815.

However, when one does not reflect about **physical** but **spiritual existence**, we need to move beyond God's beneficence, and sharply realize that without God and a conversion experience, "we are dead in our transgressions and sin" (Eph 2:1–3). How can we be resurrected to life and live a spiritually abundant life (John 10:10)? This is possible only because of God's special intervention on our behalf. The apostle Paul uses the divine "but" to contrast the change: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:4–5). We become alive only when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. This divine "but" changes everything and gives the bright future perspective of eternal life.

- The question poses itself: How does it occur because we know that a dead person is not sensitive to any of God's promptings? The answer is connected to God's grace in collaboration with **the work of the Holy Spirit and His Word (Ezek 36:26–27; 37:11–14; John 1:13; 3:5; 16:7–11; 1 Pet 1:23)**. Let us unfold this process by discerning the beauty and power of grace.

## 2. Prevenient Grace

2. **Prevenient grace** is a grace that comes before salvation and enables a spiritually dead person to hear God's voice, be awakened, and respond positively to God's call of love. What we cannot do for ourselves, God does for us gratis. He is in search of humanity, always taking the first step in initiating our relationship with Him. His question in the Garden of Eden resonates till today: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9). Jesus states: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32 ESV). He is "the true light, which gives light to everyone" (John 1:9 ESV). God always takes the initial move. He is the source of all good things in our life, the *summum bonum* (James 1:17; Pss 92:15; 115:3; 135:6), and leads us to respond properly to His desire to save everyone (Gen 3:9; Rom 5:8; 1 Tim 2:4; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet 3:9).

- Prevenient grace (i.e., initial or enabling or awakening grace; the English word *prevenient* is derived from the Latin *praevenire*, meaning "come before, preceding, anticipating, expectant") influences our heart and mind, and empowers our will to respond positively to His gentle call to return to Him, to repent when His Word is preached to us (Isa 45:22; Joel 2:12–13; Mark 1:15; John 12:32; Acts 2:38; Rom 10:17; Eph 2:1–5; 1 Thess 2:13). Paul explains it in a most eloquent way: "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (**Phil 2:13** ESV; see also **Heb 13:20–21**). The whole heaven is in collaboration to help humans find the right path to salvation. God sends holy angels to serve people to receive salvation (Heb 1:14). God's grace grips our spiritual life.
- Prevenient grace is God's initial step reaching each person with an invitation to respond to His offer of salvation, to be called out of sin to eternal life in Christ (1 Pet 2:9–10). It is a universal benefit of the atoning ministry of Jesus. In this sense, all "common grace is a subset of prevenient grace." God does everything possible to bring people to Himself (Isa 45:22; 1 Tim 2:4). God gives us the ability to respond to His call of mercy to receive His grace. However, people can harden their hearts and refuse to accept the gift of salvation (Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–27, 29; see also the second paragraph in conclusion).
- John W. Reeve, "Grace: A Brief History," in *Salvation: Contours of Adventist Soteriology*, ed. Martin F. Hanna, Darius W. Jankiewicz, and John W. Reeve (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018), 280.

- Knight rightly stresses that “most people have confused free will with free grace.” Without Christ we are not only dead but also slaves to sin and unable to follow God. However, with the preaching of the Gospel comes power to every person to respond to the words of salvation (John 5:24; Rom 10:17; Heb 4:12; 1 Pet 1:23).” Our will is enabled to be free to react and decide positively or negatively to God’s prevenient grace. Sinners do not have free will without prevenient grace. Reeve rightly explains: “With the God-empowered choice restored through prevenient grace, the sinner’s role in salvation is to allow or reject the gracious gifts of God’s saving operations on behalf of each and every sinner, empowering the saved sinner to will and act in accordance with God’s law in response to God’s love.” Prevenient grace enables people to accept or discard the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit awakens our conscience to receive forgiveness streaming from the cross of Calvary.
- George R. Knight, “The Grace That Comes Before Saving Grace,” in *Salvation: Contours of Adventist Soteriology*, ed. Martin F. Hanna, Darius W. Jankiewicz, and John W. Reeve (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018), 288.
- Reeve, 286.



# 3. Saving Grace

**3. Saving grace** proceeds from embracing prevenient grace, because prevenient grace comes before saving grace as was explained above. Prevenient grace leads people to accept God's saving or justifying grace after the initial affirmative reaction when they do not resist or reject it. We can stubbornly say no to God (Ps 81:12; Isa 48:4; Jer 5:23; 7:24). This is why every person is encouraged: "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb 3:7–8; 3:15; 4:7; cf. Ps 95:8; Prov 28:14; Eph 4:18, 30).

Repentance is not our work; it is the result of opening our heart to God and changing our mind and thinking under the influence of His Spirit and Word. God awakens the heart but never forces anyone to open their hearts to Him. Jesus proclaimed: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20 ESV). The Greek word *anōthen* in Christ's phrase "unless one is born *again* he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3 ESV), means "again" or "from above" (see John 3:3–8). This theological concept is further expanded in John 1:12; Rom 12:1–2; 2 Thess 2:13.

- When we accept God's Word and do not resist His Holy Spirit, then new life, spiritual revival, occurs within us, and we work and do things for Christ and others because we are compelled to do it by His enabling grace, Word, and Spirit (Ezek 36:25–28; 37:4–10, 14; Zech 4:6; Rom 8:11; James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23). If we do good works, we have nothing to boast about (Jer 9:23–24; 1 Cor 1:29–31), because God has already prepared the works in advance in order for us to walk in them (Eph 2:10). Only the Holy Spirit enables us to be different and act in harmony with His will. Christ is alive today to intercede for us as the only and all-powerful Intercessor to save us completely and enable us to do His will (Rom 8:34; 12:1–2; 1 Tim 2:5; Titus 2:11–14; Heb 7:25). Thus, obedience is only possible for the redeemed who are empowered to do so (Ezek 11:19–20; 36:27). Salvific grace is amazing grace because it can save broken people, and it is blazing grace due to the fact that it springs from the assurance that Jesus loves everyone. Because of God's saving grace repentant sinners are forgiven, saved, healed, liberated, kept, sustained, and redeemed. They now have good reasons to live with purpose. The meaning of life unfolds. God is generous, compassionate, caring, loving, and intervening on their behalf.

4. **Transforming grace** changes believers' lives, including their thinking, emotions, goals, motivations, desires, imagination, direction, service, and lifestyle. God's grace is amazing because it changes the human heart and behavior. This sanctifying grace transforms people's behavior; if it does not change them, it means that grace is not so amazing and powerful. What is humanly impossible, what even atomic energy cannot do, God can, for He makes believers new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:14). The fruit of the Holy Spirit is visible in their behavior (Gal 5:22). Paul speaks about this transforming power of God in Rom 12:1–2 and 2 Cor 3:18. Christ's followers become loving and lovable, trusting and trustworthy, changed into God's image with a new self (Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:9–10). It completely transforms our life, gives new orientations, attitudes, and values. Grace changes everything by the power of God's Word and the Holy Spirit.

5. **Empowering grace** equips believers for effective service and witnessing for God. The Holy Spirit gives them spiritual gifts to perform God's work, to serve and minister to people. Grace is a divine enabling (1 Cor 12:4–11, 27–31; Eph 4:7–16).

6. **Sustaining grace** is a power in life which keeps us in a vital relationship with Christ (1 John 2:24, 27). Thus, as we stay connected with Christ and persevere in our walk with Him, we constantly grow in Christ's grace and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18). This energizing grace gives new strength to endure pressures and hardships of life to be anchored in Christ, and provides vitality and joy to our lives.

7. **Triumphant grace** is the aspect of divine grace which works miracles in life and triumphs in everyday struggles over selfishness, self-centeredness, and enables one to be unselfish and focus on the needs of others. Grace gives victory over addictions and overcomes wickedness and evil day by day (2 Cor 3:18) and culminates these victories in the ultimate triumph by bringing believers to their eternal home (John 14:1-3). What God started for us, in us, and through us, He will bring to the final triumph at His Second Coming. Paul emphatically states: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). Grace triumphs over sin, hatred, and death. Christ is the Victor, so He can keep us from falling: “To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 1:24–25).

•God’s grace is all-present, all-comprehensive Christian experience of our human existence in the sinful world. Frame aptly expounds: “Grace appears in the benediction, the blessings of God. The apostolic greetings (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3, etc.) and benedictions (Rom. 16:20, 24; 1 Cor 16:23; and esp. 2 Cor 13:14) always emphasize grace. . . . So all the blessings of God come to us by God’s sovereign grace. Without his grace we are nothing. By grace comes forgiveness of our sins, the power to do good works, and the ability to serve the people of God.” The message of the book of Revelation begins and ends with an emphasis on grace (Rev 1:4; 22:21). Divine grace has different facets: from common grace through prevenient, saving, transforming, empowering, and sustaining grace to triumphant grace. We have underlined these seven functions of grace but stressed that all these roles belong to God’s one and unique grace.

• From this study, it is evident that the Bible does not state that it is impossible for the believer to turn away from or pervert God’s grace (Gal 1:6; Jude 4). The biblical teaching does **not** support the notion of **irresistible grace** as well as the concept of “once saved always saved,” because one can choose to reject or fall from God’s grace (see, e.g., John 3:36; Gal 5:4; 2 Cor 6:1; 2 Tim 4:10; Heb 10:29; 12:15; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 2:1-2). God’s grace is not forced on anyone. The nature of grace is voluntary and free, one can refuse, deny, and betray it. Believers do not earn or deserve God’s grace but receive it gratefully. The bright colors of God’s grace cannot fade and be exhausted, but can be expanded with new dimensions and actions. The apostle Paul explains the practical results of accepting God’s grace: “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11–13).

• John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 246.

• The term “irresistible grace” is a favorite phrase in Calvinism and is part of **the TULIP acronym** (total depravity; unconditional election; limited atonement; irresistible grace; and perseverance of the saints). We also do not use the term “sacramental grace” because we do not believe that the Last Supper or baptism is a sacramentum, and we also reject the phrase “infused grace” because the Lord does not infuse salvific grace into people without them accepting it first. God does nothing in redeeming people automatically, *ex opere operatum*, without the humans’ consent. God respects our decisions.

Key biblical texts underline the significance and benefits of the grace that comes from Jesus Christ: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (**2 Cor 8:9**). Paul exhorts: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (**2 Cor 13:14**). Apostle Peter’s declaration should be our daily experience with God that we may flourish in Him and go from victory to victory: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (**2 Pet 3:18**).

# The Meaning of Good Works



# First a crucial reminder

- **Our good deeds are not good for our salvation!**
- We are not saved by our performance or achievements...
- As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we confess that we follow Christ, keep His commandments and do good deeds not to be saved but because we are saved.
- Indeed, the Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus (John 5:24; Rom. 3:22–26; Eph. 2:4–9) apart from our works (Rom. 3:21, 28; 4:6; Gal. 2:16).

# Basics

- **Our performance, achievements, deeds, or even obedience to God have no power to earn our salvation.** These actions do not pave our path to heaven nor build God's kingdom on earth because we await the future establishment of His kingdom (Dan. 2:44–45).
- We believe together with the Reformers and many Protestants that we are saved ***sola gratia, sola fide, and solo Christo* meaning by grace alone, by faith alone, and by Christ alone.**
- Salvation is accomplished solely through God's will and actions. We accept that we are not saved by our works but only by the works of Jesus, by His victorious life and death (John 3:16; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:21) and by how He applies it to our lives today as our living High Priest, Lord, and King in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4:15–16; 8:1–2; cf. Ps. 110:1–2, 4; Zech. 14:9; John 20:28). His atonement on the Cross secured our salvation and nothing can be added to it from our side (Rom. 3:25; 5:8; Heb. 9:28).

# Basics

- Therefore we obey God and do charitable work **out of our gratitude for the free gift of salvation.**
- **Faith is not our savior—only Jesus Christ is our Savior.** Faith is the hand through which we receive God's grace; it is the means by which we accept His redemption.
- **Thankfulness motivates all our doing.** Even though we are saved by God's abundant mercy through faith alone, faith never stands alone.
- **Faith is the root and work is the fruit;** grace is the cause of our submission to the Lord, and because of grace we obey Him and keep His law.
- We strongly believe that **we are not saved by our works but solely by the works of Jesus,** by His victorious, unparalleled, and holy life and death (John 3:16; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:21). His atonement on the Cross secured our salvation and nothing can be added to it from our side (Rom. 3:25; 5:8; Heb. 9:28). He is alive today to intercede for us as the only, great, and all-powerful Intercessor (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25).

- **Here many make a mistake.** If good deeds are not good (or not good enough) for salvation, because we are saved by God's grace alone (Rom. 4:5), many people wrongly conclude that they are therefore **worthless**! This is completely false. Just bluntly wrong!
- This is a huge misunderstanding (Rom. 3:31; 6:1–4; 1 Cor. 7:19).
- Many Christians **undermine** the value of good deeds because of confusion of their role in a Christian's walk with God.

- **Yet, good work plays an unalterable, unmovable, and irreplaceable role in the Christian life.** Good deeds, works, or obedience are an **essential and indispensable** part of the Christian life.
- Meaningful work and acts of kindness are extremely important but their value is different from how they are normally regarded.

**We are not doing good things in order to be saved, but because we are saved!!**

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- Is there a way how to harmonize them? Luther ...

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- 1. Different **purpose:**
- 2. Different **definition of terms:**
- 3. Different **audience:**

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**James** – **faith** is a mere confession (“even the demons believe”); and **works** is the evidence of your living faith (“faith apart of works is dead”). We are saved by faith alone, but the living faith never stay alone!

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- Different **audience**: **Paul** – legalists, judaizers; **James** – libertinists, liberals

# What is the value of our good deeds?

- Why they are important?
- **What is therefore the function of good deeds?** Practically, they comprise five crucial roles:

# Why are good deeds/our works important?

**There are at least 5 reasons** why good deeds are good and essential.

# 1. Important for Salvation of Others

- Our work is not important for our salvation (our righteousness is like “filthy rags,” Isa. 64:6) but it is **crucial for the salvation/benefits of others**. People cannot be attracted to God and follow Him unless His followers demonstrate and show His virtues in their lives. Jesus underlines: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16 NIV; cf. 1 Peter 2:12), and again, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love each other” (John 13:34 NIV). Earlier the prophet Ezekiel points out that God’s children make the Lord alive or dead among people according to how they live (see Ezek. 36:22–23). God wants to vindicate His name and show Himself holy through them: “When I show myself holy through you before their eyes” (Ezek. 36:23b NIV; cf. Dan. 1:1–2). When people around us see the power and beauty of God’s transforming grace in our lives, they will thirst for a similar relationship with God. Good work makes our witnessing effective (Acts 1:8); it makes our story relevant. Meaningful actions are mighty instruments in favor of evangelism to fulfill God’s work, His mission and vision.

## 2. Our Good Work Reveals the Quality of our Relationship with God

- Our work reveals the quality of our relationship with God. **A fake friendship** cannot last. Our behavior speaks stronger than words as to whether our faith is alive or dead (James 2:14, 17–20, 26). It is a **thermometer** that shows the reality of our Adventism, if God is indeed the Lord of our lives. It is a way for our eyes to be opened in order to realize if our confessions of faith match our actions. Jesus proclaims: “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 15:14 NIV). John powerfully declares that anyone who claims that he loves God, “yet hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20 NIV). James brings it to the practical level and argues that failing to help people in need proves that such faith is empty, dead, and useless (James 2:17, 20).

### 3. Good Deeds make us pleasant and people easy to live with – it must be fun to live us

Good deeds are important to make us pleasant and easy people to live with (Rom. 12:9–21; Gal. 6:2; 1 Peter 2:11–12). Our joyful lifestyle must be positive and thus will be contagious. Obedience to God and constructive actions causes our Adventism to be attractive, making it exciting and enjoyable for others to live with such caring individuals. It is a pleasure to live with loving and kind people. **Seventh-day Adventist Christians should be known for their kindness, thoughtfulness, sensitivity, and compassion. When we know Christ, everyone must recognize it and see the difference—our spouse, children, friends, colleagues, students, neighbors, people in the shopping malls, busses, trains, or airplanes, and even our cats and dogs.** God's grace, His Word, and His Spirit change believers in such tangible ways that it is good and desirable to live with us because of our positive attitudes and the peace and joy that surrounds us (Gal. 5:22).



## 4. Good Work Helps Us to Grow in Christ

- Good work is important for maintaining and growing in our relationship with Christ (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 1:10). **Daily prayer, regular Bible study, witnessing, fasting, systematic giving, tithing, visiting, healthy diet, stewardship, building projects, community service, and involvement in worship are significant habits that help us to enjoy a good spiritual life.** The more we are engaged in worship on Sabbath, the more we will be engaged in working for God during the week. The more we enjoy God's presence in life, the more we will joyfully explain to others about His goodness and mighty works. These variety of good deeds are vital for **developing discipline** in life because through quotidian habits discipline is built. Discipline is crucial as without it there is no wisdom, success, happiness, or spiritual growth (Prov. 1:7; 3:11; 5:23; 10:17; 12:10; 13:18; 15:32; 19:20; 25:28). Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), thus cultivating self-control and discipline is a sign of God's Spirit working in us.

- **Like plants**, relationships require a pattern of give-and-take in order for them to grow. If you are in a relationship in which you are constantly taking and never giving anything in return, your relationship will eventually stop growing.

## 5. Good Deeds Bring a Deep Satisfaction and Happiness

- Good deeds bring a deep satisfaction and make those who do them happy. **Our emotional intelligence will grow.** Good work does not only affect people around us, but has **a very positive influence on us, our feelings, and thinking also.** Good conduct and actions make us cheerful. The Apostle Paul correlates that aspect with giving when he emphasized Jesus' statement to the elders in Ephesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Act 20:35 ESV). Affirmative emotions arise from supporting others and helping them. Creating a smile in a person's face or in their heart produces joy, peace and gladness which gives health to the whole person. Working for others strengthens the happiness of our own relational and social well-being. **Feelings of gratification and approval** are the results.

# Our Identity: What We Do

- These five functions of our good deeds **reveal our identity—who we are**. They, therefore, confirm that we are God's children (Rom. 8:12–16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:58; 16:10; 2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 1:6; 1 Tim. 5:10; 6:18; Titus 2:14; 3:1, 8; Heb. 10:24). Paul explains that what really counts in life is “faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6). This is why God's followers are exhorted: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb. 13:16 ESV). “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58 NIV).

How can we do good work/things when we are not good (we are sinful)?

**“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,** how much more will **the heavenly Father** give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13 ESV)

## Eph 2:1-3

- Without Christ, we are dead and alienated from God.
- We are actually God's enemies.

## Eph 2:4-10

“**But** because of **his great love for us**, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> **For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**” (NIV)

# Manuscript 36, 1890, in *Faith and Works*, 24

“**The Lord Jesus imparts all** the powers, all the grace, all the penitence, all the inclination, all the pardon of sins, in presenting His righteousness for man to grasp by living faith—which is also the gift of God. If you would gather together everything that is **good and holy and noble and lovely in man** and then present the subject to the angels of God **as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit**, the proposition would be rejected as **treason**. ... Christ for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. And any works that man can render to God will be far less than nothingness. My requests are made acceptable only because they are laid upon Christ’s righteousness. The idea of doing anything to merit the grace of pardon is fallacy from beginning to end. ...”  
Man can achieve no praiseworthy exploits that give him any glory.”