

CREATED FOR GOOD WORKS

Ephesians 2:10

Everyone I have met values good neighbors and has definite ideas about what constitutes a good neighbor. If you ask them about what makes a good neighbor, they always speak about their actions. The connection between one's activity and peoples' perceptions about them prepares us for Paul's comment that we were created to do good works. This lesson will therefore consider the responsibility to do good works and its connection to Jesus as part of this month's exploration of the purposes Jesus gives to our lives.

Jesus' good works and our good works

Paul wrote to the Ephesian church that Christians are "created in Christ Jesus for good works"¹ (*Ephesians 2:10*), works we should zealously pursue (*Titus 2:14*). While "good works" might seem like a vague category, Luke's comment in Acts 10:38 gives the phrase a definite shape – he wrote that Jesus "went about doing good".

Jesus' example, therefore, provides the shape of the good works we should zealously pursue. Consider the following features of Jesus' good works and how they offer a template for our own good works.

- Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, went throughout Galilee "healing every disease and affliction among the people" (*Matthew 4:23*).
- His actions, however, sought to do more than merely heal peoples' afflictions; Jesus intended his good works to evidence his messianic identity and his authority over God's kingdom (*Matthew 11:2-5; 9:1-8; 4:23; 28:18*).
- Even though he intended his actions to announce the arrival of God's kingdom and his authority over it, his good works were motivated by genuine compassion and focused on the poor, marginalized, and suffering people of his world (*Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 4:23; cf. Deuteronomy 10:12-19*).
- Additionally, Jesus' good works faithfully illustrated his own teachings about God's will (*Matthew 7:12; 22:34-40; 23:23*).
- While we do not have Jesus' ability or authority to perform miraculous good works, we nevertheless can see a pattern in him that ought to define our own good works. Consider:
 - Jesus taught that we are to act in ways that causes people "to see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven" (*Matthew 5:16*).
 - Our good works will attract people to God when they follow Jesus' divine example, an example that emphasizes:

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- Genuine love for others (*Matthew 22:34-40; 5:43-48; John 13:34-35; cf. 1 John 4:7-11*).
- Selfless service to others (*Matthew 7:12; 20:20-28; 25:31-46; John 13:3-17, 34-35; cf. 1 John 4:7-11*).
- Unity under Jesus' sovereignty (*John 17:20-21; Ephesians 2:10-22; 4:1-3*).
- By committing ourselves to the good works shaped by Jesus' example and teachings our works, like Jesus' works, evidence the reality of his kingdom and of God's "excellencies" (*1 Peter 2:9-12*).
- But we must not miss an important point – good works tie to proper living; they cannot be separated out from the devotion of one's entire life to God's control (*1 Peter 2:9-3:12*).

Applications

- Jesus gives us a purpose in life – he "created" us to perform good works.
- Our good works must intentionally and purposefully point to Jesus.
- Our good works point to Jesus when they seek to express his love and care for humanity through our efforts to help the people around us.
- Our good works ought to make the world around us a better place by virtue of our presence and activity in it.

Jesus has given us the purpose of being good people who do good works in the world, works that reveal His sovereign identity through the ways it transforms our lives. We should therefore ask ourselves whether our lives reveal a pattern of good works that direct peoples' attention to Jesus.