



Titus (Part 5) – Difficult Devotion

Mike Dsane – August 31, 2014

Good morning, Village Church. How are you guys? This is my fourth service this weekend. I've been fully blown away every time by the work these men and women did as part of the choir and the proficiency of the band and just the grace of the Lord toward us in teaching us diversity even in our music. I'm just really, really grateful for this weekend. It's incredible.

I'm also going to be confessional. I'm a little jealous, because I want to be part of the choir. Here's the thing. I grew up in churches that had choirs like that. First of all, they had robes, so I'm a little jealous we don't have robes. You had some main pieces. You had the music director, who kind of kept the band together. Then you had the choir director, who was making the vocals tight. But what's missing in every church that has a choir is the crowd director. In the hip-hop culture we'd call that a "hype man."

I'm thinking that should be my role in this. While they're directing the voices and the bands, I would direct you. You guys did well. You clapped on beat. I was so proud. The next step is adding some motion to your clapping, like getting it here and getting it here. Then, if you get really fancy, adding some snaps to it. I feel like I can direct you in that. So pray that the Lord would place that on somebody's heart to make that happen. We'll just keep that under advisement.

In all seriousness, my name is Mike Dsane, and I'm one of the Groups ministers here at the Flower Mound Campus. I'm grateful to be before you again, sharing the Word of God and asking the Lord to challenge and encourage us this morning. I love this time of year, because sports are back. College football started this week. This is the end of the season when ESPN is weird.

There's this weird season where ESPN shows stuff that's just like, "Why is this on?" Like X Games. It's a sport. You could get injured doing it. I get it. It's kind of cool, but I never wanted to be Tony Hawk, so that wasn't my thing. But then like the World Series of Poker. Do you know what I never did in PE class? Learn how to play poker. It's not physical education.

The one that's the worst of them all is the Scripps National Spelling Bee. That's not a sport. There's no athletic endeavor in spelling. Here's the truth of the matter. I actually just have a beef with spelling bees, because I did terrible at one in the fourth grade. I was a fairly good speller. I'm being modest. I was good at spelling. Every Friday we'd have the spelling test, and I was getting 100s on the regular. I owned those jokers.

So they said, "Hey, we're going to do a spelling bee," and I'm like, "All right, this'll be great." I didn't even study the first-round words, because I was like, "These are the words for the kids who get the blue ribbon for participation, but I'm winning this thing." I'm not even worried about the first round. I get up there, and my first word is *loch*. Now I know it's not L-O-C-K like normal *lock*, because it wasn't going to be *that* easy in the first round, but I didn't know any other way to spell *lock*.

Here's a telltale sign if somebody is in a spelling bee and they don't know the word. They say, "Hey, spell *apple*," and they lean into the microphone and say, "Country of origin, please?" They have no idea. "Could you use that word in a definition?" No idea whatsoever. So I say to the moderator, "Can I get a definition?" She gives me a definition.

I still don't know what it is. "Can you use it in a sentence?" She says something about the Loch Ness Monster. At this point, I should just own the fact that I don't know how to spell the word, that I didn't do the work on the front end to prepare and get myself ready, that I overestimated my ability to spell and underestimated the difficulty of this competition.

No, I just got angry and started blaming everything else. Like, "How are you going to give me a made-up word about a made-up creature? What's the next word you're going to give me? What 9-year-old can spell *loch*?" So I spelled it L-O-C-K and got eliminated in the first round. The problem with that is I walked in with this arrogance, thinking I had mastered the simple stuff ("Let's move on to something more advanced"), and I was eliminated early.

I'm afraid with our text, as we step into Titus 3... It's very practical and very simple, but though it's simple, I would say to you it's not easy. If we're not careful, we're going to assume we have this and have advanced past it and miss what the Lord is trying to challenge our hearts in. I want to steady our focus as we walk into Titus, chapter 3, to understand what the Lord is going to be doing. Allow me to pray, and then we'll jump into the text.

Lord Jesus, I'm grateful. I'm grateful for all that you've been doing in hearts this weekend from every facet, from even just hearing what's going on in our church, from things like covenant member meeting and elder-led prayer and having the opportunity to have Serve Connect and all of the things we're doing, the diversity of music that is showing us in some way, shape, or form what heaven will be like, with a difference of style and a difference of culture. Lord, I'm grateful for that.

I'm grateful for the challenge you've laid before us with your Word. But more than that, I'm just grateful that your presence is here. Lord, that's why we're glad, because you're worthy of the highest praise. So Lord, I'm thankful to be in your presence with your people, sitting under the authority of your Word, and I pray that you would challenge our hearts, encourage our hearts, and devote us to the good work you've called us to in these next few moments. It's in your matchless name I pray, amen and amen.

If you haven't been with us, let me give you a little bit of recap of the book of Titus before we jump into the actual text of Titus, chapter 3. The book of Titus is a letter Paul is writing specifically to Titus who is leading the church. You need to know Titus is not an apostle; he's an apostolic delegate. That's the idea: he doesn't have the office, but he's an extension of the apostle Paul's authority, power, and leadership.

He is on the island of Crete, and Paul is sending this letter because the church seems to be out of order and unhealthy, and it's Titus' job to set that order. When he begins to write the letter, the first thing he writes is to remind Titus of the promise of God that's manifested through Christ Jesus from a God who never lies. Just an encouragement to remember he is doing the good work of the good Savior and to be confident in that. From there, he begins to challenge Titus.

"Titus, I want you to set and appoint elders." He is going to give him the qualifications of what an elder looks like. One of the beautiful qualifications of that is leading the little church, the home, well before leading the big church, the actual church, well. So just some strong qualifications that are necessary for every believer but specifically for the qualifications of elders. Then he moves on to not only are elders going to help order the church and help set up sound doctrine, but elders are also going to refute false teaching.

Paul does a great work of explaining who the false teachers are and what they are teaching and calls Titus and the elders he'll eventually appoint to silence those who are doing the false teaching. Then

chapter 2 shifts a little bit, and it goes from the opposition to the church to how those believers in that context should do life together. He begins to explain for the older men to be role models, to be the dignitaries of the culture, leading and showing the example for how to walk before the Lord.

Then he begins to challenge the older ladies to use their discretionary time not to be slanderous and not to be drunk with wine but to invest in the next generation. Then he challenges the young ladies to love their homes, love their husbands, love their children, and not see that as a burden but as a glorious call from God to be loving and investing in the lives they are the most near to.

Then he challenges the young men, "Be self-controlled." He challenges the bond servants, those who are in indentured service because of some debt they owe, that though it may feel uncomfortable, though it may even be unjust, they're called to work faithfully and be above question in the way they conduct themselves. Then he ends chapter 2 reminding them of the grace that has been made available to them through Jesus.

I tell you all of that because there's a subtle shift as we move into chapter 3. He begins to talk about this is not just how you conduct yourselves within the church, but this is how you conduct yourselves in the view of the surrounding culture that may or may not believe in the same way you believe. So we'll go to Titus, chapter 3, starting in verse 1, if you'll grab your Bibles. If you don't have one, feel free to grab one of the hardback black ones in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, that is yours to keep. That's our gift to you. We'll be starting in verse 1.

"Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have

believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all."

Right off the bat, Paul says something I'm afraid may be one of those questions that eliminates us in the first round. I'm afraid it may be one of those things that is too difficult to be coming early on, when he says, "Be submissive to rulers and authorities, be obedient, be ready to do every good work." That idea of *be submissive*... That word literally means to be subject or to arrange or put oneself under the authority of.

This idea of being under the authorities and rulers wasn't just scriptural authority, wasn't just church authority; it was cultural authority. It was governmental and political authority. It doesn't just seem to be something Paul is writing to those who are in Crete. It seems to be something that is redundant over again throughout Scripture.

In Romans 13, Paul talks about how all governmental authority has been elected and placed by God and we should be subject to that. Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter when he says we should be subject to all earthly authority, even the emperor. Here is the challenge in that: the political climate of their day. That time period was called the *Pax Romana*, or the Roman Peace. It was 217 years of Roman rule and civilization and expansion of the Roman Empire.

To be Roman, this was a time of flourishing. This was a time of peace. This was a time when you weren't fighting civil wars like in the days of Julius Caesar. This was a time of flourishing and making the world more Roman. But for those who weren't Roman, it was a time of oppression and becoming second-class citizens in their own homes.

This idea gave birth to these emperors, Augustus and a lot of names that maybe you've heard throughout history. One of those emperors was Nero. The theologians think the very earliest date of the possibility of writing Titus would be AD 61, the very latest being AD 67, somewhere in that range. During that time, Nero was the emperor of Rome.

Nero was said to be a man who was more focused on pursuing his passions and his whims and his indulgences than he was attending to the affairs of state. He would give stuff away to his advisers while he would go on vacation and just enjoy the life. One of those such occasions he did that, he was on vacation and a fire started in the Circus Maximus in Rome. The fire was so bad because of the winds sweeping through the town that it burned for nine days and burned a large portion of Rome.

The people, frustrated with Nero and his leadership, began to blame Nero, even saying he himself set the fire. Nero, looking for a scapegoat, looking to take the guilt and the attention off himself, began to blame the Christians of that day. His argument wasn't that they set the fire, because he couldn't prove that. His argument was that they hated all of mankind and, therefore, they were the scourges of the empire and needed to be removed from the Roman Empire.

Then he launched a campaign of persecution. His campaign of persecution had elements where he would put wax shirts on believers and affix them to trees and light them on fire so he could light his gardens. He would take bags of wild animal skin and sew Christians in the bag and throw them to wild dogs so they could be devoured by the dogs. I think this goes without saying: Nero was a sick, sick man.

But in that, when the New Testament authors are penning the Scripture and saying, "Be submissive to authorities, be submissive to rulers, be submissive to the political entities that are above you," they are saying, "Even the emperor be submitted to, though he is unfaithful, wicked, and unjust." I don't think this is just something Paul likes to say as a theory in letters he writes to other people. I think it's something Paul lived by.

If you look at Acts, chapter 25, it's the account of Paul in the middle of an appeals process. He has been arrested and said to be unfaithful and spreading dissension and myths, so he's appealing to the process, and he's in front of the governor Festus. He's speaking to Festus, and he says in Acts 25, verse 11, **"If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I**

do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar."

Literally, Paul's statement here is, "I will put myself in front of the authority of the government, and whatever you think is best... If you find me to be evil and wrong, I will not escape whatever penalty, even up to death. I will accept that, if that's what you govern to be right. But if you can find no wrongdoing in me, I'm not even going to justify myself. I will still stay within the governmental system, stay within the legal parameters, and I will appeal to the highest level of authority I can appeal to. I am going to appeal to Caesar."

Paul was subjecting not just his ministry, not just his innocence or guilt, but even his life to the power of unjust rule. Hearing this, probably the first thing that rises up in us because of our American-ness, because of what we feel, is, "But wait a minute. What if it's unjust? What if it's unfaithful? What if it's untrue? Don't we have the right to speak to that, combat that, stand up and proclaim that to be wrong?"

Let me say two things here. First, I think that's true. I think Paul is not saying to subject yourself to the government in opposition to subjecting yourself to God. I think if the government is asking us to do something wicked, do something unfaithful, do something that is outside of our conviction and our obligation and duty to God, then it is our call to, while peacefully, be disobedient. But I think oftentimes for us when we complain about our government, it's not a matter of conviction; it's a matter of preference, and that's different.

In those instances when we are allowed to civilly disobey, when we are allowed to be disobedient to what the authority is that is over us, I think Paul even gives us the method of how we do that faithfully. Verse 2: "Speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, be gentle, show perfect courtesy toward all people." That idea of being perfectly courteous is the idea of a whole, fully fulfilled, fully built out courtesy of any and every kind.

In Greek literature, that idea was to be a meek and gentle friend. Being a meek and gentle friend in that culture meant this. It was a judge who would be lenient in his judgment or his punishment, or it was being good to your own people but being difficult and fighting against those who were your enemies. It was this idea of being willing to endure discomfort patiently over time. It was this idea of being this meek and gentle friend who was willing to absorb and, even when it was times of conflict, to not do the full measure but to be lenient in fighting against that.

Here's the difficulty of what Paul says. In a Greek mentality, you did that for friends, but you didn't do that for enemies. Paul says to do that for all people. Here's my struggle with that "all people." It means all people. Like trying to spell *loch*, you can go for language of origin. It's Greek, and it means any and every kind of people. You can use it in a sentence and it means all people. It just means all people.

For us, that means it's that neighbor who constantly steals your trash can. You have to be gentle and kind to him. You have to be kind to the kid to whom you have said for the 47,000th time, "Hey, don't play on my lawn." For the boss who's asking you to do something that's unethical and illegal, though you can stand against that, there's a call to be gentle and not speak evil, to not be quarrelsome, to show perfect courtesy even to that person.

To the spouse who's unloving and unfaithful and not willing to serve, there's a call to be gentle, to be loving, to be a meek and gentle friend, even when you don't feel like they deserve it. Here's how I know Paul is talking about all people, because the next comparison he makes is verse 3: **"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another."**

There are two things here. First, he's admitting dealing with people who are outside of the faith can be messy, difficult, and painful; that they are disobedient, that they're led astray, that they have malice and envy in them, that they hate other people and are hated by other people. He's admitting this is a difficult environment, but he's also admitting we were this way also. When we were ruled by our sin nature, when we were pursuing our sin, we had the tendencies to be disobedient, to be foolish, to be deceived.

He seems to put it in two categories. The first category shows there is this brokenness, this rebellion, in the relationship with God. We are foolish or lacking spiritual understanding. We are disobedient to God. We are deceived, and we are pursuing passions and pleasures. One theologian said that when we have our passions satisfied, then we feel pleasure, and when we want to satisfy our pleasures, we do that with passion. There seems to be this deep interlocking of doing whatever it takes to feel that pleasure, to satisfy that passion, and it puts us in rebellion against God.

The second category may be just as bad. We don't seem to do well with others. We are full of malice, not wanting to do good to others, only intending hurt and harm. We are envious, never satisfied

with what we have and jealous of what everyone else has. We are hated by them, and we are hating one another. So there's a fracture not just in our relationship with God but also in our relationship with everyone else.

Then Paul brings in hope. **"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared..."** Let me expand on goodness and loving-kindness. *Goodness* in that culture meant to be good, to be kind, to be generous. So while we were selfishly indulging, trying to pursue our passions and pleasures, while we were thinking of no one else and not being able to do relationship with anyone else, the generosity of God was afforded to us.

Loving-kindness... The word they have in the Greek is *philanthropia* and actually is where we get the word *philanthropy* or *philanthropic*. It's that idea of being generous toward someone who cannot pay back, someone who's weaker. It's the idea of a benevolent sovereign saying to those who are either disobedient or weak... He's either lifting off suffering or showing affection for those who are beneath.

It's the idea of this all-powerful God coming down and giving grace to man out of love for him, though man can't pay it back. While we were both greedy and disobedient, the loving Sovereign, even in our disobedience, showed his love and commended and lifted suffering off of us. That appeared for us, and he saved us.

Verses 4-7. If you write in your Bible, highlight in your Bible, draw in your Bible, this is something you want to circle, highlight, and underline. It is one of the most robust doctrines of salvation you will see in the New Testament, because Paul walks us through what it looks like for the Lord to save us. In verse 5 he says, "He saved us, not by any works of our own, of our righteousness."

It's a reminder that before the regenerating, awakening, reviving work of Jesus on the cross, we were dead men with hearts that did not beat, and any of our attempts at righteous action were filthy rags before the Lord. But he saved us not according to anything we attempted to do in our own righteousness, but according to his mercy. Then he washed us and regenerated us. He renewed us by his Spirit that was poured out on us richly by his Son Jesus Christ.

Notice right there the fullness of the Godhead being engaged in salvation, the full power of heaven, the full power of the Trinity, having the intention to exude mercy, to give salvation to mankind, to those he was going to call his. The fullness of the Godhead was at work. God who was our Savior

sent his Spirit to wash and renew by being poured out by his Son so we could be saved, that we might be found innocent, justified before God, that he could make us heirs of a hope of life of him eternal. That's something that's really, really good for us.

In fact, Paul says the saying is trustworthy. That saying, that this saying is trustworthy, shows up five times in the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus. Every time, it's this idea of, "Mark it down. Memorize it. Repeat it. Sing it. Tie it to your heart. Make sure this is something you apply daily, because you must know this, either for your correction or for you to walk rightly. You need to know the grace of God for you."

Paul is saying, "This is something you rejoice in, sing about, tie your heart to. You must know the work of God for you. Insist on these things, that our people would be careful to devote themselves to doing good works, for this is excellent and profitable for people." It seems like over and over again Paul keeps saying, "Good works," like good works are paramount to this idea of salvation, to this idea of gospel.

If you've been around, if you heard me speak a few weeks ago, I talked at length about how there's nothing we add to Jesus' work, that there's no way we can produce our own righteousness. We talked at length through that. So you're like, "This seems contradictory to that." Or maybe you've just been around The Village for a while. We've said often there's no king but Jesus, that he is the one who does the work and we trust in the work he has already completed and done.

So why is Paul emphasizing good works as if it seems to be something I need to do to be saved? Let me ease your heart. This is not a contradiction. What saves you *is* gospel belief. We have said all along throughout the series that gospel belief precedes gospel behavior, but the evidence of that gospel belief *is* the gospel behavior.

That call to do good works is not something you have to do to earn salvation, but it *is* the evidence of the fruit of that salvation. In the very same way that a tree produces its fruit to know what it is, our good works the Lord is calling us to do are the evidence of what he has done in our hearts by the renewing and regenerating of those hearts.

Maybe the best way I can illustrate it is this. I love my wife. I do not love folding laundry. So when I fold tee shirts into perfect squares that ultimately I'm going to have to unfold and iron because I folded it, when I'm done I don't turn to her and be like, "Hey, will you marry me now?" because

we're already married. She already loves me. I've already received her love, and out of a response to that love, I do things like folding laundry.

Because I love my wife there are a lot of things I do in response. I fold laundry. I watch *Grey's Anatomy*. There are all types of things I don't want to do, but I love her. (Pray for me, the whole *Grey's Anatomy* thing. As confession, I put that out there before you. Take that before the Lord.) There's this understanding that in response to my deep love for her I do some things.

Well, in the very same way, in response to what we just read in verses 4-7, the regenerating and saving work of God through his mercy to justify us and make us heirs of hope, we are obedient to him and we do good work to the world around us, even those who don't believe. This is excellent. Holding to the teaching is excellent. Doing this work is profitable for all people.

Then Paul makes a shift that we may not be comfortable with, but I just want to stop down in it. In verse 9 he says to avoid those who are perpetuating foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, no doubt referring back to the false teachers who were doing these things, expounding Jewish myths and trying to put man-made requirements on people that were not of the Scripture and not of the Lord, or maybe a better way of saying it is in addition to the Scripture or in addition to what was placed on us by the Lord in obedience.

He says these things are unprofitable and worthless. If holding to the teaching of the gospel and being faithful to the good work of the gospel is excellent and profitable for all people, he says the opposite is true about these things, that these foolish debates, this going down roads of meaningless genealogies, this fighting about the law, these things don't profit anybody. They're worthless and a waste of time.

Then he says in verse 10, "**As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.**" I just want to stop here, because I know that may make us a little bit uncomfortable. This idea of rejecting someone out of the church, this idea of church discipline, probably makes us a little bit anxious, but let me explain some things, and then let me give you some comfort in this.

First of all, this "As for a person who stirs up division..." The word in Greek is where we get our word *heretical* or *heretic*. It's the idea of somebody who is deliberately teaching something that's

against the truth and being divisive in the nature of doing that. Know the magnitude. I would dare say to us that New Testament authors take division and dissension and false teaching maybe much more seriously than we do.

This was something to fight against, to guard against, and for an immature, unhealthy, disordered church, there's something Paul is saying here, that we have to guard and protect our people but also see the love that is operated in this. The first move is not to reject; the first move is to engage. What Paul has written here, what he has written in other texts, and what is even written in the text of Matthew 18 through the words of Jesus, is the first move is to engage the person who is proposing this false teaching, who is turning toward the sin and trying to cause division.

So going to them privately or semi-privately and laying that before them, and if they won't listen, if they are so warped that they are turned away, twisted, or running after what seems to be sin, then and only then does it move to rejecting them in hopes that the Lord, in that isolation from the body of the church, would then win their hearts back to the church.

Let me just slow down and say this. I'm glad to be in a place that believes in church discipline. I know it's difficult and heart-wrenching. On the other side of it, know it is difficult and heart-wrenching to walk through that, to lay before a brother or sister their sin and ask them to repent and try and point them back to Christ instead of pursuing their passion and pleasure, and for them to deny it and continue to want to pursue down that road.

That is heartbreaking and heart-wrenching, and nobody wants to enter into that. But I'm thankful I get to serve in a place that is more concerned with being faithful to the Scripture and more concerned about the health of the church than they are being seen well and liked by people or having a large attendance.

Let me just slow down and say that discipline is good. It's good for the person who's disciplined. It's good for other believers who are around that person who's being disciplined, because they get to see the danger of sin. It's good for the renown and the name of the church. It's good for the glory of God. So while it is uncomfortable, it's necessary and healthy, and I want to encourage us in that.

Finally, Paul gives some final instructions and greetings. He says, "**When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis...**" We know from history, and even in

2 Timothy, that Titus does end up meeting with Paul just a little north of Nicopolis and spending some time with him. So just the validity of what happens there.

Then we also see this: **"Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing."** Here's what I love about this. Zenas is a normal guy. Zenas has an everyday job. Zenas, as far as we know, according to Scripture, is the only Christian lawyer we know of. No, no, that's not where I was going with that. (Maybe.)

Zenas had a normal vocation. He wasn't a church officer. He wasn't an elder. He wasn't a missionary. He wasn't an apostle. But, though he wasn't an apostle by title, he was living as an apostle by lifestyle, to be sent by the Lord to raise up amongst people gospel-centered communities and gospel-centered churches and bodies of worship and communities of faith. Though he had a normal everyday job, he was functioning in the mission of God, even though he was a lawyer.

Can I encourage you for a moment? Regardless of what your vocational title is, though you may not be a missionary by vocation, the Lord has invited you in to be a missionary by lifestyle. Do you know what else I love about this? Zenas and Apollos are being sent into a difficult context. They're not running from it; they're running *to* it. It's just a reminder that the gospel is fruitful even in what seems to be unfruitful places.

Either they're taking the letter for Paul, or they're in the midst of a mission and they've stopped in Crete and are heading on to somewhere else, but they're doing the mission of God. They're sending Artemas or Tychicus, and these guys are already there. They're sending people into a difficult context. It reminds me that the gospel is light that pushes back the darkness in dark places, and that's a good reminder.

Then Paul again reminds Titus, "Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works." Just a reminder of what he has been telling them, that good works are just good evidence of the gospel fruit that's being born in their hearts. Then he greets them with love and with grace. Let me point us to two things. The first is though the work of gracious living and good works is difficult, it's a worthy endeavor.

What motivates us for that endeavor is not how easy it is or how pleasurable it is or how comfortable it is or even the rewards. What motivates us is the goodness and loving-kindness of

God. Let me say it this way. There was a French poet, French author, named Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

He said when you want to build a ship, you don't gather wood or cut up the boards or delegate the task; you awaken the desire, the yearning, in the men for the vast and endless sea. Literally what he was saying is it's not so much about the materials or how you execute the tools or even the strategy you have. It really has more to do with if you would get these sailors to see the sea and desire to be out on it, they would do whatever it takes to begin to build the boat.

In the very same way, though it may be a difficult task to live with people in a culture around us who don't believe as we believe, who don't love as we love, who may be difficult in the way Paul has described them to be difficult, if we as believers would just look into the goodness and loving-kindness of God, that would be the proper motivation.

The tools are important, the materials are good, the strategies matter, but none of those things will ultimately motivate us past our discomfort beyond the work the Lord has done on our behalf in his goodness and in his kindness. That is the thing that makes us get back up when we get knocked down. That's the thing that makes us say this is a worthy endeavor to be a part of, because that's the motivation. What he has done for *us* he is now commissioning us to partner with him to do for *them*.

The second thing I want to point you to is that though the work is difficult, it's possible, not because of our capability but because he's able. Think of the context of Titus. We've already talked about it a little bit. Think of the dark cloud of the political regime that's above them, persecuting, hurting, trying to stamp out who they are. Beyond that, think of just the context of Crete.

In chapter 1 we talked about how Paul described what one of their poets said, that they are liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. They're amongst a culture of deceitful people, of people who are overindulgent and don't want to do any of the work, under people who want to go after their base desires even to the destruction of others. This is not the easiest context to build in.

Beyond that, hear what Paul is asking Titus to do. Titus doesn't have elders. He has to raise up elders. He's doing this right now, it seems like, by himself. Titus is fighting false teachers who are trying to ravage and separate the church, turning households upside down. There seems to be a vacancy of older men being role models. There seems to be a vacancy of older women investing in the next generation with their discretionary time.

There seems to be a vacancy of young men who are exhibiting self-control. There seems to be a vacancy of moms who are leading their households, housewives who are loving their households in such a way that it would glorify God. There seems to be a vacancy of bond servants who are working faithfully and above question. It seems like this is a very difficult context to do this in.

But I believe Paul is writing under the implications of, "What I'm asking you to do, Titus, I believe the Lord can do because he's able. I believe the Lord is able to raise up elders, Titus. When it comes to facing and refuting false teachers, though you may feel incapable, he's able. Titus, though you may feel that it's going to be difficult to find older men to be role models and lead, I just want to remind you that if you can't find them, if you can't raise them up, though you feel incapable of that, he's able.

If you feel like older women don't seem to be wanting to invest in the next generation and you feel like you're trying and fighting to make this happen, just remember that even if it seems difficult for you and beyond your capability, he's able. In all of these contexts, in all of these ways, to do the good work for people who seem to be fighting against, pushing against, being disobedient to, only wanting their own passions, though you feel like you're being ineffective and incapable, just be reminded the God you serve is able." Let me encourage you this morning.

You as a believer in the context you're presently in, the good work and the gracious living the Lord is calling you to do, though you feel like that may not be possible, I just want to remind you that he's able. For you who are trying to live out faith in a household or in a neighborhood or on a job that seems to be difficult and unfaithful and disobedient and full of passions and pleasures that don't glorify the Lord, though you may feel really small in a context that seems to be completely against you, we read in Titus and hear all throughout Scripture that we serve a God who is able.

There are some of you under the sound of my voice who have recently taken on the courageous role of being in our sending program to possibly do short-term ministry or long-term ministry or maybe for-the-rest-of-your-life ministry, and you're feeling a little nervous about going out on a mission field in a different culture with a different language with people you don't know, and you don't feel like you have enough training or enough skills. Even if you're not able, I just want to remind you that he's able.

Some of you under the sound of my voice have been called to be church planters, so you're going to a context where there doesn't seem to be a gospel-centered support system, nor family, nor friends, nothing to feed you while you're trying to feed them, and you feel very alone and very surrounded by darkness, and you don't feel like you're much light. Though you may not be much light, can I just remind you that the God you serve is able? This morning I just want to challenge us and encourage us.

My hope is you don't just hear this and respond in agreement at the end of the service and then it's over. My hope is that in the days and weeks and months and years and decades to come, the Lord would continue to remind us of this, that he would continue to spur us toward good work, to challenge our hearts, to encourage us that where we feel incapable he's able. My hope is that while the Lord gives us the grace to be in this community we are quick to engage in the good work of loving those who are around us, even those who believe differently from us.

My hope is the next time you're flipping through the channels and you see that the government is doing something or not doing something you'd wish they would do, that even if it's in conflict with your belief you would live out what he charged Titus to do, that we would be gentle, that we would speak evil of no one, that we would show perfect courtesy to those who are in disbelief or in opposite belief of us.

My hope is that the Lord would remind us and stir in us the good work he has done for us, in that if he was capable in his goodness and kindness to change us in our disobedience and rebellion against him and against the rest of mankind, he would do the same thing in those we are praying for, whom he has called us to engage with grace. I pray he would remind us that he's able in that. I pray that when opportunities are laid before us... Even right now, in this season of The Village Church, even this very weekend, we have so many things we're trying to do in the communities around us.

We're doing ministries like YoungLives, which is for teenage moms, and Journey to Dream, which is for teenagers who may be under-resourced or at-risk, or ministries like CCA or Communities in Schools or the Chin Refugee Ministry, all of these things that seem to be surrounding our church, even some things from within our church that are all ministries where we're trying to reach out in compassion to the community around us. I pray that the Lord would remind us of this and that we would devote ourselves to doing the good work.

Verse 8 has a beautiful phrase in there that says, "Be careful to devote yourselves to the good

work." That idea of *be careful* is to get out in front of. In the Greek, it's literally this idea of a shopkeeper standing in front of his store and yelling out to passersby to get their attention, that they might come in and partake of the product he's offering.

My hope is that the Lord would remind us he's calling us to be out front and to be on the street corner, both proverbially and literally, to get on the street corner and begin to proclaim in such a way that those who have no awareness of what we have partaken of are drawn in to come drink from the well of life and experience the goodness and loving-kindness of God, and that we would be very vocal not just in our verbal proclamation but in our good work proclamation, the evidence of the gospel in our hearts drawing people in who have yet to know his goodness.

My hope for us is that in the days to come, we'd be faithful to live out what may be difficult but is a good and worthy work unto the Lord. In a moment I'm going to pray for us, and then we'll partake of Communion and worship. I just want to invite you to let this be a reminder. That's what Paul starts with. Let it come to the forefront of your mind months from now, years from now, as the Lord gives us grace.

Here's my final hope. I pray that we devote ourselves to the good work in such an effective way that if The Village Church were to cease to exist in this community, there would be a vacuum, that there would be this feeling of angst because the way we were loving and serving the community would be missed.

My hope is not just for this entity; it's for us as individuals. If you were to change jobs, that there would be a little bit of sadness of heart in the office because of the light and grace you provided doing good works; if you were happening to move out of your neighborhood, that there would be a little bit of sadness of heart of your neighbors because something of the grace they had felt in the neighborhood seems to have shifted once your family left.

I believe that's a good and sweet call of the Lord for us to do good works in and amongst not just like brethren, but those whom he would like to call to himself. It's his work. He has just asked us to partner with him. I'm going to pray, and then we'll jump into Communion.

Lord, I'm so thankful, because though the work may seem difficult, it's your work. You are the fuel for accomplishing it, and you're the one who will actually end up accomplishing it and doing the

work. Lord, I'm not fearful that you're not going to be able to accomplish your mission. Lord, I pray that your people would be both challenged and encouraged to engage in it.

For the person who has been the spectator, maybe because they've seen themselves as a Zenas who doesn't have a ministry position, Lord, though their vocation doesn't speak of mission, Lord, I pray that their lifestyle would begin to speak of mission. Lord, I pray for the person in the room who is the Zenas who wants to engage in ministry and they feel bound by their job. They feel bound by the necessity of paying bills and taking care of their family.

Lord, that they would be freed up not to run to go jump into a full-time ministry role, but in whatever role that is, teacher, coach, businessman, businesswoman, videographer, filmmaker, whatever the range may be, Lord, whatever you're calling them to do, whatever they do every day as their vocation, Lord, I pray they would realize there is a call of you even in that and they don't have to stop doing what you have gifted them and called them to do, but, Lord, you are giving them the grace even in that to do the good work.

Lord, for the potential missionary or the potential church planter, may they be encouraged that though the fund-raising and prospecting and gathering seems difficult, you're able. Lord, for the ministry leader in this vicinity who doesn't have enough volunteers and doesn't have enough resources and doesn't have enough influence within the community, or at least not the amount of volunteers, resources, and influence they wish they had, Lord, I pray that though they feel like they're under-resourced and under-known they would know you are able and that would give them encouragement and confidence to continue the good work they've devoted themselves to.

Lord, make us as a church a faithful people who devote themselves to the good work that is the beautiful evidence of the gospel work and the grace you have borne in our hearts through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit you poured out through your Son Jesus. It's in your name I pray, amen.