

# One Key to Fruitfulness—by Pastor Larry Hoskins—CMF Board of Directors

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**P**aul wrote to his protégé, in Titus 3:14,

*"Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful."*

Guaranteed fruitfulness — now that's a concept! We need to reflect on several key ideas about this verse. First, "our people" refers to the church. It is especially the responsibility of the church to seek those we can help. So often, people think of helping as being the "government's job." After all, one might think, they tax our income, and have all this money (or at least they used to), so let them handle it. Such a thought is further accentuated by the declining numbers and donations to churches all across the country. While we would prefer that the government allow us to keep those tax funds and to choose where to spend them, and while we own the responsibility and privilege of helping support our local church, does that relieve us of the charge to "our people" that we must be of help? It's not somebody else's responsibility, it is yours and mine!

Second, Paul says that it is something we must "learn" to do. When we think of learning, we tend to think of classroom learning — but there is more to it than just that. Paul wants us to appropriate for ourselves the necessary concepts both through instruction and then the ongoing experience of doing good deeds. Over time, less and less instruction is needed, and more and more good deeds are actually accomplished. Apparently, we either need others to set the example and to instruct us so we can learn from them and model them, or we ourselves need to learn by trial and error. Paul's stated need for us to learn implies that the doing of good deeds in the right way and the best way does not come naturally.

Third, Paul instructed Titus of the need for us to "engage" in these good deeds. The Greek word for "engage" literally means "to stand before" as in "lead." It then came to have the metaphorical sense of showing an interest or concern for something (as a good leader would be expected to do in the arena in which he or she is leading). One Greek dictionary mentioned the concept of "to champion." The picture I get is that we are not to be passive observers or disengaged participants, giving half-hearted efforts, but we are to be enthusiastically engaged in the high purpose of meeting needs. This engagement is not a one-time event, but a way of life.

Fourth, Paul says that the church must learn to engage "in good deeds." Today, "good" is almost always perceived as what pleases us or society. Ultimately, however, good is not rooted in personal opinions of an individual or group, it is rooted in God's character and what pleases Him. Some would say that if a man is hungry, he needs to be fed, so feeding him would be "good." But sometimes a man is hungry because he will not work, and God's Word tells us that if a man will not work, then he is not to eat. It is implied that hunger eventually becomes an incentive to do as he ought — to work. In that case, feeding a hungry man delays the onset of learning a critical lesson, and it would not be "good" as God defines it. The question we must always consider is this, "What actions can I take that will best reflect God's character and His concerns?" The answer to that question will help us to properly engage in genuinely good deeds!

Fifth, one way that Paul defines engaging in good deeds is "to meet pressing needs." Pressing needs are physical and spiritual necessities, not necessarily wants or desires. Meeting the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and transportation are examples of physical needs, illustrated by the Parable of the good Samaritan. If someone is in financial need, their greatest need may not be cash but instruction and accountability in good financial principles. Just as pain medications do not address the root issue of a broken bone, so it takes discernment to identify the difference between a symptom and the root spiritual cause. It also takes courage and conviction to patiently and persistently address

spiritual needs in this manner. Sometimes, the felt pressing need is what the person wants to have addressed. But while the real pressing need is valued by the discerning individual, those less spiritually mature may not even see the real need or see any value in addressing it. Lastly, there is a larger purpose for learning to engage in good deeds that meet pressing needs — “so that they (our People, the church, we) will not be unfruitful.” In the days of the disciples, Jesus cursed a fig tree that was not bearing fruit, and it withered. We have been called to bear much fruit and fruit of such quality that it will remain. When pressing needs are met, it does something to the individual whose life is so touched. Gratitude, spiritual growth, and a sense of God’s working through His children opens the door for them to receive the Gospel message. That openness, coupled with God’s Word, the working of the Holy Spirit, and the visible love of the church allows seeds to be planted in fertile soil, to have that seed watered, and see it germinate, mature, and bear its own fruit. Ultimately, this brings great glory to God as Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount:

***You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16 NASB95)***

We were created to engage in good works. (Ephesians 1:10). It takes our time, talents, and treasures. Meeting pressing needs does not always come when we feel like it or when we feel like sharing some of our abilities or treasures. Often, a need presents itself when we have other plans for our time, other planned uses for our money, and when we want to rest. Then, the challenge of our goals, juxtaposed against a God-provided opportunity, forces us to decide whether we will be self-focused or other-focused. John challenges us to look at and to follow the example that Jesus set for us in just such a case:

***We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 John 3:16-18)***

What we choose to do in that moment says something about our love for God. God loves the person in need, and He is dedicated to using His children to meet the needs of people. If we love Him, we will choose to meet those needs as we are able, because we choose to love whom He loves. If not, then we will not.

Sometimes, we personally meet needs. Other times, we meet needs collectively, as a church. I have been asking myself lately, what are pressing needs that we as a church can meet? Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper has suggested helping the homeless. Habitat For Humanity works to build homes for struggling families. The Denver Rescue Mission helps many who are on the streets. Students may need help at local elementary or middle schools. I have a friend who is out of prison on parole who needs help in ways that are more than my personal resources can meet. Maybe you are aware of someone’s pressing needs and feel a God-placed burden to try to meet them. The needs are greater than our own resources, but they are totally within the scope of our Provider. What a great opportunity to touch others in their moment of need! I get excited about the prospect of “guaranteed fruitfulness.” Please pray with me about what pressing needs God wants to meet through us as individuals and corporately. Whose lives does He want us to touch? The more we do what we were created to do, the more lives will be touched, the more fruit we will bear, and the more God will be glorified. That, my brothers and sisters, is what the church is all about!