Eager to Volunteer

Third in the series, “Eager to Do What is Good”

# Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

# Key Thought: A sincere Christian is eager to help.

# Intro:

This month we are talking about being “eager to do that which is good.” Many of the good deeds that we do are accomplished through volunteer work.

Did you know that helping other people is actually been shown to be good for us? Many years ago I read a book called, “The Healing Power of Doing Good” by Allan Luks with Peggy Payne (Fawcett Columbine, 1991). In that book the authors reported upon a study that was done of people who volunteered to help other people. Now when we think of helping other people, we think that the benefits of the volunteering go to the recipients of the time and efforts of the volunteers. But what the study found was that there was a significant benefit in health and welfare to the volunteers themselves. Here’s a list of some of the benefits received by the volunteers who helped other people that they did not know face-to-face on a regular basis.

* 95% reported that personal helping on a regular basis gives them an immediate physical feel–good sensation… This is phase 1 of the healthy helping syndrome.
* 9/10 experienced one or more of a characteristic set of physical and emotional sensations during this rush, involving sudden warmth and increase energy, as well as a sense of euphoria.
* Phase 2 of the healthy helping syndrome brings a sense of calmness. This second, longer–lasting phase involves feelings of increased self-worth, calm, and relaxation.
* People who experience the healthy helping syndrome have better perceived health…. Survey respondents often dated their perception of being in superior health to the beginning of their helping efforts.

The effects were increased by a greater frequency of volunteering, by types of volunteering which had increased personal contact with the people being helped, and by helping people that the volunteers did not know (pp. 17, 18).

So volunteering can be a great benefit in itself. This morning, I would like to talk about the motivation which drives us as Christians to volunteer. I find three dynamics in Rom. 12:9-21 which encourage us to be volunteers in our communities and in the work of God.

# Love motivates us (affection)

The first dynamic that I notice in this passage is that the Christian is motivated by love. The overall title given by the Bible translators to this section in my NIV translation is, “Love in Action.” Paul is encouraging the Roman Christians in various practical expressions of their faith. Verses 9 and 10 contain multiple expressions for love.

* The first one is the familiar biblical word for self-giving, love of the will. The Greek word is Agape. It refers to a dedicated, self-sacrificing love.
* Verse 10 has two words for love in it. One of them is Philadelphia, the Greek word which means brotherly kindness, friendship love. We can remember it easily since it is the Greek word from which the city of Philadelphia gets its name and the city of Philadelphia is known as the city of “brotherly love.”
* A third word for love (v. 10) is a much less familiar Greek word, philostorgos. It refers to parental affection for children or the love one has for close relatives in the family.
* Then there is fourth expression which adds to the sense of a loving attitude which Paul is trying to convey. The word (proagesmai) means to prefer the other person over ourselves—to let them go first. This is something we only do when we are putting love into action.

So why do Christians volunteer? They volunteer because they care about the people. Why do parents and grandparents volunteer to help with children’s ministries? They love children!

We might discover that one of the reasons we volunteer in other situations is because we care about the people involved. Sometimes we volunteer to help with a project because we are friends with the people who are working on that project. It is our caring for the other volunteers that helped us to volunteer. That’s love in action. Getting something done that we mutually believe in can seem almost a side benefit to the time of friendship that happens as we work together on a mutual project.

The role of love in volunteering cannot be underestimated. That’s why Paul starts this passage with multiple references to love.

# Zeal pushes us (energy)

In verse 11, Paul moves on to a second motivator, which he calls zeal. He gives us both the positive and the negative expression. I find it helpful to look at this verse in different translations.

Ro 12:11 ESV “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”

Ro 12:11 NIV “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

Ro 12:11 CJB “Don’t be lazy when hard work is needed, but serve the Lord with spiritual fervor.”

So the negative that Paul tells us to avoid might be described as being lazy, slothful, as lacking in drive, not having any energy going towards the goal of active service to God and others.

The positive is described as being zealous, having earnestness of heart, fervency. The literal expression relates to the word hot, or boiling. A convert in a foreign country who was requesting a missionary for his people understood this concept intuitively. His wording was, "Send us men with hot hearts.” (7700 #7671)

In 2 Pe 1:5-7 the NIV translates this same word with the phrase – “make every effort.”

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge…”

Paul instructed Timothy, "Fan into flame the gift of God" (II Tim. 1:6 ).

John Wesley is famous for the statement, "If I had 300 men who feared nothing but God, hated nothing but sin, and were determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified, I would set the world on fire.”

Paul uses the same word to describe Titus.

“But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. 2 Co 8:16 ESV

Writer of Hebrews admonishes us very similarly to this verse in Romans.

“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Heb 6:11-12 ESV

## So how does this zeal, this sense of earnestness and urgency happen?

### The Holy Spirit encourages us to be the Body of Christ

I would say first of all it is the Holy Spirit’s work in us encouraging us to do the work of God. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. This is what it means to be called the body of Christ. It is up to us to do the work of healing, encouragement and blessing that Jesus wants to be happening day by day to people in our circle of influence. If Jesus were here physically, he would be figuring out ways to be a blessing to the people he met. But Jesus is here, dwelling in you and me, so he encourages us to be the kind of blessing to those around us that he wants to be.

### If we don’t do God’s work, it will not get done

Secondly I think our fervency is a result of our understanding from God’s word the kind of work that we are supposed to be doing for God. We talked a couple weeks ago about the servants of God who were sent out to invite people to the great supper, the wedding supper of the Lamb. We concluded that those servants were you and me. If we don’t spread the invitation, people will not be invited. If we don’t share the good news about Jesus, people will not know it.

### A Scriptural sense of urgency

Third, there is a time urgency about our work. Jesus put it this way.

As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. John 9:4

The night comes in many ways. The night comes because our lives change. The night comes because the opportunity to do what God is asking us to do passes. The night comes because the lives of the persons to whom we are asked to minister changes and the opportunity to minister to them goes away. The night comes because all of us will pass from the scene and no longer be able to serve God in this world. The night could come because Jesus returns and it is the end of this era. So there is an urgency about doing the work of God.

The apostle Paul caught the sense of urgency and expressed it this way.

 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Eph. 5:15-16

Sometimes Christians agonize about whether they should stop doing ordinary work and focus completely on the work of God. A few people are called to do that. But most people are not. Most of us are asked to do the work of God while we are carrying out our ordinary vocations. God will put opportunities for ministry in his name in our path while we are carrying out our business, our profession, even our recreation. We need only to be alert to allow God to use us to do his business at any time of the day or night. He might awaken you in the middle of the night with a burden to pray for somebody and by doing so, you could be a key link in something that God is doing half a world away.

I will never forget being told the story by one of the missions leaders of the Wesleyan church, by the name of Don Bray. Don was serving as a missionary in his younger years in a remote area of Papua, New Guinea. He had an accident and cut off his thumb. This was in an area where travel by vehicle was pretty much impossible so they radioed for an airplane to come to the jungle airstrip. In that part of the country if airplanes received such an emergency call, they were required to land and pick up the medical emergency. Soon a pilot came down on the airstrip. It was someone they did not know. Now Don knew where the best hospital was in Papua New Guinea and he asked to go there. But the pilot was not in the best of moods about this interruption in his flight plan. So he told Don where he was going to take him and it wasn’t to the city Don wanted to go to. Don knew that there was a medical Center at the city the pilot named but it often was not even staffed with a doctor, but at this point he did not have a choice. So they took off and Don was delivered to the town the pilot had named. Moments later, a dear friend of Don’s, a mission pilot, touched down, but Don had already left.

When Don arrived at the city the pilot had named, he was relieved to find that there was a doctor there. But the doctor took one look at the situation and at the thumb which Don was carrying, and decided to finish his lunch. After lunch he proceeded to reattach the thumb.

After the operation was complete, and Don was in the recovery room, another patient engaged Don in conversation. The other patient said, “Do you know who the doctor was? Don replied, “No.” The other patient said, “That Dr. just arrived here. He was trained in reconstructive surgery of the hand at a leper colony in India.” God had known, what Don did not.

The rest of the story goes like this. Sometime later, during his year of travel in the United States that missionaries have to do to raise support, Don and his wife were in the upper Midwest, Minnesota if I recall correctly, telling the story that I’ve just told you. After the service, a prayer partner took them aside and asked them exactly when this event had happened. Comparing notes they found that the volunteer partner had been awakened in the middle of the night and had remained on their knees until they felt released. Amazing. A volunteer prayer partner had been at the heart of what God was doing. The prayer volunteer did not know, and Don did not know, and the pilot certainly did not know, but God knew!

You never know when you make yourself available to volunteer to be a part of God’s kingdom, whether as a helper, a teacher, a prayer warrior or whatever—how God will use your involvement to make an impact.

God help us to put energy, fervency, and zeal into our service and keep it showing. As Paul says, “Never be lacking in zeal!”

# Achieving together encourages us (synergy)

The third dynamic that I see in this passage that motivates our volunteer efforts for the kingdom of God is the goal of overcoming together with good deeds as our weapon of choice. In this day when mean speech, and violent metaphors are commonplace and actual violence is also way too frequent, is good for us to remember the words of the Bible:

Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 2 Cor 10:3, 4

So what are the weapons of the Christian? Prayer is certainly one. The Word of God is another (Eph. 6:17, 18). Our testimony is another (Rev. 12:11). Here in Rom. 9:21 we have another of the Christian’s weapons to use against evil in this world.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good! Rom 9:21

Volunteers working together with God overcome evil. That motivates us. It provides the synergy we need. It helps us realize that what alone we cannot do we can accomplish together with the help of God. Together we can make a huge difference. Let us not stoop to use the world’s weapons in today’s atmosphere of distrust and polarization, but rather work together to overcome evil by doing good.

# Conclusion

Story- Grace Givers p. 161 “Teaching the World”