



March 12, 2025

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

" As believers in Jesus Christ, let's take seriously what he said and put God first in what we value, what we see, and what we take in and what we give out."

Pastor George in this week's sermon

INFO

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LOVE IS LITTLE

Shortly after our church building was destroyed in the Eaton Fire Disaster, it was decided to redirect the ABC telephone line to my personal cell phone. This has led me into an unanticipated adventure. I have answered a multitude of calls from all over the U.S.A. I wish I had kept a log of them. Some were from former ABCers who hadn't been in touch for years. Others were from media reporters looking for a first-hand interview. Still others were from various aid agencies informing us of potential help. Of course, there were also opportunists looking for a way to cash in on our losses by offering some kind of unneeded services.

The most interesting were from individuals calling out of the blue because they were personally moved to do something to relieve the suffering caused by the fires. Some had entered "Altadena" in an on-line browser, and ABC's name popped up near the top of an alphabetically-organized contact list. These calls might have been just that random, but they were nonetheless sincere. People offered all sorts of help: they had a set of living-room furniture or a little-used twin bed to donate; they wanted to deliver used clothing or cases of bottled water; some stipulated that they wanted to give to one family directly; several expressed a willingness to drive across the country from Tennessee, or Indiana, or Georgia to deliver their donations in person; some offered to come to the church and help with cleanup efforts.

After a while, I found myself becoming impatient and giving more and more abrupt answers, letting the callers know that we didn't need what they were offering. But one day I realized a very simple truth that had the effect of softening my responses: **These people were calling more because they needed to help, than because we needed their help!**

The human instinct to help one another is part of what has led to the development of complex civilizations in a species that could easily have joined the long list of extinct curiosities. As Christians, we believe that our impulse to care comes from the fact that we are uniquely created in God's image, for God himself cares infinitely.

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(Continued from other side)

This is built into the Hebrew concept of *mitzvah* (plural *mitzvot*), which literally means “Righteous Acts.” Everyone who lives in a relationship with the caring God should be demonstrating this in daily living. Early rabbis identified a list of 613 mitzvot which are taught in the Hebrew Bible, but over time the list of mitzvot has broadened to include any “Good Deed” one person has an opportunity to do for another.

Jesus went even farther in teaching his followers how to live. They should not only do Good Deeds (mitzvot) for others, but they should develop a mindset that does this automatically and unconsciously, without any need for recognition or gratitude! This is profoundly expressed in the Sermon On The Mount, where he warns against the hypocrisy of doing Good Deeds to be seen and applauded for actions that should be natural for his followers (Matthew 6:1-15).

I stumbled across a song that has traditionally been sung by the Shakers, an 18th/19th century religious group who practiced communal living and radical self-denial because they believed Jesus might return very soon.¹ The song was written in 1834 by an anonymous Shaker, and it expresses the Good-Deed mindset of a Christian in this way

Love is little, love is low.
Love will make my spirit grow.
Grow in peace, grow in light;
Love will do the thing that’s right.²

It’s just as simple as that: If we are in a relationship with Jesus, **we help because we have to.** It’s in our nature. True love is “little,” in that it doesn’t take a lot of thinking or calculation. True love is “low,” under the radar, rather than advertised on a banner. And, Boy! It sure can make your spirit grow!

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ The name “Shakers” comes from the combination “Shaking Quakers” and is a reference to their ecstatic worship

practices. Which included visions, holy dances, spiritual trembling and speaking in tongues. About twenty colonies were spread throughout the Eastern states at the movement’s height, but just a few people claim this religious heritage today. Check their history at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O26d7tXqN5A>

² Listen to a modern group sing this song at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQP1kZXIOow>