

Shine Through Goodness  
*Random Acts of Senseless  
Kindness*  
September 25, 2016

**Worship Songs: Who is Like Our God/ Good,  
Good, Father**

**Feature: Random Acts of Senseless Kindness**

### **Introduction**

How many of you know someone like Will the Train Maker? How many of you know someone who just seems to ooze kindness? Someone who will do just about anything for anyone in their time of need? I don't know about you, but I know of a few people like that. But I'm here today to tell you that I'm not one of them. I'm NOT a Will the Train maker. That's NOT me. That's my confession to you today. In fact, I've been confessing my lack of "Will-like character

qualities” on/off for the past several months to a few people I know. I’ve been a Christian for 38 years and I’ve used the gifts and abilities God’s given me a good part of my life to help people grow. I teach others, I lead ministries and even get up here every now and then to help Rick when he needs a sub. But to be totally honest, I never had the desire to be spontaneously kind. I’ve had to face the fact that the real me doesn’t think or act like...

## **Will the Train maker pic**

Now just to be clear, I admire Will. I truly want to be like Will. But I’m not Will and in the past 12 months God has revealed to me that there’s a big gaping hole in my character.

So I’ve been on a quest. I’ve been on a journey to learn what it means to be like

Will. In my quest, I'm slowly but surely learning what it looks like to be someone who is kind and thoughtful to others in their time of need. I don't know how long it will take for me to get there, but I'm committed to travelling down that road as long as it takes until my character is more like Will's or as the bible says, more like Christ's. So how about you? Where are you in your pursuit of the character quality of kindness and goodness? When you saw the video of Will, did you say to yourself, "That's me in the video!" Or did you say to yourself, "I want to be more like Will when I grow up?"

If you, like me, see a need for character change and want to be more like Christ in this area, then you've come to the right place. Today, we are going to explore this idea of goodness and how it can become a part of our everyday lives as Christians.

## Review

Last week, Rick began a message series called “Shine through Goodness”, which is part of a mega series called “Shine”. As you know, throughout the entire “Shine” series of messages, we’ve been attempting to answer the same basic question: What does it look like for a Christian and for a church to “let your light shine” individually and collectively?

Next week, we are going to examine what it looks like for the church to collectively, as a group, “shine through goodness”. But today we are going to bring it down to the individual level. Today we are going to focus on what it means for you and I individually to “shine through goodness”. In other words, what it looks like when each of us begins to live a lifestyle of goodness like Will the Train maker. So let’s begin!!

## **Goodness Defined**

How many of you were here last week? If you were, you learned an important word taken from the Greek language. The word was “agathosune“. This is the Greek word most often translated as “goodness” in the New Testament. It’s important sometimes to go back to the original language of the writers because it often helps us better understand the meaning of a word.

So what exactly does “agathosune” mean?

**“agathosune” means “goodness for the benefit of others, not simply for the sake of being virtuous.”**

As we learned last week, agathosune isn’t about avoiding bad behavior; agathosune

isn't about "being of high-moral character" internally;

agathosune is virtue and holiness in action which has the effect of blessing others. It's our faith in Christ coming out of us in acts of love and service for the benefit of others ...which is exactly in line with what the Apostle James had in mind when he wrote:

***"Faith" by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. James 2:17 (NLT)***

According to James, goodness is about doing something. It's active. So using the basic meaning of Greek word "agathosune", Rick gave us with the working definition of goodness last week that we are going to use throughout this series:

**Goodness is “energized faith”  
expressing itself in acts of love and  
service for the benefit of others.**

Will the Train Maker is a great illustration of our definition of goodness. Do you remember some of the things that Will said in the video? Will said,

- “When I was a kid I never had a train. Now when a kid wants a train, he gets one.
- I just love doing things for people.
- If I’ve got something they want, I’ll give it to them.”

Why does he build all those trains? Will said he does it as a way to get outside of himself and to deal with the loneliness and grief he’s felt ever since losing his wife. He decided that he could bring joy to himself and some kids in the neighborhood by simply building

little wooden trains out of scrap pieces of wood.

Now that's goodness...expressing itself in acts of love and service for the benefit of others.

### **Roadblocks to Goodness**

Deep down inside, all of us admire Will and his kind heart. Most of us want to be like him when we grow up. I know I sure do. I want to be open to the opportunities God sends my way to practice random acts of kindness.

But sometimes things get in the way of our good intentions. When our lives are not marked by consistent spontaneous kindness, there are probably some major roadblocks interfering with our ability to be responsive. These roadblocks must be dealt



with if we are going to live a life of goodness.

When I examine my own life, I see four hurdles that we must overcome in order to practice goodness consistently. This first one is:

### **Roadblocks to Goodness: Lack of Margin (Overload)**

“Margin”, according to author Richard Swenson, “is the space between our load and our limits. It is the amount allowed beyond that which is needed. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations. Margin is the gap between rest and exhaustion, the space between breathing freely and suffocating.”

## **Two circles: one with margin/one without**

Overload is the opposite of margin. If we are overloaded we have no margin. Most of us aren't quite sure when they pass from margin to overload.

If we were equipped with a flashing light to indicate "100 percent full," we would be able to gauge our capacities. But we since we don't have an "overload" indicator light, we aren't always aware we have overextended. As a result, many of us commit to a 120 percent life and wonder why we have little or no financial or time margin to be responsive to the spontaneous needs of others. The bible warns about such a life.

*Therefore be very careful how you live  
– not as unwise but as wise, taking  
advantage of every opportunity,  
because the days are evil. Ephesian  
5:15-16 NET*

We need to live wisely, so that we can take advantage of every opportunity God puts in our path.

When we are overloaded financially because of poor spending habits or too much debt, we can't take advantage of those spontaneous times when someone needs money for groceries or other basic necessities of life.

When we are overloaded with busyness because of workaholicism or an over scheduled personal life, we can't react to the spur of the moment opportunities when someone needs our physical presence for whatever reason.

You see, a margin-less, overloaded life can be summed up by this simple equation:

**Zero financial margin + Zero time margin = Zero ability or motivation to practice goodness**

We will never be able to be people of goodness as long as we don't do something about the lack of margin and overload in our lives. So that's the first roadblock we face.

### **Roadblocks to Goodness: Personal biases**

Personal biases are subtle yet powerful forces of restraint in our lives. They cause us to make choices for or against certain things. Unfortunately, when it comes to people, a personal bias can also manifest itself as a

tendency to unfairly treat some people better than others.

We all know we have personal biases and too often we wrongfully justify them. For example look at this short list of biases:

### **Types of biases.**

- **Racial/ethnic biases: blacks, whites, hispanics, asians, indians, etc.**
- **Economic biases: lower/higher class economically, poor/rich people**
- **Lifestyle biases: gay, lesbian, “immoral” people**
- **Enemy biases: people who have done us or society wrong**

Do you see anyone on that list that you’ve ever been biased against? If not, let’s expand the list a bit:

- **Political, Age, Body type, Career/Job, Country/City/State of Origin, Renter or Owner, Children or No children, Disability, Education level, School or College attended, Marital status, Introverted or Extroverted, Language, Vocabulary, Complexion, Clothing, Body Art, Club memberships, Body odors**

Look at this expanded list. If we are honest, most of us are biased against someone on one or both of these lists. The sad part is that our biases cause us to be unkind to “these types” of people. We resist helping them because we don’t think they “deserve” it. The bible warns us about harboring personal bias toward others.

*My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some*

*people over others? For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well, doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?  
James 2:1-4 NLT*

Whenever we are unkind to people who are different from us, we are being guided by evil motives according to this passage of Scripture. And we will never be able to demonstrate God’s unconditional love as long as we don’t confess and repent of these biases, whatever form they may take. That’s

the second roadblock that inhibits our ability to shine through goodness.

## **Roadblocks to Goodness: Fear of Getting Involved**

How many of you have wanted to help someone in need, but found yourself hesitating? Be honest. I have. We all have. For instance, when you see someone stranded on the road with their hood up...have you ever had the thought: “I wonder if it’s safe for me to stop and help?” Sometimes it’s just easier or safer to pass on by, doesn’t it? While we all know there’s nothing wrong with being cautious, caution can also be an excuse for inaction. Fear of getting involved can be a huge roadblock that inhibits us from performing random acts of kindness.



While I was preparing this message, I ran across an audio clip of Dr. Martin Luther King talking about the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. In this parable, Jesus talks about a certain man who fell among thieves and was left for dead on the roadside. Two men, a priest and a Levite passed by and did nothing to help the man. A third man of another race, a Samaritan, was the only one who stopped to help the injured man.

Listen as Dr. King delivers a riveting commentary on "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" on April 3, 1968. This is the last sermon he ever gave because he was assassinated the next day.

**Video: Picture/audio speech of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

We all know there are legitimate reasons to be “fearful” or cautious at times - at times it’s wise. But after listening to Dr. King’s sermon, I had to stop and ask myself, which man am I? Am I the priest? Am I the Levite?

**Am I the person who asks what will happen to me if I help this person?  
Or am I the Good Samaritan...the person who asks what will happen to them if I don’t?**

We would do well to remember that whoever that person is that needs help - they are the Lord’s. They are made in His image. Their well-being matters to Him. God is just as concerned about them as he is about us. In our feeble attempt to be “cautiously wise”, we inadvertently play God sometimes. If that describes you, then

you are letting the fear of getting involved stop you from responding.

The truth is that you and I will never be able to live a life of goodness if we are paralyzed by fear. That is the third roadblock that inhibits our ability to shine through goodness.

### **Roadblocks to Goodness: Apathetic Laziness**

A former mentor of mine once asked me this question: “What is the opposite of love?” I said to him, “That’s easy...it’s hate.” He replied back to me. “No, not really. The opposite of love is apathy.” Ever since he told me that, I’ve come to realize that he’s probably right. You see, with hatred, we at least acknowledge the existence of a person, but when we become apathetic, we know

there is no love. We don't care or we care very little what happens to a person.

To be honest, this has been one of my greatest struggles. I tend to be lazy, apathetic and indifferent to the needs of others. I don't love people the way God loves them. I find it easier to lay on the couch and watch TV than to get up and help a friend or neighbor in need.

Ultimately the bottom line to what I've been saying about roadblocks is this: all the roadblocks we struggle with are rooted in a lack of love of our part. We just don't love people as much as we love ourselves. I'm at the head of the line. But the bible exhorts us by saying that if we say we love people, then we need to back it up with actions.

***Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:18***

Let's push pause for a second. So far we've discussed the meaning of goodness. We said it is "energized faith" expressing itself in acts of love and service for the benefit of others. We also said that there are four roadblocks that hinder us from performing random acts of kindness...roadblocks such as no margin in our lives, personal biases, a fear of getting involved and apathetic laziness. And we said that a lack of love for others is at the root of them all. Those are some hard pills for us to swallow. Wouldn't you agree?

### **Actions For Goodness Sake**

Now, assuming we recognize that we have a problem with being kind to others, and we

“repent” - ask God to help change our mind about our behaviors - the real question becomes “how do we respond when there are so many needs all around us? How do we know which needs are ours to meet and which ones are to be ignored?”

Those are good questions and we need to wrestle with them to get to the place where we can freely, without guilt, respond to the serving opportunities God sends our way.

I believe there are three things we can do to start living the kind of life displayed by both Will the Train maker and Jesus Christ:

**#1: Be aware of needs that pop up around you.**

I believe in what some people describe as, “divine appointments”. Divine appointments are specific opportunities to show love and

kindness that God sends our way. But in order to properly handle these many opportunities, we need to learn to think and act like Jesus.

In John 5, we read about how Jesus managed this challenge. According to the bible, Jesus believed it was God's job, not his, to initiate opportunities to serve. Listen as I read:

***So Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, the Son can do nothing on his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does, and will show him greater deeds than these, so that you will be amazed. John 5: 19,20 NET***

How did Jesus know what to do all the time? He looked around and asked “What is God doing around me?” You see Jesus didn’t initiate anything. He believed that was God’s job. Jesus’ job wasn’t to initiate, but to aggressively respond to God’s initiative. So what am I trying to say? Simply this: we must assume that God is bringing the needs of people across your path. That’s why we, like Jesus, need to be aware of the needs that pop up around us.

**#2. Be willing to meet the needs that come your way.**

Every year around Christmas, my son Joel takes our entire family out for dinner at a nice restaurant to celebrate the holidays. Last year, as our family was leaving a restaurant on the Plaza, a man approached us off the street and asked for money for a taxi



so that he could get to the bus station. To be honest, my first thought was, “what kind of scam artist is this?” (Aren’t I a great model of virtue?) Now being unlike his dad, my youngest son Cory, without hesitation, reached into his wallet and pulled out a \$20 bill and gave it to the man. After seeing his unselfish response, I asked him, “Why did you do that?” He said, “Erica and I decided that once we were married, we were going to try and be generous to people whenever we have opportunity.” I was completely humbled. I decided right then that I wanted to be like him when I grow up! Why? Because he did EXACTLY what the bible tells us to do in that situation.

***Do not withhold good from those who need it, when you have the ability to help. Proverbs 3:27***

My son had made up his mind in advance that he wanted to be willing and able to respond to the spontaneous financial needs God placed in front of him.

Some of you may be wondering how God could ever use you to spontaneously help someone else. Hopefully, by watching this next video, we can expand your vision regarding the many different ways God might use you. Let's watch.

### **Video: Random Acts of Kindness**

Hopefully now you can see the many ways you can help if you are aware and willing to respond to the needs around you. But there's one last thing I want you to remember when you feel less than motivated to help others. And that's simply...

### **#3. Remember your “debt of love”.**

If after hearing everything I’ve said this morning, you are still a little resistant to becoming a “random acts of service” kind of person, then I want to challenge you with this verse from Romans 13. It says:

*Pay everyone what is owed: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:7,8*

On the surface, this verse sounds like the Apostle Paul is talking about money. But after a closer look, he’s talking about a relational debt that we owe that we can

NEVER be repaid in full, and that's the debt of love we owe to everyone around us. Everyone deserves to be treated kindly...even your worst enemies. Why? The bible says, we are to love one another just as God loves us. Therefore, God's love for us is the catalyst for us loving others.

So the next time you are tempted to NOT respond to a divine appointment that come your way, just remember that you owe a debt of love to EVERYONE, regardless who they are or what they've done. Maybe that should be your prayer today: God, help me learn to love others as I love myself and as you love me.

### **Conclusion**

As we draw this message to a close, I want to leave you with a challenge. A couple of weeks ago during our small group time, my

buddy Scott Oost, pulled out a deck of cards and said, “Pick one”. Little did I know that on each of these cards was a couple of “Random Acts of Kindness” suggestions for a person to do. He said to us, “I want you to try and do one of the random acts of kindness on the card sometime soon.” Here’s the card I drew from the deck:

### **Picture of playing card.**

To be honest, I was a little uncomfortable with the card I drew. I hadn’t ever done anything like this before. But I accepted Scott’s challenge. So two weeks ago I walked into the emergency room of St. Luke’s North...

### **Picture of flowers**

...with this bouquet of roses from Hy-Vee and went up to the receptionist's window. When I told her I wanted to give the flowers to whomever the nurses thought needed it the most in the emergency room, the receptionist looked at me kind of funny and said, "No one's ever done anything like this before". But she took the flowers anyway and gave me a smile. I smiled back and walked out of the hospital.

So today I'm going to give you the "Scott Oost" challenge. As the band plays this last song titled, "Do Something", I challenge you to "do something" and come up and choose from a deck of card filled with random acts of kindness opportunities. Pick a card and do what it says and see what happens when you take a risk and show someone the goodness of God this week. Who knows? Maybe you will bless someone in the process. Or maybe you'll also be

changed in the process. Trust me. It's worth the risk! Let's pray.