

Dear friend,

Last night, in a meeting with the Discovery Group Leaders, we were discussing 1 Corinthians 12:7. It says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit has been given for the common good.” We noted that each and every Christian has been given, by and through the Holy Spirit, abilities and opportunities to act and work “for the common good.” We then asked, “What is the good for which we are working?” The verb that is translated “common good” and the related noun show up in 1 Corinthians five times (6:12, 7:35, 10:23, 10:33 & 12:7).

What Paul says in 10:33 is the clearest description of the “good” that we are seeking to promote. He says, “For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many so that they may be saved.” According to Paul, what is the good that we are working for as we serve one another? The good we are aiming at is that we all arrive safely in heaven. Our goal is not simply to help one another be less depressed or better spouses or more loyal friends or more faithful employees. Our goal is not merely to provide financial help when one of us loses our job. The good we are working for is to help one another persevere in faith to the end of our lives and so gain heaven.

As we were discussing this I thought of an illustration I used in a sermon a couple of weeks ago. You may remember my saying that the Christian life is very much like the experience of Americans in the 1800’s who crossed the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains in order to get to California. I made the point that people only set out on this difficult journey because they believed the promise that life in California was going to be better than life in Illinois. Everyone who gave up their life in Illinois and endured all the hardships of the journey did so by believing a promise and thus being filled with hope of a better life to come.

How did these people maintain their faith in the promise and their hope of a better life while in the midst of the suffering that came upon them during the journey? They did it by traveling in groups who helped one another to persevere. They helped defend one another from attacks. They shared their food with one another. They talked together of the good life they were going to obtain once they arrived in California. They supported one another in their grief. When a wheel fell off from one of the wagons, the entire wagon train stopped and helped get the wheel back on. In other words, the only way they made it safely to California was by being a community of people where each one used the resources they had to help the others keep going. They didn’t share their food just to be nice or to impress with their culinary skills. They shared it so that they would make it to California together. They didn’t stop to help fix the wagon wheel just because a wagon without a wheel is ugly, but because they wanted the family to make it safely to California.

There are many ways that the wheels fall off our “wagons”. Personal sin, relationship disruption, disappointment with ourselves and/or others, the attractions of earthly pleasures, emotional distress, etc. knock the wheels off our faith. Each one of us has a part to play in stopping and helping those who cannot move any farther because the wheel has fallen off. Each of us has a part to play in helping to prevent wheels from falling off in the first place. If we are going to make it safely to heaven we need to be vitally connected to other believers and engage in the work of building one another’s faith.

This means you must spend time with other Christians other than on Sunday morning for the purpose of encouraging each other to press on in the fight of faith. Each one of us needs to be in a small group that meets during the week. Each of us needs to find one or two other Christians that we can meet with on a more personal level to help each other pursue Christ. Each of our homes needs a daily gathering to seek Christ together. I urge you, for your own sake and for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ, pursue the “common good” by using your time and resources and gifts to help others make it safely to heaven.

Enduring with you,