

How to **MAKE GOD VISIBLE** in an Evil World?

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Introduction:

You of Helimission are examples of New Testament believers, as seen by your record of doing good and growing. I commend you! I have been privileged and encouraged and strengthened by you all as I have had opportunity to serve you through the years. These passages came to mind whenever I think of you all:

1 Thessalonians, Chapter One

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.

³ We remember before our God and Father **your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters^[b] loved by God, that he has chosen you,

⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

⁷ And so **you became a model** to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. (Thess. 1:2-8, emphasis mine)

Colossians, Chapter One

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is **bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world**—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,^[c] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our^[d] behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[e] ¹⁰ so that you may **live a life worthy** of the Lord and please him in every way: **bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,** ¹¹ being **strengthened** with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have **great endurance and patience,** ¹² and **giving joyful thanks** to the Father, who has qualified you^[f] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:1-13, emphasis mine)

Philippians, Chapter One

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ **being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ And this is my prayer: **that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.** ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:1-11, emphasis mine)

2. What is the Status Quo in Our World?

Evil abounds! Has anything really changed? Listen to how two saints, centuries apart, describe the world:

Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) :

The world, this wretched master, is truly very much at odds with God. God wants virtue and the world wants vice. In God is all patience, while the world is unwilling to suffer. In Christ crucified is all mercy, he is solid and stable and immutable. God's promises never fail because he is life and from him we have life. Christ is truth, for he keeps his promises, rewarding every good and punishing every sin. He is light, the source of our light. Christ is our hope, our provider, our strength. Christ never fails anyone who trust in him, for we are

provided for in proportion to our trust in our Creator.” P. 96, *Give us this day*, August 2022. ¹

Simon Tanner of Switzerland (2022):

The much-vaunted tolerance of today’s mainstream only goes so far until someone disagrees and holds different values. Inevitably I have to think of the word from Isaiah 5:20, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who declare darkness to be light and light to be darkness, who call bitter sweet and sweet bitter.” This paradigm shift does not seem to stop at our churches and faith communities either. (He goes on to explain.)²

Daily news: It is impossible not to see how evil is compounding!

3. What IS the image of God? What is it we are to make visible?

When God called Moses to go up to the mountain to meet Him, Moses asked the Lord to show him His *glory*. The Lord responded by saying He would show Moses His *goodness*. (Ex. 33:18, 19) We might ask, “What is His goodness?” How does *glory* and *goodness* equate or compare?

⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” (Exodus 34:5-7a)

God exegetes his own name: “(I am) compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love...” So, it seems our purpose is to make these qualities visible to the world—to make an invisible God visible to a longing world.

Our mandate and privilege to Make God Visible is described in Colossians:

² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

³ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your^[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

¹ 2022. *Give us this day*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press. July, p. 97.

² 2022. Tanner, Simon. *Newsletter*. Helimission. Spring, p. 2

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 2:2-14)

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this *mystery*, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:27, emphasis mine)³

Let's highlight the truths in these passages:

- In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- Our own completeness is only made real through Him.
- The mystery is "Christ IN YOU!! Yes, Christ in each of us. This is not us just "getting better," it is literally Jesus living His life through us! It is an incarnation, our mortal bodies ("clay pots," "earthen vessels") filled with His Spirit!

Our awesome, present state will grow even greater in the future: **We are being transformed**, to be like him, and even creation "stands on tiptoe" to see our transformation!

But *we do* know that *we will be like him*, for *we will see him as he really is*. Beloved, now are *we* the sons of God, and *it* doth not yet appear what *we shall be*: **but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be 'like him; for we shall see him as he is.** (I John 3:2, emphasis mine)

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into his image** with ever-increasing glory (splendor), which comes from the Lord. (II Cor. 3:18, emphasis mine)

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. (Romans 8:18, 19, NIV)

In my opinion whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us. **The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.** The world of creation cannot as yet see reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God's purpose it has been so limited - yet it has been

³ Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®

given hope. And the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay and have its share in that magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God! (8:18-21, J.B. Phillips)⁴

It is crucial we know Christ, the Father, the Holy Spirit accurately, for we become like what we worship. This is spelled out in Psalm 115:8, as the future of those who make and worship idols: “Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.” To the extent that we have wrong understanding of who God is, we will go astray in our attempts to MAKE GOD VISIBLE.

Progress in making God visible comes at the cost of loss, disappointments, setbacks, griefs.

How do we reconcile these things with God’s promises of abundant life? The “abundant life” seems to be primarily about our relationship with the Lord, not about our circumstances, though Deuteronomy spells out all the ways God wants us to prosper. Here are a couple of Old Testament examples:

Queen Esther: “From the day I was brought here till now, your servant has had no joy except in you, Lord, God of Abraham. O God, whose power is over all, hear the voice of those in despair. Save us from the power of the wicked, and deliver me from my fear” (Esther 3:29)

Jeremiah: “When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart.” (Jer. 15:16)

King David, reflecting on God’s protection and provision at a time of war: “I was young and now I am old and I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.” (Psalm 37:25 NIV)

My poem: “What good is all my private joy when the world when the world around me....”⁵

4. Two realms or settings in which we Make God Visible

1. *At a corporate/group level.* Of course, “corporate” means “to form a body”—We are the Body of Christ, so as a body we are to display His characteristics, to reveal His Heart—who He is. We are to make God visible at

HM does this via purpose and practice around the globe. You join it to participate in this group means of MAKE GOD VISIBLE. I commend each of you for choosing to reveal the Lord as you do through your working together in Helimission! (Currently in Papua, Sulawesi, Madagascar. Formerly in Latin America and several countries in Africa.)

⁴ J.B. Phillips (paraphrase) of the New Testament. <http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/JBPhillips.htm>

⁵ Dodds, Lois. 1975. *We have this treasure*. A book of poetry. Monroe, NC, USA: Corey Press.

2. *As an individual member of His Body.* What do people see and experience in/through us--in spite of misery, loss, grief, disappointment--in spite of living in an evil world? We are to make God visible, not just in spite of but through these!

I will offer a few personal examples in which I discovered this to be true, not to draw attention to myself, but to illustrate the practical ways in which we can reflect God's character. Often, we don't know at the time the impact we have.

- During my doctoral work at UCSB one of my professors, who had been a priest, told me, "You are the most well- developed person I have ever met." This caused my heart to sing because I had truly come to believe that "my completeness is realized in Christ," as Colossians says. His validation meant more to me than my grades or my degree!
- When we lived in Peru a dentist missed depositing a large check from us. Five years later he found it and let us know. I wrote a new check and added interest for the years we had the money that was due him. He was astounded and said he had never seen such integrity.
- A fellow staff member criticized me harshly! "Oh, you know Lois, she always attracts the suicidal ones!" Rather than defending myself, the Lord prompted me to laugh, thinking "They probably would have said that about Jesus." Another time someone blew up in a meeting, pouring out complaints and blame. Though defensiveness rose up in me, the Spirit prompted me to respond with love, patience, self-control. Later a colleague said, "I've never seen someone 'under fire' stay calm and not respond 'in kind.' "
- In a crisis I made a sudden decision which saved our neighborhood from extreme danger. It cost me thousands of dollars, but in the moment the Spirit prompted me my values loomed very clear! Not for any amount of money would I endanger others.
- With a new home I dedicated to the Lord, my "first fruits" offering was to lend it to a pastor's family in need of a home. The realtors had never seen a choice like this, to put serving others ahead of profit.

5. How do we fail to Make God Visible?

We know it can happen at both levels. We are all too familiar with this fact. The world abounds with examples! Leaders go astray, policies are wrong, people choose all kinds of sinful behavior. One sad reality is that corporate vision and purpose can be nullified or obliterated by the ungodly behavior of even one person in our body. An example I observed relates to a translation of the Bible for an Indigenous group. It was done in record time, yet the people it was translated for did not feel the personal love or identification of the translators and thus did not want to read the Word when it was done. A tragic outcome, like others we see when someone's self-interest or personal ambition wipes out the impact a ministry has had.

6. How does God become visible? Our personal impact:

Though there is both success and failure at the corporate level of Making God Visible, in this presentation I will emphasize how we are to make God visible in our personal lives. Jesus said that by how we love “shall all men know” that we are His disciples.” (John 13:35)

What does this mean? It is through our personal relationships, our character and habits, our practices. It seems to be especially visible through the “fruit of the Spirit,” so often revealed in the emotions we display and the words we choose. I like this explicit identification—it helps me see God at work in me and others. God has made us each to be a representative of “the new humanity” which is in contrast to our old self-centeredness.

As, therefore, God's picked *representatives of the new humanity*, purified and beloved of God himself, be merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. (Col 3:13-15, J B Phillips paraphrase)

This sounds like “the fruit of the Spirit” -- the personal qualities through which we make God visible. What blocks us? Perhaps a personal lack of holiness, failure to understand and display Jesus' character and the Father's values.

We know that life today is full of opportunities for failure. I see that in myself every day! My old self is quick to want my “rights.” I must choose the way of the Spirit instead—that is the way of love. Overstress, burnout, illness, anger, pride (which goes before a fall!) and difficult circumstances all provide ample opportunity for us to sin! We may succumb to an “I deserve” attitude instead of practicing Jesus' self-giving. (Scripture lists many “footholds” of Satan which can trap us.)⁶

As a counselor to people in ministry I witness many practices which people choose in their attempts to cope with high stress. These actually make them worse, by compounding their problems and adding even more stress. We might call these “mal-adaptive coping” —though in reality they are only an attempt to cope without actually helping us cope. Many of these choices are outright sin; others are matters of inappropriate choices not right or healthy at the time.⁷ (For example, using alcohol or some other substance as an attempt to deal with stress actually adds stress and creates additional pressure and unwanted outcomes. Various habits can become addictions, adding more layers of stress. Turning to pornography or other sexual sin may add “excitement” to one's life, but at the extreme cost to relationships and spiritual wellbeing. Other behaviors may also become attempts at coping, leading to more maladjustment.)

SO—How are we to become holy enough to MAKE GOD VISIBLE? How does the Holy Spirit work in us to produce holiness, righteousness, the character of God?

⁶ Dodds, Larry, M.D. 21 Footholds of Satan class handout, Heartstreamresources.org

⁷ Dodds, Lois, and Dodds, Larry. (various years, editions) *Stressed from core to cosmos*. Heartstreamresources.org

Let's review what God said as told to Moses, recorded in Exodus, when He focused on His goodness rather than His glory. These are the characteristics of the Lord we are to make visible, as identified by the Lord Himself in Exodus 34:

- compassion
- abounding love
- graciousness
- long-suffering (patience)
- justice
- faithfulness

7. So what are the means the Holy Spirit uses to help us grow into maturity, godliness, character of Christ/God, grow fruit of Spirit?

Our relationships are primary. We must learn to love as Christ loves. I recommend memorizing the middle chapters of John because they are so rich in showing us Jesus' emphasis on how we are love and how we are to love! The apostle Paul also instructs us, in Philippians, Chapter Two:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

¹⁴Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶as you hold firmly to the word of life. (Phil. 2:1-16)

Peter too encourages us by telling us the resources God offers so we can live in a godly way:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3; NIV).

Jesus sets the example for us. His life in us is visible to others as they see the fruit of His Spirit in us: “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22 ESV) Let’s contrast this luscious, delicious and beautiful fruit, “against which there is no law,” with the opposite:

Love	versus	hate ⁸
Joy (delight)		sadness, lack of pleasure, “ho-hum” attitude
Peace		conflict
Patience		impatience, wanting our own way, our own timing
Kindness		cruelty; lack of consideration for other
Goodness		evil/wrongdoing (deceitful words, behaviors, being self-centered. See The Footholds of Satan), ⁹
Faithfulness	versus	infidelity of any kind, to God, relationships, purpose, to self by not becoming who God created us to be, lack of integrity
Gentleness	versus	roughness, harshness, hurrying others, not considering, (Example: the little boy on the church steps)

⁸ Among the Indigenous Aguaruna people in Peru’s Amazon, the evidence of the “helping spirit” they seek is to become good killers. For Christians, our helping Spirit enables to become good lovers.

⁹ Dodds, Larry. Footholds of Satan. (various years and editions) Heartstream Resources.

Self-control versus indulgence in selfish behavior, defensiveness, maladaptive “coping” turning to things which are unhealthy to “reward” self, etc.¹⁰ (self-control means choosing to exhibit the other fruit of the Spirit—choice is key!!!)

How do we go from self-centeredness to becoming the Holy Spirit’s “new humanity?” Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

So, trouble is inevitable. The normal human experiences of life which we cannot escape shape us—through our responses to Holy Spirit promptings in obedience to God’s Word, OR our reactions based on old patterns of thought and behavior which blur or obscure His image in us. Life guarantees we will encounter these. **How we choose to respond makes the difference!** Key experiences are:

- Suffering—To be human is to suffer! We can’t escape it!
- Temptation—reveals our desire to be self-centered; provides opportunities to sin.
- Testing—clarifies our values and commitments
- Hardship—teaches us patience and endurance, reliance on God
- Grief, loss—finding God is sufficient and preeminent

We can ask, “How does the fruit of the Spirit show up in me in all of these things? What is the means by which I can grow?” (See my dissertation.¹¹) The Word of God is central! Questing after God as a life habit leads us to grow. Relationship with the Lord and with others becomes our primary life motivation.

How does the fruit grow? Jesus said He is the vine, and we are the branches. The branches bear the grapes... We must stay connected with His life flowing through us, His Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is what makes God visible, because it is the character of God expressed in our human behaviors—our faces, our emotions, our choices, our character.

Discussion for Women’s Group

Dr. Dodds is a developmental psychologist and a licensed professional counselor with about 50,000 hours with global humanitarian workers and other people in ministry. She is a teacher and the author of fifteen books and hundreds of articles.

In reference to topic of MAKE GOD VISIBLE write your questions for Dr. Dodds.

¹⁰ Dodds, Lois. (various years and editions) *Stressed from core to cosmos* and class presentations on stress.

¹¹ Dodds, Lois A. 1991. *The perception and experience of supernatural, spiritual power*. Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara. Dissertation Abstracts, Int’l.

Please reflect on the group presentation and the following:

As women, we are primary nurturers of society, our group, family, others, our own selves.

In this how do we MAKE GOD VISIBLE? We have unique opportunities. How can we foster development of our love-abilities? Self-giving is our DNA; generativity is our nature. Whether we are single or married, we are generative. Though generativity is uniquely demonstrated in pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, child rearing, family creating, it operates in many spheres. In missions about one third of members are single women, who nurture others in their many roles. That is, about half of women in missions are single. (Theories of female development propose it is different from male development.)

“Fruit” is laden with meaning, as it is laden with seeds. It is the womb of nurture of what is to come, the promise of a future. It is the means of reproduction. Like the ovary of any species, the fruit is the seed-bearing promise. It is our DNA as women; we are born with all the “seeds” (eggs) we will ever have! This is a precious legacy, which behooves us to live carefully, minding the health of future generations. God’s incredible generosity is always displayed in fruit—lavish provision for the future.

In my counseling, I am always fascinated by what people tell me about who has been the most nurturing to them. I like to hear their anecdotes of their mentors and nurturers. It seems grandmothers are most frequently mentioned.

Please reflect on this and the presentation of yesterday and offer any questions for discussion.

Thank you!