

One good thing

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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I did one good thing that day. Only one.

I did some things inadequately and halfheartedly. I mechanically responded to email, returned phone calls, chipped away at the mountain of paper on my desk. I was often bored and listless, and struggled to corral my wandering mind. I yawned a lot, and looked out the window.

I did some things poorly. I was lethargic and unimaginative in my Bible study and sermon preparation. I was inattentive with my family. I used sharp, biting words rather than words that open doors and till the soil for harmony and goodness.

I failed at some things. I started and stopped. I got frustrated and tried again, but ended up in the same familiar place.

I ignored some things. I neglected some planning that needed to take place, I left books for review unopened, I refused to think about things because they were hard and required decisions that I didn't (and still don't) want to make. I didn't press "send" on some e-mails that needed to get out sooner rather than later.

That day, I did not work as if unto the Lord. I did not love God with all my heart, mind, and strength. I did not love my neighbor as myself. I don't know why, really. I just didn't. Some days are like that, I guess. Some days God and others undoubtedly deserve better than the paltry efforts I make. Some days it is easy to get fed up with yourself.

But I did one good thing. I didn't want to, mind you. I made every effort to add this one thing to my bulging bag of things ignored and undone. I thought of excuses not to get in my car and drive to where I needed to be. But in the end I wore myself down. Or maybe God wore me down, in the gentle, persistent way God has of doing these things.

In the end, my best efforts notwithstanding, I managed to do one good thing. I sat with a dear old saint who has seen much of suffering in these last years. I sat with her while the warm afternoon sun poured in through the window. I sat with her and listened to updates about her treatment, about assisted-living prospects, about how often her kids visited. I sat there listening and thinking, all the while, “This person has seen so much pain, dear God. She has buried children and a husband. She knows so much of death and struggle.” But there she sat, a smile on her face in the afternoon sun.

I read from Scripture, [Psalm 121](#). I read, “The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life” to a woman whose many years have witnessed much harm. I read, “He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber” to a woman who had recently slipped, fallen, and broken her collarbone. We smiled together when we read those words. “Kind of ironic, isn’t it?” I limply offered. She just smiled.

And then she cleared her throat and said, “I often wonder why God allows such bad things to happen to me,” she said. “Sometimes I’ve even wondered if there is a God. But God always has his ways of speaking to me when I’m about to give up. I know God is watching over me.” I smiled.

We sat in silence for a while, pondering these mysteries of suffering and providence, this mysterious God who neither slumbers nor sleeps, who watches over his children lest they stumble and fall, while all around they stumble and they fall. Then we prayed, by the window in the afternoon sun.

And I kept praying as I trudged out into the mud and the slush of a surprisingly warm day. I prayed that God would forgive me for my bulging bag full of a day’s worth of failures and ignored and undone things. But I also made sure to say, “Thank you for this one good thing.”

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