

In the Company of the Good BOOK Version March 1, 2026, Good Shepherd Church

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The heart of the last 20 years of my teaching university graduates was The Company of the Good. And that Company exists to this day ten years later. It is, after all, eternal and invaluable.

Sometimes in the Company I would do something different. I would tell the listeners something like this....

I am going to offer some comments and questions, then give a relevant quotation, without telling you who said it. Names sometimes interfere with Truth and understanding. If known, they can prompt judgements on the validity of what is said; if they are *not* known, but given, they can spur annoyance and irritation. Who in the world is that! When judgements or annoyances occur, the *message* is often lost. So today, we will leave out the names.

Truth comes from many sources, some strange. Someone, unnamed, said, “A parrot in the house screamed at 2 am—‘The house is on fire! The house is on fire!’ Now is this the time to say, ‘I’m going back to sleep. The parrot doesn’t know what he is saying!’”

So, focus only and totally on what is said. Ask inwardly to discern what is true and meaningful, and perhaps helpful for you.

First thought: Do you smile very often? Perhaps at a little child, or at someone you don't know as you pass by?

Now the quotation: "Whatever lifts the corners of your mouth, trust that."

Second thought: Have you ever raced though life, even its beautiful parts? Have you ever sped through a magnificent garden, or through a holy place? Just glanced as you tore by?

Now the quotation: "Tortoises can tell you more about the road than hares."
Turtles can tell you more about the road than rabbits. They see more than a blur, which is really not seeing at all.

Next thought: In a world that increasingly cannot tell true from false, it is imperative to know what Love *is* and what not. Many are confused.

Now the quotation: "Whenever we manage to love without expectations, calculations, negotiations, we are indeed in Heaven."

The quotation again: "Whenever we manage to love without expectations, [*Expectations... That's not love... a list of requirements or services*]... whenever

we manage to love without calculations [*Calculations*... that's not love either... love is *spontaneous*; it doesn't *calculate*]... Whenever we manage to love without *negotiations* [love doesn't *negotiate*; it doesn't settle for a C plus... or a 30% tariff; *that's not Love and its not Heaven*].

Next thought: We all have to say a last goodbye at times in this world. Goodbye, mom or goodbye dad, or son or daughter.

Now, the quotation: "Goodbyes are only for those who love with their eyes, because for those who love with heart and soul there is no such thing as separation."

Next thought: You have noticed the virtual omnipresence of discord and conflict in this world.... The horrific enmity, hostility, malice, malignance, bitterness, resentment, revenge, venom....

Now the quotation: "The holiest of all the spots on earth is where an ancient hatred has become a present love."

Next thought: We are all God's children. We are part of a Oneness that is unbreakable, inseparable, and eternal. And Oneness is not here today and gone tomorrow.

Now the quotation one Remembrance Day: “Let us never forget the solemn truth that the nation is not constituted of the living alone.” It’s bigger than that. The dead are part of it, and they always will be. This is a deeper, more profound inclusion that the word *Nation* implies.

Next thought: We admire and adulate heroes in this world, but not all of them. Some are left out. And only a kind heart has the sight to notice them.

Now the quotation: “[Humanity’s] greatest actions are performed in minor struggles. Life, misfortune, isolation, abandonment and poverty are battlefields which have their heroes—obscure heroes who are at times greater than illustrious heroes.”

The world is full of these little people. I doubt if there is a single soul here who does not know one of these heroes, perhaps many.

Now let me tell a story of the rescue of beauty. We have lost the importance of the virtues. They have flittered away, along with their beauty. But their beauty will be rediscovered and rescued. There are, of course, things that never look beautiful. And things that generally don’t—the criminal justice system, for example. But even that can be beautified.

Joe Serna, an American, was a retired army sergeant first class who did three tours in Afghanistan and was twice wounded. One night he and three other soldiers were driving along a creek when the road suddenly gave way and the truck careened into the creek. Slowly it filled with water, and Serna, unable to extricate himself, knew the end was near. The water rose past his legs, his waist, his chest, his neck, and stopped at his chin. He was the only survivor.

Later, back in the States, he was arrested for drunk driving, [part of post traumatic stress syndrome... war tears you to pieces] and as part of his probation, he was not permitted to drink. Then he lied about a urine test and was caught.

“I knew what Joe was going through, and I knew Joe’s history,” said Judge Olivera, himself a picture of kindness and empathy, for he was a veteran too. “But he had to be held accountable, so I sentenced him to one night in jail.”

As Joe entered the cell, terrifying flashbacks of being trapped in Afghanistan hit him. A moment later, Judge Olivera surprised him and joined him in that cell for the whole night. They ate meat loaf and talked of everything including family. And the frightful walls of Joe’s nightmare seemed to open and then

vanish. “He brought me back to North Carolina from being in a truck in Afghanistan,” said Joe.

The beautiful video of Judge Olivera and Joe then fades to a scene of the two in court, hugging. And Joe, deeply moved, says quietly, “I won’t let you down, ever.”

Steve Hartman, narrator of the story, said, “Sometimes jail is not what a man needs. Sometimes the best sentence is compassion.”

As Joe and Judge Olivera embrace in mutual respect in the last scene, Joe says, “I love you.... Thanks for believing in me.”¹

The crucial key in Judge Olivera’s blessing is in not just knowing how to help, but *doing it, putting it into practice*. “When the word ‘Lamp’ is uttered, darkness does not vanish; when a patient is told of the properties of a drug, his illness is not cured by attentive listening; when a man suffering from the agonies of poverty is told of the various ways in which funds can help him to overcome it, he does not feel a bit relieved; a hungry [soul] is hungry, even after hearing a tasty description of a magnificent banquet.”² He gets the description, *but nothing to eat*. If a beautiful teaching is only heard and not applied, it is useless. If it is not extolled out of the depth of one’s experience it is valueless.

The great Judge Olivera *acted*. He acted. That is the good news of the Company of the Good.

One act of kindness infinitely outweighs a thousand intentions. Amen.

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¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/judge-spends-night-in-jail-with-man-he-sentenced/>

² David C. Jones, "God, Love, Service and Practice—The Curriculum of Sathya Sai Baba and the Re-vitalization of Our Schools," *Journal of Modern Educational Review*, vol. 3 # 5, 339-346.