

**Buzz King**

[buzz@BuzzKing.com](mailto:buzz@BuzzKing.com)

<https://BuzzKing.com>

**Colossians 3:23–25, 24,26 ESV**

*<sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

**Proverbs 22:6 ESV**

*<sup>6</sup> Train up a child in the way he should go;  
even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

**Matthew 28:16-20**

*<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

**John Wayne.**

When I was a boy going to Catholic grammar school, the sisters did a lot more than teach the kids. They made sure there was breakfast in the convent before school. Any kid whose family couldn't pay for lunch was quietly nodded through the cafeteria line without paying. One day, I was with a buddy of mine. We'll call

him Tony. His family had five kids and very little money. His father had a chronic medical condition and hadn't worked in years. They barely survived. The sisters made sure Tony had uniforms, as they did for many other kids, by collecting used uniforms that kids had outgrown, cleaning and patching them, and then giving them to kids who needed them. They ran a regular uniform recycling operation, with parents routinely bringing in uniforms that their children no longer needed. Parent volunteers did much of the work making the used uniforms look as fresh as possible. That day, I was hanging out with Tony on the playground after school, when an older volunteer, we'll call her Mrs. Rivers, came along and asked Tony if he had enough clothes for after school. I imagine that Mrs. Rivers or one of the other volunteers had noticed that Tony was wearing undersized, tattered clothes to church on Sunday. He said that he could use something new. She asked him what he needed most, and he said pants. So, she put us both in her car and drove us downtown to a men's shop. It was a long, narrow store, with racks of clothing for men and boys at the front, and a back area where tailors worked. As soon as we walked in, I realized that the big man in the back of the store who was being measured for a suit was John Wayne. I'll get back to this story.

Our first Bible passage for today is from Colossians. Colossians was written to a city called Colossae, in what is now Turkey; it was a prosperous city, with a

textile and wool-dyeing industry. The church there was probably founded by a follower of Paul. Although Paul is the stated author of the letter, many scholars question this, as it contains a vocabulary not found in his other letters, and the letter doesn't focus on Paul's favorite topics of righteousness and justification by faith. So, it's likely that the letter was simply attributed to Paul as a way of honoring him. By the way, Paul, had never been to Colossae at the time the letter was written. One purpose of the letter is to argue the divinity and saving powers of Jesus Christ. Another is to teach us how to live in this world as faithful people, and in a way that honors God. In our old way of doing things, we competed viciously with each other, but now we are to have compassionate hearts, and to live with humility and kindness. We are to be forgiving, always.

In the part of the letter where our passage comes from, our pseudo-Paul is arguing that Christianity is not a way of hiding from the world in some sort of spiritual isolation. Our faith demands that we be shining lights in the world. We must be on good relations with our neighbors and run our households and our lives in honorable ways. Much of what the author teaches us reflects the ethical standards of Hellenistic and Jewish authors of the day. But in this part of the letter, we see a specifically Christian slant to this, and that is that we live this way because it is what our God and Jesus Christ expect from us. We are to live for our

God, and we are to live, not for the approval of humans, but in service of Jesus Christ. Our passage says: *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.* Well, having been brought up as a Christian kid, I knew exactly why Mrs. Rivers, who had grandkids the same age as Tony and me, had decided to help some kid in the congregation, a kid she didn't know. This was her way of serving God, pure and simple. Her grandkids, I knew, were well off; they had parents who could easily provide for them, and Mrs. Rivers knew that this wasn't true of Tony's parents – and so she had a duty in the eyes of God. She worked heartily, with no let up. There were no bounds that kept her from helping some other family's kid.

Our second passage is from Proverbs. We've looked at Proverbs recently. The Book of Proverbs is a collection of short sayings that give advice on how to live a virtuous life. It is one of a collection of Old Testament Books that are collectively called the Books of Wisdom; they also include Psalms, the Book of Job, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. Although most Protestants don't include them in the Bible, Catholics and a few other denominations also include a Book that is itself called Wisdom and the Book of Sirach, for a total of seven books of Wisdom. A "proverb" in biblical literature is any compressed, instructional statement that makes use of artistic language, rather than normal written or conversational language. A proverb is pithy. The Book gets its name from the opening verse of the Book, which

is: “The proverbs of Solomon.” Solomon might not have written very many, or any of them, however. Over the course of the history of Israel, there arose three groups of religious leaders: priests, prophets, and wise men, also known as sages. It is this last group of people who wrote the Proverbs. The priests, by the way, issued laws, and the prophets spoke in the place of God. Scholars believe that the sages or wise men, the people who wrote the Proverbs, were a professional class in Israel, and that the Book of Proverbs was carefully collected from the writings of these people. The sages were highly educated and were respected for their practical insights into morality and psychology. The sages promoted a form of happiness that was attainable through obedience to ultra-high moral standards.

Our proverb says: *<sup>6</sup>Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.* The meaning is obvious: if you start early with kids, and teach them moral ways of living, they will be far more likely to live that way and to pass it on to their children. A society maintains a high, ethical standard of living by focusing hard on how it instructs children, and parents need to know this. Well, many years after Mrs. Rivers took Tony and me out to get some clothing for him, I happened to go to Tony’s home. We were in our late twenties, I believe, at the time. He started talking about Mrs. Rivers, and he reminded me of what she had done for him. I had actually forgotten the incident until he

started talking about it. I said something like, well, it sure was nice of her to do that. What he said to me has stuck with me all these decades. He said that his parents were good people. They loved their children and they loved God. But his mother in particular was bitter at the hard life they had lived. As a boy, he had heard his mother complain repeatedly about other parents in the church who could drive fancy Chryslers and eat steak every night. Tony said that he might have grown up just as bitter as his mother if it hadn't been for Mrs. Rivers. You see, I didn't know it, but Mrs. Rivers took him shopping a lot more than that one time. She more or less adopted him as another grandchild and took care of him all through high school. Tony said it was Mrs. Rivers who made a compassionate, empathetic person out of him.

Our third passage is from the tail end of the Gospel of Matthew. It's something that we've looked at before. It's a passage I love. It's Jesus' great commission to the Apostles, spoken to them after he has risen from the dead. He tells them to go out and spread Jesus' teachings of love, forgiveness, and empathy for all people, and that Jesus is the true Lord. The very last line is: *I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"

Well, I'd like to get back to Mrs. Rivers, the men's shop, and John Wayne. You might remember that John Wayne was in the back of the store, being fitted

for a suit. While Tony was trying on various pairs of pants, a tailor was running a tape measure all over John Wayne's body, pinning this and that, offering recommendations on what shirts and ties would go with the suit. I realized at one point that John Wayne had noticed us. He flashed a smile our way. Mrs. Rivers nodded back, and then walked over to Mr. Wayne. She introduced herself as a volunteer at our church, and that she was just helping out one of the boys in the parish. John Wayne complimented her, saying that what she was doing was a very good, and then he offered to pay for whatever she was buying the boy, and when she said it was pants, he suggested that she get the boy a belt, too. I believe he said something about his family facing some tough times economically when he was a kid. He said that he was sure that Mrs. Rivers' actions would impact Tony in a big way. That was all the invitation Mrs. Rivers needed: she proceeded to whip out a donation envelope from our church, saying that there were a lot of other kids in the parish who were in need, and that she regularly took up a special collection for them. I'm not going to pretend that he reacted warmly and gleefully to this request for more money. But, with a bit of a chagrined look on his face, he did give Mrs. Rivers a big handful of cash. Perhaps noting that he wasn't the most willing donor, Mrs. Rivers told him that she hoped he knew that God would always be with him - even until the end of

the world. It was Tony who told me years later that Mrs. Rivers quoted the end of the Gospel of Matthew to John Wayne. As near as I can tell, her specific version of this quote came from the King James translation.

Mrs. Rivers *worked heartily* for God, as our first passage tells us. She did it not occasionally, or when she had some spare time. She lived that way. She was a godly person who lived her faith and offered her life to the Lord. This gave her the nerve to solicit a contribution from John Wayne while he was busy being fitted for an expensive suit. She also knew how to train a child, and how to make sure that a child would go on to live a Christ-like life, as our second passage instructs us. She did it by example. And finally, she knew that the best thing she could offer any human was the promise that came from Jesus himself: that he would always be there with us, no matter what. Please pray with me.

*God, not all of us have it within us to be like Mrs. Rivers. We don't all have the natural enthusiasm for living for you by serving other people. But we can learn from people like Mrs. Rivers. Please keep your guiding hand on our shoulders as we proceed through life. Speak to us when we fall to the temptation of living for the rewards of this life, for money and power and prestige. Give us the nerve to step out of our comfort zone when we serve you. Better yet, help us to expand our comfort zone so that we are undaunted and unafraid to speak*

*about you to others, to teach the people with whom we come into contact that they should live lives of empathy and love, that they should understand that Jesus will indeed be there for us, until the end of the world – and beyond, in fact. Most of all God, when we are afraid for ourselves, for our loved ones, for what might face us tomorrow or next week or next month, enable us to see far past that, to the day when all suffering will end and we will sit under the glow of your glory forever and ever. Let that thought give us the courage we need to live for you in the most resilient, radiant fashion possible. Amen.*