

The Goodness of God
Ps 31.19-20, Ps 84.10-11, Ps 145.7-9
July 1, 2012

based on "God: As He Longs for You to See Him" by Chip Ingram

How good is God? Maybe a better question would be, "How good do you believe God to be?" If you answered the first question by saying, "God is all good" you are correct. If you answered the second question by saying, "I believe God is all good" you are probably not being completely honest with yourself. While you can say that God is all good, saying you truly believe that, all the time, is a statement of astronomical proportion.

To claim that you firmly believe that God is all good, means you always believe the following four things about God. God always does:

- T the best possible thing.
- T by the best possible means.
- T for the most possible people.
- T for the longest possible time.

And if you truly believe those four statements, then I'm sure you have put everything in your life in God's hands. You consider God first when you interact with other people. You consider God first when you manage your financial affairs. You consider God first before you make any ethical decision. You consider God first when you decide who to date, who to marry, or who your friends will be.

Are you still sticking with the claim you always believe God to be all good? Are there ever times when you doubt what God is doing? Are there parts of your life you have held back from God because you're not sure how he will handle them – will I loose my friends, will I loose my money, will I loose my status, will God send me off on a missionary trip to somewhere dangerous filled with snakes and spiders?

If you truly believe that God is all good, that means you have taken the title, the deed, of your life and signed it over to him. That means that you have so much confidence in God's goodness that you have flung caution to the wind, you've let go of the wheel, and you're ready to take a reckless ride of faith.

That's asking quite a bit, isn't it? We all want to believe in the goodness of God, but it's hard. We need to know, for a fact, that God is good. We all know a little about God's goodness, but we need to know more. The more we know about the goodness of God — the better we will see God. The better we see the real nature of God – the more we will love, trust, and respect God.

The first step in our investigation of God's goodness is to define God's goodness. Webster's dictionary defines goodness like this, "*the state or quality of being good, specifically virtue, excellence, kindness, generosity, or benevolence.*" While this definition is accurate, God's goodness is bigger and better than this.

A. W. Tozer defines God's goodness more fully. Tozer writes:

The goodness of God is that which disposes him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy, and his unfailing attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank, and friendly. By his nature he is inclined to bestow blessedness and he takes total pleasure in the happiness of his people.

The goodness of God is light-years beyond the dictionary definition. But some might argue the validity of Tozer's definition of God's goodness. How do we know that God is as good as Tozer claims?

You might recall that last Sunday I spoke about Moses asking to see God. Moses had heard the voice from the burning bush, he had seen the miracles in Egypt, and now he wanted to see to one responsible for all this. You might also remember that God told Moses he could only catch a glimpse of his back. While God passed before Moses, God proclaimed his true name and nature. Moses recorded that scene for us in the 34th chapter of Exodus: *Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 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, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."* (Ex 34:5-7)

In light of God's own definition of his goodness, the single word which best describes that goodness is generosity. God is generous. He is generous to a fault. God's generosity knows no limits.

Have you ever thought of God looking at you with all your baggage, all your junk, and all your ups and downs, and then saying to you, "I want to be generous with you. I long to give you what will make you happy – not because you deserve it, but because there's something about who I am that would bring me infinite joy to express that kind of generosity to you."

God's generosity has no mercenary elements to it. God never gives in order to get. God doesn't manipulate. His goodness is not limited by what the recipients deserve and it always goes beyond that. God sends the rain on the just and the unjust. God gives because it pleases him to give.

All that I've just said isn't some pipedream. It's all true. That is exactly how God feels about you – not just some of the time but all of the time. God is infinite in his goodness, eternal in his goodness, holy in his goodness. And you are the object of his affection – not because of who you are but because of who he is.

The more you bring this image of God into focus, the better you will see the truth about God. The better you see God, the more your entire life will become an act of worship; and a Christian will only know true happiness and his true worth when his life is one of worship.

Now, let's turn our attention to how God reveals his goodness to us. He does this in three ways that are easily recognized if we know where to look.

First, God reveals his goodness through natural blessings. These are blessings that people easily overlook. Sometimes we take the familiar for granted. God's goodness bursts forth from nature in more ways than we can count. Could all flowering plants procreate by using the same shape and color of flower? Of course they could. But that's not what happens. God's goodness calls for thousands of flowers, all different in shapes and colors. Why is every sunrise and every sunset beautifully different. Because of God's goodness. And the list is endless.

The reason God does all of these things is in verse nine of Psalm 145: "*The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.*" Are you a part of the "all" in that verse? Yes, you are – you and every other person on this earth. God's goodness, his generosity, is so great he doesn't just give us what we need to survive, he gives us more than we could even begin to appreciate. There is nowhere in the universe that we could go to escape God's goodness. His goodness truly permeates everything. If you only remain open to God, every corner of your world and every part of your day will remind you of his goodness.

God also displays his goodness through specific deliverance. When you go home today, take out your Bible and carefully read Psalm 107. It begins like this: "*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever*" (Ps 107:1). The psalm continues by giving four incidents where God's goodness causes him to deliver people who call upon him.

Take note that the first three rescues are from dilemmas the people created for themselves; some wandered away from God, others rebelled against God, and still others made fools of themselves and did stupid things. But when they called on God, God's goodness covered them. The fourth dilemma is from natural causes and God delivered those people, too.

Before you start thinking these things have nothing to do with you, take an inventory of your life. Have you ever wandered away from God? Have you ever deliberately broken one of God's commandments, thereby rebelling against God? Have you ever done something that was really stupid? Have you ever been saved from some natural disaster?

God's goodness toward you is so great that, when you call out in your time of need, God will deliver you whether your problem is of your own creation or not. However, in your deliverance, don't mock God by criticizing the deliverance he has chosen for you. Remember, God always does the best possible thing by the best possible means whether you agree with him or not.

The third way God reveals his goodness is through his son, Jesus Christ. And this revelation comes in three different ways.

The first way comes in the form of the undeserved goodness that he gives us in Christ. In the fifth chapter of Romans, Paul tells us, “*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom 5:8). The Father gave his Son as a measure of unmerited goodness. You don’t deserve it and I don’t deserve it.

God didn’t give Jesus as a substitutionary sacrifice for us on the condition that we perform some good deeds or we work real hard to clean up our act. God didn’t send Jesus because we made some marvelous promise to be good little boys and girls. Sin had damaged us so badly that only God’s unmerited goodness could save us.

The second evidence of God’s goodness in Christ has to do with the promise of future benefits. Romans 8:32 tells us, “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*” In other words, God has already shown you the magnitude of this goodness, so how can you not trust him to care for all of your other needs?

God is that serious about you knowing just how good he is. But we are no different than all of humanity – we have a warped view of God. When we view God’s goodness, or any of God’s other attributes, from the wrong perspective, we will always have a strong, negative response. We will never truly see God’s goodness until we realize his goodness has no sinister, ulterior motives – until we realize that God’s only motive is our welfare.

Think about it. The sacrifice of Christ is the most compelling evidence that God has nothing but our best interest in mind. After such a tremendous outpouring of grace, to not trust God’s goodness to cover everything else in our lives is illogical. It would be the equivalent of someone paying a million-dollar ransom for you and then you worrying about who’s going to buy lunch tomorrow.

The third way to see God’s goodness in Christ is related to his unique role as mediator between God the Father and his Creation. Because of God’s holiness and our sinfulness, we cannot stand before God. The only natural outcome of our condition is everlasting punishment and damnation. But in his goodness, God put Jesus between himself and us so that, because of Christ’s sacrifice, we can come before the throne of a holy God.

It is in and through our relationship with Christ as our personal Savior, that all of God’s promised goodness comes to us. If you want to understand and appreciate God’s goodness, you must begin and end in Christ Jesus.

All of this goodness requires a response. How do we respond to God’s goodness in the most proper ways?

First, we repent of our unbelief and ingratitude. To repent does not mean to be sorry, it means to turn around and go the other direction. It means a change of mind and a change of heart. It means that, as you are traveling down the superhighway of life, you

see your going the wrong way and then you fix that problem. You get off at the first exit, you drive across the overpass, and you reenter the highway headed the opposite direction.

The Bible speaks of faith and repentance together. That means you can't have one without the other. You can't have faith without repentance. Both faith and repentance are crucial for the Christian life. You cannot have a desire to repent without faith, and repentance is the proof that faith is alive and well. You can't have one without the other. It's only because of God's goodness that he sends his Holy Spirit with the faith that makes repentance possible.

Our second response is to rest in God's goodness when adversity comes. Life is hard. I'm sure you don't need me to tell you that. Sooner or later trouble comes knocking; a loved one dies, a job is lost, a child goes astray, a house burns down, a friend betrays you, worse yet a Christian brother or sister betrays you.

These things are hard to deal with, but we are called to rest in God's goodness even when it looks like everything is going the wrong way and all is lost. Since we know that God will always do the best possible thing by the best possible means, we can not only rest in his goodness we can rejoice in his goodness – always.

None of us have a complete knowledge of God's will, but this much we do know. We have God's own promise that his goodness and mercy endures forever. That means that there is no problem that can take us beyond God's concern and care.

Our third response to God's goodness is that we step out in faith like never before. Since we know that our best interest is always God's first concern, we can take steps of faith. Psalm 84:11 says, "*The Lord God is a sun and shield.*" That means that God is our power source and our defense. We can boldly and safely take new steps in our faith.

Most people refuse to take steps of faith because they are afraid they'll lose something along the way. They are afraid they'll miss out on something. Where is God calling you today that you are afraid to follow; sexual purity, honest relationships, business and financial ethics, witnessing to unbelievers? If you go where the God of goodness is calling you, you can rest assured that he will be sure you don't miss out on any good thing.

When you truly see the goodness of God, you will begin to take steps of faith. When you experience how God powered and protected you in those steps of faith, you will begin to take leaps of faith and you will know for sure that God is good.