

## God's Generous Goodness • Psalm 100:5

It was one of God's favorite ideas. He decided to make for himself a pair of humans: one male; one female. They would be a lot alike, but clearly different. They would be a lot like God although distinctly different.

God carefully designed every part from their hair to their toes. He planned on ten fingers and ten toes. He crafted organs that would work like miracles and last forever. He delighted to weave a soul into their bodies that would permanently link him with them, sort of a supernatural modem of divine connection. He made them reproducible, not only so that they could make more humans, but so they would enjoy the process and so that it would be an intimate and indescribable expression of their love for each other.

And there had to be a place for them to live. God would hold back nothing good. Their home would be a paradise filled with pleasure and devoid of pain. There would be no terror or tears, no fears or failures, no sickness or sadness. It would always be ideally comfortable, filled with wondrous beauty, loaded with creative opportunities. It would be God's perfect place for his perfect creatures.

When God finished making everything he had planned, he was delighted. He stepped back and sighed to himself that everything had turned out great. It was very good! Of course it was very good because God is very good and everything was full of God.

Adam and Eve were a truly happy couple. They literally had it made. Nothing could be improved upon. There was nothing that they lacked. They had an empire that was bigger than anything Alexander the Great ever conquered. They had a home that far exceeded Bill Gates' \$60 million dollar home in California. God was good. They were good. Their home was good. Life was good. To paraphrase a commercial, "It doesn't get any better than this!"

Except they decided that it wasn't quite good enough. They thought it would be a better place and their lives would be much happier if they could add just one more fruit to their breakfast menu.

Most significant of all, they decided that God really didn't know what was best for them. They decided that God wasn't as good as he made himself out to be. "If God were really good," they thought, "he would let us eat that luscious fruit that would make us so super smart that we would not only know what is good but also know all about evil."

God had warned them. He told them that if they went for that forbidden fruit they would get sick and miserable and die. But they wouldn't listen because they had decided that God was not good enough. So they took the fruit and they tragically discovered that God was right. They were wrong. They changed the whole world and our entire human family forever.

You would think that they and we would have learned an enormous lesson from this: the lesson that God really is good, even when it seems otherwise to us. But it's thousands of years since Adam and Eve and the collapse of Paradise, and we struggle with the same decision every day. We have to decide whether God is really good or not. What we decide about the goodness of God will shape every detail of our lives. It will determine if we are happy or sad, miserable or content, bitter or grateful, generous or greedy.

The decision of the poet in Psalm 100 was clear: "The Lord is good!" But before we routinely agree with the psalmist, let's consider the options.

If we believe that God is not good, we are deciding that we know better

than God. It sounds outrageous for us to claim that we know better than God, but it is a very common belief. All kinds of people all the time decide that they know better than God about all kinds of things. Ask the couple that is living together: "God says that what you are doing is sin. It's not good. So why are you two living together and not married?" The answer may come in different forms, but it is basically this: "because we think it's a good thing to do." Any time we know what God says and de-

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cide our way is better, we have decided that we know better than God what is good for us.

If we believe that God is not good, then our whole view of God is changed and we begin to fear him. We fear that he will make a mistake. We fear that he will not do us good. Many people live in frequent fear that God will zap them with bad things. God may punish us with sickness or trick us into losing the family business. He may make me move to a new job where I will be unhappy, cause my child to die or otherwise bring calamity on my life.

Anyone who believes that God is powerful but that God is not always good should live in fear. This is precisely the way most of the world religions work. They are built around images of God that are unpredictable and take delight in causing human misery.

It is a terrible thing to live in fear. It is the sad consequence of either not believing in God at all or believing that God is not always good. In either case, we are perpetually afraid of something bad happening to us and that there is not a dependable God to do us good.

If we believe that God is not good, we begin to look for evil in everything that happens. It's true that evil is powerfully present in our world, but those who do not believe in the goodness of God easily find the evil and seldom find God's good. These are the people who always expect the worst and are rarely disappointed because they will always interpret whatever happens as an example of evil. It becomes difficult if not impossible to trust. Trust is based on the assumption of good intentions and the expectation of good outcomes. But, if God is not working in everything for good there is pervasive pessimism that turns distrust into cynicism or despair.

If we believe God is not good, we are ungrateful. Only someone who believes in God and good has anything to be thankful for. If what we have did not come as a gift from God, we can only assume that we earned it or deserved it ourselves. Then there is no one to thank. Instead of lives of gratitude, we live lives of pride.

The final product of disbelief in the goodness of God is selfishness and self-centeredness. How else could it be? If God is not the center of our lives and if God is not good, what is left for us? We either become self-centered or we make someone or something else the center of our lives. It doesn't

take long to discover that we become disappointed with anyone or anything else that tries to replace God at the center of our lives.

Consider the alternative. If we believe God is good then we decide that God knows what is best. If God tells us to be truthful, we believe truth is better than lies. If he tells us that he designed us for sexual union only within a marriage relationship, then we do what God says. If he wants us to forgive those who hurt us, we forgive them even though it's hard to do. We believe God is good and that what he wants us to do is good even if we don't fully understand it.

If we believe God is good, we trust him to bring good into our lives. We do not expect the worst. We truly believe that God is looking for every opportunity to bless and help us. We are convinced that he always has our best interests at heart. We think and behave in ways that always count on God to be dependable. He will never trick us. He will never take unfair advantage of us. God will always be on our side. If we believe that God is good, we begin to look for his good in everything that happens. Every circumstance of life is interpreted in terms of the goodness of God.

I know lots of people who do this all the time. They lose football games and see God building their character. They get surprise phone calls and consider it an interruption from the Lord for good. They meet new people and are convinced that God has brought them into their lives. They suffer a broken relationship and trust God to give supernatural comfort and peace. They receive unexpected money and see it as God's way of providing cash to help someone else. Instead of looking for a demon behind every bush they expect God to show his good through every circumstance. These are wonderful people who truly live by faith. From everything I can tell, they are among the happiest people I ever meet.

If we believe God is good, we become grateful. Gratitude always goes with belief in God's goodness. The words of Psalm 100:5 are repeated often in the Bible, and almost always with gratitude:

Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. (Psalm 106:1)

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. (Psalm 107:1)  
Praise the Lord, for he is good; sing praise

to his name, for that is pleasant. (Psalm 135:3)

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O Lord. (Psalm 145:8-10)

God is good and that brings gratitude. When we believe and see and feel and experience the goodness of God everywhere in our lives and everywhere in our world, we are grateful. We want to say thanks to God. We want to show it in every way possible. We want to “Shout for joy to the Lord.” We want to “give thanks to him and praise his name.”

The key indicator of whether we believe God is good is gratitude. It’s almost impossible to disguise. Those who truly believe in the goodness of God are grateful. Those who don’t truly believe in the goodness of God are not grateful.

If we believe God is good, we desire to be like God. In other words, we want to be good. God has an interesting system of motivation. Some people motivate negatively and some people motivate positively. One boss will try to make you into a good employee by giving you praise and a raise. Another boss will try to make you a good employee with threats of salary cuts and firing. Some parents try to shape their children’s lives with compliments, others with criticism.

God goes with good. His generosity and grace are outrageous. He goes farther than I could go. He is kind to people who are mean to him. He gives money to people who refuse to give any back. He helps people who don’t deserve any help at all. He just never gives up. He never quits. He’s just good, good, good.

The way God figures it, his goodness to us will make us want to be good. He gives good jobs and lovely possessions and a thousand other blessings to Christians who turn around and treat others just the way God treated them. They pay their employees well, are kind to others and are generous to church and charities. They desire the very best for others whether they deserve it or not. They are forgiving, patient, thoughtful, courteous, loving and good like God.

Why do you believe? Which list best describes you? Don’t try to fake it because that’s impossible. Don’t try to live like a believer if you really don’t believe because it will never work. Behavior follows belief. Believe that God is good and all the rest will follow.

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Do you remember the famous story by Victor Hugo entitled *Les Miserables*? It is the account of a Frenchman who was cruelly sentenced to prison for stealing a loaf of bread. He es-

capades and finds refuge in the home of a Catholic bishop. The man has had a rough life. He does not believe God is good; nor is he good. He rewards the kindness of the bishop by stealing the bishop’s silver candlesticks. When he is caught it is a sure sentence back to prison and probably death. But the bishop takes compassion on him and refuses to charge him. He insists that he gave the candlesticks to him.

The bishop was forgiving; he was kind; he was merciful and good . . . just like God. Not only is the escaped convict set free, but his life is transformed. His view of God is changed. He, too, becomes a believer, and a good man.

God is good! Believe that with all of your heart. Make it the basis for interpreting everything in life. See God’s goodness. Be grateful. And be transformed to be like God.

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