

"Not Too Much to Bear"
Part 7 – GOODNESS
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There's a saying that goes like this: "God is good all the time, and all the time God is good!" Today we are going to learn more about the part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit called 'goodness.' We have already learned about love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness - and no matter how many times we've heard lessons or sermons on these qualities of a Spirit-filled disciple, we all need these reminders (maybe a wake-up call) to display the character of Christ to the people around us. Let's pray:

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your presence, for your ever-ready strength and help for us in times of trouble. We are so very grateful for your Word for it truly is a lamp for our feet and a light for the path. Speak now, for your children are eager to hear from you so that we may go out and spread your goodness wherever you lead. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Jesus told a story in Matthew 20 about the owner of a vineyard who employed men to work in his vineyard. Some worked all day and got a day's wages. Others were only on-the-job for the last hour or two of the day, but the owner also gave them a full day's wage. The ones who had been on the job the whole day complained that this wasn't fair. "We worked a whole day out in the hot sun and received the same amount of money as those who only worked at the end of the day. That's not fair." Either they wanted more money, or they wanted the others to get less money in order to make it 'fair.' But the owner said to them, "Are you envious because I am generous?" The word Jesus used there and translated 'generous' is the very same Greek word the apostle Paul uses in Galatians 5:22, 23 translated 'goodness.' Knowing that, let's think about what Jesus is saying. He is saying that people who want to be good, as he is good, don't worry about what is strictly *fair*, but rather tend to (and like to) err on the side of generosity and mercy. The owner chose to be good, meaning generous and mercifully kind, towards all the workers rather than choosing to be fair and pay the latecomers just a fraction of what the others received knowing they all needed the work in order to receive a paycheck.

Biblical goodness, a characteristic of those who are followers of Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, this goodness should come out of us *generously*, without calculating how much it's costing us, or how much it's not costing others. Biblical goodness that flows from the Holy Spirit should find us committed to doing the right thing on behalf of others even when it is difficult – and this brings us to an important point about goodness. Biblical goodness has legs on it; it is visible in our actions. It's not just that a *person* is good, but a person *does* good. As the fruit of the Spirit ripens within us, good works should come flowing out like a mountain stream in the springtime after a long winter of deep snow. And people are drawn to this kind of goodness. Just think about it. God's goodness in you draws others to know the goodness of God. God's goodness in you reveals our good, good Father who is perfect in all of His ways, even when those ways seem to contradict what the world calls 'good.' What a privilege this is as his children!

Billy Graham wrote, "*The word 'good' in the language of Scripture literally means "to be like God," because He alone is the One who is perfectly good. It is one thing, however, to have high ethical standards but quite another for the Holy Spirit to produce the goodness that has its depths in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The meaning here is more than just "doing good." Goodness goes far deeper. Goodness is love in action. It carries with it not only the idea of righteousness imputed, but righteousness demonstrated in everyday living by the Holy Spirit. It is doing good out of a good heart, to please God, without expecting medals and rewards. Christ wants this kind of goodness to be the way of life for every Christian.*" (The Collected Works of Billy Graham, p. 518.)

The Bible is very clear that we are not born good. We are all born sinners with a quick tendency to do wrong. Who teaches a 2-year-old to have a screaming fit when they don't get their way? Who teaches a 3-year-old to lie about whether they ate the lollipop? Our sin nature

comes out early and it comes out strong. We are not born good. Psalm 51:5 declares, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Romans 3:11-12 declares, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Now, in our continual efforts to justify or defend ourselves, we read that and think, "Wait. I seek God. I haven't turned away. I'm not worthless. I do good." The Bible is saying is this: **Apart from the work of God in your life – apart from the power and presence of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives** – we aren't seeking God, we turn away from His ways all the time, we are worthless in the pursuits of the kingdom of God, and we don't do good that matters. With a straight face and a clear conscience, I cannot say about myself what we said in the beginning about God: "Meagan is good all the time, and all the time Meagan is good." Put your own name in there. It's complete malarkey! It's a lie! We are not good all the time. On our own, we are not even good, generous, and merciful some of the time. We are completely, utterly dependent on the work of God in us if we want to display the goodness of God in our homes, in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our church, on our sports teams, etc.

Now, let me be basic and clear: Our lives should be noticeably different after we say YES to Jesus. Why? Because when Christ is in us and we are in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and empowers us to be less like us and more like him! Once our YES is truly a YES, then we are **no longer controlled** by our sin nature and **can overrule** all the unhealthy & harmful stuff that our previously sin-controlled hands want to do, and our previously sin-controlled mouths want to say. Once we have said YES to Jesus, good fruit becomes the evidence of what is going on inside. Jesus put it this way, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit . . . A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." (Luke 6:43-45). Are we recognized as good trees or bad trees by everyone who knows us? What we do shows what we are on the inside.

Christopher Wright puts it this way in his book Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit (p. 104), "So it is out of the deep well of goodness in the heart, flowing from the life of the Spirit of God living within us and modeled by Jesus himself, that we draw the water that will irrigate the fruit of the Spirit, by being good in our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions, and by doing good – not as "do-gooders", but as "good-doers." Look with me at these Scriptures calling us to goodness:

- Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."
- Galatians 6:9-10, "Let us not become weary in doing good . . . as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."
- Colossians 1:10, "Live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work."
- 2 Thessalonians 3:13, "As for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good."
- Titus 2:3, "In everything set them an example by doing what is good."
- Romans 12:17-21, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Biblical, Christ-centered, Holy Spirit empowered goodness is visible. It is not manipulative. It does not do good in order to get good. It is costly in time and energy and often money. It doesn't feel 'fair' to do good sometimes when it feels like everyone else is just out there 'doing their own thing.' But like anything, the more you practice it and the more you exercise goodness by doing good in Jesus' name, the more natural it will become for you and you won't

even notice or care whether you're the only one doing good or not . In a world full of pain, heartache, and hatred, we are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be good and do good in order to demonstrate God's goodness.

There were many youth and adults who did many, many good things these past couple weeks as part of our church family. There were 31 different people who helped complete 5 home mission projects during our local mission week. Grateful & amazed is how I feel about all that goodness! There were 21 different people, with less than 24 hours-notice, who dropped whatever else was on their plate to come get corn into the freezers for our annual Turkey Supper in November. That's the way it is with corn. When it's ready, it's ready. That was God's goodness coming out among us, and I am grateful.

There were 32 youth and adults who gave many hours of their time this past week (and month) to help Fruitful Farms VBS happen for lots of children. Did they all have other things they could have been doing? Absolutely! But they set an example for our children by choosing to be with them, to learn their names, to hold their hands, to wait patiently outside the bathroom doors for them, to help them with their crafts and their snacks, and to do all the crazy motions to the songs. Why? Because it's so good! Even when the older students start to get in their heads that it's just not cool to sing those songs and do those motions, all of these adults surrounding them and doing it anyway demonstrates the good difference that God makes in us. It's not about what others think of us – it's about how good God is! There was a tremendous river of God's goodness flowing in this building last week, and I am grateful.

On Tuesday evening, one of the groups didn't have any kids. Hunter Waite was one of the leaders of that group. So, he came to me and asked if there was anything I needed done around the building since he was free for an hour or so. Now, he's a hardworking young man with lots on his mind. He could have gone out to his car, put his head back, and taken a nap. He could have gone downstairs and hung out with his beautiful new wife, but instead, the goodness of God within him brought him to ask the question, "What else could I do while I'm here?" (Of course, I found a few things to occupy his time...)

I know that many of you have reached out to the Barry's in this very difficult time of grieving. I know that many of you have taken meals for those in need. I know that many of you have been reaching out regularly to families in our congregation who are in times of trial, trouble, and physical affliction with cards, calls, messages, and hugs. I know that many of you are giving generously from what God has given you so that we can continue to express God's inherent generous goodness through local and international mission-giving. I know all of that merely by my own limited observation. But here's the thing: God knows it all. God sees it all. Any good thing we do for him from a pure heart of love, the angels celebrate. Any good thing we do, standing strong on our convictions that no one knows about but us, God knows. God sees. Anytime we are reaching out to quietly build a bridge of reconciliation with others, God knows. God sees. And the fruit ripens a little more. And Jesus is seen a little more. And the church radiates his goodness a little more. And the gospel is spread a little more. And God is glorified a little more – and that little more – may be the difference it takes to bring someone to a saving faith in Jesus Christ! And for that reason alone – this fruit is not too much to bear.

For all that you do that is good, church, thank you. I know sometimes it is costly. But as we were singing on Thursday night as our final night of VBS started, and the kids were having fun singing, and the adults in the room were trying to do the motions and laughing at each other, there was an overflow of the Holy Spirit in the room, so much sacrificial generous goodness in one place, I thought I might either pop with joy or fall down on my knees in grateful praise.

Psalm 23 ends this way: *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* Like a boat moving on down the river, let's live our lives in such a way that the wake that follows us is full of goodness and mercy all the days of our lives.

Amen.