

“God Is Good. Really?”

Psalm 136 begins: “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Psalm 136:1). O give thanks to the Lord, for he is....what? *Good!*

Many Scripture verses tell us that God is a good God. Psalm 135:1-3a says, “Praise the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord; give praise, O servants of the Lord, you that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.” Psalm 119:68: “You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.” Psalm 31:19 tell us, “O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you.” Psalm 145:7, 9: “They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness...the Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over that he has made.” When the rich young ruler came up to Jesus and addressed Him as good teacher, Jesus responded, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18). Do you think maybe the Bible is trying to tell us that God is good?

Maybe you had this prayer before a meal at home: “God is great, God is good, now we thank Him for this food.” You’ve probably heard this line: “God is good all the time...” – you know the rest? “And all the time, God is good!”

But don’t you wonder sometimes, “Is God *really* good?” Some of the things that happen to people...some of things that happen *to us!* The news is filled with all kinds of terrible things. People being shot. People hurt or killed in accidents. Natural disasters like floods or wildfires or hurricanes that destroy people’s property, and sometimes their lives. Parents anxiously awaiting the birth of their baby, then there’s a miscarriage, or baby is stillborn. A man works hard all his life, looks forward to retirement, and two months after he retires he drops over dead with a heart attack. You know, as well as I do, those situations in life when we just question, “If God is so good, how come He allows such awful things to happen?”

We’ve probably all been at the place in life where we really struggle to hold on to the belief that God is good? In some ways this has been a really difficult time here at Community church. People I know and love are dealing with serious illness. Then the plane crash that killed 3 of the Nelson family, the southern gospel award winning group, and 4 other beautiful Christian people.

“God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.” Is that so?

The Word of God assures us that, in spite of all the sorrow and heartache in this life, in spite of our doubts about it, God is a good God. We’ve already looked at a number of verses telling us that. If the Bible is truly God’s Word, God speaking to us, then we can trust that God is good, even when experience pushes us to question that. We live by faith, not by sight.

I’d like to suggest that there are two things we can look at when we begin to question whether or not God is good. *We can look at Biblical history – God’s actions through history with His people.*

This is what the writer of Psalm 136 did. He begins, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,

for his *steadfast love* endures forever” (Psalm 136:1). The Bible links God’s goodness to His steadfast love. The translation “steadfast love” is the Hebrew word *chesed* – it means God’s covenant love for Israel. His faithful, enduring love for them.

This psalm is a liturgical hymn of thanksgiving that the Hebrew used in their worship. No doubt a leader would say the first part, and the congregation respond, “for his steadfast love endures forever.” It’s a celebration of the goodness of God! His goodness in creation: “who spread out the earth on the water”...“who made the great lights...the sun to rule over the day...the moon and stars to rule over the night” (verses 6-9). Then the psalm goes on to celebrate God’s goodness in delivering them from slavery in Egypt...and then His goodness in bringing them into the promised land. They saw and celebrated God’s goodness in His acts in history.

The Bible – the Old and New Testaments – reveal God’s goodness in His actions on our behalf. In the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 God creates this, and then this, and then this, and at different points God looks at what He has made, and says, “It’s *good!*” After God is finished with His creation, this is what happens: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). He creates man...and woman...provides for their rich and joyful life. He sets Adam and Eve in a perfect environment, makes the earth fruitful. But then something happens. They rebel against their creator, disobey God, do their own thing. So, from the 3rd chapter of Genesis onwards, humans get worse and worse, and taste the grief and bitterness that results from their sin.

But does God’s goodness then stop? No! After driving Adam and Eve from the Garden, God sits down and makes clothes for them (Genesis 3:21). This couple are then given a child “with the help of the Lord” (Genesis 4:1). Cain kills his brother Abel, and becomes the first murderer. Cain becomes a fugitive the rest of his life, but God puts a mark on Cain so that no one will kill him – he’s a *protected fugitive*. Humans continue to get worse and worse. Genesis 6:5-6 says “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” God sends the great flood, but He saves Noah and his family, because they are righteous. God Himself even shuts the door of the ark to make sure it’s tightly sealed! Genesis 7:16 says, “And the Lord shut him in.”

The Biblical drama continues. God wants to reveal Himself and His nature to all of humanity, and He chooses a group of people called Hebrews to be the instrument through whom He reveals Himself to the world. They become the nation of Israel, God’s people. But time and again, they fail. At times, God judges them for their self-interest and waywardness. But His goodness and steadfast love for them continues – He always saves a remnant who have not abandoned Him.

Finally, God promises to send Someone – a chosen one, an anointed one – who will bring salvation to the world, and reveal to the fullest extent His goodness and steadfast love for all humanity. That promise is fulfilled when Jesus is born in Bethlehem that first Christmas night. This is God’s Son. 33 years later, He is nailed to a cross, and executed. His followers are crushed beyond measure. Think you could convince them that God is good as they stand near

the cross, and watch Jesus being executed? But three days later He walks out of the tomb, alive, and everything is changed! His goodness never fails! We look back at the cross, knowing the resurrection has taken place. We now know that when Jesus hung on the cross, what seemed to be the worst thing in the world, was actually the God showing His goodness beyond measure!

Can I look at the cross of Jesus, and what God has done for us in Christ, and say that God is not good? If someone is willing to give up their son or daughter for you, would you say that person is bad?

When we look at the whole story of the Bible, time and again we see God acting in history to demonstrate His goodness and faithfulness!

But we can look at our own history and probably see the faithfulness of God. Think back over your life. Can you recall a time when things were bad, maybe you were going through a rough time, but then in the midst of that, you saw the goodness of God? No matter what your life situation now, are there things you can be thankful for? Good things in the midst of the bad stuff? Can we lay aside the negative, the bad things in our life, for a moment, and just think of blessings we have. If there's good stuff in your life right now, it's from God! James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father."

Job, early in his horrible suffering, after he had lost all his possessions and all of his children, said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). It's so easy to focus on the "taken away" part, isn't it, and to forget "the Lord gives" part. Sometimes we take for granted the good things God gives us, and quickly complain when something bad comes.

I watched the service of celebration for the Nelons. The surviving daughter, Autumn, at one point came up front and sang with one of the other gospel groups, even though Autumn had lost her mom, her only sister, and her step-dad. She lost her sister, but her sister's husband was also on that plane. I heard his father talk about his son, what a beautiful Christian he was. His ministry to senators and representatives in Washington, D.C. The whole service was a celebration of their lives, and of the goodness of God, in spite of what happened. Sometimes we have to sing about the goodness through tears.

Eight years ago Christian singer and song writer Rory Feek lost his wife Joey to cancer. I remember using that sad story in a sermon. Rory struggled greatly with this loss. They had a little girl, 2-year-old Indiana, a Down Syndrome child, now without a mom. This July, Rory married again. He married Indiana's school teacher. He reached his decision to ask Rebecca to marry him when Indiana said, "If you would marry Rebecca I think I'd like to have her as my mom." It was such an uplifter to see Rory smile again!

Psalm 34:8 says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." I can't prove that God is good. No one can. *It takes faith* to believe in the goodness of God when bad things happen to us, or someone else. As I said earlier, the Bible says we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

That psalm, Psalm 34:8, says, “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” It’s something we have to experience for ourselves. We have to “taste it”. Our trust in the goodness of God has to grow out of our having a relationship with God through Christ, experiencing God ourselves.

In that same Psalm, the writer goes on to talk about our troubles and afflictions. “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all” (Psalm 34:17-19). The writer could declare that God is good, even while acknowledging that sometimes life crushes us and breaks our spirit.

For Rory Feek, it took 8 years for things to balance out – the bad and the good. It may take 8 years, *or even eternity*, for things to balance out for us. But God’s goodness and steadfast love never leaves us.

We sang earlier today the song, Goodness of God. It’s become one of my favorite songs.

“I love You, Lord For Your mercy never fails me
All my days, I’ve been held in Your hands
From the moment that I wake up Until I lay my head
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

’Cause all my life You have been faithful And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

I love Your voice You have led me through the fire
In darkest night You are close like no other
I’ve known You as a Father I’ve known You as a Friend
And I have lived in the goodness of God, yeah

’Cause all my life You have been faithful, oh yes You have
And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.”

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
September 8, 2024*

