

These days, as I am working on cultivating my son's character, I am constantly trying to encourage him to be a good kid. After certain behaviors I provide immediate feedback: that was good—do that again, or that was bad—don't do that again. If he shares a toy with his baby sister, I say, "That was good—do that again." If his mom and I aren't looking and he sneaks some candy and eats it, we say, "That was not good—don't do that again." (He hasn't learned to conceal the candy wrappers yet!) Hudson knows his mom loves tomatoes, so on his own initiative he went to our garden, picked the ripe ones, and lined them up on our deck for her. That was good, Hudson! Then, for some inexplicable reason, he decided to pull down his pants and "relieve" himself on them. That was not good, Hudson—don't do that again. As parents, we all want to teach our kids to be good. And even though we all make mistakes, we ourselves are typically trying our best to be good. Though there are some notable exceptions in Hollywood and Washington, D.C., we typically don't promote and celebrate bad behavior. We want to be good. We want to be around people who want to be good.

Today, as we continue our **God is \_\_\_\_\_** sermon series, we get to focus on the fact that **God is good**. Sometimes the goodness of God is referenced in a trite or superficial way. I found a front row parking spot—God is good. I got out of a speeding ticket—God is good. Some of you saw that last month, Forbes revealed that the pop star Rihanna is worth well over one billion dollars; she's the second wealthiest woman in entertainment, behind only Oprah. When a reporter asked her about it, she said, "God is good." Though that's true, sometimes those three words sounds trite and superficial, like we are saying because this specific thing worked out the way I wanted, that proves God is good—almost implying that if I ended up getting a parking spot in the last row, or getting the speeding ticket, or going bankrupt rather than becoming a billionaire, God wouldn't be good. Though sometimes circumstances are an expression of God's goodness, God's goodness always transcends our circumstances. God is good when life is good. But unlike we so often feel, God's goodness does not ebb and flow based upon the circumstances of my life. God is good, and God is good, even when life is not so good.

For centuries theologians have used three words to talk about Gods' nature: **omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient**. They simply mean that **God is all powerful, all present, and all knowing**. These are true and important concepts when it comes to understanding who God is, and what it means for God to be God. But an important word that is often left out of the conversation is **omnibenevolent. God is all good**. God is the epitome of goodness. Because God is God, and God is all good (this is a very important concept), God can only ever do what is most good. Because God is God, the Bible tells us that He cannot lie, He cannot err, He cannot sin, He cannot be tempted by evil. But in addition to that, because God is God, He cannot do anything other than what is best. He only ever does the very best thing.

All throughout Scripture the Bible tells us of the goodness of God.

- "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).
- "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things" (Psalm 107:8-9).
- "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him" (Nahum 1:7).
- "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (1 Chronicles 16:34).
- In Ezra 3:11, we read that when God's people returned from exile and finished rebuilding the temple "with praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever.'"

One of my favorite verses about the goodness of God is found in Psalm 34:8: “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” It’s not just a declaration that God is good, but an invitation to experience His goodness. Sometimes we are convinced in our minds that a certain experience is going to be bad, even though we’ve never tried it, so even having never tried it, we say we don’t like it. My entire childhood, I swore I didn’t like broccoli, that I hated it. But the truth was, I never tried it. It wasn’t something we ate in our home, and I had always heard people say it was bad. And it looked like a tree—how could it be good? Then, when I was in college, I took a girl on a date. We went to a nice steak restaurant and, when my meal came out, they had put broccoli on my plate. I jokingly told my date that I had never tried broccoli. She said, “Well you’re going to try it tonight.” I said, “No way! I’ve gone 20 years without eating it; there’s no way I’m eating it now.” I was as stubborn as a three-year-old. She said, “Until you try it, I’m not talking to you.” I figured two could play that game. So we sat there—I swear this is true—for four or five minutes just staring at each other, fidgeting with our silverware, refusing to budge. Then I figured, I’m paying a lot of money for this meal, this is miserable, so as the bigger person (ha!), I gave in and ate the broccoli. To be fair, I thought it was delicious. Needless to say, that relationship did not work out.

Sometimes, just like me with broccoli for the first 20 years of my life, when it comes to God, even though people have never really reached out to Him and experienced Him, they have already decided in their minds that God is not good. Maybe that describes someone you know, or maybe that describes the place you are in yourself right now. There are all sorts of reasons someone might believe that God is not good.

- Maybe their father was absent or abusive, and, like most of us, they view God through the distorted lens of their earthly father and assume God’s just like him.
- Maybe they had a bad experience at a church or with a religious leader; if someone who represents God is bad, it’s so easy to assume God Himself is bad.
- Maybe life has just been really hard, and they have a hard time reconciling how a good God would allow so many bad things.

There are all sorts of reasons a person could question the goodness of God. But when Jesus lived among us, one of the most important revelations He brought about God is that God is good. He began his most famous teaching ever, the Sermon on the Mount by saying, “Let me tell you the type of people a good God has chosen to bless”—and it’s not the sort of people who this world expected to be blessed.

- The world says, “Blessed are the rich.” Jesus said, “God blesses the poor.”
- The world says, “Blessed are the happy.” Jesus said, “God blesses those who mourn.”
- The world says, “Blessed are the powerful.” Jesus said, “God blesses the meek.”
- The world says, “Blessed are the crafty and shrewd.” Jesus said, “God blesses the pure in heart.”

God always does what is good.

Later in the sermon Jesus said, “Let me explain to you the way people work.” He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’” (Matthew 5:43). In other words, the world says, “You should love the people who like you and are like you, but you should hate the people who don’t like you and aren’t like you.” This wasn’t just back then; we see that exact same logic at work today—love the people who agree with you, cancel the people who disagree with you. Have you noticed that? The message of our culture is so accepting and affirming, right up until you don’t agree with everything they want you to agree with. The moment you take a divergent stance, even if you take it with kindness and grace, you’re painted as a backward imbecile and shamed into compliance. That’s how it’s always been—the way of the world is to love the people who are like you and hate the people who aren’t like you. But listen to how Jesus finished that statement: “But I tell you, love your enemies, and pray for

those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). You need to live in the opposite way from the way of the world, and all your interactions need to be marked by love and goodness. Why is that? “So that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:45). Jesus said his followers have to love everyone because our good God loves everyone. He goes on to say, “God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). Jesus taught his followers to be good to everyone, even those who are not good to them. And the reason He taught them to be good to everyone is because God is good to everyone, sending blessings and provision to the entire earth, even to those who do not believe in Him.

Jesus is helping His disciples realize that God is good. Later in the sermon Jesus talks about our tendency to be overwhelmed by stress and anxiety:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matthew 6:25-26)

Jesus is using an argument from lesser to greater. “Look at how God takes care of creation. If that is how God takes care of creation, how much more will God take care of his children?” God is good. And because God is good, you don’t need to worry.

I want to take a moment and speak a word to anyone who might wrestle with anxiety. The statistics say that more people are weighted down with anxiety and seeking professional help and medication for anxiety than at any time in history. I want you to know if that is you, I have a compassionate and soft heart for you. I know that is a difficult road to walk. I believe that for many people, there is a place for professional counseling and medication. But sometimes our anxiety is rooted in a lie we have believed about God. Jesus taught that some people have anxiety in their lives because they have not yet learned the truth that God is good and that our good God can be trusted to take care of them. Not for everyone, but for a lot of people, learning to live in the reality of the goodness of God is the life-changing turning point in their struggle with anxiety. And I hope that for some people, that turning point begins today, that living in light of the reality of the goodness of God breaks the bondage of anxiety and worry in their life.

Jesus taught again and again about the goodness of God. Toward the end of the sermon, as Jesus was teaching his disciples how to pray with boldness and confidence, He said, “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:9-11). Once again, Jesus is entering into our world and appealing from lesser to greater: even flawed earthly fathers desire to give good gifts to their children; they want to provide for them, not poison them. Every time I take my son to the store he asks for donuts. And every time he asks for donuts, do you know what I do? I get him donuts! We eat them together and get our faces covered in powdered sugar! Jesus’ point is clear: if flawed earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more does our perfect heavenly Father? God is good! He is a good father. And as a good father, it is His absolute joy and delight to give good things to His kids when they ask. Can I tell you one of the key differences I’ve observed in 15 years of ministry about people who are constantly spinning their wheels with a lackluster prayer life, and those who have a rich and deeply satisfying prayer life? The difference is often whether people believe, deep in their heart, that God is good and that He delights in spending time with His kids and giving good gifts to His children. If you believe that, your prayer life is likely to soar. If you, don’t it probably won’t.

I believe every one of us today, myself included, needs a fuller revelation and deeper understanding of the goodness of God. In the book of Exodus, after God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, after he brought them to Mt. Sinai and gave them the ten commandments, Moses went through a challenging and exasperating trial as a leader, and Moses asked God to show him His glory. Moses wanted to see the majesty and power of God in an unprecedented way. God led Moses to a cleft in a rock, the like mouth of a cave, and then God said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you” (Exodus 33:19). When Moses asked to see God’s glory, God said, “Yes, I will show you my glory; I want you to see how good I am. I will cause not just some of my goodness or most of my goodness, but all my goodness to pass in front of you.” And that is my prayer and hope for you today—that you would want to see God for who He truly is, that you would see God in all His glory, and as you do, you would know how good He is.

Not only do we face the temptation to question the goodness of God, but we also have a constant tendency to forget God’s goodness. Think about the Israelites who had just come out of captivity. They had been slaves for 400 years and God rescued them through ten unprecedented miracles: the Nile turned to blood, frogs and flies and darkness were over the land. After they were set free, a cloud led them during the day and a pillar of fire led them at night. When they got to an ocean they couldn’t cross, God split the Red Sea and they walked through the sea on dry ground—not a muddy ocean floor, that dirt was dry as a bone. God gave them water from a rock and bread from heaven every morning. But as soon as they faced the first sign of adversity, “in the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt’” (Exodus 16:2-3). No matter how many things God did, as soon as things got hard, the Israelites accused God of not being good. Have you ever found yourself doing the same thing in your life? I know I have. As long as everyone is healthy and happy and life is going right, *God is good*. But as soon as things get hard, I’m not so sure He’s good.

Because knowing and trusting the goodness of God is so important, do not think for a moment that our spiritual enemy is not engaged in this conversation. He is constantly trying to drum up doubt and solicit suspicion about the goodness of God. Think about the first temptation humanity ever faced, with Eve in Genesis 3. Though of course hitting on pride and greed may have been part of the temptation, when Satan was talking to Eve, he called into question the goodness of God. “Did God really tell you that you couldn’t have that fruit? A good God wouldn’t withhold something from you, would he? Oh, God told you there would be consequences if you ate from that tree? There won’t be any consequences; a good God wouldn’t do that.” At the heart of the temptation was Satan getting Eve to believe God is not good. The same is true for the temptations in our life. No matter the temptation, at the heart of it is the lie that God’s character, God’s word, God’s way, and God’s will ultimately aren’t good, aren’t best, so we should do what we want to do instead. Whether it is cheating on your taxes, exaggerating your heroism or moral innocence in a story, marrying a non-Christian, or refusing to forgive someone who wronged you, behind every one of those temptations is the lie that God’s word, God’s way, and God’s will are not ultimately good and best. And since God can’t be trusted to show you what’s right and to care and provide for you, you might as well take matters into your own hands.

Because the enemy is always trying to call into question the goodness of God, one of the most important things we can do in spiritual warfare is keep our eyes open for the goodness of God and, when we see it, celebrate the goodness of God and thank Him for it. One of my favorite things to do with my son each night is put him to bed. We put on his pajamas, brush his teeth, read a book, pick the stuffed animals he wants to sleep with that night, and then say our prayers. And before I pray over my son, I ask him what he wants to thank God for. He usually begins by saying, “Thank you, God, for washing away our sins.” What else do you want to thank him for? Mommy. What else? Daddy. What else? Addie. What else? And then it’s a wildcard—my bed, my fan, my clock, my clothes, our van, our church, our friends, my grandma, the carpet. He thinks about everything that happened that day, and everyone he interacted with that day, and everything he saw that day, and starts thanking God for them. At first I thought that was

sweet because it was so childish. Then I realized my two-year-old was teaching me something about how to spot the goodness of God. If you want to spot his goodness, do you know all you have to do? Keep your eyes open. And then, with every person you interact with and every object you lay your eyes on, say, “Thank you, God. Thank you, God. You are so, so good.”

God didn’t have to create that person, or to create that thing, or give you that thing, but out of His goodness, He chose to. Did you see that this week, NASA’s Mars rover sent back a picture from our neighboring planet? [View the sermon video to see a photo of the surface of Mars.] Now it’s cool that we know what it looks like, but doesn’t that make you a little more thankful for grass and trees, flowers and fruits, rivers and lakes and waterfalls, elephants and alligators, flamingos and falcons, ducks and deer, horses and hippos—even cats? If you lived there for a day, you’d come back and see the goodness of God everywhere and thank God for everything.

Our former senior pastor, Gary Johnson, is one of my dear friends and mentors. I guarantee if you have spent any amount of time with him at all you have heard him quote Psalm 27:13, “I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” If you want to see the goodness of the Lord, just look. It’s everywhere. And the goodness of God is not just on display when everything is going well. In Psalm 23, the most beloved psalm in all the Bible, David talks about God being with him in the valley of the shadow of death, about what it was like being surrounded by enemies. Yet he says in 23:6, “Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.”

God’s goodness follows you like a shadow in broad daylight; no matter what you do, it’s always there. Not just on the good days of your life, or the easy days of your life, but also the hardest days of your life, the loneliest days of your life, the darkest days of your life. God’s goodness and love is with you ALL the days of your life. God is good.

The ultimate way we know what God is like is through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Not only was every aspect of Jesus’ life perfect and good, He used an analogy to describe Himself related to a shepherd. In John 10 He said, “Think about people who look after sheep. Most of the people are hired hands. And because they are hired hands, when a wolf approaches, they run away to save their own lives. Those sheep aren’t their sheep; the sheep are just a paycheck for them, so they run away to save their own lives. But that’s not what I’m like at all.” In John 10:11 He says other people are out to promote their own interests and save their own skin, but “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” And this is of course the ultimate way that God showed He is good, through His willingness to lay down His life for us. That’s why the gospel is called *good* news.

Some religions focus on the fact that God is righteous and has to punish our sins. Other religions focus on the fact that God is merciful and desires to forgive our sins. Jesus showed us that God is both: He is a righteous God who deals with sin seriously and at the same time He is a merciful God who desires to forgive our sins. How can He be both righteous and merciful at the same time? He lays down His life for us. The sin is punished and we are forgiven. What kind of God would do something like that? A God who is good. I don’t know if you have studied the other religions of the world, but there is no other religious faith that believes in a god who gives his life for his people. That’s the God Jesus revealed to us—a God who is good. I hope and pray for each one of us, that as we get to know God better, we know that God is good, that we see His goodness everywhere we look, that we sense His goodness following us all the days of our lives, and that on those dark days when we feel grief and sorrow, we can look to the cross and know, without a shadow of a doubt, we have a God who loves us, a God who was willing to die for us, and that God is good.