

Week 1
The Goodness of God's Providence

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Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, let him do it as one speaking the very words of God. 1 Peter 4:10-11

It is right to give God thanks for the many good things in our lives. So much is provided even though we don't deserve it. The rain falls on the just and unjust alike. But there can be little doubt that the greatest gift of all is Jesus. The great CS Lewis, when asked what makes Christianity unique among other religions, simply responded, “Grace”. Human justice almost always involves punishment. The debt is not considered paid until the offender has been made to suffer as we have. The idea that a holy God would pay our penalty with the death of his own son is truly radical! We are all offered that amazing gift. But just as importantly, we are called to share it with others.

In these highly charged times, we have no more effective weapon against the forces of division than grace. Let's remember that we are in this boat together. We are all experiencing the collateral damage caused by the warring of a kingdom where the only guiding principle seems to be power at all cost. But let's not forget the true Kingdom to which we belong – a community where the two most important rules are to love God and love others as yourself. The Golden Rule is God's idea, spoken through Jesus. Treat others like you want to be treated.

How does that apply in today's world? What about purging the double standards in our own lives? I don't want people taking one decision that I make and using it to define who I am. Then, Lord, keep me from putting others into narrowly defined boxes. I need people to understand my frustration with having to choose between imperfect options. Then, Lord, let me extend that same understanding to others. It hurts when I feel shunned, dismissed, and mistreated for being on the “wrong” side. Then, Lord, please help me from responding to others that way.

We have all faced unpleasant choices. Participating in the kingdom of this world will always mean compromise. But in God's kingdom we don't have to settle. We only receive the absolute best; undeserved, unending love. No matter how current events unfold we can take the opportunity to reflect that love. Instead of withdrawing or acting out in bitter frustration, we have a chance to reach out with the same empathy and patience that God has with us. The goodness of God is seen in his extravagant, compassionate grace. He provided a means to for us to be reconciled to him. That gift is just as essential in healing our earthly relationships.

Grace - We all need it, we all get it, and we should all give it.

'The Seasons of Awesome'

One of my favorite seasons during the year is Autumn. It's a season where God pulls out his brush and palette of earth-tone paints and begins to change the colors of his creations. We are so blessed with the awesome colors of Autumn. It's so easy for us to take God's blessings for granted and not appreciate and give thanks for his wonderful creations and miracles. I can't help but wonder with all the beauty of the seasons what our home in heaven with Jesus will be like. The word awesome comes to mind! The repetition of seasons throughout the year also remind us that He is in charge. It's God's way of informing all of nature and myself of the best "season" yet to come in the next life! We have a limited time here on earth and God reminds us of this, so I give thanks and praise to our awesome God! As the apostle Paul writes in Philippians 1:21, 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

Our God is an awesome God, He reigns! 'Soli Deo Gloria'

John Raymond

'All My Life'

I turned 40 this year..... sigh... 40. I don't feel 40, well except for my achy knee. But in my mind, I'm the same energetic, passionate, adventurous 20 something that spent summers sleeping on air mattresses, fighting cockroaches, and mixing concrete by hand in Juarez, Mexico. As this milestone birthday passes, I can't help but reflect on those times long ago. I was working for a youth ministry taking teenagers across the Mexican border for their week-long mission trips. We led these teenagers in construction projects, running a Bible school for the neighborhood kids and experiencing Mexican culture. It was raw, powerful, extreme ministry. Looking back, putting the safety of 50 teenagers and adult leaders in the hands of 4 college students in a foreign country seems a little crazy. Okay... maybe a lot crazy. But we were fearless, trusting, confident. And God was on our side, walking alongside us. His hand at work was visible and tangible in the midst of everything going on. His spirit flowed through our worksites and in amongst those teenagers so strongly you could almost reach out and grab it. Week after week I'd watch God visibly transform young people as they served and opened their hearts to God and to the community.

And now at 40, looking at my current life...wife, mom, teacher, etc. it is easy to say that the powerfulness and presence of God has grown lackluster. My life doesn't seem as exciting as those days on the dusty streets of Juarez. I've traded shovels for baby toys. And that big old school bus I drove teenagers across the border in... replaced with a sweet silver minivan full of kid car seats!!

These seemingly conflicting stories have been bumping into each other in my soul for the last few months. And I've found myself wrestling with and trying to reconcile these 2 very different versions of myself.

And then I listened to the Goodness of God.

All my life you have been faithful. If it was true then. Keeping us safe on the rough and tumble streets of the Juarez colonias, opening my heart and my life so You could use me to minister to teenagers and love our community friends. Then it is still true today. You are faithful. Just as much now as then You are walking alongside me as I live this current life of ministry as mommy and teacher. Your power is alive in me now, just as much as it was then.

And all my life, you have been so, so good. Instead of hauling wheelbarrows of concrete, I may be changing diapers or grading papers. But your goodness is in those things just the same. The sweet gurgle and smile of my little baby girl, the crazy game of superheroes that constantly fills our house, and even the voice of my kindergartener working on his memory verses. God is so, so good!! God has blessed me with a beautiful family and has filled my heart with His love and purpose.

Turning 40... I don't need to look back with longing at past adventures, but look forward, trusting in God's faithfulness and goodness. Walking confidently in his power and anticipating more good things to come. God is so GOOD!!!!

Emily Klingbeil

The Goodness of God

Lyrics

I love You Lord
Oh 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
I will sing of the goodness of God

All my life You have been faithful
All my life You have been so so good
With every breath that I am able
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
I have lived in the goodness of God

Your goodness is running after
It's running after me
Your goodness is running after
It's running after me
With my life laid down
I'm surrendered now
I give You everything
Your goodness is running after
It's running after me