

Week 2

The Goodness of God's Plans

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“And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” **Isaiah 58:11**

What is God up to anyway? What is the point of letting chaos rule our world? All this disease, division, destruction causes that age-old question to arise: If we serve a loving, all-powerful God, is it not reasonable to expect that he would use that power to protect those he loves from bad things?

It is true that good things come from the “Father of Lights” (James 1:17). But the Bible clearly shows that God does not only prioritize good things. He wants *growing* things. It's only in our submission to God's cultivation and pruning that the true restoration of our soul can happen. One of the contradictions of life is that the closer we get to our image of a perfect world, the further we get from our own perfection. The more confidence and pride we gain in ourselves, the less we turn to God. Human concepts of safety, security, and stability often produce sterile environments where growth opportunities are limited.

In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14), the third servant thought he was successful because he took no risk and nothing bad happened to the master's money. But of course that wasn't the point. Risk and growth are two sides of the same coin. When we use what God gives us, when we act in faith, it's risky. But God has never promised us a risk-free life. The Bible doesn't sugar-coat the harsh realities of the world. It prepares us for a tough journey. God wants us to develop strong bones, and that strength comes from exercising our faith in the scorched places. When people are in the midst of pain, we have to be careful about how to use the phrase, “This is part of God's plan.” How can we claim to know the mind of God? But while we can't be certain of the details, we can be confident that whatever happens, God's desire is to build us.

It's nice to experience good things in this life. But good things won't get us into the next life. We need to let go of our desire to control every outcome. It is a futile and soul-sapping effort. Instead, the Bible encourages us to renew our trust in the providence and sovereignty of the Lord. The goodness of God is seen in his plan to bless people by growing them closer to him. Even in difficult times we can be buoyed by the knowledge that God is working for good.

No challenge is meaningless when it produces growth.

Weekly Devotion by Karl Nordvall

God Runs After Us

Reflection from Erin Nickelsburg

The Goodness of God is one of those things that seems to come easily to the very young and the very old (which is where I am including myself at this particular moment). Somewhere in the middle, you lose track. In our humanity we rebel and forget. We become the Israelites wandering in the desert, forgetting that our clothes haven't worn out in 40 years, that clean drinking water comes up from the rocks, and that food rains down on us from heaven. We grumble. We complain. We think we would have been better off where we used to be.

And yet, God's provision for us never stops. Just as it didn't for the Israelites.

His. Provision. Never. Stops.

It isn't enough to know that God has Plans that include our Provision. It isn't enough to know that God is the Beginning, the End, the Author, and the Creator.

Without the context of God's goodness, it is easy to convince ourselves that God doesn't know what is best for us and that, instead, we know.

Good thing His goodness keeps running after us.

I went through that rebellion in my early twenties. I mean, let's be real, I go through mini rebellions all day every day. Times when I don't want to accept His rules, His goodness, His sacrifice, His mercy...because I want it my way (insert Backstreet Boys song here...or maybe it is N'Sync...but I digress).

Looking back from a vantage point some 20 years on, the places where I left the path He intended for me are so clear. And yet, He restored me. He pruned those vines. He led me through the fire. And in darkest night, He is close like no other.

Isaiah 40:28 is a reminder to the Israelites "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable."

God never tires. And His ways are unsearchable. We are not privy to His plans. But when we recognize God's goodness – "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble: and He knows those who trust in Him" – Nahum 1:7 – our need to intricately understand His plans no longer matters. Instead we step out in faith.

Are you tired yet?

I am.

Surrender! Do it! Put it down!

He is running after us because He loves us that much.

He is running after us with His goodness.

There is a peace that comes with laying it all down.

A peace that passes understanding.

Love Wins

Reflection from Tina Langhough

God is love and “Love wins!” Jesus won it all on our behalf! He is the ultimate goodness! We claim it and it should shine through in our lives, pure and simple. True, yet not always obvious or easy. This awesome goodness of God seems to come into conflict with our egos - a lot.

Whatever we focus on, and give our energy to, grows. “Love winning” through us takes deliberate practice and devotion. Our heart is a battle ground between our ego and the goodness of God. We need to intentionally focus on the love of God, nurture it in ourselves, practice it, and express it outwardly to others. We need to humbly pray for it and give it room to grow in our hearts. That means willingly decreasing the room in our hearts for our ego and its need to be right, its opinions to be heard, and feelings validated. If we claim the love of God, then we must be joyfully obedient to it. To live out “Love wins” on a daily basis, our self-centered nature needs to take up less heart real estate than God’s goodness.

Where do I see the goodness of God today? In the steadfastness of family. In the tenderness of old friends. In the blessing of new friends. In the meals and cards that arrived as we grieved the loss of loved ones. In the relief that forgiveness brings (in both receiving and in the obedient act of forgiving). In the healing of old wounds. The bombardment of prayer from our church family to cover people in times of hardship and pain. The practical meeting of peoples’ needs with donations, listening ears, and compassionate presence. The gentle nagging of the Holy Spirit. The confidence that God will never give up on me. And in the peace that dwells in me when I finally manage to put the word of God first and the needs of my ego second. “Love wins” in a million different ways when the goodness of God shines through us brightly.

Romans 12: 9-14, 18

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

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

“The Goodness of God”

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