

# THE GOODNESS OF JESUS

THE GOODNESS OF GOD 5

Jesus is the embodiment of the goodness of God.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

The Goodness of Jesus  
The Goodness of God 5  
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*The Goodness of Jesus*

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## Welcome to *The Goodness of Jesus*

Surely the most effective way to discover the goodness of God is to consider Jesus.

In His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and rule at the Father's right hand, Jesus embodies the goodness of God in ways we can readily discern and follow. Disciples of Jesus are those who follow and imitate Him in good words and good works. By so doing they do not earn salvation from Him; rather, they express the salvation He has freely given them, and thus bring the goodness of God to light in the land of the living.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Only One is Good

*Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.”* Matthew 19.16, 17

*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.* Hebrews 1.1-4

### *Jesus and goodness*

That Jesus of Nazareth was a good Man, and did many good works, is hardly disputed today. Even skeptics and unbelievers will agree that the records show, as Peter explained to Cornelius, that Jesus “went about doing good” to strangers He’d never met, and without expecting to be paid (Acts 10.38). The word “good” is associated with Jesus throughout the Gospels, both the content of His teaching and as a description of His life and work.

So it shouldn’t surprise us to see one inquirer addressing Him as “Good Teacher”. But we note Jesus’ response to that address: “No one is good but One, *that is*, God.” It’s as if Jesus were saying to that young man, “Be careful here. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. If you acknowledge Me to be *good*, then you are acknowledging Me to be God.”

Of course, Christians believe that Jesus was good, that He did good works, taught good words, and left a legacy of goodness for His followers to emulate and enlarge upon (Jn. 14.12); and that He was also God, and thus *good* by definition. If we want to learn about the goodness of God, therefore, we can do no better than to consider Jesus, and follow in His steps.

### *Consider Jesus*

Twice in the book of Hebrews we are urged to “consider Jesus”. In Hebrews 3.1, the writer exhorts us to consider Jesus (*κατανοήσατε*) so that we will continue believing in and confessing Him throughout our lives. This word means “to discover something through direct observation, with the implication of also thinking about it – to notice, to discover” (Louw & Nida), like one might carefully observe an object in creation, or a work of art, analyzing and delighting in it, whole and part.

We can especially see the beauty and majesty of Jesus by contemplating images of Him presented in the psalms, for example, Psalm 45 (cf. Heb. 1.8; see also Pss. 2, 47, 93, and 110). Here Jesus is portrayed as exalted in glorious array, surrounded by sweet fragrances, beautiful music, and His Church in glory. From there He goes forth conquering and to conquer, gathering and perfecting His followers in the goodness of the Lord, as He prepares them for their eternal dwelling in His holy courts.

This aesthetic and poetic consideration of Jesus stirs our hearts to delight in and adore Him, as we observe the various devices and images the psalmists use to reveal His great goodness and glory.

In Hebrews 12.3, the writer calls us again to consider Jesus, but this time as a work of rational analysis (*ἀναλογίσασθε*), a theological, as opposed to an aesthetical contemplation. This suggests the need to study, think deeply, meditate, talk with others, and know Jesus in terms appropriate to His uniqueness and mission.

Each of these exhortations to consider Jesus involves the imagination, the first engaging of what Paul calls the eye of the heart (Eph. 1.18), and the second drawing on the mind of Christ and the protocols of

reasoning.

By the first, we see Jesus as He is depicted in His glory, garbed in splendor and majesty, bearing the emblems of office, wearing the crown of righteousness, and attended by worshipful saints and angels. We see Him in His majestic loveliness, which is impressed on us by images, sounds, smells, and sweeping vistas of conquest.

By the second, we trace out all Biblical arguments, explanations, reasons, hopes, and joys – all teachings, causes, and events – as they lead us to Jesus, Who is the focus of all Scripture, the consummation of all things, and the end of all meaning and purpose in life. By considering Jesus in this way, logically and theologically, we become persuaded that He alone can fulfill God's purpose in restoring all things to Himself, and that He is indeed Lord and Christ.

*Filling the world with goodness*

Thus we may come increasingly to know Jesus as the One Who fills all things in all things (Eph. 1.22, 23), Who, through His Church, is filling the world with Himself, and with the goodness of God (Eph. 4.8-10). Each of these disciplines – aesthetic observation and contemplation and logical and theological analysis – is essential for us to see Jesus and to be transformed into His image by the Spirit of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Paul instructs us to set our minds on Jesus, so that He becomes our constant focus, the North Star of our souls, and the spiritual screensaver of our every conscious moment (Ps. 16.8; Col. 3.1-3).

What a privilege and delight to consider Jesus in these ways! The more we consider Him, the more Jesus will become the desire and destination of our souls. And the more God's goodness – the very presence of Christ Himself in us – will come to light in the land of the living.

*For reflection*

1. When you think of Jesus as *good*, what comes to mind? What makes Jesus good for you?
2. How would you explain that Jesus is good to someone who doesn't know Him? Do you think we should do more of this? Explain.
3. How can you begin more consistently to *consider* Jesus in all your reading and study of Scripture?

*Next steps – Preparation: Make sure you understand the two senses in which we are to "consider" Jesus. Begin using these in all your times of prayer and Scripture reading.*

## 2 The God-Man

*Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." John 10.31-33*

*Got that right*

That Jesus did many good works during His time on earth no one could deny, not even His enemies. Indeed, they were well aware of His good works, and the great attention those works garnered, and they feared the goodness of Jesus would win the loyalty of the people, leaving them without place and perks (Jn. 11.45-48).

His opponents knew they would not be able to silence Jesus by accusing Him of good works. Still, they were determined to kill Him, even, as appears in our text, without the permission of Rome, if need be.

What grated on the religious leaders who opposed Jesus was, as they noted, that He made Himself God. He said He was the Son of the Father, that He and the Father were One, that They thought the same thoughts and worked the same works, and that He had come from the Father and would soon be returning to the Father. These were not the claims of a mere prophet; they were the claims of One Who insisted that He was God, come to earth in the form of a Man, to do a work that only a God-Man could do.

And for this, for declaring that in Himself Jesus united both God and Man, they resolved to kill Him.

But it is precisely this union of Natures in one Person that made Jesus so very good, and so capable of such extraordinary good works. And it was also this union that has been so difficult for people to accept.

*Debating the Person of Christ*

Even before the New Testament had been completed, groups of religious thinkers attacked the orthodox teaching about Christ and tried to make Jesus more agreeable with certain existing religious views. Thus the *docetists*, a "Christian" offshoot of a popular mystery religion, attacked the Manhood of Christ, saying that Jesus didn't really come in the flesh, but only *appeared* to (Greek: *dokeo*). This is the false teaching John addressed in the opening chapter of his first epistle. It would take a century and a half before Christian leaders like Irenaeus of Lyons finally silenced this attack on the unity of God and Man in Christ.

During the fourth century, once Christians received the freedom to worship, publish, and debate openly, differing views of Jesus surfaced trying to explain away the unity of His Being by one means or another. Some said Jesus was not eternally God, but was begotten in time and became God by His obedience and suffering (with the implication, of course, that so can you). Others argued a subordinationist view of the Son of God, making Him now quite equal with God, even though they affirmed that He became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was *like* God, but not the *same* as God. Yet another false view insisted that two distinct Natures existed in the one Jesus of Nazareth, but they remained separate and unmixed – no true unity between them.

Pastors and theologians addressed themselves to each of these views, in writing and preaching, and by participating in general councils where these and other issues were debated. It took more than a hundred years to expose and dismantle the inconsistencies and inaccuracies of each of these views and, at the same time, to articulate a definition of the unity of God and Man in Christ that has stood the test of nearly 1600 years. In the Formula of Chalcedon (451 AD) the assembled Fathers declared their united view concerning the uniqueness of Jesus and the existence of two Natures in one Person:

*Wherefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, the*

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*same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same consisting of a reasonable soul and body, of one substance with the Father as touching the Godhead, the same of one substance with us as touching the manhood, like us in all things apart from sin; begotten of the Father before the ages as touching the Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as touching the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from the beginning spoke concerning him, and our Lord Jesus instructed us, and the Creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.*

*What good is it?*

The debate about the unity of Natures in the Person of Christ has continued to this day. Over the past 200 years, certain liberal theologians have raised the issue again, denying either the historicity of Christ or His deity, or reducing the work of Christ to some realm of “salvation history” existing above or alongside “real” history as we know it.

Anselm, 11<sup>th</sup>-century Bishop of Canterbury, explained why all this fussing about the unity of Natures in the Person of Christ matters. In his book, *Cur Deus Homo* (“why the God-Man”), Anselm explained that God became Man in Jesus because men had incurred a debt they could not pay, one that only God could satisfy, but only in the form of a Man, like those who had rebelled and fallen into sin. His argument was ably summarized in a *B. C.* comic strip of some years back. In four spare panels, the late Johnny Hart had his poet Wiley explain what good is entailed in and accomplished by the unique Person Jesus Christ:

*Panel 1:* Wiley writes, “Who can call Good Friday good?”

*Panel 2:* He continues, “Who can call Good Friday good?”

*Panel 3:* Bearing down now, “They who are bought by the blood of the Lamb...”

*Panel 4:* With evident satisfaction: “They can call Good Friday good.”

Jesus’ work was good because He is good, and the unity of God and Man He embodies entails a goodness that fulfills the righteousness God requires and satisfies the justice He must have if we are to enter His goodness and know and enjoy His salvation.

*For reflection*

1. Why does it matter that Jesus is both God and Man? What do we lose if we deny either one of these?
2. Only the unity of God and Man in Christ could accomplish the *ultimate good work* of redeeming the world. Why is this so?
3. How would you explain the Person and Natures of Christ to an unbelieving friend?

*Next steps – Preparation: Spend some time in prayer, thanking God for all the good that arises from Christ being Man and Christ being God.*

### 3 Sinless Sin-Bearer

*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.* Hebrews 4.15

#### *Goodness and holiness*

An inseparable bond exists between the *goodness* Jesus personifies and the *holiness* He possesses by virtue of His divinity. Because Jesus is holy, He is good; and the goodness He manifests issues from and demonstrates His holiness. Many people do good works, including many people who either do not know or do not believe in God. But the works that cause the goodness of *God* to shine forth in glory are those which flow from the goodness *and holiness* of Jesus, alive within us.

Jesus has promised His followers that the works He did they will also do, and greater works than He did, because He has returned in all His holiness to His holy throne, where, seated next to our holy Father, He pours out His Holy Spirit into His Church (Jn. 14.12). This holy power from on high is given to us to work exceedingly abundantly within all who believe, that we might will and do that which pleases God and refracts His goodness (Eph. 3.20; Phil. 2.13).

Thus, the more we understand of the nature of Jesus' *holiness*, and the more we *realize* that holiness within our soul, the better able we shall be to walk the path of *goodness* which He has marked out for us.

#### *Holiness in life*

The holiness of Jesus can be understood from three perspectives. First is the perspective of His life. Jesus was not immune to temptation. He was tempted in all ways like we are. The difference between Jesus and the rest of us is that temptation never led Him into sin. He was "without sin", as our text insists, and therefore lived in perfect holiness all the days of His life.

He came not to abolish God's holy and righteous and good Law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5.17-19). No one could charge Him with any violation of God's Law, and He was only finally condemned and crucified because He stuck to the truth of His claim that He was the Son of God and, therefore, God Himself.

And because Jesus was without sin, death – which is the  *wages*  of sin (Rom. 6.23) – had no claim and could exercise no hold over Him. He laid His altogether holy life down to the ravages of death, but then He took that life back again, destroying the power of death and the grave forever.

As we observe Jesus in the gospels, going about His life and ministry, we see goodness that issues from a holy life of pleasing God, obeying His Word, and touching and teaching people with truth and grace. Unless the holiness Jesus possessed is somehow operating in us, we shall in not be able to channel God's goodness to the people to whom He sends us each day.

#### *Holiness in death*

The holiness of Jesus is also seen in His death on the cross, where the sinless One became the Sin-bearer for all the world.

Here we see holiness as complete self-emptying, so as to be filled with all the good and perfect will of God, no matter the cost (Matt. 26.39). Here is holiness that bears injustice, torment, deprivation, shame, mocking, scorn, and betrayal that the love of God might be made manifest. On the cross Jesus demonstrated the heights of God's holiness by the depths of suffering He endured.

The suffering of Jesus – vicious, violent, bloody, brutal, hate-filled and horrible – provides a stark contrast to

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the holiness of God, which is always pure and unstained by the ravages of sin. We know how truly holy God is when we consider how much He hates our sins; and we see that holiness in Jesus the sinless One, Who took our sins upon His own body, thus freeing us from them for lives of holiness and good works.

Holiness is manifest as goodness when those who walk in the truth bear up with joy, thanksgiving, and love amid the injustices of a sinful world.

### *Holiness in all who believe*

Thus, finally, we expect to see the holiness of Jesus in the good works His followers do as the Spirit of Jesus works in and through them. As Christians, we must not give first priority to doing good works. We can learn all manner of good works, and our churches provide all kinds of opportunities for us to join a program for doing good to others.

But unless those good works issue from the holiness of Jesus, living and vibrant and fruit-bearing within us, they will be only so many filthy rags. We must not concentrate in the first instance on doing good; instead, fearing God, we must strive to bring holiness to completion (2 Cor. 7.1), for as we grow in the *holiness* of Jesus, we will both know and do those good works that express the goodness of God.

Strive to be holy, and you will do good. Strive to do good, and you may in some measure succeed, but not in the way that results in good works, flowing from the indwelling holiness of Jesus and His Spirit, which proclaim our hope and glorify God to the watching world. Jesus was holy, and out of His holiness, He did many good works. This is the pattern He calls us to follow in bringing the goodness of God to light in our world.

### *For reflection*

1. Why is it more important to pursue holiness than to pursue good works? How should we do that?
2. What is holiness, and what does it mean to bring it to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1)?
3. Good works do not lead to holiness; holiness leads to good works. Explain.

*Next steps – Transformation: Spend some time in prayer, seeking the Lord and asking Him to help you improve in the pursuit of Jesus' holiness. Whatever He shows you to do, begin right away to put into practice.*

## 4 Good Works, Good Words

*Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."* Matthew 11.4-6

### *Sent with a mission*

Jesus' mission was very specific: His life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven; His enthronement at the right hand of God; and the pouring out of the Spirit of God into the world. Jesus inaugurated the coming, progress, and ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God. Now, all authority in heaven and on earth is His to wield as He pleases. He is exercising that authority to advance His rule into every area of life and all the vast cosmos, filling all things in all things with Himself (Eph. 1.22, 23; 4.8-10).

The Kingdom of God is that realm of divine goodness in which the curse of sin is reversed and the "very good" plan of God is increasingly realized (Gen. 1.31). It is not, as some suppose, merely a New Testament phenomenon. From the first days of creation, through the ages of the patriarchs, kings, and prophets, the Kingdom of God – His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit on earth as in heaven – was pointed to, prototyped, and promised. Throughout the Old Testament, the Kingdom operated at a distance from the affairs of men and nations. Jesus brought that Kingdom near, embodied and announced it, and taught His disciples to seek it as their highest priority (Matt. 6.33).

And when He took His seat at the right hand of the Father, and they together poured out His Spirit into His Church, that Kingdom took root and began to grow and expand and bear fruit (cf. Ps. 110; Is. 9.6, 7). And it has been doing so ever since. It is through the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit power operating within those who believe, that the goodness of God comes into the land of the living.

And it comes in the harmony of good works and good words, just as we see in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### *Good works*

Jesus was well-known for His many good works, which were primarily works of *restoration*. The good works of Jesus *restored* a measure of the good order God intended when He created the world and all things, and point forward to a day of complete renewal, of heaven and earth and all things. People, who are the image-bearers of God, were not meant to be deaf or blind, bent or beset by demons, riven with diseases, or at one another's throats. Indeed, they were not even meant to *die*. In His many good works, Jesus *embodied* the power that renews the world according to God's original plan; and He encouraged us to look forward to more such effects wherever His rule advances on earth.

By His good works Jesus also demonstrated His power over the forces of creation – winds and seas, deluge and drought, demons and the devil, life and death. He Who could calm a raging sea, send a legion of demons packing, or quicken a cold, dead body *by a mere word* certainly has the power to bring God's goodness to light throughout the entire cosmos of creation.

Not even death can prevent Him from restoring the world to God the Father, since He has defeated death and broken its hold over creation by taking back His own life from the dead and rising into the newness of God's eternal realm.

Good works were an essential component of Jesus' plan for restoring the goodness of creation, and He promised His followers that they would do many more good works than He had done, as they seek His Kingdom and live in the power of His Spirit (Jn. 14.12).

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### *Good News*

The coming of the Kingdom of God is thus Good News, because it brings the goodness of God to bear on all aspects of life, restoring people and all creation to God's original *very good* plan. Jesus did not merely *embody* this Good News; He *proclaimed* and *taught* it throughout His mission field, and now He has sent us into our world to do the same.

The good words of Jesus harmonize perfectly with the good works He did, providing explanation and elaboration of what those works meant and what they portend. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God, in which the goodness of God abounds, is more valuable and precious, not than *anything* we might imagine or possess, but than *everything* we might imagine or possess. He taught those who heard Him to desire this reign of divine goodness above all else. He explained how it takes root and grows, and He described the kind of fruit it yields at maturity. He spoke of the Kingdom as a totally new reality, unlike anything people had seen, where justice, mercy, neighbor-love, and worship of God flourish on every hand. His words complemented His works, providing an amazing and compelling diptych of how the goodness of God comes to light.

And He told His followers to tune up a similar harmony of words and works in their own lives, to follow Him as His witnesses, living and speaking the truth in love. For it is in such harmony, consistently sung into the world by every follower of Christ, that the Kingdom of God and His goodness advances on earth as it is in heaven.

### *For reflection*

1. Would people have understood about the Kingdom of God by Jesus' works alone? Would they have been as likely to seek the Kingdom if He had not done Kingdom works for them to see? Explain.
2. Christians are called to *be* witnesses to Jesus Christ (Acts 1.8). This involves more than just talking about Him. And it involves more than just doing good to others. Explain.
3. How can Christians help one another "sing" this harmony of words and works into their Personal Mission Fields?

*Next steps – Transformation: Spend some time in prayer reflecting on your life throughout a normal week. Where is the harmony of good works and good words most evident in your life? Where do you need to improve?*

## 5 Man under Orders

*But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"* Matthew 26.52-54

### *Pinballs or Plotters?*

Most of us go through life bouncing between one of two approaches to how we use our time.

There are times when we feel like pinballs. We have been launched into the game of life, and we spend our days bouncing off obstacles, rolling through gates and portals, lighting up lights, racking up a score, and keeping an eye on the hole at the bottom of the game. We hope someone "up there" will be working the flippers to keep us in the game as long as possible.

We don't feel like we have much control over things. We do what we have to do and react as best we can to the situations and circumstances that arise in our path, hoping we're making the most of our time, but never quite sure.

At the same time, while we're careening around on the game board of life, we fight against this tendency to feel out of control. We make plans, embrace disciplines and routines, and try not to waste time (not too much, at any rate). We hope to become something or somebody before our lives are through, so we nurture visions of ourselves which we focus on as we're buffeted and banged about day by day.

We may have a clear sense of purpose and a desired direction for our lives, but stuff keeps getting in the way, knocking us off course, making us postpone our aspirations, rewriting our hopes and dreams, and frustrating any real sense of progress.

Meanwhile, each day we draw closer to the end of our lives, and we can't help but wonder whether we'll ever amount to anything at all.

### *An ordered life*

The apostle John records a curious comment about Jesus' earthly life which we do well to consider. Jesus and John indicated that an "hour" was coming that he and Jesus sometimes referred to as "His" hour (cf. Jn. 2.4; 7:30; 12.23, 27, 28; 13.1; 17.1). Jesus was focused on that hour as the end point of His earthly sojourn, that toward which His entire life was moving. He was under no illusions about what that hour held for Him, because it had been defined and determined for Him by His Father. He had embraced that hour and emptied Himself to become a Man so that He could fulfill it (Phil. 2.5-11).

And nothing could prevent Him from moving steadily and progressively toward that appointed time. Not the needs of others nor His own needs, and not even the plans and schemes of His enemies. His life followed an ordered course, and we get the sense, reading the gospels, that Jesus is always in charge of the goings-on of the moment.

Jesus' life was ordered toward His God-appointed hour, and it was ordered by the Word of God in Scripture. In every situation in His life, Jesus resolved that "the Scriptures of the prophets must be fulfilled." So immersed was He in the teaching of God's Word that time and again the gospel writers would break in to their narrative to explain, "this was done to fulfill the Scriptures" or "as it is written in the prophets". There was never a moment in Jesus' life when He walked any path other than that revealed in the Law, Prophets, and Writings of the Old Testament. He insisted, "The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (Jn. 5.29). Those good works of the Law, which God foreordained for all who would

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believe in Jesus, Jesus fulfilled completely, every jot and tittle (Eph. 2.10; Matt. 5.17-19). Jesus was a Man under orders. His life was ordered by the Word of God, and He rejoiced, despite the difficulty of His journey, to know that at all times He was doing the will of the Father, and not merely His own will.

#### *Order is good*

God is a God of order, not chaos. Jesus lived an orderly life according to the teaching of God's Word. The goodness of God is to be known and expressed in ordering our lives like Jesus did – on, by, under, and throughout according to the teaching of Scripture.

Scripture has been given to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17). It stands to reason that the more we order our lives – every aspect and moment of our lives – according to the teaching of God's Word, the more our lives will refract the indwelling presence of Jesus, and the more the goodness of God will be seen in us.

But we must devote ourselves to learning the Word of God, letting it speak to all aspects of our lives. And we need to order the time and work of our lives as though God Himself were directing our steps at every moment (Ps. 9.12, 16, 17; Col. 3.23, 24). We need to keep a close watch on our lives, reviewing our progress daily, so that in all our thoughts, affections, words, deeds, and ways we are journeying the path God has revealed for us in His Word (Prov. 4.20-27).

We will not be able to eliminate the pinball effect entirely, but we can score big in life for the glory of God by ordering our lives like Jesus did, according to the Word of God, and for the glory of God in all we do.

#### *For reflection*

1. Do you experience feeling like a pinball in life sometimes? Explain.
2. Why is it imperative that Christians be constant and ever-deeper students of the Word of God?
3. How should prayer and planning factor into our leading more ordered lives for the Lord?

*Next steps – Conversation: How do your Christian friends order their lives for the Lord? Ask a few of them.*

## 6 To Restore What Has Been Reconciled

*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5.18, 19*

*Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Revelation 21.5*

*All things new*

For one summer I worked with a master craftsman named Ernie Daniels. Ernie could build or repair anything. He built furniture. He renovated conference rooms. He built additions to buildings. He built his own home by himself, alone. He was a genius at conceiving projects then executing them through to completion.

When it came to making, fixing, restoring, and constructing things, understanding and using tools, and following exact procedures, Ernie was everything I am not. He put up with my klutzy ways for the better part of a summer, always smiling patiently and trying to encourage me. He understood that restoring and making things new was not my calling.

At least, not when it came to construction.

But restoring and making things new *is* my calling, just as it is the calling of all those who follow Jesus Christ and worship around His throne. Jesus is making all things new. He is filling all things with Himself (Eph. 1.22, 23; 4.8-10), beginning with the soul of each of His followers, and working out from there to fill the spaces and time and relationships and responsibilities of their lives. He is making us new, and through us, He intends to make the world new, to the praise of the glory of God.

Christ is working to fill the vast creation with His newness, and to that end, He has reconciled us to God, sent us His Spirit, given us His Word, and called us to follow Him in every good work our Personal Mission Field requires. Every believer in Jesus is called to be an Ernie Daniels in our own places and spaces and among the people to whom God has sent us.

I learned from Ernie that summer that Jesus will restore and make all things in my life new, if I set my mind on Him and live and work according to the Kingdom-seeking pattern He commands (Col. 3.1-3; Matt. 6.33).

*Not the way they're supposed to be*

Jesus is a most creative Renovator. He recognizes that everything throughout the vast creation has come under the baleful effects of the father of lies and sin. The world and everyone and everything in it are not the way they're supposed to be. All people are robbed of His grace and truth to some degree, and are missing out on the full and abundant life of righteousness, peace, and joy to be found in Him.

All culture – everything we make or use to improve our way in life – is similarly tainted and stained with the sin of those who make and use it. This is not to say that all culture is evil; we've seen that this is not the case. There is much good to be found in all kinds of culture. However, "much good" is to the renewing and restoring goodness of *Jesus* like the local sandlot ballfield is to Camden Yards in Baltimore.

All creation groans under the burden of sin; and whatever space in that creation we occupy, that space is waiting and longing to experience the renewing and liberating care and attention of the sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8.20-22).

## *The Goodness of Jesus*

The possible forms of renewal that Jesus can take, as He fills us and our spaces and culture, are as many and varied as the people of God themselves. The more we look to Jesus, resting in Him and being filled with His Word and Spirit, the more He will shine His infinitely creative presence and power into all the facets of our soul and all the nooks and crannies of our lives. And, as He does, the world will begin to fill up with the presence of Christ.

### *Reconciled and restoring*

From His seat at the right hand of God, Jesus Christ sends out His volunteers every day, like the refreshing dew, to promote growth and goodness to the glory of God. At the same time, He is putting all His enemies under His feet – some of whom, like us, He subdues in order to save and renew; others, He deals with as seems best to Him (Ps. 110; Rom. 5:10; cf. Acts 12:20-24).

We are the dew of the Lord. Everything we touch should know the refreshing experience of grace and truth. Everywhere we go we should leave a glimmer of God's glory. Everyone we know should experience us as the dawning of a new day, in which the darkness is being driven away toward that day when darkness will be no more (1 Jn. 2:8).

I cannot renew and restore like Ernie Daniels. My work in the Kingdom is different from his. But I learned from Ernie that, no matter my calling – and no matter *your* calling – our true vocation is to be agents of the creative and renewing goodness of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has reconciled the world to God; He has declared the cause of darkness to be lost, and the flourishing of the light to prevail. And He is carrying out the renewing and restoring of the reconciled world through those who follow Him – daily praying and working so that the goodness of the Lord might increasingly abound in the land of the living.

### *For reflection*

1. To what has the Lord appointed you as a “master craftsman”? In your life, where do you expect the goodness of the Lord to abound?
2. Why is it so important that we set our minds on Jesus, exalted in glory, and seek His Kingdom in every area of life?
3. How can you encourage your fellow believers in their individual work for the Lord?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a fellow Christian about how you can encourage one another to become “master craftsmen” for the Lord.*

## 7 Walk in Love

*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.* Ephesians 5.1, 2

*“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”* John 15.13

### *The embodiment of love*

Jesus is the embodiment of the love of God. He was that embodiment during the time of His incarnation, and He is now, as He rules at the Father’s right hand. Jesus shows us what the love of God is like, so that, considering Him, we can imitate God’s love and bring His goodness to light in the land of the living.

The essence of Jesus’ love is self-denying sacrifice for the saving edification of others (Phil. 2.5-11). Jesus became a sacrifice of love for the sins of the world. He laid down His life for His friends and His enemies (cf. Rom. 5.10), thus showing what God is looking for in our lives as well. Our reasonable daily service to God is to be a living sacrifice, a sweet-smelling offering to God of the love He seeks from us, and the love He would disseminate to everyone around us (Rom. 12.1, 2).

The more we consider Jesus, seeing and delighting in the glory in His face (2 Cor. 4.6), fixing our mind on Him and setting Him always before us (Col. 3.1-3; Ps. 16.8), the more His Spirit will transform us into His image and conform us to His love (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We cannot define love on our own terms; love is defined in terms of Jesus. The goodness of Jesus consists largely in the love of God He embodies. And we are called to imitate His example, following the teaching of His Word, the template of His life, and the transforming power of His Spirit.

### *A sweet aroma and sacrifice*

Our lives become an offering and sacrifice to God, a sweet-smelling aroma, pleasing to Him, as we walk in love, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Walking in love, we imitate our Father, Who loved us so much that He sent His Son for our salvation, and Who loves us unfaithfully and at every moment. God’s love is constant, all-surrounding and all-pervading. He does not reserve His love for us to those times when we assemble in His Name. He loves us unfaithfully, and in more ways that we can imagine, all the time.

This is the love we are to imitate, as we express it to God and to our neighbors.

But we must *walk* in love; that is, love must define all aspects of our daily life, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. We do not imitate the love that Jesus showed merely by participating in some program or other arena where we act in loving ways toward God or neighbor – as in preaching a sermon, singing in a choir, teaching a class, serving in a ministry activity, participating in a service of worship, and so forth. These corporate efforts are good and necessary, and in many ways, they provide both shaping and outlets for us to express our love for God and our neighbors.

But programs, events, and corporate activities must not substitute for the *daily walk* of self-denial and service to others which must characterize us in all our ways. This is the reasonable sacrifice Paul commands, and the way to imitate the love God shows us in Jesus Christ.

### *Walking in love*

We are to walk in love, not merely to participate in some work of love in our church or other Christian endeavor. Walking in love engages our bodies at all times as vessels in which the Lord makes Himself known; and it makes us those living sacrifices of worship to God, that sweet aroma of love and life (2 Cor. 2.14-16) that fills the spaces of our lives with the loving reality of the living Christ (Eph. 4.8-10).

## *The Goodness of Jesus*

Walking in love begins in our *mind*, as we think ahead to the people and situations toward which we are moving, and determine what we must do to love as Jesus does (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). Walking in love engages us in our *heart*, where we continuously ward off negative and condemning affections, and nurture welcoming, forgiving, and edifying sentiments toward the people around us. When we set our *conscience* for love, so that self-denial replaces self-serving, and building-up replaces tearing-down, then our default values and priorities will work for words and deeds of love.

Walking in love can fill every moment of our lives, as we make the most of our time to glorify God by loving Him and others (Eph. 5.15-17; 1 Cor. 10.31). Learn to speak words that edify (Eph. 4.29). Practice good listening skills (Jms. 1.19). Consider how to encourage and motivate others to love and good works (Heb. 10.24). Take the initiative in little ways and big to help, serve, affirm, comfort, and strengthen others by good words and good works of love.

Walking in love requires that we be continuously in prayer, offering ourselves and situations up to the Lord, and listening for the prompting and guiding of His Spirit as He leads us in paths of love.

Will we do it? Only if we resolve to deny ourselves daily, take up our cross moment by moment, and offer the loving cup of the Lord's refreshing grace to everyone around us, all the time. Make love your aim (1 Cor. 14.1), without hypocrisy (Rom. 12.9), doing no harm to anyone (Rom. 13.10), causing no one to stumble (Rom. 14.15), and thus fulfilling all the Law of God (Gal. 5.14).

You will be a fountain of God's goodness as you consider Jesus and imitate God by walking in His love.

### *For reflection*

1. What are the greatest obstacles to walking in love? How can prayer help you to overcome these?
2. Meditate on Hebrews 10.24. How can believers do this for one another?
3. Where do you need to improve in loving God and loving your neighbor at this time?

*Next steps – Transformation: Begin making prayer the continuous context in which you consider Jesus, listen for His Spirit, and gain the power to love others like God loves you. Give thanks to God for His help in this.*

*The Goodness of Jesus*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. What are some practical ways to “consider Jesus” throughout the day? Why should we want to do so?
2. Jesus shows us the unity and harmony of God’s goodness in His words and deeds. How can we make sure that we show that same unity and harmony in ours?
3. Living the goodness of Jesus begins within, in our soul – mind, heart, and conscience. What are some ways to strengthen our soul in Jesus, so that doing good as He does comes more naturally to us?
4. What are the greatest obstacles to overcome in setting the Lord Jesus always before you (Ps. 16.8)? How can believers help one another overcome these?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.