

THE GOODNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

THE GOODNESS OF GOD 8

We should expect believers to be a primary source of goodness.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

The Goodness of God's People
The Goodness of God 8
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

Copyright, 2018 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe

Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

Welcome to <i>The Goodness of God's People</i>	4
1 Instruments of Goodness	5
2 Unity that Attracts	7
3 Holy Spirit Holiness	9
4 Ordered Lives	11
5 Greater than These?	13
6 A Heritage of Creativity	15
7 The Pleasure of Goodness	17
Questions for Reflection or Discussion	19

Welcome to *The Goodness of God's People*

Goodness appears where unity, holiness, order, harmony, creativity, and love are present. Works, situations, and conditions that reflect these components tend to be recognized as good. In fact, such things refract the very character of God, so that people are blessed and edified by His grace. Those who believe in Jesus and are united in communities as His followers should be a primary source for such goodness of God to materialize in the world.

That's the argument of this study. God intends His people to be instruments and agents of His goodness in the world. He has made us, as individuals and communities, to leaven and light the world with goodness. We do this by the many ways we express these elements of goodness to one another and the world. In our individual daily lives and in the ways we pursue life in community, Christians can go a long way toward making sure that the goodness of God comes to light in the world with greater consistency and effects.

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 Instruments of Goodness

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2.8-10

The pursuit of goodness

David longed to see the goodness of God in his day (Ps. 27.13, 14). He'd seen plenty that was *not* good, and even contributed a fair amount of that himself. But his soul longed for the goodness of God, for that “very good” condition of unity, holiness, harmony, order, creativity, and love that existed at the end of the creation week, when the vast cosmos reflected and refracted the glory of God in whole and part (Gen. 1.31).

All who know the Lord and have tasted of His goodness share that longing. We want to know more of God's goodness, and to extend that goodness to as many people and as much of creation as we can. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 33.5), but that goodness is largely overlooked or overshadowed by the evil that people perpetrate against one another and the creation.

But God has not given up on His original work. The course of history is flowing toward the new heavens and new earth, when everything will be just as God intends and His goodness will be visible, abounding, and acknowledged on every hand. In the interim, God calls His redeemed people to prepare for that glorious age by doing such good works as will manifest His goodness to the world, thus both experiencing and expressing the new creation which is coming.

As we continue to look for resources that can help us to understand the goodness of God, and how we can discern and contribute to that goodness, we need to look at God's calling and commission for His people. God intends the followers of His Son to be instruments of His goodness in all the earth. In this study we'll examine the *forms* such goodness must take, and in our final study in this series, we will consider the *ways* we may improve in goodness, that the goodness of God may be more consistently evident in the land of the living.

The goodness of God

We have been looking at the goodness of God as it is revealed through a variety of sources – Scripture, creation, culture, the Law of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the heavenly court, in particular. And we have been considering God's goodness as coming to expression in unity, holiness, order, harmony, creativity, and love. The goodness God intends for His creation will consist in such attributes as these, thus simultaneously reflecting Himself and bringing His good and perfect will to fruition on earth.

God has redeemed, saved, and appointed His people as instruments of His goodness (Eph. 2.8-10). He has given us His Word to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17). He has promised that we may expect to know marvelous success in doing good works like Jesus (Jn. 14.12). He calls us to be zealous for good works and ready at all times to perform whatever the situation requires; and He urges us not to grow weary in this aspect of our calling (Tit. 2.14, 3.1, 8; Gal. 6.9, 10). If the goodness of God is to become more evident and abundant in the land of the living, it will be through the efforts of His people, the Church.

The world should be able to look at the Church and see the very embodiment of the goodness of God. When that happens, people are drawn to God through the Church, recognizing the benefits of His goodness and eagerly desiring them (Mic. 4.1-8). Churches cannot fulfill their mission from God unless they understand the *forms* in which His goodness should appear through them and make those forms work to that end.

The Goodness of God's People

To experience and to express

God's plan for His people – all those who believe in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life – is a plan for *good*. He promises to bless us and to make us a blessing to the world (Gen. 12.1-3). He has given us His holy and righteous and good Law, and all His Word, to prepare us for good works, so that we might dwell in His wisdom and goodness (Rom. 14.12; 2 Tim. 3.15-17; Deut. 4.5-8). He promises us peace and deliverance from the destructive powers of evil (Jer. 29.11). He has established us in the hope of glory, so that we may live in the power of His Spirit and know the fruit of goodness in all our ways (Rom. 5.1, 2; Gal. 5.22, 23).

God intends His Church to know His goodness in increasing measure. Our *experience* as Christians should be one of abundant and increasing goodness, one that we enjoy in our personal lives and share with our fellow believers in all our labors together.

But the Church is also called to bring the goodness of God to the world, to *express* God's goodness in a variety of *forms*, and thus fulfill our calling as agents and conduits of grace to the world (Jn. 7.37-39). We who know God's goodness, discern and enjoy it from every source, and realize increasing measures of goodness in all aspects of our lives, want to show that goodness to the world. The goodness of God leads people to repentance (Rom. 2.4). The more of His goodness we can bring to the world, the more powerful and effective will be our proclamation of the ultimate goodness of God, which is the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom.

Thus churches must take as a driving force, in all their activities, both to *experience* the goodness of God in increasing measure, and to *express* that goodness in their local communities. This is how the glory of God becomes known, and the knowledge of that glory can cover the earth (Hab. 2.14).

For reflection

1. We are not saved by good works, but we're not saved without them. Explain.
2. We do not work *for* salvation, but we must work *out* the salvation we have freely received. How do good works factor in here?
3. What opportunities does your church have for experiencing and expressing the goodness of God in your community?

Next steps – Preparation: How do you experience the goodness of God? How do you express His goodness to others? What other opportunities for experiencing and expressing the goodness of God can you identify?

2 Unity that Attracts

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!* Psalm 133.1

Unity is good

David could hardly be clearer: For God's people to dwell together in unity is one of the ways His goodness comes to light in the land of the living.

David should know. After all, he spent a good deal of his life experiencing the hardships of *disunity*. When, as a young man, he fell out of favor with King Saul, the disunity of that period was a source of much fear, uncertainty, want, and sorrow for David. Later, because of his own sins and negligence, David provoked his son, Absalom, to revolt against him, and disunity once again became his lot. The nation was rent into opposing camps, and David was on the run and scheming to save his life and his throne.

Disunity is what everybody experiences naturally. As individuals, corporations, or nations, we don't automatically bond with people in collaborations of mutual good will. We are naturally selfish, suspicious, and inclined to think about our own wellbeing more than that of others. And this is true even among the followers of Jesus Christ. The unity that David declared to be so good only comes with conscious and diligent effort. We have to *work hard*, Paul said, to maintain as believers the unity we have in Jesus Christ (Eph. 4.3).

But working hard at unity is worth it, because unity among the followers of Jesus Christ proves that Jesus has come to us from God, and attracts the watching world to the message of His forgiveness and grace (Jn. 17.21).

On the brink of disunity

The opening chapters of the book of Acts show us a community of believers who were basking in the goodness of the Spirit's unity. They opened their homes to one another; shared of their possessions according to the needs of the community; eagerly learned together; bore animated witness to their neighbors; and deepened their life together in worship and prayer. As we read about these first believers in Jerusalem, we can see why David insisted that brethren living together in unity is such a good thing.

But the unity of the faith which manifests the goodness of God must be diligently maintained (Eph. 4.3). And this was so even among those first Christians.

By Acts 6 the Church in Jerusalem had grown by multiplied thousands. Perhaps as many as 20,000 believers now made up the community of the faithful, and these people were not all from the same background or social strata. Many of them had needs which they looked to the community of brethren to meet, especially those who were widows and without family to care for them.

For some undisclosed reason, one ethnic group's widows began to be overlooked in the regular distribution. These were not local widows, but Greek-speaking Hebrew women, perhaps transplanted to Jerusalem from the region of Galilee or beyond. We can see how this neglect could introduce a discordant note into the community and threaten the precious unity that had made the Jerusalem Church such a strong witness for the Lord.

The people, to their credit, did not allow the situation to fester. Instead, they brought the problem to the apostles, who, understanding the value of unity, acted decisively and wisely to redress the situation in a way that maintained the unity of the Spirit among the members of Christ's Body in Jerusalem.

The attracting power of unity

The results of this successful effort at reinforcing the unity of the Body of Christ were dramatic: “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6.7). Not only were all the indicators of robust unity restored and enhanced, but within the surrounding community, many people, observing this great work, became open to the Gospel. The Word of the Lord increased within the community of faith, as the love of Christ overcame the threat of disunity; and the Word of the Lord increased within the surrounding community, as people saw the power of love at work among disparate social groups, who possessed in common only their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

And even among the priests who were enemies of the Gospel, the impact of this situation was profound. Many of those priests who heard Jesus, and crucified Him; who listened to the apostles, and threatened, detained, and beat them; and who excommunicated from their synagogues those who professed faith in Christ – many of those same priests now became obedient to the Gospel as well.

When brethren live together in unity, it is a very good thing, so good, that even those who have no faith may begin to reconsider their position and beliefs about Jesus. How many opportunities do local churches have – individually and working with other churches – to show the goodness of God by the unity they experience and express together? Undoubtedly, more than we have ever stopped to consider.

For reflection

1. What are some things that threaten the unity of a local church? What is our duty as individual believers in working hard to maintain the unity we have in Christ?
2. What are some ways local churches might work together to experience and express the unity they have in Christ?
3. Without unity, can we expect the watching world to believe the Gospel? Explain.

Next steps – Conversation: What opportunities for enhancing Christian unity are available to you? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.

3 Holy Spirit Holiness

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
Ephesians 4.28-30

Grieving the Spirit

The idea that we can grieve the Holy Spirit is a curious anthropopathism. And it is just that, a way of speaking about the Spirit which is not *strictly* true, but which *communicates* an important truth.

The Holy Spirit is at all times inseparable from the Father and the Son. Together in the Trinity, these Three are sufficient in and to Themselves, and They have no need of anything else (Acts 17.25). Nothing we might do can add to or detract from the joy the Holy Spirit knows as perfect God.

So what does Paul mean to suggest by the idea that we might *grieve* the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is given to believers to bring *them* to new life (Gal. 4.6), and to bring *new life* to them (2 Cor. 3.12-18). While we inhabit this flesh, we will never attain to that fullness of our great salvation that finds us wholly without sin and manifesting all the fruit, power, gifts, and attributes of the indwelling Christ. Nevertheless, it is the Holy Spirit's work to increase in us that essence of Christ which He Himself embodies, and that essence is *holiness*.

Holiness, as we might expect, is the expression in *human* beings of the being and character of *God*. The Holy Spirit, Who *is* God, and Who dwells in all who believe, is at work within every Christian to will and do of God's good pleasure (Phil. 2.13). And it is God's good pleasure that we should be *holy*, as He is holy (Matt. 5.48).

Holiness, then, is merely the *Holy* Spirit leeching His presence and power into all our being – heart, mind, conscience, words, and deeds. We are holy as the Holy Spirit transforms us into His own image, the image of Jesus Christ. And when we do not joyfully, consistently, diligently, and earnestly *work* at being holy as He is holy (Phil. 2.12), then we may be said to *grieve* the Spirit, because He so longs to stretch out within us unto holiness.

God wills His people to be holy; therefore, holiness is good, and shows forth the goodness of God in the land of the living.

But in what forms?

Three forms of holiness

First, as we might expect, is the *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. 5.22, 23). The fruit of the Spirit is the outward evidence of His inward presence and work in our lives, such that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control become increasingly the defining attributes of our lives. All this fruit manifests the character of God, Who dwells within us. As Christ increases in us and we decrease (Jn. 3.30), such fruit becomes established in all aspects of our lives, and we fulfill the holiness to which God calls us.

When we are walking in the Spirit, filled with Him and operating out of His mind, we will neither yield to the flesh nor fulfill the desires and lusts of the world (Gal. 5.16-21; Eph. 5.18-21; Rom. 8.5-8). Instead, the Spirit will show Himself in and through us, and the goodness of the Lord – in the form of all this varied fruit – will be seen in us.

Second, the *tokens of love* provide a more detailed description of the first fruit of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 13.4-7). Love is the greatest of God's good gifts because it infuses such other fruit as patience, kindness, gentleness, and selflessness with the living presence of the Spirit of God. As the Spirit loves God and others through us, He manifests His presence – since we are unable to love like God on our own strength – and thus expresses the holiness God intends *for us* by the grace He shows *through* us.

Few will doubt that self-denying love is good. As the Spirit bears His fruit in us, love for God and neighbors increases, and we demonstrate the holiness of God – the character of His Spirit – in ways that bring God's goodness to the people around us.

Finally, the Spirit manifests the holiness of God in giving us *power for witness*. All believers are called to be witnesses for Jesus Christ (Acts 1.8), and the power to do so, and thus to fulfill an important aspect of our calling to holiness, comes from the Holy Spirit. As we reach out to the people around us with deeds of love and words of witness, the Spirit steps into our fear and weakness and makes His powerful presence known, by giving us just the words we require (Lk. 12.11, 12).

Do not grieve the Spirit!

The Spirit of God is ready to work every day, and every moment. He longs to help us realize more of God's holiness, and to express through us more of His goodness to the people in our lives. We “grieve” Him when we are neither as zealous nor as energetic as He is in working out our great salvation in the forms of holiness.

We are called to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1). We know that in this life, we will always fall short of that holy and perfect standard. But we press on, knowing that holiness brings the goodness of God into all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. And the goodness of God, thus manifested, leads to repentance and the glory of God.

For reflection

1. How do you experience the inward work of the Holy Spirit in your life? How does that inward work manifest itself outwardly?
2. Holiness is good. Explain.
3. How can you improve in your quest to be holy, as God is holy?

Next steps – Preparation: How can Christians encourage one another in the pursuit of holiness? Ask a few Christian friends.

4 Ordered Lives

For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2.5

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you... Titus 1.5

Let all things be done decently and in order. 1 Corinthians 14.40

Order is good

In the life of faith, both that of the individual believer and the local church, order is good. God is a God of order, not confusion (1 Cor. 14.33). There is a beauty to orderliness. Doing things in an orderly manner can help to promote efficiency and effectiveness. Orderliness allows all people to discover their own niches for growth and service, and helps to reinforce commitments to these.

God does not want His churches to lack in any of the order He requires. Our natural tendency, however, is not to order, but to disorder and confusion. In this fallen world, a law of entropy governs everything, not just the material cosmos. Things left to themselves tend to higher states of disorder. That includes not only your lawn and gardens, but your soul, your work, all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities, and the community of believers of which you are a part.

In all these areas and more, where order is not deliberately and diligently pursued, disorder will increase, efficiency will break down, effectiveness will falter, confusion will obtain among the members of a society or community, and goodness will elude us. Order is good; therefore, the followers of Christ should understand what God intends for them when He commands us to do *all things* decently and in order. The more we pursue God's order for His Kingdom – individually and as communities – the more His goodness will come to light through us.

What does this entail?

Ordering your personal life

Let's consider this mandate to pursue orderliness at two levels, that of the individual believer and that of the local church.

Believers are called to bring their lives into line with God's order. God's order is the divine economy of redemption, whereby, according to His Word and in the power of His Spirit, He is remaking and restoring all aspects of life in the world, so that the knowledge of His glory will cover the earth as the water covers the sea.

For our personal lives, God's order begins in the soul, where we work to bring heart (affections), mind (thinking), and conscience (values and priorities) into line with His good and perfect will. We need a solid raft of spiritual disciplines, and we need to pursue those disciplines diligently. Only by submitting our soul to God's powerful shaping forces – His Word and Spirit – can we hope to bring our soul into line with the divine order and keep it there.

Then we must consider the discipline of our bodies, how to make our eyes, mouths, ears, hands, feet, and all our bodily members act in ways that correspond to the growing divine order in our soul. What we do and how we speak express the condition of our inner lives. As our inner lives grow into God's decent and orderly ways, we will bring our words and deeds into a similar order, following the order prescribed in His Word.

And this will mean learning to make the best use of all the time God gives us each day (Eph. 5.15-17). Bringing order into the confusion of our souls and lives must take place in time. God gives us time so that we can know His work and act wisely in obeying Him (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). As we take up the work of God – of our calling to His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12) – the order in our souls and lives will affect the order by which we conduct all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. And that order will bring God's goodness to us and through us with greater consistency and effects.

Ordering congregational life

Similarly, congregations should follow the order God intends for them. We are not free to do church any way we please. The church is not ours anyway; it belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is its Head. As Head of His Church – and all His churches – Jesus has determined an order by which He intends to build His churches as healthy Kingdom signs and outposts. The better we know that order, and the more consistent we are in submitting to it, the more God's goodness will flow through our churches to our communities and the world.

God has shown us that, in all his churches, pastors and teachers must equip church members so that they do those works of love that lead to healthy, growing churches (Eph. 4.11, 12). Not *some* members – *all*. The members are the ministers of the church; the ministers and other leaders are equippers. This is God's order for bringing His Kingdom goodness to His churches.

Similarly, God has shown us that the way this equipping is to proceed is through the work of shepherding, as Jesus defined and practiced that work (cf. Jn. 10). God's order for equipping can be observed in the way Jesus prepared His disciples for their callings. Is this how we equip God's people?

God also has an order for how He is to be worshiped. He has revealed a pattern for worship in His Word, and we must make sure that our services of worship provide what *He* requires, and not merely what *we* prefer.

God also has an order for how churches are to be organized and administered – officers, discipline, connections with other churches, use of church resources, mission, and the like. Are we in line with His order here?

We can only touch on this matter of order in this space. Suffice it to say that God wants His people and their churches to be conduits of His goodness to the world, and He has not left that to chance or our own best ideas. God knows what He wants, and He has determined the best ways to realize His order and goodness. We will be wise and do good works to the extent we bring our order into line with His in all things.

For reflection

1. Why is order a good thing? Why is it so difficult to maintain order?
2. If we are not working constantly to order our souls, all our other forms of order will break down. Explain. What does this require?
3. What does it mean to make the most of the time God gives us each day?

Next steps – Transformation: What will you do to begin bringing more of God's order to your soul and life?

5 Greater than These?

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.” John 14.12-14

How can these things be?

An old George Gershwin lyric entitled, “Not for Me” sings wistfully of the love that can pass a person by: “They’re writing songs of love, but not for me...” Songs of love abound. People are falling in love all around. But though the singer reads about love, hears others singing of it, and sees it in others, it isn’t part of his experience.

Sadly, I think this same attitude guides the hermeneutic many Christians bring to the reading and study of Scripture. Consider just a few of the many incredible statements God makes in His Word: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33.3). “...by [Jesus] have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature...” (2 Pet. 1.4). “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...” (Eph. 3.20). “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4.13).

And this: “...*he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.*”

Great and mighty things? Exceedingly great and precious promises? Partake of the divine nature? Exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think? All things? Greater works than the works Jesus did?

So where is that happening? In your life? Your church? Among the Christians in your community?

Evidently, multitudes of Christians are reading their Bibles, coming across promises and declarations like this every day, and are concluding, “It’s not for me.” We see the incredible promises of God that attach to life in His Kingdom, yet we fail to lay hold on them, because, like Nicodemus, we just cannot see how these things can be (Jn. 3.9). No wonder the Church is failing in her appointed calling as light of the world, salt of the earth, and leaven of righteousness for all nations.

You all together

Jesus could not say it any more plainly. The works that He did – good works of righteousness, astonishing works heralding the presence of the Kingdom, works of healing and restoration and new life – He has chosen us to do as well, attaching to them the promise that our works will be *even greater* than His!

Greater, first of all, because we have more *time* in which to do them. Jesus had three years on earth to do those works which brought mercy, grace, truth, reconciliation, healing, and renewal to the world. For most of us, our experience as Christians extends well beyond three years.

And greater as well, because Jesus had *all* believers in mind when He made this incredible promise. This is clear by the second person plural verbs that follow the promise of verse 12 in verses 13 and 14. Combine all the good works that God’s people can do, harmonizing their gifts, filling all their opportunities, spreading out in communities all over the world and throughout all of history, and we can see that Jesus was thinking in terms of God’s promise to Abraham that in Him, the people of God would bring God’s blessings to the whole world.

It's not likely we will do the *same* works Jesus did, such as His miracles. But we can do the *same kind* of works – works that declare to the world a new reality has broken into history, a new power for good is at work among us, and a new order of righteousness peace, joy, and self-denying love is spreading out right before their eyes.

But do we live each day with such an expectation? Do we work hard to grow in the Lord, so that He might work His good and righteous works through us every day? Do we plan for such “greater works than these”? Do we step out in faith and make the most of every opportunity for doing good?

What an incredible witness it would be to the resurrection of Jesus and the reality of His Kingdom, if God's people, upon reading of promises like this, would stop saying to themselves, “It's not for me,” and would say instead, “Here am I, Lord; send me!”

If...

There is one important condition, however. Jesus says we must look to Him in prayer. We must seek the strength for doing good only He can provide. We must go to do good as His representatives, to exalt and honor His Name and to glorify His Father and ours. And we must ask for the ability to do His good works in *anything* and *everything* we do.

Imagine a world where the people of God stopped seeing the precious and very great promises of Jesus as not within their reach, but instead, as our daily work orders and every next step for seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God. All those multitudes doing all those “greater than these” good works – every day, in every situation, at every opportunity – would surely get the attention of this sad and melancholic world, so that many people might begin to think of God no longer in terms of “not for me,” but of “Sir, we would see Jesus!”

For reflection

1. Why are Christians so reluctant to lay hold on the precious and very great promises of God, to take up “greater works than these”?
2. Jesus spoke to His disciples in plural terms – *you all*. Should churches in a community think of themselves as part of one another? Explain. Would it make a difference if churches could unite in good works for their community?
3. Do you sense any of that “not for me” mindset in your reading and study of Scripture? How can prayer help you to overcome or avoid this?

Next steps – Transformation: What can you do to be less “not for me” and more “Here am I” in your reading of Scripture? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.

6 A Heritage of Creativity

*For He established a testimony in Jacob,
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers,
That they should make them known to their children;
That the generation to come might know them,
The children who would be born,
That they may arise and declare them to their children,
That they may set their hope in God,
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments...* Psalm 78:5-7

Making memories

People remember things that are important to them. Birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays all get their due. Other important matters we memorialize with certificates – as in diplomas or degrees – or photographs and other memorabilia. We bring back souvenirs from our trips abroad, or plastic magnets or other gewgaws of the states we've visited. When we're together with friends or family, we tell stories and recall situations that we have shared.

Humans are memory-makers. It's how we identify who we are and relive important events from our past.

We do this individually, but we do it collectively, too. That, after all, is what national holidays are all about. "We the people" want to remember the events and people who helped make us the nation and people we are today. Businesses remember their founders. Graduating classes hold reunions. Even local churches sponsor "homecomings" on special anniversaries, and past and present members gather to share memories and of having been part of the same congregation.

Making memories is important, as even the Scriptures will testify. Very often in the Scriptures, writers will point back to important people or events, when God did something of redemptive significance, or His people endured something that was of defining importance.

No people on earth has more to remember, celebrate, and rejoice in than those who make up the worldwide Body of Christ. For the Christian movement has generated more creative productivity for good than all other religions, political movements, philosophical schools, or other collective entities combined. By His creative and transforming power, God has enabled His people to do more good works, in more varied fields, with more lasting effects than any other similar collective can boast.

We do well to remember and celebrate these good works, both because of their historical and spiritual significance, and because they can spur us on to greater creativity in our own day.

Forgetting God's works?

These days, the followers of Christ are in danger of losing sight of the vast heritage and treasury of good works which have sprung from within the Christian movement. We no longer study our past or take care to remember, appreciate, and conserve the creative good works of our forebears in the faith. The trend in Christian circles today is to ignore or even dismiss the past as traditional, old, and irrelevant, preferring instead whatever is new, innovative, and hip.

We are in danger of forgetting the good works God has done through His people in all fields of human endeavor. In the arts, humanities, charitable endeavors, public policy, law, business and the professions,

human relations and development, science, education, and much more, creative Christians have contributed good works to delight, edify, nurture, sustain, restore, enlarge, and enrich our experience. But today's Christians are unaware of these achievements, and thus have forgotten our heritage and are neglecting a cultural treasury that could inspire new generations of creators across the board in human life and culture.

As a worldwide community of faith, we are unmindful of those people, works, and efforts that have brought so much blessing to the world, and that might serve us today in strengthening our hope in God and our efforts at seeking His Kingdom. Our glorious Christian past and heritage is simply not important to us, and it therefore will be even less important to our children.

Make some memories!

God does not want us to forget the good works He has done through our creative forebears. He wants us to remember their contributions, enjoy and celebrate and make use of them, and pass them on to the generations that will succeed us. Each of us who believes has a duty to acquaint ourselves with our Christian past and to study, remember, and imitate the good works of those whose faithfulness and diligence have made it possible for the Gospel to come down to us.

Where to begin? Start by doing some reading about our Christian past. Mark the names and achievements of those who stood out in each era. Read some of their writings. Listen carefully to their music. Contemplate their works of art and literature. See how their contributions to the sciences or education continue to bless the world today. Take up more specific studies and share what you're learning with your Christian friends. Create ways of remembering and celebrating the creative good works of God from past generations and look for ways to inspire and encourage Christian creators today.

We cannot afford to be indifferent to or ignorant of our great and creative heritage of Christian culture. So many good works are there to be discovered and delighted in, and to spur us on in creative good works of our own. Make some memories of your own from the heritage of Christian creativity, and you'll be better equipped and more zealous to see such good works of creative genius be replicated in the land of the living today.

For reflection

1. What good works of creativity from our Christian past can you recall? What makes these such good works?
2. What are some ways the world continues to benefit today from creative Christian works of the past?
3. What will you do begin acquainting yourself with the heritage of Christian creativity and good works?

Next steps – Conversation: Use the three questions above to talk with some of your Christian friends. Discover something you can do together to learn more about our Christian heritage.

7 The Pleasure of Goodness

Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1.11, 12

Called to goodness

We should expect that the followers of Jesus Christ will be a major source of the goodness of God coming to light in the land of the living. Individually and as communities, Christians are the primary means whereby the goodness of God fills the earth and points the world beyond its misery, uncertainty, and fears to the eternal hope of Jesus Christ. Believers are not saved *because* they do good works; salvation is all of God's grace. We are saved *unto* good works, and this, too, is the work of God within us.

In many ways, doing good is what defines Christians as such. If we are truly *following* Jesus, then we will walk that path of obedience and good works which He walked (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

His good Spirit, *dwelling within us*, will bring forth the fruit of *goodness* in us as, by His power, He transforms us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

We have been redeemed and saved in Jesus Christ *unto* good works, which God has revealed from long ago to guide us in fulfilling our calling (Eph. 2.8-10).

He has given us His Word in Scripture, to equip us for *every* good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17).

And we are called not to become weary in doing good works, especially to those who are within the household of faith (Gal. 6.9, 10).

The people of God, whom He has called to Himself in Jesus Christ, must make it their priority to become zealous for good works, always ready to do good, and careful to maintain those good works that fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness in us and in our world (Tit. 2.14; 3.1, 8, 14).

God at work

The good news is that we are not alone to carry out this high and holy calling. God is at work within us to will and do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13). His good pleasure is that we should live worthy lives, carrying out our calling to good works by trusting in Him and drawing on the indwelling power of His Spirit (Eph. 3.20).

God has not left us to ourselves either to figure out what His goodness requires, or to conjure up the will and strength to do good, even to those who hate us and spitefully use us and even persecute us (Matt. 5.44, 45). God Himself teaches us. God in His Spirit empowers us. And God in Jesus Christ leads us step by step into those words and deeds that fill the world with His presence and bring the goodness of God to light in the land of the living (Eph. 4.8-10).

Thus we fulfill His calling for our lives, as we walk in His Spirit, trust in His Word, and take those steps of faith that issue in good works to the people in our daily lives. Seeking the goodness of God and living His goodness in all our words and deeds, we enter into the pleasure of the Lord, where His glory radiates through us to magnify the precious Name of Jesus and His grace.

And there is no greater joy nor any more satisfying pleasure than entering into the pleasure of God (Ps. 16.11).

The Goodness of God's People

Love is not burdensome

The apostle John reminds us that love is our highest calling, and love is not burdensome. The good works we do in the power of God's Spirit express the many ways Jesus' love works through us to reach the world with God's grace and truth. How could this possibly be burdensome? How can we *not* be zealous for good works, when we know that through those works Jesus demonstrates His love to the love-starved world?

If the goodness of God is truly to come to light in the land of the living, we, the followers of Jesus, will need to rally to that calling and embrace it energetically and with joy. It is not burdensome to love our neighbors, not when we're depending on God and resting in His power and pleasure. But we need one another in this high calling, to encourage and exhort one another to love and good works (Heb. 10.24).

It is to this great calling, to embracing and pursuing it, that we turn in our final installment in this series. What can we do as believers to discover the goodness of God, shine the light of His goodness, and leaven this sad world with the glorious goodness of God, to the praise of the glory of His grace?

This is the question we will pursue in our final segment.

For reflection

1. We're not saved *by* good works, but *unto* them; we're not saved *by* good works, but we're not saved *without* them. Explain.
2. Why does doing good bring us into the pleasure of God? What is it like to find yourself in the pleasure of God?
3. All good works are expressions of the love of Jesus Christ. Explain.

Next steps – Conversation: What can believers do to encourage and exhort one another to love and good works? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.

The Goodness of God's People

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What are some ways that Christians reflect and refract the goodness of God in the world?
2. Churches should be a major source of the goodness of God in their communities. In what ways?
3. What opportunities for bringing God's goodness to light are presented to you in your Personal Mission Field?
4. What obstacles can keep us from being ready to do good and to maintain good works?
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 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.