

# WAITING FOR GOD'S GOODNESS

## THE GOODNESS OF GOD 9

We must be busy about the goodness of God.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Waiting for God's Goodness  
The Goodness of God 9  
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Welcome to *Waiting for God's Goodness*

The earth is full of the goodness of God, the psalmist insists (Ps. 33.5). It's there, but it's not obvious. It is the calling of God's people to discover God's goodness and glory and to live and proclaim that goodness to the world.

Sounds like a pretty important job.

God calls us to wait on Him and not to despair. Through prayer, preparation, and faithful obedience, we can realize more of God's goodness in every aspect of our lives. We'll have to work at it; but it's what we have been redeemed for, so we may as well get started.

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 The Goodness of God in a Groaning World

I would have lost heart, *unless I had believed*  
*That I would see the goodness of the LORD*  
*In the land of the living.*  
*Wait on the LORD;*  
*Be of good courage,*  
*And He shall strengthen your heart;*  
*Wait, I say, on the LORD!* Psalm 27.13, 14

### *The longing for goodness*

The world longs for more of the goodness of God. We don't have to look far or long to discover that deep groaning and desire.

Creation itself groans under the burden of human sin (Gen. 3.17, 18; Rom. 8.20-22). Man's greed for material gain has jeopardized ecosystems and species all over the world. Conservationists strive against self-interest to restore health to portions of the creation, but it can seem as if they are fighting a losing battle. Concerns about changes in world climate generate initiatives designed to bring balance and goodness back to the environment.

People long for peace. Everywhere the cry goes out, "Peace! Peace!" But there is no peace, for human self-interest and the lust for power threaten all that is good and stable and decent in human society. Everyone wants justice. Everywhere people clamor for rights. We all want relief from trouble and anxiety, and we want someone to do something good for us.

But is the definition of what is good as firm as we might hope? People are in danger of becoming inured to the moral corruption, spiritual decay, and the wicked workings of our contemporary society. We are drowning in a sea of bad news, uncertain developments, decadent entertainments, dire forecasts, and a shape-shifting *status quo*. For many people, the answer to such disruptions is to redefine the terms of goodness – to call what is bad good, in hopes of assuaging our troubled consciences.

But the desire for true goodness persists. The world longs for more unity, harmony, purity, creativity, order, and love – more of what we have seen to be characteristic of the goodness of God. But the world is getting used to bad news, and cynicism, doubt, distrust, and narcissism are everywhere on the rise.

Still, the longing for goodness remains, and the challenge of bringing more of God's goodness to light in the land of the living falls squarely on those who know that goodness and are called to exemplify and pursue it as a defining characteristic of their lives. For if Christians do not salt the world with the goodness of God, wherewith will it be salted (Matt. 5.13)?

### *In all the earth*

In fact, as we have seen, "The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (Ps. 33.5). God showers His goodness upon us day by day, throughout the vast creation and in the people and cultures of the world. He holds out His goodness to us in His Word and Law, as well as the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. Everywhere God's goodness refreshes and sustains us. But noting and enjoying the goodness of the Lord can be a difficult challenge for those who do not know Him or His goodness, and who tend to see more what's wrong in the world than what can edify and give us hope.

We who know the Lord may discern and experience His goodness from a wide range of sources. God has invested His people with the calling to show His goodness to the world, as a witness to His faithfulness and

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love, and a portent of the promise entailed in the Good News of His Kingdom. So much should this calling motivate and guide us, so great should be our longing for God's goodness to be known, that we, like David, can almost despair at the thought that the magnificent, omnipresent, unceasing goodness of God might go unnoticed, unacknowledged, and unappreciated.

#### *Waiting for the goodness of the Lord*

In response to our longing for the goodness of God to be more widely visible and acknowledged, the Lord tells us to "Wait." In His way and time, He will make His goodness known. The Lord is working continuously to see to it that the knowledge of His glory and goodness will be everywhere present in the world (Hab. 2.14). Through His people He is filling the world with Jesus Christ, and in His time, He will see to it that every eye shall see Him, every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess Him as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

For now, He calls us to wait. But not merely to sit passively about until He does something apart from us. Rather, He calls us to pray, to learn and discern more of His goodness, to demonstrate, celebrate, and accelerate His goodness by our lives and words, and above all to embody and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

The world longs for more goodness, but many in the world have already become so blind to true goodness, that when it is shown them, their response will be scorn, opprobrium, oppression, and worse. But show them we must, and call them to acknowledge the goodness of God with grateful hearts, before the judgment of God, which is also in all the earth (Ps. 105.7), overwhelms them, and all hope of goodness is lost forever.

#### *For reflection*

1. What evidence do you see to indicate that the world is longing for more of the goodness of God?
2. What opportunities for showing God's goodness do you have each week?
3. What can you do to begin observing and sharing more of God's goodness?

*Next steps – Preparation: Begin a journal to note the many ways you see God's goodness each day. At the end of the day, give Him thanks and praise for His goodness.*

## 2 Knowing What Is Good

*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.* James 4.17

*The problem with goodness*

We would be naïve not to acknowledge that we live in a day when the Christian worldview does not provide the guiding framework for thinking about life. Or goodness.

Ours is a secular age, and the norms that guide how people think about what is and is not good revolve around such things as self-interest, material boon, social media (or, what my friends think), and mere sensuality. *Goodness* has become so personalized and secularized that it can be difficult to achieve consensus on any overarching criteria to guide us in seeking the common good.

The danger to Christians is that we look around to see what the culture considers to be good, and then we bend our own views to match what others think. If the culture believes it's a good thing to change our sexual mores and our views of marriage, then we might be tempted to think the Church should go with the flow. If it seems that our unbelieving friends and co-workers find the "God of the Old Testament" to be unappealing, then we might be tempted to set that part of Scripture aside, and focus only on Jesus and the New Testament. If we see that our culture thinks entertainment is the highest form of happiness, then we might be tempted to make our worship and congregational life conform to such an expectation. If our culture thinks that what's truly good is that which provides maximum happiness or satisfaction for any individual, then we might be tempted to steer clear of prescribing any unchanging norms of right, wrong, and evil and good.

But if we give in to the temper of the times, and let the world and its culture pipe the tune of goodness, we will not succeed in bringing the goodness *of God* to light in the land of the living. Rather, by taking our cues from our unbelieving, secular age, we will *forfeit* the goodness of God and add to the *confusion* about goodness that is currently raging at epidemic proportions in our nation.

The problem with goodness is that the goodness of God is presently being *sublimated* to the narcissism and materialism of the age, and to the extent that we as Christians are complicit in this, we need to repent and return to the Lord and His Word.

*Do we even know?*

The question arises as to whether Christians even know what the goodness of God is. We have seen that God is good, and that in Himself He manifests the kind of unity, holiness, harmony, creativity, order, and love that can guide us in thinking about and pursuing that which is truly good.

But if we as Christians are not growing in the *knowledge* of God, and if we are not actively seeking to understand *goodness* as God embodies and defines it, then we will be left with our vague notions of goodness to sail against the storm of secular values and opinions, tossed about and carried about by all kinds of doctrines which can keep us from truly knowing what is good (Eph. 4.14).

The way to begin in bringing the goodness of God to light in the land of the living is to make sure we truly know *God*, and that we are daily increasing in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life (Jn. 17.3; 2 Pet. 3.18).

Knowing God is a deeply personal and transforming relationship. We know God when, drawn to Him through Jesus Christ, we faithfully engage all the means by which God reveals Himself, beginning with His Word, waiting on the Spirit of God to bring us ever more deeply into His presence, goodness, and glory. We want to encounter God in His glory, see Him in His goodness, and increase in fear and love of God as the

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true measure of knowing Him.

The people of ancient Israel insisted they knew God, but theirs was a merely formal knowledge, comprised of traditions and rituals devoid of any meaningful relationship with God as Father and Lord (cf. Hos. 4.1-6). In rejecting true knowledge of God, Israel rejected what was truly good, and sought the goodness which other nations commended or preferred to that which God revealed in Himself and His Law (Hos. 8.1-3).

The Church today will not be able to bring God's goodness into relationships, culture, society, law, and all other aspects of life as long as knowing *God* first of all is not our first priority. If we know *God*, we will know true *goodness*. And knowing God, as He reveals Himself and His goodness in His Word, we will be better able to discern His goodness through all the other means by which He reveals it, and to *do* His goodness in all things.

### *Know and do*

As we grow in the knowledge of God and His goodness, we will begin to function as agents of transformation in our culture. Like light, illuminating the darkness; like salt, preserving what is good against all forms of corruption and decay; and like leaven, penetrating to all parts of society and culture, transforming that which is unpalatable to that which is wholesome and good – like these agents of transformation, we who *know God and His goodness* can, by *doing what is good*, provide a serious counter-balance and remedy for the malaise of goodness currently besetting our world.

We must thus give ourselves anew to knowing God and to learning His goodness as He reveals it in Himself and through all the means of revelation by which He speaks to us every day. We must work hard to know God, beginning in His Word and searching Him out in all aspects of His creation. For the only hope our sad world has of breaking free from the death-grip of corrupt views of goodness is as those who *know* what is truly good, *do* and *declare* that goodness in every aspect of their lives.

### *For reflection*

1. How do people today define “good”?
2. Meditate on Hosea 4.1-6 and Hosea 8.1-3. Did Israel “know” the Lord? Explain. How should this warn Christians today?
3. Whatever we know to be good, we must do, or our knowledge of the good will be only evil. Explain.

*Next steps – Preparation: Begin a journal or notebook on the goodness of God. From your daily times in His Word and prayer, and from your observations throughout the day, begin to jot down as many things as you discover that demonstrate the goodness of God. The more you know what is good, the better prepared you will be to do it.*

### 3 Pray for the Goodness of God

I would have lost heart, *unless I had believed*  
*That I would see the goodness of the LORD*  
*In the land of the living,*  
*Wait on the LORD;*  
*Be of good courage,*  
*And He shall strengthen your heart;*  
*Wait, I say, on the LORD!* Psalm 27.13, 14

*And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me..."* Acts 1.4

#### *Why pray?*

Jesus associated losing heart in the life of faith with failing to persist in prayer (Lk. 18.1). Many Christians today have given up hope that the world can be renewed in the goodness of the Lord. They despair of ever seeing unity, holiness, harmony, order, creativity, and love abounding to the glory of God and the blessing of the world, and they have retreated into their spiritual huddles, praying "Maranatha, come Jesus," waiting only for the Lord to deliver them from this present evil age.

Certainly we must pray eagerly for the Lord's return, but not at the expense of our present witness and work.

Other Christians have come to believe that whatever goodness is to be preserved or restored in the world will be through the political process. They urge us to "get out the vote," call on us to lobby Congress and the courts, and point us to those candidates or policies they believe will preserve our religious freedoms, if not restore our nation's greatness and goodness.

Certainly, we must participate as responsible citizens in government and the political process, for God intends even this to be a vehicle for His goodness to come to light in the land of the living (Rom. 13.1-4). But the goodness of God is ultimately the business of the heavenly council and court.

We must above all, therefore, wait on the Lord for His goodness by turning to Him in prayer. As we seek the Lord in prayer, in the Name of Jesus and the power of His Spirit, according to the promises of His Word, we can know that our prayers will be heard and answered (Matt. 21.22). Prayer is a powerful means of strengthening our faith and opening the way for God to do great and surprising things (Jer. 33.3; Jms. 5.7, 8, 16-18). By prayer those spiritual forces of wickedness which blind the world to God's goodness and prevent its flourishing may be cast out and trampled underfoot, so that the flower of goodness can blossom once again (Mk. 9.28, 29).

And waiting in prayer – and only in prayer – we may expect to lay hold on the precious and very great promises of God, as the apostles learned through their 10 days of waiting and praying for the Spirit in Acts 1.

#### *What to pray*

If we would not despair of seeing the goodness of God in the land of the living, and if we would not lose heart in doing good, we must pray. We must pray that God will work His goodness within our own souls, so that we are transformed increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

We must pray that God will alert us to the opportunities for doing good in our daily lives, and that He will empower us to be zealous and ready for good works, so that we make the most of the time He gives us for bringing His goodness to light (Tit. 2.14, 3.1; Eph. 5.15-17).

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Let us pray specifically for others, for the people we see each day, for the lost of this world and those who exercise authority over them, for our neighbors and co-workers, and for those who create and manage the culture which is so essential to all our lives, that more of unity, holiness, harmony, creativity, order, and love may be evident around, within, and through them. And let us pray that their hearts may become dissatisfied with the relative and fleeting goodness of this secular age, and they might long for the purer, truer, and more lasting goodness that can come from God alone.

And let us pray that churches everywhere might fulfill their callings as the Body of Christ to be salt, light, and leaven, so that the goodness of God may flow with healing and renewal to our sad and weary world.

### *When to pray*

When should we pray for such goodness? Jesus would say, "Always" (Lk. 18.1). Paul would say "in everything" (Phil. 4.6, 7). As the disciples joined together for an extended season of prayer, that the promised goodness of God might fall upon and unfold within and through them, so we also must pray.

We must pray in all our times of prayer, waiting on the Lord with pleading and in silent groaning, to bring His goodness to light in us and our world. Always to pray in everything means that specific prayers for specific aspects of the goodness of God should be mentioned in our times of worship, our Bible study and prayer groups, and when we are gathered with families or friends for prayer. We should breathe them with sighs and heaving and thanksgiving throughout the day, as often as the Spirit provokes us to seek the goodness of the Lord.

If we will wait on the Lord in prayer, we will find our spirits buoyed, our vision for God's goodness renewed, our hopes revived, and our lives made new in God's goodness day by day. And we will not despair of seeing His goodness come to light in the land of the living. To the contrary, we will rejoice and give thanks for the increasing evidence of His goodness all around, and wait with eager expectation for greater manifestations of His goodness yet to come (Ps. 67).

### *For reflection*

1. What will it require of you to begin praying more consistently for the goodness of the Lord?
2. Make a quick list of aspects of God's goodness which you have observed in recent days. Thank Him for them, and ask Him to open your eyes even more.
3. Why is it so important that Christians pray specifically for specific manifestations of the goodness of God?

*Next steps – Conversation: Share with a Christian friend whatever you have observed lately of the goodness of God, and invite your friend to join you in giving thanks and in seeking more of God's goodness.*

## 4 Nurturing Goodness

*“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.”*  
Matthew 12.33

### *Actively waiting*

We’re beginning see that waiting on the Lord for His goodness to be known in the land of the living, is hardly a passive endeavor. We’re not merely sitting around hoping that God will do something. Ultimately, *only* God can bring forth His goodness, so that the goodness of the Lord which is in all the earth may be observed, acknowledged, enlarged, and emulated, to the praise and honor of God alone.

Only God can bring forth the fruit of goodness in the world. But we have a part in this good work, and God expects His people to be busy about that part. Christians are the agents of God’s goodness in the world. We are people called to be equipped, zealous, and ready for good works. It falls to us to *discern* the goodness of God, to *model* that goodness, and to *bring that goodness to the attention of others*, so that the *knowledge* of the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

That will certainly require more of us than simply sitting around looking at our watches.

We’ve also seen that waiting on the Lord for His goodness requires diligent and faithful prayer. How much we long for the goodness of God to come to light will be demonstrated by the amount of time we spend pleading with God to do what only He can do.

And still there is more. The goodness of God is like a seed, sown by His common grace into the weed-infested soils of the world. The seed has all the potential for great, visible, glorious goodness – just as the acorn holds within itself all the majesty of a mighty oak.

But the seed of divine goodness – which we can discover in creation, culture, the Word and Law of God, the court of heaven, and the people whom He has saved and called for Himself – is so designed as to require nurturing before it can bring forth its full potential. We must *make* the tree good, as our Lord Jesus explained, or else the weeds and brambles of the world will choke and thwart and overgrow it.

### *Making the tree good*

What is involved in making the tree good?

For a tree to bear good fruit it must be watered, fertilized, protected against harmful pests and blights, and regularly pruned. Trees have the potential to bear good fruit, but it doesn’t just happen. If we don’t work to make the trees good, the wickedness which everywhere abounds will prevent them from bearing the good fruit for which they have been sown.

So it is with our lives. Christians are a people who bear Good News. They can discern the goodness of God, and should be quick to point His goodness out to others. And they themselves have the power of God’s Spirit at work within them so that they can embody the goodness of God in the good works they do in every area of their lives – all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities (Gal. 5.22, 23; Phil. 2.13).

But goodness doesn’t just happen. Waiting on God’s goodness requires that we *make* our souls good, and that we bring our *lives* into conformity with God’s good plans for us and His world. We must work on ourselves continuously, nurturing our souls and lives for goodness, and encouraging and assisting one another in this high and holy calling.

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This will entail being firmly planted in the good soil of faith, beside the flowing waters of the Spirit (Ps. 1). Let us sow the good seed of the Word liberally over and over into our souls, and guard and keep that soil and seed from every evil influence. Whatever has the potential to thwart the fruit of goodness in our souls or lives must be identified, resisted, and expunged. In its place let us work hard to cultivate every good thought, affection, priority, and work that God's Word reveals to us.

We cannot merely patch on a few good works here and there. A *life* of goodness issues from the goodness we are becoming in our *soul*, where the Lord Himself is making us good. We have been called and redeemed for good works, and the way to realize this purpose is to set ourselves to be made good by Him alone Who is powerful to do so.

#### *Making the world good*

From the good God is making of us, and the good fruit He brings through us, we may expect to bring His goodness to light in all aspects of our lives. Historically, Christians who have been increasing in the goodness of God have been used of God to bring out His goodness in all areas of life and culture. Culture can be redeemed. Relationships can be renewed. Whole societies can be reformed and become seed beds for God's goodness when the people of God take seriously their calling to make the tree good, both in their lives and their times.

Wherever we discern the goodness of God, we must remark it, celebrate it, and do our best to cultivate more of it. Whatever comes into our lives, we may affect it for good by *knowing* what is good, *praying diligently* for God's goodness, and *doing as much goodness* as we can in each opportunity and situation of our lives (Eph. 5.15-17).

We are called to *make* the tree of this world good, beginning in our own lives, and then branching out into every relationship, role, and responsibility in which we are involved. By so doing we wait actively on the Lord to honor our faithfulness and bring His goodness to light in the land of the living.

#### *For reflection*

1. What are some differences between *passive* waiting and *active* waiting on the Lord?
2. How could you improve in the work of making your own soul a better nurturing ground for the goodness of the Lord?
3. Suggest some ways of preparing each day to be an agent of God's goodness in the world.

*Next steps – Conversation: How can Christians help one another to make the tree good in their souls, lives, and times? Discuss this question with some Christian friends.*

## 5 Pursuing God's Goodness

It is *the glory of God to conceal a matter,*  
*But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.* Proverbs 25.2

*The works of the LORD are great,*  
*Studied by all who have pleasure in them.* Psalm 111.2

### *Surrounded by goodness*

As we have seen throughout this study, God's goodness is present on every hand; we can observe it in a wide range of situations and things, including God's Word and Law, creation and culture, and the good works of God's people in all walks of life. Beyond and over all these, believers see the goodness of God in Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and in the heavenly court where Jesus reigns as Lord.

We are surrounded by God's goodness. It's just that, for the most part, we're blinded by sin or handicapped by laziness from *seeing* those works and appreciating and acknowledging them as manifestations of God's goodness. And as believers, we are not as energetic or consistent as we should be in doing those good works that manifest the goodness and glory of God.

To clarify, whatever of life, goodness, blessing, or glory we know is neither inherent in us nor derived from our best efforts or our temporal and material circumstances. Rather, the goodness we know in this life – all the forms and expressions of unity, holiness, harmony, order, creativity, and love that we enjoy each day – is only our experiencing God, in Whom we live and move and have our being. We're like Pip in Dicken's *Great Expectations*, thinking that all our daily bounty and blessing comes from people and things we can see, when in reality, in the unseen background and animating all the blessings we know is a Being we've put out of our minds, and never think to acknowledge. Though we always exist in God, our sinfulness and self-centeredness make us blind to His presence and glory, and cause us to take for granted the abundant goodness and many blessings which daily redound to us in and from Him.

We do not add to the glory or pleasure of God in any way – to His own blessedness or goodness or joy. He is in all these things sufficient in Himself. When we become aware of His goodness, as we experience it in one form or another, the proper response is to *acknowledge* God's goodness and *praise* Him for it, then to *proclaim* that goodness to others and to emulate it in our works. Whatever is good or blessed or glorious in our lives is only the presence and work of God, manifested in ways appropriate to our need, wrought in, upon, or unto us to draw us more mindfully and gratefully into Him (cf. Acts 17.22-30).

Since at every moment we exist in God, we ought to be more attentive to His goodness and blessing, more mindful of His glory, and quicker to enter His presence and praise, for the joy and pleasure of it, when signaled to do so by the circumstances of our lives or the contemplations of our minds.

For it is God's glory to *conceal* His goodness throughout the world around us; and it is our *calling* as His royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2.9) to search out His goodness and make it known to the world.

### *Pursuing God's goodness*

The psalmist says that when we delight in the good works of God, we will *pursue* them diligently. That's the sense of the Hebrew verb, דָּרַשׁ, דָּרַשׁ – *studied*. The more we note the goodness of God in the world around us, the more we will glimpse God Himself. And the pleasure we derive from this will spur us on to *pursue* and *study* the works of God, to be more careful and consistent in seeking to uncover His goodness, concealed in everyday situations and things, so that we may enter His pleasure more consistently, and offer Him the praise and thanks which are His due.

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But let's be honest: How many of us are willing to take on the *pursuit* and *study* of the works of God, to know His goodness and enjoy His presence and pleasure? Aren't we all just too distracted by our mundane busyness, too settled in our avocations and diversions, and just too lazy to gin up the heart and mind necessary for seeking the Lord?

And because this is so, we should not be surprised that we so seldom *experience* God or *know the pleasure of His presence* in the everyday situations of our lives. The Lord promises that we will *find* Him, and thus know all the goodness of our lives as *His* goodness, when we seek the Lord with all our heart (Jer. 29.13). The half-hearted, inconsistent manner in which most Christians approach their reading and study of God's Word, and the almost non-existent way in which we seek to discover His concealed glory and goodness in the world and the people and things of our daily lives, just about guarantees that we're not going to take up the *pursuit* of God and His goodness by studying the works He does all around us every day.

### *Before we despair*

So the next time we begin to despair of the world ever becoming a better place, of people ever treating one another with more civility and love, or of works of beauty and goodness taking the place of the smut and crudity which swirl continuously around us and poison the moral and spiritual air, let us consider the alternative to such despairing – which is to *wait upon the Lord* for His goodness, and to take up the *pursuit* of God's works for the sake of enjoying His pleasure, praising His Name, and making His goodness known to the world.

If the world fails of much goodness, it is not only the world's fault. It is the fault also of those who, knowing that God is good, and His goodness is everywhere to be discovered, enjoyed, and proclaimed, fail to embrace their calling to seek the Lord with all their hearts in His Word and His works, and to make known the glory and goodness which brings them such pleasure.

Are you waiting on the goodness of the Lord by seeking the Lord in His Word and His works? Or are your best energies of *pursuit* being frittered away on things that will not last, cannot satisfy, and are not in the best interests of God and His goodness?

### *For reflection*

1. Many Christians find the idea of *studying* anything to be an option rather than an integral aspect of their calling to follow Jesus. How do you respond to that idea?
2. What activities are involved in seeking the Lord in His Word? How about in His works? Since the glory and goodness of God are revealed in His works, shouldn't we make more effort to seek Him there? Explain.
3. In a world captive to materialism, narcissism, relativity, and sensuality, what can we expect to be the norms of "goodness" if Christians fail in their calling to note, appreciate, acknowledge, respond to, and proclaim the goodness of God everywhere it occurs?

*Next steps – Transformation: How will you begin to pursue the works of God to note and acknowledge and proclaim His goodness as it is revealed there?*

## 6 Anticipating the Goodness to Come

... for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Hebrews 11.10

### *Looking ahead to God's goodness*

Biblical religion is forward-looking. Christians live by promises, words spoken by God concerning goodness and blessedness, eternal peace and joy, available in part in the here and now, but stored up and being prepared for an eternal dwelling in the world to come.

Patriarchs like Abraham, and all the good kings and prophets of Israel, together with the apostles and saints of the New Testament, understood that the full realization of God's goodness awaits another City, another world. Only in the New Heavens and New Earth will we realize that perfection of unity, holiness, harmony, order, creativity, and love which perfectly expresses in material forms the eternal, spiritual goodness which is God Himself.

That day of eternal and abounding goodness is coming, and we are well served in this life to look ahead to that new world. For then and there, all goodness, beauty, and truth will unfold daily around and through us, in forms and expressions creational, cultural, and social that will speak with one voice of the glorious goodness of our God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If, drawing from the writings of prophets and apostles, we can fix in our minds an image of the City to Come, that vision and promise can strengthen us in our waiting here and now, and guide our efforts to bring to light the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

### *The vision of eternal goodness*

In his epic poem *The Task*, William Cowper (1731-1800) provides an encyclopedia of lessons in noting, enjoying, sharing, and contributing to the goodness of God. In six books, Cowper teaches us how to observe the world of late 18<sup>th</sup>-century England so that we see the goodness of God in creatures, scenes, seasons, and the everyday work of country folk, highlighted against the backdrop of what was *not* good in that period of England's history.

*The Task* concludes with Cowper, like Abraham and faithful saints in all ages, looking forward to the new heavens and new earth, and the abounding, endless, universal goodness of God we will know and enjoy then. Here is Cowper's vision of coming goodness from Book VI of *The Task*:

Oh scenes surpassing fable, and yet true,  
Scenes of accomplished bliss! which who can see,  
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel  
His soul refreshed with foretaste of the joy?  
Rivers of gladness water all the earth,  
And clothe all climes with beauty; the reproach  
Of barrenness is past. The fruitful field  
Laughs with abundance, and the land once lean,  
Or fertile only in its own disgrace,  
Exults to see its thistly curse repealed.  
The various seasons woven into one,  
And that one season an eternal spring,  
The garden fears no blight, and needs no fence,  
For there is none to covet, all are full.  
The lion and the libbard and the bear

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Graze with the fearless flocks. All bask at noon  
Together, or all gambol in the shade  
Of the same grove, and drink one common stream.  
Antipathies are none. No foe to man  
Lurks in the serpent now. The mother sees,  
And smiles to see, her infant's playful hand  
Stretched forth to dally with the crested worm,  
To stroke his azure neck, or to receive  
The lambent homage of his arrowy tongue.  
All creatures worship man, and all mankind  
One Lord, one Father. Error has no place;  
That creeping pestilence is driven away,  
The breath of heaven has chased it. In the heart  
No passion touches a discordant string,  
But all is harmony and love. Disease  
Is not. The pure and uncontaminated blood  
Holds its due course, nor fears the frost of age.  
One song employs all nations; and all cry,  
"Worthy the Lamb, for He was slain for us!"  
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks  
Shout to each other, and the mountain-tops  
From distant mountains catch the flying joy,  
Till nation after nation taught the strain,  
Each rolls the rapturous Hosanna round.  
Behold the measure of the promise filled,  
See Salem built, the labour of a God!  
Bright as a sun the sacred city shines;  
All kingdoms and all princes of the earth  
Flock to that light; the glory of all lands  
Flows into her, unbounded is her joy  
And endless her increase...  
Thus heavenward all things tend. For all were once  
Perfect, and all must be at length restored.

*Catch the vision!*

We will be and do that to which we aspire. When we, like Abraham, fix our gaze on the City to Come, and as we rehearse, like William Cowper, the abounding goodness we anticipate there, we will find the strength and direction we need to seek the goodness of God for our lives and for all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

Catch the vision of God's goodness, and let that vision escort and enrich you everywhere you go and in all you do in the here and now of your life.

*For reflection*

1. Do you ever meditate on the City to Come? Where would you turn in Scripture to discover some images or descriptions of the new heavens and new earth?
2. All the different components of William Cowper's vision are grounded in Scripture. How many references to God's Word can you identify in Cowper's vision of the coming goodness of God?
3. What can you do to make this vision of the coming goodness of God a more operative and motivating

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vision for your life?

*Next steps – Conversation: Share Conper's vision of the coming goodness of God with a Christian friend. Talk about how having such a vision can affect your waiting on the Lord for His goodness in the here and now.*

## 7 No Guarantees, No Despairing

*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps... 1 Peter 2.18-21*

*The harsh reality of goodness*

The simple fact is, not everyone is as eager as Christians to see the goodness of God come to light in the land of the living.

We must get busy waiting on the Lord for His goodness, studying God's Word and all His works to discover as much unity, holiness, harmony, order, creativity, and love as we can. Let us talk about our observations and invite others to wonder at the goodness of God, so abundant on every hand. Let us take up our calling to embrace and embody the goodness of God, following the teaching of Scripture, the example of Christ, and the lessons we glean from creation and culture. Yes, let us become examples and channels of goodness, exuding and celebrating and advancing God's goodness on every hand, all in the power of God's Spirit, and all for the praise of His glory.

But let us keep in mind that, frankly, that just won't set well with some folks.

The harsh reality of goodness is that not everyone seeks or welcomes goodness, at least, not the goodness of the Lord. They have their own ideas about what's good for them, and God's view of goodness does not always line up with what they're seeking. Confronted with God's goodness, many people will snort, harrumph, mock, or even become angry. They may turn argumentative or belittle what they will regard as our naiveté. They may even ridicule our silly ideas about right and wrong, beauty, goodness, and truth. Laugh in our faces. Cut us out of the conversation or deny us a place at the table. And maybe even worse.

For let us never forget that, when eternal and unblemished Goodness walked among us, He provoked those who despise the goodness of the Lord to nail Him to a cross. Our pursuit, embrace, enjoyment, celebration, and sharing of God's goodness may elicit similar forms of harshness, grief, suffering, and wrong to us as well.

*Nevertheless...*

But the prospect of suffering for the goodness of God must not deter us. Those around us may threaten, intimidate, or shun us for our commitment to the goodness of God, but we must continue waiting on and doing what is good. Peter instructed those who served among unbelieving masters to be good, do good, and speak what is good, even if they were beaten for it. Such would be "commendable before God," because we are called to this (v. 21), to do good and seek the goodness of God, even if it means suffering humiliation, scorn, injustice, rejection, or bodily harm.

For while goodness comes with many blessings, it also comes at a price. This is why we find David, in Psalm 27, entering the presence of the Lord to meditate on His beauty and be renewed in His goodness. David was not a perfect man, by a longshot. But he did many good things, and in many ways, he sought the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

But this did not mean he never had enemies, or troubles, or unforeseen difficulties that threatened his peace and security. He did, so it's no wonder we find him waiting on the Lord for His goodness and coming *to* the Lord to behold His beauty and goodness in prayer.

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As we also seek the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, knowing that this could put us at cross purposes with people we know and see each day, we must focus on and rest in the goodness of God Himself, or we will not be able to persevere.

### *How desperate are we?*

David said he nearly despaired because he did not see as much of God's goodness as he would have liked. *Nearly*, but not. Instead, he went to the Lord, lingered in His presence, meditating on His beauty and basking in the radiance of His goodness. Thus the goodness of God was infused into his soul, so that he could do nothing other than to wait upon and seek God's goodness by every available means.

So must we. The goodness of God is very good indeed, and very much needed in our sad and goodness-deprived world. And though we may be opposed or dismissed in our pursuit and celebration of God's goodness, if we can abide in the presence of the Lord, soaking up His goodness from all available sources, we will be changed; we will become good people who wait patiently for the goodness of the Lord, never despairing, never giving up, and never backing down.

And what powerful, wonderful, far-ranging, and good effects might such a commitment have in these days when the goodness *of God* is not high on the world's agenda?

### *For reflection*

1. Why would some people not like to be made aware of the goodness of the Lord?
2. How should we respond when people make it clear they're not interested in the goodness of the Lord?
3. How are you taking up the calling to wait on the goodness of the Lord?

*Next steps – Conversation: What should we expect if Christians fail in their calling to wait on the goodness of the Lord? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.*

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*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. What does it mean to *wait* on the Lord for His goodness?
2. How can we make waiting on the Lord for His goodness a more consistent part of our daily walk with the Lord?
3. What should we expect from the people around us as we embrace the calling to seek God's goodness?
4. How can Christians help one another in this calling? How might local churches work together in seeking the goodness of God for their communities?
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.

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Thank you.