

Faith that Moves us to Goodness

What is “good”? What does saying something is “good” mean?

Common definition of good = what is pleasing and right

Calvin and Hobbs cartoon.

This idea of good can be confusing as Calvin demonstrates – what is “good”?

A young man walked up to Jesus one day and said – “Good teacher what good thing must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus did not first answer the eternal life question – he answered the label of “good” he put on his price to gain heaven and that he put on Jesus. Jesus knew this man – like most of us – had a wrong view of good. Jesus said, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. God!”

Jesus was saying, “God alone is good.”

Today God is going to redeem and redefine the word, the idea of good.

God is mercy and his mercy is good. God is justice and his justice is good.

(Both are good, but both aren’t what you would always define as pleasant.) God defines good as

Good = anything (pleasant or painful) which comes from God with the purpose of bringing us to know God

This is so hard for us to believe and God knows this. In this passage he warns us ..

When we live in an overwhelmingly painful trial – we can easily believe God is not good.

This is the main truth – the big truth or idea God is going to plead with us to believe today.

When we believe in God’s unchanging goodness –

God and his goodness define trials rather than trials defining God.

*That is – when we truly believe God is good and unchanging in His goodness, painful trials don’t make me believe God is not good. **Rather than trials defining God – God and his goodness define trials.***

01. Why is what we believe as true about God so important?

02. How do we see God’s unchanging goodness in trials?

01. Why is what we believe as true about God so important?

James 1:13, 16 (ESV) 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, 16 Do not be deceived,

believe = to acknowledge as true and to trust oneself to this.

What we believe as TRUE - actively shapes how we think, how we act, what we strive after.

*Some of us are moved by love because **WE BELIEVE** it promises something pleasant and wonderful to us – it speaks a truth to us that is hopeful and pleasing.*

*Some of us run from love because **WE BELIEVE** it promises something painful and hurtful to us – it speaks a truth to us that is hopeless and unpleasing.*

Both of these situations could be very similar: there is love between two people. But they can have totally different outcomes because people believe different truths about love. One believes the truth that love is hopeful and pleasing: so they are moved to pursue it. One believes the truth that love is hopeless and painful: so they run from it.

What we believe as true shapes how we think, how we act, and what we pursue in this life.

Ponder for a moment what happens when we believe something to be true – that is a lie. Ever done that?

I coached my sons teams for a lot of years. One baseball season early when my oldest son was about 7, I let a guy help coach who fed me all sorts of great info about his ability and his knowledge of baseball and his love for kids. I believed his words as true so I let him help coach. Two years later – we had to ask him to leave the team and it was ugly. Besides being a less than helpful coach who slowed or hurt kids developmentally, he was horrible relating to parents, umpires, and kids. I exposed our team to that because I believed a truth that was actually a lie and it took a long time for that lie to be exposed.

What you believe about God and how we relate to God is often called theology or doctrine.

You may say you don't care about that or think that is very important. Truth – it is vital. What you believe as true about God and who we are as people – leads to how we think, how we act, and what we pursue. Everyone has a theology. Everyone says – “Oh, I don't think God is like that.” *You say that bc you have a theology, a belief about God.* And this belief – shapes how you think about situations, how you act and react in these situations, and what you pursue as a result.

In this passage – God is going to warn us. He is going to loudly and strongly say – what you believe to be true about me vitally affects how you receive trials. Here is our main truth for the day: When I believe in God's unchanging goodness – God and his goodness define trials rather than trials defining God.

02. How do we see God's unchanging goodness in trials?

1] **Truth:** Trials – are tests from God - *not to PROVE who we are* – but to **IMPROVE** us, transform us into His good and perfect image.

James 1:12 (ESV) 12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Blessed = joy, this internal eternal longing of our soul that only comes from life with God – comes to us through trials.

Trials – are from God and can be painful or pleasing moments or seasons.

Truth: Trials – are tests from God - not to prove who we are – but to improve, transform us.

There is a lie we are tempted to believe in trials.

Lie: God set me up to fail.

When we believe a trial is a test to prove who we are we will see God as tempting us to fail, setting us up to be overwhelmed by sin. Trials are meant to overwhelm – but not overwhelm you to sin, but overwhelm you so you see your desperate need for Christ alone. Trials – remove (test) the old nature by pushing us to see Christ as the greatest, by driving us to see Jesus as most powerful, by moving us to see Jesus as most beautiful – turning from our way to Him.

I Cor 10:13– God will provide a way out of temptation. **Gen 22:1**- But God will test you beyond you.

James 1:13-15 (ESV) 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

• **God tempts no one to sin with evil.** God is not the author of sin and death.

• **God uses evil acts by those who do not follow Christ to accomplish his purposes.**

• **This desire to pursue things not of God – come from within us.** *The scripture also says this desire is echoed in world views that oppose God and in Satan who lives to oppose God.*

• **God can use evil to test Christ followers – but he does not use it in followers to tempt us to sin.** **Truth:** Trials – are tests from God - *not to PROVE who we are* – but to **IMPROVE** us.

2] **Truth:** **God's own know all trials come to us from our Father's love and goodness.**

James 1:16-18 (ESV) 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

God pleads again – don't believe the lies that we hear during trials.

• **Lie:** **God doesn't love me** - if he did I would not be going through so much pain.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

17 ... Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth (Jesus – John 1:1)

Truth: God proves His love in that he willfully allowed His Son to know our evil so we could be His own and know His goodness.

Pain does not mean God does not love you – look at the cross. He allowed his Son whom he has loved for eternity to endure it all so you could know the greatness and goodness of God. Sometimes we may not understand the why of pain - but we can know for sure the God of our pain and that he loves us.

- God's goodness redeems every thing that comes your way – to be for His good – even painful things.

- **Lie: God is not always good to me** - look how up and down my life is.

Truth: My life is God's - not mine - so everything in this life is not about me but first and foremost about displaying the greatness of God.

- In our pain, God is most often displayed as overwhelmingly loving and good above all things.

18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

- The center of God's world is not me – yet he loves me greatly – does this show you the goodness of God.

I love Fran and have made her the center of my world humanly speaking. She is the greatest love of my life so much so I have sworn before God and everyone – I will never give myself to another – yet the confession of my heart to you – is that my love to her is not very great. “We had a moment before Christmas where it was said this way by my wife to me – “I feel more functional than I do cherished by you.” This has been the pursuit of my heart for the last months – to cherish my wife for who she is not what she does. But her the confession again – She is the center of my world – and yet my love for her can be so small. Hear this truth about God's love for you – You are not the center of his world – you are his “firstfruit”. He is our master, we are His, He is God above all whose own fame and greatness is his highest goal – and yet – His love for you is GREAT. So great – he willed his son to know pain, the pain of our guilt, shame, and judgment so you and I could know Him and his love and goodness. This is unchanging goodness – wills you to know pain at times – so you can more deeply know the goodness of God. And at times – he wills you to know pain – so others can know his goodness.

What would you endure for your son to know the grace and mercy of Jesus – the goodness and love of His acceptance? Would you give up your comfort? Would you give up your job? Would you endure great pain? I bet you would. Believe in the truth that your God is GOOD and has a plan a will in all trials – good and painful.

When we believe in God's unchanging goodness – God and his goodness define trials rather than trials defining God.