

The Goodness of God

Text: Psalm 86:1-7

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

How do you know if something is good? These days it is easy to go online and read reviews. If you are looking for a fancy restaurant where you could take a date on Valentines day, all you have to do is type into the search engine, “good steakhouses in my area.” Within seconds there is a list of potential dining establishments displayed on the screen, complete with pictures of the food, a copy of the menu, and comments from people who have recently been there. One reviewer gives it 5 stars and writes a glowing review. “This is a fantastic place to eat, they have the best ribeye around.” Another person raves about the friendly service and the romantic ambiance of the dining room. They give it 4 ½ stars. After scanning through a half dozen or so reviews, you decide this looks like a place that’s worth checking out. Everyone has such positive things to say, you can’t wait to see for yourself. Ultimately, that is the best way to determine how good it really is, go and experience it firsthand. You make reservations, hop in the car with your date, and eager to enjoy a good meal.

If you were wondering whether or not God is good, you don’t have to read reviews on the internet or take someone else’s word for it. We can experience his goodness in our lives every day. We see it in all kinds of ways, like the little things we often take for granted: feeling the warmth of the sun on a cold winter day, or hearing the sound of laughter from our children as they play, or receiving some unexpected kindness from a stranger. There are many ways the Lord blesses us, and all we can say is: “God is good.” But that statement is not only true when things are going well, the people around us are smiling, the sun shining. God is good through every season of life, even in times of sorrow.

We see that in our passage this morning. Psalm 86 can be described as a psalm of lament. These are a group of prayers scattered throughout the book that express overwhelming grief in the midst of some crisis during which the psalmist cries out to the Lord for help. The heading tells us that it was written by David. We don’t know exactly what he was going through when he penned these words, but there are many incidents in his life recorded in 1 & 2 Samuel that would fit the circumstances. He describes the affliction that he was facing, feeling helpless and alone. In verse 14 he says that “...*arrogant men have risen up against me, and a band of violent men have sought my life.*” This may have been the period of his life, when he was a young man, hiding from King Saul in the wilderness of Israel. Even though he had served the king faithfully, Saul became jealous of David’s military victories and sought his life. David spent many sleepless nights lying on the rocky ground of some cave. These must have been dark times, in his life, and if it had not been from the Lord, he would have found himself sinking into despair. But in all these afflictions David did not become bitter continued to place his trust in the Lord.

The psalms of lament may seem like a strange place to go for a sermon about God’s goodness, but these are actually moments when we experience his presence in striking ways. Times of trouble test our faith. When we are suffering, or afraid, or uncertain, or grieving we may wonder if God truly does care for us... if he truly does have our best interests at heart. Satan would like to use these opportunities to tear us down, whispering lies, trying to convince

us that the Lord is cold, or distant, or vindictive, or uncaring, but nothing could be further from the truth. The Lord reaches out to us, in our moments of desperation, to draw us close.

We may not find ourselves sleeping in caves, but all of us can identify in some way with the struggles David was facing. We know what it is like to feel helpless and alone, overwhelmed by our troubles. David's confidence encourages us to cling to Lord through every season of life. Our faith in God's goodness becomes anchor for our lives as we are tossed about by the storms of life.

God's goodness is shown in his provision.

Look at verses 1-3. David begins his prayer with a cry for help. He says,

"Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy. ² Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man; O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You. ³ Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long."

I appreciate how David approaches the Lord from a position of humility, acknowledging his need. That's not always an easy thing for us to do. Most people have a difficult time admitting how helpless and weak we really are. You might try to convince yourself that you are fine: "I can handle this, it's no big deal, I don't need help from anyone." But we can only fool ourselves for so long. No one can make it through life on their own. Underneath the false bravado we come to realize how much we need the Lord.

David doesn't pretend that he can handle this, but cries out to the Lord for strength. He needed courage because wicked men sought his life. He needed a friend, because everyone else had abandoned him. He needed hope, because the future appeared dreary and bleak. The Lord would be faithful to minister to his servant in all of these ways.

This prayer was based on the conviction that God is good, and will hear us when we call out to him. He is aware of our circumstances, and understands what we need, even before we open our mouths to ask. God gracious toward us, not because we somehow deserve his kindness, but because he cares for us. He provides for our needs. He blesses us. He takes care of his children.

The Lord responded to David's prayer, and he will respond to us as well. Psalm 34:8 (NASB95) says, *"O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!"*

We see this also in the NT, if you will turn in your Bibles with me to Matthew 7. // Jesus was teaching his disciples about prayer and he reminded them that we can be confident as we call out to our Heavenly Father because he cares for us. // In Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus said...

⁷ *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ "Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹*

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

Jesus explains that we don't have to go through life anxious and worried about every little thing, because we have a Father in heaven who watches over us. We can trust him to minister to our needs.

I don't always give my children everything they ask for, but I do try to give them everything they need. That's what a good father does. If they say: “Daddy, we're hungry! Can we have some bread?” I'm not going to respond by handing them a stone. “Here you go. Got it fresh from the driveway, might be a little crunchy but you'll be fine.” No, what kind of Father would I be if I did something like that? Or if they ask me for a fish, I'm not going to turn around and give them a basket of rattlesnakes. They open up the basket and look inside to find something slithering. No, that would be incredibly dangerous. I'm sure it wouldn't take long for Child Protective Services to show up at my front door. If my kids wake up one morning and ask for eggs, I'm not going to give them bowl of scorpions. “Here you are, breakfast of champions.” Only a cruel and heartless person would do something like that. I'm going to them something good and healthy that will meet their need.

Jesus reminds us that if we, sinful people, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more should we expect our Heavenly Father to give good gifts to us? We can bring our cares and concerns to him, knowing that he will provide.

One commentator explains,

Everyone who prays is bound to want to know to what kind of God they are praying. Are we praying to a grudging God out of whom every gift has to be squeezed and coerced? Or are we praying to a God whose heart is so kind that he is more ready to give than we are to ask? ...Human beings can hardly hear two people talking at once, but if all the world calls to God at the one time, he hears their cry. A man [might be] annoyed by the [constant] requests of his friends, but with all the times we put our needs and requests before God, he loves us all the more... God will always answer our prayers; but he will answer them in his way, and his way will be the way of perfect wisdom and of perfect love.¹

People have a tendency to blame for the bad things that happen in our lives on the Lord, while taking for granted the many ways that he that he demonstrates kindness to us. David didn't do that, in the psalm. He understood that his problems were part of living in a fallen world. Saul's wrath wasn't pleasing to the Lord, it was the fruit of his rebellion against God. Even still, the Lord was working in the midst of David's struggles, and he is working in the midst of our struggles, blessing us with his presence, offering comfort in our sorrows. That means there is always reason to give thanks.

Don't take his blessings for granted. Maybe you get to enjoy a special day with family. You spend the entire afternoon together, making memories. How often to go to him with a heart of praise saying, “Lord thank you for this gift! You are good!”

James 1:17 (NASB95) reminds us that *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”*

God’s goodness is also shown in his willingness to forgive.

Go back to our passage in Psalm 86, and look at verse 5. David prays, *“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive...”*

David was honest about our fallen condition, as human beings, and our need for God’s grace. Looking back over his life, he realized that there were times when he had failed miserably. Even though he knew the commands of the Lord, he had not kept those commands, but allowed his pride and selfish desires to get the best of him. In those moments, it have perfectly just for the Lord to cast him aside forever. But that isn’t how God deals with us. He shows patience, drawing us back, bringing conviction to our hearts, so that we might discover his mercy.

In Psalm 32, David shows us this was something he came to experience in a personal way. After his sin with Bathsheba, he tried running from Lord. Instead of dealing his with failures, he thought he could just sweep it all under the rug, pretending as if he had done nothing wrong. I’m sure he did his best to rationalize his behavior. “I am the king after all, doesn’t that mean I get to make the rules?” But no matter what he told himself, or how hard he worked to cover it up, the nagging sense of guilt would not go away. He was miserable. It was as if a tremendous weight was press down on him crushing his should. Guilt ate away at his conscience. Finally, he stopped running. And that’s when he found mercy.

In Psalm 32:1 (NIV) he says,

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ² Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

He learned the hard way that we cannot hide from our sin. We can make excuses. We can compare ourselves with others and say, “I’m not so bad.” We can put on a good show trying to convince ourselves that we’re okay. But in the end, we only wear ourselves out. It’s when we stop running that we make an amazing discovery. The Lord’s desire is not to condemn us, but to redeem us. He is a God of forgiveness, gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy (Neh. 9:17).

Our passage says that the Lord is “ready to forgive.” That tells us it is not something that he does reluctantly, only under compulsion, because we’ve persuaded him somehow to take us back. No, it is the Lord who takes the initiative, reaching out to us, even before we have taken

the first step towards him. He is eager to do so, longing to restore us into a right relationship with him, cleansing our hearts and making us whole.

How different God's attitude is toward us, than the kind of attitude we often have towards one another. Picture two neighbors who are angry with one another. They've been arguing for years, so long they can't even remember how the conflict started or why don't like each other. There is so much bitterness and resentment between them, they can even stand to look at each other. Neither person is willing to put forth the effort to extend an olive branch or mend the broken relationship. "The only way I would ever consider forgiving him is if he first tells me how sorry he is and begs for my forgiveness." The other neighbor says the same thing. "I'm not going to make the first move. It's his fault. He's the one who needs to apologize to me." And so nothing changes. There is no movement toward healing in their relationship. They both dig in their heels, insisting on waiting for the other person to make things right.

If God waiting for us to make the first move, our situation would be hopeless. But while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). We were the ones who had done wrong. We were the guilty party. But God was willing to take the initiative, bearing our sin on his shoulders, reaching out to draw us back into fellowship with him. Why? Because he is good.

A.W. Tozer writes,

Nobody ever got anything from God on the grounds that [they] deserved it. Having fallen, man deserves only punishment and death. So if God [redeems us] it's because he is good. From His goodness, His lovingkindness, His good-natured benevolence, God does it! That's the source of everything... Why were we not destroyed when we sinned? The only answer is that God of His goodness spared us... Why would God the Eternal Son bleed for us? Because God out of His goodness acts according to that goodness and does what His loving heart dictates that He do.ⁱⁱ

God's goodness means that we don't have to wonder where we stand with him. If you have received his mercy by faith, you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you are forgiven. God doesn't hold a grudge. He doesn't nurse resentments. He doesn't say he has forgotten about our past and then bring it up again. In Christ our sins have been wiped away, once and for all, and we are his beloved child. I can stop running, and I no longer need to hide, because I have been found by his mercy. He knows everything there is to know about me, my greatest failures and my worst mistakes, and yet still for some reason he calls me his own. God is good.

God's goodness is also shown in his unfailing love.

Go back to our passage in Psalm 86, and again look at verse 5. David writes, "*For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.*"

In some ways David's life must have seemed like a roller coaster filled with ups and downs, tragedies and triumphs. One day he defeated Goliath and the people of Israel were chanting his name. He became an instant celebrity overnight. And then, David narrowly escaped when King Saul tried pinning him to the wall with a spear. One moment he is living in the palace, but the

next moment he is sleeping in a cave. He must have wondered how things could change so quickly? But isn't that often the case? Life is filled with both joys and sorrows and we don't know what challenges tomorrow might bring. And yet David learned that through it all there is one thing that remains constant... God's love.

This is an important word in the OT. It describes God's faithfulness towards his people, his unwavering commitment, and steadfast love. Even if everyone else in the world were to abandon us, God would never leave our side because he loves us.

Love is a word we use all the time but we don't often think about what it means. If you were to stop random strangers on the street and ask them for their definition of love, you'd probably get a variety of answers. One person might say that love is the strong feeling of affection you have towards someone special. Others might describe it as the happiness that you share when you are together. Someone else might say that it's finding the right person who completes you. These are sorts of answers you would likely hear, and they're not necessarily wrong, they're just incomplete. None of them measure up to the kind of love God demonstrates towards us. It isn't about what we offer him; it centers around his commitment to us.

God's love is unselfish. He pours himself out for the sake of others. God's love is constant. He holds us close to his heart, every moment of every day. Even in those moments when we might take our eyes off of him, he will never forget us. God's love is pure. He always has our best interests at heart and uses the circumstances of our lives to shape us more and more into the people that we were made to be.

David tells us that the Lord is abounding in love. It is vast, and will never be exhausted. No matter how many years you have walked with him you will continue to dive deeper and deeper into his love and never reach the end. There is no end.

It means we think of a waterfall that is constantly flowing. As you approach the edge you hear the roar of the rushing stream, and you feel the mist spraying into the air. Thousands of gallons of water rush by every second. A child looks on in amazement and asks, "when will it run dry?" And you answer them, "It will never run dry." You could visit the same waterfall in ten years and it would continue to flow the same force and power as you remembered. You could come back and twenty years and it would remain the same. You could come back in fifty years and the waters are still flowing. That is a picture of God's unfailing love for us.

Psalm 57:9–10 (NIV84) says, "I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples."¹⁰ For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies."

And the wonderful thing about God's love is that it is available to all people. David tells us that the Lord is good, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who will call upon his name. This reminds us that the Lord has a heart for the entire world. He knows the name of every man, woman, and child on the earth and cares about all of them, not just a few, not just a handful, not just a select group. We see that especially in the NT where the gospel of God's grace is carried across the globe to people of every nation, tribe and tongue. But even in the OT, in passages like

this, we read about the broad scope of his love. Scripture tells us that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). His gift is available to all, all that is left is for us to receive it by placing our trust in him.

Do you realize how much God loves you? You were on the heart of Jesus as he gave his life on Calvary. He did it for you and for me, and calls us to receive his love. The invitation is going out to the farthest reaches of the earth, and he longs for all people to respond to the good news of his grace. The question remains what we will do with his love. Will we open our heart to him? Will we embrace his gift? Will we place our faith in the Savior and allow ourselves to be drawn into a relationship with him? I can tell you this... you could spend you whole life searching, but will never find a greater love than this.

God Is Good All the Time

God is good, through every season of life, when the sun is shining and when the storm clouds have darkened the sky... in times of laughter, and in moments of tears... when we are on top of the world, and when it feels like we're sinking.

It's easy for us to lose sight of his goodness during the struggles of this life. But no matter what you're going through, let this truth anchor your soul.

This should make us bold in our prayers, calling out to God with eagerness and urgency trusting the Lord to work in our circumstances.

It should change our perspective, allowing us to praise God even when we are hurting.

It should also guide the way we live, imitating the Lord as we show concern for those around us. We meet people everyday who are struggling, and hurting in different ways, and we can be the one who do good bringing the kindness and mercy of the Lord into their lives.

ⁱ Barclay, W. (2001). [*The Gospel of Matthew*](#) (Third Ed., pp. 313–314). Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.

ⁱⁱ Tozer, A. W., & Fessenden, D. E. (2003–). [*The attributes of God: A journey into the Father's heart*](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 56–57). Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread.