

Our Part In The Sanctification Process (Part Seven): Cultivating Goodness

Yielding to God's Divine Purpose

David F. Maas

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Today, we will turn to related scriptures upon which I intend to weave a theme for this message. Most scriptural references will be taken either from the Lockman Foundation's *Amplified Bible* or the Lockman Foundation's *New American Standard Bible* or the *New American Standard Bible E-Prime*. All three of these versions are available in electronic format on the Church of the Great God website.

Genesis 1:1 (AMP) In the beginning God (prepared, formed, fashioned, and) created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:4 (AMP) And God saw that the light was good (suitable, pleasant) and He approved it.

Here we find the first place in the Old Testament where something is called "good." It is translated from the Hebrew word *tov*, which John Ritenbaugh pointed out in his August 1988 *Forerunner* Personal on "The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness," has an extremely wide range of contexts. According to Roger Cotton in his article on "Goodness," "the point here involves expected function. God's creation did what He intended it to do. It accomplished its purpose. It met His expectations."

Richard Ritenbaugh in his sermon on "Seeking God's Will: Goodness," where he explores the Greek word *agathos*, the equivalent of the Hebrew "Tov" in the context of Matthew 7:17, "every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit," explains that "the tree is good because it fulfills its purpose. It is doing what it was designed to do. A thing is good—such as a tree or fruit—when it does what it was designed to do." This is the main point to remember.

My former colleague, Doug Winnail, wrote a highly informative, instructive article titled “Don’t Eat up the Clean-up Crew,” in which he substantiated that God’s clean and unclean laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are not capricious, but have logical reasons why all creatures are not suitable for food ever—refrigerator or no refrigerator. For example, crabs are referred to as “professional garbage hunters” and as “scavengers “they eat almost anything. The edible crab *prefers dead fish*, but will eat any carrion [dead, putrefying flesh]” (*International Wildlife Encyclopedia*). Common shrimp, a small, delicate relative of crabs and lobsters, live by day in the mud or sandy bottoms of bays and estuaries all over the world. However, they become active at night as predatory scavengers and are “bottom dwelling detritus feeders [eating dead and decaying matter” (*Encyclopedia of Aquatic Life*). These organisms were all created [by Almighty God] for an important ecological purpose.

They are, in essence, the “garbage collectors” or the “cleanup crew” for the bottoms of lakes, rivers, beaches, bays, and oceans. They were *not intended* to be food for human beings. That is why the consumption of raw, pickled, or undercooked crabs, snails, and shrimp carries a significant risk of parasitic infections like liver flukes, which infect up to 80 percent of some rural populations in Southeast Asia.

Swine and shrimp are both “good” and serve a definite purpose—just not for human food. With this principle in mind, let us return to Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:10 (AMP) God called the dry land Earth, and the accumulated waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good (fitting, admirable) and He approved it.

Genesis 1:12 (AMP) The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding their seed according their own kinds and trees bearing fruit in which was their seed, each according to its kind [no Monsanto GMO gene-splicing here]. And God saw that it was good (suitable, admirable) and He approved it.

In verse 18, God reflects on His creation of the sun and moon.

Genesis 1:18 (AMP) To rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good (fitting, pleasant) and He approved it.

Genesis 1:21 (AMP) God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. [One species did not evolve into another through natural selection.] And God saw that it was good (suitable, admirable) and He approved it.

Genesis 1:25 (AMP) And God made the [wild] beasts of the earth according to their kinds, and domestic animals according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good (fitting, pleasant) and He approved it.

In verse 26, this is what was to have been the masterpiece of His creation, humankind (referencing Psalm 8:4).

Genesis 1:26 (AMP) God said, Let Us make mankind in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have complete authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the [tame] beasts, and over all of the earth, and over everything that creeps upon the earth.

Genesis 1:27 (AMP) So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them [not the 63 genders proposed by leftist, ‘progressive’ politicians and educators].

Genesis 1:31 (AMP) And God saw everything He had made, and behold, it was very good (suitable, pleasant) and He approved it completely.

Genesis 2:2-3 (AMP) And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work He had done. (3) And God blessed (spoke good of) the

seventh day, [the same day which has been rejected by the vast majority of professing Christians]. God set it apart as His own, and hallowed it , because on it God rested from all His work which He had created and done.

Genesis 2:8-9 (AMP) And the Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden [delight]; and there He put the man whom He had formed (framed, constituted). And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight or to be desired—good for food; the tree of life also in the center of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of [the difference between] good and evil and blessing and calamity [as exemplified by harnessing the atom for providing electrical energy but sadly also for destructive weapons to wipe life off the planet].

In verse 16, the Lord commanded our father Adam, you may freely eat of every tree in the garden; but in verse 17, God solemnly warned, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and blessing and calamity you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Shortly after that admonition, in Genesis 3:4-5, Satan the Devil convinced our first Mom that she would not die, but that her eyes would be opened, becoming just like God, knowing the difference between good and evil and blessing and calamity—in short, the knowledge of how to abuse, twist, pollute, or pervert anything and everything humans get their grubby hands on.

When our parents consumed this poisonous fruit, our carnal nature became a toxic mixture of good and evil, not unlike half of our physical constitution overtaken by virulent stage 4 cancer. As Herbert Armstrong repeatedly stated, “Every wholesome project that God has initiated, man has perverted, twisted, and tainted with evil.”

Eddie Foster, in his article/sermon on the “Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness” explains that the stark opposite of goodness occurs when we decide what is right or wrong based on the values of a world twisted by the Devil who intensely hates us.

John 8:44 reminds us that Satan “was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks

a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the *father of it*.” (emphasis added) Eddie Foster asks, “Do we really think the father of lies is going to tell the world what it really means to “be good”? Not likely. Satan lied to Adam and Eve, convincing them that they would benefit by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

And to this day, the world has been influenced by the Devil’s deceptions concerning what is good and what is evil as we see continually in the mendacious mainstream media—particularly CNN and MSNBC which have attempted to dispirit and discourage America for the past three years, spewing out a relentless daily deluge of Fear, Anger, and Resentment.

Consequently, the very core of our nature is hopelessly corrupt—a deadly combination of what the late Garner Ted Armstrong described repeatedly as “vanity, jealousy, lust, and greed.” The apostle Paul describes our seemingly hopeless condition in Romans 3.

Romans 3:10-12 (AMP) As it is written, None is righteous, just and truthful and upright and conscientious. No one understands [no one intelligently discerns or comprehends]; no one seeks out God. All have turned aside; together they have gone wrong and have become unprofitable and worthless; no one does right, not even one!

In his article/sermon “Goodness (For Goodness Sake!),” Greg Elie asserts that “God’s evaluation of the human race is straightforward not pulling any punches. God tells us like it really is. No one is good. Everyone is like a diseased tree, a polluted well. We can do nothing good.”

The apostle Paul (fairly far along in his spiritual walk), laments that nothing good lives in him. Please turn over to some familiar, but admittedly somewhat discouraging or disheartening verses in Romans 7.

Romans 7:16-21 (AMP) Now if I do [habitually] what is contrary to my desire, [that means that] I acknowledge and agree that the Law [which most Protestants and the majority of professing Christians are convinced has been done away] is good (morally excellent) and that I take sides with it. However, it is no longer I who do the deed, but the sin [principle] which is at home in me and

has possession of me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot perform it. [I have the intention and urge to do what is right, but no power to carry it out.] For I fail to practice the good deeds I desire to do, but evil deeds that I do not desire to do are what I am [ever] doing. Now if I do what I do not desire to do, it is no longer I doing it [it is not myself that acts], but the sin [principle] which dwells within me [fixed and operating in my soul]. So I find it to be a law (rule of action of my being) that when I want to do what is right and good, evil is ever present with me and I am subject to its insistent demands.

To the extent that our hearts, our minds, or nervous systems are not composed of God's law (anticipating Hebrews 8:10; 10:16 and Jeremiah 31:33), we are automatically under the law of sin and our hearts continue to be hopelessly corrupt and deceitful (referencing Jeremiah 17:9).

Let us turn over to Mark 10. While Jesus still inhabited His fleshly body (preparing to be our substitutionary Sacrifice), He was approached by a rich young man addressing Him as Good Teacher. Jesus replied to him,

Mark 10:18 (AMP) Why do you call Me [essentially and perfectly morally] good? There is no one [essentially and perfectly morally] good-except God alone.

In his book, *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit* in the chapter on "Goodness," Chris Benjamin asserted, "There is a distinct, unique goodness about God. The goodness of God is total—100%, not a degree of goodness or the highest grade possible. It is the source of goodness." Similarly, in his August 1998 *Forerunner* "Personal" The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness," John Ritenbaugh asserts, "Only God's goodness is absolute. All others have degrees of goodness as measured against this absolute standard. Therefore, God is the Source of all goodness. If men cannot do good, it renders as meaningless all the exhortations of the prophets for the people to do good (Amos 5:14; Isaiah 1:17). If human beings cannot do good, then all the moral injunctions throughout the Bible are also meaningless, and we must view the Bible, with its promises of blessings accompanying good deeds, as deceptive."

Let us go back to the apostle Paul's frustrating dilemma at the end of Romans 7 and the beginning of Romans 8 to solve this conundrum. Paul cries out in anguish in verse 24,

Romans 7:24-25 (AMP) O unhappy and pitiable and wretched man that I am! Who will release and deliver me from [the shackles of] this body of death? O thank God! [He will] through Jesus Christ (the Anointed One) our Lord! So then indeed I, of myself with the mind and heart serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. Please scroll ahead to chapter 8.

Romans 8:1-2 (AMP) Therefore [there is] now no condemnation (no adjudging guilty of wrong) for those who are in Christ Jesus, who live [and] walk not after the dictates of the flesh, but after the dictates of the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life [which is] in Christ Jesus [the law of our new being] has freed me from the law of sin and of death.

If the Protestant antinomian animus were against the law of sin and death, I would gladly join them, but their antinomian animus is against the law of God, as is witnessed by their hatred for the seventh day Sabbath, their shameless ordination of homosexuals to the ministry, and their cowardly assent to abortion as a supposed pretext to honor women's rights.

Romans 8:3 (AMP) For God has done what the Law could not do, [its power] being weakened by the flesh [the entire nature of man without the Holy Spirit]. Sending His own Son in the guise of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, [God] condemned sin in the flesh[subdued, overcame, deprived it of its power over all who accept that sacrifice].

In his book *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit* chapter, "Cultivating Goodness," Chris Benjamin reminds us that we have "... *potential for good*. We have some capacity for good and we cannot deny that since we were created in the image of the good God. Paul very truthfully and accurately described our pitiful sinful condition, but he also truthfully and accurately states that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to

do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (referencing Ephesians 2:10).”

Chris Benjamin asks us “How do we reconcile this conflict between our sinful nature and the calling to do good works”. . . . “when we are corrupted by our sinful carnal nature?” It can be reconciled, he contends, if we accept that we must depend on God’s Spirit to cultivate goodness.

Look at this oft-quoted memory scripture:

Romans 8:9 (AMP) But you are not living the life of the flesh, you are living the life of the Spirit, if the [Holy] Spirit of God [really dwells within you [directs and control you.] But if anyone does not possess the [Holy] Spirit of Christ, he is none of His [he does not belong to Christ, is not truly a child of God].

Now turn ahead to a variation of that theme from the apostle Peter.

II Peter 1:3-4 (AMP) For His divine power has bestowed upon us all things that [are requisite and suited] to life and godliness, through the [full, personal] knowledge of Him Who called us by and to His own glory and excellence. By means of these He has bestowed on us His precious and exceedingly great promises, so that through them you may escape [by flight] from the moral decay [rottenness and corruption] that is in the world because of covetous (lust and greed), and become sharers (partakers) of the divine nature.

Repeating Richard Ritenbaugh’s salient point in his sermon on “Seeking God’s Will: Goodness,” “A thing is good—such as a tree or fruit [I would expand this appraisal to a human being—created in the image and likeness of Almighty God] an entity is good when it does or performs what it was designed to do. This is the main point to remember—whether we examine physical or spiritual functions.”

My specific purpose in this message is to provide some strategies how we, as Jesus Christ's spiritual sharecroppers, can cultivate the spiritual fruit of goodness by diligently searching for the purpose or use God has prepared for us as His handpicked, called-out ones.

The common denominator of all the previous scriptures in this message is that when we do or perform what we were designed to do (submitting to God's holy law) we are good. When we choose to do something else following our carnal impulses (such as murder—even in the name of women's rights—fornicate, commit adultery, or commit or tolerate sodomy in the name of inclusive civil rights, steal, lie, or covet) we sully, pollute, and pervert ourselves and consequently cease to be good.

While our forebears lived under the Old Covenant, Moses observed that the “Lord had not given them a [mind and heart] to understand and eyes to see and ears to hear to this very day” (referencing Deuteronomy 29:4). This inability for the children of Jacob to understand God's purpose was not remedied until the night our Lord and Savior was betrayed when He promised His called-out disciples—then and now—the gift of God's Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of Truth” (AMP) (referencing John 14:16-17) and the very mind of Christ (referencing I Corinthians 2:16), literally resetting the spiritual DNA of all of God's called out-ones.

Two weeks ago, we kept the anniversary of the Feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, a day God sent a “deposit,” the “earnest” of the Holy Spirit—the guarantee of the full payment to come later when we are changed from flesh to Spirit, when God's law will be our first nature rather than our second nature. After our baptism and the laying on of hands, we receive a down payment or earnest payment of God's Holy Spirit.

II Corinthians 1:22 (AMP) [He has also appropriated and acknowledged us as His by] putting His seal upon us—His [Holy] Spirit in our hearts as the security deposit *and* guarantee [of the fulfillment of His promise].

II Corinthians 5:5 (AMP) Now He Who fashioned us [preparing and making us fit] for this very thing is God, Who also has given us the [Holy] Spirit as a guarantee [of the fulfillment of His promise].

Now turn over to Ephesians 1.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (AMP) In Him also have heard the Word of Truth, the glad tidings (Gospel) of your salvation , and have believed in and adhered to and relied on Him, were stamped with the seal of the long-promised Holy Spirit. That [Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance [the firstfruits, the pledge and foretaste, the down payment on our heritage], in anticipation of its full redemption and our acquiring (complete) possession of it—to the praise of His glory.

Herbert W. Armstrong described this process metaphorically as God impregnating our mind with His Holy Spirit, attaching it to the spirit in man (referencing Romans 8:16). Jesus' brother James referred to a harvest of righteousness (of conformity of God's will in thought and deed) as the fruit of the seed] no doubt tended by the Master Gardener Jesus Christ (referred to in Mark Schindler's sermon last week), with whom we are all not only firstfruits, but spiritual sharecroppers.

Whether we use the metaphor of an implanted seed or a fertilized egg, the commonality in both of these processes can be described in scientific terms as a genotype (the implanted code in the seed or egg) which causes the plant or organism to grow into a fruit bearing phenotype. As we cooperate with or assist the Master Gardener Jesus Christ, we can expect to bear a high yield of fruit pleasing to God and which glorifies His name.

In her September 26, 2016 article, "The Most Underrated Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness," Lindsey Smallwood warns us "If we forget what we were created for, we could end up being a lot of things: a good employee, a good cook, a good wife, a good bowler, a good musician, a good barber [which I sorely needed this week], but we miss out on being a good human, a good person, a good image bearer. And that's what we were created to do."

Micah 6:8 (AMP) He has showed you, O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love kindness and mercy, and to humble yourself and walk humbly with your God?

In Matthew 23:23, Our Lord and Savior assured the Pharisees that these three overarching behaviors constitute the weightier matters of the law. In the aftermath of all the protests and destructive riots this past week, it is obvious that most of the offspring of Jacob have absolutely no clue about the interconnection between justice, mercy, and humility. To cultivate goodness, one must be able to harmonize those behaviors (doing justly, exercising mercy, and walking humbly) in different proportions or combinations depending on what one encounters in each new situation.

John Ritenbaugh in his 1998 *Forerunner* Personal, “The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness,” quotes Martyn Lloyd Jones, in his *Darkness and Light*, a commentary on Ephesians 4:17-5:17, who writes that this goodness is “indicative of a perfect balance in the various parts of the personality. A good man is a balanced man, a man in whom everything that is noble and excellent works harmoniously together” (p. 402). John explains, “Thus he can be gentle or sharp, but what he does always has the right balance and is good.”

Forty years ago, we directors of the Ambassador Men’s Clubs encouraged the members to read Aubrey Andelin’s book *Man of Steel and Velvet: A guide to Masculine Development* in an effort to instill a harmony or blend of firmness and gentleness.

Gary Petty, in his sermon/article on the Fruits of the Spirit: Goodness, maintains that godly goodness appears to be a balancing skill of harmonizing tenderness and severity or modulating nurturing and protection. When Jesus drove the money changers out of the Temple using a whip, He was exercising goodness standing up to evil.

Both severity and tenderness are complementary aspects of goodness, just as masculinity and femininity are composite aspects of God’s image and character. God created the marriage covenant with the purpose of providing

models for each spouse to learn the traits of Almighty God in which he or she lacks or has deficits.

Childrearing requires a careful blend of firmness and nurturing—avoiding extremes of harshness or indulgence. As Kim Myers taught us last week, if we overprotect our offspring from skinned knees and bloody noses, we deprive them of their ability to grow physically or spiritually.

Gary Petty observes that mainstream Christianity, with its cheap grace and no works theology, continues to deteriorate because people do not *believe* that God will actively respond to evil—just because He waits for repentance. God gives us a whole lot more room than we would ever give to each other. But eventually, He *will*, through His active goodness, deal with disobedience.

Another critical area creating a critical imbalance in the scattered greater church of God is in the matter of judging, as in Matthew 7:1, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged,” especially when juxtaposed with Matthew 12:33, “the tree is known and recognized and judged by its fruit.” Gary Petty claims that God’s called-out ones tend to go to the opposite extremes, one resembling the California soy-boys’ insistence that we should never judge anyone—perhaps not to the extreme exemplified by one of the local Lutheran Churches in Simi Valley proudly flying the LGBT flag—but nevertheless expressing a kind of mainline Protestant timidity of not wanting to make waves.

But the other extreme is just as disgusting, something Gary Petty has referred to as a Phineas Complex, in which one walks around with a javelin, looking for someone to thrust through, thinking “it is my job to slay everybody.” Several of the major split-offs of our former fellowship fancy themselves as God’s hall monitors, reporting on the latest heresies threatening the Body of Christ.

The apostle Paul warns us in I Corinthians 4:5, “So do not make any hasty or premature judgments before the time when the Lord comes [again], for He will bring the secret things that are [now hidden] in darkness and disclose and expose the [secret] aims (motives and purposes of hearts. Then every man will receive his [due] commendation from God.”

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Richard Ritenbaugh, in his sermon “Seeking God’s Will: Goodness,” stresses that the severity of God (referencing Romans 11:23) is designed to bring people to repentance, writing “But, as we saw in verse 23, His intention with His severity is to bring them around to repentance so that they could have salvation. And if we would have read down to verse 26, we would have found out that all Israel will be saved. God has every confidence that His goodness will bring good things to the Gentiles, and His severity will bring good things for Israel, ultimately.” Likewise, we as God’s offspring must learn when to exercise firmness and when to exercise tenderness, both necessary components of goodness.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ taught us in Luke 11:13 that as we parents (with our corrupted, carnal nature) “know how to give good gifts [gifts that are to their advantage] to our children, how much more will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit [a gift exuding goodness] to those who ask and continue to ask Him!”

We learn, however, from the apostle Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:38 that there are conditions or strings attached to receiving this gift, as he tells the assembled crowd, “Repent [change your views and purpose to accept the will of God in your inner selves instead of rejecting it] and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of and release of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Chris Benjamin in his book *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*” in the chapter on Goodness, identifies daily continuous confession of sin as a major strategy of increasing the stream of Holy Spirit and the fruit of goodness into our lives.

All of us probably have a generic formula for confession of sin: including “Please Lord, forgive our sins of thought, word, and deed, omission, commission, blatant, secret, presumptuous, and so on,” but become squeamish when identifying particular sins that have separated us from God. Chris Benjamin contends that, “until we name the sin that prevents us from cultivating goodness, we will never mature. Ignoring the sin and weakness in our life keeps us from growing in God’s Spirit. We have tamed goodness, but we have also tamed sin. We dismiss the poisonous nature of sin by saying or thinking things like “Well everyone sins.” True, but that is why it

is so bad. We should not dismiss sin, but name it. And naming it does not make it worse, it actually opens us up to healing from a source outside ourselves.”

John Ritenbaugh, in his August 1998 “*Forerunner* Personal” “The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness” asks, “Was not David ‘a man after God’s own heart’ despite having a number of serious failures during his life? [adultery, murder, and failure at childrearing to name a few]. Those sins were certainly contrary to the determined direction of his life because he repented of his failures in humility and tears (Psalm 51)” [a prayer incorporated into the liturgies of the world’s churches and private prayers than perhaps any other psalm]. David then “resumed pressing toward the goal for the prize of his high calling (referencing Philippians 3:14).” John continues by pointing to Peter who also exhibited the same “direction of his life by rising first from the humiliating debasement of his three-fold denial of Christ and later from his rebuke by Paul to offer himself in selfless, sacrificial devotion to God and the brethren.”

One of the primary functions of God’s Holy Spirit working in us is to convince or convict us of sin (referencing John 16:8). As we continuously repent of the toxic corrosion of daily sin, God’s Holy Spirit will cleanse our hearts, making it sensitive to sin—consciously feeling the intense pain that transgressing God’s law automatically brings. As we follow the apostle Paul’s admonition to, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit to mortify the flesh daily (referencing Romans 8:13), we will re-sensitize our consciences to the excruciating pain of sin.

Of the Micah 6:8 and Matthew 23:23 triumvirate (justice, mercy, and humility), mercy and longsuffering are perhaps the hardest godly trait for humans (with or without the Spirit of God) to emulate, just as love (the greatest of the triumvirate in I Corinthians 13:13—faith, hope, and love) is also the hardest trait for God’s called-out ones to master or to emulate.

We see the outward manifestation by its beneficial effect on others. It is an active, positive quality manifested in concrete helpful deeds. As Lindsey Smallwood in her article, “The Most Underrated Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Goodness” stated, “Goodness is not just the abstinence from evil. If the effort from abstaining from sin is not accompanied by the practice of the

good, such as helping the oppressed, pursuing God's truth by studying His Word, and serving others, we cannot claim to be good because of what we don't do nor can we let the good we perform do be an excuse to indulge in evil."

Don Hoosier, in his sermon/article "Goodness: God's Character and Humanity's Potential," insists that "doing good equates to serving one another." Jesus "went about doing good" (referencing Acts 10:38) and we should too! "Through love, *serve one another*," Paul instructs us in Galatians 5:13). Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and Goats shows that God knows how much we love Him by how much we are showing self-sacrificing love for other people (referencing Matthew 25:31-45).

Eddie Foster in his sermon/ article "Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness" maintains that our acts of goodness should bring thankfulness, stating: "God is good, and He wants us to grow in the fruit of goodness so we can be like him." Foster continues, "A phrase that is repeated several times in Psalm 107 reads "Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men! The rest of the psalm mentions many aspects of God's goodness, such as He delivered His people from distress and afflictions brought on by their sins and He led then the *right* way (verses 6-8). "Our goodness," according to Eddie Foster, "should be something that other human beings can be thankful for, just as we are thankful for the amazing goodness God has shown to us."

In the same vein, John Ritenbaugh in his August 1998 "Personal" stated that a good person, emulating Almighty God, wants to alleviate suffering and to mitigate wrongs. He consciously looks for ways to benefit others. Because he is not out to gratify himself, his works are the opposite of the self-centered works of darkness. The good person is the benefactor of the weak, helpless and those in trouble—and sometimes of the evil."

Roger Cotton, in his article on goodness, asks us what we mean when we say we had a good experience. Though each person may mean something entirely different," there is one principle in common—"the idea that there was some kind of benefit to us. A good deed benefits someone in some way. It is an act of kindness."

Richard Ritenbaugh, in his sermon “Seeking God’s Will,” concurs with the concept of goodness as beneficial, insisting that the Greek word *A-ga-thos*’ implies that “it is beneficial in effect; what is produced is good; it is perfect for the instruction the person was to do. Please turn over to Isaiah 55 for a passage showing the current gap between the carnal thoughts of man and the thoughts of God, narrowed only through the exercise of the earnest payment of God’s Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 55:6-9 (AMP) Seek, inquire for, and require the Lord while He may be found [claiming Him by necessity and by right]; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteousness man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have love, pity, and mercy for him, and to our God, for He will multiply to him His abundant pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

John Ritenbaugh, in his “Personal” on the “Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness,” puts this seemingly insurmountable gap into perspective, stating that “God’s inexhaustible goodness ought to be self-evident from the creation and a cursory understanding of human history. God’s providence has been supplying unending resources for life for 6,000 tumultuous years of human history. These come as air, water, food, housing, and reproduction and all the uses man’s creative mind and energetic workmanship put them to. Even our minds and workmanship are products of God’s goodness! In spite of our stiff-necked and rebellious conduct, He has continued to bear patiently with us, forgive us, supply us with life and knowledge and move us forward with His purpose.”

When God called each of us, giving us an earnest payment or seal, planting a seed or impregnating our minds with His precious Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, and the mind of Christ, He has been giving us ample time to repent of our evil ways, mortifying our flesh, and crying out for a greater measure of Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts to edify our spiritual siblings in the body of Christ and to prepare to serve the billions resurrected after the Millennium.

As our Elder Brother Jesus Christ, we strive to please our heavenly Father when we behave just like He does, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth (referencing Exodus 34:6). The Lord pities all those who fear Him, realizing our fragile frame, remembering that we are dust (referencing Psalm 103:13-14).

To wrap up this message, please turn to Psalm 107.

Psalm 107:8-9 (AMP) Oh, that men would praise [and confess to] the Lord for His goodness and loving-kindness and His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with good.

As Almighty God has satisfied our hungry soul with good, we have a God-given responsibility to serve our spiritual siblings and those with whom we come in contact, tending to their physical and emotional needs, providing comfort, encouragement, physical or material provisions, as well as respectful tender admonitions steering them away from potential danger—carrying out the mandate from our Lord and Savior to love our fellow men as God has loved us and how we desire to be treated by others.

Remember, the best strategy we can employ to increase the yield of the spirit of goodness is to yield and submit to God's divine purpose for us, formulated before the foundation of the world.