



Daily Devotionals: God Is Good | August 29, 2021

Day 1 – Devotional

“The very first temptation in the history of mankind was the temptation to be discontent...that is exactly what discontent(ment) is—a questioning of the goodness of God.” ~ Jerry Bridges

Good. We use this word to describe many things—a meal we love, an enjoyable evening, the weather when it looks like a forecast we desire. The term *good* has, in some respects, taken on a superficial meaning in the English language.

The dictionary defines the word “good” as “morally excellent, virtuous, righteous, pious; satisfactory in quality, quantity, or degree; of high quality, excellent.” This week we’re going to explore the biblical definition of this specific aspect of God’s character.

God is good.

If you were asked if you believed this statement, how would you respond? Do you believe in the goodness of God? Have you truly experienced Him as good?

If you struggle to embrace the goodness of God, you’re not alone. A study conducted at Baylor University concluded that 37 percent of conservative Christians believe that God is both “judgmental and highly engaged in the affairs of humans.” Like a diving judge, God is watching us closely, eager to punish us for even minor infractions. Could this be the heart of a good God?

Maybe you’ve experienced hardship in your life and it is hard to fully comprehend why a good God would allow hard things to happen in the world. Perhaps you’ve viewed the pain you’ve experienced as punishment from a judgmental God, skewing your understanding of the goodness of God, reinforcing that if God is good, all outcomes should also be what we would call “good.” James Bryan Smith shares these thoughts on what he refers to as a “punishing-blessing god”:



Jesus clearly abolished the notion that we “get what we deserve” ...Jesus uses a famous phrase to show that God treats all people the same: “He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (**Matthew 5:45**). Jesus is telling us an obvious truth: just as sunshine and rain are given equally to saints and sinners with no distinction, so God gives blessings to all without regard to their behavior. Terrible things happen to wonderful people. Wonderful things happen to awful people.

Smith goes on to suggest a reason for why we believe in a punishing-blessing god. “We like control. This narrative allows us to live in the illusion that we can control our world, which is very appealing in our chaotic existence.” In other words, we want to control the outcome in our situation and circumstance. If the outcome is not what we would view as good, then God must not be good for allowing it.

Jesus pointed to the goodness of the Father. He refused to affirm the idea that external rewards and punishments are given by God on the basis of our own merit or our good or bad works. Rain falls on the good and the bad (**Matthew 5:45**). Smith shares these encouraging words about Jesus’ ability to bridge the gap to the goodness of the Father in these words:

Sometimes we pray for rain (for our crops), and sometimes we pray that it will not rain (for our picnics). Both good and bad people get rained on, whether they want it or not. Jesus faced suffering, rejection and alienation, and the people jeered at him as he hung on the cross, questioning whether God was really with him. And Jesus believed. And he believes for me. He believes even when we cannot. He prays even when we cannot. We participate in *his* faith...Christ lives in me, and I live by his faith. I am not alone. This is something more than simply getting my narratives right. It is allowing Jesus to live in and through and for me. The love of the Father, the redemption of Jesus and the communion I have with the Spirit are not based on anything I do. It is a gift from the Holy Spirit to believe in a God who is good even when things look bleak..

Jesus demonstrates, in the flesh, the profound goodness of the Father. So, let’s invite him to reveal God’s goodness to us in fresh new ways this week.



- What comes to mind when you think about the goodness of God?
- “God is an angry judge. If you do well, you will be blessed; if you sin, you will be punished.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Does this thinking align with the scriptural truth that God is good? Why or why not?
- Have you ever wondered how and when you would be punished by God for a particular sin? Or have you ever had something bad happen to you and wondered what you did to deserve it? Explain.
- How might the need or desire for control be affecting your view and understanding of the goodness of God?

Prayer:

May God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is the source of all goodness and growth,
pour his blessing upon all things created,
and upon you, his children,
that you may use them to his glory and the welfare of all peoples.



Day 2 – Look at the book

*“The goodness of God is infinitely more wonderful than we will ever be able to comprehend.” ~
A.W. Tozer*

Today, as we continue to learn about God’s goodness, we’re going to hear from author Scot McKnight, from his book *A Church Called Tov*, as he explains to us the nature of the goodness of God.

Tov, the Hebrew word for “good” or “goodness,” is by far one of the most popular terms in the Bible. With more than 700 occurrences of the word in Scripture, we could say that our Bible is the Book of *Tov*...From the very first page of our Bibles, *tov* is the bible’s summary term, the “executive virtue,” for how God wants us to live.

God alone is *tov*.

Goodness, or *tov*, is first and foremost about God: God is *tov*. **Read Psalm 119:68 and Exodus 33:19.**

God is *tov* and God does *tov*. **Read Joshua 21:45, Psalm 23:6, Psalm 73:28, and Psalm 86:5.**

God’s design is *tov*.

Tov is God’s design for all creation. He shapes everything for goodness. His turning of the “formless and empty” (**Genesis 1:2**) into created order gave everything He created a design, a purpose, a function. *Tov* is God’s artistic evaluation of all He did. In other words, perfect, excellent, just as I wanted! ... When everything is in its place doing its proper task, we say, *Tov!*

When we live according to God’s design, we become people who *love*. God’s ultimate design for us is love...A *tov* life develops in us over time...Over time, in accordance with God’s design for us, and by the inner working of God’s Spirit in our lives, we develop a *tov* character—a character that God can approve. A *tov* character is formed by Spirit-filled *tov* behavior, and those who have a *tov* character will behave in *tov* ways.

***Tov* is active.**



Tov is something that happens, something visible. Jesus went around *doing good* (**Acts 10:38**). Jesus is the Good Shepherd (**John 10:11**). Jesus doesn't just **do** *tov*; He **is** *tov*. When we look at Jesus, we see *tov*. To be like Jesus (Christlike) is to be *tov*; and to be *tov* is to be like Jesus. Remember, we don't make ourselves into *tov* people. God transforms us through the power of the Holy Spirit, for whom *goodness* is a natural fruit.

***Tov* is God's ultimate approval.**

Tov is a one-word summary of God's ultimate approval. He doesn't give letter grades. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that Moses got an A, David got a B, Solomon a C, Isaiah an A, Paul an A, and Peter...well, he pulled it together at the end and got an A-minus. No, God's final approval rating is simply *tov*. When God spoke from heaven at the baptism of Jesus and said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased," that was *tov* (**Matthew 3:17**). The life of Jesus? *Tov*. The teachings of Jesus? *Tov*. The accomplishment of His death, resurrection, and ascension? *Tov*. In Christ, it's all *tov*.

- How does understanding the Hebrew word for good (*tov*) change your understanding of God's goodness?
- What does it look like to think of goodness as God's design? To understand it as active?
- What obstacles exist in your mind and heart to experiencing the goodness of God?



Day 3 – Scripture Survey

“We should be astonished at the goodness of God, stunned that He should bother to call us by name, our mouths wide open at His love, bewildered that at this very moment we are standing on holy ground.” ~ Brennan Manning

As we look at how “God is good” this week, we want to see what the whole story of Scripture has to say about this particular topic. Where else in Scripture can we go to read about God’s goodness?

Take a few moments to slowly read through the passages below. As you read, take some time to ask yourself these three questions:

1. What does this passage teach me about how *God is good*—specifically viewing the passage through the lens of the Hebrew word *tov*?
2. What questions do I have about this?
3. God, what are you inviting me into as I read and look through these verses?

Keep in mind what you discovered from Scripture and your understanding of the Hebrew word *tov* as you read through these passages.

Genesis 1-2

Psalm 23:6, 34:8, 27:13-14, 86:5

Matthew 8-9 (*pay close attention to Jesus “doing good works” or tov on display*)

Galatians 5:22



Day 4 – Story Work

“In the darkest night to be certain of the dawn...to go through Hell and to continue to trust in the goodness of God—this is the challenge and the way.” ~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

We keep coming back to the quote from A.W. Tozer, who said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Today, we want to reflect on how God’s goodness intersects with us personally, to see how His goodness has done or could do something within us.

To begin today, read through **Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 23:6, 34:8, 27:13-14, 86:5** thinking of this week’s character trait of God’s goodness (*tov*). Then, respond to each of the questions below with this specific trait in mind.

1. Reflect on the times in your life when you have experienced God’s goodness. What was that like? How did God show His goodness to you in those moments?
2. Have you ever been through a situation that made you doubt God’s goodness? If so, describe what happened and how it felt. Is it easy or difficult for you to trust the goodness of God? What do you think has contributed to that in your own life?
3. What relationships or experiences in your life have affected (positively or negatively) the way you view God’s goodness? What would God want to say to you about those relationships or experiences?
4. How have you witnessed the goodness of God in the lives of others? How has God invited you to show His goodness to others?



Day 5 – Response

“Do not look for evil. Look for the goodness of God all around you. As you look for signs of His Presence, many more opportunities will occur for you to bless people and share God's true nature.”
~ Graham Cooke

For this last day, let's slow down and pay attention to what God has been inviting us into as a result of our work this week. Find a quiet space. Silence any technology around you. Spend some time reviewing your devotions this week. Allow God to bring to mind the places where He's been showing you His character in His goodness.

Jot down your thoughts to the following reflection questions:

- As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?

How have you seen God as good over the course of this past week? How have you chosen to display His goodness to others in response? Where have you not made this choice?



What is God inviting you to DO as a response to this week's reflections?

Consider some of these suggestions as possible action steps as you step into living this week's truths:

- Use the *Prayer of Examen* for the next week and see how it impacts your understanding of God's goodness (*tov*).
- In her book *Experiencing God's Tremendous Love*, Maureen Conroy advises us to "become deeply absorbed in creation" as a way of experiencing God's goodness and love. She suggests this practice: take a walk outside and pay great attention to the sights, sounds and colors of nature. If you can, go to a park or some place that has been relatively untouched by humans. Take something to write on and jot down everything you see. Imagine you're trying to communicate what you see to someone who has never been able to go outdoors and experience why God said creation was good. Notice the color and sound of the birds, the symmetry of the leaves and the feel of the sun and wind. Think of God as a great artist and yourself as the art student, paying close attention to the detail of the artwork.



- Using the QR code above, listen to this song—"The Goodness of God"—by Bethel. Take a moment to ask God where His goodness is running after you. Recount the blessings He has given to you throughout your lifetime, seeing His goodness in each one.



- In the evening before going to bed, jot down three places you saw God’s goodness (*tov*) show up throughout the day. Find someone to text and share what you’ve noticed about God’s goodness that day. Invite them to share with you as well.
- Spend some time talking with your family over dinner about what God’s goodness looks like in your family. Brainstorm some ways you can show that goodness to one another.

Practice:

The Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen is a simple, daily prayer practice that helps us discern how God is calling us in small and large ways. The prayer is broken down into five steps. Do not feel as though you need to do these as a checklist. This is not about completing a task, but about building a relationship with God.

BE STILL

Quiet your mind and heart. Ask God to help you see where He has been at work. Ask Him to show you what He wants you to see and learn. With God’s help, be attentive to how the Spirit was working today in and through you, others, and creation. Let yourself see your day as God sees it. Ask Him to show you His goodness.

GIVE THANKS

Gratitude cultivates our hearts and minds to see God in all the workings of our lives. It changes the way we view our circumstances and the people around us in profound ways. Go through your whole day and give thanks for all of it—the large parts and the small things. Include the gifts of others, but don’t neglect to look at the gifts within you as well.

PRAY THROUGH SIGNIFICANT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS OF THE DAY

Pick one or two strong thoughts or feelings and pray through them. Ask God to help you understand what stirred those thoughts or feelings and where they led you. Ask these questions— Did they draw you closer to God? Did they help you grow in faith, hope, and love? Did they make you more generous with your time and talent? Did they make you feel more alive and more whole? Did they lead you to feel more connected to others or challenge you to life-giving growth? Or did the feelings lead you away from God, make you less faithful, hopeful, loving?



Did they cause you to become more self-centered or anxious? Did they lure you into doubt and confusion? Did they lead to the breakdown of relationship?

Notice these thoughts and feelings without judging them. Simply bring them before God.

REJOICE AND SEEK FORGIVENESS

Rejoice in the moments when God brought you closer. Confess (agree with God) and ask for forgiveness for those times when you resisted God's presence in your life. Thank God for the gift of awareness. Put on God's grace and receive His mercy for the entire situation.

LOOK TO TOMORROW

Just as God was with you in this day, He will be faithful and will be with you tomorrow. Invite God to be a part of your tomorrow. What do you need God's help with? Invite Him to help you. Commit the day to Him. Ask Him for greater awareness of His presence, His love, and His goodness. Thank Him for His grace.