

The Goodness of God (James 1:17)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



Most of us can remember receiving gifts on Christmas day. We could hardly wait for the morning so we could open our gifts and see the good things our parents had purchased for us. In a similar way, every day we awake we should look for the good gifts that the Father has given to us – health, strength, a beautiful sunrise, victory, sanctification, etc. God is the giver of good gifts for He is intrinsically good in His eternal being and nature. Luke 18:19, “And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none *is* good, save one, *that is*, God.”

Many have prayed, “God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food.” God is good because He loves us and wants what’s best for us. His goodness is demonstrated through His actions toward us. In fact, we see evidence of God’s goodness every day. We see it in the sun rising each morning, in the rain falling from the sky, and in the flowers blooming in our gardens. We should thank God for every good gift we receive from Him. God is a gracious Father, giving good gifts to His children. Examples of these wonderful gifts would include His Son’s death on our behalf, our salvation and justification before God, the truth of Scriptures, healing, protection, peace, joy, victory, strength, wisdom, food, and so many other blessings.



James 1:17 declares:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights (*the luminaries*), with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

I must confess that this is one of my favorite verses in Scripture! James has been focusing on the subject of possessing victory over temptation.

James 1:13-14 provide the setting:

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

James is essentially teaching that God is intrinsically holy and good. Since He never changes, there is no variation in His attributes, including His goodness, which means the Lord could never be responsible for tempting His children to sin and do evil. Because there is no shadow of turning with God in relation to His eternal essence and being, His goodness cannot fluctuate, nor can it be questioned by the finite mind of man.

To state is succinctly, God could never tempt us for He is good. Just the opposite is true. Out of His own innate and unchanging goodness, He supplies us with the spiritual provisions we need to possess victory over temptation. His power and victory is ours to claim. We have an escape hatch! It's the spiritual provision of God's goodness which grants us victory over the temptations of the Devil.

1 Corinthians 10:13 relates God's goodness to the time of temptation:

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful (*an expression of His goodness*), who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.”

The way of escape, God's escape hatch, is His strengthening and sufficient grace.

2 Corinthians 12:9

“And he said unto me, My grace (*strengthening and enabling grace*) is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

We experience victory through grace!

“Not to the strong is the battle, not to the swift is the race,
Yet to the true and the faithful vict'ry is promised thro' grace.”

I heard the story of a little boy who was helping his attorney father move the contents of his library upstairs. His dad placed three volumes into the boy's outstretched arms. "I can take more, Daddy," the little boy insisted. "Oh no, you can't son. You've got enough, the father replied. Walking up the stairs the child was heard to say, "My daddy knows how much I can carry."

Our loving heavenly Father knows how much temptation we can carry too. He keeps His hand on the thermostat to dial in our temptation – not giving more than we are able to bear. Each time, the escape hatch will be there for us. God guarantees it. Why? Because He is good! He makes no mistakes!

Apparently, some of James' readers were already nibbling on Satan's bait and hook like the sunfish in a pond. They were saying: "If God is good and loving, why is He letting me suffer? If He is omnipotent, He could stop it." James reminds them that God is both good and sovereign over evil and He never sends anything that is evil into our lives (James 1:13). He only gives good gifts. He's the Giver of good gifts! Even if those gifts are somewhat hidden in the trials and temptations that we face in life.

This means we need to define those "good gifts" from God's eternal, all-wise perspective and plan, not from our own shortsighted, temporal point of view. God sends trials into our lives and allows temptation in accordance with His own sovereign purposes. However, this does not diminish God's goodness. His nature is bound to goodness. God is good without our permission!

Paradoxical to God's goodness, Amos 3:6 declares:

"Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil (*calamity*) in a city, and the LORD hath not done *it*?"

When reading such a verse as this someone will ask, "How can God be good when through His own orchestration and sovereignty He allows certain calamities and evil events to transpire on earth? How can God be good when, like Job, He permits His children to be tempted (Job 1:12; 2:3-6)?" The obvious answer is because the Bible tells us that God is always good. First, God never directly tempts man to do evil (James 1:13). Second, God is good to mankind in that He sends rain on the just and unjust (Matt. 5:45) and gives blessings, breath, and life to all living creatures (Acts 14:17; 17:24-28). It's "the goodness of God that leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom.

2:4). For Christians (God's own children) He can work all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28; Gen. 50:19-21). Why? It's because in God's never-ending plan in the circle of life He expresses His goodness to us when we pass through hard times by turning our trials into opportunities for Christlike growth.

When something unexpected comes into the picture, we may wonder if God is paying attention. That's when we need to realize that God is painting on a large canvas. He is looking at the big picture. We see only what is in front of us at the given moment. But God is working everything together for our good for He is a good God! God's goodness follows His children in a special way throughout their days on earth. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life ... (Ps. 23:6).

Lamentations 3:25

"The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him."

Psalm 34:10

"The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good *thing*."

Psalm 84:11

"For the LORD God *is* a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good *thing* will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

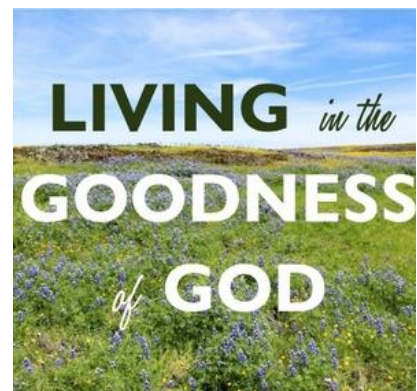
Psalm 31:19

"*Oh* how great *is* thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; *which* thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!"

Nahum 1:7

"The LORD *is* good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

We must not only live and walk in the light of God's holiness (1 John 1:7) but also His goodness. We should recognize God's goodness even when the trials of life hit us. Although it was Satan that directly attacked the godly Job, it's clear that that he did it with God's full



permission (Job 1 -2). When Job's wife told him to curse God and die, Job wisely answered her in Job 2:10: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips." Job reasoned from man's perspective that God was in control over all the events of his life – both the good and evil. However, even the evil God allowed to come into Job's life was for His own good for in the end Job said, "But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

Charles Spurgeon said:

"Remember the goodness of God in the frost of adversity."



So even the trials and temptations that God allows and ordains to come into our lives can ultimately be turned around for our good when seen from His sovereign and eternal perspective.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 reflects this truth:

"Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation (*an expression of God's goodness*), that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

This reminds us that when we experience spiritual comfort during the time of trial, which is a blessing that comes from a good God, we can in return become a source of comfort to others who are passing through similar things. We will understand in a greater way how to comfort them having passed through it ourselves. The ability to comfort and help others is a blessing that comes from the hand of a good God who has already supplied our spiritual needs. So, goodness comes out of difficult times. God's goodness is seen even when we face hard times.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 is another case in point:

"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory."

Even though our body is getting older and experiencing the signs of impending death, we can continually be renewed in our inner spirit and be refreshed by God's daily supply of grace and mercy (Ps. 23:3). And the end result of suffering is glory! We are going to get a new body and dwell with the Lord forever in Heaven. So again, goodness comes out of hard and sad times. God's goodness is inevitably seen while passing through trials and at the end of our trials. God is good! He is always good!

This means when bad things happen to us, they do not alter God's intrinsic goodness. Not only did Job recognize the sovereignty and goodness of God working together in the events of his life, so did Paul. The apostle Paul came to see that his thorn in the flesh that came from Satan was a cause for rejoicing, because it kept him in humble dependence on God.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Paul's trial humbled him ("lest I should be exalted above measure"). Through this trial Paul also learned the sufficiency of God's strength to supply His spiritual need ("My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" and "for when I am weak, then am I strong"). Lastly, this trial results in Paul worshipping God for His provision ("Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"). So once again, we see different facets of God's goodness coming out of Paul's difficult trial that he experienced in his life. The message is clear. God is good! He is good all the time!

Here is the point. Sometimes the "good gifts" (James 1:17) that God sends into our lives may include extremely difficult trials. But they are still good when we view them from the perspective of God's sovereignty and how good things result from them such as spiritual growth and Christlikeness. God always gives us unexpected blessings even in the midst of our trials.

“The Lord will make a way for you,
He will bring you through with a light in the night of day.
And He will give you strength, strength to live your days,
Here in this world, He’ll make a way for you.”

James himself reminds us of this in James 1:2 -4:

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

In relation to our Christian life, good things like patience and spiritual maturity come out of trials and we can be sure they come from the hand of a good God!

Charles Spurgeon again reminds us:

“God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”

God knows what He is doing and everything that occurs into our lives comes from the hand of a loving and sovereign God who is always good.

It is not unusual for some people who fall into sin to blame God instead of themselves. They say, in effect, to the Creator, “Why have you made me this way?” But this is a form of self-deception. Only good gifts come from God – not evil. When we sin it’s a matter of self-destruction – not God-destruction!

Robert Burns, the poet of Scotland, wrote this blatant error about God:

“Thou (God) knowest thou hast formed me
With passions wild and strong;
And listening to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.”

This is a dangerous and distorted view of God that James strikes down in a single affirmation in this section. God is intrinsically good, and He never changes. There is no shadow of turning with Him! Therefore, He is not responsible for your sin!

In James 1:17 God is said to be the “Father of (the) lights” (luminaries). God is the Creator or Source of lights. But what is meant by lights? Certainly the reference is

to the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14–18; Ps. 136:7). But by extension, James seems to be teaching that God is also the Source of all spiritual light as well. So, we should never think of God as the Source of evil in the universe. The luminaries testify (they are a testimony) to the Creator’s own luminous nature. In other words, the glory and dignity of the heavenly luminaries declare the nature and essence of God Himself, that “God is light and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). God’s creative relation to the heavenly lights prompts James to assert the immutable or unchanging nature of God and His goodness!

He goes on to say in James 1:17, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” This means “there is no variation or shifting shadow” with God. James is probably drawing a comparison between God and the sun and other luminaries. Although there appears to be shifting degrees, shadows, and shades of light in the sun, moon, and stars from our perspective as they move about during the day and night, they are actually constant and remain the same.

Like the sun, God does not vary in His essential nature, which is light. He is always a steady light. There is no shadow of turning with Him. He is always good. So, we should not make the mistake of thinking that God has changed in His essential goodness towards us. His nature and His purpose towards His children are steady and unchanging. Therefore, we can trust Him at all times and in every difficult circumstance. God is always good and will meet our needs (Phil. 4:19).

Like the essential nature of the sun, God does not change. He reveals no shifting back and forth. He remains our gracious, giving God, as the hymnist recorded:

“Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.”

So, the Father of lights is the giver of every “good and perfect gift” which means He is not the instigator of evil, temptation, and the defeat and downfall of Christians (James 1:13). This is because God never changes in His essential being! Malachi 3:6 says, “For I *am* the LORD, I change not ...” This means God does not change. He is good. He is always good. This reality must sink into our hearts or else we will begin to question God’s ways and movements in the world and even in relation to our own lives.

Every good gift from God “Cometh down” (James 1:17) is a present participle meaning “they keep on coming down.” God does not give occasionally; He gives constantly. Even when we do not see His gifts, He is still sending them. How do we know this? Because the Bible tells us so and we believe His Word.

A.W Tozer said:

“The goodness of God is infinitely more wonderful than we will ever be able to comprehend.”

A good God gives us good gifts! Never forget this as you pass through difficult times. Don't let Satan get you to doubt God's goodness. No matter what you pass through God is always good!

In Genesis 3:1 the Devil said to Eve:

“Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

Satan originally tempted and deceived Eve, and he did it by getting her to doubt God's goodness. He was casting doubt on God's goodness. The implication was, “God is holding back something good from you. Therefore, God Himself is not good.” She fell for this line of deception, and you know the terrible consequences.

Jerry Bridges states:

“The very first temptation in the history of mankind was the temptation to be discontent...that is exactly what discontentment is - a questioning of the goodness of God.”

Beware of questioning God's goodness and becoming discontent in God's will and purpose for your life. When we ask, “God, why did you allow this to happen?” or “Why can't I have this?” we are beginning to question God's goodness. Satan is getting his foot in the door.

James 1:17 teaches the truth that only good gifts come from the hand of a loving and sovereign God. This is a wonderfully positive statement that offers a solution to handling temptation. God's goodness provides a way out – the way of victory. Victory comes from the hand of our loving and good God! During temptation the goodness of the Lord provides us with the good and perfect gifts of His grace, mercy

(Heb. 4:16), power (Eph. 6:10), and sanctification (Phil. 2:13) which enables us to overcome the Evil One.

The words “good” and “perfect” in James 1:17 are tied together. The word “perfect” is one of James’ favorite words. It has the nuance of maturity and reaching the goal of greater sanctification. He used it twice in James 1:4. So James 1:17 in some way ties back to James 1:2–4, with the idea that even our trials and tests in life can be viewed as God’s perfect and good gifts, because when we persevere in them, He uses them to produce patience, spiritual maturity, wisdom, faith, and greater sanctification in us.

"In the greatness of our troubles there may often be space for the greater display of the goodness of God!"

~ Charles H. Spurgeon

James’ point is that these good and perfect gifts are needed to grant us victory over temptation and they are ultimately designed to produce spiritual growth or advancement in our lives. Actually, experiencing temptation (James 1:13-14) should result in praise and thanksgiving because God is always good, and He is truly adequate to meet our needs while being tempted. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. The Lord’s objective for our lives is to bless us (Ps. 23:5; 103:1-5). He desires to give us good gifts even if it means to pass through some hard times. This is a truth we need to hang on to! The gifts of God are good and perfect for God is good and unchanging. They are designed for our ultimate good and benefit.

Think of the many good gifts that God gives us to enjoy - the taste of good food, the love of our families and friends, the beauty of His creation, and every wonderful experience in life, including the spiritual supply and victories He brings our way - all of these good things come to us from a God whose very nature is good. God blesses our lives in so many ways. All we must do is take time to reflect and meditate on His goodness.

Psalm 145:9

“The LORD *is* good to all: and his tender mercies *are* over all his works.”

Psalm 34:8

“O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him.”

Psalm 119:67-68

“Before I was afflicted I went astray: But now have I kept thy word. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.”

Psalm 135:3

“Praise the LORD; for the LORD *is* good: sing praises unto his name; for *it is* pleasant.”

Psalm 100:5

“For the LORD *is* good; his mercy *is* everlasting; and his truth *endureth* to all generations.”

Let me share with you some thoughts of application.

(1) Understanding God’s attributes as revealed in His Word is essential for your spiritual well-being. You must know God, not as you might conceive Him to be or wish Him to be, but as He has revealed Himself in the Bible.

I’ve heard professing Christians say, “My God is not a God of judgment; He’s a God of love.” That’s nice, but your God is not the God of the Bible! He is a figment of your own imagination! The God of the Bible is both a God of judgment and of love.

(2) Interpreting your circumstances in light of God’s attributes is essential for your spiritual well-being. You must know who God is when the trial hits your life. By faith, you have to rehearse for yourself what you know to be true about God. He is good, righteous, and holy. You may need to do this a hundred times a day!

It is impossible for God to change. He cannot change for the *worse* because He is holy; He cannot change for the *better* because He is already perfect. He cannot become evil for His is always good.

Christian friend, when you’re in the emotional throes of a major trial, you have to face your trial by faith in God’s Word, not by your feelings. Your feelings will be all over the charts, but your faith must rest on the facts about God, as declared in His Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). He is good! He never changes. And He is there for us!

I remember being in a group setting in a living room where several of the older Christian teens were playing the piano. They were up and down the keys doing an amazing job. Then, after they were finished a little girl came up to the piano and with one finger began to play her song. Everybody was amazingly blessed. With one finger she played, “God is so good, God is so good. God is so good, He’s so good to me.”

Sickness, war, accidents, natural disasters, tragedies—they come indiscriminately to the just and the unjust, the Christian and the non-Christian, the moral and the immoral. If God is so good and all-powerful, why doesn’t He just wipe out evil things and all suffering in this world? This question often arises after a tragedy, especially when it affects people we think should be protected from such things.

We must remember that God originally created the world perfect. But he also gave human beings the freedom to choose to obey him or to disobey him. When Adam sinned, death and suffering became an inevitable part of life (Romans 5:12). From the creation of man and his fall into sin (Gen. 3) the Bible places man at blame for sin and evil in the world. So in one sense we should always lay the responsibility for evil in the world at man’s feet. But God is in control and is all-powerful orchestrating the events of time and eternity and nothing occurs outside His providence (Ps. 115:3). This means a good and just God is obviously accomplishing some good and just things through the introduction and continuation of evil in the world.

The most obvious illustration of this is the death of Christ. Judas, the betrayer of Christ, and other evil men perpetrated this evil act, yet God planned it for our good from eternity past. Judas and the others are judged for their evil, but God is praised for the good accomplished through it. Judas broke God’s moral will but God accomplished the sovereign will or purpose He intended. In Acts 4:27-29 Jesus’ followers



conclude that these evil men were gathered “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:28). In other words, they believed in God’s sovereignty, His complete control over all events, which included Jesus’ betrayal. But the betrayal of Christ turned out to be a blessing for mankind! The sacrifice of His Son and salvation of sinners was the good that came out of it.

Acts 2:23 is another example of God turning evil around for good. Again, it relates to Christ's death. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (*God's sovereignty*), ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (*man's freedom of choice*). Christ was put to death by evil men, but God turned it around for the salvation of millions of sinners! You see, God is always intrinsically good and doing good things even when we see Him superintending the evil events within the world. In fact, His goodness in some mysterious way overrides evil.

Psalm 76:10

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

In some way God gets the glory, He is honored or praised through even the evil acts of mankind. The light of God's holiness and goodness is seen against the backdrop of the blackness of sin and evil. This means His attributes of goodness, righteousness, and holiness are maintained and glorified despite the evil acts of people occurring on earth. The fact that God is good means that He has no evil in Him, His intentions and motivations are always good, He always does what is right, and the outcome of His plan is always good.

Here is the point. Evil and suffering occurring in the world does not override God's goodness. In fact, God allows many events to come into our personal lives - good things, bad things; things that make sense, things that make no sense at all. Every one of these incidents serves as a part of His sovereign and providential plan for us. Tragedy in itself is never good (a car accident, earthquake, tornado, loss of a loved one, broken leg, terminal illness, etc.). But God can take tragedy and hardship and use these things for His glory and demonstrate His goodness toward our lives in so many ways. Joseph knew this to be true.

Genesis 50:20

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive."

It's true. God is intrinsically good and never changes. Therefore, He is not directly responsible for evil, temptation, and suffering in the world. This is because there is never any variation in His goodness. However, since God is good it means He knows

how to grant us victory over the Devil's temptations by providing us with power, grace, mercy, faith, and sanctification – all the good and perfect gifts we need to live victoriously. This is what James 1:14-17 is teaching us. God is good, all the time! Even when in His sovereignty He allows the Devil to tempt us (Matt. 4:1-11). God is good for He gives us the power and provision we need to be victors. Even when in His providence He allows us to pass through the deep waters or trials of life, He has a way of turning them into an opportunity to produce Christlikeness in us (Rom. 8:28). There is never a time when God is not good to us. God is so good! God is good all the time!

Psalm 33:5

“He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.”

“For His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds
Give thanks, give thanks to the Lord.
He is good, He is good
His love endures forever.”

