
The Fruit of Goodness

DAVE BAST

He was a good man in the worst sense of the word, so said Mark Twain. You know, sometimes we think that being good is primarily a matter of keeping the rules, staying in bounds, and that can come across as hypocrisy. It can make us appear to be self-righteous and judgmental: You are such a goody-goody. You think you are so good. But real goodness, genuine goodness, fruit of the Spirit goodness, is a beautiful and appealing thing. We are naturally drawn to those who are good in this way; so let's think about it together today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, now we are in the middle, pretty much, just past the midpoint, of a long series on the fruit of the Spirit. It is long because there are nine of them, and they are listed in Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23, which goes this way: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, we have done five so far, and this the sixth one; the fruit of goodness; and Dave, we suggested in previous parts of this series that some have suggested that you could lump these nine fruit into three groups of three. The first three, love, joy and peace, have a lot to do with our relationship with God. Patience, kindness, and now today, goodness, the middle three have how we relate to other people; and then the last three that are to come yet, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, have a lot to do with ourselves and how we behave—how we help the Spirit govern us, and so forth and so on.

DAVE BAST

Right; really, as we talk about goodness in and of itself, I think we need to address first of all the conception that goodness is somehow something that we are, or it is something inside us, some quality; and then the debate starts to go: Well, are people basically good by nature or are they evil by nature or are they some mixture? And we can kind of get caught up in that philosophical question and really miss what the Bible wants most to say about the quality of goodness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and it is not as though the question about our sin, and so forth, is irrelevant, right? We were created good. We were created with the ability to relate well to God and to one another; and we lost that in the fall into sin; and so, now we are born bent—we are born, not as evil as we could be, but not as good as we were meant to be. That is important, right; but in a sense, that is not exactly what the fruit of goodness is all about. It is not just a state of being, as though you could just sort of sit in your chair and be totally quiet and say: There, I am good. Because as we are going to be seeing, the fruit of goodness, as we also see it coming from God, has a whole lot to do with not just sitting around and having a certain moral state of being, it is what you do.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; there is a great emphasis today in our culture on self-esteem and learning to accept yourself and feel good about yourself, and God don't make no junk, you know, as the old saying says, so I must be good because God made me. That is all well and good and fine, if that helps you or you find it useful in living with yourself, but that is not really what the fruit of the Spirit is getting at. It is not about some putative inner state or inner being. It is about actions and the power of the Spirit—what the fruit that the Spirit wants to grow within us—is the strength to do good to other people; to treat them well; to be helpful; to be a servant; all those things we are called to do as Christians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and you know, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as they say. I mean, how many times haven't we seen it on television? Sometimes it is in fictional dramas, but often it is in real life cases of somebody in a courtroom, they have been convicted of a terrible crime—maybe of abusing children or looking at child pornography or other very bad crimes—and at the sentencing the guilty person will say to the judge: Yes, but you know, deep down I am a good person.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I am really a good person...what does that mean?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, because if you were, you would not have done that. If you were good through and through or deep down, because goodness—the fruit of the Spirit all show up like fruit shows up on the branches of our lives. You see it or you don't.

DAVE BAST

You know the tree by the fruit that it bears, Jesus said that. There is also an old saying...an English saying...handsome is as handsome does. It is not the outer appearance or some inner quality, it is what you do...it is your actions...that is the key; and as we have often noted with these fruit of the Spirit, the great model for us in all this is God himself—the character of God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

The goodness of God is that quality by which God treats people—treats his creation—with respect, with love, with care, and gives his creatures what they need. So, I think of a passage, for example, like these beautiful verses from Psalm 145 that say:

⁹The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. ¹⁴The Lord upholds all who fall down and lifts up all who are bowed down. ¹⁵The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food at the proper time. ¹⁶You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

So, how is God good? What does God's goodness mean? It means he treats people with compassion. He gives people what they need. He gives the food, the air they breathe, everything that sustains their life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, when theologians talk about the nature of God...and I think we have reflected on this in other *Groundwork* series' in the past...but, when we think about the nature of God, we talk about the attributes of God—the characteristics of God—and theologians talk about how there are incommunicable attributes that God has; things God has that we don't, like being all-knowing or being everywhere at once or being all powerful. We do not have that; but, there are other attributes of God that are communicable—God can share them with us—and goodness is one of the core characteristics of God that *is* portable—it is shareable with us; and when the Holy Spirit moves into our hearts after we become baptized, we become one with Christ, all of these fruit of the Spirit are premised on baptism; that we become new people in Christ; and once that

happens, God shares what he can share of himself with us; and so, right, God is good because he tends to the people who fall down; God is good because he sees the lowly and he lifts them up; God is good in how he treated Israel despite its sin; and now we are called to imitate that by bearing the fruit of goodness.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think we recognize that in other people, too, sort of instinctively, like you will sometimes hear someone say: He is good people; you know, kind of a colloquial expression, but when we look at someone and say that is a good person...that is a good person, what strikes us, I think, is the quality of their actions...of the way they treat other people, and there is an attractiveness to that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It draws us to that person, really.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; if you are sitting at Panera Bread with a friend for lunch and you say to that person: My friend Jane Smith is a good person. The person you are eating lunch with is going to say: How? How so? And then you are going to tell stories, and we know what we are going to say: Oh, well, when Jane is in the grocery store, if she sees an elderly person struggling with their shopping cart...you know, it is one of those carts with that fourth wheel that will just flip around wrong...Jane will drop everything and help her, and stays with her through the checkout lane and gets her groceries...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jane is a good person.

DAVE BAST

That is a good person, right...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is the kind of stories we tell.

DAVE BAST

Goodness in action, absolutely; but it is not easy. I think we all recognize that, and there are challenges—there are barriers—that are raised against our being... We might want to be good in that way...we might have the desire...but what is it that keeps us from doing it? We will talk about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and we are talking today about the wonderful fruit of the Spirit, goodness; it is pretty simple. In many of these programs in this series, we have done word studies and gone back to the Greek and kind of dug into the meaning of these special terms, but goodness is something I think everybody knows—everybody gets—and everybody recognizes it when they see it. We were just talking about that,

weren't we?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

When you see goodness in action, that attracts you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, as you said, too, Dave, at the end of the last segment, it is not easy, and we all know that. I mean, those of us who are old enough to have children who are teenagers who learn to drive or go out with their friends. Sometimes what is the last word we say to our kids before they go out the door? Be good. We have a sense we want to be good. Not too many people want to be bad; we want to be good, but it can be difficult, partly because we are thrown into some trying circumstances. If goodness, as we just said, is shown in our actions toward others, well, it is not always easy to be good to people who are ungrateful or snap who your head off...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or who are just kind of surly in general. Our goodness gets tested in different ways.

DAVE BAST

There is always a price to pay. I mean, this is not one of those things that you can just sort of open up a can of goodness and serve it out unflinchingly to those around you; it is going to cost you something. It is going to test you; it is going to tire you. I think one of the big obstacles to doing good to others is what we sometimes refer to today as compassion fatigue, you know? I am tired. Let someone else serve for a while; I have done my share; I have done enough; I need some me-time; time for myself. So, it is, you know? It is a drag, and people are needy; and sometimes needy people just sort of suck it out of us and we get to the point where maybe we cannot go on, and maybe even shouldn't go on because, you know, you can go overboard on that; but still, where do we find the stamina to continue to do good over and over with those whom we meet?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and I think of a passage from Paul elsewhere in Galatians. The fruit of the Spirit as we read them earlier are from Galatians 5, but just in the next chapter, in Galatians 6, Paul says this: ⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever one sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. So, do not give up...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, the only reason Paul writes that is because we are tempted to give up.

DAVE BAST

Yes; a beautiful passage, really, and did you notice the repeated emphasis there on doing good and sticking at it; you know, keeping at it; and the analogy with sowing and reaping? When you sow something...when you plant a crop...you do not stint with the seed. You know, you do not put a little bit of seed and say: Well, I don't want to waste my seed here. No farmer ever comes in in the spring after planting out in the back 40 and

says: Well, I just threw away umpteen bushels of seed. I buried it in the ground. I will never see it again. No. Paul says if you sow generously you are going to reap a big crop. You reap what you sow. You are going to get back what you do, and that is just a basic law in God's world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is applied to goodness here, as Paul says; and then Paul immediately connects this to not growing weary in doing good; do good to everybody, especially your sisters and brothers in the faith, but do good to everybody. Paul is, I think, pointing, Dave, to an interesting dynamic here. Maybe we could call it good momentum, I don't know, but Paul is saying: The more you sow goodness into other people...if other people are like your field...the more you sow goodness into them, the more likely it is that you will not grow weary; and I wonder...and I have not thought a lot about this before...but I wonder if part of what he is saying here is that when you do good to others, they are not *all* going to do good back to you, but enough of them will. Over time they will be there for you when you need help. When you, as we are going to think about later in the program, when you need to be forgiven or something, there is going to be enough of the people in whom you invest your goodness who will in turn at some point invest their goodness back into you that you will be refreshed; that you will not be beaten down and weary and burned out. So, sometimes our goodness boomerangs back to us, in other words, and gives us a boost to get up and do it again.

DAVE BAST

You know, I think he also is encouraging us here to take a long perspective...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Take the long view: In due season, you will reap a harvest if you don't quit...if you don't give up...if you don't lose heart, as an older version has it. So, you know, it may not happen right away. We might have to wait until the end of our lives to see the full results or the full return on the goodness that we sow in other people's lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and how many times has it happened to you and to me and to all of us? Maybe we were extra kind and good to somebody for years, maybe. We went out of our way to help somebody, and frankly, they did not say thank you all that often; frankly, they did not always seem to notice as much as deep down we thought they should have noticed. We kind of think: Eh, that was just sort of wasted effort; and then, all of a sudden the day comes when maybe you need something, and there they are. That very person that never seemed grateful enough, but you know, you didn't grow weary in being good, and there they are at your door now; or they will send you a note telling all at once how much it meant to them; and it is sort of like: Oh, that was never wasted effort after all. It sure felt like it some days...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it boomerangs back.

DAVE BAST

You know, when you were just saying that, Scott, I had a flash thinking of the scene so often in a funeral home, and people are going through the line and they are telling a spouse who has lost their partner stories, things that maybe they never told the person who died...

SCOTT HOEZEE

They never heard before, yes.

DAVE BAST

And only now the story is coming out as some good thing that person did and what it meant to the individual who received it; and it is almost like you would say: Well, it is too late now. Why didn't you tell him while he was alive, you know; but that is not lost, because in Christ, you know, we don't really die, and someday we will see that...we will see this wonderful harvest that has come about in other people's lives because we persisted...because we believed...because we, by the power of the Spirit, kept sowing that good seed of good kindness and patience and forbearance and all these other wonderful virtues of the Spirit into the lives of others and blessed them as a result.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, speaking of those funeral home encounters, Dave, yes, sometimes it is a story or a testament to the deceased person's goodness that they never heard about; but you know what? When you as the family hear about it...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It inspires you all over again to say: I am going to live like Dad. I am going to be more like that in my own life now because Dad was, and so I want to be that way, too.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, as we close out this program, we want to think on a very practical level of one very particular facet to bearing the fruit of goodness. It has to do with generosity of spirit, and that is going to lead us to think about something pretty important called forgiveness, and we will think about that in a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are talking about the fruit of the Spirit of goodness; and Scott, you just mentioned at the end of the previous segment about one particular instance or example where we need to persevere in doing good to others, and that is the need to show forgiveness; and there is a story in the New Testament, one of Jesus' parables, that was triggered by a question his disciple Peter asked him one day.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Matt. 18:21 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 And Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 And therefore," Jesus said, "the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants, 24 and as he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and children and all that he had be sold to pay the debt. 26 At that, the servant fell on his knees before him, 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'I will pay back everything.' 27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."

DAVE BAST

28 "But when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him, 'Pay back what you owe me,' he demanded. 29 His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me and I will pay it back,' 30 but he refused; instead he

went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged, and went and told their master everything. ³²The master called the servant in, ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours, ³³shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant?’ ³⁴And in anger, his master handed him over to the jailers.” (And Jesus’ punch line): ³⁵“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

So, it is a powerful story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Somebody once said that one of the scariest words in the whole New Testament is the two-letter little word *as* in the Lord’s Prayer: Lord, forgive us our sins *as* we forgive those who sin against us. If we understand what God has done for us, we will go and do likewise; and if we refuse to go and do likewise, we kind of show we do not get it; and this story is...you know...the man owes the king a million bucks...begs for mercy...the king cancels it; another guy owes him five bucks, and he throws him in jail...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He does not get it—he does not get it; and we read that psalm, from Psalm 145, earlier in the program, Dave, where we said the goodness of God is seen in God’s action toward us; and he picks up the lowly, he lifts up the needy, and he forgives us; and that is the generosity of God’s...we said that goodness and generosity have a connection...that is the generosity of God in action, and we are called to do the same; and so, the fruit of goodness in our lives is as often as not tested when we have somebody to forgive, right? I think we have used this C. S. Lewis line before. C. S. Lewis once wrote: Everybody loves the idea of forgiveness, until they actually have someone to forgive.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; yes, that is when the test really comes; and of note, too, we have been talking about this in the context of persevering...continuing to sow goodness, like the good seed, and not growing weary and not giving up and not quitting and thinking we have done enough; and that is exactly the context...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That triggers this story, because Peter comes to Jesus and says: Well, look; okay, I get that I have to forgive; but how many times? Isn’t there a limit? He is kind of thinking like a basketball game, where you can foul out, you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Five fouls and you are out of the game. So, five times maybe, and I don’t have to forgive anymore, because if the guy keeps offending me at that point, then clearly I should dismiss him; but Jesus says: No, in effect, don’t keep count because there is no limit to the need for doing this; and of course, then that raises the question: Well, doesn’t that mean we are going to be taken advantage of? Somebody is just going to walk all over us—treat us like a doormat.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course, that is not what God is calling us to do; and certainly we are also called to be discerning and wise, and sometimes we also need to rebuke people. The New Testament says that, too. I can forgive you

and rebuke you at the same time, and say you cannot keep doing this. It is going to ruin our relationship. It is going to hurt you; it is going to hurt me. So obviously, we make a stand for truth and for morality and not being walked all over.

DAVE BAST

Maybe we should say forgiveness is not the same thing as condoning evil or wrong or accepting it, or justifying it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And forgiveness does not rule out natural consequences following. I can forgive you for what you did, and still say you really cannot work here any more. Too much damage has been done. So, we want to make that that much clearer; but at bottom here...barring such extreme circumstances...at bottom here...right, Peter is wondering when goodness runs out; and Jesus is saying it doesn't; and of course, the connection we are supposed to make here is, do you want God to run out of patience with you?

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How many times should God forgive you?

DAVE BAST

Yes...I've reached my limit; no more. Yes, that is a great point. You know, it is about not keeping count, isn't it? It is about not keeping track; it is about just keeping on, keeping on and keeping on. I think of something else Jesus said in another connection with respect to generosity and giving: Don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. We are so inclined to want to do this, to want to be this kind of person, that we just do it without keeping track. We do not keep a notebook or a journal, where we write down all the good things...all the good deeds that we did. Like they used to say about the Boy Scouts, you have to do a good deed every day...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And write it down. No; you just continue to live this way in the power of the Spirit. This is not just something we gin up on our own because we are good inside. It is the fruit that the Spirit produces in us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, it is premised, Dave, on the idea that there is this infinitely deep well of goodness in God, which spells our very salvation, and God...when we become baptized in Christ and become one with Christ through the Spirit...God then lets us tap into that well. I mean, sometimes Jesus used the image of vine and branches, so the sap of Jesus' good tree flows into us; and so also if there is this deep well of goodness that the roots of Christ's tree draw upon, that then gets transferred also into us so that we are then able to bear also this fruit of goodness to all whom we meet and in all circumstances of our lives.

DAVE BAST

Well, may it be so in my life and in yours. Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as guest Neal Plantinga joins our conversation to discuss the spiritual fruit of faithfulness. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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