

The Things to Add to Faith: THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Have you ever used one of the additives that you pour into your car's gas tank, or maybe an engine oil additive, to make the engine run like it's supposed to? Maybe the engine just clanked and sputtered along before, but you pour in the additive, and hey, they really work! Well, people's faith can be like a clanky, old engine that just isn't operating up to par—a substandard faith that is deficient and lacking something. On more than one occasion, Jesus turned to His disciples and commented on such unacceptable faith when He'd look at them in disappointment and say: "O ye of little faith."¹ But on only two occasions did Jesus ever turn to anyone and comment upon their "**great faith.**" Interestingly, both of those times Jesus was referring to the great faith of Gentiles—one was the Roman centurion, and the other was the Canaanite woman.² So what is the difference in the quality of the faith of some people as compared to the faith of others? And when you think about that question, notice this: For those to whom Jesus refers to as having "**little faith**"—it may well only be a **very little faith**. Actually, they have so little faith that a tiny little mustard seed³ would appear huge in comparison to such meager faith. And that is a dangerous faith to have because it has very little substance. It is like a mere mist that is subject to evaporating away, leaving the person lost and empty. So we need to strive to go beyond that danger zone marked by an empty faith. We need a faith that has substance—faith that is solid like a rock—a faith that is durable and lasts even through the storms of life. So what are the ingredients that need to be added to faith to change it from a mere mist to something as hard and strong as granite?

The Apostle Peter talks about these **additives to faith** when he says: ⁵ [M]ake every effort to **ADD TO YOUR FAITH GOODNESS**; and to goodness, **KNOWLEDGE**; ⁶ and to knowledge, **SELF-CONTROL**; and to self-control, **PERSEVERANCE**; and to perseverance, **GODLINESS**; ⁷ and to godliness, **BROTHERLY KINDNESS**; and to brotherly kindness, **LOVE**. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Peter 1:5-8 (NIV) I'd like for you to begin thinking about these important additives to faith—**goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness** and **love**. So for our purposes this morning, we'll take up that first additive—the one called "**goodness**" and try to see what this is all about.

The Book of Psalms has quite a lot to say about "**goodness.**" Repeatedly, the Psalms point to the fact that **God is the source of all good things**. For example, in Psalm 107, we find the following:

“⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ⁹ For he satisfies the longing soul, **AND THE HUNGRY SOUL HE FILLS WITH GOOD THINGS.** Psalm 107:8-9 (ESV) Where does God give us these good things? Well, apparently one of the places God exposes His people to goodness is in the House of the Lord—the Church. So right here is a good place to start. In this regard, we all know the ending to the 23rd Psalm: “Surely **goodness** and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and **I shall dwell IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD forever.**” Psalm 23:6 (ESV) We find something similar to this in Psalm 65: “Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the **GOODNESS OF YOUR HOUSE, OF YOUR HOLY TEMPLE.**” Psalm 65:4 (NKJV) In a similar vein, David praises God and says: “How great is the **goodness you have stored** up for those who fear you. You lavish it on those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world.” Psalm 31:19 (NLT2) And so, we can see that the Church itself is a **storehouse of God’s goodness**. If you don’t come to the store, you don’t receive the goods. But, exactly what is this “**goodness**” that is spoken of?

Well, “**goodness**” is something that radiates a mysterious mixture of purity and wholeness combined with **joy, delight and gladness**. And so, it’s no great surprise that the words **goodness** or **good** are found more than 600 times in the Bible. After all, the Bible is designed to tell us about God and one of His signature characteristics is His unfailing goodness. The Scriptures proclaim: “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him.” Nahum 1:7 (NIV) And again, look to the Psalms where it tells us: “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in His ways.” Psalm 25:8 (NIV) This last verse makes a very important point. It indicates that God is, in fact, very good, and we—in contrast as sinners—are actually good for nothing. Jesus states the case quite plainly: “No one is good except God alone.” Luke 18:19 (TEV)

Now some think that they can make themselves “**good**” if they go about doing **good deeds**. But that can never be the case. The preacher and Christian writer, Edwin Hubbel Chapin, spoke truly when he said: **“Goodness consists not in the outward things we do, but in the inward thing we are.”**⁴ And unless your inward being has surrendered to Jesus Christ and is devoted to faith in Him, your outward good deeds have no value whatsoever. The Bible tells us: “Faith without deeds is dead.” James 2:26 (NIV) But the inverse of that is equally true: Good deeds without faith are dead. In other words, if your good deeds spring merely from your own personal efforts to feel good about yourself apart from faith, then forget it—for they count as nothing as far as your salvation is concerned. But if you have faith in God, and your good deeds grow out of that faith to please Him (and not yourself), then it’s a sign that your

faith is true because it is bound up in the goodness of God. There are just so many people today who don't get that.

They believe that they are “**good**” because they do “**good things**.” For example, maybe they do come to Church, maybe they give money to charities, perhaps even serve at a food pantry or help out at a homeless shelter—even go on a mission trip. All these things are “**good**” and are not to be discouraged. But, the Bible is clear that doing those things, in and of themselves, won't make **you** “**good**.” You, acting on your own behalf, can never make yourself “**good**” in the eyes of God because it always comes back to the fact that somewhere along the line—probably thousands of times—you have sinned. And what do you call people who have sinned? Yes—you call them “**sinners**.” You can do a million **good deeds**, but your status as a sinner will never change simply by virtue of what you do. So what is the solution?

Well, the solution is faith in Jesus Christ. Paul proclaims: “8 For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. (TEV) And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 **SALVATION IS NOT A REWARD FOR THE GOOD THINGS WE HAVE DONE**, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.” (NLT2) Ephesians 2:8-10 We are saved by faith and nothing else. But, if your faith is anemic, then you need a spiritual vitamin to build it up. That first vitamin is “**goodness**.” But, we need to realize something about “**goodness**.” We need to realize what the Psalmist said in Psalm 16 and turn to the Lord and admit to Him that, “You are my Lord; I have **no good apart from you**.” Psalm 16:2 (NRSV)⁵ People, by their very nature, don't tend to be good. We lack any true goodness because of our tendency to sin. I love the way the Christian writer, Jeremy Royal Howard, puts it: “**We freely and gladly choose to sin because we are by nature sinners.**”⁶ But God, in His goodness and mercy, has made for us a way to change that. We are able to begin taking on some of the goodness of God when we repent of our old ways and surrender our lives to Jesus Christ. It is then that we start to return to our roots—to return to what we were meant to be. You, see in the beginning God created man and woman in His image (Genesis 1:27)⁷ and all of Creation was then an extension of God's own goodness.⁸ In fact, at each stage of creation, God would look back over what He had made and declared it to be “**good**.” Indeed, when He had completed His Creation, He deemed it “**very good**.” Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31⁹ That is why Paul could say with confidence in his letter to Timothy that “everything created by God is good.” 1 Timothy 4:4 NASB

And so, in the Garden of Eden, we could see the closest thing to Heaven here on earth—where man and woman lived free of sin and in complete communion with God. But the choice of man and

woman to live apart from God put them, and now us, apart from the goodness of God—and it was then that sin entered into this world. And now, as we turn back to God, little by little, we start to recover a bit of His image in us. But, again, this can never be accomplished by us acting alone. It requires us to open the doors of our heart to the power of God’s Holy Spirit and to allow the presence of God to enter into your life through Jesus Christ. It starts with a spark of faith that God will fan with His goodness into a shining flame for those who will let Him do exactly that. And oh what a difference that will make for anyone so inclined to allow God’s goodness into their lives! The prophet Jeremiah describes this difference in a person’s life when they allow the goodness of the Lord into their hearts. Jeremiah tells us: ¹² “They shall come home and sing songs of joy upon the hills of Zion and shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord—the good crops, the wheat, the wine, and the oil, and the healthy flocks and herds. Their life shall be like a **watered garden**, and all their sorrows shall be gone . . . ¹³ for I will turn their mourning into joy, and I will comfort them and make them rejoice, for their captivity with all its sorrows will be behind them.” Jeremiah 31:12-13 (TLB) Now don’t make the mistake of thinking that Jeremiah was sounding like Joel Olsteen—spouting off some kind of false prosperity gospel about getting blessed with all kinds of material things. Rather, what Jeremiah is really saying is that you could be a pauper, the poorest guy financially for miles around, but if you have God’s goodness inside, your attitude toward even the most sorrowful of things will be as if you are a billionaire. Even in the most dire of circumstances, your life will still be **“like a watered garden”** and you will still be able to rejoice. So, what does that look like in the reality of a world filled with sorrows?

It looks like two people who you may not be familiar with. One was named Dan Quisenberry. If anyone is baseball fan, you may remember him as three-time All-Star pitcher for the Kansas City Royals in the 1980’s. If you ever saw him pitch, you wouldn’t forget him. He had this submarine-style pitching delivery that just confounded batters. He retired from baseball in 1990 with 244 saves, then the 6th-highest total in major league history. And you might expect that with a successful major league career like that, it would be easy to live a life **“like a watered garden.”** But, in the winter of 1996, he was diagnosed with an aggressive form of brain cancer and the prognosis was terminal. Now you might think that that would have changed the **“watered garden”** of his life. But it didn’t. It didn’t because Don’s faith was not just a speck in the shadow of a mustard seed. His faith was reinforced by the goodness of God. Following surgery to remove a tumor, he could still say with gratitude in his heart: **“Every day I find things to be thankful for . . . Sometimes it’s just seeing a little boy on a bicycle. Sometimes it’s the taste of water. It’s hard to explain.”** Don died in the fall of 1997 at age 45. At his funeral, his pastor told about the time that he came into Don’s hospital room after one of his surgeries.

He recalled that Don was in good spirits. He distinctly remembered that he was ***“talking about how good God had been to him. He blessed me on that visit.”***¹⁰ The 19th century Scottish minister and Christian writer, James Hamilton, said that: ***“Goodness is love in action, love with its hand to the plow, love with the burden on its back, love following His footsteps who went about continually doing good.”***¹¹ And Daniel Webster commented: ***“Real goodness does not attach itself merely to this life—it points to another world. Political or professional reputation cannot last forever, but a conscience void of offense before God and man is an inheritance for eternity.”***¹² Though Hamilton and Webster’s comments were expressed long before Don Quisenberry ever came into this world, their words were lived out by him—for his faith was strong in the goodness of Jesus Christ.

Or, take the case of someone I feel fairly certain you have not heard of—his name is Nick Vujicic. Now Nick was not able to throw a baseball with the velocity of a Don Quisenberry. He did not have such a great arm. In fact, he didn’t have any arms or legs at all because he was born with a rare genetic disorder known as tetra-amelia syndrome. As he grew up, he had an extremely difficult time, both emotionally and physically, accepting his condition. But, one day, Someone touched him and asked him to take a walk. And he accepted that offer and he embarked on that a walk. The thing is, it was a walk in which he didn’t need any physical legs, because what he started on was a journey of faith on the day he decided to walk with Jesus and to follow Him. And when he started on that walk, he slowly began to understand something. He could begin to see that God’s goodness still abounded in his life despite his severe physical limitations. And now Nick has what he calls—in his own words: ***“A ridiculously good life.”*** Nick writes: ***“When I’m asked how I can claim a ridiculously good life when I have no arms or legs, [people] assume I’m suffering from what I lack. They inspect my body and wonder how I could possibly give my life to God, who allowed me to be born without limbs. Others have attempted to soothe me by saying that God has all the answers and then, when I’m in heaven, I will find out His intentions. Instead, I choose to live by what the Bible says, which is that GOD IS THE ANSWER TODAY, YESTERDAY, AND ALWAYS. When people read about my life or witness me living it, they are prone to congratulate me for being victorious over my disabilities. I tell them that my victory came in surrender. It comes every day when I acknowledge that I can’t do this on my own, so I say to God, ‘I give it to you!’ Once I yielded [to Him], the Lord took my pain and turned it into something good . . . He gave my life meaning when no one and nothing else could provide it. [And] if God can take someone like me, someone without arms and legs, and use me as His hands and feet, He can use anybody. It’s not about ability. The only thing God needs from you is a willing heart.”***¹³

He's 100% correct—all God needs *is* a willing heart. And a **willing heart** is a heart filled with an unshakeable faith. It is a faith that has grown from something smaller than a mere mustard seed to the point that the individual is no longer guided by all the fearful things that they can see surrounding them. Rather, those with a **willing heart** are guided by trusting in God—“for [they] walk by faith, not by sight.”¹⁴ They have taken on those things that Peter spoke of and added it to their faith—beginning with the goodness of God. And so, their faith grows stronger day by day.

What about you? Is your faith growing in such a manner? Or, do you sometimes feel like your faith is just a little bit stuck. Maybe it is there, but it doesn't seem to be growing. If so, then start adding God's goodness and give your faith a jump-start. Maybe you need to allow God to “**water the garden**” of your life as He did in the lives of people like Don Quisenberry and Nick Vujicic who both surrendered **willing hearts** to Him and allowed God to impart unto them His very own **incomparable goodness**. Maybe we need to focus upon Paul's words when he said: “And we know that in all things God works for **THE GOOD** of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28 (NIV) The question is: “**Will you accept God's call?**” Will you live your life in His goodness according to the plan and purpose He has for you? God has a special plan that He has designed just for you—and it's one that only you can fulfill. But He also has a collective plan for all of us. And that plan is for us to be a light shining in a world of darkness—a light that reflects His goodness in a world engulfed by evil.¹⁵ For as Paul says: ⁸ “You yourselves used to be in the darkness, but since you have become the Lord's people, you are in the light. So you must live like people who belong to the light, ⁹ for it is the light that brings a rich harvest of every kind of **goodness, righteousness, and truth.**” Ephesians 5:8-9 (TEV) As creatures made in the image of God, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can shine the **goodness of His light**. We can take on a little bit of **His shining goodness** by Christ's work for us on the Cross. And won't it be a wonderful feeling of sheer **joy, delight and gladness** to take on God's goodness that elevates our faith to such a degree that one day, when we are face to face with our Savior, He will no longer shake His head and say to us, “**Oh ye of little faith,**” but rather He look upon us and declare, “Well done, **GOOD AND FAITHFUL** servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!” Matthew 25:23 (NIV)

Let us pray.

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¹ Matthew 8:26 (KJV) And he saith unto them, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm."

² Matthew 8:8-10 (NIV)⁸ The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed." ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

Matthew 15:28 (NIV) Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour."

³ Matthew 17:20 (NIV) He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

⁴ Edwin Hubbel Chapin (1814-1880) Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 276.

⁵ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, ed., "Goodness," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 344.

⁶ Jeremy Royal Howard, Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding Jesus (Nashville: Holman, 2009), 293.

⁷ Genesis 1:27 (NIV) So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.

⁸ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, ed., "Goodness," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 344.

⁹ Genesis 1:31 (NIV) God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

¹⁰ *World* (10/10/98). *Leadership*, Vol. 20, no. 2., *Volume 5*, (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "GOODNESS".

¹¹ James Hamilton (1814-1867), Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 276.

¹² Daniel Webster (1782-1852), Edythe Draper, *Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 276.

¹³ PreachingToday.com.

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NASB) For we walk by faith, not by sight.

¹⁵ Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV) [Jesus said:] ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."