

Introduction

One of the earliest prayers that I remember is the simple one that we were taught at the dinner table:

**God is Great.
God is Good,
Let us thank Him for our food.**

It's really a great prayer: think of it as 1) worshipping His creative power, and then 2) his character, and finally 3) responding in gratitude.

But it is easy to get confused about the Goodness of God. We look out at the world and all of the evil there, and we ask the age-old question: "If there is a God, how can He allow all of this suffering?"

Now, I'm not going to go into the fall of man and the power of Satan in this world. I just want to focus for a minute on thinking about Good. When I think about God being Good, I don't look to see if I have been getting everything I want. I think about the champion of the greatest concept in the universe. I think about the countless times people have been Good to me, and think of the **sum of all that Good**. When you think about true love, you begin to see the power of Goodness.

God is **so** Good, and He expresses Himself in part through the good actions of all of us on this earth. Can this Good overcome the sum of all evil? Who wins the great battle between Good and Evil? Well, Christ played the **trump card** when He loved us so much that He died for our sins. I don't think that any evil can really compare in magnitude with that.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said that he so believed in the ultimate decency of things that if he woke up in hell he would still believe in it. **Far Side Cartoon**. This is the love of Goodness that we all need to develop. There is a supreme Good for which you must forsake yourself once you find it, like the story of the **Great Pearl**. The Goodness of God is such a thing.

Machinery

In my study of Goodness, I realized that I want to be on God's side. I want to be a part of that Good, to live in a world with that as its chief principle. As I thanked God for my many blessings one day, the thought struck me that I just wanted to be a **tiny cog in the great machinery of Good**. I don't need to be a Big Wheel, and I certainly don't want to be a squeaky wheel. Any sounding of the trumpet should be for God's benefit. I don't need a lot of attention, I don't need to play a big role. I don't mind being one of the cast of thousands, one of the ants doing their best to make the anthill run smoothly.

Thinking of a smooth-running machine, let me give some examples from my own fleet:

First Van: silent

Second Van: not smooth running, either

Cutlass: smooth running, but not very pretty

Camry: smooth running, and better looking

There is such a joy in being a part of a great operation, like a championship sports team or a movement for the right cause. Once I was asked by a top manager of the company that had just hired me if I felt I worked for that company or for **AEDC**, where I had worked for over twenty years. I was put on the spot in front of my peers, but I answered "AEDC" with honesty rather than political correctness. I felt then, and still feel, proud to be a part of that complex, smooth-running (for the most part) "machine". Think about how a finely tuned machine sounds.

The purpose of the machine I want to talk about today is to echo the nature of God, to fill the world with Good. I can imagine God watching this machine of His; perhaps getting emotional when he sees part of it (meaning you or me) working properly. I can see the devil trying to draw denominational boundaries around different areas, but God is only interested in seeing the performance of individual cogs meshing together. God sees His machine run in spits and starts; but loves it when even a part of it runs smoothly.

Our bodies are somewhat like a machine. Paul talks in **1 Corinthians 12:12-31** about how the body in all of its parts works together for good, and likens that to the meshing of Christians in

the church. I don't need to be an organ, just a single cell, a blood cell to pass on life, or a white cell to protect the body: it doesn't matter. I just want to be a part of it.

Fountain of love

This meshing of gears is best shown through our love for each other. Paul refers to the Christians in **Colossians 2:2** as being “**knit together in love**”, and that expresses the thought very well. We are part of a strongly linked fabric of Good, and we must do our part wherever and whenever we can.

The world should be filled with Good; I don't think that anyone would argue with me about that. But we must realize that the evil in the world is partly our fault, not just because Adam and Eve sinned, but because we don't love each other enough. We are not doing our jobs! Have you ever thought that we sin simply by not loving enough? We can't overcome this weakness, but fortunately it is covered by God's Grace.

We **can** raise the level of Good around us, though, overwhelming the loneliness and sorrow and despair of people that we have contact with.

I once offered to David Elrod a truly wonderful morale-building tool for him to use at work. I called it, “**the sphere of Cheer**”, and I asked nothing in return for it. The idea was that we each had a sphere of influence around us that could improve people's spirits. I even personalized it for David. (**My Face**) Unfortunately, he did not choose to implement this at AEDC. Go Figure! Perhaps “the hood of Good” would have worked better for him. I think that I even have a picture of that somewhere. Dave, just let me know.

In **Matthew 5:48**, Jesus says to us, “**Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect.**” The “therefore” relates back to loving those who don't necessary care very much for us. God does not want us perfect in terms of the law (which we cannot accomplish), but He wants us to flood the world with Good (which we can do). We should do good as the Lord said in **Matthew 6:3**, so that our right hand did not know what our left hand was doing. This was said to warn against doing things for show, but it also could mean that we are giving out with both hands without regard to counting it all up.

I have been where love flows like an everlasting **waterfall**; it is a constant and invigorating shower of blessing. You may know this feeling, too! I am referring to groups of people that make you feel loved, even though you don't deserve it: a friend's family, a work group, or like this congregation of the church. If you have ever walked through the woods to see the glory of thousands of gallons gushing over weathered rocks, you know the wonder of it. It might be that you could better understand the picture by thinking of the comfort of a hot shower. But the main point is that the feeling of overflowing love shown to us by a **family** that smothers us with hugs and words of friendship is truly awesome. Unfortunately, I don't have a group picture of all of my people.

The Psalmist wrote that “**Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfall (Psalm 42:7)**”, and it makes me think about the fact that in a similar way we can't hear our troubles as well when we are in the flow of this type of love. God is able to make love flow in the desert of our lives, just as he was able to provide overflowing water in the desert for the people of Israel. (**Psalm 105:41**). Once we truly comprehend that we are loved, and what that means, it transforms just as powerfully as it did the apostles, who changed into dynamic men who gave their lives for God.

Mission-directed

Many times we let a program drive our definition of the Good that we should do. Programs sometimes divert us from doing good all of the time to doing good in the “special” times. The story of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:30-37**) is a great example of this. We know that this story is a response to a question to Jesus about the greatest commandments, and thus who exactly is our neighbor. In other words, how much can we limit who we have to be Good to?

It appears to me that this story emphasizes, not bad men, but men who have missed the point. I see them as men on a mission to do good. They are church people, even religious people, who are dedicated to and focused on the particular job that they have committed themselves to do. It is the mission that is important, not doing good wherever it might be found. In Scouts we learned a slogan, “**Do a good turn daily.**” This was a great rule, but the implication

is that we can quit when it is done. There is an infinite amount of opportunity to do Good out there, and we don't really have to look far to find it.

The Good Samaritan, on the other hand, had no good "thing" to do such that he couldn't stop when he saw a need. He was just a man carrying out his business and responding to the needs that he saw on his way. He had probably been doing "Good" all day long, and would continue to do Good after he left the man at the inn. We see that the church men have an emphasis on rules, while the Good Samaritan has his emphasis on the principles which form the basis for the rules. The priest and the Levite illustrate the "Corban" principle that Jesus talked about in **Mark 7:11**, where people used the **illusion** of a greater good to help them avoid their real duty.

Jesus said in **Matthew 10:42**, "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." We find ourselves thinking in a legalistic way here, too. We think that we can go out and give out a cup of water, and then we're "in"! We found the "Cup of Cold Water" program and have meetings and everything; but Jesus would have to say, "Oh, people! You've really missed the point!" Our Good must be a continuous activity, and not just to important people, but to the little ones as well.

Jesus carries on in a similar vein in **Matthew 25:34-40**, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" We must simply be doing Good as we see the need, especially to those who cannot return the favor.

The work of missionaries and personal evangelists is extremely important. But I feel that without the ground swell of the mass of Christians doing good, we aren't providing the foundation that they need to build on. The more the light of Christianity burns in our community, the more we light it up for those who try to spread it throughout the world. They must be able to look back to the glow from home. If our own community is dark, then it is as if we have cut off our support to them.

Examples

The Bible has several examples of the type of Goodness that I'm talking about. In **2 Kings 4:8-10**, we read of a woman who sees a need and acts on it, "One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us." She just wanted to do something nice for someone.

Think about the woman who anointed Jesus with oil in **Luke 7:36-50**. It was a service, something she saw that would be a good thing to do to show her love for him. She wasn't trying to be somebody important, and Jesus recognized and praised that type of spirit.

And maybe my favorite example is the widow with her two mites (**Luke 21:1-4**). She was probably poor because of her constant unselfish giving. This was the smallest gift, yet the whole goodness of man is somehow compared to the value of it. This woman was part of the machinery of Goodness. She was a tiny cog, as we all are. But she helped make it run.

Our Touch

Look at how Christ dealt with us. He didn't let His focus on the cross cause Him to ignore us as people. His work was performed not just in a thundering, earth-splitting event on the cross, but in touching the lives of those He came in contact with. He touched the leper, he spoke to individuals, He went to meet people instead of having everyone come to him. He did little things like holding the children that came to be blessed by Him. He didn't try to get by with the minimum, but interacted with mankind one-on-one. Everyone wanted something Big from Jesus,

but He concentrated on doing small things such as going back and finding the man who had been kicked out of the synagogue for testifying about Jesus when he was healed from his blindness.

We need to know that we touch so many lives as we go about our work each day.

Molecules. Just like in a crowd, we may be jostled by many people that we are not even aware of or know personally. But we touch them just the same. We must strive to make that touch one of comfort rather than pain. We must be focused, not on our program of Good, but just letting the Good flow out from us.

We touch people every day of our lives, and many times we don't even know it. When the woman who had an issue of blood touched Jesus, He was aware of it because of His divine nature. But there were so many jostling him in the crowd that the disciples were amazed. We need to realize that we have contact with so many people each day, and each one should receive a blessing and new energy to live a better life.

Mike said one time that the people that waitresses dread the most is the Sunday morning "I just got out of church" crew. We've been asking, and all we get is verification of that. What a shame on us! How do we reflect God's love that way?

There was so much intensity in the simple touch of Jesus, so much Good in it. He literally touched many individuals, and had a profound impact on their lives. He touched the dead to bring them back to life. He touched the leper to bring him back to a normal life. Think about living a life where you were so despised that no one would touch you! But Jesus loves you enough to do that.

Dr. Brand worked with leper patients for most of his lifetime, and he wrote about the impact of touching one of his patients. He had made a joke and laid his hand on the afflicted man's shoulder, expecting him to smile in response. But instead he began to shake with muffled sobs. Dr. Brand asked his assistant in English what he had done wrong, and after speaking to the patient in his own language, she said that he was crying because no one had actually, physically touched him in many years.

Michaelango's hand

Think about the people in your live who have touched your heart; they are like angels from God. Then think about how much an expression of love and concern from you will affect someone else.

The lesson I am trying to present to all of us is that we must be good apart from church activities and programs; it must flow from us all of the time. We should not wait for a big opportunity but take all of the small ones that come along. We don't have to be burned alive (1 Corinthians 13:3), but we just let the Good flow as we touch those around us.

You know that we are all lepers, essentially, in the sight of God. But He loves us so much he touches us and gives us comfort. **Spiritual Leprosy** Jesus died to take the filth of our affliction from us, carrying it away so it won't bother us anymore.