

Thanksgiving 2017 Thank God for his goodness and mercy

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.

Five times in the Bible we have these exact words; four times in the Psalms and once in 1 Chron (1Ch 16:34; Ps (100:5) 106:1, 107:1, 118:29, 136:1). The author of these words exhorts us to give thanks to God for two reasons: he is good, his mercy endures forever.

At Thanksgiving, we often think about all the things that God provides for which we are thankful. We thank God for our families, our homes, our health, our food, our church, etc. But we should also be thankful for God himself and for his character. God has many attributes or characteristics that we should be thankful for, but today we'll focus on the two that these texts mention: God is good and God is merciful.

I think we would all agree that God is good and merciful, but we may not be able to define those terms very well. We may not understand the implications of these characteristics. "So what?"

Today we'll consider what the Bible means when it says that God is good and merciful.

I. We should thank God because He is good. (טוֹב)

God has revealed certain characteristics/attributes about himself, and one of the most prominent is the fact that he is good.

A. Biblical material

"Good" is a very common word in the OT, used hundreds of times. The Bible asserts God's goodness many times.

1. "He is good" (referring to the Lord) is found 9 x in the Bible.
2. "The Lord is good" – found 7 x in the Bible.
3. "Thou art good" is used a couple of times (Ps 86:5, 119:68)
4. "God is good" is used only once (Ps 73:1)
5. "Good and upright is the Lord" (Ps 25:8)

6. The Bible mentions “thy great goodness” (Ps 145:7), that God is abundant in goodness (Ex 34:6), and that God has bestowed his “great goodness” to his people (Isa 63:7).

B. Definitions

The word “good” has a wide range of meanings, many of which pertain to God.

“Good” can mean beautiful, best, better, bountiful, cheerful, at ease, favorable, fine, glad, gracious, joyful, kind, best, loving, merry, pleasant, precious, prosperous, ready, sweet, wealthy, and well-favored.¹

Goodness, in the Scriptural sense of the term, includes benevolence, love, mercy, and grace.²

1. To simplify things a bit, we’ll define “good” as “worthy of approval.” We often use the word “good” that way.

Illus.: When I’m watching a football game and say, “That was a *good* catch,” I am expressing my approval of the quality of that catch. It was a bit better than average. There was something favorable about it, something worthy of notice.

When we say that God is good, we are affirming that God’s character has positive qualities; there is something beneficial and kind about God; we see him in a favorable light.

We should be thankful that God is good. Imagine if God were all-powerful and all-knowing but not good. Imagine if God were like the Greek or Roman false gods, most of whom were not good at all.

2. When we say that God is good, as in “worthy of approval,” it begs the question, “Worthy of approval *by whom?*”

¹ James Strong, *The New Strong’s Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 427.

- a) Is God good because we evaluate his character and work and determine that he is worthy of *our* approval? Is our approval what makes God good? No, obviously not. God was good before we came along. His goodness is independent; it has nothing to do with our approval. We are not competent to decide by ourselves what is worthy of approval and what is not.

In fact, one of the problems with sinful man is our tendency to approve what is bad, sinful, ugly, and corrupt. What is good to some people is really very bad.

Further, what we define as good depends a lot on opinion and taste. People define “good” according to their own feelings and experiences.

So it’s obvious that we can’t define “good” as meeting with our approval.

- b) Perhaps there is an independent standard of good floating around somewhere, and God is good because he comes up to that standard. God is good because he fits some definition of good. No, that’s not right either.
- c) God sets the standard for what is good/worthy of approval. Ultimately, all the characteristics of God are self-referential. That is, God sets his own standards. God is good because goodness is within his nature. It’s God’s nature to be good. “Good” is what God approves. God defines what is good.
- d) God’s being and actions are perfectly worthy of his own approval. He is therefore the final standard of good. Jesus implies this when he says, “No one is good but God alone” (Luke 18:19).

Quote: The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval. There is no higher standard of goodness than God's own character and his approval of whatever is consistent with that character.³

C. God demonstrates his goodness⁴

1. in all his actions, and particularly, in creation.

Gen. 1:31 *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*

(Ps 119:68 See also 2Ch 30:18; Ne 9:20; Ps 73:1; 143:10; Ac 10:38; Ro 2:4; 1Ti 4:4 See also Ge 1:4,31; Ps 145:9)

2. in his love (Ps 86:5 See also 1Ch 16:34 pp Ps 106:1; Ps 25:7-8; 69:16; 100:5)
3. in his gifts (Jas 1:17 See also Nu 13:27; Dt 8:7; 26:11; Heb 9:11)
4. in his promises (Jos 23:14-15 See also 2Sa 7:28 pp 1Ch 17:26; 1Ki 8:56; Jer 29:10)
5. in his commands (Ps 119:39 See also Ps 19:7; Ro 7:12,16; 12:2)
6. All that God does is worthy of approval.

Ps. 119:68 *You are good and you do good.*

Everything that God makes or does must be good. God's character is good, his purposes are good, his intentions are good, his plans are good—everything about God and everything that God does is good in some way, manner, shape, or form.

App: We must be careful to evaluate things from God's perspective. What God thinks of as good is anything that glorifies himself or that fulfills his purposes.

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 197–198.

⁴ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

E.g., the death of Jesus—good or bad? From God’s point of view, Jesus’ death was a good thing; God’s intent was good. Jesus’ death included many bad things, but the effects of it are very good. God intended it for good.

We must define good how God defines good—worthy of God’s approval. It really doesn’t matter what we think about it. How we might define “good” has no bearing on whether something is good or not.

7. Scripture also tells us that God is the source of all good in the world. God is good to everyone.

Psalm 145:9 *The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.*

Theologians call this aspect of God’s goodness “common grace.” Common grace restrains sin and the effects of sin on the human race. Common grace is what keeps humanity from descending into the quagmire of evil that we would see if the full expression of our fallen nature were allowed to have free reign.⁵

James 1:17 *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, ...*

Whatever good we see in the world can somehow be traced back to God.

8. God does only good things for his children.

Psalm 84:11 *No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.*

- a) Jesus assures us that God will “give good things to those who ask him” (Matt. 7:11), and even chastisement is a proof of his love and is for our good (Heb. 12:10).

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The God Who Loves* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 117.

- b) Paul assures us that “the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom 2:4) and that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28.).
- D. [[That assertion—that all things work together for good—may bring up some difficult questions. Any thinking person has to struggle with reconciling God’s goodness with the terrible conditions we find in the world. Our world is full of evil, pain, abuse, and suffering. How can God be good in light of all the pain and suffering in the world? If God were truly good, wouldn’t he remove or prevent such pain and suffering? If God is good, why does he allow us to suffer? How can we say that such suffering is good?
1. First, the only way that we can even object to pain and suffering is if God exists. Without God, there is no way to say that pain and suffering are bad or problematic.
 2. Second, the Bible tells us where pain and suffering came from originally. Evil originated with the fall of man into sin. Pain and suffering were not within God’s original creation. They are the result of human sin.
 3. Third, because God is good, pain and suffering have meaning and purpose. Trials in life lead to proven character. I.e., God can redeem the suffering that we experience.
 4. Fourth, God himself came into this world to experience firsthand the pain and suffering so much a part of human life. The God-Man suffered pain, humiliation, injustice, and death so that we would not have to. It’s the goodness of God—love—that caused the Son of God to leave the glories of heaven to die on the cross.

5. And finally, we are not alleging that all suffering is good. Much suffering in the world is absolutely evil and wicked, caused by the bad behavior of evil people. We don't deny that. Disasters and death are not good, i.e., not beneficial or pleasant; we don't approve of evil things. We face these things realistically. However, we recognize that God has a purpose in all things, even in suffering. God can use such things for good. E.g., Gen 50:20 "God meant it for good."]]

We live in a troubled world where suffering and pain are common. Sometimes it's hard for us to see the good in things. Sometimes the things that happen to us are not good by any standard definition. But we trust that God can use all things for our good; he's working all things together for our good and for his glory. Our painful experiences do not contradict/invalidate God's goodness. Only in eternity will we fully understand how God worked out all things for our good.

We affirm with the psalmist (Psalm 34:8) *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*

Trans: The proper response to God's goodness is thanksgiving. The goodness of God's character leads him to do good things for all people, and especially for his children. God himself and what he does is "worthy of approval." Ultimately, that approval comes from God himself, but we should add our approval as well. That's what we call thanksgiving—being grateful for God's goodness.

Psalm 135:3 *Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good...*

God's goodness is closely related to several other characteristics of his nature, most notably, that of his mercy.

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.

II. We should thank God because His mercy (חסד) endures forever. God is good because his mercy endures forever.

Here we have two things for which to be thankful—his mercy and the fact that it endures forever.

A. Definitions:

1. Biblical terms for “mercy”

a) The principal OT word for mercy (חַסֵּד) expresses a deep and tender feeling of compassion and pity (lit., “bowels”). We would use the word “heart” to refer to a feeling of pity or compassion.

But the word used in the phrase, “his mercy endureth forever,” is a different word (חֶסֶד), usually referring to God’s faithful, steadfast, covenant love toward his people.

This word does not refer to man’s feeling toward God but of God’s love toward his people. The KJV uses eleven different terms in translating *hesed*, but most often it uses “mercy” or “lovingkindness.”⁶

b) The primary NT word for mercy (ελεος) means “kindness, goodwill.” Another word (οικτιριμος) literally refers to the bowels/viscera/heart. Mercy has the sense of compassion and pity.

2. Someone defined mercy as “God’s goodness toward those in distress.”⁷ God is merciful because he is good.

3. Another definition suggests that God’s mercy is His compassion, pity, kindness, tenderness, and gentleness toward miserable sinners.⁸

⁶ David Booth, *Hesed*, 2010.

⁷ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 197–198.

⁸ Rolland McCune, *McCune’s Systematic Theology*, n.d.

4. Mercy is “the compassionate disposition to forgive an offender or adversary and to help or spare him in his sorry plight.”⁹
5. Mercy is kindness exercised towards the miserable, and includes pity, compassion, forbearance, and gentleness.¹⁰

B. The Biblical Material

1. From the OT

Psalm 25:6 *Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies (חַסְדֶּיךָ) and Your lovingkindnesses (רַחֲמֶיךָ), For they are from of old.*

2. From the NT

Perhaps the best NT example of mercy is the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:37). At the end of the story, when Jesus asked who was the man’s neighbor: *And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”*

Matthew 9:27 *two blind men followed [Jesus], crying out and saying, “Son of David, have mercy on us!”*

Luke 16:24 (The rich man in Hades) *Have mercy on me for I am tormented in this flame.*

2 Corinthians 1:3 *God is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort*

So it’s part of God’s character to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving.

C. Manifestations of God’s Mercy—how does God demonstrate his mercy

1. God demonstrates his mercy in saving lost sinners.

Read Ephesians 2:4-8 *God is rich in mercy*

App: Have you experienced the mercy of God in salvation?

2. God demonstrates his mercy in caring for his creatures.

⁹ *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2, 1440.

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 427.

Psalm 145:9, 15-16 *God's mercies are over all His works* (persons seem to be meant); God provides food for every living thing.

3. God demonstrates his mercy in helping his people.
 - a) In Genesis 24:27, Abraham's servant praises God for showing mercy in providing a wife for Isaac.
 - b) In Genesis 39:21, God showed mercy to Joseph by bringing him into the favor of the warden of the prison.

4. God demonstrates his mercy even in judgment/discipline.

God is a Father to His people. He loves and cherishes His children, but also disciplines and judges. A father should love his child unconditionally, but he should also discipline that child when he goes astray. God's *hesed* does not pander to the whims of people, nor does it overlook sinfulness.¹¹

- a) Isaiah 54:8 *With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," Says the LORD, your Redeemer.*
- b) Micah 7:18 *God ... does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.*

- D. God's mercy "endureth forever."

Ps 136 is an unusual psalm in that the words "His mercy endures forever" is repeated 26 times.

Quote: When it describes God, *hesed* clearly emphasizes an eternal and unshakeable part of God's character and action. While His people may fail, God's *hesed* will not. God's mercy is unconditional and permanent. The fact that *hesed* is frequently used together with *`owlam* (forever) should instill confidence in God's eternality and faithfulness to His *bēriyth* (covenant).¹²

¹¹ David Booth, *Hesed*, n.d.

¹² David Booth, *Hesed*, n.d.

- E. The proper response to God's eternal, steadfast love and mercy is thanksgiving. God saves us in his mercy, cares for us, helps us, and even disciplines us in mercy. We should be thankful that God delights in showing mercy to his wayward people. God demonstrates his goodness by being merciful to us.

This Thanksgiving season, let's focus on God's character more than on the things that he provides for us. We are thankful for all the good things we enjoy. But we should be even more thankful for the fact that God is good and merciful.

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.