

GOODNESS

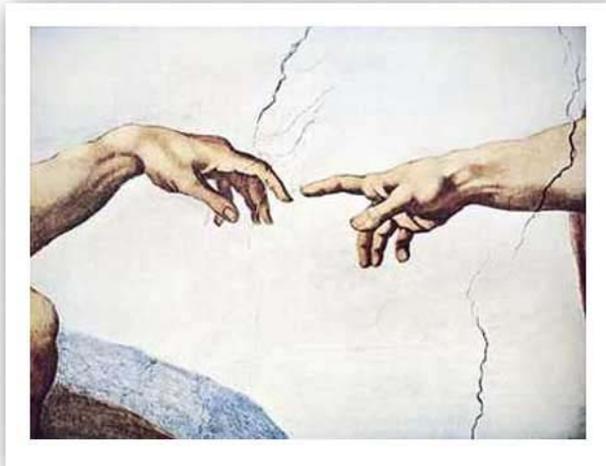


THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS,
GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL . . .

IF WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT,
LET US ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 5: 22-25

O give thanks to the Lord for he is good.



"It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want To Be is a handbook of how to succeed in the world, a pocketbible for the talented and the timid to help make the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible possible. The world's top advertising guru, Paul Arden, offers his wisdom on issues as diverse as problem solving, responding to a brief, communicating, playing your cards right, making mistakes, and creativity, all endeavors that can be applied to modern life?"
(Ad Copy)

**IT'S NOT HOW
GOOD YOU ARE,
IT'S HOW GOOD
YOU WANT TO BE.**

The world's best selling
book by **PAUL ARDEN.**

PHAIDON

GOODNESS

“For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of the light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.”

Ephesians 5: 8-9

The Theme

Given the breadth and popularity of self-help books and programs, one of the messages proclaimed is that people have within them whatever is necessary to attain the “good life.” This “cult of self-help” encourages us to think we are both competent and morally equipped to take care of our own problems and be “good” on our own.

The Word

- ◆ **DAY 1: Read Mark 10: 17-22** (*God alone is good*)
After you read this passage, consult a Bible concordance to locate references to the term *goodness* throughout the Bible.
- ◆ **DAY 2: Read Romans 7: 4-25** (*goodness in relation to sinfulness*)
How exactly does Paul make the connection between what he calls good and human sinfulness?
- ◆ **DAY 3: Read 2 Thessalonians** (*doing good to others*)
What does it mean to “do” good? What do you think of when you hear the phrase, “She’s a good woman” or “He’s a good man”?
- ◆ **DAY 4: Read 2 Peter 1: 3-8** (*goodness in God’s life*)
Spend some time reading the Psalms to see how the word good is used to describe God: see especially Psalm 23:6; 27:13; 31:19; 65:4; 68:10; 145:7.
- ◆ **DAY 5: Read Chapter 7 in *Life On the Vine*** Pay attention to why Kenneson believes the notion of “Christian self-help” is misguided.

The Book

Trying to grasp the character of the sixth fruit of the Spirit poses several difficulties. First, the word that Paul employs in his letter to the Galatians (*agathosyne*) does not appear at all in secular Greek, only appears three additional times in the New Testament and only occurs about a dozen times in the Greek Old Testament. In other words, there are not a lot of places to go to see how the word was commonly used. Second, examining the related words does not necessarily help. . . .

The word good usually points to some excellence (what the Greeks called *arete*) that is befitting the object described. As such, the notion of “good” cannot usually be separated from some idea of that object’s purpose. For example, if I remark that I have a good watch, most will understand me to be commenting on the watch’s worth as an instrument for keeping time. . . .

What do we mean when we say that someone is a good person? As with kindness, we usually mean more than the purely negative judgment—that this person abstains from engaging in evil and malicious acts. We are usually also making an affirmation—that this person does what is “right” or “good.” But as with the good watch, making such a judgment about a good person entails believing something about the purposes of human existence.

(Kenneson, pp. 156–157)

The STUDY GUIDE

Exploring the Roots of GOODNESS

When you hear someone described as a “good woman” or “good man” or “good kid”, what is the definition of the term “good” in those instances? Recall the last time you sang the chorus, “God Is So Good”—perhaps in worship or on a retreat. Or if you have a hymnal, find the hymn and read (or sing) the words. How do you define the term “good” when you use it to describe God?

Recall Kenneson’s observation that when we say someone is a good person, that judgment “entails believing something about the purposes of human existence” (book, p. 157; or in an excerpt from Participant Guide).

- ◆ Where do you get our notions of the purpose of human existence and of what counts for goodness?
- ◆ Look at the book title advertised on the Participant Guide page. What cultural assumptions about the meaning of the word good are reflected in the book title and ad copy?

Examining the Fruit of GOODNESS

Character of the Fruit

Kenneson makes three points to locate the character of goodness within the witness of Scripture (see pages 158–160).

1. The consistent witness of Scripture and the church is that **God alone is unequivocally good.**
2. If human bondage to sin makes us incapable of goodness apart from God, **we are created with the capacity for goodness.**
3. If God alone is good and we are capable of good only by the work of God’s Spirit, then **knowing what counts for good can only be determined under the guidance of God’s Spirit.**

Consider the points one by one using the following questions as a guide.

1. God alone is good (Recall Romans 7:4-25):

- ◆ How does Paul understand the relationship between sin and good?
- ◆ Paul calls the law or the commandment “holy, just, and good.” What about God’s commandment makes it good? And why doesn’t God’s good commandment make us good?
- ◆ Why do you think Paul is so adamant that good does not characterize our human condition?

2. We have the capacity for good (Recall 2 Peter 1:3-8):

- ◆ What does God give that enables us to “support [our] faith with goodness”?
- ◆ What does the claim that “we may become participants of the divine nature” say about our capacity for goodness?
- ◆ What specific actions or behaviors are necessary on our part to participate in God’s goodness?

3. God’s Spirit guides us in knowing what counts for good (Recall 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22 and Colossians 1:9-10):

- ◆ How would you describe the connection between the work of God’s Spirit and our “good work”?
- ◆ What do the various admonitions in Paul’s words to the Thessalonians have in common?
- ◆ In light of the world we live in today, and in spite of our world’s definitions of good, what does it mean to “hold fast to what is good”?

Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit

Kenneson highlights three perceptions that contribute to our confusion about the real nature of “goodness.” Reflect on each one below.

(1) General cultural conviction: good equals decent and law-abiding.

Recall a time, in childhood perhaps, when you learned that being distinguished from your peers as “goody-goody” made you an object of scorn. Or recall an occasion when you engaged in “less than good” behavior simply because you didn’t want to appear to others as “too good.”

- ◆ What is the downside to “goodness” defined primarily as decent or law-abiding?

(2) Storytelling in the media: goodness is little more than the absence of badness.

Identify some contemporary television or film depictions of “good guys” and “bad guys” in which neither group is clearly identifiable from the other (Example: spaghetti westerns featuring Clint Eastwood).

- ◆ How do the stories television and film tell shape our understandings of goodness? What are the consequences of that?

(3) The “self-help” movement: goodness is cultivating one’s own potentialities.

What was the last “self-help” book you read or program you used? What motivates our desires and efforts to “improve” ourselves and where do those motivations come from?

- ◆ What effect does a self-help way of thinking have on a person’s view of sin? on the church’s capacity to talk about sin?

Bearing the Fruit of GOODNESS in the World

Cultivating the Fruit

Kenneson urges us to see goodness, along with the other fruits of the Spirit, as other-directed in two ways: (1) the character and ultimate story of goodness must be drawn from God who alone is good, and (2) our reflection of God's goodness is to be aimed at drawing others to God. Discuss what impact the church might have in the world if its people embodied goodness as Kenneson suggests.

Consider this statement from page 174: *“Confession, preaching, imitation. These are three important activities we need to recover if God is going to cultivate goodness in the life of the church.”* Then reflect on these suggestions:

- ◆ Evaluate your church's practice of corporate confession. Reflect on your own practice—or avoidance—of confession, not simply to God but also to another Christian.
 - How might a renewed emphasis on confession, or naming our sin together, help a congregation to bear the fruit of goodness?

- ◆ Consider making the effort in the coming weeks, following worship, to ask these questions of one another:
 - What word of God have we heard?
 - What should our response as a congregation be to that word?

- ◆ Kenneson reminds us that Paul repeatedly invited his fellow Christians to imitate him.
 - What challenges and opportunity are inherent in trying to imitate another Christian, or being the object of another's imitation particularly in terms of cultivating goodness?
 - Whom would you choose to “hang out” with in order to learn how to bear the fruit of goodness?
 - What young Christian would you consider inviting to “hang out” with you for a while on your faith journey?