



Celebrating God's Goodness

Have you ever got in from a walk in the countryside only to realise you spent most of the time looking down at your feet - because you were trying to make sure you walked safely and didn't fall foul of anything on the way? I have, many times. I know there are some for whom walking is such a challenge there is no other way to get out and about; nevertheless there are many others, like me, who are missing out on so much beauty and fun because we are so consumed with just completing the journey. I am having to train myself to look up, enjoy the scenery and take care of myself at one and the same time.

I suspect this is similar to how many of us need to re-train our understanding of God, how He wants us to enjoy Him and journey through life well and safely. In Romans 12 Paul encourages us to "*... be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" In other words our first thoughts about God may prove to be inadequate; and if they are we end up missing so much that is good about Him and from Him. For those of us blessed with a high IQ and trained to a very high level, through the fruit of an excellent education, it can be quite a challenge to embrace a need to think again.

For example: I remember, maybe 20 years ago, a bishop starting a meeting I was in with a responsive declaration. He said "God is good!" The response he looked for was: "All the time." Then he came back: "All the time."; and we were expected to shout out: "God is good!"

At first I thought it was a bit childish but as there were many children and teenagers present it felt the right thing to go along with the congregational mood. However it was an experience I never forgot. As weeks went by I realised here was a sentiment or belief that I hadn't embraced deep-down - this bishop had got under the surface, rattled my cage and set me thinking about what I really thought about who God is and how He acts towards us.

I came to realise I was holding onto a view of God that made Him capricious - sometimes good, often confusing and from time-to-time (at best) hard to call. I also had to acknowledge much of what I was believing about God was contrary to what the Bible declares about Him. Having been a Christian at that point for almost 30 years, also feeling reasonably well qualified theologically, it was a sobering moment.

In Psalm 119v105 we read: "*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*" On the one hand it is a typical piece of Hebraic poetry saying the same thing twice; on the other it suggests God's word both shows us where we stand and how we are to move

forward in safety. To start to see how I was playing fast and loose with what God is saying to us in the Bible brought me to a crossroads - either I could ditch the lot or I had to reshape my attentiveness to what He says. I chose the latter.

Here is how the rubber hits the road. Like many people I have had experiences I thought were tough and even unfair. (I know many would think I have had a charmed life and others have had much more to contend with.) Prior to my crossroads moment I see now I was blaming God for some of the things that had happened and trying to use the Bible to reinforce my mistake!

In Romans 8v28 we read: "*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.*" Paul is saying God is working in me through all things; whilst NOT saying God is responsible for all things that have or are happening to me. The difference may seem small but I have begun to discover it is huge and with far-reaching consequences. As a result I really do think, believe and can shout confidently now: "God is good all the time!" Yet I do so knowing that sometimes, in some situations I have to look for Him and pursue what is good about Him whilst not blaming Him for certain struggles and predicaments, especially ones I don't yet understand why they are with me!

One lesson I have to revisit regularly is that anxiety about whether I will have enough of whatever I need is answered by what we know around us - God keeps on proving His goodness and we can learn from nature how unfailingly good He is (Matthew 6v13-34).

This tells me His goodness has invaded our lives so generously and repeatedly the only proper response is to become generous like Him, on a daily basis. Experience tells me that very often our expressions of generosity are conditional and if that is so then we still need more transformation of how we think.

The reason for the reformation of what I think and do is simple - the Christian good news is God has shown His love and continues to manifest it unconditionally. Jesus said so (John 3v16) and his followers were quick to share that message (Romans 5v6-8).

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