

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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Carrie Gleeson
“Is God Really Good?”
Genesis 3**

Good morning, everyone! I am Carrie Gleeson and I have the privilege of working with our students here at CPC in Student Ministries. I love our students. They are good people. I had a junior in high school text me last night just before the 5:15 service to tell me she was praying for me as I was about to get up and speak. Those are the kinds of people our students are.

We are in this series on asking questions. These are questions you wrote in and asked us as a staff to wrestle with. When I was little, I was that annoying question-asker and so I love this. Every single time my parents would say we were going to do something, I would ask why? “We are going to go to Target.” Why? “Because we need things, Carrie.” Why? “Because we ran out of things.” Why? That question constantly followed me when I was a child. Along the way my parents finally just stopped listening to me, which was fine. This morning, we get to tackle the question, is God really good? Let’s pray as we dive in.

God, we pray that You would meet us here. We pray that You would show us a little bit more of Your character so we can understand a little bit more of how You ask us to live and how You ask us to follow You. We pray, Father, that Your voice would be the loudest voice in the room. In Your Name, we pray. Amen.

So, is God really good? How the question struck me was, is He really good *to me*? Is He really good *for me*? On a personal level down to the very bottom of my soul, do I believe that God is good all the time? Do I believe that all the time, God is good? And do I rest in that? Do I live in that? When I was growing up, I had a mom and a dad and a little sister though she’s not so little anymore. We had a golden retriever. We lived in a nice white house in the suburbs. We had a minivan. Our lives looked very normal, quote-unquote, “normal”. Our lives looked safe. They looked secure. It looked plentiful. It was good until I turned 13. From ages 13 to 23 or 24 years old, that nice picture was just on the outside. It was just what people thought because between the ages of 13 and 22, my family suffered a decade-long time of a lot of questioning and sorrow and despair. I had three grandparents growing up. My mom’s father passed away before I was born so I had three grandparents, and when I was between 13 and 14 years old, all three of my grandparents died, two of them unexpectedly. Also, during high school, my sister’s best friend passed away unexpectedly. My parents’ marriage was in shambles. My dad had lost his business. There was so much going on.

I can remember being a junior or senior in high school. I had gone through Commitment Class here and accepted Christ, and I was trying to figure out what it looked like to follow Jesus, what it looked like to trust Him. I can remember one night standing out on our front porch and yelling at God. I said, “If You are good, if You are here, if You truly are who You say You are, You are

not doing a very good job.” I was semi-audacious as a child. But I remember having those feelings, that this can’t be how it’s supposed to be. “I can’t be asking You for things in prayer and then having the exact opposite happen. I can’t be asking You to help my family and then having something else go wrong.”

How do you see God’s goodness? Do you see God as an aloof or angry God? Do you see Him as a personal God, but maybe not always as personal as maybe you need Him to be? Do you trust in His goodness no matter what? **I think that our perspective of God’s goodness falls into two different categories. One, that we view God and His goodness as transactional or two, we view it as transformational.** When we view God’s goodness as transactional, we think, if God is good, then If God is good, then my husband will find a job. If God is good, then my friend won’t have cancer. If God is good, then I will get into the school I want. I will make the team that I want to make. If God is good, then

When we look at God’s goodness from a transactional perspective, God’s goodness is based on my circumstance. God’s goodness is based on my behavior. God’s goodness is based on something He is withholding from me that He owes me. Our tendency to view God’s goodness as a transaction started a long time ago in a garden with a woman. We are going to read from Genesis 3 this morning and I am going to read out of The Voice.

¹ Of all the wild creatures the Eternal God had created, the serpent was the craftiest.

Serpent (*to the woman*): Is it true that God has forbidden you to eat *fruits* from the trees of the garden?

Eve: ² *No, serpent. God said we are free to eat the fruit from the trees in the garden.* ³ *We are granted access to any variety and all amounts of fruit with one exception: the fruit from the tree found in the center of the garden. God instructed us not to eat or touch the fruit of that tree or we would die.*

Serpent: ⁴ *Die? No, you’ll not die. God is playing games with you.* ⁵ *The truth is that God knows the day you eat the fruit from that tree you will awaken something powerful in you and become like Him: possessing knowledge of both good and evil.*

⁶ *The woman approached the tree, eyed its fruit, and coveted its mouth-watering, wisdom-granting beauty. She plucked a fruit from the tree and ate. She then offered the fruit to her husband who was close by, and he ate as well* ⁷ *Suddenly their eyes were opened to a reality previously unknown. For the first time, they sensed their vulnerability and rushed to hide their naked bodies, stitching fig leaves into crude loincloths.* ⁸ *Then they heard the sound of the Eternal God walking in the cool misting shadows of the garden. The man and his wife took cover among the trees and hid from the Eternal God.*

Satan says to the woman, “He’s holding out on you. You know that He has something better for you. Why don’t you follow me? Why don’t you believe me? He’s not giving you what you deserve.” And in that moment, Eve chose to believe that and say, “Yes, He *is* holding out on me. There is more that He is not giving me and I want it.” And in that moment, God’s goodness was linked to a transaction. Satan doesn’t stop there. All throughout Scripture, you can see him eyeing and attacking people and tempting them. Then those people choose to believe Satan, to follow him, and they viewed God’s goodness as a transaction, they viewed God’s goodness as something they were owed.

In the Book of Ruth, we see Naomi coming back from living in a foreign land. She had lost her husband. She had lost her children. She had lost all of her possessions and upon returning to her homeland, she said,

²⁰ “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”
[Ruth 1:20-21]

“He’s held out on me. He’s done this to me.” Satan continues this way and Elijah falls. All the way to Jesus, Satan continues this. Jesus was tempted in every way. He was in the desert for 40 days, alone, desperate, starving, and Satan sees an opportunity and attacks. N. T. Wright says that the first two temptations play on the very strength Jesus had just received when He was baptized when God came out and said,

²² . . . “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” [Luke 3:22]

and Jesus started His public ministry. “Very well,” whispers the demonic voice. “If You really are God’s Son, surely He can’t want You to be hungry when You have the power to get food for Yourself. Surely You want people to see who You are. Why don’t You do something really spectacular? Why not *not* follow God’s plan? Why not do it right now?” And then dropping all apparent logic in the third temptation, the enemy comes out boldly and says, “Just forget Your Heavenly Father. Just worship me. I’ll give You power *now*. I’ll give You relief *now* like no one else has ever had.”

If God is good, then do you view God’s goodness as a transaction? Is God’s goodness based on your circumstance? Is it based on what’s happening in the world? Do you often question God’s goodness when there’s evil in the world? We’re constantly at war with the temptation to define God’s goodness in earthly terms or with a human equation. So what is the alternative? There has to be an alternative, right? I believe that it’s found in, **God’s goodness comes first and, therefore, it is transformational.** God’s goodness is a part of His character. It’s a part of His nature. It’s not based on me. Grace isn’t based on me. Goodness isn’t based on me. It is based on Him and who He is, and because of that, it becomes transformational. I don’t think there is a better example in Scripture of how God’s goodness is played out than through Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine, but because He was fully human, He can completely identify with our temptations, with our suffering, with our confusion and our pain. When the weight of the world was upon His shoulders, He asked for another way. He asked for a different path and then as He was hanging on the cross, He said, “Where did You go? I can’t hear You anymore. Where are You?” But He kept going. He kept walking forward to the tomb and then to heaven. The cross of Jesus Christ is our pathway to transformation, to breaking the chains of transaction. Why on earth would a mean God or an absent God or a vindictive or malicious God ever walk through so much pain to save us? I don’t think He would. If we believe in the cross, and we believe in the resurrection and what we celebrated two weeks ago, then we have to believe in the goodness of God. I know that it doesn’t always make our circumstances easier, it doesn’t make the confusion go away, but because Jesus was in it with us, we can believe in His goodness. Tim Keller says that because Jesus went into the ultimate life furnace,

the ultimate horrible circumstance, you can be assured that He is with you in your personal furnace. He wouldn't have done that for you if He wasn't going to be in it with you.

That truth has the power to transform us. It has the power to sit with us in the pain, in the darkness, in the questioning, in the confusion. Because faith isn't based on our feelings, faith means taking steps forward to believe, to live out, to trust in the goodness of God, sometimes in spite of our feelings. The question that I so often have to ask myself is, if I never get what I want, if desires I have go unmet, would I still be willing to trust Him and would I still believe in His goodness? If I look back to the life my family had in those ten years and if we hadn't received healing—although we did...God moved in powerful ways in the midst of that decade-long process—but what if that healing had never come? Would I still be willing to trust Him and would I still believe in His goodness?

I got a call recently from a family member telling me that another one of my family members was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She is in her mid-twenties and she is not married. A few months earlier, I had found out that a friend of mine, closer to my age and also not married, needed to have a hysterectomy. I remember calling my best friend on the phone and before she even said *hello*, I knew she had picked up, I said, "I'm telling you, I would leave Him. I promise you, if something like this happens to me, I'd probably walk away from God." I hadn't even told her what was wrong. But on the other end of the phone, she said, "No you wouldn't, Carrie, but let's talk about this. And then when you get off the phone with me, I want you to go and talk with God about this because you wouldn't walk away from Him."

That was just two months ago when I sat there and said, "I think this would be my breaking point, Lord. I don't know if I could trust You if this were happening to me." And so I wonder what it is for you, for us. Where is it that maybe you would get to the breaking point and say, "No more, I can't go anymore"? And then are you willing to take a look at your response and ask yourself if you are viewing God's goodness as a transaction or a transformation?

It's not always easy and it doesn't mean that the questions go away. It means that in the questions within what we are going through, we have the opportunity to be transformed by the love of a God and the grace of a God who would go to a cross for us. He's in it with us and His goodness comes first. Believing in God's goodness in the midst of the pain, in the midst of the suffering is about trust. Trusting and saying, "I will be in this with You. I won't walk away from you, God, because I know that Your goodness is still present because Your goodness is based on Your character. It is not based on my circumstance and I will trust who You say You are."

Are you able to connect with Jesus in that way? How are you able to connect with Jesus in that way? Are you willing to step out in faith and say, "Yes, I believe in the goodness of God. I believe that God really is good no matter my circumstances." Let's pray.

God, You are good, but sometimes that is really hard for us to say. We doubt and we walk through things that push us so far that we don't think we can get back. God, help us to see You. Help us to know that You are good. Help us to believe that Your goodness is transformational and that it can transform us even if the questions and the suffering and the pain still linger. Help us believe in who You are. Help us follow You with trust that is unending. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.