

# Learning From Jesus

## Week 1

### His Goodness and His Greatness

#### Key Verse

*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.*

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

1 John 1:3-5 (NIV)

#### Reflections on God's Goodness

Think about what you would say if someone came to you and asked you to tell them, in short form, the message that Jesus brought to earth. Perhaps you would begin to talk about how God loves us... or about Christ's wonderful sacrifice for our sins... or about the hope of eternity... But honestly, would you ever sum it up the way John did in 1 John 1.5?

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

I wouldn't. And the fact that John did has probed my thoughts for the past year or two. Why did he summarize Jesus' teaching this way? What does he mean by this summary?

The statement that God is light immediately brings to mind God's glory, God's holiness and God's goodness. We think of frequent biblical imagery of light (goodness) and darkness (evil), and so we tend to think when John says that God is light that John is referring to his moral purity. And he is (see the following verses in 1 John 1), but he is also referring to God's unfailing kindness, care, and compassion. That also is part of his goodness.

Think of Jesus' teaching that God is our Father, that he sends his rain on the good and the bad alike (Matthew 5.43-48), that he cares for us and will provide for our needs (Matt 6.25-34), and that our Father gives good gifts to those who

ask him (Matt 7.7-11). This is part of what John means when he says 'in him there is no darkness at all'

Remember the biblical story of this world's creation... God created everything there is by speaking it into existence...

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

It was very good because God is very good. I wonder if you believe in the goodness of God and the goodness of life.

You might want to spend some time reading how C.S. Lewis imagines the birth of Narnia... (Readings from the Magician's Nephew..., pp 116-164)

Do you believe that God is good and that he has made this world good and your life good? That...

- God is your Father and he is good. All the way through.
- This world is your Father's house. It is good.
- My life is my Father's gift. It is good.
- That even with all my challenges, difficulties, failures and opportunities... even with the reality of evil, it is good to be me, good to be living my life.

St. Clare made this prayer her own, and said it was the daily breath of a disciple of Jesus:

*'Lord God, blessed be thou for having created me!'*

*"We will never have the easy, unhesitating love of God...unless we are absolutely sure that it is good for us to be, and to be who we are."*(Dallas Willard)

Let me ask you again, do you believe that God is good and that he has made this world good and your life good? Can you confess with David that...

*The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.*

Ps 16:6 (ESV)

Look again at our verse from 1 John...

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.*

1 John 1:5 (RSV)

This is the message of Jesus' Kingdom, that God is good, that there is no darkness, no evil, no mean streak in him. His universe is good. My life is a good gift. I can trust him to manage my world.

But there is something deep within us that is ill at ease with God's goodness. There is a default mode of the human heart that simply, to be honest, does not believe God is good. Because of this, our capacity to trust him is crippled, cautious, and always suspicious. This default attitude of our hearts is not eradicated by our conversion; it remains, haunting our life of faith with suspicious whispers, "You can't really trust him, not all the way... be careful here, he is going to take you to a hard place and abandon you..." Have you ever had thoughts like that? Do you think God has a mean streak?

*"When 'moral failures' of well-known Christians...are examined, they always turn out to be based on the idea that God has required them to serve in such a way that they themselves must 'take care of their own needs' rather than being richly provided for by God." (Divine Conspiracy 338)*

If you believe that, you will not trust God to manage this world – or manage your life. You will try to take hold of the world and make it serve you.

In Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when Susan hears for the first time that Aslan is a lion, she is afraid to see him. *"Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."* Mrs Beaver responds... *"Safe? Who said anything about being safe?"* Mr Beaver would later explain that Aslan is *"not a tame lion"*. *"But he is good."* It is the discovery of Aslan's goodness that settles Susan's heart.

When you look hard at our failures in life, I think underneath them is a fear that God is not good, then he cannot be trusted to manage my life, that he has required too much of us, and that we must take things into our own hands and live our lives from our own resources. And when we do, we fail. It is the discovery of God's goodness that settles our hearts.

The Gospel of God's Kingdom sits squarely on the deeply rooted truth of God's goodness, which is why it is called "Good News". Because God has shown himself to be good, supremely in the life, death and resurrection of his Son, we can trust him, without reservation, in all he directs us to do. This is the message of the Kingdom that gives us assurance that his world is 'a perfectly safe place for us to be,' (DW) and that in Jesus, we are under a perfect love that eliminates all fear (1 John 4.18). We do not have to hold back, We do not have to 'hedge our bets.' We do not have to keep one eye on the escape hatch. 'God is good', we say, 'all the time'. Upon that confidence, we flourish and live.

**Reflection Question: Summarize the key ideas in the Reflection in your own words.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **Bible Study: God's Goodness**

**1. Look up the following verses, and summarize them in the spaces below.**

Reference Mark 10:18

---

Reference Psalm 145:8-9

---

Reference Exodus 33:18-19; 34:5-9

---

Reference Gen 1:31

---

Reference 2 Chron 5:13

---

Reference Psa 106.1; 107.1

---

**2. How would you summarize God's goodness?**

---

---

**3. Is there a part of you that does not believe God is good? What effect does that have on your trust in God?**

---

---

**4. What has been the most help to you these weeks in seeing God's goodness with new eyes?**

---

---

---

---

## Spiritual Tool for the Week

The following exercise is to be done this week. Record your experiences in the spaces below.

### Counting Your Blessings One By One

Look at Psalm 136. It is a great psalm of praise to God for his goodness (vs 1) and his steadfast love and mercy. From themes of creation (vv 4-9) to redemption (vv 10-24) to daily provision (vs 25), praise rings out, always with the rejoinder "his steadfast love endures forever".

Write your own psalm over the next days, adding new lines every day, thanking God in specific detail for his goodness and steadfast love to you. Take the time to be specific, and to write it down. Pair each thanksgiving with a verse of your own creation about God's mercy and goodness to you as the psalm does, such as "your mercy to me overflows", or "all the time you are good". Pray it aloud every day.

### Reflections on your experience

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

---

---

---

## Readings for Nov 12th

Read "Embracing...", Chapters 1-6 and answer the following questions on chapters 1-3.

**1. Read the quote by Wm Blake (pg 1) and Ephesians 3.18-19 (pg 5). Do you agree with Blake?**

---

---

---

**2. Look at Jim's comment (p 18, para 3) that "For most of my Christian life I related to God on the basis of what I did for him," and (p. 19) "now I am only impressed with Christ's commitment to me." Consider his example of the swivel chair on p. 21. Is this shift of focus easy for you?**

---

---

---

**3. Explain St Francis' comment (p. 24) and Jim's comment (p.26) that "we are who God says we are". See also pp. 37-38. How does this shape your sense of identity?**

---

---

---

**4. Where does Jim say shame comes from (pp. 27-28) and how do we normally deal with it (p. 28)? How does realism (pp 34-35) and God's gracious voice (pp. 38-39) remove the fear?**

---

---

---

**5. What does Jim mean by 'we revere each other too little (pp. 50-51)?'**

---

---

---

**6. Jim says, "I can only give as I have received, and the measure of love I receive is in direct proportion to how much I desire to... give it away." Do you agree?**

---

---

---