

Attributes of God (Series 2): The Goodness of God

by A.W. Tozer

God's goodness is a fundamental aspect of His nature, characterized by kindness, favor, mercy, and good-heartedness.

Duration: 47:14

Scripture: Psalm 23:6, Psalm 34:8, Psalm 36:7, Psalm 119:68, Psalm 139:17-18

Topics: "Attributes of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the unchanging truth that God is good, regardless of the evil and darkness present in the world. He encourages listeners to experience God's goodness for themselves by seeking Him and taking advantage of His open door. The preacher shares his own personal testimony of how God's grace and forgiveness have transformed his life, highlighting that it is God's goodness, not our own goodness, that brings about positive change. The sermon concludes with a reminder that God's goodness is a factual truth, just like the multiplication table, and it remains constant throughout our lives.

Transcript

Let's have a moment of prayer, please. O God, we only can cry unto Thee, who is sufficient for these things? Lord, our minds are dull, our tongue stiff and without eloquence, our hearts cold. O God, we would speak worthily, and we would hear worthily.

For Christ's sake, enable us to do both. We have no merits, no gifts, nothing. We are before Thee, O Lord, as little children, and we pray Thee, speak to us as to children.

O God, through Thy Holy Son, Jesus Christ, it's written that nobody knows the Father save the Son, and only they to whom the Son will reveal Him. Reveal Thyself through the Son to us tonight, that we may have such an elevation of faith, that we may go out from here believing as we've never done before, with strong foundation for our beliefs. Open Thy word to us, open our eyes, that we may behold wonderful things out of Thy law.

Open our hearts, bring our wills into line with the truth. For Christ's sake, save us from routine and ritual and the perfunctory speaking or hearing of holy words. These words will be judged by them someday.

Help us now, we pray to Christ our Lord. Amen. I am to speak tonight on the goodness of God, and I'll read, as has been my custom, a few verses which I've typed out to say, flipping over from page to page, and tell you where they are.

Psalms 119, verse 68. Thou art good, and doest good. Isaiah 63.

I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us. And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. Psalms 139, 17 and 18.

How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I awake, I am still with thee. Deuteronomy 39.

For the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers. Psalm 36, 7. How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wing. Psalm 34, 8. O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. The words of our Lord in Matthew 7. If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him. Now I am to speak on God being good.

And in conformity with my previous sermons, I say that this goodness of God is something which God by revelation has declared to be true of himself. It is therefore an attribute. And it can be unequivocally asserted concerning God, God is good.

Now when we say that God is good, as we've read it here tonight, and I've only read a few texts out of many scores and hundreds, when we say that God is good, we do not mean to say that God is righteous or holy. God is both righteous and holy, but that's not what we're talking about tonight. And to say that God is good, and that good doesn't mean righteous and holy, should not be interpreted as coming down lightly on the righteousness and holiness of God.

I must speak on the holiness of God before I'm finished, and on the justice of God. But the holiness of God is not before us tonight. Neither is the righteousness of God, the goodness of God in the sense of being righteous.

When we talk about the goodness of God, O God, thou art good and doest good, we have in mind something else altogether. For here is what the Spirit is saying. He is saying that God is kind, and favorable, and merciful, and goodhearted, and that God is of good will.

You'll remember when Moses said to God, O God, show me thy glory. God said, All right, I'll show you my glory. I will make all my goodness pass before thee.

In other words, the goodness of God is the glory of God. And the Lord proclaimed and said, The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious. Exodus 34.

So that the goodness of God is how God is by nature. It means that God is a God of good will, that there is no cynicism in God. That is, God is not sensitive, and God is not resentful, and God is not sulky.

There are sulky saints. I have met some of them. And if they can't have their way, they're sulky.

And there are cynical people of God. And I've been accused of being a cynic in my time. Now, one fellow heard me preach, and he went out, and as he left the building, he said, A clinic conducted by a cynic.

But I don't know whether he was just being a poet or whether he ever writes. But there's no cynicism in God, and God is good-hearted and friendly. Now, I'd like to have this understood.

I have tried to show something of the greatness, the magnitude, the altitude, the transcendence, the ineffability of the great God Almighty. And I believe that until we see how infinitely elevated God is in his kind of life and in his being, we will not be the kind of Christians we should be. And we'll certainly not have the kind of conviction for sin there ought to be on sinners.

But along with God's ineffable greatness, God is also good-hearted and friendly. Now, God is open and frank and candid. And when I am saying these things to you, I am saying only what every Hebrew scholar knows is within the framework of the Hebrew words that are translated good.

God is benevolent. And yet I wonder whether I ought to say that God is benevolent, because when I say that God is benevolent, I am only saying and using Latin words to say what I said before and used Anglo-Saxon words. The dictionary is like that, though.

You go to the dictionary and there will be one word, benevolent, and it will say good-hearted. And then you go to good-hearted and it will say benevolent. It's just giving you, just saying it a different way, coming from a different language is all.

And God is cordial. There is a cordiality. I had a dear friend.

He's still my dear friend, but he wrote me a very severe letter because I signed my letter cordially yours. He said cordiality ought not to exist between Christians. He said there's something finer than cordiality.

And I wrote him back and I said, when I sign my letter cordially yours, it's just a way for me to get stopped. Don't pay any attention to it. I said, when you write a letter and say dear Mrs. Brown, you're not emphasizing the word dear.

You're not making love to Mrs. Brown. It's just a way to get started. And that was about the end of that with him.

But when we say that God is cordial, we mean exactly what we say, that there's a cordiality and a graciousness about God. And then when we say that God is good, it's God's nature to be good like that. It's God's nature to wish for you every good thing and to will for you every good thing in time and in eternity.

That is the way God is. Now let's get that straight. God isn't moody and changeable, but he is like that.

He was like that. He will be like that. He always is like that.

And God wills not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. God wills that we should know the protection of the sacred wing of Jesus Christ the Lord. He wills that heaven should be our home and not hell.

He wills that we should prosper. He does not look upon our tears except with tears in his own heart. Think not thou canst sigh a sigh and thy maker is not by.

Think not thou canst weep a tear and thy maker is not near. Never, never can it be, never, never can it be, so wrote William Blake. God is patient.

It says in one place in the Old Testament that God makes all our bed in our sickness. I don't know about you, but I have to preach out of my own heart and there's a lot of me gets into it and I suppose it can't be any other way. But I'll say about this about myself that I'm no good when I'm sick.

I don't know about you. I've heard about the saints that they got sanctified when they were sick. But when I get sick, I just get bored.

I can't pray, I can't think, I can't write, I can't do anything. I just have to lie there and suffer. And sickness has never done me any good up to now.

Now there are people, even David said, before I was sick I went astray, but now I have returned unto the Lord. So David evidently, when he was sick, he had the kind of sickness that allowed him to pray, but I never get that kind. I get the kind that just stops me up and all the wheels come to a stop until I get out of bed.

Since I've been in Canada, I haven't had colds. I used to have colds two or three times a year and go to bed for three or four days. Just lie there and wait it out, nothing to do but wait it out.

I never got anywhere much that way, but it's true that even when your mind has come to a stop and you're not getting anywhere, God is still good and God still loves you and God is still patient towards you. Do you ever look into the face of a little child with red flaming cheeks and two bright eyes, that is, eyes that are too bright, fever, running a fever, 103 or 104, and now that little thing was half out. It was in a state of half coma so that it wasn't anywhere, but it didn't change you any.

In fact, it only stirred the love within you. You always suffer more when your children suffer than when you suffer yourself. There isn't a man or woman, a normal man or woman in this city, but what would rather be ill than to have his child ill? Would rather suffer than to have his child suffer? So it is with God.

God makes all our bed in our sickness, so says the Scripture. When you're sick, God makes your bed. Now, he stands beside your bed.

This old man says, You think not thou canst weep a tear, and thy Maker is not near. And God is like that all the time, that because it is God's nature, it is just because it is the nature of light to shine and is the nature of heat to be hot and the nature of water to be wet and the nature of a bird to sing and fly, it is the nature of God to be good and feel good and gracious and bountiful and cheerful and gracious toward his people. And not only is this eternal, God was always like that, but it is immutable, he will always be like that.

You see, that's why it's so important that we know what kind of God God is, that we can weave the attributes of God together and we can see what a mighty foundation is laid there. That God is good now, and God is immutable, and God will always be good. And you never need to worry about God having a change of mind.

God does not blow hot and cold, but he is one thing. And when he is one thing, one of the things he is, is good. And then it is a perfect goodness.

There is no imperfection there, but a perfect goodness. There can be no improvement. In other words, God couldn't feel any kinder toward you than he does.

And he never has felt any kinder toward anybody than he feels toward you now. And he never will feel any kinder toward anybody than he feels toward you now. But you say, you don't know me.

No, I don't know you, but I dimly and faintly know him, and I know what the scripture says about him. And since God is eternal and immutable and perfect, then there can be no improvement in the kindness of God. Sometimes when people get old, they get sour.

I have prayed that God would not allow me to live to become a sour old man. I have met sour old men, sour old women. They are sulky and sour and tart-tongued, and you want to stay away from them, and because you stay away from them, that makes them tarter-tongued than ever.

And when anybody comes within tongue-lashing distance of them, they suffer, and then they are mad because they stay away. People get like that. Now, I don't know why.

I remember Dr. H.M. Schumann one time was lying in bed in my home, lying on top of the bed resting one afternoon, and I wandered in. I shouldn't have, I suppose. And I said, Dr. Schumann, I'm bothered about something.

I was a young preacher then. I said, I have noticed so many old Christians that when they get old and they ought to get sweet and ripe and fruity and gracious, they get bitter and sour and critical. Why? He didn't answer.

He didn't have any answer. He usually had the answer, but he didn't have any answer for that one. But people usually, when they get old, they either get tart-tongued and critical and harsh, or else they get tender and loving and kind.

I've met some of the sweetest old Christians that ever lived in this world. I've met some Christians and know some Christians that if you could just take all the rest of us and wipe the slate of the world clean and populate the world with people like that, there would be no reason to have any heaven up there because there would be one down here. Just full of loving kindness, like my dear old friend Tom Harer, the Irish plumber that I often speak about.

The whole world was filled with men like Tom who would be no reason why any policeman, every cop could go home and go to bed tonight. He could just go home and go to bed and put his gun away. And all the contracts and all the lawyers would have to get a job doing something else.

And there wouldn't be any reason for any cop or any soldier or any air flyer with these bombs. The whole world would be all right because it would be populated with the men of goodwill. God is a God of goodwill.

And God is infinitely kind. And the love and kindness he feels toward you are infinite. That is, I mean that they are boundless.

Now for the sake of the students who may be listening to me, particularly students who may be in universities where they blame us for what they call anthropomorphism. You ever hear one like that before? Anthropomorphism. Well, now that is a long word and for a few of you who might not know what it means, you know anthropos is the Greek word meaning a man.

And anthropomorphism means that I have made God in my image, in the image of a man, and that all I do is to take the best qualities in a man and project them upward and I've got God. If we like to see a kind man, well, we say, all right, then that God up there must be kind and we project that kindness out of the heart of the man up to God and say, God is kind and he's infinitely kind and we preach about it. They say, that's what you are, you're anthropomorphic.

Well, I've been called worse ones than that, but no bigger ones than that, just worse ones. So now let me explain that a little bit for any of you who may be studying and somebody might hurl at you the charge of anthropomorphism and say that you're anthropomorphic. Well, what they say is this, that you're making God in your image, that God isn't like that at all, that our concept of the Heavenly Father is only a manufactured one and isn't like that at all.

Well, now to answer that, let me tell you this, that the man who says that, that God isn't the way we say he is, the way the Bible says he is, he's got to know what kind of God God is and what God is like. Then he must compare the God whom he knows with the God we say God is and then criticize us. He says, in effect, now I know that God isn't the way you say he is and we answer, all right, how did you find it out? You could only find it out by discovery or revelation.

When did you discover God so that you can tell us what kind of God God is? And if you didn't discover him, then you had a revelation. Will you please tell us where the revelation is? What is the revelation? It presumes that the critic knows something about God that we don't know, that the Bible doesn't know, that prophets and apostles did not know, that Jesus our Lord did not know, that church fathers and martyrs and reformers did not know, and that they know that we're old-fashioned obscurantists. Now, of course, obscurantism is another word that they hook on to you.

They say he's an anthropomorphic obscurantist. Now, if you thought that you were just a Canadian, well, just let me tell you that as a believer in the gospel, you're an anthropomorphic obscurantist. You're all of that.

Obscurantist means you cover things up and keep them obscure. But we don't believe that. We believe that sinners cover things up and keep them obscure, and that the children of God do all things in the light.

The obscurantist is the fellow right now who's sitting somewhere drawing up a dirty contract, a crooked contract, to cheat a widow out of a property. There's your obscure fellow. He's hiding in the darkness.

But the children of the light come out into the light. They're the illuminata, if I might coin a word or use one that doesn't mean what you've used it to mean. Now, I'd like to know if this man is supposed to know.

And when I say God is love, they say, that's what you'd like to have God like. And because you like to see love in people, you like to see love in God. The whole thing is nonsense to me, my brothers and sisters.

If God made man in his image, isn't it reasonable to believe that the best things in a man would be the nearest to what God is? If you'd like to see a mother showing tenderness over her baby, then don't you suppose, where did she get that tenderness anyhow? Where did she get it? That love that we have for each other, where did we get it? That pity we show for each other, where did we get it? We got it where we got our life. We got it from God. And though we are fallen and lost, that which is left in us that's decent all came from the heart of God.

If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good gifts to them than to ask him? So that instead of our running and hiding and admitting we're ignorant, we stand right up to these critics and name callers, and we say, keep your long names. I believe in God, and I believe God made me in his image, and I believe that every good there is in humanity came from God. And yet God is not the goodness of humanity projected upward.

Man was made in the image of God, and I repeat, any little decency that may be left in our fallen natures came from the heart of God. Well, now, God is kind. And this is taught or implied throughout the entire scriptures.

I've read a few proof texts, but I don't back out on proof texts, either. You can't read the whole Bible, so you have to read a few texts, and I've read them. And this we therefore may lay down as a datum of truth.

When you study the multiplication table, two times two make four, two times three make six, and two times four make eight, and so on, those are data of mathematical fact. You'll be that way all the rest of your life, from right on up through to the highest possible reaches of mathematics, it will still be true that two plus two equals four. And so there are datum or data, and this is a datum of truth.

God is good. And you can go out into the world and you can see accidents and polio and murders and all the rest, and when it's all finished, it doesn't change the fact God is good. You can go down where men cheat each other and lie and misuse figures for their purpose and make two times two add up to seven to fill their own pocketbook, but that doesn't change the fact that two times two equals four.

And so you can see everywhere among men their fallen and evil ways. You can see cruelties and darkness, but it doesn't change the fact that God is good. That's the datum of truth.

There. It's a foundation stone of all sane belief about God. It's necessary to human sanity to believe that God is good, that the God who is in the heaven above is not a malicious God or an unkind God or a God who seeks our evil, but a God who seeks our good.

To allow God to be any other kind of God would be to upset, completely change all our moral values or all the moral values of mankind. To deny the validity of human thought would mean to turn heaven into a hell and hell into a heaven. It would mean that good could be bad and bad could be good and God could be devil and devil could be God.

But when we stand on this solid rock of truth, our Father which art in heaven is kind and he makes all our bed in our sickness and he's good and does good and if we taste we'll find that he's good and his loving kindnesses are excellent throughout all the earth, we'll find this is true, so you can count on that. That's where faith rests, you see. So many times we try to rest our faith on texts and promises.

My brother, faith rests, as I have repeated, on the character of God. I believe that I have faith because I believe in the one in whom my faith is placed. And so I believe in a God who is good.

And I never worry to hear God behind my back will mistreat me. Never need to worry for fear God will catch me when my back is turned and do something malicious, for there is no malice in the heart of God, only love. There's only goodness in the heart of God, that is all.

And therefore I need not worry. Now, God is kind. And God's kindness, what do I mean by this, that God is kind? Well, I think I've said enough on that subject, that God is gracious and filled with lovingkindness, and

he is a God of goodwill.

When he said, goodwill toward men, I know that they've translated to men of goodwill, but it could as easily have been goodwill toward men because Christ came because he was a man of goodwill. And he walked among men as a man of goodwill. Oh, what contrast between the Christ who walked among men and the evil men among whom he walked, the malicious, beard-pulling, whispering men, and the calm, quiet, loving Jesus with a tender look on his face for every harlot at his feet and every babe on the lawn and every sick child and every pain and sorrow there was in the world.

He walked among men with goodwill. And the men among whom he walked hated him for his goodness and wished he was dead and finally nailed him on a cross. But when they nailed him on a tree, they didn't change the goodness of him.

And when he died on that tree and was taken out to die, he didn't turn on them and curse them. He said, Father, forgive them for they know not what to do. They could kill him, but they couldn't destroy the goodness in his heart, his goodwill toward men.

Now, I'd like to point out to you something which you may have overlooked, and it is that God's goodness is the ground of our expectation. There are three things I want to mention that are not the grounds of our hope. One is repentance, the other is prayer, and the other is faith.

Now, these are not the ground of our expectation. Repentance is not meritorious. Repentance is but a condition that God lays down.

He says we are to repent and believe on his Son. And that's necessary now because God has put that down as a condition. But there is no merit in repentance.

If a man has been a thief for 50 years, there isn't any merit if the 51st year he stops being a thief. There's nothing. You don't give him a crown.

The Canadian government doesn't pin a medal on his chest and say, for service rendered, this noble hero used to steal everything that wasn't nailed down, and now he's quit it. ...down, and now he's quit it. And everybody claps their hands and the band plays Canada Forever.

No, no, no. You don't do things like that, brother. You don't do things like that.

A man ought to stop because it's right to stop. And there's no merit in it. It was wrong to do the other thing.

So, repentance isn't a meritorious act. And though repentance is necessary, it carries no virtue with it at all. And then prayer is not a meritorious act.

You pray because God hears, and God hears because God's good-hearted toward people. That's why God hears, not because prayer is meritorious. Why, there are people that pray to sticks and stones and scarabs and mummified cats and all sorts of crazy things throughout the whole world.

There's no merit in their prayers at all. And God hears not because prayer is good, but because God is good, you see. He hears because he's good.

He wants to hear. He's eager to hear. He bends his ear to hear.

Because God inclines his ear unto me, that he stoops down. And one brother used to cup his ear. An old man of God used to cup his ear and say, God stoops and cups his ear to hear me pray.

Not because the prayer was good, but because God's good. And prayer is the means that God has of knowing that we're ready to receive what God wants us to have. And faith is not meritorious either.

No justification by faith. There's a grave danger that we shall make faith meritorious. A great Lutheran preacher by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for whom the Nazis hanged in Germany because he wouldn't follow their way when preaching the gospel.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, though he was a German and loyal, though he was a Lutheran and loyal to the Lutheran Church, he wrote a book. I think I saw it in the library, brother. And in that book, I wrote a review on it years ago.

Some of you may have seen it hanged there properly. But this man was hanged for some things he dared to say. And among the things he said was that his church, in their great emphasis upon justification by faith, had made an idol out of faith.

And they were loving faith and trusting faith. He was right. I'm not quoting him verbatim.

I'm giving you the gist of what he said in his book. The cost of discipleship. But there is no merit in faith, my brother.

You have faith in God because of who God is, not because of what you are. Like this. Suppose that you, in a great hour of temptation and weakness, suppose you wronged a man.

You wronged a man. Then after you came to yourself like the prodigal, you said, I'm going to my friend and I'm going to confess and make that right. And your wife said, but do you think he'll forgive you? And you say, yes, I know he'll forgive me.

How do you know? Because faith in him is a meritorious thing. No, I know the man. I know what kind of man he is.

I know he's a kind, good-natured gentleman and he'll pardon me at once and forget the whole thing and never mention it again. That's the kind of man he is. Now, where does the merit lie there? Does it lie in the request for forgiveness or does it lie in the man who forgives? Does it lie in the man who forgives? Certainly.

So when I go to God and confess my sin and trust him to forgive me, by faith I take forgiveness. Does the merit lie in my faith? Never. It lies in the good God who forgives me because he is that kind of God, because he's gracious and kind and ready to forgive and glad and merry and cheerful.

All those words are found in the Hebrew original about God. Now, what does all this mean to me? Ah, there are so many texts that blossom and flower out when we think of the goodness of God. The goodness of God leadeth me to repentance.

It says in Romans, oh, that men would serve the Lord and speak of his goodness. Especially in Psalm 23, 6, I notice, Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all my days. He didn't say, Oh, surely goodness and mercy will follow me as though it were a hope that he had in his heart but wasn't sure of.

No, that's not the meaning of the text. But he said, Of the surety, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Why would goodness and mercy follow a man all the days of his life? Because the God of goodness and mercy followed him all the days of his life.

Now, the Lord takes no pleasure in judgment. God has to judge and no question about that. When I come to the justice of God, as I shall continue to preach on the attributes of God, I must say that God will judge.

I believe in the judgment day. I believe that every man shall receive according to the deeds done in the body. I believe there shall be a resurrection of the just and the unjust and there shall be a resurrection of men unto eternal life and of men unto damnation.

I believe that. Yet God takes no pleasure in judgment. The Lord will rejoice over thee for good.

But it never says, The Lord will rejoice over thee for judgment. He rejoices over us for good because he's a God of good will. And in 31.7 of the Psalms, How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

Well, some would scorn all this and doubt it and argue about it and draw back. But others trust under the shadow of the wings of God. A little psalm I used to hear when I was a boy in the shadow of his wings.

There is rest, sweet rest. In the shadow of his wings there is rest. There is rest for friend and neighbor.

There is rest from toil and labor in the shadow of his wings. And if we'll realize that God is that kind of God, you never need to go away with a hangdog look or a hangdog feeling in your heart. Never.

You never need to go away with a deep sense of inferiority. There's quite a difference between real repentance and a feeling of inferiority. That inferiority feeling, that sense, that hangdog sense that makes you feel, Oh, I'm no good.

There's no use to pray I'm no good. Of course you're no good, but he is good. And because he is good, there isn't anybody listening to me.

But that should believe it and dare to take advantage of it. God's door is open, open for any of his children that have done wrong, open for any sinner that's not in to come in. Oh, taste the and see that the Lord is good.

Now, you can experience this for yourself. Taste and see means that you can experience this for yourself. You can learn how good God is.

Over the last days, I've spent a little time with the Lord each day, and I have been overwhelmed at how kind God has been to me, how utterly good he's been. Now, you look up and you see a partly bald gentleman here that looks as if he might be a saint, but brother, you don't know me. And you don't know my past, and you don't know my nature, and you don't know my temptations, and you just don't know.

Don't you get any false ideas about any wax saint here with detachable wings. I just am not that kind of a man. I, if it were not for the grace of God, would be roasting in hell or languishing in jail if it were not for the grace of God.

The United States would have had me somewhere behind barred long before this. If God's goodness hadn't found me and surrounded me and pardoned me and people forgave me, and God in his loving

kindness has made my life reasonably decent only because he's good, not because I'm good, but because he's good. Now, if that disappoints you, everybody wants a little idol.

I remember once over in the state of Pennsylvania at the famous campground called Mahaffey. I was preaching there and a woman came up with her husband, the two of them together, and she looked down at my feet. Now, I wear a ten and a half, but that wasn't what she was looking at.

She wasn't looking at that. She said, I was just looking at your feet. And I said, well, what would be about my feet? Well, she said, I was just wondering if they were feet of clay.

She said, I have never had an idol yet, but it didn't turn out to have feet of clay. And I said, lady, I've got them. There they are right down there.

And the husband was standing smiling. I said, I have feet of clay. Now, she made an idol out of me because I was preaching and she was getting help out of my preaching.

Never make that mistake. Never learn to love this man so much that he becomes necessary to you. Never learn to love me so much that I become necessary to you.

No man is necessary to me. Only God is necessary to me. Only God.

So we don't need each other. That is, we don't need each other in that ultimate, final sense. Though as a church we need each other certainly, as I've said many times before.

The fellowship of the brethren is the sweetest thing short of heaven. But it's God we need finally and at last. Oh, the goodness of God, the mercy of God.

Nobody, nobody can sing about the grace of God with any more enthusiasm than I and with a worse voice. Nobody. Nobody can sing two steps off key with any more joy than I. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

A wretch like me. Dear God. He saves wretches.

Now, I have a little book, and I've never been away anywhere for years without this little book. I've never been away from it. It's a little prayer book.

I wrote it myself. I guess maybe seventeen, eighteen years old, I've carried this thing around, and I got it in the tenth cent store, and you know the state cent. And I write prayers in there, and I have a little understanding with God.

One little thing is, because I, by nature and conduct, have been the worst man that ever lived, I want God to do more for me than for any man that ever lived. And I have a right to ask that, because where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. And if the goodness of God specializes in hard cases, and if the goodness of God can shine the brighter against the dark sky, I provide the dark sky.

Shine on, oh goodness of God, for I am the dark sky, and I set the backdrop for the shining goodness of God. And I have a right to ask that, because ever lived, I want God to do more for me than for any man that ever lived. to ask that, because where sin abounded, grace does much more abound.

And I have a right where sin abounded, And I have a right where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. And I have a right to ask that, because abound. And I have a right where sin abounded, and grace does much And I have a right in all! And I have a right to ask that, because grace does much more abundant than said, when I go back and tell them, they'll kill me.

Boy, that was tough. I sat there with this young chap, maybe 22 years old, 23, young redhead I remember, and I said, Red, let her die. Better go back and tell them and die.

Better let them sink your feet in soft concrete and have it set and take you out in a boat and dump you over. Better take you out in a car somewhere and put a bullet in the back of your head and dump you in the gutter. Better die, because you've found life's summa bonum, salvation through the blood of the Lamb.

I said, don't you be afraid of the gang. You go back. I'm sorry I don't have the rest of the story.

I don't know what happened. I don't know whether Red went back and told them to put a bullet in him, or whether the great mercy of God found a way. I know another instance where a man came and was converted.

He said to me, now he said, I'm in a jam. He said, I'm saved now. The story was almost identical.

He said, I'm saved now, but he said, I'm in trouble with the law. And he said, I've got to go to the police and confess. And he said, when I go to the police and confess, I'm in the clink.

Well, I said, better go to the clink than to go to hell. You'll get out of the clink, but you never get out of hell or something to that effect. And I didn't make it easy for him.

No, I'm not a softy. When they come to me, I never paw over them and pat them and put oil on them. I give it to them, and so I give it to him.

And I said, you better go to jail and to hell, and go tell them. So this young fellow went to the police the next day. And I didn't expect to see him back, you know.

I thought I'd be preaching to one less man. But he was back, down near the front, and his face shining. After the meeting, I went to him, and I said, Well, you look all right.

What happened? Oh, he said, I went down and confessed up and told them what I'd done, and told them I'd been converted and wanted to live the right life. And he said, they went over the books and said they couldn't find the thing, and they turned me loose. Now, they could have found the thing all right, no question.

But they didn't want to find it, so they just turned him loose. God's very, very good. And I was a young chap.

I used to ride the rails. That is, I used to ride the rods, rather. And after I got converted, I wanted to pay up, you know, get in a box car and ride from one town to another, or get under the possum belly of an old steel car and ride.

And when I got converted, it bothered me. I said, Now, wait a minute, I've been riding around at the expense of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and I owe them something. So I wrote to the traffic manager, and I said, Dear sir, I have been converted to Jesus Christ, and I'm a Christian now, and I want to

straighten up my life.

And I said, A little while back, it wasn't too long, I said, A little while back, I rode from here to here and from here to here, and I tried to remember where it was. And I said, I rode the possum belly, I rode the rod, I told them how I'd ridden. And I said, Now, I'd like to have you send me the bill I want to pay up.

So shortly afterward, I got a letter, one of those yellow letters on official B&O stationery. I opened the letter and said, Dear sir, your letter has been received. We note that you have been converted and want to live a Christian life, and we want to compliment you on this new act.

We compliment you on becoming a Christian. Now about what you owe us. We rather suppose you didn't get very good service on our line when you traveled, and therefore we'll just forget the whole thing.

Sincerely yours, Traffic Manager. Ah, I kept that letter. That was a honey.

I kept that a while, all right. My conscience was clean and free. God was good to me.

He was good to me. I couldn't have paid that. I'd have had to go to jail for debt, because I didn't have enough money to pay all around where I'd ridden, you know, and jumped over hedges and fences to keep away from the bulls.

I didn't have money for that. But they forgave the whole business, because I didn't get good service. Well, amen.

So now I'm encouraging you tonight. God is a just God and a holy. God is severe with unbelief and sin, but God is good, infinitely good, and always good.

And if you need him and you need help, this is the hour now tonight. Our brother will announce a song in a moment. And if there's any kink in your life, any crooked thing in your life, any failure in your life, if you've not been a Christian, not become a Christian, or if you've become a Christian and cooled off and slipped away, he is a good God and infinitely kind, and he calls you to himself.

And so tonight I'm inviting you in his name, inviting you to come to the God who is so good that you can taste and see how good he is. And when you come through Jesus Christ, always remember that God's goodness is channeled through his Son. No man cometh unto the Father but by me, said Jesus.

And so God will rejoice over you for good if you will come to his Son, Jesus Christ, tonight. Come just as you are. Come without trying to spruce up or make yourself better.

Come telling God the whole bitter serial comic story of failure and falling and rising and tumbling about. And God will be good to you as he's been good to me and good to all of his children. And he'll forgive and he'll cleanse and he'll deliver and he'll be patient.

He'll do all of this for his Son's sake and because he's a good God.

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