Lesson 17 – The Holy Spirit’s Gift – To Bear the Fruit of Goodness

What is the difference between Kindness and Goodness?
How did Jesus and St. Paul manifest the fruit of goodness?
What are three attributes of Goodness?
How can we grow so that the fruit of goodness flows out to others?
Why the Friday of Holy Week is called Good Friday?
What are three ways we can be grateful to God for His Goodness?

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness
Kindness is the disposition we should have toward others. It is more than a feeling; it is a quality that causes us to “act” toward others in a kindly manner. Kindness and goodness are similar in nature, yet not identical. Goodness also involves a disposition of kindness toward others, but it includes an additional aspect of honesty or firmness in our relating with others that is meant to lead that person towards reform or change.

The Greek Translation
Kindness and goodness are closely connected words. For kindness the word is chrestotes. It, too, is commonly translated goodness…. The whole idea of the word is a goodness which is kind. The word Paul uses for goodness (agathosune) is a peculiarly Bible word and does not occur in secular Greek… It is the widest word for goodness; it is defined as “virtue equipped at every point” What is the difference? Agathosune might, and could rebuke and discipline; chrestotes can only help…. The Christian needs that goodness which at one and the same time can be kind and strong.

The Fruit of the Spirit Is Goodness
Here's an example of goodness: A doctor firmly lectures a couple in hopes of getting them to follow a medical regimen that will improve their health. The doctor could, uncaringly, simply prescribe some drugs and graciously ignore the real needs of the couple when they fail to follow the prescribed regimen. This, of course, would not be goodness. The spiritual fruit of goodness empowers us to speak with one another honestly and firmly. God loves each one of us, and asks us to love one another, even when it involves saying difficult things for that person's benefit.

When Jesus dealt firmly or sternly with others, it was not because he ran out of patience or abandoned his love for the people involved. Instead, Jesus spoke honestly with people as an act of kindness and love, and with the ultimate motive of doing good, both to them and to others who heard him. So let's begin by looking to see this quality in action in our Lord himself and in his apostle, St. Paul.

The reward of the Fruit of GOODNESS is that you know you are being consistent with God’s will for us.

The Spiritual Fruit of Goodness in Jesus and St. Paul (see attached readings)
   How does Jesus' answer to Martha demonstrate the quality of goodness?
2. Jesus was even sterner when he drove out the money changers in the Temple. Often we refer to Mark 11:15-18 as an illustration of Jesus' righteous anger. 'What made Jesus' cleansing of the Temple an act of goodness?

3. How do you see kindness accompanied with the healing quality of goodness in Jesus' response to the sinful woman in Luke 7:37-50?

4. Read Galatians 3:1-11. How does St. Paul also demonstrate the spiritual fruit of goodness in his dealings with the Christians in Galatia?

Growing in the Fruit of Goodness

5. How can you grow so that the fruit of goodness flows through your life to others more often?

6. What is the difference between simply expressing our annoyance with others and manifesting the character of goodness?

7. Why is it more effective for you to express kindness and goodness at the same time?
Bible Readings

Luke 10:38-42

Martha and Mary. As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”

Mark 11:15-18

Cleansing of the Temple. They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, “Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’? But you have made it a den of thieves.” The chief priests and the scribes came to hear of it and were seeking a way to put him to death, yet they feared him because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching.

Luke 7:37-50

Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said. “Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days’ wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?” Simon said in reply, “The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven.” He said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The others at table said to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” But he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”
Galatians 3:1-11

Justification by Faith.* 1 O stupid* Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 I want to learn only this from you: did you receive the Spirit from works of the law, or from faith in what you heard? 3 Are you so stupid? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? 4 Did you experience so many things* in vain?—if indeed it was in vain. 5 Does, then, the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works mighty deeds among you do so from works of the law or from faith in what you heard? 6 Thus Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

7* Realize then that it is those who have faith who are children of Abraham. 8 Scripture, which saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, foretold the good news to Abraham, saying, “Through you shall all the nations be blessed.” 9 Consequently, those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham who had faith. 10* For all who depend on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not persever in doing all the things written in the book of the law.” 11 And that no one is justified before God by the law is clear, for “the one who is righteous by faith will live.”

Related Articles:

GOODNESS OF GOD

The perfect conformity of God's will with his nature (ontological goodness), and the perfect identity of God's will with the supreme norm, which is the divine essence (moral goodness).

God is absolute ontological goodness in himself and in relation to others. In himself, he is infinitely perfect and therefore his will is perfectly and infinitely happy in loving and enjoying himself as the supreme good, the summum bonum. He needs no one and nothing outside himself for his beatitude. God is also absolute ontological goodness in relation to others. He communicates his goodness to creatures, as the exemplary, efficient, and final cause of all created things.

God is absolute moral goodness or holiness. He is holy because he is exempt from all profaneness. He is the wholly Other whose will is not dependent on any creature. He is also holy because he is free from sin and, indeed, cannot commit sin. He is finally holy because his goodness is the norm of holiness for his creatures. They are as holy as they are like him.
Goodness
By Roger D. Cotton

The fruit of the Spirit is goodness. What do you think of when you hear the word goodness, or the phrases a good sermon or a good job? It refers to something that meets a certain standard, someone’s expectations. It fulfills the goal of the job. The sermon does what sermons are suppose to do — change lives. The meaning of goodness often depends on the context. A good book is different for different people and purposes. A good book for scholarly research is quite different from a good book for bedtime reading; and what is good recreation for one person may not be for the next.

What do you mean when you say you had a good experience? Each person may mean something different, but I believe there is one principle in common — the idea that there was some kind of benefit to us. A good deed benefits someone in some way. It is an act of kindness.

And what is a good friend? Probably the common quality above all others is someone who is dependable, someone you can count on to be there for you in need. The relationship benefits you.

Finally, what is a good heart? It is sincere, honest, and moral. But who defines morality? For Christians, God is the One who defines moral goodness. He sets the standards, and it is His expectations that must be met. The Scriptures reveal an ultimate and absolute definition of goodness.

Thus, from our common usage of the idea of goodness I see three aspects that all derive from the first. Goodness, or the idea of being good, means that the thing fulfills its purpose or the expectations for it. In the ultimate context of God’s expectations, goodness includes the second aspect of morality, and that is defined by God. The third aspect is that in most situations the purpose or expectation involves some form of benefit.

These three aspects are just what are found in a study of goodness in the Scriptures. By looking at the usage of this word in the circles of context of the fruit of the Spirit passage beginning Galatians 5:22, we can see these principles expressed. The circles of context from the far to the near are: the Greek culture, the Hebrew background of the Old Testament, the rest of the New Testament, the rest of Paul’s writings, and then Galatians itself.

The Greek word for goodness in Galatians 5:22 is agathosune. Besides being used in this passage, it occurs about a dozen times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament from around 200 BC, called the Septuagint. There are no references to it in existing secular Greek literature from ancient times. Should we make anything out of this? The biblical writers simply added the Greek equivalent of the “ness” ending to the word good. But the idea of goodness was not new to the culture. We may not use the word teachableness, but that does not mean we do not have the concept in our culture. However, secular Greek writers did not know the depths of God’s definition of moral goodness.

The root adjective of this word, agathos, was used in the Greek culture as our word good is used in the examples given above: for practical goodness in the sense of a good result, a benefit, or what we call a blessing; for moral goodness; and for something pleasing to the gods. There is another word for good, kalos, which some say emphasizes the aesthetic angle; but I have found it to be used interchangeably with agathos in Paul’s passages, and in the Gospels.

The Hebrew word for good is tov and has about the same range of meaning as has been discussed for the English and Greek words. Simple concordance work shows this. Various enlightening illustrations will be discussed below, but first a point needs to be made that the original languages do not open up any great insights on this word. A person does not have to be a Greek or Hebrew scholar to understand the biblical teaching on goodness. But knowing how to use the language does make possible quicker study and more confident conclusions.
The first place in the Old Testament where something is called good is Genesis 1. As God spoke into existence each phase of creation, He saw that it was good. What does this mean? How could it have been bad or evil? I believe the point here involves expected function. God’s creation did what He intended it to do. It accomplished its purpose. It met His expectations. And that is one of the basic ideas of the goodness the Spirit wants to manifest in our lives.

In Genesis 50:20, Joseph says to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring about his present result, to preserve many people alive” (NASB). The Septuagint has agathos here. God had a purpose, which was to save many lives. God’s good purpose in every situation is ultimately to save lives. Joseph suffered some very hurtful things, but they turned out to great benefit for him and for many others. They fulfilled the purpose of God, His redemptive purpose.

Deuteronomy 30:15 presents the covenant choice: “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction” (NIV). The word prosperity here in the NIV is tov, the word for good or goodness. God calls His people to choose His way which will be of great benefit to them rather than great harm. The opposite of life and good is death and destruction. Again we see God’s ultimate beneficial purpose of saving life and providing a new quality of life and well-being in fellowship with Him.

The sense of moral good versus evil is seen in Genesis 2 in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Evil here has the idea of rebellion against God. The character of God defines moral goodness. Exodus 33:19 shows this when in response to Moses’ request to see God’s glory the Lord says: “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD [Yahweh], in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” This says that the entire Lord is represented by His name, is called His goodness, and is expressed in merciful, gracious love which offers forgiveness and salvation to all who will receive it. This association of goodness, forgiveness, and love is seen also in Psalm 86:5.

Thus, there is an overlapping of goodness with other fruit of the Spirit such as kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and, of course, love. Goodness is a quality of God associated so closely with Him that people use it as a euphemism for Him when making an interjection, such as “Oh, goodness!”

Besides describing the character of God, goodness describes His acts on behalf of His people, the benefits of His salvation. At the end of Psalm 23 David confidently proclaims: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” One of the places in the Septuagint where agathosune is used is Nehemiah 9:25 (and 35). It says there in going over the history of Israel that they enjoyed God’s great goodness, which refers to the benefits of His salvation.

Finally, Amos 5:4–15 is a powerful passage which parallels seeking the Lord with seeking good and doing good for others. Verse 6 says, “Seek the Lord that you may live,” and verse 14, “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live” (NASB). The good in this context is the opposite of oppressing the poor and the needy. Verse 15 indicates it is hating evil and loving good by maintaining justice in the courts. Seeking good meant seeking to benefit rather than harm the needy, thus demonstrating the kind of saving, redemptive purpose God has.

Significant New Testament references must include the commendation of the servants in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:21, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (NIV). Good is associated with faithfulness, and it refers to conduct which goes even beyond expectations in taking care of the master’s capital. These servants made an extra effort and even took a risk to bring their master gain and benefit, because of their commitment to him. Goodness involves going beyond the mere requirements.
Luke 8:15 talks about good ground and then speaks about a person with an honest and a good heart who hears the Word and responds to it. So here goodness involves the honesty of receiving God’s Word repentantly, then responding in faith and obedience, and accomplishing His purpose for one’s life.

One of the most famous and interesting passages is Luke 18:18,19. The rich young ruler calls Jesus good Teacher, or Master in some versions. “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good, except God alone” (NIV). We can talk about good people and good things in terms of human standards, and our expectations for them, but when it really comes down to it, who sets the ultimate standard and expectations for goodness except God? Jesus was challenging the young ruler to consider the truth that He was God come in the flesh, and that appreciating God’s holiness and the gift of His Son would end the thinking that there is anything one can do to earn salvation. Third John 11 says that the one who does good is of God. True goodness can only flow out of a life right with God and yielded to Him.

An important example from Acts is Barnabas in 11:24. He is called “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (NIV). He encouraged others, according to chapter 4, and was generous and honest. Later, in giving Paul a chance and then Mark a second chance, he showed great patience and unselfishness which reached out to benefit someone else. He demonstrated the connection between being filled with the Spirit and these qualities in one’s life.

Paul’s use of goodness outside of Galatians includes an interesting passage in Romans 5:7: “For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die” (NASB). You can name righteous people who do things right and never break the rules, but you do not feel like dying for them. However, the person who benefits you somehow, out of generosity and kindness, going beyond what is right, is one you might die for. Goodness goes beyond righteousness.

Another famous passage is Romans 7:18-21: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it” (NIV). In our sinful, selfish human nature there is no motivation to live God’s way and accomplish His purposes.

Romans 15:14 says the Christians in Rome were “full of goodness [agathosunes], complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (NIV). They were able to benefit and to help one another fulfill God’s purpose in their lives. They were characterized by God’s moral qualities.

Chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians give specific ways goodness is to be expressed in our lives. Some of these are, beginning in 4:25, speaking truthfully, not sinning in our anger, not stealing but doing something “useful” (NIV). That word useful translates the Greek word agathos, usually translated good. We are not to do hurtful, harmful things but helpful, beneficial, useful things. Then, continuing in verse 29, we are to build up one another with our conversation. We must get rid of all malice and be kind, compassionate, forgiving, imitators of God and Christ, living lives of love. In this way we align ourselves with the Holy Spirit and avoid grieving Him.

Furthermore, verses 5–12 of chapter 5 remind us that God’s goodness in His people avoids sexual immorality, impurity, greediness, all disobedience, and fruitless deeds of darkness. On the contrary, God’s children live as children of light and seek to please the Lord, “for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth” (verse 9, NIV). Here Paul clearly parallels righteousness and truth with goodness. Finally he calls for us to be filled with the Spirit, blessing God, blessing others, and submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.
This brings us to Paul’s context in Galatians. He is clarifying the gospel message of our salvation by grace through faith, and not by keeping the law. He shows that it means freedom from bondage to the law, freedom from condemnation, and freedom from bondage to our old sinful nature. In 5:6 Paul says that what matters is faith working through love. This freedom is not to mean license, he says in 5:13, but serving one another in love. We are exhorted in 5:16-25 to walk in the Spirit, or live by the Spirit and bear good fruit. This is the opposite of fulfilling the works of the old sinful nature which are sexual immorality, hurting other people with strife, and wild, drunken, destructive behavior from alcohol.

Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit, like his list of the works of the flesh, seems to have a lot of overlapping. Goodness following right after kindness seems to be closely associated with it. In fact, that same Greek word for kindness (chrestotes) used in Galatians 5:22 appears in Romans 11:22, translated goodness in the King James Version where it refers to the goodness and severity of God. I believe there are many ways in which all the fruit are interrelated. To understand goodness one must understand all the fruit.

A demonstration of God’s kind of goodness is called for in Galatians 6 where Paul appeals for gently and humbly ministering to others who are stumbling. We are to carry each other’s burdens and care enough to get involved with one another to prevent moral and spiritual ruin.

Finally, verses 7—10 read, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (NIV). We must keep sowing to the Spirit, which means we must keep seeking God and letting His qualities be developed in us and flow through us by the Spirit. When we do, we will benefit others; we will reach out beyond our own selfish needs and be self-giving or generous as some translations refer to this fruit. God’s goodness goes beyond what is legally right, goes the extra mile, and gives what is needed and what will benefit, build up, and bless others.

The fruit of the Spirit must continually be cultivated. We do not produce them once for all time. We need to sow to the Spirit continually so goodness will be expressed in our lives instead of the old selfish qualities. If I meditate on envy, jealousy, lusts, worries, or fears I am going to reap from them some very selfish evil fruit in my behavior and relationships. I may explode all over someone and cause great harm rather than good. But when I sow to the Spirit by meditating on God’s qualities through the Word, I will bear good fruit of kind, generous, beneficial acts toward others. I will help others experience God’s forgiving, restoring love in Christ through faith. I will also live a morally pure life according to God’s holiness. Bearing goodness means God can depend on me to be honest, repent of my sins, and turn away from evil. We need to continually seek to express this goodness in our responses and actions toward others.

In conclusion, think of your favorite apple. What do you expect it to be like when you bite into it? What are the qualities of a good apple? Now, think about what you are like when someone bites into you. Do they receive goodness from you? Remember, only God in you is good.
Goodness - The 6ht Fruit Of The Holy Spirit

The Bible says that it is the goodness of God that will lead sinners to repentance and salvation. The quality of goodness is another real powerful quality to have operating through you.

This particular quality has a real drawing power to it. Not only does the goodness of God draw people direct to Him, but this fruit of goodness operating in a believer can draw people direct to God through the actual believer. Spirit-filled saints who are walking with many of these fruits operating through them are like a magnet. Many people who have been saved through an individual believer say that what drew them in was the love and goodness they saw shining through that believer.

Jesus says that we are to carry His light and we are to let that light shine before men and not attempt to hide it. Part of His light is these 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit shining through an anointed believer. Nonbelievers are really drawn to someone who has some degree of these nine fruits manifesting through them.

However, there is something extra special about the quality of goodness. Many Christians can effectively witness to others by just living right and being a good example and role model for others to follow. Many nonbelievers carefully watch and study some Christians because they know there is something different about them.

One of the key qualities a nonbeliever will pick up on in a solid Christian is this quality of goodness. This quality has an ability to really get down deep into the core of a believer's personality. To those who really have this quality, you can tell that it is something operating deep down inside of them. This quality is not something that waivers like some of the other qualities can. These people are good down to their very cores of their personalities. You can see it and feel it when you get around these types of people.

As a result of seeing this God-like goodness deeply ingrained into their personalities, there is an immediate drawing towards them. You feel safe around them because you know you can totally trust them and you know they would never deliberately hurt you.

Children are quick to sense and pick up this quality in people who really have it. These types of Christians draw children and adults to them like magnets. This is why this particular fruit and quality is so important for each Christian to have. With it, you can easily draw many more people to the Lord.

If the goodness of God will lead people to repentance and salvation - then the goodness of God operating through an anointed believer will have the ability to draw nonbelievers into salvation. And the goodness of God can be transmitted and worked up into your personality through the power of the Holy Spirit. You can have the actual goodness of God shining through you to reach others if you are willing to work with the Holy Spirit in this sanctification process.

Now here are some of the different definitions of what this quality is all about: Beneficence, ready to do good, love in action. Kindness in actual manifestation; virtue equipped for action; a bountiful propensity both to will and to do what is good; intrinsic goodness producing a generosity and a Godlike state or being. The word beneficence means the fact or quality of being kind or doing good.
Goodness by Fr. John Hardon

The second area for our reflection is on the goodness of God. As we said before, we distinguish between the love of God which is God Himself and the goodness of God, which faith tells us he need never have exercised. It is the goodness of God that we believe on faith, which puts the divine free will into action. Everything in God within the bosom of the Holy Trinity, all the love that Father, Son and Holy Spirit have for one another is the love of necessity but not in our crude sense of coercion or compulsion. It belongs to the very essence of God that he loves within the Holy Trinity. And except for our faith, we believe God might have what he did. And we dare not ask for how long because the Holy Trinity never began. But the world began. Whatever else you forget, please don't forget the world began. God never began. When then, God, not satisfied with just loving within the Trinity, chose, (free will) to use his same divine will but now exercised in favor of those who, until God had decided to show this kind of goodness, didn't exist. We then must say that although creatures began to exist, God never began loving creatures, he always did. We repeat: although we had a beginning, God never began to love those whom he created.

Now we look more closely. We are immediately struck by the marvelous selectivity that God, using his free will, exercised in creating some creatures and not creating others. Again, we marvel at God's selectivity in creating some with less and others with more. More of what? More of a share of his own divine perfections. And let no one dare to say, what blasphemy this would be, that God is playing favors. He is God! If God wants to make a flea, he makes a flea. If he wants to make a fly, he makes a fly. If he wants to make a tree, he makes a tree. If he wants to make an animal, he makes an animal. And if he wants to - get that verb - if he wants to, if he wants to, he makes a human being.

To reflect on this in the bright light of faith, you almost cannot do it too long without being overwhelmed. My God! And we must say: "Lord, there is nothing, absolutely nothing that you owed me, or that I had any claim to your making me. And that for the best of reasons: because nothing, which we were before we became what we are, nothing can claim nothing."

Over the years I have taught the spirituality of the saints often enough and long enough to say every one of the saints was overwhelmed by this ineffable, indescribable goodness of God; so much so that I would say the surest way of becoming a saint is to realize your own nothingness and then burst with gratitude to God for all he has given to you.

God made us personally, each one of us phenomenally different, totally different. We even look different which is God's way to make sure that we realize we are different. And it is that individuality, that distinctive personality that God has been showering and continues to shower now. And our faith and hope tell us: "Lord, is it true?" "Yes," he says, "it's true. I intend to continue pouring out my goodness on you to the endless reaches of eternity."

Sometimes we wonder and may be a bit embarrassed to realize not only that we are different, but other people are different. It takes an effort but it's worth it. Ask God to enlighten you - "Lord, there is no question that I'm different from other people and others are sure different than I" - to realize that God in his infinite wisdom wants all of us to be different.
Do you know why? Every human being is meant by God to be a reflection of one of his divine attributes. Our world has an estimated population of six billion, but six billion worlds with the same population would not exhaust, could not possibly exhaust reflecting the perfections of God, which we call the divine attributes. God wants people to be different. God is glorified in variety; because variety in his creatures is a faint reflection of the infinite variety of totus perfections of the all-good God.

God wants us to glorify him, in and through, the creatures he has made. And no small part of the glory that he expects from us is to not merely resign ourselves to people being different, but to rejoice in their difference. Even though their being different from us and we from them can be very costly, very hard on our self-preoccupied human personality.

We know that this God not only made us, he redeemed us. We are reflecting on the goodness of God and we are just spot checking here and there, just pinpoint examples of God's goodness to us. He has given us the true faith. By the way, that adjective "true" faith is most revealing. Everyone has the faith. Every rational human being believes. No choice. Life would be unlivable. I'd never sit down to a meal unless I believed and trusted the one who made the meal. Nobody would ever get married. Lo, the sublime love, the faith of a couple lost in mutual ecstasy; how they believe in one another! In the ten years I taught in New York City I marveled at the simple childlike faith of the hard, bitter executives riding the subway in Manhattan; monastic silence on the train, buried reading - what faith! - the New York Times.

God has given us the true faith. Talk about selectivity which unbelievers call divine discrimination! Let them have their vocabulary. All we know and we are grateful: "Lord, thanks." Having taught the other religious systems over the years; you name it; there is only one true faith. Honest. He has given us membership in his own Mystical Body; he has been showering blessings on us from the moment of conception till the present day. And our faith tells us he will continue giving us his blessings until we don't need any more grace because we have merited an eternal reward.

What are some of the obvious consequences in our spiritual life, now reflecting not precisely on the love of God which IS God, but the goodness of God as shown in his lavish blessings on creatures, that except for his goodness would be the nothing which they were before he brought them into being?

First and mainly, if there is one virtue that in the practical order synthesizes the pursuit of holiness it is gratitude. I am afraid many of us, beginning with the speaker, are not sufficiently aware of the importance of cultivating the virtue of gratitude, cultivating it daily towards God. We shall be as grateful to God as we are aware of his goodness to us. And while there are many reasons we should not give in to worry or anxiety or depression, I believe the most important reason is that then it blinds our minds to what we need to constantly keep in mind: how good God has been and is to us.

For some us this may be the most important resolution we can make. We must stop one thing and start something else. We must make a conversion. The simple occupation with all the things that are wrong with me, and there's plenty; if we had seventy-two hours in the day it wouldn't be enough to find out all that's wrong with us. But that's no way of treating the blessings of God. If we are to really grow in sanctity we must become constantly aware with the mind, of God's goodness to me, so that I can thank him. And not just an abstraction: "Thanks, Lord." Be specific.

Then besides thinking gratefully, we are to speak gratefully. Take ourselves; we do someone a favor. We say: "I suppose she's grateful;" but we sure appreciate if she says thanks. Tell God.
And it is not merely speaking gratefully, it is acting gratefully. All of us, every one of us, owes a debt of gratitude, and no matter how long we live, we won't live long enough to pay that debt. Am I making sense?

Not only does God want us to be grateful in our minds; to say we are grateful with our lips; to act gratefully in our deeds; he wants us out of gratitude to him, to not only give but to give up. And in my theology, that is the highest form of gratitude we can show to God. And except for our faith, we wouldn't know how pleased God is with sacrifice.

Meaning what? That among the gifts he gives us, out of the infinite bounty of his goodness, there are those, depending on our vocation and call in life, depending on the graces we receive in greater or less measure, gifts we cherish, blessings we love, creatures we enjoy; "But Lord, to express my gratitude I will give it up." This kind of gratitude God understands, he appreciates, and in the heaven that awaits us, he rewards.

Realizing that nothing which God has given to us is meant to be hugged by ourselves alone, we must ask the good Lord, first to make us understand what he has given to us, and how much of what we have he wants us to share. It is in giving to others that as far as we creatures of flesh can do, we are imitating the Holy Trinity: giving of our time; giving of our convenience; giving of our knowledge; giving of our skill; giving of ourselves. In the last analysis, if we examine our own hearts we will all admit, no matter what others may give to us, or do for us, and frankly, we may not need that much, or more often, they may not have all that much to share; no matter. What we most appreciate and what most pleases God is that even as God has done toward us, we do toward others. This is not theory; this is not abstraction; this is not high-sounding theology; this is real life: we give ourselves. And every person whose life we touch knows whether we are really, really giving ourselves.

Most loving Trinity, I adore you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I acknowledge you as my God and want to please you in everything that I do. O infinite goodness of God, I thank you for creating me, for redeeming me, and offering me the prospect of possessing you in heaven. Teach me to put my faith in your goodness into practice by seeing every person you put into my life as a blessed opportunity of repaying you. Make me more and more like yourself in giving myself to others out of love for you. Amen.