

Nine
F r u i t s
of the
S p i r i t

A Bible Study on Developing Christian Character

Goodness

R o b e r t S t r a n d



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Introduction

There is an ancient story out of the Middle East which tells of three merchants crossing the desert. They were traveling at night in the darkness to avoid the heat of the day. As they were crossing over a dry creek bed, a loud attention-demanding voice out of the darkness commanded them to stop. They were then ordered to get down off their camels, stoop down and pick up pebbles from the creek bed, and put them into their pockets.

Immediately after doing as they had been commanded, they were then told to leave that place and continue until dawn before they stopped to set up camp. This mysterious voice told them that in the morning they would be both sad and happy. Understandably shaken, they obeyed the voice and traveled on through the rest of the night without stopping. When morning dawned, these three merchants anxiously looked into their pockets. Instead of finding the pebbles as expected, there were precious jewels! And, they were both happy and sad. Happy that they had picked up some of the pebbles, but sad because they hadn't gathered more when they had the opportunity.

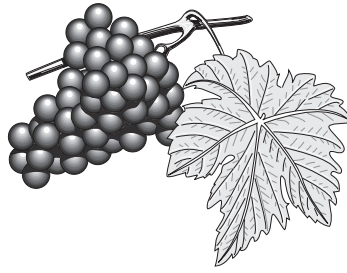
This fable expresses how many of us feel about the treasures of God's Word. There is coming a day when we will be thrilled because we have absorbed as much as we have, but sad because we had not gleaned much more. Jewels are best shown off when held up to a bright light and slowly turned so that each polished facet can catch and reflect the light. Each of these nine jewels of character will

be examined in the light of God's Word and how best to allow them to be developed in the individual life. That is how I feel about the following three verses from Paul's writings which challenge us with what their Christian character or personality should look like. Jesus Christ has boiled down a Christian's responsibility to two succinct commands: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and body, and love your neighbor like yourself. Likewise, Paul the apostle has captured for us the Christian personality in nine traits:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25).

At the very beginning of this study, I must point out a subtle, yet obvious, distinction. The "fruit" of the Spirit is a composite description of what the Christian lifestyle and character traits are all about — an unbroken whole. We can't pick only the fruit we like.

Unlocked in these nine portraits are the riches of a Christ-centered personality. The thrill of the search is ahead of us!



Goodness

Agathos (Greek) describes that which, a person being good in character or constitution, will be beneficial in its effect on others.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS . . . GOODNESS!



“Goodness” has fallen on bad times in our day! It has a bad press connotation — after all who really wants to be “good.” It’s expecting people to be wimpish or weak or somehow less than aggressive. In the minds of too many people today, it’s an old-fashioned quality which is out-of-date. We’d rather be chic, slick, popular, exciting, with it, or living on the edge.

Then . . . when you think about it, wouldn’t you rather do business with a “good” merchant? Send your kids to a “good” school? Be a patient of a very “good” doctor? Drive a “good” car? Be married to a “good” spouse? Do everything you can to raise “good” kids?

Theological Insight:

The word agathos is used of things which are physical such as a good tree (Matt. 7:17) or good ground (Luke 8:8). It is also used in a moral sense of persons. God is essentially, absolutely, and consummately good. It also means that “the good” is morally honorable and pleasing to God. Christians in their lifestyle are to prove this to the world. We are to be zealous of goodness and to overcome evil with it.

“Good” and “goodness” are two very popular words in the vocabulary of our day. We like to think that what we do is “good” to benefit others. But what really is “goodness”? Are the actions of our living amounting to the greatest “good” for others?

Before we consider “being” good and “doing” good, we will be needing a working definition of goodness. The measuring rod and the standard has been set by God and not by humans. God is the measure of all things, including goodness and what it means. So we’ll attempt to start with an understanding of the “goodness” of God as a harvest of the Spirit’s working in our living.

Goodness is love in action, love with its hand to the plow, love with the burden on its back, love following His footsteps who went about continually doing good.

(James Hamilton)

Wesley's Rule:
Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.
(John Wesley)

Our first study takes us to Psalm 100:1-5.

Describe what you mean by calling someone a "good" person:

Would you consider yourself a "good" person? Why? Or why not?

What do we know about the character of God from Psalm 100?

Exactly how do we know that God is good?

How do the actions of God reflect the goodness of God?

Have you discovered how we are to worship God from this psalm?

How have you responded to the goodness of God in your life?

What do these verses say about our relationship to God?
