

God is good, He is beyond compare

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Date: 06 July 2025

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

! It's good to come to the Psalms once again. We remember that Psalm 1 and 2 are the doorposts through which we enter into the Psalter, through which we enter into the way of obedience, the life of prayer and worship of the disciple of Jesus.

We remember that the Psalms are both the prayer book and the hymn book which our Lord Jesus knew and used.

There is a journey through the Psalms. From Psalm 1 to Psalm 150, from obedience to praise, from Psalm 2 to Psalm 150, God establishing his king to reign over all creation.

And yet, as with all journeys, there's a bit of a dip in the middle. I wonder if you remember an older style of bed.

[1 : 27] I had a wooden headboard and a wooden footboard and there was a metal frame which was joined to the head and the foot and there was a kind of wire mesh around the metal frame.

I see some people nodding, right? You know what happened with these beds. They kind of sagged in the middle. This is the story of our journey.

John Newton wrote for us to sing, Through many dangers, toils and snares, that's the sag in the middle, I have already come. 'Tis grace has led me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.

Our life as disciples of Jesus begins in grace. God is good and in his goodness and love, God sent Jesus his son to be our saviour.

Our life as disciples of Jesus ends in grace. God in his goodness has taken hold of us and no one can snatch us out of his hand. He just won't let go.

[2 : 37] God in a work of grace will welcome us home into his presence. Like the saggy bed, the beginning and the end are rock solid.

But some days it gets a bit saggy in the middle. The road gets a bit hard. We fall into discouragement or perplexity or distress.

And we see this reflected in the shape of the book of Psalms. You might remember that the biblical book of Psalms is divided into five different books within the 150.

Psalms 1 to 41 and 42 to 72 are books 1 and 2. And they focus on David the king and God's faithful covenant with David.

Books 4 and 5, 90 to 106, 107 to 150, they focus on God establishing his kingdom and his kingly reign over all creation.

[3 : 44] But today, at Psalm 73, we enter into book 3, which is right in the middle. The saggy bed. We face up to the discouragement of the failure of human kings and human rulers.

We face up to the perplexity of living this life which God has given us to live. 17 Psalms, which refuse to pretend that all is fine.

We should ban that word fine. Almost every time someone says to you, it's fine, you know it's not. 17 prayers to cry out when life gets overwhelming.

17 poems to assure us that our father knows, our father understands. 17 expressions of God's word given to us, which turn out to be exactly what we need to say when we hit the sag in the middle.

Our father knows our lives, our struggles and our frustrations. God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

[5 : 08] This is the rock upon which Psalms 73 to 89 rests. God is good all the time. All the time God is good.

Even if at times it is the very goodness of God which gives rise to our anxieties and perplexities. We are always invited to return to the unchangeable, unbreakable, unfailing goodness of God.

Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. Our psalm begins with the goodness of God and it ends. But as for me, it is good to be near God.

The goodness of God expressed towards his people ends with the good experience of God's people being in his presence. And we need to hold fast to that.

When we look at the perplexities of our situation, verses 1 to 12. When we look at our attempts to answer our situation, verses 13 to 17.

[6 : 19] We need to hold tight to the goodness of God. God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good.

So Psalm 73 is divided into three sections by the word truly. Verse 1, truly God is good to Israel. Verse 13, truly all in vain have I kept my heart clean. Verse 18, truly you set them in slippery places. In verses 1 to 12, we read of the problem which I see in the world.

In verses 13 to 17 of the solution which I have tried to make for myself to the problem I see in the world. And then in verses 18 to 28 of the solution God achieves by his own goodness.

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[7 : 31] We set off in grace, trusting God, filled with joy and hope in the Holy Spirit. And we follow in his way and we encounter this difficulty.

Our path is steep and our feet begin slipping. Because we look around and we see the wicked ones being successful. They are hale and healthy.

They dress themselves in pride and protect themselves with violence. They reject and deny the only God there is. They say, how can God know?

Is their knowledge in the most high? What they mean is, there's no one there to know anything anyway. Behold, these are the wicked. They are at ease and they increase in riches.

Now be honest with yourself. Haven't you thought that some of the time? It's easy for us to look around our city and our nation and our world and to see the greedy and the proud and the self-important and the violent and the God-deniers and to see that they are getting on fine.

[8 : 49] Why don't you join in with them? Why don't you go and be greedy and selfish and proud and arrogant and violent and you'll get on fine as well?

Why am I bothering to be generous and kind and gentle and helpful and respectful and worshiping God and serve him when all the time what I see all around me is the wicked getting on fine?

And even worse than that, I see the wicked getting on better than me. It isn't so much that we have almost stumbled or nearly slipped.

When we think about the wicked, we fall flat on our faces. Why do good things happen to bad people? Now that's not where our psalms started.

Truly God is good to Israel to those who are pure in heart. In 2025, every time we come across the word Israel in our Bibles, we need to remind ourselves it's not writing about the modern state of Israel.

[10 : 10] It's not writing about a political nation that exists at the beginning of the 21st century. By poetic parallelism, we know that Israel, in the first line in verse 1, is those who are pure in heart.

From the second line in verse 1. The people of God. Those who through faith in Jesus, who by dependence upon the cross of Christ, have been made pure in heart.

The problem we see around us, the problem the psalmist holds before us, is exactly this. If God is good to those who are pure in heart, who are his people, why do good things happen to those who are not pure in heart?

Who are not his people? We won't make any progress as disciples of Jesus by ignoring such questions or discouragements.

We cannot pretend that this is not a perplexity to us. This is the way our Lord leads us. Not apart from these questions, but right through them.

[11 : 22] The rest of the psalm offers two different solutions to this problem. In verses 13 to 17, what I've called the ineffective solution.

And then verses 18 to 28, God's effective solution. And the difference can be illustrated simply by reading the verses. So there we are.

In verses 13 to 17, the word I, me, or my, appears 10 times in five verses. 200 percent.

10 out of 5. The word God only appears twice. Only appears twice. It should be 40 percent, not 0.4. Can't count.

But a fifth of the references. 10 times I, only twice God. Notice the contrast in verses 18 to 28.
[12:19] Out of 11 verses, 22 times we read of God. The 200 percent figure is now about God.
And I is not quite the same, but it's still less than the references to God.

There's a change. The ineffective solution focuses on me. And God's effective solution focuses on God. The ineffective solution is one which I have created by myself, for myself.

Self-help is not the answer. Verse 13. I have tried to make myself clean and pure of heart by my own hard work.

But the cross of the Lord Jesus gently tells us that we cannot make our hands clean. We cannot make our hearts pure. We have no innocence of our own.

Verse 15. I might be tempted to join in with the wicked. To give in to the whispers of temptation in my ear. To betray my God.

[13:35] That doesn't work either. Verse 16. Well, I can think this through. I'm a clever person. I can get a bit of paper and a pencil and work out the answer to this question.

And yet we know that philosophers and people far cleverer than us have run aground trying to work out why good things happen to bad people. Whatever attempt at self-help we pursue.

I'll make myself good and I don't need God. I'll join in with the wicked. I can be clever enough to work it out. Or any other answer of self-help. It doesn't work.

The perplexity caused by the wicked is not answered by me. Thanks be to God there is an answer. And the end of the psalm takes us there.

And verse 17 leads us in. Until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then I discerned their end. The sanctuary of God is the temple in Jerusalem.

[14:39] Yes it is. But the sanctuary of God, the temple in Jerusalem. Represents access to the presence of God. Verse 23.

I am continually with you. You hold me by my right hand. But as for me, it's good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my refuge.

That I may tell of your works. The promise of the temple is fulfilled in the reality of the presence of God. which God's people are welcomed into through Jesus.

When we gather together in worship. As it were, in black and white. We sit in a lovely church building. We sing lovely hymns.

And we hear lovely prayers. But in glorious technicolor. We are welcomed into the living presence of the living God. Right now, we are in two places at the same time.

[15:44] We are sitting here in a building in Craig Lockhart in Edinburgh. And we are also standing in the throne room of God. In his very presence.

We are relocated into the place where God is. And in God's presence, our eyes work a bit better. Truly, you set the wicked in slippery places.

You make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment. And swept away utterly by terrors. In God's presence, we see their end. Any success the wicked achieve is temporary and insignificant.

Would you really exchange the joy and peace of the presence of God. For the tawdry gains of greed and selfishness. When we are lost in our perplexity.

It turns out the goodness of God is at work for us. You guide me with your counsel. And afterwards, you receive me to glory. The presence of God our Father takes hold of our hand.

[16:53] And guides us on the right way. Through the cross and the empty tomb. His goodness leads us into his own uncreated glory. Whom have I in heaven but you?

There is nothing on earth that I desire beside you. The wicked condemn themselves. So that they might gain the things of this earth.

But our desire is fixed upon God. God is good. And his glory. And his blessing. All my heart desires is Jesus. He is all and all and more than all.

All the empty and passing away things of earth. Even if I gained them all. I would sacrifice them.

Considering them as nothing. For the all surpassing glory of gaining Christ.

Truly God is good. Truly God is good. God is good beyond compare. God is good all the time. And all the time God is good. Truly God is good.

[17:57] To this alone let us hold with all our might. Truly God is good. May this hope silence all the turmoil of temptation.

There is no hope for us. In joining in with the wickedness of the wicked. There is no hope for us. In the get rich quick schemes of the greedy or the violent.

The only way for the disciple of Jesus. Is the goodness of God. There is no other way. May the goodness of God.

Quieten. Our endless striving. To fix every problem by ourselves. May God's patience with us overwhelm us.

So that at the end of the day. We turn around to him and say. I've tried but I can't do it. I need to depend upon your goodness. How many roads must we walk down.

[19 : 01] Of our own devising. Before we walk in God's way. How many times will we seek refuge with the wicked. Before we come to God's good presence.

How many times will we turn our ears to the temptations. Before we hear and heed God's loving invitation. Come into the presence of God.

Come close to the cross of Jesus. Come through the empty tomb. Into the safety of the presence of the living God. Truly God is good.

When we are filled with anger. God calms the storm. And plucks the seed of bitterness from us. Truly God is good.

When we are lost and alone. God comes and finds us. And picks us up and carries us home. Into his grace. Truly God is good.

[19 : 58] He fills our mouths with words of grace and power. That we might declare them to a needy world. Truly God is good all the time.

And all the time God is good. Truly. Let's pray together. Father we long for your goodness.

We long for your goodness to overwhelm us. To transform our thoughts and our hearts. To take away from us.

To take away from us. Our perplexities and our anxieties. That we might be still. And rest in your goodness. Hold the cross of Jesus before us.

And call us there. That we might know your goodness. And might rest in your presence. Hear us for we ask it in Jesus name.

[21 : 03] Amen.