

Week 6:

Cultivate Goodness

Dear brothers and sisters at Grace,

How are you doing on this journey? Nine weeks is a considerable trek, and it wouldn't surprise me if you're feeling like you're hitting 'the wall'. I encourage you to persevere for there is much goodness still to go!

I encourage various activities to give some symbolic meaning to your devotional life this week. Do you happen to have some invisible ink in the house, hidden in your child's play area, or easily found at the Dollar Store? You might want to pull out some matches and a non-flammable bowl so it's ready for family members to use safely.

In addition to 'noticing' and 'pondering' the Scriptures, I hope you are doing some writing in a journal or at your computer, if that suits you better. Have you commented yet on the Grace blog – or about Cultivate on your own blog?

Let's persevere and continue to do the pruning, digging and fertilizing which is fitting for this time of year. Blessings to you all!

Elizabeth

CULTIVATE
rooted and built up in Him

1. *The Good Shepherd* —

John 10:7-21

As we consider the fruit of goodness this week, I can think of no better place to begin than with the person of Jesus. Our devotional task today is a simple one. It is simply to *notice*. Notice what the text reveals about Jesus and his goodness. And notice your response as you consider his example.

If your time feels spacious, start reading at John 9:1 for it provides the context for Jesus' teaching on being the good shepherd. As you read, notice what signs of Jesus' inherent goodness come through his interactions with the man who had been blind since birth. Notice too the contrasts to goodness in the story.

As you continue on (or as you begin) in chapter 10, notice what things reveal the shepherd as good. Notice the contrasting imagery which Jesus uses, and what that tells you about the Lord. Notice too your inner responses to Jesus' words.

Finally, what is your response to your noticing? Be sure to respond in some way to your reading today. That could be in a spoken or written prayer, by musing on this text as you head to (or go about your) work, or by sharing your thoughts with someone. You could also (of course!) write a post or comment at the Grace blog or—have those of you who blog considered this yet?—post a link at the Grace blog to your own blog article.

2. Living as Light – Eph 5:1-14

Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. (v. 8-9)

Kenneson tells us that the Greek word which Paul uses for goodness in Gal 5:22 is used only three other times in the New Testament. These are: Eph 5:9, Rom 15:14 and 2 Thess 1:11. In today's passage Paul names goodness is one of the three characteristics which reveal us as being children of light. Here goodness is also a fruit, along with righteousness and truth. It is interesting in itself to consider the relative importance this gives to the fruit of goodness. Rather than being tucked inside a list of nine, here it is as the first of three. As Evangelicals we sure wouldn't downplay the importance of righteousness and truth! What does that say to you about the importance of goodness? Lest we're growing a little weary in this journey of cultivating the fruit of the Spirit, I hope that will help us to persevere over the three-quarter way hump.

As you read Ephesians 5:1-14, notice Paul's use of contrast as he describes the fruit of darkness with that of light. This passage reflects back to chapter 1 and 2 of the book, to Paul's glorious apologetic of God's saving power to transfer people from the dominion of darkness into his kingdom, as a demonstration of the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:7).

As you consider the first half of the passage, you may feel confronted by Paul's words, whether by the tall order to 'be imitators of God' or in by one of the behaviours he mentions. Make a (mental) note of the inner dissonance and keep on reading.

Continuing on from verse 8, Paul presents a truth: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Then he tells us how to go about living out this truth. Notice his invitation to discovery (find out what pleases the Lord), his imperative to throw off that which hinders, and his description of the ability of the light to expose all things.

Sometimes we write the deeds of our lives as with invisible ink, counting on them to remain invisible. Yet they are never really invisible. Paul reminds us that deeds are exposed by the Light.

If you happen to have some [invisible ink](#) in the house, it could be a valuable exercise to write down the things with which you have been confronted by this passage and then, as an act of confession, make the invisible words visible. Speak Ephesians 5:13-14 over yourself before you destroy the paper. If no invisible ink is available, write a confession on a sheet of paper and then burn the paper (do this outside or on a non-flammable surface!) as a symbolic act of your sins coming under the purifying light of a match.

3. Living as Light – Part 2 –

1 Peter 2:9-12

Note: We've put this one here for the page layout, but I suggest you do it as devotion #3.

Like Paul, Peter also uses language of contrast to declare our status as children of God. Today read 1 Peter 2:9-10, just four verses that are packed full of goodness. This is a great passage to 'ponder'. Read it slowly, verse by verse, letting the words and their meaning sink in to your soul.

You may want to make a list of the truths Peter declares to help you to process them. You might prefer to respond to Peter's proclamation and exhortation in writing. You may want to write out one particular verse or the passage (or to take a photo of it with your phone) to carry with you as you commit it to memory.

4. Grace Above All —

Isaiah 55:6-8

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.
Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.
Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

This invitation is compelling no matter where one is on their spiritual journey. Devoted followers are wise to respond by looking inside to see if anything is hindering their walk with God. Those who've been distracted spirituality are invited to come and seek wholeheartedly again. And those who've been walking far from God are heartily invited to change their direction, for the Lord's abundant mercy always awaits a seeking heart.

Like the prodigal's father, waiting, watching intently at the gate, our heavenly Father stands ready to receive us when we come. To embrace us in forgiveness. To lavish his love upon us. To freely pardon. Yes, freely! If I've strayed far and have indulged in shameful things, his love covers my offences. If my heart has grown cold, his grace is sufficient still. My sins do not need to keep me from him, for he stands ready to welcome me with open arms.

It seems the Lord knew that this concept of pardon would be difficult for us to grasp, for he adds an explanation to it. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." This statement isn't offered in the way I've often heard it explained, as an assurance of God's sovereignty in the hard things in life that I cannot understand. Certainly that is true but, honestly, when my world has crashed around me, that perspective puts the Lord high and above me rather than tenderly beside me, and offers little immediate comfort.

Rather, the Lord offers this reflection with compassion to help me grasp perhaps the most wonderful thing in life--that his grace is infinitely greater than mine. That although I have difficulty extending grace to others, he extends it freely. The moment I turn to him, his grace is mine to experience in all its fullness. Though I've walked my independent path, approaching him with a humble heart causes the walls I've built between us to crumble. Regardless of my offence, laying a broken heart before the Lord never fails to allow our relationship to be restored.

God's thoughts and ways are wonderfully different from mine, soaring high above my limited capacities. The good news doesn't stop there, for God has replaced my heart of stone with a heart of flesh. He has redeemed my heart and put a new spirit in me (Ezek 36:26). This work is by no means complete but it is in process, growing concurrently with my surrendered resolve to seek him. My thoughts and ways are not like his but, little by little, they are being transformed to reflect his.

The Apostle Paul, on this side of the cross, puts it in a slightly different way: We all, who reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (2Cor.3:18). That too is pure grace, a gift which gives back pleasure to the Giver as our capacity to extend grace grows.



How does this meditation speak into your experience of growing in goodness?